

MONTENEGRO: Parliamentary election, 2001

The Phantom Issue of Independence

BHHRG representatives visited Montenegro to observe the extraordinary parliamentary election held on 22nd April, 2001. At the same time, they examined the questions surrounding state independence which was the real issue at the heart of the election campaign

Summary of Conclusions

In the past, this Group's observers have concluded that Montenegrin elections have been seriously flawed by problems with voter registration, police pressure during the campaign and, on polling day, massively one-sided media bias, and inexplicable delays in the announcement of full results. The extraordinary parliamentary elections on 22nd April saw some improvements on voting day itself - especially the absence of police pressure - but the removal of up to 10% of electorate from the voters' register just days before the poll seriously distorted the fairness of the vote.

The media remained almost entirely in the hands of the governing party and may have distorted the count by premature reports of misleading results. (Foreign media like CNN also pre-empted the count.) Virtually no campaign posters for the opposition parties were visible. Despite the narrow outcome of the count announced by the Central Election Commission it would be a mistake to conclude that all Montenegrin citizens had the chance to have their vote counted equally.

The key issue in the campaign seemed to be for or against independence for Montenegro, at least in the rhetoric of the politicians. However, closer questioning suggests that what was at stake for the two main contenders was manoeuvring for position in a reformed Yugoslav Federation.

Introduction

On 22nd April 2001 extraordinary parliamentary elections were held in the Yugoslav republic of Montenegro – the next poll was scheduled for June 2002. However, defections from the ruling coalition and the pressing problems of the republic's status in the Yugoslav federation led President Djukanovic to seek an earlier mandate for his policies which, it was widely accepted, centred on possible independence for the small republic of 650,000 inhabitants.

BHHRG has monitored all the elections held in Montenegro since 1997 [see reports: **Montenegro Presidential Election, 1997; Montenegro Parliamentary election, 1998**]. The Group's representatives returned to observe the April 2001 poll. They interviewed a wide variety of people in the republic including political parties and members of the Orthodox church (both official and breakaway factions). On polling day itself they visited areas in the south-west, including the towns of Bar, Ulcinj, Cetinje and Budva and surrounding regions; Niksic and Danilovgrad in the north east of the country; the capital Podgorica and surrounding areas, including the mainly Albanian town of Tuzi.

Background to the Election

By the mid 1990s only two republics were left in the Yugoslav Federation: Serbia and Montenegro. However, their relationship was to come under increasing strain as the decade progressed. By 1997, Montenegro had come to play a pivotal part in the international community's Balkan strategy. This began in the summer of that year when the ruling pro-Belgrade party of Democratic Socialists (DPS) split and was taken over by a group of pro-Western politicians. In presidential elections held in October 1997 Montenegro's prime minister, Milo Djukanovic narrowly beat the incumbent, Momir Bulatovic, in a controversial poll criticized at the time by BHHRG observers.

Although Djukanovic had been a leading member of the Yugoslav governments involved in the Balkan wars of the early 1990s he was likely prevailed upon by the international community, in particular, the US, to detach himself from Belgrade. After doing so, his role in events like the bombardment of Dubrovnik undertaken by Yugoslav army (VJ) troops stationed in Montenegro in 1991 was conveniently forgotten about. So, too, were allegations of his involvement in smuggling and profiteering from the sanctions imposed on the former Yugoslavia in 1992.

Djukanovic established further control over the republic when the DPS won parliamentary elections in June 1998. By now, Montenegro was receiving large sums of money from both the US and EU to encourage it to distance itself from Belgrade. When Nato bombed Yugoslavia in 1999 the republic was largely spared; Djukanovic made no secret of the fact that he supported the West's strategy over Kosovo, despite widespread domestic opposition. He also provided Serbian opposition leaders, like Zoran Djindjic, with a comfortable billet on the Adriatic coast during the hostilities.

The Issue of Independence

Montenegro showed no interest in independence when the other republics – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Macedonia – split from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. This has been put down to the fact that the bulk of its population has never distinguished itself from Serbs in Serbia proper.

However, the small Montenegrin Liberal Party had long campaigned for a separate identity based on the republic's brief period of internationally recognized independence between 1878 and the end of the First World War when the kingdom of Yugoslavia was created by the Great Powers. During that time the country had been ruled by the Njegos family who resided in the small mountain town of Cetinje. Visitors today can see the remains of its former grandeur in the buildings that once housed diplomatic missions from countries like France and Great Britain. The last (and only) King of Montenegro, Nikola 1 died in exile in Italy in 1921. When the question of Montenegrin independence was raised again his heirs were prevailed upon to visit the country.

Orthodox Church

Added spice has been given to the independence issue by the emergence of an independent, autocephalous Montenegrin church. According to its self-styled bishop, Mihailo, the church was 'revived' in 1993 and now operates in an ordinary house on the outskirts of Cetinje which has been kitted out with a chapel and other appurtenances of the Orthodox faith.

