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Montenegro: Vassal or Sovereign?


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Several key points are made in this study:

- § A decisive move toward Montenegrin independence in the near term will result in a war between Serbian and Montenegrin forces.
- § 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.
- § Russia is unlikely to take decisive action to save the Yugoslav Federation.

INTRODUCTION

Serbia and Montenegro each, 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 Great War 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 and violent 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 have only exacerbated and accelerated nationalistic tensions. The 20th century, which began with such promise for Serbia, has 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 the Voivodina and Montenegro. And Serbia continues to try to hold on to what remains using the same failed policies that have proved so counterproductive in the past.

If Montenegro goes the way of the other republics, the idea of Yugoslavia is a dead letter. Serbia will lose her access to the sea. Therefore, Serbian policy and the ability to salvage something from the current series of debacles are extremely important issues for the peace and stability of the Balkans and Eastern Europe. And crucial in all this is the policy of the

Russian Federation towards Serbia and the Balkans and Montenegro in particular. It is the Russians who have shown an affinity to aid their South Slav cousins from the Tsarist Empire, through the Soviet Union, even onto Boris Yeltsin's Russian Federation.

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. This question is addressed and possible outcomes discussed below.

Many Montenegrins do not want independence but pledge allegiance to Greater Serbia and will support Milosevic. The Serbian refugees from Kosovo and Bosnia, some 32,000 of whom are currently living in Montenegro, will also oppose secession.

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF MONTENEGRO

Montenegro has never before enjoyed the international importance it currently commands. The Montenegrin leadership is shuttling to Western capitals where it is assured of increased support, Western strategic analysts focus their attention on the country, and NATO officers fill their folders with detailed maps and aerial photos of the region. There is a simple explanation for the sudden international prominence that this small region now enjoys: Montenegro is the final element of the Yugoslav federation outside of Serbia. Montenegrin independence would end of 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. A Western-oriented Montenegro would firmly isolate Serbia and Milosevic, make the economic blockade work and bring an end to the Milosevic regime. However, the mountainous republic may have to pay too a high price for its independence. Strategists fear that "Montenegro will all too likely be the next war in the series that have pockmarked the death of the fantasy of Greater Serbia".¹

Indeed, the little Adriatic country of 650,000 inhabitants and 13,812 square kilometers, the size of US state of 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, incorporated Montenegro into the newly established kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, treating the inhabitants of Montenegro as Serbs. During this period, all symbols or

¹ SMITH Dan, "Integrating Serbia into the Balkan region", *Security Dialog* Vol 30(3), PRIO, SAGE publications, 1999.



Nikola Bacevic wearing traditional costume and hat.



An enlargement of the picture showing the King's initials.

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.²

According to the 1991 census, the current inhabitants of Montenegro identify themselves 62% as Montenegrins, 9% as Serbs, 7% as Albanians, 15% as Muslims and 7% as others. Many Montenegrins regard themselves as Serbs just as the Bavarians regard themselves as Germans. Others support the creation of a separate Montenegrin nation, a separate state and a separate church. 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.

²G.W. Hoffman: *"The Balkans in Transition"*, D. Van Nostrand Company. New Jersey, 1963, p.40.

The geography of Montenegro is dominated by two high mountain ranges going 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 capital 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 cut apart for long time Montenegro and Serbia and prevented 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 the 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, the Vladyka, 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 (notably the Austrian, French, Russian, British and Italian).³



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 Srbska), Serbia proper, Kosovo and Albania. If before Montenegro was simply an isolated seaside resort on the Yugoslav Adriatic coastline, today it may provide for 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.⁴ Recently Montenegro has opened customs offices on Albanian and Croatian borders, however it still has unresolved a dispute with Croatia over the possession of Prevlaka 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).⁵

While visiting the region this spring, Octavian Sofransky 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 has to bear the same "yoke."

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 European and Euro-Atlantic integration, a path that guarantees a long-term stability and a clear prospective of

³ For more information see The Montenegrin Association of America Home Page.

