

Yugoslavia erased from map

By Misha Savic
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BELGRADE, Serbia-Montenegro — Erasing Yugoslavia from the map of Europe, lawmakers all but dissolved the troubled Balkan federation Tuesday and gave birth to a new country with a new name: Serbia and Montenegro.

Under a European Union-brokered accord approved by parliament, the two republics stick together in a loose union that gives each greater autonomy and the trappings of statehood. The final breakup of the former Yugoslavia — outright independence for both — could come as soon as 2006.

Widely seen as a compromise solution amid conflicting demands within both republics that Serbia and Montenegro be either firmly tied or completely separated, the accord preserves the alliance but allows each member state to hold an independence referendum after three years.

The deal offers the republics near-total sovereignty, although they will remain linked by a small joint administration in charge of defense and foreign affairs. Yugoslavia, the federation's name for nearly three quarters of a century, is relegated to the history books.

"This is a new beginning, but we should not be euphoric," Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic said after both chambers of parliament approved the overhaul.

"This new country is based on a minimum of common interest between Serbia and Montenegro, and we should give it a chance," he said.

Yugoslavia, founded in 1918 as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, com-

prised six republics until the early 1990s, when Slobodan Milosevic presided over a bloody breakup that saw Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia and Slovenia secede.

Serbia and Montenegro, tightly knitted for centuries, opted to stay together as a rump Yugoslav federation. But the relations between the republics soured, prompting the EU to mediate the accord last year in an effort to keep the two together and prevent fresh upheaval in the volatile region.

The latest arrangement is meant to accommodate a strong independence movement in Montenegro, the smaller republic. Montenegro's leadership began boycotting federal institutions in 1998, prompting some Serbs to demand separation.

Srdja Bozovic, a pro-Serbia official from Montenegro, hailed Tuesday's reform as "a fresh start for Serbia and Montenegro — an opportunity to have a stable state."

But the new arrangement left many dissatisfied, including staunchly separatist leaders in both republics.

"This new country is still-born," said Vladan Batic of Serbia's Christian Democrats, who serves as justice minister in the Serbian government. He predicted the two republics would go their separate ways in three years.

Equally unhappy were staunchly separatist Montenegrin politicians like Miodrag Zivkovic of the Liberal Alliance, who contended that Montenegro was being "cheated with this reform."

"Full independence is our true interest," he said.

Moderate politicians from both republics gave their crucial



Serbia and Montenegro

Key characteristics of Serbia and Montenegro, the new country set to replace Yugoslavia.

Administration and status

► Will have one seat in the United Nations and other international organizations.

► Will have a joint administration consisting of a 126-seat parliament (91 deputies from Serbia; 35 from Montenegro) and a shared government called the Council of Ministers.

► Will have a joint armed force to be the Yugoslav Army.

► Will each have separate currencies and economies.

► Kosovo, currently administered by NATO and the United Nations, is part of the new country.

What's in store

► Republics' constitutions will be amended in six months to conform with provisions defining the new union.

► After three years, each republic may hold a referendum on full independence.

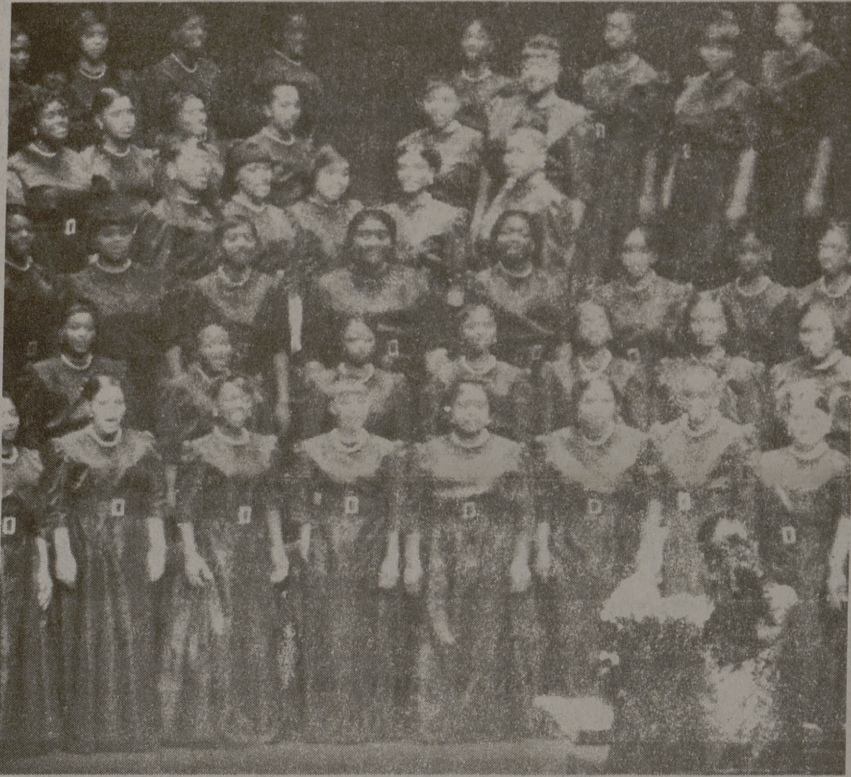
SOURCES: World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2003; CIA World Fact Book; Associated Press

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Uranium plant workers strike

By Kimberly Hefling
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PADUCAH, Ky. (AP) — Half the workers at the nation's only plant that enriches uranium for commercial nuclear power walked off the job Tuesday in a protest over wages, health care and pension issues.

About 620 workers went on strike at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant in this western Kentucky city. The facility's operator said it would keep the plant running with management taking over some of the tasks.

United States Enrichment Corp., which operates the plant for the Energy Department, will meet customer demands "safely and reliably" with salaried workers, company spokeswoman Elizabeth Stuckle said.

"We will continue all essential work at the plant," Stuckle said.

Kevin Choate, a 15-year worker at the plant, said he wonders how that will be possible if the strike continues more than a few days.

"You have 600 people maintaining it — with them gone, you can figure it out," Choate said.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspectors will be at plant for the first 72 hours of the strike to ensure the plant operates safely, commission spokesman Jan Strasma said. Extra inspections

are possible to shut down the plant or issue orders if necessary.

USEC, a privatized federal corporation in Bethesda, Md., took over management of the plant's enrichment operations in 1993. The last strike at the plant was in 1979, when it was run by Union Carbide Corp.

Hourly workers in Local 550 of the Paper, Allied, Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International went on strike after rejecting USEC's latest offer for a five-year contract.

"We have expressed a willingness for the last eight weeks that this has been going on to reach a mutually acceptable resolution," said Leon Owens, the local president. "The problem has been the company's unwillingness to address union issues."

Stuckle said USEC had "made a very fair and competitive offer." The company has offered to meet with a federal mediator and is willing to work with the union, she said.

Owens said the union and management are far apart for a mediator to be useful. Union leaders seek better pension benefits and say the company's proposed salary increases will not offset increases in health care costs.

Sen. Jim Bunning, R-Ky., said he supports the union's decision to strike, though he wants the dispute settled quickly.

"We have expressed a willingness for the last eight weeks that this has been going on to reach a mutually acceptable resolution."

— Leon Owens
Union president

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