On previous visits to Montenegro representatives of the official Orthodox church which operates under the auspices of the Pec Patriarchate in Kosovo, have accused the breakaway faction of harassing priests and vandalising churches. It is also alleged that the bishop and several of his priests have criminal records. In fact, one priest admitted as much in an interview with BHHRG on 21st April, although he claimed the charges were unjust. The Group was shown a video film of the church's New Year celebrations provocatively held outside the monastery which is the seat of the official church in Cetinje – a well-attended gathering rendered somewhat bizarre by the presence of mafia-style bodyguards.

Bishop Mihailo also warned that the Hague Tribunal "would not ignore the Serbian Orthodox Church or other churches involved in the Balkan wars". Presumably the bishop himself and his followers would not be on the list of indictees. Meanwhile, Metropolitan Amfilohje, the recognized head of the Montenegrin church, claimed that his name (and those of other priests) had been removed from the electoral register in Cetinje before polling day.

Political support for independence in Montenegro

When Milo Djukanovic and his party took over the running of the republic the independence issue was revived, albeit discreetly, for the first time since Nikola's death. It is probably true to say that the president was encouraged in this change of direction by his Western backers.

Had Milosevic not been ousted during the September 2000 poll, Plan B, so to speak, might have been put into effect with Montenegro leaving the federation so pulling the rug from under Milosevic's power base. By the summer of 2000, Montenegro was de facto independent in many ways: it had its own banking and financial regulations, its own currency (the D Mark formally adopted in November 1999) and quasi-official diplomatic representation in both Brussels and Washington. In reality, this state of affairs was anything but independent: Montenegro was a client state, dependent on Western money to pay everything from local bribes to old age pensions.

But declaring outright independence was still a risky venture for, as previously stated, enthusiasm for going it alone is by no means widespread in the republic. The SNP made substantial gains in local elections held in June 2000 in Podgorica and Herceg Novi with the party gaining control of the coastal town [see BHHRG report **Montenegrin Local Elections, 2000**]. The Liberals did badly, gaining only about 4% of the votes – an odd state of affairs if independence was as popular as some polls suggested.

However, matters were not entirely clear cut even in the ranks of those who supported the federation. Many people were tired of the Milosevic years. Like their brethren in Belgrade they blamed their economic problems and international isolation on his continued hold on power. There was also a constant stream of propaganda suggesting that under Milosevic's instructions VJ troops stationed in Montenegro were poised to stage a coup and promote civil war.

This never came about – nor was it ever likely to. As was evidenced in Kosovo, the Yugoslav army held on by a process of attrition rather than attack. Also, the balance of forces was not as appeared on the surface. A British newspaper article described the training given to Djukanovic's police force by crack SAS forces from the UK.¹ Montenegro's elite, 15,000 strong police force became sufficiently well-equipped to retaliate against any threats from the local VJ. The extraordinary increase in police numbers is demonstrated by the fact that there were only 960 policemen in Montenegro in 1992. The regime in Belgrade wasn't stupid. It knew that the mightiest army in the world was ranged against it and that any provocation would probably be met with another round of bombing.

So, it seemed strange for the regime in Podgorica to make even more vociferous demands for independence *after* Milosevic had fallen. Wasn't a new, reformist president now in power in Belgrade? Vojislav Kostunica was supported by the international community and hailed by opinion polls as the most popular politician in Serbia? Why, then was Djukanovic now pushing even harder than ever to break free from the federation?

To understand the motivation behind his move it is necessary to look at Djukanovic's relationship with the federal institutions over the past few years.

The Yugoslav Federal Parliament

The Federal Parliament (*Savezna Skupstina*) in Belgrade is divided into two separate entities: the Council of Citizens (*Vece Gradana*) and the Council of the Republics (*Vece Republika*). The former chamber has 138 members, elected by popular mandate. The latter has 40 seats, divided equally between the two republics, Serbia and Montenegro. The 1992 constitution was amended in July 2000 so that both houses would be elected in the future by popular mandate. The previous constitution had preserved some kind of parity between the larger Serbia (pop. 9m.) and Montenegro (pop. 650,000) by legislating for the appointment of deputies to the Chamber of the Republics (10 from each entity) by the lower house. The Montenegrins regarded the 2000 constitutional amendments as reducing further their influence in the federal government.

Arguments between the government in Podgorica and Belgrade over the functioning of the federation had gone on for some time. After the parliamentary election of 1998, Djukanovic sent 20 deputies from the winning coalition to take their seats in the Chamber of the Republics. Previously, membership of the Council had been on a proportional basis. However, Montenegro passed a new law after the 1998 election that changed the rules.

When the federal authorities disagreed, the DPS coalition withdrew its representatives from the body. However, 7 opposition deputies refused to obey and remained in the chamber and participated in its work.

