Kenneth Morrison
The Political Life of Milo Djukanović

Abstract. Milo Djukanović became Montenegro’s prime minister for the sixth time following the recent Montenegrin parliamentary elections. He continues to dominate the political scene and has done so since he became prime minister in 1991. Djukanović’s presence has given Montenegrin politics a sense of continuity through turbulent and uncertain times. His decisions have – more than any other individual in Montenegrin politics – dictated the direction the country has taken over the past eighteen years. From a staunch supporter of Milošević to his most virulent opponent and from a (often hard-line) supporter of Serb nationalism to the architect of Montenegro’s independence, Djukanović’s career has been characterised by his ability to adapt quickly to rapidly changing circumstances. He has developed something of a personality cult among his many supporters, yet he is despised by his critics who argue that his domination of Montenegrin politics is detrimental to the democratic development of the state.

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Parliamentary elections, held in Montenegro on 29 March 2009, brought the Democratic Party of Socialists (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore, DPS) and their leader, Milo Djukanović, victory and a renewal of their mandate. By going to the polls early, the DPS-led “Coalition For a European Montenegro” (Koalicija za Evropsku Črnu Goru) managed to secure the required majority, by capitalising on continuing divisions among Montenegro’s largely ineffective opposition and before the full effect of the global economic downturn could be felt.1 As a consequence of the election results, Milo Djukanović, the quintessential political survivor, began his sixth mandate as prime minister (in addition to his six-year period as president); an impressive record by any standards.

1 When the pre-term election was announced in January, a deputy prime minister, Igor Luksić, explained the decision to bring it forward from the due date (September 2010). He argued that the government required a clear mandate to press ahead with EU integration. The opposition, however, expressed scepticism about this, arguing that the early scheduling of the election was motivated by the desire to retain another term in power before the full effects of the worsening economic crisis were felt. Cfr. Interparliamentary Union, PARLINE Database on National Parliaments, Montenegrin Parliament, 28 April 2009, available at <http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2385_E.htm>, accessed 7 September 2009.
The political career of Milo Đukanović is, to a significant extent, illustrative of modern Montenegrin history. Whilst the country’s recent history has been one characterised by significant flux it has, conversely, been a story of continuity. Despite the vast changes that have occurred within the smallest of former Yugoslavia’s six republics since the collapse of the federation in 1992, there remains a small number of political elites whose careers have thrived by their ability to adapt to fluid political situations. The most high-profile among these is Milo Đukanović.

In Montenegro, there are a number of specific structural and systemic anomalies which have allowed for the political longevity of certain individuals. Give or take a few transitions – both in term of ideology and personnel – the same political party (in various incarnations) has de facto held power for over sixty years and the structure of power has been well preserved – the relationship between party and state remains opaque. Montenegro has largely experienced political change through splits within the ruling elite, rather than through the mechanism of democratic elections. That is not to say that the country hasn’t gone through significant political changes, but whilst two key transformations have taken place (namely the „anti-bureaucratic revolution“ in 1989 and the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) split in 1997) the same basic structure of power remains. The ruling DPS remains the legal successor to the monolithic party and the Montenegrin League of Communists (Savez Komunista Crne Gore) within the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Savez Komunista Jugoslavije), and the current DPS is the legal successor to the party which existed between 1991 and 1997. As a consequence, it has retained much of its structural framework, many of its assets, and some of its practices. In 1997, Bulatović lost his position as the leader of the DPS to Milo Đukanović. In contrast to the latter, Bulatović continued to support Slobodan Milošević. The party split over the issue, with Bulatović founding the Socialist People’s Party of Montenegro (Socijalistička Narodna Partija Crne Gore, SNP). During the communist period, the party had been the state and comprised individuals who would join not simply for ideological reasons, but to advance their career prospects and access associated privileges. Such motivations for joining Montenegro’s ruling party still exist and those that are willing to ideologically adapt as the leadership require can thrive within it.

This article, however, focuses not on the structural patterns of the Montenegrin political system, but on the one man who has best understood the complexities and idiosyncrasies of this system, and how to utilise them to his advantage. The Montenegrin political scene is, undoubtedly, a tough environment. Yet, Milo Đukanović, the current Prime Minister and DPS President, has gradually mastered the nuances, subtleties, and (on occasion) brutality of Montenegrin and wider Balkan politics. As Pejić notes:
A person doesn’t remain at the pinnacle of power in a country in a volatile region like the Balkans for two decades – as Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Đukanović has done – without knowing how to determine which way the wind is blowing and how to reinvent oneself. Indeed, it is this chameleon-like quality that has facilitated Đukanović’s impressive political career. Milo Đukanović is the latest in a long line of Montenegrin leaders who have thrived and consolidated their power despite the difficult circumstances in which they have ruled. He has become, according to the Bosnian weekly Slobodna Bosna “The New Montenegrin Vladika”.

In order to understand the dominance of Milo Đukanović (and the DPS), one must go back to the so-called „anti-bureaucratic revolution” of 1989. As Yugoslavia began its descent into collapse, an internal coup within the Montenegrin communist leadership led to the imposition of new and inexperienced elites. Whilst it appeared that this new elite were akin to those challenging communist regimes across Eastern Europe, the changes in Montenegro were rather superficial and can be defined simply as elite reproduction – a generational change, yes, but from within the existing political system. As Iván and Szonja Szelényi have argued, in many post-communist countries the composition of the ruling elites remained essentially unchanged. Revolutionary changes throughout 1989-91 did not, they argued, necessarily change the elite structure. Rather than new elites from a different sector of society taking power, there was simply a horizontal shift bringing forth „new” elites from within the existing system. „Old” elites (or younger party members) remained in positions of political power, despite the superficial impression of political change.

The “anti-bureaucratic revolutions” in Montenegro represented one such superficial, horizontal change. The Montenegrin political scientist Srdjan Darmanović argues that this was, sociologically speaking, a fight within the elite is supported by the fact that all the leaders of the protest movement were members or officials of the League of Communists of Montenegro and Yugoslavia, or of the so-called socio-political organisations, SSRN and SSO. Moreover, after the overthrow was accomplished a new political

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3 Slobodna Bosna (Sarajevo), 11 December 2008, 21. From the 16th century, Montenegro was ruled by the Vladike – prince bishops who controlled Montenegro’s tribes. The Vladike were elected by the tribal skupština (assembly) and drawn from exemplary families within various tribes. From the 15th century onward, they represented the main focal point of resistance to the Turks. Whilst they were essentially the sole authority, they often experienced problems uniting the tribes. See Kenneth Morrison, Montenegro, A Modern History. London 2009, 17-19.

party was not created; instead the leaders of the January movement simply took over the main offices within the League of Communists of Montenegro.\footnote{Srdjan Darmanović, The Peculiarities of Transition in Serbia and Montenegro, in: Dragica Vujadinović et al., Between Authoritarianism and Democracy: Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia. Beograd 2003, 153. The organization of the Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije (Socialist Alliance of Working People, SSRNJ) was, according to Darmanović, “the broadest or so-called front organization which in the ramified and complicated institutional scheme of Yugoslav self-managing socialism was supposed to act as the locus where the most diverse interests – provided they were not contrary to the socialist character of society and state – were brought together”. The Savez socijalističke omladine (Association of Socialist Youth, SSO) was “the youth organization bureaucratized to a large extent and serving as a political cadre reservoir for the League of Communists”. See ibid., 154.}

Thus whilst the personnel may have changed, the structure of power was kept unchanged. The League of Communists changed their name to the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) in 1990, but the party elite remained in place. Montenegro belongs to those countries where many of these previous systemic anomalies have been preserved. Within the new elite who rose to prominence in 1989, one man has remained a constant in Montenegro’s tumultuous past two decades. Milo Đukanović has been a key player within the DPS (between 1991 and 1997) and has essentially led the party since. During this period, he has demonstrated an impressive ability to adapt and survive in a tough political environment.

**Đukanović’s Rise to Prominence**

Milo Đukanović was born in 1962 in the Montenegrin industrial town of Nikšić. The son of a judge (Radovan Đukanović), he studied at the „Veljko Vlahović“ Faculty of Economics in Titograd (Podgorica), and in 1979, at the age of 17, he joined the Yugoslav League of Communists. With his father an influential member of the Montenegrin League, Milo had an opportunity to advance quickly through the ranks. A decade later, he emerged onto the national political scene. Although he played a limited role in the „anti-bureaucratic revolution“ of 1989 and the „politics of the streets“ which led to the downfall of the old Communist leadership, he became a key player in the events that followed. In January 1989, the existing (interim) communist leadership were replaced by younger elites firmly under the political influence and patronage of Slobodan Milošević.\footnote{Nebojša Čagarović refers to this event as the “January coup d’état”. See Nebojša Čagarović, Montenegrin Identity: Past, Present and Future, *The Journal of Area Studies*, 1 (1993), n. 3, 129-36.} The new „young, handsome and intelligent“ Montenegrin leadership (who wore sweaters rather than the stuffy grey suits so characteristic of old communists) were led by the troika of Momir Bulatović, Svetozar Marović and Milo Đukanović (with Bulatović being the *primus inter pares*) under the slogan
Mi znamo kako! (We know how!). All were youthful, politically inexperienced, and – given the logistical support provided by external forces during the anti-regime protests – pliable and loyal to Belgrade. This change in leadership, lauded in the state controlled media as „the Montenegrin Renaissance“, may initially have been perceived as dynamic and progressive, but the new leadership (the average age of which was forty) promised little in the way of solutions to Montenegro’s political and economic problems.