⁴ "The next Balkan Crisis" – The New York Times – Editorial, posted April 21, 2000 through www.montenegro.com.

economic development. All of these countries, but Yugoslavia, have in one form or another engaged in the integration process with the European Union and NATO. The most advanced candidates, such as 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, should it not too sound droll, through its foreign minister, has unveiled its strategic goal to become part of the European Union.⁶

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 are following in line.

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, provided a democratic transition takes place, as an equal part of a

⁵ CIA Home Page.

⁶ VUKOVIC Borislav, "Yugoslavia and the European Union", Review of International Affairs, 1999.

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. Indeed, the crucial question asked by international community and the Montenegrins themselves today is how to avoid violence and to reach towards the European and world community at the same time.

INTERNAL POLITICAL DUALISM

The bicephalous 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 the unification with Serbia, the Montenegrin patriots under the green flag confront 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 on its orbit more and more moderate parties and voters. The incumbent president, Milo Djukanovic, has lately emerged as a leader of the Montenegro drive for sovereignty against Belgrade autocratic rule.

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), have advanced a common "Platform," where they call Belgrade to accept confederate relations, stopping short from independence.

Djukanovic, the president of Montenegro since the 1997 elections and a former Prime Minister, is an aparatchik. However, since becoming president he has 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



Montenegrin coat of arms



Milo Djukanovic, President of Montenegro

Western countries and international financial institutions for aid and investment, which yet was slow to come partly because of the blockade on Yugoslavia, partly because of unclear status of relations between Montenegro and Serbia. Internationally, the federation of Montenegro with Serbia is not recognized by the United States and many others, Russia and Cuba being among the few exceptions.⁷

Since 1999 the idea of a referendum on independence has become increasingly attractive to many Montenegrins. Djukanovic uses it as a 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. So far Milosevic has worked against this proposal by sponsoring pro-Serbian parties and increasing the Yugoslav army presence in the region. The utility of the Yugoslav army, according to Belgrade professor Vojin Dimitrievic, is greatly enhanced by the fact that it is the only federal institution that still functions in this fractured nation.⁸

The Liberal Alliance (LSCG) headed by Slavko Perovic, the most active promoter of independence, has however stayed aside from the governing coalition. Its supporters argue that Montenegro, as an independent nation was abusively incorporated into 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, USA, the Montenegrin Autocephalic Orthodox Church was reactivated in Cetinje in 1993. In the same year Dr. Vojslav Nikcevic published a book suggesting that "Montenegrins speak and write Montenegrin", different from Croatian or Serbian. Today independence is actively supported by the Montenegrin Diaspora, scattered around North America and Europe, which plan to hold their Second World Congress in August, 2000 in the

⁷ 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.

⁸ Interview, Graz, July 1, 2000.

old Montenegrin capital of Cetinje under the patronage of President Milo Djukanovic.

Summing up, on the issue of independence, Djukanovic can rely on his voters, the radical nationalists from LSCG, the support of the Diaspora, the Montenegrin Autocephalous Church and the 20,000 strong Montenegrin police as well as many Albanians and Muslims antagonized by Milosevic's behavior during the wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

On the other side there are the supporters of maintaining Montenegro as a part of Yugoslavia. Their leader, Momir Bulatovic, the former president of Montenegro, is backed by Milosevic, himself a Montenegrin, loyal Serbs and Montenegrins as well as the 10.000 strong Yugoslav army and 1.000 pro-Serb paramilitaries. Recently the Second Yugoslav Army located in the republic was reinforced by 240 Kosovo hard-liners replacing officers of Montenegrin origins.

Momir Bulatovic's Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (SNP) is the strongest single party in the country and has established an electoral coalition known as "Yugoslavia – SNP – Momir Bulatovic." The coalition is an attempt 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), which so far failed to gain representation in the parliament. However, conversations with various members of these parties indicate that the coalition will not be easily maintained since the SRS does not recognize Montenegro as a state or as a Montenegrin nation. This view, they acknowledge, is rather unpopular in Montenegro.

