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Chapter 5

MONTENEGRO: VASSAL OR SOVEREIGN?

Montenegro: Vassal or Sovereign?

Octavian Sofansky, Stephen R. Bowers, Stephanie E. Cameron, and Marion T. Doss, Jr.

Executive Summary

A move toward Montenegrin independence would cause Serbian public opinion to focus inward and would likely be the first step in the process towards true democratic evolution. Russia is not likely to support Montenegrin independence and Russia is unlikely to take decisive action to save the Yugoslav Federation. The removal of Slobodan Milosevic from power will have a modest impact on the prospects for maintaining independence.

INTRODUCTION

Serbia and Montenegro, with the help of Russian arms and through the Treaty of Berlin, July 13, 1778, were recognized as independent from the Ottoman Empire. The early 20th century saw the Serbian government ignite the fuse that sparked the World War II and its progeny, the fall of the great multinational empires, worldwide depression, World War II, and the Cold War. From the carnage of the Great War, representatives of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Montenegro announced the creation of a new South Slav confederation, Yugoslavia, under the ruling Serbian dynasty. The history of this federation was troubled with the Serbs attempting to create a centralized Serb state and the other nationalities resisting this effort in an attempt to maintain some degree of autonomy.

The Post Cold War period has witnessed both globalization and a revival of nationalism by oppressed peoples. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the fragmentation of Yugoslavia are two of the more dramatic examples of these phenomena. The policies of the Yugoslavian (Serbian) government under Slobodan Milosevic had exacerbated and accelerated nationalistic tensions. The 20th century, which began with such promise for Serbia, ended in failure and frustration. During the 1990s, Serbian power has been serially excluded from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, and Kosovo. All that is left outside Serbia proper is Voivodina and Montenegro.

If Montenegro goes the way of the other republics, the idea of Yugoslavia is nonexistent. Serbia will lose access to the sea. Therefore, Serbian policy and the ability to salvage something from the current series of debacles are important issues for the peace and stability of the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The policy of the Russian Federation towards Serbia and the Balkans, Montenegro in particular, is also extremely crucial. It is the Russians who have shown an affinity to aid their South Slav cousins from the Tsarist Empire to the Soviet Union.

The principal author looks at the Montenegrin question from an East-European perspective in the wake of Western opposition to ethnic cleansing and other distasteful practices, examining the ideas of Yugoslavian unity, the notion of a Greater Serbia, and the possibility and implications of Montenegrin independence. Crucial to the outcome is the extent to which Russia will come to the aid of Serbian policies and the post-Milosevic stance of the West on Montenegrin secession.

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF MONTENEGRO

Montenegro has never before enjoyed the international importance it currently commands. Until October 2000, the Montenegrin leadership was traveling to Western capitals where it was assured of increased support. During this time, Western strategic analysts focused their attention on Montenegro, and NATO officers fill their folders with detailed maps and aerial photos of the region. There is a simple explanation for this international prominence that this small region enjoys: Montenegro is the final element of the Yugoslav federation outside of Serbia. Montenegrin independence would end the dream of a nation of southern Slavs and, as some optimists predict, the beginning of a democratic Serbia, an event which might bring a long awaited stability to the Balkans. Prior to October 2000, a Western-oriented Montenegro would have firmly isolated Serbia and Milosevic, making the economic blockade work and bring an end to the Milosevic regime. It was predicted that the mountainous republic would have to pay too a high price

for its independence. Strategists feared that "Montenegro will all too likely be the next war in the series that have pockmarked the death of the fantasy of Greater Serbia".¹³⁰

Indeed, the little Adriatic country of 650,000 inhabitants and 13,812 square kilometers, the size of United States' state Connecticut, with no important mineral resources, and no strategic infrastructure has never before enjoyed such international prominence. It has been an isolated borderland that even the Turks were unable to control, paying little attention to the remote mountainous theocracy after the conquest of Serbia in 1389. In 1918, after more than five centuries of semi-independence, Serbian King Alexander Karadjordjevic, a son-in-law of Montenegrin King Nikola, backed by the Treaty of Versailles, incorporating Montenegro into the newly established kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, treating the inhabitants of Montenegro as Serbs. During this period, all symbols or reminders of Montenegrin sovereignty were suppressed. Even the traditional Montenegrin hat, which, displayed the Cyrillic initials of King Nikola, was banned and a new Serbian symbol was required to be worn atop formal hats.

In 1945, Tito granted federal status to allied Montenegro to increase the voting power of Belgrade in the eight-man collective leadership of the newly established Yugoslav federation, relying on Montenegrins as the most loyal allies of Serbia. In this period, vestiges of the old monarchy were suppressed and Montenegrins seemed to accept their place in the Yugoslav federation. Apparently loyal to the end, Montenegro was the only part of Yugoslavia that voted in the 1992 referendum to stay in federation.

The symbolic role of Montenegro assumed great importance over the years. The only Balkan military force not defeated by the Turks, it was seen by many as a beacon in their fight for independence. The Russians regarded Montenegro as the first free Slavic nation in the Balkans and their natural ally, while the Serbians saw Montenegro as the beginning of the Serbian independence and the cornerstone of Greater Serbia. The rocky highlands of Montenegro (Crna Gora), with their nucleus on the Zeta River, served as an important refuge to Serbs fleeing from the advancing Turks in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Montenegro resisted as a semi-autonomous theocracy for three centuries before becoming fully independent at the end of the eighteenth century.¹³¹

According to the 1991 census, the current inhabitants of Montenegro identify themselves 62% as Montenegrins, 15% as Muslims, 9% as Serbs, 7% as Albanians, and 7% as others. While the majority of the population belongs to the Orthodox Christian tradition (Montenegrins and Serbs), there is also a large Muslim population and smaller numbers of Roman Catholics. This leads to significant support of a separate Montenegrin nation, a separate state, and a separate church.

The geography of Montenegro is dominated by two high mountain ranges spanning across the country. The Montenegrin seacoast is a narrow strip of land running from Kotor Bay near Croatia to the Bojana River at the frontier with Albania. The high Dinaric Mountains of Orjen, Lovcen and Rimija rise from the sea, forming a magnificent background to the coastal strip but a great obstacle to communication between the coastal and inland parts of Montenegro. The old capital of Montenegro, Cetinje, is hidden high on the mountain of Lovcen. The Zeta plain bordering lake Skadar comprises the biggest lowland region of Montenegro and the most fertile area. It is dominated by the economic and political center of Montenegro, Podgorica (former Titograd), the country's capital,

¹³⁰ SMITH Dan, "Integrating Serbia into the Balkan region", *Security Dialog* Vol 30(3), PRIO, SAGE publications, 1999.

