



HELŠINŠKI ODBOR ZA LJUDSKA PRAVA U SRBIJI  
HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA  
YU-11-000 Beograd, Zmaj Jovina 7, tel: (+381 11) 637542, 637116, 637294  
fax: 636429, e-mail: biserkos@EUnet.yu, <http://www.helsinki.org.yu>

## ALBANIANS IN MONTENEGRO

In the past decade inter-ethnic relations in Montenegro were relatively satisfactory.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to Serbia, members of minorities in Montenegro have never been physically harassed. Moreover members of Albanian national community in Montenegro, unlike their counterparts in Southern Serbia and Kosovo, have never been the victims of Milošević regime. Although the problem of status and state of minorities in Montenegro has been by and large ignored, following the 1997 DPS split and Đukanović's distancing from Milošević's policy, the first positive steps towards improvement of the minority status were made.

There are 50,000 Albanians in Montenegro. They make up about 7% of total population. Together with 50,000-strong diaspora, they would make about 15% of total population of Montenegro.

Key problems of the Albanian national community in Montenegro are unemployment in public sector, education and culture. Despite the fact that the Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro clearly specifies that members of minorities should be employed in civil services in proportion with their share in total population, only 0.03-0.05% of Albanians are employed in state bodies and public services. Except for three "coerced" positions in the republican government<sup>2</sup>, there are no Albanian employees in the republican judicial bodies and those of internal affairs.

The largest 'Albanian' town in Montenegro is Ulcinj. Although Albanians make up 85% of the town's population, head of police and head of the municipal court are not of Albanian ethnicity. Albanians are also underrepresented in the local police.

As regards education and culture situation is equally bad. Albanians attend Albanian language primary schools. But educational curricula, notably language, history and arts syllabus are not in line with needs of the Albanian community. For example Albanian history makes up 2.5% of total curricula, while in secondary schools that percentage is somewhat higher, that is, 5.9%. Currently there isn't a single Albanian language magazine subsidized from the republican budget.

On their part Albanians, that is the Democratic Alliance made its first offer for settlement of their status in Montenegro as early as in 1992 in the shape of Memorandum on Special Status of Albanians in Montenegro. Unfortunately that document was ignored

---

<sup>1</sup> In comparison with other newly-emerged countries, barring Slovenia.

<sup>2</sup> Democratic Alliance in Montenegro and Democratic Union of Albanians, as backers of Đukanović-led coalition shared one ministerial post, one deputy minister post and one deputy secretary post in the republican government after the 1988 parliamentary elections. Many Albanians see this only as a marketing gesture of Milo Đukanović, that is a minimal "reward" for their backing rendered to his party.

by the then authorities. In November 2000 Democratic Union of Albanians submitted to the government of the Republic of Montenegro Platform on Political and Legal Framework of Self-Management of National Communities in Montenegro. This platform does not represent exclusively Albanian claims but is open to incorporation of demands of all national minorities in Montenegro. Some of the main claims spelled out in the Platform are amendments to the Act on the Local Self-Rule, reinstatement of status of municipality to Tuza, introduction of institution of Ombudsman, establishment of bicameral Republican parliament, etc. The Montenegrin Parliament is yet to discuss this Platform, which if adopted, would entail certain constitutional amendments and those of legal provisions of Montenegro.

*Treatment of the Albanian national community by the Montenegrin authorities*

In September 1997 DPS signed an agreement with the leading Albanian parties, Democratic Union of Albanians and Democratic Alliance which was tantamount to the government's commitment to fully respect minority rights. Unfortunately some experts maintain that DPS started treating better the Albanian minority because they needed minority votes at the previous elections to emerge victorious.<sup>3</sup> Although under the same agreement members of minorities should be proportionately represented in state structures<sup>4</sup>, after the 1998 elections Albanians got only one ministerial post, one deputy minister post and one deputy secretary post in the Montenegrin government.<sup>5</sup> Even DPS coalition partners think that the share of Albanians in state structures should be proportionately much higher.<sup>6</sup> Although Albanians are represented in the government, ranks which they have been accorded and consequently their influence are purely symbolical.