From that time onwards the Djukanovic coalition had no representation in the federal structures nor did it participate in the elections held to the federal parliament on 24th September, 2000 (at the same time as the Serbian presidential election). The Montenegrin government also refused to acknowledge the amendments passed on 6th June 2000 which brought about the direct election of the Yugoslav president. The leading Montenegrin opposition Socialist Party, the SNP, did participate in the poll and gained 28 seats in the Chamber of Citizens and 19 in the Chamber of the Republics.

Djukanovic's official reason for boycotting the parliament was the perceived inequities of the federal arrangements. In other words, supporters of Montenegrin independence say that the federation could only have any meaning for them if they had complete equality in all federal bodies with their larger Serb neighbours. Of course, this is total nonsense. There is no federation in the world which gives complete parity between its larger and smaller components. Switzerland's National Council has 200 members elected in proportion to the population of the cantons. In Belgium 25 members of the senate are from the Flemish majority while 15 are French. In the United States the total number of senators and congressmen sent to Washington broadly reflects the size of the respective states, though each state, of course, has only two senators.

During the Autumn months of 2000 while the international community heaped praise on the new president, Vojislav Kostunica, a different message was coming out of Podgorica. It seemed that the Montenegrin authorities were not satisfied with the momentous changes in Belgrade and were more hell-bent than ever on pursuing independence. Their rhetoric also grew in intensity against the recently elected Kostunica.

As the debate continued in Montenegro the battle lines were drawn. The Liberal Party had always supported a sovereign Montenegro and they were joined in this by the Albanian minority parties which had long supported Djukanovic. Inevitably, the Socialist Party supported a continuation of the federation. But, splits were developing in the coalition itself and on 28th December the Peoples' Party (NS) which had previously supported independence walked out over the issue leaving the DPS and its only ally, the Social Democrats, to run a minority government.

Even then, early elections could have been avoided. For one thing, the government could have survived as a minority administration or it could have taken up the Liberal Party's offer to join a new coalition. Djukanovic refused the offer and decided to call elections in April. By this time, the independence issue had come to dominate all public debate and it was commonly accepted that the election was a referendum by another name. At a press conference held on 20th April, Miorag Vukovic, President Djukanovic's spokesman predicted that the referendum would take place on 13th July, a date which had attained near magical properties in his eyes, anyway: for example, Montenegro launched its anti-fascist uprising on 13th July, 1941 and there are 13 letters in Milo Djukanovic's name! (Dj = one letter ' Đ' in the Serbo-Croat alphabet)

Inevitably, many people wondered why Djukanovic had not decided to grasp the nettle and seek a mandate for independence on 22nd April rather than subject a poor country like Montenegro to two polls on exactly the same issue within a matter of months. As stated, everyone BHHRG talked to regarded this as the only issue in the election.

The view from Belgrade

President Vojislav Kostunica:

Finding a candidate capable of beating Milosevic in the September 2000 federal presidential election was not easy. Although Milosevic was unpopular in Yugoslavia for many of the reasons outlined in this report the Serbian opposition was trusted even less. Many of its

leaders were regarded as traitors for siding with NATO during the Kosovo War; those that hadn't (like the excitable Vuk Draskovic) were perceived as being unreliable. Of course, this implies (quite rightly) that the candidate was not chosen in Belgrade but in Washington and Brussels. It also reveals that the international community could not easily resort to rigging the vote as the Serbian Socialist Party and its allies were in charge of administering the election at this stage.

Vojislav Kostunica, an academic lawyer and leader of the small opposition Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) proved to be the best choice. He had maintained his patriotic credentials by unreservedly opposing the Kosovo War, remaining in Belgrade during the conflict. Although he was a Serb nationalist the international community was prepared to overlook this drawback in their resolve to remove Milosevic from power.

However, his election (following a successful 'coup' on 5/6th October 2000) was regarded by many as a transitory victory. Such people included Milo Djukanovic in Montenegro whose hostility to the president was apparent at an early stage. Over the months the barrage of criticism against Kostunica coming from newspapers and other media in Podgorica has grown.

- "There have seldom been rulers in Serbia who have succeeded in creating as much hostility among Montenegrins as Kostunica has" said the government-supporting newspaper, *Pobjeda* on 10th February, 2001
- Filip Vujanovic, Montenegrin prime minister, said that had not Montenegrins monitored the poll "he [Kostunica] would have comprehensively lost the election".
- Earlier, the Montenegrin representative in Sarajevo, Novak Kilibarda, announced that Kostunica was "a greater threat than Milosevic".
- On 4th April, Djukanovic said that Kostunica was "interfering" with the election campaign
- and, on 16th April, Predrag Boskovic of the DPS accused Kostunica of using methods that were "perfidious and much further-reaching" than those used by Milosevic.