In 1991, Djukanović was elevated to the position of prime minister – the youngest in Europe at the age of just 29. Upon assuming his post – which was his first paid employment – he faced significant challenges. With no political experience except in youth and party organizations, many observers questioned whether one so young would be able to handle the complexities of the post. But almost immediately Djukanović proved remarkably adept at managing the republic’s diverse affairs in a time of acute crisis. The early years of his high-profile political life were something of a baptism of fire. Indeed, he found himself at the forefront of the controversy generated by the Montenegrin / Yugoslav Army’s attack upon the Konavle region and the ancient town of Dubrovnik (the campaign remains one of the most regrettable chapters in Montenegro’s history). Television pictures of Montenegrin soldiers shelling the UNESCO protected city of Dubrovnik significantly damaged Montenegro’s international reputation and went a long way to damaging the wider Serbian and Montenegrin cause. The sight of Montenegrin reservists „sweeping the terrain“ and laying waste to much of the Konavle region (which rests between Dubrovnik in Croatia and the Montenegrin border) shocked many Yugoslavs and crystallized wider international opinion.

Within Montenegro, these actions were justified (and by the majority perceived) as a defense of Yugoslavia from Croatian fascism. But the Montenegrin leadership and the JNA’s frequently conveyed pretexts sounded hollow in the context of Dubrovnik. There existed no Serb (or Montenegrin) minority there and the area, which had been demilitarized in 1971, possessed no army barracks. Put simply, there existed no tangible threat to Montenegro’s territorial integrity from the Croat population of Konavle or Dubrovnik. Given the lack of a definitive pretext for attacking this part of Croatia, justification for an attack would need to be carefully engineered. With this objective uppermost, the Montenegrin leadership set

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7 Veseljko Koprivica / Branko Vojičić, Prevrat ’89. Podgorica 1994, 341. See also Darmandrović, The Peculiarities of Transition (above fn. 5), 156.

8 So loyal was Momir Bulatović that he became mocked in some circles. He was referred to as “Milošević’s coatpeg” or “the waiter”. This aside, it was absolutely necessary for Milošević to have a pliable leadership in Montenegro – this “reliable” Montenegrin regime would assure that the Milošević bloc held four of the eight votes in the “collective head of state”. For a fascinating insight into the relationship between the two men see Momir Bulatović, Pravila Ćutanja. Beograd 2004.

9 Koprivica / Vojičić, Prevrat ’89 (above fn. 7), 1.
about constructing a climate of fear and mass hysteria among the public; a risky strategy which had unknown and possibly deeply unpleasant consequences. The Montenegrin government could, however, always rely on their counterparts in Croatia to assist them (albeit unintentionally) in their endeavors. Numerous ill-considered statements by Franjo Tudjman (with regard to Croatian aspirations to the Bay of Kotor in Montenegro) did much to help what may otherwise have been a lost cause. These blunders played straight into the hands of the many Montenegrin politicians who were regularly warning of dark times ahead if Montenegro did not defend itself. This kind of rhetoric and daily warnings of „Ustasha formations amassing at the border“ proved effective in convincing the Montenegrin public that attack was the best form of defense. In the days leading up to the Montenegrin advance on Konavle, Djukanović made a number of statements which served to intensify anti-Croatian sentiment in Montenegro. He argued that the time had come to “draw the demarcation lines vis-à-vis the Croats once and for all”, and that the existing border had been designed by “poorly educated Bolshevik cartographers”. Later he announced that he would never play chess again because of the Croatian flag, the šahovnica – a statement that would continue to haunt him for years. Whilst these statements attracted attention in the international media, his statements aimed at the Montenegrin public were no less powerful. In an interview for the state daily Pobjeda Milo Djukanović explicitly warned that those reluctant to serve in the army should be subject to a law that would involve harsh punishment for deserters; more than simply “firing them from their jobs”. The effect of this rhetoric is difficult to measure, but by late October 1991, many had mobilised and the assault on Dubrovnik began.

The target was the worst choice that the JNA and Montenegrin volunteers could have made to press their military advantage on the Dalmatian coast. Whatever the actual course of events on the ground and whether or not they intentionally targeted the Old Town of Dubrovnik, it was a public relations disaster for the Montenegrin leadership, who had failed to grasp that such actions were fundamentally detrimental to their cause. As a consequence of overwhelming condemnation, some sought to distance themselves, with Djukanović among those who lost their initial zeal so characteristic of the early days of the campaign. Acknowledging his own role in fomenting a war psychosis yet becoming increasingly concerned with the course of events, Djukanović drew a clear demarcation between himself and those who still advocated war:


11 Pobjeda (Titograd), 18 September 1991. The newspaper Pobjeda also published the names of “deserters” within its pages. However, as the Dubrovnik campaign continued, the JNA stopped releasing figures for Montenegrin desertions as they were too high and publishing them was deemed bad for morale. See Christopher Bennett, Yugoslavia’s Bloody Collapse. London 1996, 213.
Fifty dead and hundreds wounded! All of us have to take responsibility for that, including us in the parliament building. First of all, responsibility lies with those who are still calling for war from their warm houses and offices.\textsuperscript{12}

A split emerged within the Montenegrin Assembly between those who continued to call for war and those who argued that Montenegro should seek a way out of the debacle. The mechanism for attempting to find a way out was to back Lord Carrington’s peace plan (known as The Hague proposal). Djukanović’s and Bulatović’s decision to accept the plan (which envisaged Yugoslavia splitting into six independent states – among them Montenegro) was soon reversed under significant pressure from Belgrade.\textsuperscript{13} Montenegro joined Serbia in forming the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) following a referendum held in March 1992, and the next five years there was little in the way of conflict between ruling elites in Belgrade and Podgorica.

The Milošević – Djukanović Split

By the mid-1990s, however, the cosy relationship between ruling elites in Serbia and Montenegro was becoming increasingly strained. Djukanović – not for the last time – sensed which way the wind was blowing. He correctly assessed that Milošević’s time may be nigh and opted to attempt to ensure his own political survival by denouncing him. The opportunity to do so presented itself following elections in Serbia in late 1996, when the Serbian president had been accused by opposition parties of electoral fraud.\textsuperscript{14} As the crisis escalated, some within the Montenegrin leadership observed with interest. Initially cautious, they issued ambiguous statements declaring themselves in favour of “recognising the will of the electorate” in Serbia. Such signals indicated that all was not well within DPS ranks. Indeed, the party was internally convulsing and clear splits were emerging within the top level of its leadership. The three key actors within the DPS – the president, Momir Bulatović, prime minister Milo Djukanović, and the vice-president of the DPS, Svetozar Marović – became increasingly divided. Whilst Bulatović threw his support behind Milošević, Djukanović and Marović saw an opportunity to exploit Milošević’s weakness. For Milo Djukanović, this was a matter of both personality and politics. His relationship with Slobodan Milošević had been strained since late 1993, and he had been excluded from Milošević’s

\textsuperscript{12} Speech by Milo Djukanović in the Montenegrin Parliament, in the film directed by Koča Pavlović, Rat za mir, Obala Productions. 2003/2004. This also represented an attack on General Kadijević and Branko Kostić who continued to call for a wider mobilisation.

\textsuperscript{13} For a more detailed analysis of the Montenegrin leadership’s attempt to accept the plan, see Kenneth Morrison, Montenegro (above fn. 3), 101f.

\textsuperscript{14} The election of 1996 was followed by the “Winter of Discontent in Serbia”. The protests, known as the Zajedno (Together) protests, led to a significant destabilization of the Milošević regime, ibid., 153.
close circle. His previous sparring with Milošević’s wife, Mira Marković, had increasingly made him *persona non grata* with Serbia’s most powerful political family.\(^{15}\) Djukanović had criticised Mira Marković’s *Jugoslovenska Levica* party (Yugoslav Left, JUL), referring to them as a party “devoted to an ideologically retrograde and abstract society”, a remark that elicited a sharp response from Marković, who in retort accused Djukanović of being “a concealed smuggler employed as a prominent politician”.\(^{16}\) Thus, whilst the personal pretext had been established years earlier, the events in Serbia at the close of 1996 provided a political pretext for dissent.