Historically, besides Serbia, Yugoslavian patriotism has found a more fertile ground in Montenegro, which saw itself as the lighthouse 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 Montenegrin origins, 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 and also become a tourist paradise in summer. Since the beginning of the recent crisis in Yugoslavia the heavy industry has been dragging and 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.⁹ Indeed, many speed boats anchored in Kotor Bay belong to veteran smugglers who earned their fortunes in the Bosnian war when a liter of gasoline smuggled by Albanians over Skadar lake could be sold to Bosnian Serbs for a fivefold price.

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.¹⁰ The recent “monetary divorce” between the two republics, with Montenegro resorting to the 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

⁹ “Italy’s Mafia obsession aids Milosevic-Montenegro”, December 28, Brussels, (Reuters) by montenegro.com.

¹⁰ Weekly political report, May 11, 2000 by montenegro.com

numerous villas overlooking the sea. Today these people worry that they might have to sell their holiday properties again, 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.

Today, Montenegrins insist that the West must subsidize Montenegro until Milosevic leaves power. While they express gratitude that the United States has committed \$55 million in technical assistance, budget support and humanitarian aid for Montenegro in 2000 and plans a similar commitment in 2001, 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 10 to 20 million Euro this year, the 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."¹¹ 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 shade 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 this year. 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, Montenegro liberals", said a local analyst.¹² According to Srdjan Darmanovic,

¹¹ "EU urges more international support for Montenegro", posted March 29, 2000 by montenegro.com.

¹² "Weekly political report", May 11, 2000 by montenegro.com

a local political analyst, the elections indicated that there is 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." ¹³ Indeed, Podgorica, the country's capital, accounts for one fourth 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.

Table 1. Preferred status of Montenegro ¹⁴

	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 %

President Milo Djukanovic has threatened to call a referendum on the question of independence in the near future. "So, this spring or a bit later the referendum will happen," Djukanovic declared on the 4th of April. "Serbia is sinking deeper and deeper, its debts are accumulating, it has imposed a blockade on Montenegro, and is playing various tricks." ¹⁵ "A referendum offering a straight choice between Yugoslavia and independence could probably be won now," experts of the International Crisis Group have stated.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

On the other side, there are fears of a forced removal from office of Montenegro's pro-independence president. US

¹³ Interview, Perast, July 20, 2000

¹⁴ "Public Opinion in Crna Gora", CEDEM, Podgorica, April 2000.

¹⁵ "Montenegro might hold independence referendum within months: minister", April 4, 2000 by montenegro.com

¹⁶ "Montenegro: In the Shadow of the Volcano", March 21, 2000, ICG Home Page

¹⁷ "Za i protiv otcpljenja Crne Gore od Jugoslavije", Blic Montenegro, July 20, 2000

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has repeatedly warned Milosevic that "any change by force of political situation of Montenegro will be sanctioned." NATO's European former military leader Wesley Clark told 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.¹⁸ Both officials and the average citizens express great concern about the role of a 1,000 member paramilitary force created by the Serbian government and recently stationed in Montenegro. For them, such a development is an ominous accompaniment to the already threatening role of the 10,000-man Yugoslav Second Army that has taken over Montenegrin airports and set up pro-Serbian television stations on its Montenegrin bases. Montenegrin officials complain, both in private as well as in public, that the Serbs are taking these actions in an effort to provoke President Djukanovic into overreacting in a manner that will bring about popular support in Serbia for a military move against Montenegro.

In the meantime Milosevic is 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 due in the fall, saying that "Montenegro will not participate in any elections that would mean the ruling of Slobodan Milosevic."¹⁹ 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 16 of Montenegro's public television and radio stations. Many analysts in Montenegro warn of possible strikes on Montenegro after the conclusion of the elections.

¹⁸ NATO sees threat to Montenegro, warns Serbia, Lisbon, posted on March 29 (Reuters) posted on montenegro.com.