More criticism was heaped on the president by Djukanovic's spokesman at a press conference in Podgorica held on 20th April.

Demonizing the federal president in the eyes of the Montenegrin public is obviously a necessary element in the run-up to the endgame when his job would become redundant. Kostunica himself has been more discreet in public, on the one hand, backing the existing federation on the other, pledging not to interfere if a referendum supports independence. He is still the most popular politician in the former Yugoslavia so side-lining him will have to be done with care.

The DOS led government in Belgrade

It is generally accepted that the most influential politician in Serbia is the prime minister, Zoran Djindjic. He is viewed as more pivotal to the future of the Balkans both by Djukanovic (they are old friends) and the international community. While Djindjic and the DOS coalition of parties that govern Serbia have refrained from openly supporting Montenegrin independence, they have also been lukewarm in their backing for the federation, and, less than enthusiastic over cooperation with President Kostunica. Djindjic's public statements about the future composition of the former Yugoslavia are consistent: independent states whose sovereignty will be properly constrained by integration into a larger pan-European entity.

SERBIAN PREMIER DESIGNATE DJINDJIC FOR CONCEPT OF BALKAN UNION
BERLIN, A statement by Zoran Djindjic, the candidate of the Democratic
Opposition of Serbia (DOS) for Serbian premier and the leader of Democratic Party

(DS), that the future of the Balkans lies in integration with the European Union (EU), and that a faster and simpler solution would be to create a Balkan economic union, has attracted much attention in the German press.

Clarifying the concept, Djindjic told German Deutsche Welle radio that the majority of Balkan countries want to join the EU, but that this would "require for us to show maturity by first establishing mutual links within some kind of economic or customs union so that, as a whole, we attract interest."

Djindjic pointed out certain regional problems such as the ethnic Albanian issue, which concerns Serbia, Macedonia and Greece. He said that this could be resolved only through a single concept of development and the relativization of mutual borders.

"Many elements indicate the idea of mutual links between the Balkan states and the creation of a joint space which, at the first moment should be an economic one, and then it would be necessary to set up institutions which transcend economic integrations and are also important for mutual political relations," Djindjic set out.

He underscored that Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia have already expressed interest for such a process and expressed expectations that Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina would join talks on this during 2001.

"I believe that these talks will first focus on the economic sphere as early as this year," Djindjic stated adding that even within the Yugoslav federation, Serbia and Montenegro would have more links than now if they were organized as in the European Union.² January 11, 2001 (Tanjug)

It is interesting to note that a leading Kosovan politician, Adam Demaci, has also proposed the same solution for Kosovo itself. In a talk given at the London's Bosnia Institute on 2nd April 2000 he said that "Kosovo is asking for its natural position as an independent state. After that, all the natural and organic integration processes will unfold, in the region and beyond"³

The view from Podgorica

Main Political Parties and Coalitions in Montenegro

The Victory is Montenegro's – Pobjeda je Crna Gora Coalition
Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), party of president Milo Djukanovic
Social Democratic Party (SDP)

Together for Yugoslavia – Zajedno za Yugoslavie coalition
Socialist People's Party (SNP)
People's Party (NS)
Serbian People's Party (SNS)

Liberal Alliance – pro-independence

People's Socialist Party (NSS) anti-independence

Democratic Union of Albanians (DUSh)

Democratic League in Montenegro (LdneMZ)

Party of Democratic Prosperity (PPD) - all three Albanian parties are pro-independence

The Government

The governing coalition consisting of the DPS and its smaller partner, the Social Democratic Party, support independence. However, this would lead to a future union between Serbia and Montenegro. The two 'independent' republics would form a loose association united by a common currency, joint army command and foreign policy (although Djukanovic insists that Montenegro must have its own seat at the UN).

The Opposition:

The main opposition party in Montenegro, the Socialist People's Party (SNP) opposes Montenegrin independence but, matters are not entirely straightforward here either. The party has become less confrontational since Milosevic fell from power, but it was probably changing, albeit discreetly, before then.

Until January 2001, the SNP was led by Momir Bulatovic who was also the prime minister of the Yugoslav Federation until the 2000 federal election when he was replaced by Zoran Zizic. Although he seemed to be a mild-mannered and reasonable person, Bulatovic was tarnished, even in the eyes of some SNP supporters, with the Milosevic brush. He seems to have exhibited unusual qualities of loyalty for this part of the world: in 1997 he told BHHRG that he had been offered a large amount of money (\$2m.) "from humanitarian aid in the normal way" by the US Balkan envoy, Robert Gelbard, to abandon the ex-president, an offer he had refused. With Milosevic gone the party obviously decided that its bona fides would be improved if Bulatovic too was to be side-lined.

