

## INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN MONTENEGRO

### Third PER Roundtable Albanians in Montenegro

July 5, 2002

Budva, Montenegro, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

On July 5, 2002, in Budva, PER's Roundtable on Interethnic Relations in Montenegro met for the third time. This session was a follow up to the previous roundtable that was held in Ulcinj in October 2001 (see <http://www.per-usa.org/montenegro2nd.doc>). The participants at the Ulcinj roundtable had agreed on six practical steps, the implementation of which would result in improvement of the situation of the Albanian community in Montenegro.

The Budva roundtable was chaired by PER President Allen Kassof and was opened by Dragan Djurovic, a deputy prime minister and acting minister of foreign affairs of Montenegro, and Gezim Hajdinaga, minister for ethnic communities of Montenegro.

The roundtable's international participants emphasized that they were well aware of the complexity of the current political situation in Montenegro, especially the reforming of relations between Belgrade and Podgorica. Despite the turbulent events in Montenegro's neighborhood in the last decade, the republic has managed to preserve its good interethnic relations for which, as one participant said, it deserves recognition. The preservation and improvement of these good interethnic relations can come only from within Montenegro.

The Montenegrin government representatives pointed out that Montenegro presents a model of peaceful coexistence of different ethnic and religious communities in the Balkans. Since the start of the post-Yugoslav wars, the republic has accepted tens of thousands of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo, including ethnic Albanians. Ethnic Albanian representatives agreed with this assessment and expressed their appreciation for the actions of the government of Montenegro during the war in Kosovo. They also agreed that Montenegro's interethnic accord makes constructive approaches in resolving ethnic issues possible. Solid interethnic relations are a good basis for a faster integration of Montenegro into Europe.

A senior government official emphasized that the government of Montenegro is dedicated to the principles of multi-ethnic tolerance and therefore has taken a number of steps, most of them coming from the Ulcinj roundtable, toward improving the situation of the Albanian ethnic community in the republic. They include opening a border crossing with Albania near Ulcinj and another one near Plav, recognition of university diplomas issued in Kosovo, opening a department for Albanian language teachers at the faculty of philosophy in Niksic at the University of Montenegro, and founding a government-sponsored weekly newspaper in the Albanian language. The parliament of Montenegro

is currently drafting a law on the protection of national minorities. This government official mentioned that the new constitutional charter of the state of Serbia and Montenegro that is being discussed between Belgrade and Podgorica at the moment would not be an obstacle to the continued existence of the ministry for ethnic communities within the government of Montenegro. He also encouraged the Project on Ethnic Relations to focus its attention on the problems of other ethnic communities in Montenegro.

Another member of the Montenegrin government added that the subject of PER's roundtable is important not only for the Albanians in Montenegro, but also for the development of democracy in the country. This participant offered an update on implementation of the points adopted at the meeting in Ulcinj in October 2001.

The Ulcinj points included (1) opening of a maternity hospital in Ulcinj; (2) returning Tuzi the status of a separate municipality; (3) opening a department for Albanian-language teachers at the University of Podgorica; (4) recognition of university diplomas issued to Albanian graduates in Tirana and Pristina; (5) opening a border crossing near to Ulcinj; and (6) appointing ethnic Albanians for the positions of chief of police and head judge in Ulcinj.

The ministry for ethnic communities was asked by the participants of the Ulcinj roundtable to be in charge of implementing these points. Some of the points have already been implemented in the first half of 2002. A new border crossing at Sukobin near Ulcinj is open, and another border crossing at Vermosh, near Plav, is about to be open soon. The Montenegrin government approved recognition of university diplomas issued in Kosovo. Diplomas issued by the universities of the Republic of Albania will be recognized through the regular procedure of validation, as it is the case with other foreign country issued diplomas. (Ethnic Albanian participants did not agree with this procedure and proposed a special arrangement to be made through a separate Montenegrin-Albanian government bilateral agreement. They cited the agreement signed by the governments of Albania and Macedonia as an example.) The Montenegrin government accepted that a maternity ward hospital would be open in Ulcinj but discussion continues over financing the construction of the facility and other related technical matters.

Issues of restoring municipal status to Tuzi and appointing ethnic Albanians to the positions of the chief of police and head judge in Ulcinj are still to be discussed.

As for the opening of the faculty for Albanian teachers, the ministry for ethnic communities was notified by the ministry of education of Montenegro that the department for Albanian language teachers is now open at the faculty of philosophy in Niksic.

The ethnic Albanian participants rejected Niksic as an entirely unacceptable location for such a faculty. They insisted that all participants at the Ulcinj session of the roundtable agreed that the faculty would be located in Ulcinj or Tuzi.

A leading official at the ministry of education explained that the government decision on the location of the department was affected by the fact that Montenegro is a small place with limited financial means and that the republic has no teacher's college and that the faculty in Niksic meets all necessary technical and educational requirements for opening

a department for Albanian language teachers. Departments for other languages, such as English, Italian, French, etc. are located in Niksic as well. This participant said that the Albanian students are supposed to attend two years at the department for Albanian language at the faculty of philosophy in Niksic and the remaining two years of their studies will be pursued in Podgorica. It was also pointed out that the deans of the faculty of philosophy in Niksic and the faculty of the University of Shkoder in Albania concluded an agreement of cooperation and exchange of professors that would enhance the Albanian-language studies in Niksic. The ministry of education considers that it would be technically difficult and expensive to move the faculty to Tuzi or Ulcinj, and did not accept the argument that the Albanian-language studies should be located exclusively in the areas predominantly populated by Albanians.