The fuse was lit by Djukanović’s implicit support for the *Zajedno* (Together) coalition led anti-Milošević protests taking place throughout Serbia in the wake of the alleged electoral fraud. But whilst Djukanović’s early statements may only have implied support for the protesters, he was more explicit in his public pronouncement that Milošević was a spent force. As the *Zajedno* protests in Belgrade and other Serbian cities were shaking the foundations of the Milošević regime, Djukanović selected his moment, publicly declaring his opposition to Milošević, and leaving little space for ambiguity or misinterpretation. Utilising the widely read Belgrade political weekly *Vreme* (Time) as the forum for his calculated but risky inventive against the Serbian president, Djukanović boldly asserted that

*Milošević is a man of obsolete political ideas, lacking the ability to form a strategic vision of the problems this country is facing.*\(^{17}\)

The Belgrade authorities wasted little time in striking back. An orchestrated campaign by media loyal to Belgrade began to proliferate accusations of Djukanović’s involvement in illegal activities, in particular his involvement in lucrative cigarette smuggling and his links with the Italian mafia. Milošević sought to portray Djukanović as an individual without morals – an opportunist. Undeterred, Djukanović subsequently sent a letter of support to the students in Belgrade who were the bulwark of the anti-Milošević protests. He thus willingly entered into an irreversible conflict with Milošević. Montenegro’s President, Momir Bulatović, suspected that Milošević would overcome the crisis and chose not to follow the same path. Thus, the crisis in Serbia caused not only a

\(^{15}\) An on-going feud, played out through the media, had strained relations between the Miloševićs and the Montenegrin Prime Minister. Mira Marković had alleged that Djukanović was enriching himself and his associates by indulging in shadowy economic activities (cigarette smuggling) during UN sanctions. See Lenard Cohen, *Serpent in the Bosom*. Boulder/Co. 2002, 330.


split between ruling elites in Belgrade and Podgorica; it caused an open conflict within the top echelons of the DPS leadership.

The split was personified by the rivalry between Djukanović and Bulatović. Close friends since their days in the communist youth organisations, they had risen through the ranks together, had enjoyed a close friendship (they were even neighbours in Podgorica’s wealthy Gorica district), and had remained united during the difficult years of the Croatian and Bosnian wars. However, whilst Bulatović was participating in international peace conferences, Djukanović was running the Montenegrin economy during the imposition of sanctions, facilitating the payment of state pensions and attempting to limit the ravages of economic sanctions generally. Bulatović often acknowledged this achievement, referring to his prime minister as a „magician“.

Djukanović’s methods, however, were criticised by opponents, who accused him of involvement in shady and illegal activities. Moreover, they argued, whilst he may be feeding the population, he was simultaneously enriching himself. From the perspective of his opponents, this was not simply an attempt by Djukanović to help Montenegrins survive sanctions but a method of increasing personal power. This power could be harnessed at the crucial time.

Djukanović’s controversial comments convulsed the ruling DPS. Publicly, however, the party retained a visage of unity. Senior party officials were quick to emphasise that although there may have been conflict between Djukanović and Milošević, there was no significant schism within the DPS itself. But despite the rhetoric of unity, a division was becoming increasingly manifest, and by March 1997 the party was on the verge of an open split. As intra-party tensions increased, Djukanović continued to court controversy – continuing the anti-Milošević rhetoric and referring to the FRY as “the so-called” federation. Relations had become so strained that on 24 March, during the first DPS main board meeting since Djukanović’s denunciation, a vote was called amongst board members that would ultimately determine the future direction of the party. Ostensibly arranged to discuss matters pertaining to wider political, economic and social issues in Montenegro and the FRY, the meeting instead became an intra-party debate on the implications of Djukanović’s invective toward Milošević.

The direction of the discussions demonstrated that the majority of members of the main board of the DPS was unconvinced of the wisdom of generating an

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18 Djukanović ensured that the elderly citizens of Montenegro were paid pensions but used some of the “sanctions busting” methods to ensure this. He is alleged to be a major player in the smuggling of oil across Lake Skadar from Albania. See Elizabeth Roberts, The Realm of the Black Mountain. A History of Montenegro. Ithaca 2007, 188.


21 Ibid.
open confrontation with Belgrade. As a result, Djukanović was lambasted by a number of his DPS colleagues for comments he made in Vreme and during a visit to Washington, whereupon Bulatović (who later confessed that he had been instructed by Milošević that he was obliged to remove Djukanović) decided that the time was ripe for a showdown. Following lengthy discussion and argument, the main board voted. Bulatović’s pro-Milošević stance was convincingly confirmed. Sixty voted in favour, seven voted against, and twenty-two delegates abstained. This was seemingly an overwhelming endorsement and suggested a confirmation of Bulatović’s strength within the DPS and the continuation of the party’s pro-Belgrade position. Djukanović, however, argued that the debate was conducted in such a way that it skewed the final result of the vote – that delegates had been swayed by the argument that Momir was for Yugoslavia whilst Djukanović was against Yugoslavia.

The distribution of power within the DPS was key here, however. Of the seven who voted for Djukanović and the twenty-two abstentions were some of the most powerful individuals in Montenegrin politics. Crucially, Vukašin Maraš, the chief of the Montenegrin State Security Service (Služba državne bezbednosti, SDB), and Svetozar Marović both backed Djukanović. Both men would be key factors in convincing wavering DPS members that Montenegro’s interests were best served by distancing themselves from Milošević’s regime in Belgrade. Over the following months, an intense and largely hidden internal-party power struggle ensued. Building a powerful coalition of individuals with significant establishment interests, Djukanović wrested control of the party and the SDB. He succeeded in applying pressure and breaking down most of those who had voted against him to secure the majority vote, although little has been documented which sheds light on how this was achieved. The second meeting of the DPS main board, held on 11 July 1997, was the last time that the DPS main board would meet as a single unit. The party confirmed Djukanović’s ascendency.

The subsequent presidential campaign was a continuation of this bitter political struggle, and was no less controversial. Djukanović was confirmed as the DPS candidate for the presidential elections, although both Djukanović and Bulatović ran as DPS candidates. Hinting at their future course, Djukanović’s wing of the DPS drafted an Agreement on Minimum Principles for the Development of Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro. The agreement, signed on 1 September 1997, had two primary functions – to guarantee transparent, free and fair elections in the future, whilst simultaneously establishing an anti-Milošević-Bulatović political alliance.
Meanwhile Bulatović initiated and organised a parallel DPS conference, largely consisting of party members from his heartland in northern Montenegro.\(^\text{27}\) Thus, although Djukanović was the official candidate, Bulatović supporters within the DPS simultaneously nominated the latter as their chosen candidate to contest the elections. Of twenty-one municipalities in Montenegro, the Djukanović wing controlled sixteen, whilst Bulatović and his bloc, although he could rely on additional rhetorical and logistical support from Serbia, controlled only five.\(^\text{28}\)

The campaign was about personality as much as political orientation. Bulatović sought to portray himself as an “ordinary guy” who would appeal to middle and lower-ranking members of the DPS and to the older generations.\(^\text{29}\) He utilised the rhetoric of his communist past and defined himself in binary opposition to Milo Djukanović; portrayed by Bulatović’s supporters as a scheming capitalist whose main objective was to separate Montenegrins from their „brothers“ in Serbia. Djukanović, on the other hand, sought to portray himself as a modern, progressive, European style reformer, with all of these constructions remaining somewhat flawed. Djukanović’s image, despite the obvious contradictions, was nurtured by Western governments. His assiduous cultivation of a westernising and reformist image was not questioned by western governments as long as Milošević remained in power in Serbia.\(^\text{30}\) Presenting two quite different approaches, styles and ideological platforms, their support bifurcated into two natural groups – Bulatović’s supporters were largely older, less educated voters from the north of Montenegro or the republic’s rural areas, whilst Djukanović garnered most of his support from younger, urban, educated Montenegrins.\(^\text{31}\) Whilst portrayed as a struggle between two fundamental positions – advocates of a conservative, orthodox and anti-European politics versus advocates of a more pro-European, progressive and democratic politics – the division between the pro-European and traditionalist positions manifested itself, not only as a conflict.

\(^{27}\) _Monitor_ (Podgorica), 8 August 1997, 10f.