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.²⁰ However, while last year the Western powers have urged Montenegro not to try to secede from Yugoslavia but to join Serbian opposition to confront Milosevic and work for democracy "from within," now the option of independence might be the only one feasible.²¹ A new attempt to unite Serbian opposition under one banner failed again this July in Svety-Stefan, a Montenegrin resort. In speaking with Octavian Sofransky, many people from Podgorica, Belgrade and Zagreb expressed their conviction that Yugoslavia's enduring political crisis is beyond the control of the "democratic" forces. For these individuals, the only answer is 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 like Kosovo last year.²² The international crisis group has called for a slow internalization of Montenegro through infiltration of NGOs and other initiatives.

EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana agreed that Montenegro should stay within the Yugoslav federation but with closer contacts with other nation in the region.²³ Meanwhile in Podgorica, President Milo Djukanovic said that Bodo Hombach, who heads EU's Balkan Stability Pact, recently promised him that Montenegro will

¹⁹ "The governing coalition will boycott federal elections", Pobjeda, Podgorica, July 23, 2000

²⁰ GOW James, "Montenegro: Where to take the fight", Security Dialog Vol 30(3), PRIO, SAGE publications, 1999.

²¹ Italy's Mafia obsession aids Milosevic-Montenegro, December 28, Brussels, (Reuters) by montenegro.com.

²² UNHCR says Montenegro not next Balkan flashpoint, Tirana, March 26 (Reuters) by www.montenegro.com

²³ Montenegro should stay in Yugoslavia, (AP/MTI), March 29, by montenegro.com

attend the pact's meeting in Thessaloniki in July as a full participant.²⁴

The more radical members of this camp declared that "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 direct contradiction... Three more viable states – independent Montenegro and Kosovo, plus a democratic Serbia – may be the most stable outcome... To end 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."²⁵

²⁴ RFE/RL NEWSLINE Vol. 4, No. 99, Part II, 23 May 2000.

²⁵ "For Balkan peace, final split needed", May 11, 2000 by montenegro.com

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. In spite of increased international attention, until recently, Russia has kept quiet on Montenegro.²⁶ Since the peace in Kosovo, Russian political establishment was too busy with internal matters, such as the election of the new president and the “antiterrorist campaign” in Chechnya, to follow-up on Yugoslav developments. The newly elected Russian president Vladimir Putin prioritized the revitalization of the system of vertical power inside Russia, while most foreign policy objectives have been postponed. In a recent speech, the foreign Minister Ivanov has described as priorities of the Russian foreign policy the strategic balance with NATO and major super-powers and the “near-abroad” CIS states as its sphere of strategic interest.²⁷

A long-time Montenegrin ally, Russia's contemporary concerns are 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, was training Russian marines. If anything reminds one of Russia in Montenegro today, it is the portraits of Russian emperors in historical museums and the icons donated to the Montenegrin Orthodox churches by their Russian protectors a long time ago. “Our relations with Russia pertain to the past” – say many Montenegrins. However one can spot symbols of the new Russia in Montenegro as well. The vanguard of Russia's oil exporters Luk Oil has made its presence felt in the country and a new air route has opened this year connecting Podgorica and Moscow. Russians seems to be interested in acquiring property on the sunny Adriatic coast,

²⁶ A search of the archives of major Russian newspapers shows literally nothing on Montenegro.

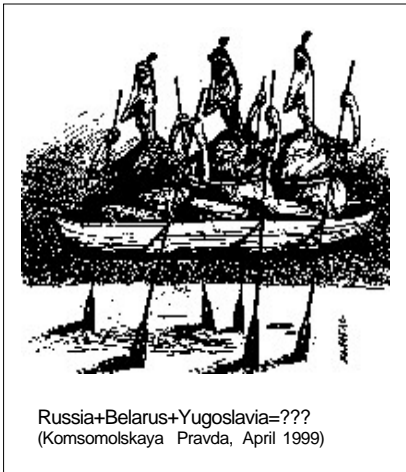
²⁷ The NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume V, Number 8 (16 May 2000).

bearing in mind that this is a visa free country, while Montenegrin businessmen, in turn, are eager to open the immense Russian market for their goods. On the diplomatic side, the Montenegrin authorities, following their goal for international recognition have set-up a "representation" in Moscow and in exchange, a Russian consulate opened in Podgorica.