According to Vuksan Simonovic, Director of the SNP, arguments broke out during the Autumn of 2000 over the tactics deployed by the SNP deputies elected to the Federal parliament that September. In an interview with BHHRG on 20th April Simonovic said that the SNP deputies had entered a coalition with DOS members of the Federal Parliament after the election. The party felt that this was the best way of preserving the federation. However, Momir Bulatovic and others in the SNP regarded this as a form of treachery as leading members of the DOS coalition were, to say the least, equivocal about the federation's future.

On 29th January 2001, Momir Bulatovic resigned from the SNP taking several of the party's MPs and leading activists with him. Vuksan Simonovic claims that Bulatovic and his supporters 'left' the party without pressure. Others disagree. The ICG says that "former federal prime minister Momir Bulatovic was ousted as SNP leader in early 2001"⁴. It seems fairly obvious that they he was pushed. Leadership of the party passed to the former mayor of Podgorica, Predrag Bulatovic (no relation) while Momir Bulatovic and his supporters formed a new party, the People's Socialist Party (NSS) which failed to capture any seats in the Montenegrin parliament on 22nd April.

When the voting figures for the September election are examined it seems strange that the SNP decided to join DOS as the best way of preserving the federation. While DOS gained 58 seats in the Chamber of Citizens the combined vote of the pro-Yugoslav forces, the Serbian Socialist Party (SPS) and JUL, Serbian Radicals and Montenegrin Socialists (SNP) was 77. Similarly, in the Chamber of the Republics DOS gained 10 mandates while the SPS/JUL, Radicals and SNS together got 28. In other words, would it not have been more effective for the Montenegrin Socialists to join with the pro-federalist forces from Serbia as together they had an overwhelming majority over the DOS?

Zoran Zizic has said that the SNP wants inter-party dialogue on future relations between Serbia and Montenegro and a new constitution after which there would be a (another) new constitution for the common state. A view seemingly indistinguishable from that held by Dr.

Djindjic et al. Mr. Simonovic told BHHRG that the party had held several meetings with Western diplomats and politicians who had, no doubt, persuaded the SNS to tone down the pro-federal rhetoric.

The view from the international community

While all the local players seem to be undecided as to how exactly Montenegrin independence would work, none speak with such forked tongues as the international community. The official view is that the West which, after all, funds Montenegro is opposed to its independence. Politicians like Britain's Robin Cook are regularly quoted urging caution and restraint on Podgorica.

However, a long acquaintance with the double-talk of the international community breeds suspicion. The US and bodies like the EU usually come down like a ton of bricks on something of which they disapprove, threatening all kinds of sanctions and penalties to those who fall out of line. The tone has been more nuanced and mellow when it comes to Montenegro. Influential think-tanks which reflect much of the international community's thinking, like the International Crisis Group, (ICG), have actually been recommending independence for both Montenegro and Kosovo for some time now.

It is interesting to note that both the US and EU have been involved in helping Montenegro set up its own institutions. The leading Montenegrin news agency, Montana-fax, reported on 28th January 2001 that parliament would "soon be presented with a customs bill that will define this field in line with the Montenegrin aspirations to become an independent and internationally recognised state. Experts from USAID also participated in the preparation of the text of the law".⁵ Another report, carried the same day said that the Montenegrin parliamentary group "in charge of preparing a draft referendum law will resume work tomorrow with the participation of representatives of ...the OSCE and the EU monitoring mission."⁶ All this 4 months *after the fall of Milosevic* and in direct contradiction of the international community's stated opposition to Montenegrin independence.

Why the coyness then? First of all, Kosovo. No one wants the province to feel it can rush into independence on the back of a decision by Montenegro. Any decision on Kosovo's future must be according to the West's time table. There is also the thorny question of Vojislav Kostunica. If the federation collapses – in this case by the exit of Montenegro - Dr. Kostunica will be without a job. As the president has a genuine popular base (unlike the favoured Djindjic et al.) there could be a backlash, at least, if that was to happen in too peremptory a fashion.

The People

BHHRG have found no enthusiasm for independence in Montenegro on this and previous trips to the republic. A wide variety of people were asked for their opinions on the subject during the pre-electoral period and the overwhelming majority wanted to maintain the federation, Teenage boys interviewed in Niksic were keen to point out that support for the federation was not only confined to the older members of society .

No doubt, their views reflect a certain 'Yugo-nostalgia' and hark back to a time when people had jobs and security. But, there is also a perception that the government in Podgorica wants independence to bolster its own power base rather than improve their standard of living.