\(^{29}\) Whilst it is hardly a solid framework for analysis, there did exist a perception, particularly among pro-independence Montenegrins, that Bulatović was “less of a Montenegrin” than Djukanović. Momir Bulatović was the son of a Yugoslav Army officer. He was born in Montenegro but soon after settled in Zadar in Croatia. Having spent many years living outside Montenegro, Bulatović returned there in 1975 to study economics at the University of Titograd (Podgorica). Conversely, Milo Djukanović had lived only in Nikšić in Montenegro before enrolling at the Faculty of Economics in 1981 and was believed to possess a greater sense of who the Montenegrins were.


between value systems but between the advocates of preserving the FRY and those advocating Montenegrin independence.\textsuperscript{32}

The positions were clearly defined, yet the outcome of the vote was still difficult to predict. Nevertheless, the presidential elections were taking on the characteristics of a Serb-Montenegrin conflict, although Djukanović was careful not to emphasise a commitment to independence.\textsuperscript{33} In any event, the result of the two horse race (the other candidates were largely symbolic) turned out to be exceptionally close. In the first round Bulatović was victorious, winning by a narrow margin of only 2,200 votes with a sixty seven per cent turn-out. It was, however, not a decisive enough margin to declare a clear victory. With a second round of voting required, the Djukanović camp made significant efforts to overturn the small margin, organising an energetic house-to-house campaign which would, they hoped, facilitate a significant enough swing. It proved to be a fruitful strategy. Djukanović reversed the first-round results, crucially winning the Nikšić municipality (the largest in Montenegro) and improving his share of the vote in other municipalities. The overall winners in each municipality remained as in the first vote, with Djukanović winning majorities in Kotor, Ulcinj, Plav, Cetinje, Bar, Rožaje and Tivat, whilst Bulatović retained the traditionally conservative and Serb-oriented municipalities of Berane, Pljevlja and Bjelo Polje.\textsuperscript{34} The municipality of Herceg-Novci was won by Bulatović – the only coastal municipality to be won by him. The final margin of victory was narrow with Djukanović gaining 5,884 votes more than Bulatović. The latter bloc immediately cried foul. Bulatović claimed that there were significant irregularities during the election process, citing intimidation of members of the electoral commission as an apparent example. Whilst the OSCE, however, rejected these accusations claiming that the final results of the elections accurately reflected the will of the electorate, Bulatović continued to claim foul play.\textsuperscript{35} Minor protests by Bulatović’s supporters took place in front of the Montenegrin parliament and almost simultaneously, Milošević tightened the noose around Montenegro, closing the FRY’s common border with Albania and imposing a \textit{de facto} blockade on the border between Serbia and Montenegro.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} Vladimir Goati, \textit{The Party Systems of Serbia and Montenegro.} Beograd 2000, 175.

\textsuperscript{33} The Montenegrin print media reflected this split. In 1997, the Montenegrin press flourished. In September of that year, the daily newspaper \textit{Vijesti} was established. The paper was independent and favourable toward Djukanović, whose party, the DPS, already controlled Montenegro’s state daily \textit{Pobjeda.} The pro-Serb Montenegrins responded by establishing the pro-Serbian newspaper \textit{Dan} which became a mouthpiece of Milošević’s policy in Montenegro.

\textsuperscript{34} AIM Press, 23 October 1997.


\textsuperscript{36} Monitor (Podgorica), 24 October 1997, 12.
As the presidential inauguration approached, Bulatović rallied his supporters for demonstrations in the capital Podgorica. It was a return to the “politics of the streets” – the method used during the “anti-bureaucratic revolution” to overthrow the Montenegrin communists in 1989. Protesters gathered in front of the Montenegrin Assembly and remained there for three days. Planned to coincide with Djukanović’s presidential inauguration, the objective was to foment an uprising. The crowd carried banners emblazoned with messages such as, „Yugoslavia is our Destiny“, „Police! You are our sons!“, „Overthrow the government, defend our honour!“, alongside banners denouncing Djukanović as a „Turk“. Initially, the protests were good humoured and peaceful, but on the evening of the inauguration a peaceful walk descended into violence. As the protesters moved from the Assembly to the government building (around five-hundred metres away), tensions rose dramatically. An attempt to storm the government building was halted by the police, who used tear gas to quell the increasingly violent demonstration. The police intervention had ensured that a bloody showdown was averted, and in the cold light of morning, both sides blamed each other for the chaos. Bulatović, increasingly on the defensive, described events as “a brutal police intervention against the citizens who were protesting because of the theft of the elections”. He was also disappointed with the lack of support given by the Yugoslav Army, which he had hoped would intervene in the event of police action against the demonstrators. Thus, far from achieving their objective, the demonstrations turned out to be counterproductive for Bulatović. Almost immediately, the international community condemned his actions. Robert Gelbard, the U.S. special envoy for the Balkans, blamed Milošević for encouraging the demonstrations and described Bulatović’s role in them as “absolutely outrageous”. The „Great People’s Meeting“ had turned out to be a catastrophic miscalculation which discredited Bulatović in the eyes of many Montenegrins.

With the support of the international community now secure, the Djukanović faction of the DPS consolidated their position in the immediate weeks and months. The opposition was shaken by its failure to overthrow the government,
support for Bulatović was receding and that for the pro-Serbian political bloc was in turmoil. Seizing the opportunity presented by the spirit of the times, Djukanović made preparations for parliamentary elections. But firstly, his faction wanted to ensure that they retained the DPS brand (and all that this implied). As the ruling party in Montenegro since 1990, the party name carried weight. Retaining the name would provide both continuity and legitimacy – critical in such a period of flux. The faction that could retain the original party name of DPS may be perceived by the public to be the legitimate successor to the previously monolithic version of the party. Both factions coveted the DPS brand, but the High Court of Montenegro ruled that Bulatović’s DPS must give up their claim on the party name. As a result, on 21 March 1998 the pro-Serbian faction, led by Momir Bulatović and members of the powerful and influential „Podgorica Lobby“ (former high profile DPS members who for years had been critical toward Djukanovic), reformed themselves as the Socialist People’s Party (SNP). The new party relied heavily on supporters from towns in the north of Montenegro and rural areas and was comprised largely of individuals from lower social and educational strata. Their core rallying call was the preservation of the FRY and the defeat of the Djukanović-led separatists.

A more cautious, if ambiguous, platform was adopted by the „new“ DPS. Initially Djukanović remained cautious of aligning himself with pro-independence parties, whose agenda was too radical, and particularly this was the case with the Liberalni savez Crne Gore (Liberal Alliance of Montenegro, LSCG). Instead, he maintained close links with Zoran Djindjić’s Demokratska Stranka (DS), and sought an alliance with Novak Kilibarda, university professor and leader of the traditionally pro-Serb Narodna Stranka (People’s Party) of Montenegro. Although this awarded Djukanović’s DPS with an aura of being a pan-Yugoslav party, it created a division within the People’s Party itself, as many high profile members of the party refused to work with the „separatist“ Milo Djukanović. Thus, at this stage at least, there was little suggestion of an openly pro-independence platform being followed by the DPS. Whilst distancing the DPS from the Milošević regime in Belgrade, Djukanović simultaneously acknowledged his commitment to Montenegro’s role within Yugoslavia. The DPS adopted the slogan Nikad sami, uvijek svoj (Never alone, always its own), and it typified the ambiguous party platform of the time – a blend of progressive pro-western rhetoric, free market reform and the consolidation of human rights – all within

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45 AIM Press, 10 October 1997.
46 Thomas, Serbia under Milošević (above fn. 31), 380.
the framework of continued union with Serbia from whom they were progres-
sively becoming more isolated.\textsuperscript{47} Djukanović, however, was careful not to express explicit aspirations for Montenegrin independence at this stage, as doing so would represent an overtly risky gambit with unknown consequences. Thus the Djukanović faction played a double game – continuing to fully support the existing FRY structures, whilst simultaneously emphasising their inability to cooperate with Milošević. Regarding the latter, Djukanović drew significant support from Montenegro’s minorities, a factor which would prove instrumental in tipping the electoral balance in his favour. Given their negative experience in the early 1990s, many of these minorities (particularly Muslims and Albanians) deeply distrusted Bulatović and his pro-Milošević allies. Additionally, they viewed the FRY as a Greater Serbian and Milošević-led construction within which their rights were not sufficiently protected. The results of the parliamentary elections held in May 1998 indicated that his strategy was effective. Seeking to highlight the democratic character of the victory and setting the tone for the period ahead, Djukanović hailed the triumph of the coalition “Da živimo bolje” (So we live better, DŽB) led by him as “our penultimate victory; our final victory will be scored when democracy wins throughout Yugoslavia”.\textsuperscript{48}

**NATO, Kosovo and the International Community**

Whilst attempts were being made to distance Montenegro from the crisis in Kosovo, the country, by accident or design, was being incrementally drawn in. By the late summer of 1998, refugees were already streaming over the border from Kosovo, with the majority of those concentrated in the municipality of Plav in northern Montenegro, a municipality sharing a border with both Kosovo and Albania. The residents of the town of Plav and the surrounding villages were hardly in a position to offer the required aid and support to the refugees. The municipality was one of the poorest in Montenegro and the endemic underfunding and the hosting of refugees from previous conflicts (in Croatia and Bosnia) had taken a heavy toll upon the already strained social and economic infrastructure. As the crisis threatened to escalate into war, the Montenegrin authorities sought to distance themselves from the approaching maelstrom, declaring themselves neutral and advocating dialogue with Albanians from Kosovo in conjunction with the European Union. But continued military actions by Serb forces and retaliations by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) were driving Serbia (and the FRY) into possible military conflict with NATO, who had warned Milošević to halt military activity in Kosovo. As the rhetoric

\textsuperscript{47} International Crisis Group, Montenegro’s Socialist People’s Party (above fn. 44), 7.