If Montenegro has any importance for Russia today, it will be derived from the larger Russian games in the region, especially its "protection" of Belgrade on one side and relations with NATO on the other. As an example, the controversial "humanitarian" convoy that was stopped by Hungarian officials from reaching Yugoslavia in April 1999 had announced its destination as Montenegro.

One can say that the Balkan policy of the Russian Federation has entered a new phase. During the 19th century in an attempt to gain the access to Mediterranean, the Russian Empire dressed itself as a savior of Balkan, particularly Slavic nations, sponsoring the independence movements of the Montenegrins, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks. Soviet Russia, after winning World War II, attempted to control the entire Balkans ideologically. The current Russian Federation has adopted the role of a distant observer from its bases in eastern Moldova and Sevastopol on the Black Sea. Since NATO made it clear that it regards Southeastern Europe as a zone of its strategic interest, Russia, after signing a Russia-NATO charter, has tried to avoid a direct confrontation with NATO, while occasionally testing the waters or attempting to bargain for some advantages.

If Russia has tempered its Balkan aspirations for the moment, then some countries in the region continue to nurture warm feelings towards their former ally. This is true for Bulgaria and especially for the politically and economically isolated Serbia. In a desperate attempt to receive badly needed external support during the height of the Kosovo crisis, Milosevic has appealed to Russia as a "traditional ally," with the request to admit Serbia into the Russia - Belarus Union. Setting aside the 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. In Russia an opinion poll has revealed that only 28% of the public favor the Union while 69% are against.²⁸ It is seen with reservation in Moscow, as an economic burden and a political embarrassment, due primarily 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 for 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. At home, anti-NATO campaigns have found fertile ground among Russian nationalists, but debates about the cost of peacekeeping efforts in the former Yugoslavia indicated that other concerns were driving Russian politics. The Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow, Borislav Milosevic, in an interview given to the weekly "Vek," acknowledged 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. Yet he had to confess that the idea of the Union is opposed by both the Yugoslav opposition and Montenegro.²⁹ The appeal was followed by Milosevic's petition to the presidents of Russia and Belarus in which he declared that "Yugoslavia is ready to join the Union." Among his arguments were economic complementarity, "multiculturalism," the common Orthodox religion and Islam as the second largest religion in the country. What was this if not a vaguely camouflaged reference to the Russian experience in "deterring Islamic extremism" in Chechnya?

Though Yugoslavia as a whole might have supported Milosevic's move to an alliance with Russia, in Montenegro things are seen differently. A recent opinion poll shows that only 16% of ethnic Montenegrins in the republic support adherence to

²⁸ Moscow News opinion polls, 15-22.04.1999, MN Home Page.

²⁹ SOLOVIEV Vladimir, "Belgrade longing for an Union", Vek weekly, No. 8, March 25-03, 2000.

Russia-Belarus Union compared to 53% of ethnic Serbs. The same source indicates that both Serbs (65%) and Montenegrins (87%) support the eventual accession of Montenegro to the European Union.³⁰

The idea of aligning with Russia is not new in Yugoslavia. Vojislav Sesel, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party, voiced it first back in 1993, but no one took it seriously at that time. It is not surprising, however, that it was resurrected in 1999 under the imminence of NATO bombing. Russia and Yugoslavia have signed an agreement on military cooperation, but it was suspended because of the UN embargo, and Belgrade made a new attempt to involve Russia on its side.