Montenegro on the eve of the 20th April election

Since 1997 Montenegro has received millions of dollars in international aid and the US Congress has earmarked another large tranche of funds for the coming year. Much of this has been used to pay salaries and pensions in order to support a basically peasant and working class population. By doing this, the government in Podgorica was able to distance itself from cash-strapped Belgrade. People interviewed by BHHRG said they had received their pensions – 2 months late, but obviously better late than never. Wages and salaries are

also reputedly higher than elsewhere in the region although a professional person earns c.\$100 per month, not the \$250 as stated. The jury seems to out on the effects of the introduction of the D Mark as the state currency – it is early days yet. But there was no consensus that prices had stabilized. Everything now seems to be imported and not only staple food stuffs. BHHRG noticed that the cement being used to build a new marina complex was imported from Greece - an absurdity in a mountainous, limestone-based country like Montenegro. The importation of cement was also visible in many Albanian villages in the south and in Cetinje.

There is no evidence that state-sponsored public works have been undertaken with the large infusions of foreign cash. On election day, BHHRG saw palm trees being planted along one of the main highways in the capital, Podgorica. This Potemkin village-like activity may not have been unconnected with the visit made by British Foreign Minister, Robin Cook, the next day. Meanwhile, the civic infrastructure, in the form of activities like garbage collection, seems to have deteriorated since the Group's last visit. Where has all the money gone? In one of the only detailed, critical articles to appear in the English language press about corruption in Montenegro it is revealed that large sums of money have been spent on "54 apartments with marble corridors, oak parquet floors, climate-controlled systems ... comforts rarely seen in a republic where the average worker takes home \$85 a month. ...The complex also contains government offices ...furnished to the most modern European standards"⁷

On previous visits to Montenegro BHHRG has noted (like everyone else) the omnipresence of mafia-type men. There seem to be fewer in evidence now – for example, Cetinje's cafes, normally crowded with such people were empty. It was suggested that after the fall of Milosevic many of these people decamped to Belgrade. It may also be the case that recent attacks on the government of Montenegro for complicity in smuggling both cigarettes and people may have led the authorities to clamp down, at least, on the more public displays of ill-gotten gains.

The authorities in Italy have been the most active in this regard. Prosecutors there have pointed to connections between the Italian and Montenegrin mafias for some time. In 1999 the Montenegrin foreign minister, Branko Perovic, was forced to resign after being named in a smuggling operation. Then, in January 2001, the former Italian Finance Minister, Ottaviano Del Turco launched an investigation into cigarette smuggling naming President Djukanovic himself as a chief participant in the rackets.⁸

Djukanovic launched a series of personal attacks on Del Turco. The Deputy Interior Minister, Vuk Boskovic, said that his allegations were "tendentious and spin-doctored". It was also claimed that Belgrade was behind the scandal. At a press conference held on 20th April in Podgorica, Djukanovic's press spokesman, Miorag Vukovic (a constitutional lawyer) called Del Turco " an imbecile, a man of minimal education" while denying the allegations. It is somewhat salutary to see the president and his spokesmen in a small Balkan statelet having the confidence (and chutzpah) to take on one of the largest and most powerful countries in Europe in this way. It suggests that Djukanovic's confidence is backed up by forces even more powerful than those of the EU.

BHHRG was told that the government had the greatest access to the media for its pro-independence message. The introduction of a parliamentary channel on state TV for the period of the campaign didn't counter the imbalance. However, as there was only one issue in the election and everyone knew what it was, media propaganda was almost superfluous.

More important, perhaps, was the fact that the ruling coalition had plastered the whole country with lavish posters and billboards. The parliament building had been turned into a vast propaganda vehicle for the government: in the press conference centre, neon lights flashed with the Coalition's message and glossily produced leaflets lay everywhere. When BHHRG asked a female assistant whether or not this was meant to be a government building or a party office, she just giggled. Outside Podgorica the situation was the same. In one town, Danilovgrad, some buildings and windows were almost totally obliterated with Djukanovic election material. It must have been an expensive business, presumably paid for indirectly by

the donations from foreign governments, who, we are told, are hostile to the independence idea.

There was little election material for the opposition and posters for the SNS were often defaced with splashes of black paint.

Opinion Polls

Although it was accepted that the desire for independence was not entirely popular, opinion polls produced before the election consistently supported a wide margin of victory to the government coalition. A poll by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) was also widely off the mark predicting 13% support for the Liberal Alliance.

Poll for the Podgorica Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM)
carried out between 27th March –3rd April, 2001

DPS coalition	37,6%
Liberal Alliance	9,7%
Together for Yugoslavia	30.4%
Undecided	17.7%

An earlier CEDEM poll (24.1.2001) predicted 49% in favour of independence and 39.8% against

Poll by the NDI carried out between 1 - 4.4.2001-05-08

DPS coalition	44%
Liberal Alliance	13%
Together for Yugoslavia.....	26%
Undecided	12%

Election Day

Conduct of the poll: It was generally agreed that the conduct of the poll had improved on previous elections. For one thing, BHHRG observed no police presence in and around the polling stations visited. Local observers insisted that there were no *secret* policemen present either. Commissions operated efficiently, if slowly. There was only one register for each polling station and the procedure involved a rather elaborate process of collating stubs from ballot papers. The voter's name was then read out for the benefit of the domestic observers present, which was rather intimidating. Only four people a time were allowed into the polling station which meant that queues developed in many places. While these were patient and good-natured, in many places it seemed unnecessary for them to wait out in the rain as many polling places were large enough to accommodate people without causing chaos.