\textsuperscript{48} *AIM Press*, 8 June 1998.
sharpened and the crisis escalated, the Montenegrin authorities became acutely aware that despite their self-proclaimed neutrality, Montenegro, as an integral part of the FRY and the home to strategic military sites, would be targeted as part of any NATO bombing campaign. During a Supreme Defence Council meeting held on 4 October 1998, clear rifts emerged between the Serb and Montenegrin leaderships.

The subsequent NATO bombing of Yugoslavia had significantly less impact on Montenegro than on Serbia, but from the start of the 78-day bombing campaign the internal situation in Montenegro steadily worsened. The bombing, and the continuing flow of refugees, which made up around 80,000 (over ten percent of Montenegro’s total population), put a considerable strain on the economy and threatened to destabilize the delicate ethnic and social balance.\footnote{Bieber, Montenegrin Politics (above fn. 28), 33.} On 2 April 1999, Djukanović met with religious leaders in Montenegro, appealing to them to help calm the increasing tensions. A joint statement released in the wake of the meeting implored all peoples of different faiths to remain united stating that, “the preservation of civic peace and ethnic and religious tolerance in Montenegro and Yugoslavia is today the most important obligation of all our citizens”.\footnote{Vijesti (Podgorica), 2 April 1999.} Aware of the increasing instability, Djukanović and then Prime Minister Filip Vujanović appealed to the special envoy of the European Union, Wolfgang Petritsch, who visited Montenegro to assess the humanitarian, social and economic situation, to help halt the NATO bombing and renew the negotiating process in Kosovo.\footnote{Vijesti (Podgorica), 30 April 1999.} Targeting Montenegro had only served to intensify internal political and social tensions. This was ominously manifested by a tense stand-off – most notably in Podgorica – between the Yugoslav Federal Army and the Seventh Battalion (formally a unit of the Yugoslav Army, although constituted primarily of SNP members) on one side and the Montenegrin police and special forces on the other. To compound the tension in the capital, there were a number of parallel military or quasi-military structures operating throughout the Montenegrin territory.

Besides the Seventh Battalion, a number of other groups emerged, like the Lovćen Guard, a formation located in Cetinje and self-proclaimed „defenders of Montenegrin statehood“. Because Montenegro did not possess its own army, Djukanović strengthened the Montenegrin police force to around 20,000 loyal policeman. The new force consisted of individuals who had left the federal army, party loyalists, and a number of Muslims and Albanians, who supported Djukanović in the wake of the DPS split, whilst it was purged of those deemed
to be inappropriate or unreliable. According to the OSCE estimate, the police force became increasingly militarised and had evolved into a virtual armed force. Montenegro was on the brink. Not only was the nascent Montenegrin force prepared for armed conflict, individuals on both sides began to equip themselves for a potentially bleak scenario. Thus, SNP and pro-Serb party members, generally excluded from joining the police, took matters into their own hands – many joining the pro-Milošević-Bulatović Seventh Battalion. Montenegro was awash with armed men with an axe to grind.

There were a number of scenarios in which a single shot would have triggered chaos. In the areas of Debeli Brijeg on the Montenegrin-Croatian border and in Cetinje (where the Yugoslav Army blocked the road between the town and the coast), the Yugoslav Army added to the sense of crisis by erecting roadblocks and restricting movement. Such moves were sufficient for the denizens of Cetinje to perceive themselves to be under siege. Within hours, protesters gathered outside the municipality building demonstrating against the roadblocks and the attempts by the Yugoslav Army to enter the town. As they attempted to do so, there developed a tense stand-off between the Yugoslav Army and the local militia. The capture of three young men almost turned into an armed rebellion by the militia, the police, and ordinary citizens of Cetinje.

Although a peaceful resolution was found – the Yugoslav Army halted their attempts to enter Cetinje – the incident was indicative of the growing tensions throughout Montenegro. Tension was palpable in Podgorica. Fears of a military coup were intensifying in the capital, fueled by statements emanating from Belgrade. Responding to speculation that a Milošević backed coup was imminent, Djukanović claimed that, “neither open nor a creeping coup is taking place in Montenegro”, adding, “if something like that did happen, it would be the most tragic and violent conflict so far in the former Yugoslavia”. In order to preserve stability during these testing times, Djukanović made broad appeals intended to bridge the ever-widening divisions within Montenegrin society. He utilised the rhetoric of pan-Serb and Yugoslav sentiment whilst urging people to recognise the negative impact of Milošević’s policies.

53 Ibid, 28.
54 International Crisis Group, Montenegro’s Socialist People’s Party (above fn. 44). Cfr. Richard Monks, Study of Policing in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Vienna 2001 (OSCE Mission to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), 34. Monks’s influential report argued that the number of militarized police was closer to 10,000. However, Belgrade analyst Miloš Vasić argues that the number may have been as high as 30,000 armed men. See Vreme (Belgrade), 30 March 2006.
56 Vijesti (Podgorica), 17 April 1999, 2.
Whilst tensions ran high, a military coup against the Montenegrin government was not attempted. But problems intensified in the north of Montenegro, as the Albanian refugees, many of whom had returned to Kosovo, were replaced by Serb and Montenegrin refugees fleeing reprisals by angry Albanian returnees. Many northern Montenegrin towns (in particular Andrijevica, Rožaje and Berane) were placed under significant pressure. Fortunately, Serbia’s capitulation after 78 days of bombing dictated that Montenegro, against the odds, survived the war. Given the many risks and potential for open conflict, this was nothing short of miraculous.57

Cigarettes, Scandal and the Controversy over the Belgrade Agreement

Montenegro may have been relatively unscathed by the NATO bombing, and the Montenegrin authorities may have demonstrated their resolve in distancing themselves from the Serbian government, but however independent they may have perceived themselves to be they remained part of the FRY. The question for Djukanović now was thus: How should Montenegro redefine its status vis-à-vis its larger partner within the FRY? Should he seek to further undermine the federation? Should he explicitly aim for independence? In the wake of the NATO bombing, the Montenegrin government drew up their plan to redefine the FRY as a confederation of two equal states (much the same as that proposed by the pro-independence SDP in January 1999), which would possess separate monetary systems, separate foreign ministries, and perhaps most significantly separate defence capabilities. But events in the region took a dramatic turn in late 2000. The parliamentary elections, scheduled for 24 September, produced what appeared like a convincing victory for the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (Demokratska opozicija Srbije, DOS), led symbolically by Vojislav Koštunica. Milošević, in characteristic style, attempted to engineer the vote in his favour. Both DOS and representatives of the international community implored Milošević to retire gracefully, a strategy meeting with little success. On 5 October, mass rallies in Belgrade forced Milošević from power. The protests, which were dubbed the “October Revolution”, heralded the end of the Milošević regime and the beginning of a new era in Serbian politics. The Montenegrin President, Milo Đukanović, made a statement declaring that, “democratic Montenegro, like the whole democratic world, supports new, liberated Serbia. I believe that with the victory of democratic politics in Belgrade, a chance is created for the

establishment of new and healthy relations between Montenegro and Serbia”. Despite the rhetoric, however, the dynamics within the region changed overnight. Serbia, being the largest state in the region, would once again become the focus of the international community. Despite the collective relief, however, there was an understanding that Montenegro’s strategic significance had been reduced. With the fall of Milošević in Serbia, Montenegro would cease to be the focus of much of the international community’s efforts, but furthermore it removed a key dynamic of the DPS’s justification for control over all spheres of society – the threat from Belgrade (and the political capital that could be attained from that fear) had diminished. The objective of independence would no longer be supported by Montenegro’s powerful allies.