¹³¹ G.W. Hoffman: "The Balkans in Transition", D. Van Nostrand Company. New Jersey, 1963, p.40.

accounting for 130,000 inhabitants. The second range of high mountains, composed of Durmitor, Komovi, and Sinjajevina, separates the center of the country from the northern plateau of Sandjak. Historically, it was the Ottoman province of Sandjak that for many years cut apart Montenegro and Serbia preventing their earlier unification. Divided between two republics in 1945, it remains home for much of the region's dispersed Muslim population.

Montenegro traces its identity from one of the first kingdoms in the Balkans called *Duklja* (independent since 1077), later *Zeta* and finally *Montenegro*. In the 12th century the principality became a battlefield between the Catholic and Orthodox missionaries under Croatian and Serbian (called *Raska* at that time) influences. In 1186 Raska conquered Duklja and its inhabitants converted to Orthodoxy. Since 1455, when Serbia was defeated at Kosovo Polje, Zeta resisted the Turkish penetration. While the Serbian church was subordinated to the Turkish Patriarchy of Constantinople, the Montenegrin Autocephalic Church functioned independently and was recognized by the Russian Synod and the Eastern Pope of Constantinople. Its elected leader, *Vladika*, became the supreme authority of the theocracy. Cetinje, the Montenegrin capital since 1482 and the mountain Lovcen today are symbols of the highlanders' ethic of honesty, courage and loyalty to their country. The Berlin Congress of 1878 formally recognized the independence of Montenegro and for 40 years Cetinje, one of the smallest European capitals was the host of many foreign embassies.¹³²

The continuing fragmentation of Yugoslavian federation and the wave of changes in the region since the fall of the Iron Curtain placed Montenegro in a completely new geopolitical environment. Montenegro suddenly found itself bordered by five political entities, namely Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina (exclusively Republica Srpska), Serbia proper, Kosovo and Albania. If Montenegro was simply an isolated seaside resort on the Yugoslav Adriatic coastline, today it could provide critical transportation links between Croatia and Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. There are calls to begin using Montenegro's port of Bar to help supply aid to Kosovo.¹³³ Recently Montenegro has opened customs offices on Albanian and Croatian borders, however it still has an unresolved dispute with Croatia over the possession of Prevlaka, a half-island in Southern Croatia. This strategic peninsula controls the entrance to Kotor Bay and it is currently under observation by the UN Military Observer Mission (UNMOP).¹³⁴

While visiting the region this spring, Octavian Sofranksy observed that, for Serbians, Montenegro represents not only a critical route to the sea through the Ports of Bar and Kotor, but also a physical expression of the idea of Yugoslavia unity. Montenegrins regard Serbia as their most significant economic partner and a long-standing ally but they also view it as something of an albatross. They complain that as long as Belgrade is a pariah in Western eyes, isolated politically and economically, Montenegro must also be viewed this way.

Today, along with all the countries in the Southeastern Europe, Montenegro is going through a painful economic and political transition. Ten years after the end of the Cold War it became clear that the majority of the states in the region have opted for

¹³² Austrian, French, Russian, British, and Italian embassies were located here. For more information see The Montenegrin Association of America Home Page.

¹³³ "The next Balkan Crisis" - The New York Times - Editorial, posted April 21, 2000 through www.montenegro.com.

¹³⁴ CIA Home Page.

European and Euro-Atlantic integration, a path that guarantees a long-term stability and a clear prospective of economic development. All of these countries, except Yugoslavia, have in one form or another engaged in the integration process with the European Union and NATO. The most advanced candidates, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria, have opened negotiations for a full membership in the European Union. They are also the forerunners for NATO membership. Countries like Albania, Macedonia and, since recently, Croatia are members of the Partnership for Peace program sponsored by NATO. Even Yugoslavia through its foreign minister has unveiled its strategic goal to become part of the European Union.¹³⁵

What one observes in the Balkans today is a complex process of integration that proceeds at various speeds. Throughout the region, both university scholars and government officials speak of the urgency of creating a more effective regional framework. Recognition of the need for a more concerted, balanced, regional approach in cooperation was demonstrated by the creation of the Stability pact for South-eastern Europe in 1999. The crucial significance of this agreement is that through its concluding Cooperation and Association Agreements, it offers the prospect, though a remote one, of membership in the European Union for all the countries in the region. Macedonia was first to benefit from this status, and Croatia and Albania next to follow.

The notorious exception to this integration process is the politically and economically isolated and authoritarian Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, within which Montenegrins increasingly voice their dissatisfaction. Given its isolationist past and an affinity to Serbia few can predict the future of Montenegro. Several options appear plausible. The first envisions an independent Montenegro, coming out of a non-violent divorce with Serbia, as one of prosperous Adriatic mini-states, living on tourism and commerce from a larger Europe. The second scenario sees Montenegro as still a part of Yugoslavia, providing a democratic leader, like Vojislav Kostunica remains in office, as an equal part of a loose confederation. The third scenario predicts a violent break-up with Serbia, transforming Montenegro into a NATO protectorate, similar to Kosovo or Bosnia-Herzegovina, living on donations from the international community. The fourth scenario predicts the resurrection of a federal Yugoslavia, in which, the central government would exercise all significant powers under this scenario. Indeed, the crucial question asked by international community and the Montenegrins themselves, is how to avoid violence and to reach toward the European and world community at the same time.

INTERNAL POLITICAL DUALISM

The double-headed Montenegrin eagle reflects perfectly the dilemma of the country today. One head is looking to Brussels and the West and the other remains loyal to Belgrade. Since the 1999 crisis in Kosovo, the Montenegrin polity is crystallizing around the two options: independence or a continued federation. As in 1918, when the local assembly voted for unification with Serbia, the Montenegrin patriots, under the green flag, confronted the Yugoslav patriots under the white. The Green Camp is growing constantly. Traditionally supported by the nationalist wing, the Diaspora, and the Montenegrin Autocephalous Orthodox Church, for the last two years it has attracted an increasing number of moderate parties and voters. The incumbent president, Milo

¹³⁵ VUKOVIC Borislav, "Yugoslavia and the European Union", Review of International Affairs, 1999.

Djukanovic, has emerged as a leader of the Montenegro drive for sovereignty against Belgrade's autocratic rule.

