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Amnesty International Annual Report 2011 - Montenegro

Head of state: Filip Vujanovic

Head of government: Igor Luksic (replaced Milo Dukanovic in December)

Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes

Population: 0.6 million

Life expectancy: 74.6 years

Under-5 mortality (m/f): 11/9 per 1,000

War crimes prosecutions continued. Journalists and some NGOs were subject to intimidation. Roma continued to be denied social and economic rights.

Background

Although the European Commission in November had highlighted the continued need for the country to combat organized crime, improve the situation of displaced people, and ensure freedom of expression, Montenegro was granted EU candidate country status in December. Also in December, Prime Minister Milo Dukanovic resigned. Except between late 2006 and early 2008, he had held power as Prime Minister, or as President, since 1992.

International justice

While war crimes prosecutions against low-ranking military personnel or police officials continued, senior officials were rarely indicted. Under an extradition agreement signed with Serbia in October, 11 people wanted in Montenegro were arrested in Serbia including five men suspected of committing war crimes in Dubrovnik, Croatia.

- Proceedings continued against nine former police officers and officials, five in their absence, for the enforced disappearance in 1992 of Bosniak refugees, who were handed over to the de facto Bosnian Serb authorities. In November the authorities granted former President Momir Bulatovic permission to divulge state secrets when he appeared as a witness in this case.
- Six former members of the Yugoslav People's Army convicted in May for war crimes were found guilty of torture and inhumane treatment of 169 Croatian prisoners of war and civilians at Morinj camp near Kotor in 1992. They were sentenced to less than the statutory minimum of five years' imprisonment, on the grounds that they had not previously been convicted of any offence.

- Proceedings opened in June against seven former members of the Yugoslav Army (which succeeded the Yugoslav People's Army) for crimes against humanity against Bosniak civilians in Bukovica in 1992-3. In related civil proceedings in April, Saban and Arifa Rizvanovic were each awarded 10,000 euros compensation for torture inflicted by Yugoslav Army reservists in 1993.

Torture and other ill-treatment

The Ombudsperson's Office was established as a National Prevention Mechanism in line with the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture, empowered to conduct unannounced visits to places of detention. In March, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture reported on its 2008 visit, concluding that investigations into alleged ill-treatment needed to be more effective. In October, the NGO Youth Initiative for Human Rights reported that the Ministry of the Interior had started responding more promptly to allegations reported by the NGO, and that some police officers had subsequently been disciplined or charged.

- In January, Dalibor Nikezic and Igor Milic, detainees at Spuz prison, filed a new complaint against prison guards, alleging they had been ill-treated and threatened to force them to withdraw a previous complaint. Their first complaint was rejected by the State Prosecutor in February. Despite viewing a prison surveillance video (showing the men being dragged from their cells and beaten), she found no basis for a criminal prosecution.

Freedom of expression

Journalists and some NGOs continued to be threatened and intimidated. Public officials brought defamation proceedings against journalists, resulting in heavy fines, sometimes exceeding the 14,000 euros set out in law. NGOs and journalists considered that amendments to the Law on Freedom of Information proposed in June restricted freedom of expression and access to information. In October, the State Prosecutor refused to provide the NGO Human Rights Action with information on the progress of 14 criminal proceedings in which they had an interest, including the 2007 threats to the life of Aleksandar Zekovic, member of the Committee for Civic Control of Police.

Discrimination

An Anti-Discrimination Law, including provisions protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, was adopted in July, despite homophobic remarks by the Minister of Human and Minority Rights during the parliamentary debate. The law was not implemented by the end of the year as amendments to the Law on the Ombudsperson, empowering the Ombudsperson's Office to receive complaints of discrimination, had not been adopted. Roma continued to be denied social and economic rights. In the absence of adequate housing, many lived in unsafe conditions: in October, two Romani children died in an unofficial settlement on a garbage dump at Lovanja after their home, built of tar paper, caught fire.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

More than 24,000 displaced people remained in Montenegro, including 3,192 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians from Kosovo. New legislation and reduced fees enabled some refugees and displaced people to apply for permanent or temporary residence. By December, only 880 people had applied for permanent and 40 for temporary residency, reflecting continued problems in obtaining the necessary documentation. People displaced from Kosovo feared they would be returned after the Podgorica city authorities announced that they would dismantle the Konik camp, where they had lived since 1999.