In the 1998 elections Albanians backed Milo Đukanovic's policy in line with the principle "choose the lesser evil."<sup>7</sup> The fact that the current Montenegrin regime failed to deliver many promises given to Albanians, or to tackle their key problems made Albanian leaders decide to condition their backing to Đukanovic's coalition at the forthcoming elections and possible referendum.<sup>8</sup> Prior to referendum Albanian leaders shall definitively demand definition of status of their community in Montenegro.

Despite certain readiness of the current Montenegrin authorities to integrate all members of the Albanian national community into all sectors of society, many facts indicate that the government should indeed tackle more seriously the problem of status of

---

<sup>3</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Miodrag Živanovic, political leader of Liberal Alliance of Montenegro, Podgorica, 11 April 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Albanians account for only 0.3-0.5 workforce of the civil service and state bodies in Montenegro, which clearly indicates disproportion between their share in total population and their representation in state structures.

<sup>5</sup> A member of the Democratic Union of Albanians is a Minister for National Minorities, while Deputy Education Minister and Deputy Information Secretary are from the ranks of the Democratic Alliance.

<sup>6</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Ranko Krivokapic, Vice President of the SDP, Podgorica, 11 April 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Nik Gashaj, politicologist and President of Association for Culture and Social Trends "Malesia."

<sup>8</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Ferhat Dinosh, President of the Democratic Union of Albanians, Podgorica, 12 April 2001 and Mehmet Bardhi, President of the Democratic Alliance, Podgorica, 12 April 2001.

minorities in general. Unfortunately many think that the current authorities neglected that issue, under the pretext that the biggest problem of Montenegro were threats coming from Serbia.<sup>9</sup>

### **Albanians within the current Montenegrin context**

Within the current Montenegrin context members of minorities in Montenegro, notably Albanians, are caught in the crossfire between the pro-Montenegrin coalition "Montenegro shall win" and the pro-Yugoslav block "Coalition for Yugoslavia. The latter's advocacy of civil Montenegro<sup>10</sup> and its flirting with members of minorities, leaders of Montenegrin Albanians see only as a political discourse. They also note its lack of willingness to implement the project. As regards Coalition "Together for Yugoslavia" its members suggest that it would be dangerous for Montenegro to let its minorities take decisions about their own fate. By extension they widely promoted their thesis about alleged Albanian threat, and Albanian attempts to destabilize Montenegro. Hate speech dominates the political discourse of this coalition. At the promotional rally of the Coalition "Together for Yugoslavia" in Mataguži, President of SNP Predrag Bulatovic stated: "Kudos to Montenegrin Albanians, they know we must cohabitate, but they are firebrands who want to destabilize Montenegro...I would not like to scare Montenegrins with stories about spill over of terrorism into our country."<sup>11</sup> President of Popular Party Dragan Šoc stated: "Why would Muslims and Albanians take decisions on future state-legal status of Yugoslavia, for only the majority Orthodox people are entitled to take such decisions."<sup>12</sup> Top-ranking analyst of the International Crisis Group, Peter Palmer told BBC, that some statements of top leaders of the coalition were not acceptable. In a response to his statement *Vijesti* of 12 April 2001 in an article headlined. "Do people who thus speak about Albanians and Muslims have some interest in creating tension in Montenegro?" It is obvious that such a stance of coalition "Together for Montenegro aims to firstly discredit the ruling coalition<sup>13</sup>, that is indicate hazards of its denial of "the Albanian threat", and secondly to tip the electorate scales towards the Yugoslav option.

By extension Albanian leaders qualify such messages of "Coalition for Yugoslavia" as an open call to apartheid, obviously in terms of minority support for Đukanovic's option.<sup>14</sup> As regards their possible backing of Đukanovic, they announce

---

<sup>9</sup> Nik Gashaj, politicologist, President of Association for Culture and Social Trends, "Malesia."

<sup>10</sup> "...Vice President of DPS Svetozar Marovic said that "to have the strength to say that Montenegro is not only Montenegrin, but also Serbian, Muslim and Albanians, is not an act of betrayal ...for all of them Montenegro is their common house both today and tomorrow." *Vijesti* 12 April 2001..."we shall not allow them to engage in incident-mongering and to start counting members of minorities.", Milo Đukanovic, *Vijesti* 12 April 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Glas Crnogoraca, 12 April 2001.

<sup>12</sup> *Glas*, 1 April 2001.