In an article published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* on April 14, 1999, the editorialists strike the direct question: "Will a new treaty imply an obligation of military assistance to Yugoslavia? Will this help with solving the conflict? Will this involve the Russian nuclear potential and will Russia be dragged into a Balkan conflict? Do we need a base on the Adriatic?" The authors themselves concluded that "the status of a country not involved in the conflict is more ponderous on the international arena than a suicidal intervention, and therefore Russia should limit itself to peaceful means of intervention."³¹

The Russian political scene had an unequal reaction on the Yugoslav initiative. Constantin Zatulin, leader of the "Derzava" movement, said that rather than signing-up for a sure defeat, Russia should increase assistance to Yugoslavia, especially through deliveries of military equipment. Alexei Mitrofanov from the ultra-nationalist LDPR (Zhirinovski's party) argued for accepting Yugoslavia into the Union and bringing the country under the Russian nuclear umbrella, an act that, in his opinion, will guarantee the end of the conflict and resurrect the legendary Russian might. Elena Zazulina from the reformist "Yabloko" block insisted that an Union can be debated only after

³⁰ "Public Opinion in Crna Gora", CEDEM, Podgorica, April 2000.

³¹ BARANETZ Victor, TCHIZIKOV Maxim, "Russia+Belarus+Yugoslavia=???", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 14, 1999.

the end of military conflict, and pointed to a referendum as the only legitimate means.³²

Russian hawks trumpeted the issue of military involvement throughout the conflict. In an interview with a popular Russian daily, Sergei Govoruhin, complained that “today no one takes Russia into account” and “NATO freely demonstrated its superiority during the rocket-aerial voyage in Yugoslavia.” He urged that the only way to stop the war is by delivering to Yugoslavia modern air-defense systems: “ten mobile C-300 units can fully control the Yugoslav air” and the threat of a direct Russia NATO confrontation is not higher than in Vietnam or Afghanistan.³³

At the beginning of the Kosovo bombing in March 1999, the custom officers of Baku airport in Azerbaidjan impounded the Russian-made transport plane “Ruslan” with 5 jet fighters 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.³⁴

On April 2, 1999 Russian military leaders made known that they intended to send to the Adriatic an expeditionary Russian fleet composed of 7 vessels: two destroyers, two guard vessels, a transport and an intelligence ship headed by the cruiser “Admiral Golovko.”³⁵ In the end however, only one Russian military ship—the Sevastopol based “Liman,” an hydrologist—reached Montenegrin waters some two weeks later.

In spite of the calls of the hard-liners and attempts to blackmail NATO, more realistic views have predominated among Russian military and political establishments. The former Russian defense minister, Igor Rodionov, put it this way: “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

³² “Two questions to politicians”, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 14, 1999.

³³ “Two questions to politicians”, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 14, 1999.

³⁴ “Visits”, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 31, 1999.

³⁵ “Will Russian vessels crash with NATO fleet?”, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 2, 1999.

thus escaping NATO “help” to Russia itself on the Yugoslav model.”³⁶

Nonetheless, during the entire Kosovo war, Russia actively supported Yugoslavia with intelligence information. The Russian General Staff was closely following the development of the Yugoslav situation using the land-radars and space-based systems of observation. NATO commanders accused Russia of supplying the General command of the Yugoslav army with intelligence data, accusations that Russia never denounced. Instead the Russian military proudly acknowledged that its suggestions helped Yugoslav army to avoid substantial human losses, especially for the 40,000 strong Serbian army in Kosovo. Other useful advice, claimed by Russian intelligence, was telling the Yugoslavs not to disclose their entire air-defense system with the beginning of air raids; this tactic came as a surprise for NATO planners.³⁷

Trying to get international leverage and cement the fragmented Russian voters against an external threat on the eve of new presidential elections, the Moscow power holders attacked NATO threatening it with “strong pressure inside Russia for sending volunteers to the conflict, large deliveries of arms and including Yugoslavia in the Russia-Belarus union.”³⁸

However, in spite of an ample anti-NATO campaign, Russian public opinion never favored at large military support for the rump Yugoslavia. If in October 1998, when 44% of Russian respondents in an opinion poll favored the action against 53%, then in April 1999, at the height of NATO strikes, only 36% were in favor, with 61% being against. And even if a larger percentage declared its readiness to go to fight as volunteers in Yugoslavia –67% against 27%–, there has been no confirmation of organized Russian military groups fighting on the Serbian side.³⁹ Nor could any Russian volunteer face a NATO pilot flying at 30,000 feet.