Any potential referendum was hindered by Milo Djukanović’s worsening international profile. Pressure from the EU and U.S. was compounded by the specific pressure emanating from Rome and Zagreb – and this was not simply confined to refuting Montenegrin claims for independence. In early 2002, the Croatian newspaper Nacional proceeded to publish a number of articles implying Djukanović’s direct involvement in the trafficking of cigarettes, a charge the president flatly denied. Almost simultaneously, the former Italian finance minister, Ottavio del Turco, publicly accused Djukanović of having close links to organised crime, being the lynchpin in the illegal mechanisms that controlled the smuggling of cigarettes in the Balkans, and having provided safe haven for Italian criminals in the Montenegrin town of Bar. By July, the public prosecutor in the Italian port city of Bari, Guisseppe Scelsi, initiated investigative proceedings against the Montenegrin president. The accusation was that Djukanović (in concert with the Italian mafia and the cigarette manufacturers R. J. Reynolds and Philip Morris) smuggled large amounts of untaxed cigarettes into the EU from the port of Bar in Montenegro – generating significant profits for all the participants. According to Glenny, “two Montenegrin companies, both controlled by Djukanović and the secret service, levied £ 20 on each case transited through the country”. These profits, claimed Djukanović, were not channelled into private hands, but rather used to pay for the state’s running costs during the period of UN-imposed sanctions – a matter of patriotic duty, so to speak. But the Italian’s prosecutors were not sympathetic to such altruistic claims, and they continued to pursue their case. Domestically, however, the matter was deemed absurd by leading DPS members and, in July 2002, a Montenegrin parliamentary

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58 Montena-Fax (Podgorica), 5 October 2000.
60 Ibid., 36-37.
commission was established to investigate the matter. But whilst their findings acknowledged the existence of organised crime structures in Montenegro, it rejected claims that Djukanović himself was involved. However shaken by the scandal the leadership of the DPS may have been, Djukanović retained his grip on domestic political power.

International pressure was applied on Djukanović in an attempt to persuade him to abandon the aim of independence. This intensified in early 2002, when EU representatives, always sceptical about Montenegrin independence in the post-Milošević era, sought to persuade Djukanović that Montenegro should form a new state union with Serbia. Their concerns were threefold. Firstly, they were concerned that the political and social climate in Montenegro, with a divided population, was not a terribly promising foundation for an independent state. Secondly, there existed a concern that Montenegrin independence would serve to encourage other territories, such as the Republika Srpska, to seek independence. Finally, there were the possible implications within Serbia – that the loss of Montenegro and possibly also Kosovo would be a tough psychological blow for Serbia and their new and shaky democratic coalition. In an attempt to persuade Djukanović to retreat from his pro-independence stance, the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, Javier Solana, played a significant role. Montenegro still relied on significant Western aid, dictating that Djukanović had only limited scope for manoeuvre. Caving in to Western pressure, Djukanović signed the Belgrade Agreement on 14 March 2002, much to the dismay of pro-independence Montenegrins.

The formation of the state union and its inception were directed not by the public in a referendum (as in the case of the FRY), but by political elites from Serbia, Montenegro and the EU. It was, therefore, regarded by many in Montenegro as an imposition. Seeking to give the impression that this was not the case, the Montenegrin leadership lauded the creation of the new state as a victory, emphasising that Montenegro had, for the first time in almost a century, been recognised by its own state name, albeit within the new federation – a first step toward outright independence. Approval came from the union-oriented within the Montenegrin political spectrum, with parties such as the People’s Party (Narodna Stranka, NS) and the Socialist People’s Party (Socijalistika Narodna Partija, SNP) heralding the creation of the state union as a consolidation of Serb-Montenegrin unity and a rejection of Djukanović’s separatist policy. But news of the agreement was not well received among those Montenegrins who advocated independence, and a number of pro-independence ministers resigned from the Montenegrin Assembly. The leader of the Liberal Alliance

61 Judy Batt, The Question of Serbia (above fn. 30).
63 Vijesti (Podgorica), 7 March 2002, 2.
of Montenegro (Liberalni Savez Crne Gore, LSCG), Miodrag Živković, raged that the behaviour of Đukanović represented „one of the biggest cases of treason in European history”. Moreover, in an open letter to Javier Solana, one hundred Montenegrin intellectuals protested against the EU’s policy toward Montenegro, which they argued, deprived the republic of,

the right of existence and self-determination that is guaranteed by the Charter of the United Nations, and by both international covenants on human rights, as well as of the respect for her historical rights that were confirmed by Badinter’s Commission and Lord Carrington’s Peace Conference in 1991.

But, in reality, Đukanović had made the rational choice. Despite the anger generated by the signing of the agreement, he secured a number of concessions from the EU and the Serbian government that would essentially dictate that the state union could never develop into a functioning state entity. The structure of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro could be best described as minimalist: a Council of Ministers comprising of only five members chaired by a President, indirectly elected, and with very few powers. Add to that a joint parliament with one hundred and twenty six delegates (ninety one from Serbia and thirty five from Montenegro) who were, in fact (and largely due to Montenegrin resistance to direct state union elections), delegates from the republican parliaments of Serbia and Montenegro respectively. The Agreement bestowed some positive discrimination in favour of Montenegro in the Union’s institutions, which was comprised of a unicameral parliament, a Council of Ministers (foreign affairs, defence, international economic relations, internal economic relations, human and minority rights) and a Court with “no jurisdictional competence”. Most significantly, however, was the concession forced and eventually secured by Milo Đukanović, which allowed for the scheduling of a referendum after three years. This concession dictated firstly that the state union could never function to its full capacity, and secondly, that the statehood issue remained at the core of Montenegrin politics. Such a loose arrangement amounted to “a union with an expiry date”.

Six months after the signing of the Belgrade Agreement, in November 2002, Đukanović resigned from his post of president, several months

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64 Zoran Živković, Godina konačnog raspleta. Niš 2006, 2. Many members of the LSCG were angered by the DPS adopting elements of their party programme, and particularly the commitment to independence. Whilst many of the LSCG faithful supported Đukanović’s split with Miloševid in 1997, they felt betrayed by the signing of the Belgrade Agreement. The issue of whether or not to support the subsequent post-2002 Đukanović-led drive for independence divided party members.


66 Vijesti (Podgorica), 7 March 2002.

67 Andrijašević / Rastoder, Istorije Crne Gore (above fn. 62), 271.
prior to the expiration of his mandate. The motivation behind this was to once again take up the post of prime minister.

The early months of his fourth term were characterised by continuing struggles over Montenegrin independence and a significant degree of scandal. To compound existing accusations regarding his alleged role in organised criminal activities (primarily cigarette smuggling), Djukanović faced accusations that he was personally involved in human trafficking. One case drew particular attention, that of „S. C.” – a young Moldovan woman who claimed to have been forced into prostitution in Montenegro and sexually abused (by among others, several high-ranking politicians – including Djukanović). As the investigation intensified, Deputy State Prosecutor Zoran Piperović and a number of other high-level government officials were arrested. It was not a good start, but Montenegrin politics were dominated not by scandal, but by the issue of statehood. Regardless of the signing of the Belgrade Agreement, and regardless of the personal scandals that dogged him, Djukanović continued with the independence project.

The Road to Independence

Djukanović led the pro-independence bloc throughout the referendum process. The campaign was excellently planned and delivered, and aesthetically seductive. Not unfamiliar with this territory – the DPS mastered the art of campaigning during the late 1990s – the pro-independence campaign proved to be a credible and ultimately successful endeavour in both form and content. As expected, the pro-independence bloc, during this rally and throughout, utilised emotive rhetoric intended to appeal to the romantic inclinations of the Montenegrin people, cleverly appealing to the pre-existing self-perception of Montenegrins as a brave, honourable, and independent people. Contemporary Montenegrins, they argued, were presented with a unique historical mission – to correct the grievances felt by their forefathers who had to bear the loss of Montenegrin independence in 1918. What their forefathers had sorrowfully lost they could regain. The era of the independent Montenegrin state (1878-1918) was recast as such and the contemporary supporters of Montenegrin independence recast as descendants of the heroes and martyrs that had created the independent Montenegrin state. But this rather romanticised reworking of history blended with contemporary arguments proved to be effective. It was the first and most emotive of the justifications for independence. On a more contemporary political level, a number of key arguments were advanced by pro-independence leaders. Firstly, that Montenegrin interests could not be best served by playing what pro-independence leaders claimed was a subservient role within an unequal and unworkable state union. Secondly, that continued union with Serbia was
impeding Montenegro’s accession to European Union membership. Thirdly, that an independent Montenegro would be a better foundation upon which to consolidate regional stability and civil society, and finally, that the republic could harness better its economic potential if it were fully in control of its interests.\textsuperscript{68}

Not surprisingly, the pro-independence campaign was also notable for its inclusion of minorities as an integral part of its movement. Unlike the pro-union bloc, who aimed their campaign almost completely at ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins, emphasis was placed quite significantly on the participation of minorities. Since 1997, such sentiments toward Montenegro’s minorities has served the ruling authorities well, and as a consequence the pro-independence bloc enjoyed most support not in the municipalities where there were many citizens who defined themselves as Montenegrins, but rather in the predominantly Muslim or Bosniak municipalities of Plav and Rožaje, and the majority Albanian municipality of Ulcinj. Demonstrative of the strategy of incorporating minorities was the campaign literature and electronic media advertising. The pro-independence campaign literature specifically both used Albanian and Serbian (Latin and Cyrillic) language, awarding their campaign an air of legitimacy and inclusion. In predominantly orthodox areas Da (Montenegrin for Yes) posters were omnipotent, whilst in predominantly Albanian areas posters adorned with Po (Albanian for Yes) were ever-present. It proved a master stroke.

