

## **U.S.-Montenegro Policy Forum: Montenegro on the Road to Final Status**

**Featuring Miodrag Vlahovic, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Montenegro**

Center for Strategic & International Studies  
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On 17 September 2004, the East European Project hosted Montenegro's Minister of Foreign Affairs Miodrag Vlahovic at a roundtable within the CSIS U.S.-Montenegro Policy Forum series. The discussion focused upon the EU-brokered loose union between Montenegro and Serbia. This union has served as the backdrop for Montenegro's attempts at European Union (EU) and NATO integration since the signing of the Belgrade Agreement in 2002. Recently, the nature of this association was redefined by the EU at a meeting of EU foreign ministers held in Maastricht earlier this month on 3-4 September. Minister Vlahovic discussed the implications of this shift as well as Montenegro's priorities and outlook for the future.



Minister Vlahovic; Zorica Maric, Head of Montenegro's Trade Mission to the United States; and Janusz Bugajski, Director of CSIS East Europe Project.

### **Highlights of Minister Vlahovic's Remarks**

***State of the Union:*** The current state of the union of Serbia and Montenegro can be described as a non-functioning set of institutions. Efforts to harmonize political and economic levels of the two states have been unsuccessful. No significant reform has taken place in the military sector either, and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) process of earning NATO affiliation for either Montenegro or Serbia or the joint state has been hindered by the unworkable nature of the EU-brokered union.

***New Developments:*** Montenegro would like to see Serbia and Montenegro exit their union as it is currently defined based upon the model of the "Velvet Divorce" between Slovakia and the Czech Republic. This new relationship would provide an effective scenario for EU integration. What is needed is a political delimitation between Serbia and Montenegro and an elimination of the constant threat that Montenegrin interests are undermined by the joint state with Serbia. The response to this notion from the Serbian government remains largely negative, with the notable exception of the G17 Plus party.

***Situation in Montenegro:*** Economic reforms and a new legislature are working toward fighting organized crime, including trafficking. The latest polls are showing a shift in public sentiment toward independence: 41.5 percent favor independence, while 32.1 percent are against, 13.7 percent are not interested in participation either way, and 12.7 percent simply do not have an opinion. On the issue of a referendum upon the expiration of the Belgrade Agreement, 54.7 percent favor holding a referendum, 25.8 percent oppose it, and 19.35 percent have no opinion.

***Serbia, Kosovo, and Beyond:*** The outcome of local elections in Serbia could destabilize the Serbian ruling coalition and may provoke new extraordinary general elections. This would be a point of concern for Montenegro. On the topic of Kosovo, Montenegro maintains a position of neutrality. Montenegro is ready to provide support for constructive solutions to provide security for all people living in Kosovo, as well as mediation, but has no intention of being included in the final status talks.

***Maastricht & the EU:*** A new “double track” approach has been adopted by the EU for Serbia and Montenegro toward a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). The EU has recognized the legitimate differences between the two states, and Montenegro has expressed full readiness to communicate and cooperate in the SAA negotiations with the EU.

***How the U.S. Can Help:*** The Western Balkans is an unfinished project, and whoever wins the U.S. presidential election in November will be faced with the prospect of addressing it. The United States has invested a great deal of resources in the Western Balkans and has displayed an understanding of the region, acting decisively in the past. The U.S. should continue to play an active role in the final stage of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The U.S. should not be neutral in this process; a stable and independent Montenegro is in the best interests of Europe and the United States, as the country will become a responsible and accountable partner for both. In addition, the continued good work of such organizations as USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NDI) are crucial to Montenegro’s progress.

## **Discussion**

***The Approach to Independence:*** The impracticality of continuing the union of Serbia and Montenegro in its current form is clear and the attitude of the citizenry is increasingly pro-independence according to recent polls. Montenegro now has the legal and political means to pursue independence. As such, independence will be achieved peacefully, with the support of Montenegro’s allies and there is no longer fear of unrest in Montenegro. The time for antagonism is gone.

***The Nature of the Union:*** The proposed union of two independent states seeks to redefine the *nature* of the liaison. The cultural and political domination of Montenegro by Serbia needs to end, as currently in important political matters Montenegro is not brought to the table. Yet, when there are consequences for the decisions made Montenegro shares the blame as an equal partner. Montenegro simply seeks to be an equal partner within the current union, whose distinct cultural and political institutions are respected and allowed to function.

***Serbia and the EU:*** The EU has no strategic policy for Serbia, only a palliative one. Within that context, it must be understood that Montenegro is neither Serbian nor anti-Serbian. Montenegro does not advocate a weak Serbia; a strong Serbia is a workable and acceptable scenario. But Montenegro wishes to see a separate Serbia. Meanwhile, the EU has refused to take a strategic approach to the situation.

***The Question of a Referendum:*** According to the Belgrade Agreement, the referendum should be held in 2005. And Montenegro will exercise its right to hold that referendum if we see a continued failure to solve the current problems plaguing the union. The emphasis has been on patience in this process, with the understanding that patience cannot be an eternal state. A resolution must be found.

***Ethnic Minorities:*** Montenegro has a multi-ethnic government and one of the ministers is an ethnic Albanian. This is unheard of in certain other countries in the region. During the NATO bombing campaign, Montenegro allowed 100,000 ethnic Albanians to cross its borders, without a single negative incident. The minority population in Montenegro supports an independent state, which speaks well about the democratic nature of society.

***Role of Media:*** Montenegro now has a professional media association and the role of the press plays an important role in the country's democracy. There still exist certain media outlets under the control of Serbian state interests, as well as other interest groups, but by and large the media is quite functional.