

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Freedom in the World - Montenegro (2007)

Population:
600,000

Capital:
Podgorica

Political Rights Score: 3
Civil Liberties Score: 3
Status: Partly Free

Notes

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

Montenegro, formerly a republic within the Communist-era Yugoslav federation, and most recently a republic within the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, held a May 2006 referendum in which a 55 percent majority voted in favor of independence. The country duly declared independence the following month, but still faces ethnic divisions, economic problems, and concerns over the extent of official corruption. Pro-independence parties won parliamentary elections held in September.

In 1878, European powers gathered at the Congress of Berlin first recognized Montenegro as an independent state. Historically, a majority of Montenegro's Slavic and Orthodox Christian population has considered itself to be a branch of the larger Serbian nation in the Balkans, and in 1918, Montenegro voted to join the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. After World War II, Montenegro was declared a constituent republic in what would eventually become Marshal Josip Broz Tito's Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. As that state collapsed amid ethnic conflict, Montenegro in 1992 voted to maintain its ties to Serbia as part of the truncated Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, dominated by Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic. In 1997, however, a younger generation of politicians in Montenegro, led by then-prime minister Milo Djukanovic, broke ranks with Milosevic and set Montenegro on a slow course toward independence.

Milosevic's ouster in October 2000 did not significantly improve relations between Montenegro and its larger federal partner. In March 2002, under strong pressure from the European Union (EU), the two republics signed an agreement that loosened their bond, and federal Yugoslavia was formally replaced with the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003. However, the new state suffered from numerous problems, due largely to the great disparity in size between the two republics. Montenegro was only one-tenth the size of Serbia in population and accounted for a negligible part of the overall economy, but it enjoyed parity representation in most institutions of government. The union preserved some vestiges of a common state but also provided each republic with its own central bank, currency (the EU's euro is the official currency in Montenegro), and customs and taxation system. Furthermore, the union's charter stipulated that each state could hold an independence referendum after three years.

Djukanovic, Montenegro's leading politician, has served as either president or prime minister of the republic since 1991. After he left the presidency to reclaim the premiership in 2002, two attempts to elect a new Montenegrin president failed because voter turnout fell below the required 50 percent threshold. In February 2003, a new law on presidential elections that dropped the 50 percent rule came into force, allowing Filip Vujanovic, a Djukanovic ally, to win the post in a May 2003 vote. Vujanovic took 64 percent of the ballots, with 48.3 percent of eligible voters participating. The turnout and results were skewed somewhat by the main opposition parties' failure to agree on a candidate.

Montenegro is split between a large segment of the Orthodox Christian population that declares itself to be Serb and supports strong ties with Belgrade, and another segment that declares itself to be Montenegrin. The latter is supported by the country's ethnic Albanian, Muslim Slav (or Bosniak), and Roman Catholic minorities, all of which generally back Montenegrin independence. Despite these divisions, however, Montenegro under Djukanovic has been able to avoid the ethnic conflicts that have plagued the region over the past 15 years.

During Montenegro's independence referendum on May 21, 2006, voter turnout was high at 86 percent, with most citizens voting according to their ethnic loyalties. Nevertheless, the referendum campaign and the announcement of its outcome proceeded smoothly, offering a rare example of a state disintegrating in the Balkans without violence. The country formally declared independence in June, and voters confirmed their choice by giving the pro-independence coalition a majority in September parliamentary elections.

Montenegro's ultimate stability is still in doubt, however, given its ethnic divisions, weak economy, and endemic corruption. Adding to the uncertainty, Djukanovic announced in October that he was leaving office after 16 years at Montenegro's helm. Although he will likely continue to wield considerable power behind the scenes, there is some concern that his successors lack the political skills to manage Montenegro's problems with the same steady hand.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Montenegro is an electoral democracy. International observers reported that both the May referendum and the September parliamentary elections were conducted freely and fairly, albeit with some minor irregularities. Voter turnout for the September parliamentary elections was 71 percent, according to officials. The Montenegrin National Assembly is a unicameral, 81-seat legislature, with deputies serving four-year terms. Seventy-six seats are allotted according to polling results in all of Montenegro, while five seats are allotted according to results in majority Albanian areas. Group voting, in which the head of a household votes on behalf of all members of the family, was reported in 8 percent of polling places, generally those in majority Albanian areas. The president of Montenegro, directly elected for a five-year term and eligible for a second term, nominates the prime minister, who must be approved by the legislature.