Djukanovic, the president of Montenegro since the 1997 elections and a former Prime Minister, is an apparatchik. However, since becoming president he sharply criticized Milosevic for his confrontation with the West, and has enacted liberal reforms, launching a program of privatization, introducing the Deutsche Mark as the second currency in the country, and seeking cooperation with Montenegro's neighbors. During the NATO bombing campaign in 1999, Djukanovic blamed Milosevic for provoking the strikes but also called on NATO to stop the bombing. He repeatedly addressed the Western countries and international financial institutions (IFIs) for aid and investment, which was slow to come partly because of the blockade on Yugoslavia and partly because of unclear status of relations between Montenegro and Serbia. Internationally, the federation of Montenegro with Serbia was not recognized by the United States and many others, Russia and Cuba were among the few exceptions.¹³⁶

The electoral block headed by Milo Djukanovic, "Da Zivimo Bolje," won the 1998 parliamentary elections with 49.54% of the votes over the pro-Serbian Serbian National Party (SNP), which received 36.1% of the vote. The three parties of the coalition; Social Democrat Party (SDP) of Zarko Rackevic, the People's Party (NS) of Dragan Soc and Djukanovic's Democratic Socialist Party (DPS), advanced a common platform, where they called Belgrade to accept confederate relations, stopping short of independence.

Until 2000, the idea of a referendum on independence became increasingly attractive to many Montenegrins. Djukanovic used it as leverage against Milosevic in order to obtain a "redefinition of relations with FRY", which in fact would mean the maintenance of loose political affiliation with Belgrade and at the same time an opportunity to enact independent economic policies and qualify for Western aid and investment. Milosevic worked against this proposal by sponsoring pro-Serbian parties and increasing the Yugoslav Army (VJ) presence in the region. The utility of the Yugoslav Army, according to Belgrade professor Vojin Dimitrijevic, is greatly enhanced by the fact that it was the only federal institution that still functioned in this fractured nation.¹³⁷

The Liberal Alliance (LSCG), the longest consistent supporter and most active promoter of Montenegrin independence, has stayed aside from the governing coalition. Its supporters argue that Montenegro, as an independent nation was abusively incorporated into the Yugoslav Kingdom and the Montenegrin Autocephalous Church was subordinated by force to the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1920. Surviving in exile, for instance in Detroit, Michigan, USA, the Montenegrin Autocephalic Orthodox Church was reactivated in Cetinje in 1993. In the same year Dr. Vojislav Nikcevic published a book suggesting that "Montenegrins speak and write Montenegrin", different from Croatian or Serbian.

Today the Montenegrin Diaspora, scattered around North America and Europe, who held their Second World Congress in August 2000 in the old Montenegrin capital of Cetinje under the patronage of President Milo Djukanovic, actively support independence.

¹³⁶ The US view is that the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) has dissolved and that none of the successor republics represents its continuation. Source: CIA Home Page.

¹³⁷ Interview, Graz, July 1, 2000.

This pro-independence president can rely on his voters, the radical nationalists from LSCG, the Democratic Party of Socialists, the Social Democratic Party, the support of the Diaspora, the Montenegrin Autocephalous Church and the 20,000 strong Montenegrin police. Many Albanians and Muslims antagonized by Milosevic's behavior during the wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo also support Montenegrin independence.

On the other side there are supporters of maintaining Montenegro as a part of Yugoslavia. Milosevic, loyal Serbs and Montenegrins as well as the 10,000 strong Yugoslav Army and 1,000 pro-Serb paramilitaries backed their former leader, Momir Bulatovic, the former president of Montenegro. After Milosevic was voted out of office, Momir Bulatovic also left his governmental position.

The Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (SNP) is the strongest single party in the country. Momir Bulatovic established an electoral coalition known as "Yugoslavia – SNP – Momir Bulatovic." This coalition attempted to unite the pro-Yugoslav forces in the republic and is specifically addressed to two small Serb-nationalist parties: Serb Radical Party (SRS) and Serb People's Party (SNS). After the 2000 federal elections, the SNS gained the parliamentary seats allocated to Montenegro.¹³⁸

After Milosevic was voted out of office the Democratic Opposition of Serbia became increasingly popular. Today DOS and the SNP have formed an alliance fighting for the formation of a united Yugoslavia.

Historically, besides Serbia, Yugoslavian patriotism has found a more fertile ground in Montenegro, which saw itself as the beacon of the southern Slavic independence. The Montenegrins were ferocious fighters in the World War II resistance movement, they had a disproportionately high percentage of members in the Yugoslav communist party, and they were always over-represented on the federal level. Many Montenegrins will comment that they always went to Serbia to go to school and to assume authority. In addition, there is a large population in Serbia of native Montenegrins, while at the same time there is a large community of Serbs and Serb refugees in Montenegro itself. Just several years ago Montenegrins fought along with Serbs for Yugoslav unity in Dubrovnik.

In addition to ideology and politics, the economy plays an important role in the development of this region. Montenegro, along with Macedonia and Kosovo, was one of the poorest republics of Yugoslavia. However, it was the Yugoslav central planning that allowed Montenegro to jump from a backward feudal society into industrialization and urbanization. Montenegro also became a tourist paradise during the summer months. Since the beginning of the recent crisis in Yugoslavia, the heavy industry has been in economic distress. The only revenues are provided by Serbian tourists, and, increasingly, by smuggling. Montenegrin government sources acknowledge that years of sanctions have fueled the black economy and the smuggling of cigarettes into Rome, which is costing Italy millions in tax revenues.¹³⁹ Indeed, many speedboats anchored in Kotor Bay belong to veteran smugglers who earned their fortunes in the Bosnian Conflict when a liter of gasoline smuggled by Albanians over Skadar Lake could be sold to Bosnian Serbs for a fivefold price.

¹³⁸ ICG Balkans Report, 107, 28 March 2001. 3, posted May 24, 2001 by www.crisisweb.org

¹³⁹ "Italy's Mafia obsession aids Milosevic-Montenegro", December 28, Brussels, (Reuters) by montenegro.com.

While the living standards dropped by more than 50%, "the only thing that Montenegrin authorities have been doing efficiently for all these ten years is controlling the national economic resources and their distribution among the *nomenclatura* pyramid members," argue local experts.¹⁴⁰ The recent "monetary divorce" between the two republics, with Montenegro resorting to the Deutsche Mark (DM) as its second currency, highlighted the deterioration in their relations. Serbia has retaliated by closing its markets to Montenegrin exporters and denying Montenegro subsidized food that keeps ordinary Serbs from starving.

Traditionally, the Montenegrin coast was the summer destination for the inhabitants of the Yugoslav capital Belgrade with thousands of them flooding through Tivat Airport to elegant Venetian-style city-ports of Budva, Kotor, Perast or numerous villas overlooking the sea. Today these people worry that they might have to sell their holiday properties, as they did in Croatia. Even without the possible disruption of a move for Montenegrin independence, the prices for food and basic services on the coast are so high that they cannot be met by scarce wages back in Serbia.

