

The post-communist political transition of Montenegro: Democratization prior to Europeanization

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Abstract: *This paper examines the process of post-communist political transition of Montenegro from the 1989 introduction of multipartism to the 2006 referendum on its independence. Similar to Central/Eastern European (CEE) states, Montenegro has, at certain point, recognized membership in the European Union as the top political priority. However, while the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and other CEE countries had an 'open way' toward the EU subsequent to the collapse of communism, Montenegro — for more than a decade being a part of the internationally isolated federation with Serbia — has gone a long and difficult path. Owing to its divergent transition course, the extent to which EU leverage has affected the democratization of Montenegro substantially differs from that in Central/Eastern European states. In other words, whereas democratic transition of these countries went hand in hand with their European integration, democratization of Montenegro preceded its Europeanization.*

Keywords: *Post-Communist Transition, Democratization, Europeanization, Montenegro, Central/Eastern Europe*

Introduction

Vladimir Goati points out that while great changes in the “social landscape” and dominant political culture in countries of stable democracy took decades, the process of post-communist structural transformation of Central/Eastern European societies was much faster and much more intense (2008: 258). In the countries of the Western Balkans, however, this process was much more intense than fast.¹ The journey from the old world of real socialism to the new democratic one had turned into their worst nightmare before it actually began.

In Montenegro, political and overall life during this period was substantially influenced by several dramatic events, such as the collapse of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY),² wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, economic sanctions by the UN Security Council against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), NATO military intervention against Milosevic’s regime, transformation of the FRY into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) and, finally, the referendum on independence.³ Their cumulative effect on this country resulted in its divergent transition pathway from that of most Central/Eastern European states. While the latter directed them toward the EU, the former led Montenegro into political and economic isolation, making it a reform laggard and late democratizer. Although a multiparty system was established subsequent to the 1989 changes both in Montenegro and these countries, political contexts in which its development took place were thus completely dissimilar.

On the one hand, in light of their likely EU accession, democratic transition of the countries in Central/Eastern Europe was to a large extent determined by EU leverage. Put simply, the willingness of their political elites to fulfill the membership criteria was *conditio sine qua non* of their European integration. As Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier argue, “the desire of most CEECs (the Central and Eastern European countries – I.V.) to join the EU, combined with the high volume and intrusiveness of the rules attached to membership, allow the EU an unprecedented influence in restructuring domestic institutions and the entire range of public policies in the CEEs” (2005: 1).⁴ In other words, democratization of Central/Eastern European states was causally linked with the process of their Europeanization.

On the other hand, trapped under the ruins of a collapsed Yugoslavia, Montenegro was left out of the process of European integration for more than a decade. Being a part of Milosevic’s internationally isolated Yugoslav federation, Montenegro was too far from the EU to be influenced by its leverage during that period. This long stage of Montenegrin transition was hence unaffected by any kind of political incentive coming from Brussels.

At the same time, the basic contours of political life in post-communist Montenegro were created back then. Stated another way, by the time the EU officially

entered Montenegrin political scene, it had already been shaped the way it looks nowadays. Unlike the transition experience of Central/Eastern European countries, democratization of Montenegro thus preceded its Europeanization.

In order to understand the post-communist evolution of the political system in this country, it is crucial to shed light on political conflicts that have determined its path. In my view, those from 1997 between progressive and traditional factions of the ruling Montenegrin party, and from 2001 between supporters and opponents of Montenegrin independence, symbolize critical junctures of this process and turning points in Montenegrin recent political history. As a result of these conflicts, Montenegro has been set on the European tracks of no return.

To completely unfold the logic of the political process that led to these conflicts, it is necessary, however, to enlighten its development prior to them. Therefore, by using a process-tracing method aimed at identifying “causal chain and mechanisms between independent variables and the outcomes of the dependent variable” (George and Bennett, 2005: 206). I will look at the three periods of Montenegrin political transition, dominated by the following political conflicts:

- a) before 1997 — authoritarian versus democratic,
- b) from 1997 to 2001 — progressive versus traditional,
- c) after 2001 — independence versus federalism.

Authoritarian vs. Democratic

Unlike the countries of Central/Eastern Europe, the collapse of the communist regime in Montenegro did not come as a result of bottom-up social pressures aimed at substantial change to the existing political system. Instead, the 1989 transfer of power happened within the ruling party, from old elite to a new one. On the wave of populist movement instigated by Slobodan Milosevic⁵, in the atmosphere of street protests in Podgorica⁶, the nationalist stream of the League of Montenegrin Communists (SK CG) forced the incumbents out of office.⁷ As a result, the foundation was laid for close cooperation of political regimes in Montenegro and Serbia based on loyalty of the former to the latter.