A senior Podgorica city official who is also a member of the leadership of the Democratic Party of Socialists reminded the participants that it is in fact in the plans of DPS to return the status of a separate municipality to Tuzi. According to this plan it should be done simultaneously with the adoption of a set of laws related to the organization of local self-government in Montenegro, financing of local self-government, and the law on the capital city of Podgorica.

This official also commented on the location of the faculty for Albanian teachers. He said that because of the problems connected with urban planning and lack of funds and of a sufficient economic base in Tuzi it is impossible to open an institution of higher education there. He suggested Podgorica as a compromise location for the faculty for Albanian-language teachers. The faculty could be temporarily moved to the university's old rectorate building in Podgorica. The new building of the rectorate is under construction and is to be completed by the end of the year. After that, the faculty for Albanian-language teachers could move in. This participant also said that with support of the international community, a new building for the faculty for Albanian language teachers within the university campus in Podgorica could be built in two to three years. This participant and other Montenegrin officials emphasized that the ghettoization of Albanian-language education is a very bad and unacceptable option.

One of the leaders of the ethnic Albanian community in Montenegro continued the theme. He was emphatic that Niksic is not suitable for any Albanian-language studies, stressing that the ethnic Albanian students do not feel safe in Niksic. Albanians still remember threats that were made against them there. Even today, when ethnic Albanian students who study at other departments there telephone home from Niksic, they speak with their parents in Serbian rather than in Albanian in order not to attract attention of those who might hear them speaking in their mother tongue. So far, not a single Albanian had applied to study at the new department for Albanian language in Niksic.

A representative of the Montenegrin governing coalition viewed positively the proposal to move the faculty for Albanian teachers from Niksic.

The ethnic Albanian participants also did not agree with the structure of the curriculum for the Albanian language studies in Niksic. They objected to the fact that most of the subjects will be taught in Serbian rather than in Albanian. One of the Albanians called for alternative European models of minority education to be explored. A representative of the Montenegrin opposition said that it would be harmful for the interests of the Albanian students if they were to miss the second deadline for enrollment in the new

department in Niksic. He also thinks that safety concerns regarding Niksic are strongly exaggerated. This participant did suggest, however, that Podgorica could be a compromise solution for the location of the faculty for Albanian language teachers.

An ethnic Albanian representative stated firmly that Podgorica would not be an acceptable solution for the location of the faculty for Albanian teachers. Such a faculty should be located in Tuzi or Ulcinj only, he said. He also clarified that the Albanians do not want a department for Albanian language but a faculty for Albanian teachers.

A high-level official of the ruling party said that he believes that all necessary safety and other conditions will be met in Niksic, that it is a good place for the faculty for Albanian language teachers, and that safety concerns of the Albanians are exaggerated. He mentioned that there is a general shortage of well-trained and educated personnel in Montenegro and not only within the ethnic Albanian community. He added that the only criterion for selecting personnel should be professional ability and not ethnic origin or party affiliation. This participant also said that there are ongoing consultations at the highest level about the issue of appointing new heads of police and court in Ulcinj.

The organizers of the Budva meeting believe that the discussions demonstrated that political will exists on both sides and that this may make it possible to implement the remaining points that had been agreed on in Ulcinj. The issue of the location of the faculty seems to be the most difficult, but with some additional consultation and willingness to compromise it could be resolved, perhaps before the end of this year.

### ***Participants in the Budva Roundtable***

**Mehmet Bardhi**, Member, Parliament of Montenegro; President, Democratic League in Montenegro

**Razvigor Bazala**, Public Affairs Officer, Podgorica Office, US Embassy in FRY

**Ferhat Dinosha**, Member, Parliament of Montenegro (Democratic Alliance of Albanians)

**Dragan Djurovic**, Deputy Prime Minister, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Montenegro

**Jamie Factor**, Democratization Officer, OSCE Office in Montenegro

**Rada Gavrilovic**, Consultant, OSCE Office in Montenegro

**Alex Grigor'ev**, Program Officer, Project on Ethnic Relations (USA)

**Gezim Hajdinaga**, Minister for the Protection of Rights of Persons Belonging to National and Ethnic Communities, Government of Montenegro

**Dusan Janjic**, Director, Forum for Ethnic Relations (Belgrade); Member, PER Council for Ethnic Accord

**Allen Kassof**, President, Project on Ethnic Relations (USA)

**Dragan Koprivica**, Member, Parliament of Montenegro; Spokesperson, Socialist People's Party

**Ranko Krivokapic**, Chairman, Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms, Parliament of Montenegro; President, Social Democratic Party

**Miomir Mugosa**, Mayor, City of Podgorica

**Dzermal Perovic**, President, Conference of the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro

**Livia Plaks**, Executive Director, Project on Ethnic Relations (USA)

**Rifat Rastoder**, Vice President, Parliament of Montenegro; Vice President, Social Democratic Party

**Bozidar Sekularac**, Assistant Minister of Education and Science, Government of Montenegro

**Aleksandar Vidojevic**, Representative in Serbia and Montenegro, Project on Ethnic Relations

**Miodrag Vukovic**, Head, Parliamentary Group of Democratic Party of Socialists, Parliament of Montenegro; Adviser on Constitutional and Legal Issues to the President of Montenegro