Montenegrins express gratitude that the United States committed \$55 million in technical assistance, budget support and humanitarian aid for Montenegro in 2000 and in 2001, however they maintain that more is necessary. Some disappointment has been expressed at the reaction of other international actors who have responded to Montenegro's crisis. While the European Union announced that it would double its aid to Montenegro from ten to twenty million Euro in 2001, World Bank president James Wolfenson stated that he "was under legal obligation not to act in Montenegro because it was not a member of the bank."¹⁴¹ Many Montenegrin officials privately concede that they are forced to place greater reliance on individual countries, such as Germany, which have played a more consistent role in providing investment guarantees for companies prepared to invest in Montenegro.

In the spring of 2000, Montenegro found itself in what local observers refer to as "the shadow of a volcano." The drive for independence and the counter-drive slowly polarized the society. If in February 1998 the majority of Montenegrins were still favoring the federation, then by September 1999 the relative majority had switched to independence and this trend was on the increase. The local elections in Podgorica and Herzeg-Novi, held on June 11, were seen as the test for support for both rival camps in Montenegro. "During the oncoming elections the citizens will be in fear of a monetary strike by Belgrade, Yugoslav Army seventh battalion, and Montenegro liberals", said a local analyst.¹⁴² According to Srdjan Darmanovic, a local political analyst, the elections indicated that there was a slow but firm trend in favor of Djukanovic government while strengthening his party's position in the capital in spite of losing some voters in Herzeg-Novi.¹⁴³ Indeed, Podgorica, the country's capital, accounts for one forth of the total electorate while Herzeg-Novi, a small town on the Bosnian border, is also home for some 5,000 Yugoslav refugees. "The European and American assistance, provided to Podgorica, not to Herzeg-Novi, undoubtedly helped Djukanovic's turnout, since every local vote here has larger political connotation," added Darmanovic.

¹⁴⁰ Weekly political report, posted May 11, 2000 by montenegro.com

¹⁴¹ "EU urges more international support for Montenegro", posted March 29, 2000 by montenegro.com.

¹⁴² "Weekly political report", May 11, 2000 by montenegro.com

¹⁴³ Interview, Perast, July 20, 2000

Table 1. Preferred Status of Montenegro¹⁴⁴

	Federation	Independence	Confederation
February 1998.	51.7 %	21.0 %	10.5 %
May 1999.	38.8 %	28.9 %	20.5 %
September 1999.	27.6 %	32.3 %	19.6 %
January 2000.	28.0 %	36.1 %	22.5 %

After the Spring 2000 elections, President Milo Djukanovic threatened to call a referendum on the question of independence in the near future. Djukanovic declared on the 4th of April 2000, "This spring or a bit later the referendum will happen. Serbia is sinking deeper and deeper, its debts are accumulating, it has imposed a blockade on Montenegro, and is playing various tricks."¹⁴⁵ "A referendum offering a straight choice between Yugoslavia and independence could probably be won now," experts of the International Crisis Group have stated.¹⁴⁶ The opinion polls show a constant increase in support for independence. In July 2000, surveys indicated that 39.7% of Montenegrins were in favor of separation of Montenegro from Yugoslavia.¹⁴⁷

On the other side, there were fears of a forced removal from office of Montenegro's pro-independence president. Former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright repeatedly warned Milosevic "any change by force of political situation of Montenegro will be sanctioned." NATO's European former military leader Wesley Clark said at a news conference that Serbia is clearly preparing for possible military action against pro-western Montenegro. Clark declined to comment on any military preparations NATO may have made in this respect, but clearly warned Milosevic not to interfere.¹⁴⁸ Both officials and the average citizens expressed great concern about the role of a 1,000 member paramilitary force created by the Serbian government and stationed in Montenegro. This development was an ominous accompaniment to the already threatening role of the 10,000 soldiers of the Yugoslav Second Army that had taken over Montenegrin airports and set up pro-Serbian television stations on its Montenegrin bases. Montenegrin officials complained, both in private as well as in public, that the Serbs took these actions in an effort to provoke President Djukanovic into overreacting in a manner that would bring about popular support in Serbia for a military move against Montenegro.

In the meantime Milosevic was attempting to exercise his final instrument of leverage against Montenegro. In July 2000, the federal assembly, disregarding the opposition, passed amendments to the constitution of Yugoslavia, paving the way for a new mandate to Milosevic. In response Filip Vujanovic, the Chairman of Montenegrin

Parliament, announced that the government coalition of Montenegro will boycott federal elections in the fall saying, "Montenegro will not participate in any elections that would mean the ruling of Slobodan Milosevic."¹⁴⁹ On August 25, in an effort to limit local participation in the elections, the Montenegrin government banned state media coverage of the election campaign. This ban covered all of Montenegro's public television and radio stations.

Western support for Djukanovic was partly predicated on the judgement that, in the absence of credible opposition in Serbia, he constituted the only serious opposition to Milosevic in the Yugoslav context aiming at making Djukanovic the figurehead for all the opposition to Milosevic.¹⁵⁰ However, in 1999, the Western powers urged Montenegro not to try to secede from Yugoslavia but to join Serbian opposition to confront Milosevic and work for democracy "from within."¹⁵¹ A new attempt to unite Serbian opposition under one banner failed again in July 2000 in Sveti-Stefan, a Montenegrin resort. In speaking with Octavian Sofranksy, many people from Podgorica, Belgrade, and Zagreb expressed their conviction that Yugoslavia's enduring political crisis is beyond the control of "democratic" forces. For these individuals, the only answer was one that would come from within Milosevic's political entourage.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, said she did not see Montenegro becoming the next Balkan flash point. However, the UNHCR was building up emergency facilities in the region, though she was cautiously optimistic the tense situation would not escalate to the extent of Kosovo in the late 1990s.¹⁵² The international crisis group called for a slow internalization of Montenegro through infiltration of NGOs as well as other initiatives. EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, agreed that Montenegro should stay within the Yugoslav federation but with closer contact with other nations in the region.¹⁵³

The more radical members of this camp declared, "the Serb preparations for violent intervention against Montenegro's President Milo Djukanovic are clear and present, staying out of Montenegro will be impossible. Balkan stability and Yugoslavia's existence are in a direct contradiction, three more viable states, independent Montenegro and Kosovo, plus a democratic Serbia, may be the most stable outcome. The end of Balkan instability requires far more than bombing from 15,000 feet and peace-enforcement. It may, ultimately, require military force to ensure the dismemberment of Yugoslav remnants."¹⁵⁴

The September 2000 elections brought about great changes in strategy for the entire Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Vojislav Kostunica, the Western-preferred presidential candidate, defeated Milosevic. After Milosevic left office the threat of violence ceased and the international community exhaled. Soon, the West began to expect Montenegrin and FRY problems to dissipate, bettering relations and remaining a confederation.