Moreover, while those controlling the Montenegrin system of governance altered, the system itself thus remained intact. Therefore, although it led to the formal establishment of a pluralist political arrangement a year later, the 1989 revolution did not bring about genuine discontinuity with the *ancien* regime. As Srdjan Darmanovic points out, the Montenegrin leadership turnover was “at base a Serbian-engineered coup with strong nationalist overtones, and not a democratic opening” (2003: 147).

In the first multiparty election held in Montenegro in 1990, the League of Communists — with new leadership and under the original name — performed

extraordinarily. The party alone won 56.2 % of votes and as many as 83 out of 125 seats in the Parliament. Its overwhelming victory — unmatched elsewhere in ex-Yugoslavia⁸ — was, according to Bieber, determined by three main factors:

“Firstly, the ‘anti-bureaucratic revolution’ in the Republic had happened less than two years prior to the elections and the Serbian nationalist movement in Montenegro, represented by the new leadership of SK CG, Momir Bulatovic and Milo Djukanovic, continued to be genuinely popular within the Republic ... Secondly, the Communist system, despite being discredited, was still more popular than elsewhere. Thirdly, the conditions for the elections were hardly free and fair; information about the political alternatives were limited and — where available — usually aimed at discrediting the opposition.” (2003: 16–7)

Soon after the election, the SK CG renamed the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS). By using monopolies of power inherited from the previous system, the DPS will remain predominant political force in Montenegro until 1997. Darmanovic portrays the face of its power in the following way:

“The DPS held the system together by assiduously using its complete control over state organs and resources in order to squelch critics and rivals and win elections. The usual range of methods was employed, including party domination of the state-owned media; the packing of offices with party favorites; the maintenance of slush funds; occasional intimidation of adversaries; the abuse of police authority to influence the electoral process; and manipulations of the electoral system. Backed by these kinds of tactics, the DPS easily bested its dispirited opponents and retained an absolute majority of seats in the Montenegrin parliament.” (2003: 147)

In view of that, one can rightfully argue that Montenegro from the early transition period stands for a typical example of Anna Grzymala-Busse’s concept of “rebuilding the post-communist Leviathan,” symbolizing the exploitative reconstruction of state by political elite (2007: 1). While formally establishing new democratic system, Montenegrin governing party actually sought to ensure control over state institutions and resources, thereby increasing the odds of its own political survival.

More to the point, Grzymala-Busse underlines that “the degree to which governing parties can obtain private benefits from public state assets is constrained by robust competition: opposition parties that offer a clear, plausible, and critical governing alternative that threatens the governing coalition with replacement” (ibid). Throughout the first decade of Montenegrin post-communist transition, the opposition was weak and unable to jeopardize absolute political domination of the Democratic Party of Socialists. The results of 1992 and 1996 parliamentary elections⁹ clearly showed the powerlessness of opposition demands to the DPS for political and economic transformation of the country into a modern democratic system based on market economy principles.

The unlimited political authority of the Democratic Party of Socialist, accompanied by ineffective opposition activity aimed at its restraining, was undoubtedly the main characteristic of the first phase of Montenegrin transition. Its further development, however, was determined not by this political conflict, but the one within the incumbent party. Considering its power and the degree of influence on the overall situation in the country, I believe this fact should not come as a surprise.

Progressive vs. Traditional

In 1997, up to that time politically predominant DPS formally split up as a result of internal disagreement between the two party factions: progressive, led by Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic, and traditionalist, led by Montenegrin President Momir Bulatovic. The latter subsequently transformed into a new Socialist People's Party (SNP). This was the first serious conflict in the post-communist political life of Montenegro and, more importantly, the one whose outcome would largely determine its political future. In order to understand the reasons behind it, it is necessary to come back to the very beginning of the Montenegrin transition story and enlighten the relationship of the DPS with Slobodan Milosevic.

Political ties of the Montenegrin officials with the Serbian strongman would remain close even after it became obvious that his politics was inevitably leading Yugoslavia into a serious political crisis. In fact, following its collapse, they argued vociferously that Montenegro should continue living with Serbia within a single state, subsequently organizing a referendum in order to gain popular mandate for such decision. On the 1st of March 1992, the majority of 62 per cent of Montenegrins agreed to stay within a two-member federation with the country whose president was probably the most responsible for war that was already underway in the neighborhood. Therefore, as a consequence of the decision of its political elite and the will of its citizens, Montenegro became both a part of the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and a subject to UN sanctions.¹⁰

The alliance of its incumbent party with Slobodan Milosevic thus resulted in international economic and political isolation of Montenegro. What is more, given the absolute political domination of the DPS, it was clear that as long as the party was loyal to the regime in Belgrade the country itself would be trapped in stalled transition.¹¹ Therefore, the only way out of this situation was an alteration of the pro-Milosevic political course of the Montenegrin ruling party.