Djukanović was the focus of much of the pro-union campaign. The cornerstone of the pro-union arguments were that Serbia and Montenegro in political union were a stronger economy together than the sum of their parts, that there were strong cultural bonds between the republics of Serbia and Montenegro, and that Serbs and Montenegrins possessed strong ethnic bonds. But whilst the pro-union forces rightly acknowledged the importance of the youth vote, they mistakenly marginalised the minority vote, directing their campaign primarily at the Serb and Montenegrin communities. This strategy was flawed from the outset. Many Montenegrin Muslims and Bosniaks still had raw memories of the early 1990s, when they were victimised by Serb parties. As a consequence, Montenegro’s minorities overwhelmingly supported the pro-independence bloc.

But, primarily, the pro-union campaign was focused upon what they argued was the corrupt character of Montenegro’s ruling authorities, placing particular emphasis on Djukanović’s links with organised crime and playing on fears that he and his associates would turn Montenegro into a “private state” within which his opponents would be economically and politically marginalised. In addition to this, marginalising an already unsupportive Albanian community, pro-union leaders warned of the danger of a “Greater Albania”, based upon the thesis

\textsuperscript{68} An article written by Montenegrin Supreme Court Judge Cedomir Bogićević entitled “Common State – Economic Burden and Political Taxation”, published in \\textit{Pobjeda}, was typical of a plethora of economic arguments against the state union. See \\textit{Pobjeda}, 11 May 2006, 4.
that an independent Montenegro would be a weak state potentially vulnerable to incursions or insurrections by Albanians. In short, they argued that politically and economically the Montenegrin state could only survive and function properly in union with Serbia. Their rhetoric, although at times a throwback to the paranoia of the early 1990s, was less focused on nationalism. Instead, the pro-union politicians focused on what they argued were the benefits for retaining the union with Serbia. Economic, cultural and historical reasons were most frequently cited, and whilst the majority of the pro-union campaigning focused substantially on these justifications, personal attacks against the Montenegrin Prime Minister, Milo Đukanović, were common throughout. Many of those gathered for the pro-union rallies would chant *Milo – lopove!* (“Milo is a thief!”), and much of the invective was directed at the prime minister and the alleged criminal nature of his regime.

This theme remained key throughout the pre-referendum debates. Three days before the referendum, in the last of a series of televised „duels“, Đukanović debated Montenegro’s future with SNP leader Predrag Bulatović. The context seemed favourable for Bulatović – the mediator and presenter was Olja Bećković, the daughter of the hugely influential Serbian poet and vociferous member of the pro-union campaign Matija Bećković.69 The atmosphere before the debate was one of uncompromising bitterness – the two participants did not shake hands either before or after the debate. The content of the debate was predictably antagonistic, with Bulatović (aided by Ms. Bećković) accusing Milo Đukanović of a number of criminal activities, attempting to create a „private state“, and for being anti-Serbian.70 “A private state”, Bulatović stated, “means that you [Đukanović] control everything in it, from the police, to the courts, and most importantly, the money.”71 Regardless of the fact that this was a valid argument, this offensive strategy backfired. Whilst Bulatović appeared aggressive and confrontational, Đukanović fended off the accusations (in a manner that he has become accustomed to) with some dignity and professionalism.

On the referendum day itself, turnout was high (86 percent). At a number of polling stations there were queues for several hours. Despite a few very minor irregularities – OSCE observers reported suspicious activities which may have indicated vote-buying schemes on the part of the pro-independence bloc in Pljevlja and Berane – and some issues with unsealed ballot boxes, the day

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69 As is the case with Boris Tadić and his father Ljubomir, the political views of Matija Bećković and his daughter Olja do not always correspond.

70 Bulatović’s accusation about the creation of a private state was a constant variable throughout the pro-union bloc’s campaign rhetorics. It is not without foundation. Much of Montenegro’s capital is owned and controlled by a small circle of individuals and families. Many political elites within the pro-union bloc are disenfranchised from the processes of privatisation and the subsequent profits generated as a consequence.

passed without significant difficulties. The EU had imposed a formula with two conditions: firstly, that for the referendum on independence to be valid 50 percent plus one voter would have to participate; and secondly, that 55 percent of those who did vote had to cast their votes in favour of independence. But with the possibility of the referendum result being between 50 percent and 55 percent came the probability of both sides perceiving such a result as a victory. What came to be called „the grey zone“ represented an ambiguity, and could lead to a stalemate of sorts. This would have been the worst possible outcome, as both sides would have perceived it as a victory of sorts and the stalemate within the state-union would likely have continued. The statehood question would remain predominant and Montenegrin political life would remain fixated on future status.

On the evening of the referendum the air was thick with anticipation when the non-governmental organisation Centar za monitoring (Center for monitoring, CEMI) announced the first set of preliminary results only half an hour after the polls closed. It was a rash move. The (very) preliminary results brought pro-independence supporters out onto the streets letting off fireworks and firing guns into the air. The tentative celebrations belied an air of uncertainty that hung over the capital. As pro-independence supporters began to pour onto the streets, the leader of the pro-union bloc, Predrag Bulatović, appeared on television appealing for calm and imploring supporters of the union not to be intimidated by the unofficial results, calling upon „all citizens of Montenegro to maintain peace and demonstrate tolerance and patience“, adding that “the result of the referendum is not final until political parties on both sides accept it”. Nevertheless, the celebrations continued unabated, and as the night wore on it became clear that the pro-independence bloc had triumphed, albeit by a tiny margin. At around 5 a.m., Milo Djukanović addressed the crowds who had amassed outside the government building in the city centre. There he officially declared victory and, somewhat controversially, congratulated Serbia on its own independence. The following morning the Republican Referendum Commission announced the first official results – 55.5 percent in favour of independence.

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73 The CEMI used initial reports from polling stations throughout Montenegro, carefully selected to represent the overall electorate as closely as possible. The Montenegrin NGO CDT (Centre for Democratic Transition), perhaps having seen the chaos caused by the preliminary results given by CEMI, chose a more cautious approach. Their spokesperson, Milica Kovačević, stated that “we are of the opinion that the referendum commission should be allowed to complete its work and count all ballot papers. The projections show a very tight result. The CDT does not want to contribute to confusion.” Statement by CDT, Radio Televizija Crne Gore, transmitted 21 May 2006.
75 Speech by Milo Djukanović, Radio Televizija Crne Gore, transmitted 22 May 2006.
44.5 percent in favour of continued union, with the turnout being estimated at 86.3 percent. The grey zone had been avoided by only 0.5 percent.⁷⁶

On 22 May, celebrations were held in the historical capital of Cetinje where Djukanović addressed the crowds, appealing to the opposition bloc to recognise the results of the referendum. But simultaneously, in a statement which served only to further marginalise Serbs in Montenegro, Djukanović hinted that the Montenegrin language will be formally constituted as the official language of Montenegro and that the status of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church would be reviewed, although he was careful to point out that, “it is not up to the state to dispute or proclaim autocephalous status”.⁷⁷ But whilst the pro-independence bloc continued their celebrations, the pro-unionists cried foul. The four leaders of the bloc for state-union requested that the preliminary results of the referendum were checked and that all ballot papers in all voting stations be recounted. In Serbia itself the reaction was relatively muted. By 27 May the Republican Referendum Commission announced the official result as 55.53 percent in favour of independence, and 44.47 percent in favour of continued union with Serbia, based on the total turnout of 86.49 percent.⁷⁸ Serbia officially acknowledged its own independent status on the 6th of June in a parliamentary session that can best be described as low-key.⁷⁹ It marked the end of the joint state of Serbia and Montenegro and ushered in a new era for both republics.