¹⁴⁹ "The governing coalition will boycott federal elections", Pobjeda, Podgorica, July 23, 2000

¹⁵⁰ GOW James, "Montenegro: Where to take the fight", Security Dialog Vol 30(3), PRIO, SAGE publications, 1999.

¹⁵¹ Italy's Mafia obsession aids Milosevic-Montenegro, December 28, Brussels, (Reuters) by montenegro.com.

¹⁵² UNHCR says Montenegro not next Balkan flashpoint, Tirana, March 26 (Reuters) by www.montenegro.com

¹⁵³ Montenegro should stay in Yugoslavia, (AP/MTI), March 29, by montenegro.com

¹⁴⁴ "Public Opinion in Crna Gora", CEDEM, Podgorica, April 2000.

¹⁴⁵ "Montenegro might hold independence referendum within months: minister", April 4, 2000 posted by montenegro.com

¹⁴⁶ "Montenegro: In the Shadow of the Volcano", March 21, 2000, ICG Home Page

¹⁴⁷ "Za i protiv otcpljenja Crne Gore od Jugoslavije", Blic Montenegro, July 20, 2000

¹⁴⁸ NATO sees threat to Montenegro, warns Serbia, Lisbon, posted on March 29 (Reuters) posted on montenegro.com.

For the first time since 1998, Djukanovic attended a session of the Supreme Defense Council on December 25, 2000. Since Milosevic was no longer in office, there were many changes to the military stationed in Montenegro. The most important development was the plan implemented in late March 2001 concerning the Second Army from Montenegro. General Milorad Obradovic, the commander of the Second Army was removed from his position. By mid-March, the Seventh Battalion was disbanded from Montenegro and was redeployed to Southern Serbia. The presence of the Yugoslav Army remains in Montenegro although the VJ's chief-of-staff, General Nebojsa asserted "the army will not interfere in Montenegro's decision over its future status."¹⁵⁵

Today, the VJ is no longer regarded as a security threat to Montenegro, although, its presence remains, showing Montenegro and the rest of the international community, "Montenegro has yet to establish full control over its territory."¹⁵⁶

Table 2. Preferred Status of Montenegro II¹⁵⁷

	Federation	Independence	Confederation
April 2000.	25.3%	35.7%	19.8%
October 2000.	19.0%	36.8%	26.1%
January 2001.	16.1%	36.0%	33.7%

After the September presidential elections, the percentage of Montenegrins who wanted to remain in the federation decreased dramatically. The idea of a confederation became more popular after Milosevic left office, thus demonstrating that many Montenegrins were not against the FRY but were against Milosevic. The increased support of a confederation showed political duality within Montenegro. These statistics from January ended up playing a vital role in the April 2001 elections.

The April parliamentary election results showed that the secessionist movement had approximately 42% of the vote while, just over 40% voted for the opposition party.¹⁵⁸ Although the results of this election were extremely close, Milo Djukanovic has "pledged to push on with plans for holding a referendum on independence."¹⁵⁹ In Montenegro, referenda require the participation of 50% of all eligible voters to be valid. Those who support the federation plan to boycott this election, making it virtually impossible for independence to be achieved.

Anti-independence voters were strongly represented in this election giving FRY President Kostunica and Predrag Bulatovic, head of the Socialist People's Party, hope that the Yugoslav federation would stay intact. On the other hand it gave Djukanovic's

¹⁵⁵ VIP Daily News Report, 17 January 2001.

¹⁵⁶ ICG Balkans Report 107, 28 March 2001. 7 Posted May 24, 2001 by <http://www.crisisweb.org>

¹⁵⁷ Data from April 2000, October 2000, and March 2001 CEDEM polls.

¹⁵⁸ "Leaders Urge Caution in Montenegro,"

<http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/04/23/montenegro.poll.03/index.html> 23 April 2001.

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/04/24/montenegro.poll.02/index.html> 24 April, 2001.

party the majority of seats in the parliament, encouraging him that independence is clearly a possibility for Montenegro.

RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARDS THE BALKANS

While Serbia has long been the dominant influence on Montenegrin affairs, Russia has also played an important role in this region. Only recently has Russia begun giving Montenegro increased attention.¹⁶⁰ Since the peace in Kosovo, the Russian political realm was too busy with internal matters, such as the election of the new president and the "antiterrorist campaign" in Chechnya. The newly elected Russian president Vladimir Putin prioritized the revitalization of the system of vertical power inside Russia, while most foreign policy objectives were postponed. Foreign Minister Ivanov described the strategic balance with NATO and major super-powers and the "near-abroad" CIS states as its sphere of strategic interest as priorities of the Russian foreign policy.¹⁶¹

Russia, a long-time Montenegrin ally, has contemporary concerns very different from those it had during the Russian-Turkish Wars when Montenegrin Admiral Mateja Zmajevic fought under the Russian flag, and the naval school in Perast, an ancient Montenegrin port, trained Russian marines. In Montenegro, there are portraits of Russian emperors in historical museums and the icons donated to the Montenegrin Orthodox churches by their Russian protectors many years ago. Many Montenegrins believe their relations with Russia pertain to the past, however one can spot symbols of the new Russia in Montenegro today as well. The vanguard of Russia's oil exporters, Luk Oil, has made its presence in Montenegro and a new airplane route has opened this year connecting Podgorica and Moscow. Russians seem to be interested in acquiring real-estate property on the sunny Adriatic coast, bearing in mind that this is a visa free country. Montenegrin businessmen, in turn, are eager to open the immense Russian market for their goods. Diplomatic exchanges are being made between Montenegro and Russia as well. The Montenegrin authorities, following their goal for international recognition, have set-up a "representation" in Moscow while, a Russian consulate opened in Podgorica.

The Balkan policy of the Russian Federation has recently entered a new phase. During the 19th century in an attempt to gain the access to Mediterranean, the Russian Empire provided vital support for the Balkan region, particularly Slavic nations, sponsoring the independence movements of the Montenegrins, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks. After winning World War II, Soviet Russia attempted to control the Balkans ideologically. The present-day Russian Federation has become a distant observer from its bases in Eastern Moldova and Sevastopol on the Black Sea. Since NATO announced that it regards Southeastern Europe as a zone of strategic interest, Russia, has tried to avoid a direct confrontation with NATO. Even after signing a Russian-NATO charter, Russia still occasionally attempts to bargain for some advantages.