<sup>13</sup> The current authorities in Montenegro in their public discourse stress their partnership with minority communities. But that view is not shared fully by political leaders of Montenegrin Albanians.

<sup>14</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Ferhat Dinosa, President of Democratic Union of Albanians, Podgorica, 12 April 2001.

they shall first monitor the conduct of Montenegrin authorities towards the Albanian electorate at the forthcoming elections ...that is, their support to coalition "Montenegro shall win" shall hinge on assessment thereof. President of Democratic Union of Albanians Ferhat Dinoš says that already some manipulations and different kinds of pressures are at play, but he stresses that such phenomena are contrary to interests of Montenegro "for any democracy-minded government in Montenegro should see Albanians as partners and not as subjects."<sup>15</sup> Political representatives of Montenegrin Albanians think that the authorities are in a way manipulating the Albanian electorate and piling up pressure to the detriment of the Albanian national parties. Names of some members of Albanian national community can be found on electoral lists of coalition "Montenegro shall win." This is interpreted as an utterly wrong move by the current regime, or its bid to curry favor with "Albanians." Both Ferhat Dinosh and Mehmet Bardhi consider that under the current political circumstances minorities interests can be best represented by their political parties.<sup>16</sup> Moreover contact with member of minority peoples which the current Montenegrin authorities are trying to realize through "obedient" members of minorities, in opinion of leaders of Montenegrin Albanians is also counter-productive.

#### *Independence of Montenegro- pro and contra*

Montenegrin Albanians did not back the third Yugoslavia, partly because of their distrust of Serbia, partly because of their awareness that the current federation, characterized by internal disproportion, was doomed to collapse. They also knew that the federation was seen as an extension of dream of Greater Serbia. Albanian political leaders, representatives of the current regime, and the opposition parties, agree that Montenegrin Albanians see Montenegro as their state.<sup>17</sup> Hence their political leaders clearly express their stance that in case of referendum they shall call on their fellow-nationals to vote for independent Montenegro. Albanians should be interested in independence of Montenegro, for it would represent the most acceptable framework for resolution of their status. Although national states in the Balkans, in markedly multinational states, came to be seen as nearly untenable project, Montenegrin Albanians state that they favor national Montenegro, with civil society and minorities equally represented in all segments of political and social life over the existing federation. According to claims of their political leaders Albanians in Montenegro want the same status enjoyed by minorities in Western, developed countries. They demand that their status be regulated under a new Constitution and introduction of legal mechanism protecting their individual and collective rights. Contrary to assertions of some Serbian politicians and coalition "Together for Yugoslavia", Albanians maintain that they

---

<sup>15</sup> *Onogošt*, 6 April 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Ferhat Dinosh, President of Democratic Union of Albanians, Podgorica 12 April 2001 and Mehmed Bardhi, President of Democratic Alliance, Podgorica 12 April 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Democratic Alliance, Democratic Union of Albanians, Social-Democratic Party and Liberal Alliance of Montenegro.

genuinely favor their full integration in Montenegrin society.<sup>18</sup> They also maintain they would fight for their rights only within Montenegrin institutions.

In case of internal conflict between pro-Montenegrin and pro-Yugoslav block Albanians have given their assurances that they would defend Montenegrin interests.