Faced with terrible consequences of the Serbian regime's belligerent politics¹², while being aware of his own political responsibility in this regard, the vice-president of the party and Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic gradually moved away from it.¹³ Instead, in the period subsequent to the end of the war in Bosnia,

he found new political partners — in the first place the EU and the US. As Bieber notices, “the rapid improvement of relations between the FRY and the West in late 1995 and early 1996 was taken by the Montenegrin government as an opportunity to build closer economic and political ties with western countries while loosening the federation with Serbia” (2003: 27).

Djukanovic’s occasional and moderate criticism of the Serbian autocrat finally turned into an open confrontation in 1996. After he explicitly endorsed the protests of the Serbian political opposition against Milosevic later that year¹⁴, it became obvious that Djukanovic turned his back to the Belgrade regime once and for all.¹⁵ At the same time, unlike the Prime Minister, the President of Montenegro and the chair of the Democratic Party of Socialists Momir Bulatovic remained loyal to the old political ally from Serbia. A conflict between the two most important figures of Montenegrin politics and crisis in their party were therefore inevitable. Ironically, the split within its leadership took place only a few months after the party convincingly triumphed in November 1996 parliamentary election. Bearing this mind, some analyst believed that Milosevic secretly sparked the dispute — thereby using Bulatovic as his willing agent — as a part of the plan to smoke out and eliminate opponents within the DPS (Darmanovic, 2003: 148).

However, by the will of the majority of its officials, Djukanovic came out the winner of this conflict. His takeover of the party control was a clear signal to Bulatovic’s faction to leave the DPS. From that moment on, as Darmanovic notices, “the game was ... no longer a matter of the regime versus the opposition, but of regime reformists plus the opposition versus pro-Milosevic forces led by President Bulatovic” (Ibid: 149).

Although Djukanovic had prevailed within the party, the presidential election in October 1997 was still to show which one of the Montenegrin political leaders had majoritarian popular support. After the first round that was a virtual tie, Djukanovic won the second by less than 5,500 votes (out of 344,000 cast) and became the new President of Montenegro. His narrow victory was, in fact, the first political setback for Slobodan Milosevic in this country since 1989. At the same time, it was an unambiguous indicator of greater political changes in Montenegro. In this regard, the symbolic connotation of the violent riots in the Montenegrin capitol on the night of 13–14 January 1998, when the followers of the outgoing president — unwilling to accept the election result — attacked the government building,¹⁶ as well as the presence of the ambassadors of the US and the EU states at the inauguration of the new one two days later, was exceptionally strong.

However, Djukanovic still had to win the next legislative balloting in order to finally consolidate power and additionally strengthen his anti-Milosevic position. In the parliamentary election held on the last day of May 1998, the coalition of three parties grouped around Djukanovic’s DPS won an absolute majority of 45 out of

73 seats, whereas Bulatovic's newly formed Socialist People's Party garnered only 19 mandates.¹⁷ Hailed by the entire Western world, this great success of progressive political forces in Montenegro initiated the process of its genuine democratic transition.¹⁸

On the one hand, this was the final point of the period of Milosevic's domination over Montenegrin politics. Elected the president of the Yugoslav federation in 1997, the autocrat was now left with an open confrontation as the only option available to reassert control over Montenegro (Ibid). In light of the escalating conflict in Kosovo, owing to a considerable presence of the Milosevic-controlled Yugoslav army on Montenegrin soil, tensions between Belgrade and Podgorica did gradually increase. Nonetheless, says Darmanovic, Montenegro actually faced little more than Serbia's belligerent tone and occasional military threats, combined with harassment from the federal government (2003: 149).¹⁹

On the other hand, the Montenegrin government was finally able to take the country's destiny into its own hands. Accordingly, it began taking over function after function from the federal state level.²⁰ In return, through the establishment of border checkpoints between the two republics, Yugoslav authorities practically denied Montenegro an access to the Serbian market.