Bulgaria and, politically and economically isolated, Serbia continue to nurture warm feelings toward Russia although this former ally has slowed financial and political support. In a desperate attempt to receive badly needed external support during the height of the Kosovo crisis, Milosevic also referred to Russia as a "traditional ally." He requested Yeltsin to admit Serbia into the Russia-Belarus Union. Setting aside the

¹⁶⁰ A search of the archives of major Russian newspapers revealed nothing pertinent concerning Montenegro.

¹⁶¹ The NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume V, Number 8 (16 May 2000).

geographic unfeasibility of the project, Serbia being isolated from Russia by EU and NATO candidates, the current union itself is hardly functioning economically or politically. A 1999 Russian opinion poll revealed that only 28% of the public favors the union while 69% are against it.¹⁶² After observing the union, Moscow sees it as an economic burden and a political embarrassment. This is primarily due to President Lukashenko's notoriously undemocratic rule in Belarus. The rationale of union survival lies in the geo-strategic realm, namely Moscow's fear of NATO reaching Russian frontiers. Milosevic's appeal generated little support among the Kremlin leadership, thus demonstrating the limited geo-strategic significance of Yugoslavia in Russia today. Instead, Moscow's reaction to the Kosovo crises focused on a diplomatic effort to get a stake in the post-conflict arrangement and on military maneuvering to test the cohesion of NATO forces. In Moscow, anti-NATO campaigns found fertile ground among Russian nationalists, but debates about the cost of peacekeeping efforts in the former Yugoslavia indicated that other issues were influencing Russian politics. The former Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow, Borislav Milosevic, acknowledged in an interview that the idea of joining the Russia-Belarus Union had been discussed in Belgrade before the bombing, and on March 24, 2000 the Yugoslav parliament requested observer status in the Union. He did admit both; the Yugoslav opposition and Montenegro oppose the idea of the union.¹⁶³ The appeal was followed by Milosevic's petition to the presidents of Russia and Belarus in which he declared, "Yugoslavia is ready to join the union." Milosevic argued on the basis economic complementarities, "multiculturalism," and the Orthodox religion commonality.

Yugoslavia as a whole might have supported Milosevic's move to an alliance with Russia, but in Montenegro things are seen differently. A recent opinion poll shows that only 16% of ethnic Montenegrins in the republic supported adherence to Russia-Belarus Union compared to 53% of ethnic Serbs. The same source indicates that both Serbs (65%) and Montenegrins (87%) support the eventual joining of Montenegro to the European Union.¹⁶⁴

The idea of aligning with Russia is not new in Yugoslavia. Vojislav Sesel, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party, suggested it in 1993. Although this idea faded away, it was resurrected in 1999 under the imminence of NATO bombing. Russia and Yugoslavia signed an agreement on military cooperation, but it was suspended because of the UN embargo. Belgrade then made a new attempt to make Russia an ally.

This Yugoslav initiative was received with varied reactions from Russian politicians. Constantin Zatulin, leader of the "Derzava" movement, suggested, Russia should increase assistance to Yugoslavia. This assistance would be given through deliveries of military equipment. Alexei Mitrofanov from the ultra-nationalist LDPR (Zhirinovski's party) argued for the acceptance of Yugoslavia into the Union and bring the country under the Russian nuclear umbrella. In Mitrofanov's opinion, this action would guarantee the end of the conflict and resurrect the legendary Russian might. Elena Zazulina from the reformist "Yabloko" block insisted that a union with Russia and Bulgaria would only be considered only after the end of military conflict. Instead, she suggested a referendum.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Moscow News opinion polls, 15-22.04.1999, MN Home Page.

¹⁶³ SOLOVIEV Vladimir, "Belgrade longing for an Union", Vek weekly, No. 8, March 25-03, 2000.

¹⁶⁴ "Public Opinion in Crna Gora", CEDEM, Podgorica, April 2000.

¹⁶⁵ "Two questions to politicians", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 14, 1999.

Russian hawks trumpeted the issue of military involvement throughout the conflict. In an interview Sergei Govoruhin, a popular Russian journalist, complained "today no one takes Russia into account...NATO freely demonstrated its superiority during the rocket-aerial voyage in Yugoslavia." He believes the only way to stop the war is by delivering modern air-defense systems to Yugoslavia. Govoruhin stated that "ten mobile C-300 units can fully control the Yugoslav air." He believes that the threat of a direct Russia NATO confrontation is not higher than in Vietnam or Afghanistan.¹⁶⁶

At the beginning of the Kosovo bombing in March 1999, the custom officers of Baku Airport in Azerbaijan impounded the Russian-made transport plane, "Ruslan", with 5 military pilots on board. According to accompanying documents, the cargo was to be transported from Kazakhstan to Slovenia; other sources, however, indicated its actual destination as Belgrade.¹⁶⁷

On April 2, 1999 Russian military leaders made known that they intended to send an expeditionary Russian fleet to the Adriatic. This fleet was composed of 7 vessels: two destroyers, two guard vessels, a transport, and an intelligence ship headed by the cruiser "Admiral Golovko."¹⁶⁸ In the end, only one Russian military ship, the Sevastopol based "Liman," reached Montenegrin waters some two weeks later.

Despite attempts to blackmail NATO, Russian military and political establishments have kept more realistic views concerning NATO forces. The former Russian Defense Minister, Igor Rodionov, stated, "Russia has to give up its Soviet-time ambitions.... It should by no means accept to be dragged into a military conflict with NATO, and should focus on the internal political, economical and social problems particularly on avoiding a civil war, and thus escaping NATO help to Russia itself on the Yugoslav model."¹⁶⁹

Nonetheless, during the entire Kosovo conflict, Russia actively supported Yugoslavia with intelligence information. Using land-radars and space-based systems of observation, Russian military staff closely followed the development of the Yugoslav situation. NATO commanders accused Russia of supplying the Yugoslav army with intelligence data. Russia never denounced these accusations. Instead the military proudly acknowledged that its suggestions helped the Yugoslav army to avoid substantial human losses, especially for the 40,000 strong Serbian Army in Kosovo. Russian intelligence also admitted to telling the Yugoslavs not to disclose their entire air-defense system with the beginning of air raids; a surprising tactic for NATO planners.¹⁷⁰

Trying to get international leverage and unite the fragmented Russian voters against an external threat on the eve of new presidential elections, the Moscow power holders attacked NATO. They threatened NATO with strong pressure inside Russia for sending volunteers to the conflict, large deliveries of arms and including Yugoslavia in the Russia-Belarus union.¹⁷¹

Even with an ample anti-NATO campaign, Russian public opinion never favored military support for Yugoslavia. In October 1998, 44% of Russian respondents in an opinion poll favored the action and 53% were against. Six months later in April 1999, at

¹⁶⁶ "Two questions to politicians", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 14, 1999.