**The Post-Independence Era**

With Montenegro’s independence delivered, Djukanović, as the main architect of the independence project, could enjoy his status as „father of the nation. “ Fearing that the victors would create the much feted „private state“, his critics were heartened by Djukanović’s announcement following the 2006 elections that he would retire from politics to focus on his business interests, although he would remain president of the DPS and retain a seat in the Montenegrin Assembly. Even without the immediacy of engagement in day-to-day political life, however, Djukanović remained in the spotlight. In September 2007, Žejlko Ivanović, the editor of Vijesti, was assaulted by three masked men after leaving a party held in the Ribnica café in Podgorica to celebrate a decade of the publication. Almost immediately, Ivanović publicly blamed Milo Djukanović for arranging the attack upon him. Whilst both Monitor and Vijesti had supported the pro-independence

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⁷⁷ Pobjeda, 23 May 2006, 3.
⁷⁸ International Crisis Group, Montenegro’s Referendum, Europe Briefing, 42. 30 May 2006, 12.
⁷⁹ In the Serbian parliamentary session in which independence was declared neither President Boris Tadić nor Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica were present.
campaign, they have since become increasingly critical of Montenegro’s ruling elite, and in particular Milo Djukanović and his closest associates. In the immediate period before the assault on Ivanović, both publications were very critical of Djukanović, in particular with regard to the peace prize award of the “International League of Humanists” presented to Djukanović (highly inappropriate given his role in the 1991 attack on Dubrovnik, they argued), and with regard to the public disclosure of private financial transactions deemed by Vijesti journalists to represent a clear case of money laundering. Djukanović immediately threatened to sue for libel. A number of the staunchly pro-independence intellectuals who supported the government during the referendum process also fell from grace. The writer Jevrem Brković, founder of the Doclean Academy of Arts and Sciences (Dukljanska akademija nauka i umjetnosti, DANU), is a case in point. Forced into exile in 1992 following public exchanges with Djukanović, Brković returned to Montenegro in the late 1990s and placed himself firmly in the service of the government. Fully rehabilitated, he began to regularly appear, and with increasing frequency in the run up to the referendum, on Montenegrin television and radio, and within the pages of the print media. But after the objective of independence had been met, his brand of Montenegrin nationalism was no longer useful. In November 2006, Brković was assaulted (and his bodyguard killed) in Podgorica, following the release of his latest book Ljubavnik Duklje (“The Lover of Doclea”). Allegedly, through the use of pseudonyms, Brković alluded to the involvement of several high-ranking officials with a number of Montenegro’s core criminals, although links with the government have never been proven. For this, he claims, “they” – meaning associates of Djukanović – tried to kill him. Meanwhile, allegations of involvement with organised crime and links with criminals, such as Andrija Drašković and Stanko Subotić “Cane”, also continued to proliferate. Djukanović, however, sought to silence his critics by making a low-profile visit to the prosecutor’s office in Bari, Italy, in March 2008 – to answer questions regarding his role in cigarette smuggling. His supporters claimed that this demonstrated his innocence, whilst his critics argued that he was doing so only because he would have faced an international arrest warrant had he failed to do so.

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80 Milo Djukanović is alleged to have raised a loan of 1.4 million euros at an unidentified bank in London. The purpose of this was to purchase shares in the First Bank of Montenegro, owned by his brother Aco Djukanović. The problem lies in the fact that those shares were used as a guarantee for the loan, despite the fact that they were not in his possession in the precise moment of acquiring the loan. One month later, the value of the shares of the First Bank of Montenegro doubled.

81 For a more detailed account of the relationship, both business and personal, between Djukanović, Subotić and Drašković, see Monitor (Podgorica), 8 June 2007, 8-10; Vreme (Belgrade), 22 March 2007, 16-21.
In February 2008, however, Djukanović had come out of retirement to take up the post of prime minister once more after his successor, Željko Stjuranović, stepped down due to health problems. During his period out of office, Djukanović remained the president of the DPS and was generally assumed to be pulling the strings behind the scenes. However, there were strains within the ruling DPS-SDP coalition, and these were exacerbated by a widespread feeling that, with Djukanović out of office, the government missed his unique authority. Conversely, the DPS President was reportedly dissatisfied with the Stjuranović government’s performance, and so he returned to the prime minister’s office.

The most difficult issue to face the returning prime minister was how to react to Kosovo’s declaration of independence in February 2008. After months of procrastination, the Montenegrin government announced, on 9 October, that they would formally recognise Kosovo as an independent state. Anticipating the controversy that would inevitably be generated, Milo Đukanović immediately presented the justifications for the course of action his government had taken. Arguing that Montenegro could no longer deny the political reality of an independent Kosovo, Đukanović simultaneously emphasised that, however unpleasant the decision was, recognition of Kosovo would bring benefits, implying that Montenegro’s path into the European Union and NATO could be accelerated as a consequence. Opposition parties organised demonstrations in Podgorica for the evening of 13 October to protest against what they argued was an „illegal and illegitimate act“ on the part of the Montenegrin government. The opposition demands were three-fold: firstly, that the government rescind their decision, which, they argue, does not have democratic legitimacy; secondly, that a democratic referendum on the issue be held, and finally that early parliamentary elections be called. The demonstrations began peacefully but soon turned violent, as protesters attempted to storm Montenegro’s government building. The police used tear gas and baton charges to disperse the crowds, making thirty-five arrests in the process.

Officials from the ruling DPS blamed the violence on „football hooligans“ and „pro-Serb agitators“ from Belgrade, whilst opposition leaders argued that the violence had been orchestrated by state security (NSA) to discredit their actions. Following the 13 October riots, the rhetoric emanating from both sides

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82 *Monitor* (Podgorica), 8 June 2007, 8-10.
84 *Vijesti* (Podgorica), 15 October 2008, 2.
became increasingly antagonistic. The government banned further demonstrations, opposition deputies boycotted the parliament and the leader of the SNS, Andrija Mandić, embarked upon a well-publicised hunger-strike to protest about the recognition and the subsequent ban on further demonstrations. Mandić’s supporters in the northern Montenegrin towns of Bijelo Polje and Berane, the latter in particular being the heartland of SNS support, began a protest walk to Podgorica. Belgrade was also quick to act, expelling the Montenegrin Ambassador in Belgrade, and recalling Belgrade’s opposite number in Podgorica whilst denying involvement in the demonstrations. Yet despite the controversies generated by his approach toward Kosovo, Djukanović has survived. It is accusations that he has enriched himself through illegal activities that have continued to undermine him. In June, in the latest of a series of such accusations, an international consortium, which included the Belgrade-based Centre for Research Journalism of the Independent Association of Serbian Journalists, claimed that Djukanović owned properties and companies worth approximately 14.7 million U.S. dollars, a claim which the Montenegrin prime minister dismissed.

**Conclusion**

In Milo Djukanović, Montenegro possesses the most pragmatic, single-minded and determined politician of his generation. His ability to adapt to fluid political situations and his instinct for political survival has dictated that he remains the only high-profile Balkan politician to survive the last eighteen years relatively unscathed. Whilst he was a key Milošević ally and was instrumental in forging a war psychosis in Montenegro in 1991, he subsequently guided his country through the difficult 1990s and to independence without war. This is a significant achievement that is testament to his remarkable political skill and personal courage. The phenomenon of Milo Djukanović can, to an extent, be understood by how he is perceived among Montenegrins. Even his most vehement critics acknowledge that he possesses qualities that are held in high regard in Montenegrin society (bravery, strength, ruthlessness, charm, physical presence). Very rarely does one politician possess all of these qualities.

But however much one may admire Djukanović’s significant political abilities, it is – in the final analysis – inherently unhealthy for one individual (or even small group of individuals) to dominate a country’s domestic politics for almost two decades. Djukanović presides over a regime that comprises a tight-knit clan of only his closest political (and business) allies, and collectively they control

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86 Dani (Podgorica), 20 October 2008, 1.
87 Večernje Novosti (Belgrade), 20 October 2008, 4.
88 Vijesti (Podgorica), 3 June 2009, 1.
much of Montenegro’s political power structure and economic assets. The Djukanović-led DPS represents the vehicle for the preservation of these vested interests. A state party with control over many aspects of Montenegrin society, the DPS possesses the mechanisms and capacity that make genuine opposition very difficult. Their budget for election campaigns alone significantly outstrips even their closest competitors. Given this, political change may be hard to effect in Montenegro, fundamentally because, in such a small society, the control of the state awards the ruling party a significant advantage over Montenegro’s fragmented opposition (future political change may again emanate from within the ruling elite). Moreover, there is no politician in contemporary Montenegro charismatic enough to challenge Milo Djukanović, and such a dearth of genuine opposition dictates that a change of government or key personnel in Montenegro looks unlikely any time soon. With the DPS firmly holding on to power, Montenegro holds the unenviable record of being the only state in Southeast Europe that has been governed, uninterrupted, by a successor to the communist government.

Milo Djukanović has been the dominant political figure in Montenegro since the mid-1990s and is likely to remain so. Although his position is secure, as has been demonstrated by his handling of the divisive decision to recognise Kosovo’s independence from Serbia, he will have to tread carefully in the coming months, when Montenegro’s previously rapid economic growth is set to go into reverse and contract following the global economic downturn. Milo Djukanović plans to retire from politics in 2011, yet disagreements within DPS ranks over who should become his successor may dictate that he remains the key figure in Montenegrin politics for the foreseeable future. Djukanović is believed to favour Igor Lukšić as his successor. However, other senior figures in the DPS, including Svetozar Marović, have in the past resisted Lukšić’s promotion to the post of prime minister. With his appointment as deputy prime minister in the new government, long-time Djukanović ally Svetozar Marović will most likely stake his own claim to the succession. To prevent a struggle for the succession, Milo Djukanović may delay plans to leave the government.