Still, the pro-democratic Montenegrin leadership was receiving significant political and economic support²¹ from the most important Western countries. In the situation where Milosevic was getting ready to make new problems in the region, they recognized Djukanovic as a new chance for its stability. Their expectations were fulfilled and the pro-Western and pro-European political orientation of Montenegrin president strongly confirmed the 1999 NATO intervention against Yugoslavia. Namely, despite strong pressures coming from Milosevic and the pro-Milosevic opposition in Montenegro aimed at involving the state into the conflict, Djukanovic managed to keep it neutral.²² Although still a part of the FRY, Montenegro was clearly no longer in the same political boat with Serbia. While its captain was tirelessly drilling new wholes in its hull, until its crew decided to dismiss him in October 2000,²³ the smaller republic of the Yugoslav federation was surely heading toward Western ports.

After Milosevic was finally toppled, the most serious threat to security of Montenegro was gone. However, although a new democratic government was formed in Belgrade, the dilemma remained of whether this state could ever be an equal partner in the FRY with seventeen-times-its-size-Serbia. During the last period of Milosevic's rule, as previously mentioned, the government of Montenegro considerably increased the span of its sovereignty in order to protect the country from the consequences of his politics. Moreover, for the first time in the post-communist history of Montenegro, the opinion polls were showing a stable majority of its citizens favoring its independence.²⁴ Now, when the battle of pro-Western Montenegrin elite

against the Serbian dictator and his domestic followers was over, the statehood question was hence emerging as a new line of political cleavage in the country.

Independence vs. Federalism

As long as the Democratic Party of Socialists was united and in close relations with Belgrade, advocates of Montenegrin independence had no choice but to put aside this question. For that reason, the 1997 split between Djukanovic and Bulatovic symbolized a genuine spark of hope for those dreaming about the rebirth of the Montenegrin state.²⁵ As Darmanovic notices, it was the moment when “the Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic and his Democratic Party of Socialist, upset by Milosevic’s authoritarianism and the potential international costs of being associated with his rule, began to shift toward a policy of independence from Belgrade and its dictator” (2007: 153).

In the period between the 1997 democratic changes in Montenegro and the democratic changes in Serbia three years later, the development of the political situation in the FRY was extremely favorable for the idea of an independent Montenegro. On the one hand, the sovereignty project began its journey toward majority approval, with the local political elite putting wind in its sails (Ibid: 154). On the other hand, the more problems Milosevic was causing, the bigger support from the West this elite was getting.

However, after the revolution in Serbia put an end to his regime in October 2000, political circumstances in the Federation changed drastically. In a completely different political context, with a new government in Belgrade supported by the entire democratic world, Montenegro was no longer playing the role of its favorite in the Balkans.²⁶ Likewise, now when the threat of Milosevic was gone and democracy in Serbia “finally” prevailed, compassion for the idea of Montenegrin independence was replaced by concern for stability of the region. After an entire decade of Yugoslav wars, with the one in Kosovo finished in late 1999, the US and, in particular, the EU did not want to take the risk of giving consent for creating another Balkan border. As stated in an International Crisis Group (ICG) analysis on the Montenegrin referendum, “the EU worked very hard to counter, or at least postpone, any prospect of Montenegrin independence, which it felt would have a negative spillover effect in Kosovo and force a decision on its final status before the international community had a consensus on that question, and have a wider destabilizing effect in a still fragile region” (2006: 2).

At the same time, long time being a victim of political decisions that it could not possibly influence, Montenegro had its own bad memories from this period. The damage to enthusiasm and trust of the Montenegrin people in joint life with Serbia,

made by Belgrade's official politics was simply beyond repair. Albeit welcoming the beginning of new, post-Milosevic political era in the FRY, the political leadership of Montenegro thus clearly said no to the idea of turning the wheel of their joint history back.

Instead, the coalition around Djukanovic's DPS proposed to its new Serbian partners a redefinition of the relations between the two states on a completely different institutional basis.²⁷ On the one hand, it included a Czechoslovak-style "velvet divorce" of Montenegro and Serbia that would both gain independence and international recognition. On the other hand, in a similar fashion to the EU member states, they would sign an association accord guaranteeing some functional binds between Podgorica and Belgrade. However, due to the previously mentioned historical reasons, the initiative of the Montenegrin government gained little support in Brussels and Washington.

In April 2001, while the talks on future relations of Montenegro and Serbia were still underway, parliamentary election took place in Montenegro. Considering the character of electoral alliances, it was obvious that the statehood question was dominating its political scene. The ruling Democratic Party of Socialists, in the coalition with the Social Democratic Party, presented the program of independent state of Montenegro and promised a referendum on this issue if reelected. Contrary to them, the opposition Socialist People's Party, the People's Party and the Serb People's Party (SNS) formed the coalition "Together for Yugoslavia" offering substantially different perspective of its future development, based on the maintenance of the joint state with Serbia.

