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InterMedia finds support for NATO membership increases in Bosnia but drops to 2005 levels in Montenegro

WASHINGTON, D.C. Domestic politics appear to be a root cause of fluctuating levels of support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) over the past 12 months among the populations of the Balkans—Bosnia, Montenegro and Serbia. Montenegro saw a significant drop in support for NATO membership in the past year (following a large increase after independence in 2006); support in Serbia has remained fairly steady. Bosnia—where internal tensions are at their highest levels in years, putting the country squarely back on the international agenda—saw a significant increase in support for membership between 2007 and 2008.

The fall 2008 data are the latest from InterMedia’s decade-long annual program of tracking communication and media behaviors, and public opinion across the Balkans, and follows a 2008 12-country InterMedia report that looked at support for NATO membership as well as the organization’s public diplomacy and strategic communication efforts.

“Although there have been a number of international events that, in theory, should have similarly affected support across the region—such as membership in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program by all three countries in 2006, NATO’s problems in Afghanistan, and the independence of Kosovo—there has not been a consistent rise or fall of support for NATO membership there,” said InterMedia’s SE Europe Regional Research Manager Aneta Genova. “Instead, trends have varied in each country over the past year. Support for NATO membership in the region seems much more closely related to internal politics.”

In Montenegro, increased support for NATO membership in 2006 and 2007 is possibly related to post-independence euphoria and high expectations about what independence would bring. Many Montenegrins felt their union with Serbia was holding them back from NATO and EU membership and expected that once they gained independence, they would be put on a fast-track to do so. Their admittance to the Partnership for Peace program in 2006, soon after independence,

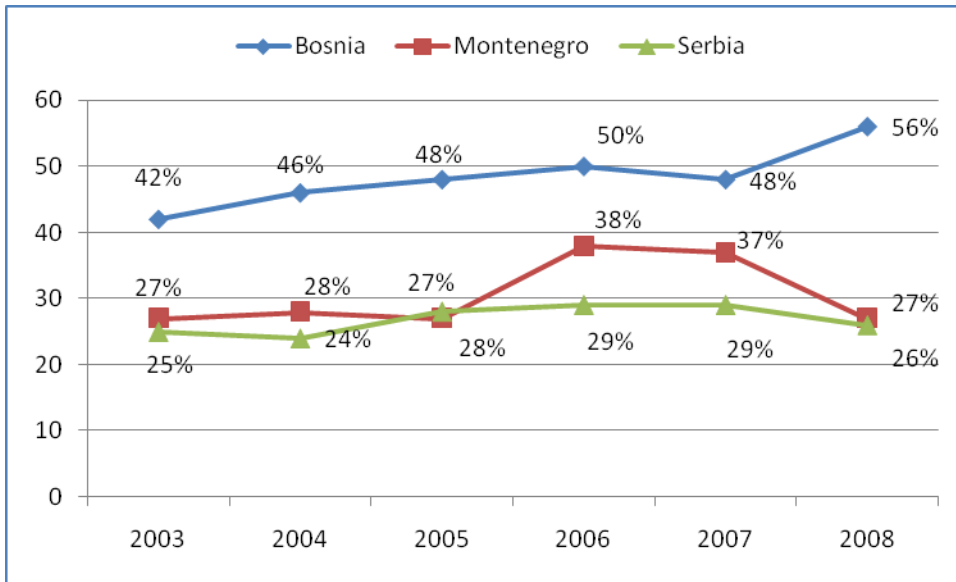


Figure 1. Support for NATO Membership 2003-2008

supported these expectations. However, it has become clear since then that the process of joining both NATO and the EU is not without its obstacles. Favorability towards EU membership has similarly suffered, falling from 76 percent in 2007 to 61 percent in 2008. Recent moves by the government—including the self-dissolution of parliament and calling of early elections for 29 March 2009 to strengthen the government mandate to make changes in line with European integration—may further affect support for both NATO and EU

membership in 2009. In addition, Russian investment and influence in the region has been growing, resulting in a more positive opinion of Russia and, likely, more skepticism of NATO and the EU. Currently, approximately two-thirds of the population is favorably inclined toward

Russia, compared to around half who feel the same toward Germany and the UK, and two in five toward the U.S.