Numerous political parties compete for power in Montenegro. The main pro-independence parties have been Djukanovic's Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), led by parliamentary speaker Ranko Krivokapic. The pair took a combined 41 seats in the latest elections. The main opposition pro-Serbia parties have been the Socialist People's Party (SNP), the People's Party (NS), and the Serbian People's Party (SNS). Pro-Serbian factions

won a combined 23 seats in September. Predominantly ethnic Albanian parties in Parliament are the Democratic Albanian Union (DUA) and the Democratic Alliance. Bosniaks are represented by the Democratic Union of Muslims-Bosniaks. Although most minorities have traditionally voted for major parties and not these small parties catering to their ethnic groups, there are indications that this may change in the postindependence period. Separately, a former nongovernmental organization (NGO) called the Group for Changes, led by the economist Nebojsa Medojevic, is playing an increasingly prominent role as a political party, capturing 11 seats in the latest vote.

Corruption is a serious problem in Montenegro. The country was not ranked in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index, but some international officials believe that corruption is an even greater problem in Montenegro than in neighboring Albania, which was ranked 111 out of 163 countries surveyed. By comparison, Serbia was ranked 90. Djukanovic himself has been accused by Italian prosecutors of involvement in cigarette smuggling, and since 2000, three high-ranking Montenegrin police officials have been assassinated.

Freedom of the press is generally respected, but journalists face some infringements. In May 2004, the publisher of a major opposition daily, Dusko Jovanovic, was assassinated, and his killers have never been found. During the September 2006 parliamentary elections, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) found that broadcast media, particularly public television, concentrated on the ruling parties and the activities of the government. Libel remains a criminal offense in Montenegro, but is punishable by fines rather than prison terms; nevertheless, there are frequent reports that the threat of fines forces journalists to engage in significant self-censorship. In 2005, government officials reportedly threatened media outlets that covered state corruption. Access to the internet has not been restricted.

According to the constitution, all citizens enjoy freedom of religious belief. Restitution of church property nationalized by the Communists remains a point of contention between church and state. This is a particularly complex problem in Montenegro, where the canonically recognized Serbian Orthodox Church frequently struggles with a self-proclaimed Montenegrin Orthodox Church over many church properties.

Montenegro's independence drive has also had implications for academic freedom. A group of professors in the city of Niksic were dismissed in 2005 for refusing to teach language courses named "mother tongue" in place of what had been called Serbian. The Djukanovic government claimed the professors were fired because they had illegally gone on strike, while the professors said their dismissal was politically motivated.

Citizens enjoy freedom of association and assembly. Foreign and domestic NGOs are able to pursue their activities without state interference. Although Montenegro's labor law was reformed in 2003 to make job dismissals easier, economists believe firing procedures are still inflexible and costly, deterring foreign investment. The country's General Collective Agreement, also passed in 2003, extends a long list of benefits to all employees, including generous provisions for holidays, housing, transport and meals, and seniority premiums. World Bank analyses suggest that such labor laws hinder the efficient allocation of labor and

encourage informality in the economy. A large number of Montenegro's workers—75,000, or 45 percent of all employees—belong to various types of unions. The ability of workers in Montenegro to engage in collective bargaining is considered to be relatively strong.

The Montenegrin judicial system lacks independence from political authorities, and judicial corruption remains a significant problem. In a case filed in October 2003, Djukanovic claimed that an opposition party member had committed libel by claiming that he was engaged in human-trafficking operations. The judge fined the opposition leader in question, Miodrag Zivkovic, several thousand euros after prohibiting him from submitting any evidence in his defense. The judge refused to accept reports from the OSCE and the U.S. State Department as evidence. Defense requests for access to earlier investigations into the human-trafficking scandal were also turned down. Prison conditions generally meet international standards.

Cultural and ethnic minorities have their own political parties, access to media in their own languages, and other types of associations. Ethnic Albanians, however, claim that they are underrepresented in the civil service, particularly in the police and the judiciary. In September 2006, over a dozen ethnic Albanians were arrested by Montenegrin security services for their involvement in an alleged terrorist plot. Several of those arrested were tortured or severely beaten. Now that Montenegro has become independent, it is likely that ethnic minorities, and particularly Albanians, will begin increasing their demands for proportional representation in government and administrative reorganization to create more Albanian-majority municipalities.

Although women are legally entitled to equal pay for equal work, traditional patriarchal attitudes prevalent throughout the Balkans often limit women's roles in the economy. In general, women are underrepresented in higher levels of government. Only 14.6 percent of the candidates in September's parliamentary elections were women. Currently, 11 women serve as deputies in the 81-member Parliament.