The first coalition won 36 out of 77 seats and, supported by the traditionally pro-independent Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG) that gained 6 mandates in this election, formed a new, minority government. The concept of an independent Montenegrin state hence got strong popular legitimacy.²⁸ Alongside the 1997 split within the DPS, which initiated the process of genuine transition and actual democratization of Montenegro, this was the most important moment in its modern political history.

On the one hand, stirred by the great electoral victory of the idea of Montenegrin sovereignty, the DPS officially modified the party program in the Congress held a few months later, proclaiming a democratic, internationally recognized, independent state of Montenegro as its main political goal. At the same time, despite the April failure, the Montenegrin opposition did not change political course but remained loyal to the vision of Montenegro and Serbia in a single state. The main political cleavage in Montenegro until the 2006 referendum would thus be the one separating supporters of its independence and opponents to this concept.

On the other hand, the 2001 elections symbolize the turning point in the relations of Montenegro with the European Union. Beside the independence and inter-

national recognition of Montenegro, in the abovementioned Congress following the elections, the Democratic Party of Socialists officially declared another great political goal — European integration of Montenegrin state and society.²⁹ In effect, this was only a formal verification of the pro-European policy of this party which, albeit existing from 1997, could not be implemented under the conditions of isolation and Milosevic's political domination over Montenegro.

While the DPS thus merely confirmed its attitude toward European integration, the Socialist People's Party (SNP), as the leading force of Montenegrin political opposition, substantially modified its official policy regarding this issue just before the 2001 election. Less than a month after the October 2000 democratic changes in Serbia that put an end to Milosevic's rule, although being his closest political partner until that very moment, the SNP formed a coalition in the Yugoslav Parliament with those Serbian parties that had organized his overthrow. The party's overnight change of political course would be formalized by its Congress in February 2001, when a new leadership was elected, while Momir Bulatovic and other pro-Milosevic officials were deposed.

The SNP's break with Milosevic also marked its discontinuity with the anti-Western and anti-European orientation from the period of their political alliance. Namely, the party Congress adopted the Resolution in which expressed full support to the process of European integration of Montenegro within the Federal State of Yugoslavia. What happened within the SNP actually indicated a new political trend among Montenegrin opposition parties most of which, as Darmanovic notices, "changed leaders and began expressing a newfound appreciation for Europe and the European rules of the game" (2007: 156).

Finally, main Montenegrin parties adapting their official policies toward the European Union to the new political situation in the country, the EU itself considerably changed its point of view as well as the institutional approach to political processes in Montenegro. Previously acting as a part of the wider Western coalition, the Union now formally entered the political life of this state as an individual actor with its own political agenda. The official Brussels stepped in by launching a strong initiative aimed at persuading political leadership of Montenegro to give up the independence plan. Instead, it forcefully advocated creation of a state union of Montenegro and Serbia, i.e. maintenance of the integrity of what was left of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Edmunds: 2009, 136), as their fastest way route to the EU membership.³⁰

As a result of such pressure, despite majoritarian popular support for independence of Montenegro and notwithstanding the credits for democratizing the country while opposing Milosevic's regime, its government was forced to suspend the realization of this idea. In accordance with political demands coming from Brussels, Montenegrin officials signed the Belgrade Agreement in March 2002, which initiated the process

of creation of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG). It would be finished in February 2003 when the Constitutional Charter establishing the new State Union was finally agreed by the highest political representatives of Montenegro, Serbia and the European Union.

Responsive to the new political situation in the country and hence willing to make compromises with Brussels and Belgrade, Montenegrin officials were nonetheless everything but ready to abandon the concept of an independent state. At their insistence, a “temporality clause” was built in the Constitutional Charter guaranteeing the right to both constitutive members of the SCG to opt out of it via referendum after three years (Article 60). This way, the legal framework was set up for a future plebiscite on independence of Montenegro.

However, not all pro-independent Montenegrin parties were ready to justify the postponement of a referendum in terms of “political realism.” In fact, immediately after the signing of Belgrade Agreement, the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro accused the ruling coalition of betraying national interests and, accordingly, ceased to uphold the minority Montenegrin government. For that reason, a new parliamentary election was held in October 2002.