Anti-NATO demonstration in front of the Russian Parliament.
April 1999

³⁶ “Two questions to politicians”, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 14, 1999.

³⁷ PROKOPENKO Serghey and BARANETZ Victor, “Information wars”, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 31, 1999.

³⁸ ARBATOV Alexey, “How to untie the Balkan nodes”, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, May 7, 1999.

³⁹ Moscow News opinion polls, 1998-1999, MN Home Page.

Vasili Axenov, a well known Russian intellectual, portrayed Russia as being in a double-sided situation: "One hand protesting, stretched in a fist, the other begging the West with humiliation."⁴⁰ He condemned the ambitions of the Russian leadership and the "wave of hysterical anti-Americanism" and called upon Russia to act as a mediator.

There is a long history of mediation in this region and the results of the process are well known. First, 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."⁴¹ Belarus President Lukashenko, in a visit following that of the Russian delegation, voiced his support for the "Primakov's initiative" in a show of solidarity. 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, the Russian Patriarch Alexi II and others. He also presided over the repatriation of Russian citizens, about one thousand of whom left Yugoslavia during the bombing campaign.⁴² On April 22, a new Russian mediator, Victor Chernomyrdin, arrived to the region. Chernomyrdin, a former Prime Minister as well as a special representative of President Yeltsin, proclaimed that his mission was "to convince USA and NATO to stop bombing of Yugoslavia, and the leadership of this country – to soften its position and relaunch the talks".⁴³

In spite of this energetic campaign, 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

⁴⁰ SAPOJNIKOVA Galina "Vasilii Axenov: I know the recipe for peace", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 31, 1999.

⁴¹ TCHIZIKOV Maxim, "Do not shoot the peace-makers: they play as they can", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 31, 1999.

⁴² KOTOV Yuri, "Russian Embassy under the Bombs", *Review of International Affairs*, September 1999.

Germany, refused to accept their claim. Feeling its honor at stake, the Russian military command ordered its troops to occupy the Pristina airport several hours before NATO, using a part of its peacekeeping force stationed in Bosnia. This military-political trump was short lived, however, as the Russian contingent in Kosovo was forced to accept a NATO command, as it did in Bosnia.

According to "Intellectual Capital", this maneuver was planned in the utmost secrecy by the Russian Supreme Commander, President Yeltsin. The NATO generals were not the only ones taken by surprise when the Russians paratroopers arrived. It was only after receiving presidential approval that the Chief of Russian General Staff, Anatoliy Kvashnin, informed his nominal boss, the Russian Defense Minister Sergheev. Neither Prime-Minister Sergheev, nor Chief Intelligence Officer Vladimir Putin knew about the daring plan.⁴⁴ Another strategic ploy, use of the Pristina airport for a large deployment of Russian troops, was proven futile when Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria refused to open their air space to Russian military planes. The Russian reaction, predictably, was negative.

In addition, the Russians faced two real challenges: the lack of trained modern peace-keeping units and the financial costs of peace-keeping. 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 because the rest needed training and equipment that could not be ready in time".⁴⁵ The second issue was a financial one. Russia's preference for a United Nations mandate was dictated by financial concerns. The NATO framework obliges each participating country to honor its bill and Russia would have had to dispense no less than \$150 million a year. The Bosnian battalion is already taking half of the 440 million ruble annual

⁴³ GAMOV Alexandr, "Tchernomyrdin – the heavy artillery in the Balkans", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 14, 1999.

⁴⁴ GOLTZ Alexander, "Russia beat NATO for one day", *Intellectual Capital*, No.25, June 23, 1999.

⁴⁵ GOLTZ Alexander, "Russia beat NATO for one day", *Intellectual Capital*, No.25, June 23, 1999.

budget for peacekeeping operations as approved by the Russian Duma.