Bosnians, however, became more pro-NATO membership between 2007 and 2008. For residents of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where most ethnic Bosniaks and Croats live, levels of support for NATO membership are high (currently 72 percent) and have been rising steadily. Most significant is the level of support in Serb-dominated Republika Srpska, which rebounded to 32 percent after a

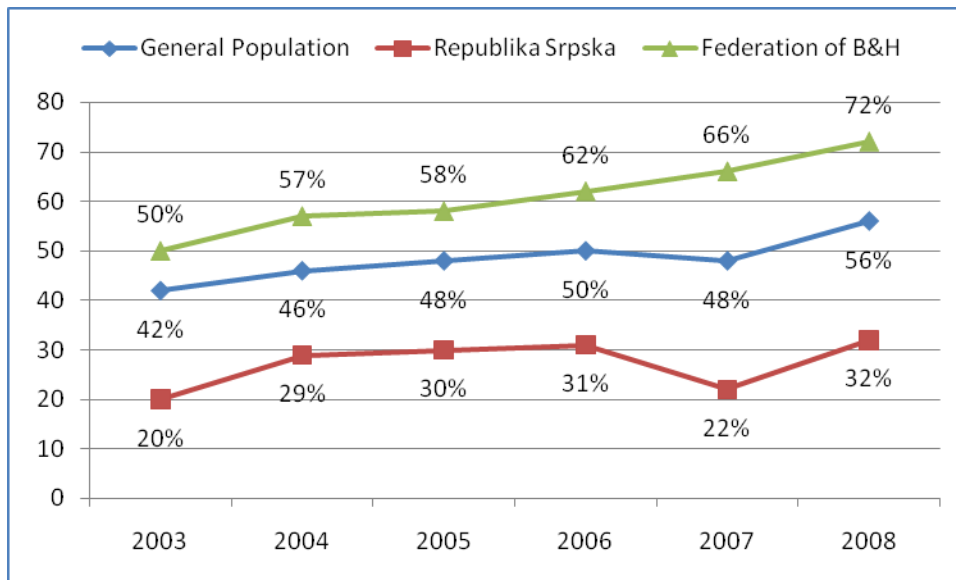


Figure 2. Support for NATO Membership in Bosnia 2003-2008

drop to 22 percent in 2007. This can be closely linked to the internal political situation in the republic. Calls for secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the republic peaked in 2007 and early 2008 and likely contributed to an anti-NATO sentiment there. Secessionist rhetoric, particularly from those in the Republika Srpska government, lessened throughout 2008 and support for NATO membership rebounded to the 2006 rate, although support is still much lower than in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Bosnia, as in Montenegro, opinions of Russia are higher than are opinions of the U.S., but there is a clear difference between Republika Srpska, where favorability toward Russia is 70 percent, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where it is only 16 percent.

NATO has been involved in the Balkans to varying degrees since 1992; this year will mark the 10th anniversary of peacekeeping operations in Kosovo.

InterMedia is a leading international media research, public opinion, evaluation and consulting organization creatively equipping clients to understand their audiences, gauge their effectiveness and target their communications in transitional and developing societies worldwide. Based in Washington, D.C., and active year-round in more than 60 countries, InterMedia helps clients understand complex issues in challenging research environments. The company's strengths include its people—area experts skilled in scientifically-based research and focused on client solutions—its vast global network of local research partners and contacts and its rich data archive of more than 700 media and opinion surveys carried out over the past 15 years.

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InterMedia conducts annual nationally representative surveys in Bosnia and Herzegovina (n=2,500), Montenegro (n=1,000), and Serbia (n=2,000) using face-to face interviews. In 2008, fieldwork took place in May and June. The surveys were conducted via a multistage random probability sample of the adult population (those 15 and older). The sample data were weighted on gender, age, and on type of settlement. Maximum margin of error, with a 95% confidence interval, is ±3.1% for Montenegro, ±2.2% for Serbia, and ±2.0% for Bosnia.

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