Its outcome left no doubt about at least three things. First of all, the old ruling coalition of the Democratic Party of Socialists and the Social Democratic Party won an absolute majority of seats (39 out of 75), which only confirmed its supremacy in the political scene of Montenegro. Moreover, the name of the DPS-SDP electoral list — “For European Montenegro” — clearly demonstrated that the lack of EU understanding for the key element of political program of this coalition, i.e. the independence of Montenegro, had absolutely no influence on its pro-European orientation. Finally, the overall result of pro-independent political parties (62.3 % of seats in the Parliament) showed a considerable increase of public support for the idea of Montenegrin sovereignty from the last elections in 2001 (57 %).³¹

Like in the last phase of Milosevic’s rule, the time after the 2002 elections was again working for the Montenegrin ruling coalition and the idea of an independent Montenegrin state. Knowing that a great opportunity for its final accomplishment was only three years away, while having a perfectly stable political situation in the country, the government in Podgorica was now merely to be patient. Besides, from the very formation of the new State Union in 2003, the functioning of its institutions did not go as planned. Some of them, such as the Court of Serbia and Montenegro, would not be established for another two years, in spite of the legal obligation of their foundation within 30 days from the Constitutional Charter adoption (Article 3).

During this period, Serbia seemed primarily focused on its own internal political issues.³² However, as the referendum moment was getting closer, Belgrade’s pro-unionist orientation and its ensuing support to the Montenegrin opposition were becoming more and more apparent.³³ While formally accepting the right of

Montenegrins to freely decide on their country's statehood, Serbian government did everything it possibly could to prevent its secession.³⁴ As pointed out in the aforementioned ICG analysis, official Belgrade on numerous occasions hinted at terrible consequences if Montenegro chose independence:

“The Belgrade tabloid press carried sensational stories warning of Albanian and Croat plots to use Montenegro to dismantle the State Union and then to carve up Montenegro between them. Even the staid, government-influenced daily *Politika* carried a front page article hinting that Albanians would decide the referendum. Other newspapers speculated that all Montenegrins might face sudden unemployment inside Serbia or students would be forced to cut their studies short.” (2006: 5)

On top of it, in June 2005, Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica openly interfered in the pre-referendum process by handing over to the EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn the list of — presumably pro-unionist oriented — Montenegrins living in Serbia³⁵, arguing that they should be allowed to vote on the plebiscite. His effort, nonetheless, proved to be futile.³⁶

Back in Montenegro, supporters and opponents of its independence could not agree even on the basic rules of referendum procedure. Therefore, the EU was able to decisively influence their establishment through the process of mediation between the two sides.³⁷ On its suggestion, the threshold majority for the success of referendum was set at 55 per cent of votes cast. As a result of adoption of such unprecedented voting rule, political parties grouped in the “Movement for European State Union of Serbia and Montenegro”³⁸ gained considerable advantage to their opponents from the “Movement for Independent European Montenegro”³⁹. Believing this supermajority to be out of their reach, the unionist bloc agreed to partake in the referendum race. The possibility of its boycott of the referendum due to high probability of majoritarian popular support for independence was hence forestalled.⁴⁰

At the same time, the pro-independence bloc also accepted to compete under these referendum rules owing to its leaders' conviction that the 55 per cent threshold could be achieved as well as their awareness of the EU legitimacy which Montenegrin independence would acquire in that case. The EU's majority requirement thus gave rise to high mobilization within both referendum blocs as well as impressive turnout of almost 87 per cent of eligible voters. As a result of the referendum⁴¹ held on 21 May 2006, by the will of more than 230,000 of its citizens and the majority of 55.5 % votes cast, Montenegro became an independent state.

Conclusion

Being at the same historic crossroads after the collapse of communism in 1989, the countries of Central/Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and the Western Balkans⁴², on the other, moved on in opposite directions. While the former region subsequently started the process of structural transformation of political and economic system, the latter entered the period of crisis that would end up in Europe's bloodiest conflict after the Second World War. As a result, the Western Balkans states lost almost a decade in facing the consequences whereas the countries of Central/Eastern Europe used this time to gradually move toward the EU through fulfillment of its membership criteria.

Although being the only country of the Western Balkans that managed to stay away from the terror of Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, Montenegro was not exempted from its isolation from the mainstream of European integration process during this period. In fact, when compared with the other states of the region, Montenegro was in considerably worse situation in this regard due to the unresolved statehood question. Therefore, its post-communist political development was, for the most part, unaffected by external incentives of the European Union. As a result, opposite to the transition experience of Central/Eastern European countries, the process of democratization of Montenegro, which followed the 1997 split within its ruling party, preceded its Europeanization.