During the entire course of the 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 even 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 and the Russian capacity to offer surprises such as the one in Kosovo. 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 can 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".⁴⁶

By examining Russian behavior in previous Yugoslav conflicts one may first predict possible Russian reactions in the event of a greater Montenegrin crises and, second, 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 may conclude that Russia will neither support the Montenegrin independence movement nor do much to save the remnants of the Yugoslav Federation. The most Russia can do is to offer a dethroned Milosevic political asylum and use him as a symbol of resistance to NATO expansion. Yet, as a signatory of International Human Rights conventions, Russia will find it embarrassing to hide a convicted war criminal.

For the time being, Russia will continue to supply Milosevic with military intelligence but there is little chance that he will provide Serbia with the latest weapon systems. However, in a case of a protracted civil war, Russian volunteers, armed

⁴⁶ Interview, Perast, Montenegro, July 1, 2000.

with light Russian military equipment, might enter Montenegrin territory. Their role would likely mirror 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, 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.

One question that remains unanswered is how enduring is Moscow's support for Milosevic. A parallel between Russia and Yugoslavia reveals a large degree of commonalities but there are also fundamental differences. Both were multinational federations that disintegrated after the end of the era of Cold War confrontation. Both were headed by former aparatchiks who governed in an authoritarian manner. Both attempted to preserve an influence over the former satellites through military means. However, while nuclear Russia has encountered little opposition in asserting itself, the much weaker Yugoslavia has stumbled into a suicidal confrontation with the West. While Yeltsin and Milosevic spoke the same basic language and thus cemented their alliance during the last decade, Putin, who sees himself as a modernizer, might decide to use a different vocabulary. Hoping for a new language of political discourse, a delegation of Serbian opposition forces went to Moscow to demand an end to Russia's unconditional backing of the Milosovic regime.⁴⁷ Eventually, Russia will have to abandon its support for the authoritarian Balkan regime and look for new allies in a post-Cold War Southeastern Europe. Given the long history of mutual *entente*, Montenegro might well become one of Russia's new partners.

At the July 2000, G-8 summit in Okinawa, Russian President Putin and US President Clinton reportedly discussed

⁴⁷ CNN report, May 26, 2000

Montenegro and this most recent Balkan crisis. They stressed “the importance of democratic government in Montenegro and its President Djukanovic”.⁴⁸ Many political observers in Eastern Europe—from Montenegro to Moldova—have seen in that a promise of a decline in the long-standing unconditional Russian support for Milosevic.

⁴⁸ “Clinton and Putin discussed Milosevic’s attempts to destabilize Crna Gora”, *Pobjeda*, Podgorica, July 20, 2000.

MULTILATERAL IMPLICATIONS OF MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE

“ **A** unilateral declaration of independence by Montenegro will bring civil war”: this is said by everyone 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, though renowned as tough fighters, have never taken up arms against the Serbs. In numerous conversations, they made this point to Octavian Sofransky 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”.⁴⁹ 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, Sofransky observed that there is a very complex mosaic of allegiances, a multi-layered political process, and a grotesque historical

⁴⁹ “Montenegro: In the Shadow of the Volcano”, March 21, 2000, International Crisis Group Home Page.

heritage that render the apparent Green and White palette extremely nuanced. Indeed, Montenegrin society seems to be made up of opposites: there are two parallel currencies—the Yugoslav Dinar and the German 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 German mark as well. Montenegrins have conformed to duality and prefer to live with it rather taking one final decision.



MIEL, The Straights Time, Singapore

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 and anti-Milosevic 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.” However, by now Montenegro and Serbia are already in de facto confederational relations and are learning to accept a parallel existence. What could not be done during the violent collapse of Yugoslavia, namely a “velvet divorce,” might be the ultimate result.

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. A military campaign, provoked by Milosevic’s brutal interference in Montenegro’s affairs, would require a massive presence of ground troops to deter guerrilla fighters. NATO countries, however, might find it difficult to attract domestic support both for a ground intervention, as for a new aerial strike on Serbia,

since Milosevic's interference in Montenegro could be portrayed neither as ethnic cleansing nor as genocide. 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 Sofransky that "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, Sofransky'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 nor 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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