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Freedom in the World 2011 - Montenegro

Capital: Podgorica
Population: 628,000

Political Rights Score: 3 *
Civil Liberties Score: 2 *
Status: Free

Explanatory Note

The ratings through 2002 are for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, of which Montenegro was a part, and those from 2003 through 2005 are for the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

Overview

In December 2010, Montenegro was officially granted candidate status in its bid to join the European Union. Later that month, Milo Dukanovic, who had served as prime minister or president for most of the previous two decades, resigned from the premiership. He was replaced by Finance Minister Igor Luksic.

Montenegro was first recognized as an independent state in 1878. In 1918, it joined the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which after World War II became the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. As that state collapsed in the early 1990s, Montenegro maintained its ties to Serbia as part of the truncated Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), dominated by Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic. In 1997, however, a group of former Milosevic cohorts in Montenegro, led by then prime minister Milo Dukanovic, decided to break with Milosevic and set Montenegro on a slow course toward independence.

Milosevic's fall from power in 2000 did not improve relations between Montenegro and its larger federal partner, and the two republics signed an agreement in 2002 that loosened their bond, replacing the FRY with the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. The deal allowed either republic to hold an independence referendum after three years, and Dukanovic chose to exercise this right in May 2006. Referendum voters approved the final break with Serbia by a relatively small margin, and in July the Montenegrin parliament officially declared independence.

The September 2006 parliamentary elections confirmed voter support for the ruling proindependence coalition. Dukanovic retired from the premiership in October, but subsequently returned to the office in April 2008, allegedly after a brief experiment in trying to maintain control of the country from behind the scenes. Aside from that 18-month hiatus, he had served as either president or prime minister of Montenegro since 1991.

Independence and national identity remained divisive issues, and a 2007 investigation stoked suspicions that Dukanovic's Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) had manipulated the 2006 referendum and elections. Several police officers reported being pressured by the DPS to solicit votes in favor of independence and for the government. The government drew additional criticism from pro-Serbian factions in October 2008, when it officially recognized Kosovo's independence.

In January 2009, President Filip Vujanovic, a close Dukanovic ally, called snap parliamentary elections, reportedly because the government was concerned that the effects of the global economic crisis could erode voter support by the time its full term ended. The early balloting, held in March, yielded the best outcome for the ruling party to date. With voter turnout at 66 percent, the DPS-led coalition won a comfortable majority of 48 seats in the 81-seat parliament. The opposition Socialist People's Party took 16 seats, followed by New Serb Democracy with eight, Movement for Change with five, and four small ethnic Albanian parties with one seat each. Local elections held in several municipalities in May 2010 again confirmed the DPS's dominance of the political scene.

Montenegro had sought to join NATO and the European Union (EU) since gaining independence, and in December 2010 the EU officially granted Montenegro candidate status. A few days later, Dukanovic resigned from the premiership for a second time, arguing that he had successfully guided the country toward European integration. However, there were indications that his continued tenure could have obstructed Montenegro's EU candidacy, as he had been accused of involvement in smuggling activities in the 1990s. Dukanovic retained his post as chairman of the DPS, and 34-year-old finance minister Igor Luksic, also a DPS member, succeeded him as prime minister.

Despite its ambitions to join NATO and the EU, Montenegro has built extensive economic ties with Russia. Some accounts suggest that as much as \$13 billion in Russian capital has entered Montenegro since the 1990s, allegedly making it the largest recipient of foreign investment per capita in Europe in recent years.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Montenegro is an electoral democracy. International observers reported that the independence referendum, the 2006 and 2009 parliamentary elections, and the 2008 presidential election were conducted freely and fairly, though with minor irregularities. Members of the unicameral, 81-seat Assembly (Skupstina) are elected for four-year terms. The president, directly elected for up to two five-year terms, nominates the prime minister, who must be approved by the legislature. The current president, Filip Vujanovic of the DPS, was elected to a second five-year term in April 2008 by a wide margin.

Numerous political parties compete for power, though the opposition remains relatively weak and divided. The current coalition government consists of the DPS, the Social Democratic Party, and two smaller parties representing the Bosniak and Croat minorities. Other parties in the parliament represent ethnic Serbs and Albanians, and the Movement for Change party advocates liberal policies and European integration. Serbs, who form an estimated 35 percent of the population, were generally opposed to independence prior to 2006, but their adjustment to the new reality in recent years has eased political tensions to some degree.

Corruption has traditionally been a very serious and widespread phenomenon. The European Commission reported in 2010 that recent reforms have largely established the

necessary legal and institutional framework for dealing with organized crime and corruption, but that anticorruption legislation is not consistently implemented, and political will to deal with the problem is lacking. Montenegro was ranked 69 out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index. The corruption problem is partly a legacy of the struggle against the Milosevic regime in the 1990s, when the small republic turned to various forms of smuggling to finance government operations. Prime Minister Milo Dukanovic has been accused of involvement in cigarette smuggling, and a number of Montenegrin officials and businesspeople have been indicted in Italy for such activities.

Freedom of the press is generally respected, and there is a variety of private print and broadcast outlets, but journalists who criticize the government are sometimes attacked. In August 2009, the mayor of Podgorica assaulted two journalists working on a story about official abuses of power. Belgrade-based publications remain popular in the country, partly because a large segment of the population identifies itself as Serb. Criminal libel is not punishable by imprisonment, but the threat of fines forces journalists to engage in self-censorship. Access to the internet has not been restricted.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief. However, the canonically recognized Serbian Orthodox Church and a self-proclaimed Montenegrin Orthodox Church have repeatedly clashed over ownership of church properties and other issues.

Academic freedom is guaranteed by law, but political debates about the nature of Montenegrin identity and history have sometimes spilled over into the educational realm. In 2010, "Montenegrin" became the official language of the state broadcaster, and a Montenegrin grammar text was introduced in schools, drawing criticism from those who argued that the government was promoting an artificial language carved out of standard Serbian.

Citizens enjoy freedoms of association and assembly. Foreign and domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are generally able to pursue their activities without state interference, though the European Commission's 2010 report noted that some NGOs have been subjected to political and administrative pressures after criticizing the government. Some 95 percent of all employees in the formal economy belong to unions, and the right of workers to strike is generally protected. Collective bargaining, however, is still considered to be at a rudimentary level. The country has strict protections against employee dismissal and generous worker benefits, but these are thought to limit efficiency and encourage informality in the economy. A 2009 law expanded the right to strike to public administration employees. Workers at Montenegro's largest industrial enterprise, the Podgorica Aluminum Plant (KAP), staged a number of protests and strikes in 2010 over low wages.

The European Commission's 2010 report on Montenegro cited improvements in the area of judicial reform, but also expressed continuing concerns about political interference and inefficiency in the court system, as well as problems with the implementation of newly adopted laws, particularly regarding organized crime. Despite efforts to improve prison conditions, most facilities are antiquated, overcrowded, and often unhygienic.

Ethnic Albanians, who make up roughly 7 percent of the population, claim that they are underrepresented in the civil service, particularly in the police and the judiciary. They have also sought proportional representation in the government and greater municipal autonomy. Members of various other minority groups, such as Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) communities, often face both societal and state discrimination.

Women in Montenegro are legally entitled to equal pay for equal work, but traditional patriarchal attitudes often limit their earnings, education, and role in the economy. In general, women are underrepresented in higher levels of government. Domestic violence is rarely punished with imprisonment, and sexual harassment in the workplace is illegal but reportedly common. Trafficking in persons for the purposes of forced prostitution and forced labor remains a significant problem. The country has secured only 17

criminal sentences for human trafficking since 2004.

** Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom.*

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