Notes

- ¹ See: Vujadinovic et al. (2005).
- ² A comprehensive study of the political crisis that led to the end of socialist Yugoslavia, find in: Mihajlov (1991).
- ³ See interesting analyses of different aspects of Montenegrin post-communist transition, in: Bieber et al. (2003).
- ⁴ For more on this topic, see: Ekiert, Kubik and Vachudova (2005); Grzymala-Busse and Innes (2003); Haughton (2007); Jacoby (2001); Moravcsik and Vachudova (2003); Schimmelfennig (2000), (2001), (2003), (2007); Schimmelfennig, Engert, and Knobel (2003); Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2002), (2004); Vachudova (2002), (2005).
- ⁵ On Milosevic's rise to power and his political strategy, see: Gagnon (1994).
- ⁶ The capital of Montenegro.
- ⁷ The removal of the old communist leadership of Montenegro from power – later to be labeled the “anti-bureaucratic revolution” – was, in effect, a part of the wider process of nationalist mobilization which, set in motion by Milosevic, was inspired by the idea of supposedly endangered Serbian national interest within existing Yugoslavia. The most immediate goal of this movement, as Florian Bieber explains, was the overthrow of republican and provincial elites which were portrayed as anti-Serb: “After the protests – in conjunction with an internal party

coup – had succeeded in replacing the political leadership of Vojvodina in summer 1988 with new pro-Milosevic authorities, the demonstrations focused on Montenegro ... During the protests, the Montenegrin elite was likened to Vuk Brankovic, the mythological Serbian traitor at the Kosovo battle in 1389, while a personality cult surrounding Milosevic described him as a savior” (2003: 13–5).

- ⁸ For instance, in 1990 parliamentary elections, the Croatian Democratic Union of Franjo Tudjman won 42 % of votes, whereas Milosevic’s Socialist Party of Serbia garnered support of 46.1 % of the voters.
- ⁹ In 1992 parliamentary election the DPS won 46 out of 85 seats in the Parliament, whereas in 1996 election its result was 45 out of 71 seats.
- ¹⁰ Darmanovic notices that 1992 referendum was “a unique case of political elite and a population deciding to remain within a country (Milosevic’s new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) that at the very time of its formation had been placed under sanctions by the world community” (2003: 146).
- ¹¹ Belgrade’s strong political presence in Montenegro, apart from the close relation of its leadership with Milosevic, was determined by several other factors. Firstly, Serbian aggressive nationalistic propaganda aimed against the Croats, Slovenes, Albanians and other “separatists,” resonated extremely well in Montenegro where a significant majority of people – feeling strongly about Yugoslavia – embraced Milosevic as its “defender.” In addition, the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as one of the main institutional pillars of the Belgrade’s nationalism, was exceptionally strong in Montenegro throughout 1990s. Finally, a few extreme pro-Serb nationalist parties, such as the People’s Party, played a prominent role in the Montenegrin political scene during this period.
- ¹² For instance, in 1993, the Montenegrin GDP was below 70 % of the one in 1990, whereas the annual inflation rate of 123,751,836,168,522 % was one of the highest ever recorded (Djuric, 2003: 140).
- ¹³ Despite the outward harmony of their relations in the first half of the 1990s, political interests of the governments in Belgrade and Podgorica would not always match during this period. As outlined above, owing to the crisis in the region, the Montenegrin leadership was facing dire economic and political situation in the country, which resulted in gradual moderation of its political discourse. For this reason, Bieber writes, “the disenchantment of the DPS with the Socialist Party in Serbia became visible” when the latter formed a coalition in 1993 with the extreme nationalist, pro-war Radical Party (2003: 24). At the same time, he underlines, politically dominant Serbia sought to obstruct the normalization of political relations between Montenegro and its neighbors: “In response to a rapprochement with Albania, for example, the Serbian authorities stopped some trucks crossing the Montenegrin-Serbian border,” justifying embargo on Montenegro by “a ban on the export of goods from Serbia, which were deemed strategic during the times of crisis” (Ibid). However, political relations between the two governments remained generally cordial until 1996, which lead Bieber to conclude that this worsening was “only temporary.”
- ¹⁴ Three month-long street demonstrations came as a reaction to Milosevic’s attempt to rig the results of local elections held in November. For more about the activities of Serbian opposition in this period, see: Bieber (2003b), McCarthy (1997).
- ¹⁵ This was confirmed in Djukanovic’s interview to a Serbian weekly “Vreme” in spring 1997, in which he dismissed Milosevic as an “obsolete politician” saying that “in numerous and big mistakes he made so far, he made an impression of someone that lacks the ability to seriously and in a long-term project the future, and choose the right way to it.” Available at: <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=327446> (Accessed on 2 June 2011).