Commissions: Apart from 4 token polling stations with opposition chairmen, the 3 main commission members in the whole country (including the chairmen) were members of the ruling DPS party. The remaining members of the commissions were, supposedly, from opposition parties but BHHRG observers found that, when questioned, many were vague about their party affiliation leading to suspicions that they, too, were representatives of the Djukanovic forces. In some smaller places commission chairmen were obviously powerful people in the community which was evidenced by the fact that they told observers that everyone would be voting for the SDS in their polling station eg. in Tuzi, Cerovu and Mijokusovici.

Registers: At pre-election meetings with BHHRG observers both the NS and SNP had raised the likelihood of problems with voting lists. The NS had stated that large numbers of people were on the lists who had lived abroad for some time. It was impossible for BHHRG to verify this accusation. However, they did visit several places where people had gone to vote and not found themselves on the register even though they claimed to have been registered to

vote on previous occasions and were present the last time they had checked, in some cases only 3 weeks previously. The problem was particularly acute in the south and south west of the country although both teams of BHHRG observers encountered this problem. In the Konek district of Podgorica, (visited at 18.00) the DPS chairman said that 50 people had found themselves not on the register; in Cerovu, 15 people had been turned away at 14.00. The Group calculated that between 2% and 7% were unable to vote and they were almost always SNS supporters.

At Sutomore No. 59, 34 people had been unable to vote when BHHRG visited. Voting was halted for a time after the SNP complained. Commission members said that people (Serbs) had been taken off the lists because they contravened the 2 year residency requirement, being only summer visitors. A DPS observer explicitly stated that it was "known" who the people were and by implication that they were not pro-independence. As if to make the point that political allegiance was central to determining the right to vote or not, a boisterous man in his sixties entered the polling station, announcing, "The Serbian people have always produced their traitors. And I am one of them! I am for Milo Djukanovic!" However, others pointed out that Albanians who came to work in the area for the summer had not been so excluded. Other places visited with similar problems were Bar (No. 51), Petrovac and Budva, No. 8.

Observers: There were a large number of party observers in each polling station as well as representatives from 2 domestic groups, CEDEM and the Centre for Democratic Transition. Assessments given for the number of foreign observers present in the republic were patently outlandish, ranging from 3000 to even 4000! BHHRG met few foreign observers during election day.

As is sadly often the case, many of the people labelled as party observers showed remarkably little awareness of their role, and sometimes even of their party, waiting for the electoral commission chairman to assign them their allegiance. This suggests that some observers were bogus, set up by the DPS authorities to provide the simulacrum of objectivity, while others were simply hardly politically aware and therefore not really suitable people to follow the technicalities of the election process.

Turn-out: Turn-out was steady throughout the day although in some places it was said that more people had voted earlier than usual. BHHRG calculated that c. 70-75% had voted by the end of the day but not the 81% recorded by the CEC in Podgorica.

Count: The counts observed were properly conducted although in Podgorica, No. 85 it took over 2 hours to count 620 votes. This is because Montenegro has adopted elaborate vote counting methods at the insistence of bodies like the OSCE.

The count in Budva No.8 was almost unique in Montenegro as this was one of only 4 polling stations in the whole country where the opposition provided the chairman of the election commission. The relations between the different party representatives seemed cordial and they did their work efficiently. Turnout was 679 or 79% with only 7 people refused the right to vote. 4 of the commission members had drafted a complaint to the Regional Election Commission (which was based in the same building) to complain that all 7 electors had been on the register until four days before the voting. This problem of the regional authorities removing people whose names had been on the register earlier - and who had often checked their right to vote already before it was withdrawn - was more pronounced in another coastal station where up to 10% of voters had been struck off often after they had checked their places on the list earlier in the campaign.

Results: After the first round of the presidential election in 1997 Montenegrin state TV stopped its coverage of the results when the desired outcome (a victory for Mr. Djukanovic) failed to materialize. A long evening of folk-dancing filled the air waves instead. Similarly, on the night of 22nd April Montenegrin TV transmitted hours of traffic driving quietly round Podgorica before giving out preliminary results after midnight.

However, foreign media had taken the initiative in announcing the results much earlier. The BBC claimed a decisive victory for Mr. Djukanovic at 22.45 and CNN transmitted the same news on its 23.00 bulletin followed by a long analysis supporting Montenegrin independence by a Balkan expert in Washington, Janos Bugajski. One BHHRG group was still observing the count in Budva as these news items went out, so, it has to be asked where the BBC and CNN got their information from? The Commission in Budva were angry that reports of results were being issued while they were still counting and suspected pressure on election commission members. In other states the OSCE has sharply criticised both local and international media and monitors for issuing partial or projected results before counting has been completed because of the chances that such news will influence the commissions still counting.