### **Albanian issue and Greater Albania/Kosovo**

Problem of the Albanian national issue and concept of Greater Albania/Kosovo was introduced into the pre-election campaign by leaders of the Serbian and federal authorities and representatives of coalition "Together for Yugoslavia." The Serbian press has recently been launching the thesis that conflicts from Southern Serbia and Macedonia shall spill over into Montenegro in case of the federation break-up. One of Vice Prime Ministers of Serbia, Momcilo Perišić argues that "there are some indications thereof".<sup>19</sup> That thesis is linked to domino effect, expected in the Balkans after proclamation of Montenegrin independence. The same thesis is expounded in the election race by members of Coalition "Together for Yugoslavia". Namely they say that armed conflicts with Albanians can be expected in Montenegro, in case of proclamation of independence of Montenegro, for Montenegrin Albanians have adopted the strategy of Macedonian Albanians.<sup>20</sup> Federal Prime Minister Zoran Žižić stated at a promotional rally of coalition "Together for Yugoslavia" that "small Montenegro is an incentive for Greater Albania".<sup>21</sup> According to SNP assessments separatism of Montenegrin authorities is grist to the mill of Albanian separatists. SNP expects a spill over of conflicts from Macedonia and Southern Serbia in case of proclamation of Montenegrin independence.<sup>22</sup> *Glas* of 26 March 2001 writes that the Greater Kosovo project includes annexation of some parts of Macedonia, Southern Serbia and of autonomous area of "Malesija" stretching from "the Raška area to the Adriatic sea and including Plav, Gusinje and Ulcinj." In *Blic* of 24 March 2001 Srbobran Branković, Head of Opinion Poll Agency "Medium" stated that the three Albanian parties would unanimously vote for independence of Montenegro in view of their assessment that "the Greater Albania project would be more easily implemented if Montenegro broke away." Secretary of the Federal Defense Minister Milovan Cogurić thinks that Serbia and Montenegro can together stop disintegration process in the Balkans, for "unless they do that, Montenegro shall be under threat of a new separation incentive: the Albanian Academy of Sciences has drawn a map of Albania, covering Budva and Nikšić and northern border cutting deeply into the heart of Vasojevića tribe land."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Ferhat Dinosha, President of Democratic Union of Albanians, Podgorica 12 April 2001 and Mehmed Bardhi, President of Democratic Alliance, Podgorica 12 April 2001.

<sup>19</sup> *Novosti*, 25 March 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Predrag Drecun, President of the Executive Committee of the Popular Party, Podgorica, 11 April 2001.

<sup>21</sup> *Glas Grnogoraca*, 11 April 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Dragan Koprivica, member of the EC of SNP, Podgorica, 10 April 2001.

<sup>23</sup> *Dan*, 11 April 2001.

In mid-March many media in Serbia extensively covered emergence of armed Albanians in areas of municipalities Plav and Gusinje and the KLA graffiti on walls of some schools in Podgorica. According to the coalition "Together for Yugoslavia" Albanians wanted to get across a message that Montenegro was next in line...When asked by a Helsinki Committee representative if those graffiti were perhaps a message from Serbia, Dragan Koprivica, member of the Executive Committee of the SNP answered that "such a message from Serbia would have been understood as a well-intentioned warning...if currently there are no armed Albanians, they might emerge in the near future."

Representatives of the Montenegrin and Albanian minority political parties agree that the Albanian issue is the biggest unsolved national issue in the Balkans. But problem of the Albanian national issue should not be linked to the concept of Greater Albania/Kosovo which doesn't exist as a clearly articulated political project. The gist of Albanian national issue, not only in Montenegro, but also in Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo is legally and constitutionally unregulated status of minority Albanian communities and undefined status of Kosovo.

Albanians in Montenegro consider Montenegro their state and they see no other alternative.<sup>24</sup> They consider Albania only as a historical factor. In those terms accusations leveled at them by representatives of the Serbian and FRY authorities and leaders of coalition "Together for Yugoslavia" are not founded. According to statements of Albanian leaders in Montenegro, Albanians only want to attain and exercise their rights within their domicile state of Montenegro without any territorial pretensions, that is claims to parts of Montenegrin territory or aspirations to annexation thereof.

Albanian diaspora entertains the idea of Greater Albania, but political leaders of Montenegrin Albanians consider this idea a purely theoretical concept.<sup>25</sup>

There is no political support to this project and Montenegrin Albanians think that after the Serbian experience with the Greater Serbia project, similar projects in the Balkans are doomed to fail. For political leaders of Montenegrin Albanians the solution of the Albanian national issue is an integration of independent states in the Balkans, that is a union with open borders and free flow of people, ideas and commodities.

The biggest priority in the resolution of the Albanian national issues is definition of status of Kosovo beyond the framework of Serbia/the FRY. Independent Kosovo and constitutionally and legally regulated status of Albanian national communities in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro are main prerequisites for stabilization of the Balkans and full integration of Albanians in all structures of states in which they constitute minorities. Final definition of status of Kosovo as an independent entity within the existing borders would boost arguments of those currently floating the idea of Greater Albania/Kosovo for daily political purposes.

Belgrade, April 2001.

---

<sup>24</sup> Greater Albania/Kosovo.

<sup>25</sup> Talks between representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia with Ferhat Dinosha, President of the Democratic Union, Podgorica, 12 April 2001.