

The United States recognized this status in June. The United Nations General Assembly unanimously accepted Montenegro as the UN's 192nd member at the end of June; and, on August 15, we established diplomatic relations with Montenegro pursuant to an exchange of letters between the Presidents of the United States and Montenegro.

Just 3 weeks ago, Montenegrins voted in their first general election since gaining their independence. A coalition headed by Milo Djukanovic took 40 seats, and it will lead the country's government.

Prime Minister Djukanovic has been the leading political figure in the country over the past decade and a half. The vote that I just referred to is important because the new parliament will draft the constitution defining the newly independent country's goals and its governmental structure.

Madam Speaker, this peaceful separation of Montenegro from Serbia is truly historic. Montenegro has demonstrated its readiness to assume the responsibilities of independence. As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said, "In achieving its independence through a nonviolent and democratic process conducted in a fair and open way, Montenegro showed the entire world not only its patience but also its political maturity."

The government of Serbia also acted responsibly and maturely with regard to the independence of Montenegro. Shortly after the parliament of Montenegro declared its independence, the government of Serbia formally recognized the country, established diplomatic relations with Montenegro, and the President of Serbia, Boris Tadic, was the first head of state to pay an official visit to Montenegro.

President Tadic was our guest here in Washington just this past week, and I want to commend him for his very positive role in this singularly civilized and peaceful evolution in the Balkans.

Throughout the history of the world, Madam Speaker, we have seen much bloodshed and violence over similar situations. The peaceful, amicable separation of Montenegro and Serbia, as the earlier peaceful separation of Slovakia and the Czech Republic, have been exemplary, and all of those countries deserve our recognition and praise.

The European Commission has announced that it will open talks on closer ties between the European Union and Montenegro this month. We look forward to welcoming Montenegro into full membership into the European Union and into other international organizations. We also express the hope that the government of Montenegro and its people will continue to embrace the principles of democracy and particularly will encourage a free and open and democratic society with full respect for the human rights of all of its citizens.

Ethnic Albanians in Montenegro, with whom I have visited at length,

have faced many challenges in the past. But I look forward to this newly independent state of Montenegro; and I hope it will remember its tradition as a multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious society based on the rule of law. It has the responsibility of protecting the freedom and human rights of all of its citizens.

Our resolution commends the people of Montenegro on the referendum on independence, welcomes them to the community of nations and to membership in the United Nations and welcomes the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Montenegro.

I strongly support this resolution, Madam Speaker, and I urge all of my colleagues to do as well.

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from California (Mr. LANTOS) for his leadership in this resolution; and I ask for adoption of the resolution.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, as one of the cosponsors, I am pleased to rise in support of House Resolution 965. The people of Montenegro deserve this commendation for the fair and orderly manner in which they achieved independence. They also deserve commendation for their patience. Many Montenegrin citizens wanted independence much earlier, but they and their political leaders understood that following a process marked by democratic norms and mutual agreement would only add credibility to the result.

A significant number of Montenegrin citizens, I should add, did not see a reason to break its ties in a state union with Serbia and voted against independence in the May referendum. To their credit, they have nevertheless accepted the result. Just last week, Montenegro held new parliamentary elections which were favorably assessed by the OSCE, indicating that the republic remains committed to democratic norms where differences of opinion will be respected.

As noted in the text of the resolution, Serbian authorities and the people of Serbia deserve some credit here as well. While many in Serbia failed to understand why Montenegro felt a need to break with Serbia, there was a willingness to work out differences and, since the May referendum, to respect the results.

Things were not always so easy. As Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I recall holding hearings on Montenegro. At the time, this republic posed the only genuine and effective internal opposition to the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, and became his threatened next target as a result. Montenegro became a haven for those displaced by the Bosnian and Kosovo conflicts, which was very challenging given its own, small yet ethnically diverse population. For some, it continues in that role. Montenegro needed to assess its own role in the violent disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, and to rebuild good relations with its neighbors. It has done just that. The Commission has maintained a dialogue with Montenegrin political leaders over the years, held hearings on the situation in Montenegro, observed elections there and most recently observed the referendum itself. Whatever concerns have been expressed in this ongoing dialogue, we have had a serious back and forth.

It is my hope that Montenegro, as the 56th participating State in the OSCE, will remain committed to the path it has chosen, and remain engaged with the Helsinki Commission on issues of common concern. Among those issues, few are as important as trafficking in persons. This criminal activity remains a widespread problem throughout southeastern Europe, and Montenegro must endeavor to stop it. I also want to encourage Montenegro to undertake the reforms necessary, especially regarding the judicial system and other aspects of the rule of law, in order to realize its aspirations for European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The people of Montenegro can count on my support.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I think it important to note that Montenegro's independent statehood has implications not only for Montenegro but for the region as a whole. With Montenegro's independent statehood accepted and recognized, another outstanding issue has been resolved, and this time, thankfully, in a peaceful and democratic manner.

Other issues still remain, including of course the question of Kosovo's status. Some would assert that Montenegro's achievement of independent statehood is a precedent that can be easily applied to Kosovo or elsewhere. I would argue, however, that it is not the result of the process Montenegro followed but the process itself, with its commitment to democracy and respect for human rights as well as to finding the most widely acceptable arrangements through compromise, that is the true precedent here that others should follow.

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 965.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment a bill and a concurrent resolution of the House of the following title:

H.R. 5074. An act to amend the Railroad Retirement Act of 1974 to provide for continued payment of railroad retirement annuities by the Department of the Treasury, and for other purposes.

H. Con. Res. 235. Concurrent resolution expressing the sense of the Congress that States should require candidates for driver's licenses to demonstrate an ability to exercise greatly increased caution when driving in the proximity of a potentially visually impaired individual.

The message also announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 3679. An act to authorize appropriations for the National Transportation Safety Board, and for other purposes.