



Briefs & Updates

Montenegro to vote on independence

The constituent republic of Montenegro will vote on independence from Serbia on May 21. Montenegro's Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic wants to cut the ties that bind Serbia and Montenegro, currently united in a federal government. Djukanovic's pro-independence coalition in Montenegro's Parliament and the opposition agreed on the referendum after negotiations with the European Union. The EU set a threshold of 55 percent of more than half the electorate for a vote in favour of independence to succeed.



Milo Djukanovic,
President of
Montenegro

ETA declares "permanent" ceasefire in Spain

The armed Basque separatist group *Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna* (Basque fatherland and liberty or ETA), which has been blamed for up to 800 deaths since the late 1960s, declared a "permanent" ceasefire on March 22, 2006. The cease-fire statement was read on Basque television by a masked woman flanked by two masked men. The group, founded in Spain during the Franco dictatorship, declared a previous ceasefire in 1998, which was followed by a number of fatal bombings when talks with then Prime Minister Jose Luis Aznar broke down. The current prime minister, José Luís Rodriguez Zapatero, reacted cautiously to the declaration, as did French President Jacques Chirac. Spanish newspapers with pro-government editorial stands lauded the declaration as a breakthrough. The more circumspect Spanish online news service, *Periodista Digital*, commented to the *New York Times* that it was naïve to take the ETA at face value. The ETA declaration also called on France as well as Spain to begin respecting the right of Basques to self determination. There are almost two million Basques in Spain and about 250,000 across the border in France.

Somalia's parliament meets as fighting threatens

The first meeting of Somalia's parliament inside the war-torn country on the Horn of Africa has been overshadowed by the most serious fighting there in years.

The violence in the ancient capital of Mogadishu raged off and on from late February 2006 to the end of April, and caused many to flee the city. Nonetheless, the parliament of Somalia's transitional federal government went ahead and met 240 km southwest of Mogadishu in Baidoa town, the

newly-proclaimed capital of Somalia during the same period as the fighting. There is as yet no united Somali army, and many regions of the country are controlled by militias, local warlords or political factions.

The fighting in Mogadishu was taking place between three warlords and Islamist forces. The Islamists, known as the Islamic Courts militia, want to impose Sharia law to end the violence in the capital. The warlords, Mohammed Deere, Mohammed Qanyare and Bashir Rageh, have united as the "Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism." They claim the Islamists are harbouring a Sudanese man, known as Zuweydan, who is sought by the U. S. as a suspect in terrorist attacks. Deere, Qanyara, Rageh and their business allies control large parts of Mogadishu and airstrips around the capital.

The parliament in Baidoa marked the return to Somalia of the newly constituted federal government from its exile in Kenya (see "Somalia's transitional government starts building a federal democracy," *Federations* Vol. 4 No. 4, March 2005).

New editor of *Federations*:



Rod Macdonell is the new Senior Editor of *Federations*. Before joining the Forum of Federations in December 2005 as Senior Director of Public Information and Education, he was the Executive Director of Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, based in

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