¹⁶⁷ "Visits", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 31, 1999.

¹⁶⁸ "Will Russian vessels crash with NATO fleet?", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 2, 1999.

¹⁶⁹ "Two questions to politicians", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 14, 1999.

¹⁷⁰ PROKOPENKO Sergey and BARANETZ Victor, "Information wars", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 31, 1999.

¹⁷¹ ARBATOV Alexey, "How to untie the Balkan nodes", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, May 7, 1999.

the height of NATO strikes, only 36% were in favor, with 61% against. An even larger percentage declared its readiness to go to fight as volunteers in Yugoslavia, but there has been no confirmation of organized Russian military groups fighting on the Serbian side.¹⁷² Nor could any Russian volunteer face a NATO pilot flying at 30,000 feet.

Vasili Axenov, a well-known Russian intellectual, portrayed Russia as "One hand protesting, stretched in a fist, the other begging the West with humiliation."¹⁷³ He condemned the ambitions of the Russian leadership and the "wave of hysterical anti-Americanism." Axenov called upon Russia to act as a mediator.

There is a long history of mediation in this region. Upon arriving in Belgrade on March 30, 1999, Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, accompanied by Defense Minister Sergheev and Foreign Minister Ivanov, proclaimed his intention to "attempt a political solution ... by enabling Yugoslavia to defend its rights on the international scene."¹⁷⁴ Belarus President Lukashenko, in a visit following that of the Russian delegation, voiced his support for the "Primakov's initiative." Over the next two weeks the Russian ambassador in Belgrade, Yuri Kotov, arranged numerous visits by Russian representatives including the President of the Russian Duma, Gennady Seleznyov and, the Russian Patriarch Alexi II. He also presided over the repatriation of Russian citizens, about one thousand, whom left Yugoslavia during the bombing campaign.¹⁷⁵ On April 22, a new Russian mediator, Victor Chernomyrdin, arrived in Yugoslavia. Chernomyrdin, a former Prime Minister as well as a special representative of President Yeltsin, proclaimed that his mission was "to convince the United States and NATO to stop bombing Yugoslavia, and ask Yugoslav leadership to soften its position and relaunch the talks".¹⁷⁶

Russian diplomacy has neither succeeded in proposing effective solutions for the crisis nor in securing a firm place for Russia in the post-conflict arrangement. Moscow's diplomats demanded a separate zone of control for Russian peacekeepers, but NATO, fearing a de-facto partition of Kosovo much like the post-World War II partition of Germany, refused to accept their claim. Feeling its honor at stake, the Russian military command ordered its troops to occupy Pristina Airport, several hours before NATO, using a part of its peacekeeping force stationed in Bosnia. This military-political triumph was short lived, however, the Russian contingent in Kosovo was forced to accept a NATO command. According to *Intellectual Capital*, the Russian Supreme Commander, President Boris Yeltsin, planned this maneuver in the utmost secrecy. NATO generals were not the only ones taken by surprise when the Russian paratroopers arrived; it was only after receiving presidential approval that the Chief of Russian General Staff, Anatoliy Kvashnin, informed his boss, Russian Defense Minister, Sergheev. Neither Prime-Minister Sergheev, nor Chief Intelligence Officer Vladimir Putin knew about the paratrooper launch.¹⁷⁷ Another Russian strategic ploy was the use of Pristina Airport for a large deployment of Russian troops. This plan was proven futile when Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria refused to open their air space to Russian military planes.

¹⁷² Moscow News opinion polls, 1998-1999, MN Home Page.

¹⁷³ SAPOJNIKOVA Galina "Vasiliy Axenov: I know the recipe for peace", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 31, 1999.

¹⁷⁴ TCHIZIKOV Maxim, "Do not shoot the peace-makers: they play as they can", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 31, 1999.

¹⁷⁵ KOTOV Yuri, "Russian Embassy under the Bombs", *Review of International Affairs*, September 1999.

¹⁷⁶ GAMOV Alexandr, "Tchernomyrdin - the heavy artillery in the Balkans", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 14, 1999.

¹⁷⁷ GOLTZ Alexander, "Russia beat NATO for one day", *Intellectual Capital*, No.25, June 23, 1999.

Russian forces faced two real challenges: the lack of trained modern peacekeeping units and the financial burden of peacekeeping. According to Alexandr Goltz in *Intellectual Capital*, "Moscow's plan to control an entire sector in Kosovo required at least 10,000 troops while the maximum that the army was able to provide was only 3,600. The low number is due to the rest of the troops, needing training and equipment that would not be ready in time".¹⁷⁸ Secondly, Russia's preference for a United Nations mandate was dictated by financial concerns. The NATO framework obliges each participating country to honor its bill forcing Russia to dispense over \$150 million a year. The Bosnian battalion is already taking half of the 440 million ruble annual budget for peacekeeping operations as approved by the Russian Duma.

During the entire Yugoslav crisis, Russian policy on Balkans was spontaneous, reactive, and highly contextual. The major crises, like the ones in Bosnia and Kosovo, brought sudden media, diplomatic, and military reverberations in Moscow. When these crises were past, the issue was forgotten and new issues and priorities appeared: a new president, a new executive power, and regional reform. However, one should not underestimate the unpredictability of Russian policy. According to Margaret Blunden of the University of Westminster, "NATO's avoidance of the UN Security Council was a test of Russian strength, showing that there is little Russia could do in the Balkans. Russians, who opposed bombing, watched it and were completely powerless and inactive. However, such blatant disregard of a former superpower may and will backfire, as in the case of Chechnya".¹⁷⁹

By examining Russian behavior in previous Yugoslav conflicts one may predict possible Russian reactions in the event of a greater Montenegrin crises and then, formulate a policy that will prevent Russia from working against the interests of the international community. Generally, the Balkan region, including Yugoslavia, is not a high priority for the Russian Federation. Therefore, one conclusion may be that Russia will neither support the Montenegrin independence movement nor attempt to save the remnants of the Yugoslav Federation.

Russia continued to supply Milosevic with military intelligence. However, in a case of a protracted civil war, Russian volunteers, armed with light Russian military equipment, might have entered Montenegrin territory. Their role would have mirrored that of the several hundred Russian volunteers who journeyed to Serbia during the NATO bombing campaign in 1999.

Should NATO forces threaten a new attack on Serbia, a highly unlikely even since the electoral defeat of Milosevic, Russia would probably resume its diplomatic efforts to prevent military intervention while also offering its services as a mediator in the conflict. If intervention takes place, Russia would undoubtedly demand a zone of control and, if refused, it might once again use the Pristina airport as a landing zone. In Montenegro Russia could rely on popular support of the large pro-Serbian community.