In fact, in Budva there was a sharp swing against the DPS coalition by comparison with the previous polls. Members of the local commission said that Milo Djukanovic and his preferred candidates usually received 60-66% of the poll in their station, but on 22nd April the DPS fell behind the Za Jugoslavia, SNP vote: 268 to 314; and it was only the 76 votes for the Liberals which gave the pro-independence parties a narrow 50% of the total vote. Other Budva polling stations reported similar swings to the regional election office.

This made it all the more surprising that on the drive back to Podgorica on Sunday night/Monday morning Montenegrin state radio began to report a triumphant surge of support for the DPS after midnight. The percentage recorded for the DPS steadily rose to 48% and then briefly to an absolute majority. Just as striking was the claimed fall in the vote for the SNP. Equally politically significant was the reversal of the Central Election Commission's report of an early trend giving Momir Bulatovic's Party two to three seats.

In fact, the final results announced by the CEC were remarkably close, with the DPS falling to 42% from its previous official performances and the SNP coalition gaining 41%. If the media reports during the count were supposed to intimidate the commissions into producing a decisive victory for the DPS, clearly they failed, but psephologists may be puzzled by how well the DPS did despite early real results from its traditional bastions suggesting a sharp swing against it even before the SNP's strongholds had reported their results.

Conclusion

The conduct of the April 2001 parliamentary election was an improvement on the previous poll in 1998. Polling stations were well-organized and the absence of police and other unauthorized persons is to be welcomed.

However, the overwhelming police presence in the country as a whole and the power enjoyed by the government meant that both in terms of public propaganda and back stairs influence some people felt pressurised to vote according to the government's wishes, and others may have been pressurised to count that way. This was particularly so in small communities – BHHRG found several villages with small numbers of voters where the commission chairman announced that everyone would support the DPS and Mr. Djukanovic.

Although the turn-out was high, BHHRG observers' figures do not tally with the 81% turn-out reported by the CEC in Podgorica. Their findings were more in line with a c.70% turnout. Also, there was compelling evidence that enough people had been left off the voters' registers to influence the outcome of the poll.

The haste with which the foreign media broadcast the results – before counting had finished and any results were announced in Montenegro itself, is to be regretted and was a form of interference. Despite its shambolic performance in the United States Presidential election last November, CNN still seems to feel it has a God-given right to “call” even before a count is properly underway let alone completed. Perhaps it was not surprising that ordinary Montenegrins repeatedly insisted “It is not Florida here” or asked if the BHHRG had observed that poll.

Future Developments

In conversation with BHRG observers, the OSCE's Daan Everts said the poor DPS results so far in Budva after the counts there were "disappointing" and "well below" the level required to trigger a successful referendum. The results were, indeed, very close. At the OSCE's post-election press conference on 23rd April ODIHR/OSCE head Gerard Stoudmann reflected the close nature of the vote by urging the parties to enter into discussions about the federation's future before jumping headlong into a referendum as previously indicated by the Djukanovic forces. However, since then the Liberal Party has agreed to enter a coalition government with the DPS on the understanding that a referendum is not postponed.

Whether or not it is postponed, BHHRG has concluded that EVERYONE (including the SNP) involved in this process is, ultimately, committed to the same agenda, namely, the reconstituting of the present federation. The international community has merely been posturing in its opposition to Montenegrin independence, as has Djukanovic himself. It is telling that all previous independence movements in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia itself were preceded by declarations of sovereignty. This has not been the case in Montenegro.

This is because Djukanovic does not want proper sovereignty. He is merely a tool in a long term project, outlined in documents prepared by bodies like the ICG and South East European Stability Pact to redraw the map of the Balkans and reconstruct the area along regional lines, connected by a series of interlocking agreements and agencies to the European Union. It is an open secret that such a plan - defended by its adherents as the only way of breaking the cycle of nationalist-sponsored violence in the region - is in the international community's pipeline.

¹ "We have the heart for battle, says Montenegrin trained by SAS" by Phil Rees, *Independent on Sunday*, 30th July, 2000

² *Tanjug*, 21st April 2001

³ Bosnia Institute <bosnia.org.uk>
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⁵ *Montana-fax*, 28.1.2001

⁶ *Montana – fax*, 28.1.2001

⁷ "Accusations of Cronyism in Yugoslavia's Other Republic" by Paul Watson, *LA Times*, 19th April, 2000

⁸ "L'Italie s'associe a la plainte de l'Union europeene contre deux fabricants Americains de cigarettes", Danielle Rouard, *Le Monde*, 30th January, 2001