At the July 2000, G-8 summit in Okinawa, Russian President Putin and US President Clinton discussed Montenegro and the Balkan crisis. They stressed "the importance of democratic government in Montenegro and President Djukanovic".¹⁸⁰ Many political observers in Eastern Europe—from Montenegro to Moldova—have seen

¹⁷⁸ GOLTZ Alexander, "Russia beat NATO for one day", *Intellectual Capital*, No.25, June 23, 1999.

¹⁷⁹ Interview, Perast, Montenegro, July 1, 2000.

¹⁸⁰ "Clinton and Putin discussed Milosevic's attempts to destabilize Crna Gora", *Pobjeda, Podgorica*, July 20, 2000.

in that a promise of a decline in the long-standing unconditional Russian support for FRY unification.

MULTILATERAL IMPLICATIONS OF MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE

"A unilateral declaration of independence by Montenegro will bring civil war", is a popular claim by those in the Balkans. Milosevic would be happy to open a new offensive to extend his "legitimization" as the defender of the Yugoslavian motherland in defiance of "American imperialism". Many Montenegrins who do not want independence, pledging allegiance to Greater Serbia, will support him. The community of Serbian refugees from Kosovo and Bosnia, some 32,000-strong in Montenegro, will also oppose secession. Finally, most East Europeans simply do not believe that anyone can defeat the Yugoslav army, always loyal to Milosevic, on the ground in the Balkans.

Montenegrins have never taken up arms against the Serbs. In numerous conversations, they made this point to Octavian Sofrasky during his visit to the region. "Going ahead with the referendum on independence for Montenegro would risk radicalizing a population still peacefully divided over the issue, and would offer maximum provocation to Belgrade, which retains a powerful military presence in Montenegro".¹⁸¹ An armed struggle would highlight the status of hundreds of thousands of Montenegrins living in Serbia. Unlike Kosovo, where Albanians had a large majority, which increased after the Serbs fled, or Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Serbs have obtained a territorial autonomy, Montenegro has no other division, than political, between the nationalist Greens and unionist Whites.

During his visit to Montenegro in July, Sofrasky observed that there was a very complex mosaic of allegiances, a multi-layered political process, and a grotesque historical heritage that render the apparent Green and White palette extremely nuance. Montenegrin society is a duality; there are two parallel currencies—the Yugoslav Dinar and the German D-Mark; two churches—the Serbian Patriarchate and the Montenegrin one, even two capitals—the capital city Cetinje and the main city Podgorica. Some people claim they speak Serbian, some affirm that they speak Montenegrin, some use the Latin, some the Cyrillic alphabet. Almost half want an independent Montenegro while the other half prefers a common state with the Serbians. However, there is no one clear boundary within the Montenegrin society, since these predilections overlap and extend well beyond Montenegro into neighboring Serbia where the business class uses the Latin alphabet and the D-mark as well. Montenegrins have conformed to duality and prefer to live with it rather taking one final decision.

A negotiated settlement, leading to a non-violent independence for Montenegro implies an agreement from Belgrade. Prospects for this look grim, however, as long as this independence is perceived in Belgrade mainly as an anti-Serbian conspiracy of the West. Since the political and economic pressure applied on Belgrade did not function before, in case of non-Serbian territories like Bosnia or Kosovo, it is even less probable than they might function today in Montenegro—"a symbol of Serbian civilization." Montenegro and Serbia are in de facto confederation relations and are learning to accept a parallel existence. What could not be done during the violent collapse of Yugoslavia, namely a "velvet divorce," may be the ultimate result.

¹⁸¹ "Montenegro: In the Shadow of the Volcano", March 21, 2000, International Crisis Group Home Page.

A quick multinational intervention is the third way to attain independence. Obviously the only party who can provide security guarantees for an independent Montenegro is NATO. Even if a NATO led force should be deployed in the independence-minded republic, how much time would be needed until the peacekeepers could leave?

Ultimately, the issue of the partition of Montenegro can be resurrected. The northern districts of the country are traditionally pro-Serbian. Moreover, several parts of today's Montenegro, such as the bay of Kotor in the south and part of Sandjak in the north were granted to the republic by Tito and were never part of Montenegro before.

The status of an independent Montenegro and its political system is another unanswered question. Montenegro is a multinational country, less than two-thirds of its population describes itself as Montenegrin. One can envision the Macedonian scenario, with the development of a Montenegrin civic identity that would be embraced by other ethnic groups. It will take many decades, however, for a Serb to call himself a Montenegrin.

Today, the symbols of Montenegrin statehood are the omnipresent policemen in blue uniforms and the famous urban complex Vector of Podgorica: built by private money it hosts several ministries as well as apartments for government employees. A retired Montenegrin minister spoke about the need for more uplifting national symbols and admitted that the local political establishment, once deprived of the figure of a defiant Milosevic, resembles an oligarchic regime with no rationale for its existence. No one, he maintained, knows who would assume prominence in and take the role of an opposition in an independent Montenegro. Promoting democracy within Montenegro should be a central objective whether done in concert with a drive for independence or acceptance of its status as part of the Federation. As things stand today, the elements of democratic politics are absent.

The next issue in contemplating the future of Montenegro is economic reconstruction. The inclusion of Montenegro into the Stability Pact framework will provide for critical investment into infrastructure but a long-term strategy requires foreign investment and prospects for EU membership. A fervent supporter of Montenegrin independence told Sofrasky "once we get independence we should immediately join the United States." What he meant, however, was that an independent Montenegro will have to rely on US security and economic support and was unable to function as a genuinely independent nation.

After spending three weeks in Montenegro, talking to academics, students and politicians, Sofrasky's impression is that the country is indeed ready for self-governance, has a certain identity, political institutions and an economic system enabling it to function parallel to Yugoslavia. However, Montenegrin society would be devastated by a sudden break. It is not ready to openly confront the Milosevic regime or to cope with internal tensions. The pragmatists in Montenegro have adopted the gradualist strategy towards greater sovereignty and this approach seems to work in this Mediterranean culture.

Today, many see Montenegro as the key for Balkan peace. Relieved of its Yugoslav appendix, Serbia might finally focus inward on the pressing economic problems and opt for democratization and cooperation with the international community. However, it might also be that Montenegro is a trigger for a new protracted civil war, a new Vietnam, which will immerse the future of Balkan people in uncertainty. The

Montenegrins, however, do not think in purely strategic terms but tend to focus on a much more important, if disruptive, concept: their honor. With that as the focus for so many, the prospects for peace in the Balkans will remain clouded in the uncertainty of a potentially violent post-communist nationalism.

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