- ¹⁶ Darmanovic asserts that Milosevic was content to stand by during these events and not send the Yugoslav army into Montenegro, “probably because he calculated that he would get other opportunities to deal with Djukanovic” (2003: 149).
- ¹⁷ The same month, as an expression of Milosevic’s gratitude for his political loyalty, Bulatovic was elected the Prime Minister of the FRY.
- ¹⁸ Darmanovic (2002) uses the term “second transition.”
- ¹⁹ For the preservation of peace on its soil, the smaller Yugoslav republic was most probably to thank Milosevic’s unwillingness to open another military front, after the war broke out in Kosovo in 1998/9.
- ²⁰ Beside the takeover of the taxation system and foreign trade, one of the most important decisions the government of Montenegro made in this regard was the change of its official currency in November 1999 from the Yugoslav dinar to the Deutschmark. Three years later, the government went for an automatic switch to the Euro as the new official currency.
- ²¹ For instance, direct U.S. support that Montenegro was then receiving was exceeded, per capita, only by the American aid to Israel.
- ²² This was exceptionally difficult due to the fact that NATO targeted its air strikes against Yugoslav military installations in Montenegro as well. Since Djukanovic failed to react by supporting “patriotic defense of the country against the evil alliance” (standard interpretation of the conflict by Serbian media in that period), there was a real possibility of the clash between police forces loyal to him and army formations in Montenegro controlled by Milosevic. Peace was, nonetheless, preserved.
- ²³ See an interesting analysis of the last years of Milosevic’s rule in: Thompson and Kuntz (2004).
- ²⁴ These trends can be found in the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) brochures titled Public Opinion in Montenegro 2000 and Public Opinion in Montenegro 2001.
- ²⁵ Prior to the end of the First World War, Montenegro had been independent for centuries. It was the only portion of the Balkan Peninsula never to come under the rule of Turkish Ottoman Empire. At the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Montenegro was internationally recognized as a sovereign state. However, as a part of the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, Montenegro was first military occupied, then formally annexed by Serbia and hence abolished as a state. In 1945, Montenegro became one of the six republics of socialist Yugoslavia.
- ²⁶ As a strong indicator of the Western “turn to Belgrade,” Aaron Presnall reminds that, following the end of the Milosevic regime, “international donors virtually flooded Serbia with money, initially to seize a perceived window of opportunity to boost efforts at democratization of the new order” (2009: 662).
- ²⁷ In fact, back in 1999, the ruling coalition in Montenegro was already considering the possibility of transformation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into the confederation of two independent states. Needless to say, such an idea did not have any chance for success as long as Milosevic was in office in Belgrade.
- ²⁸ The two parties of Albanians in Montenegro, the Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA) and the Democratic Alliance in Montenegro (DSCG), with one mandate each, endorsed the pro-independent government as well, which thus had the support of 44 out of 77 (57 %) delegates in the new assembly of the Parliament. The coalition “Together for Yugoslavia” had 33 seats.
- ²⁹ Accordingly, the new party manifesto was named “Along with Europe.”

- ³⁰ Due to noticeable personal engagement of Javier Solana, the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, in its creation, the State Union was later unofficially named "Solanaland."
- ³¹ In the 2002 election, pro-independent parties won 45 out of 75 seats in the Parliament. Next to 39 mandates of the coalition "For European Montenegro," the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro won 4, whereas two parties of Albanians in Montenegro won one mandate each. At the same time, the pro-federalist coalition "Together for Changes" won 30 seats.
- ³² On 12 March 2003, Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was assassinated in Belgrade. The state of emergency that was subsequently declared in Serbia as well as other consequences of this act would shift the center of political attention in this country away from the question of State Union with Montenegro.
- ³³ A while ago, Serbian businessman Slobodan Radulovic publically stated that the Serbian government of Vojislav Kostunica donated 5 million euro to the Montenegrin opposition prior to the referendum. Such claim was confirmed by Dobrilo Dedeic, a former high official of the pro-unionist New Serb Democracy in Montenegro. Available at: <http://www.portalanalitika.me/politika/licnosti/23183-finasirali-su-nas-i-beko-i-mikovi-.html> (Accessed on 1 June 2011).
- ³⁴ According to the recently released Wikileaks document from March 2006, even the Serbian president Boris Tadic – widely considered to be politically moderate – sought to convince the US ambassador to the OSCE Julie Finley that the Montenegrin government was buying voter identification cards from opposition supporters at the rate of 500 euro per voter, to keep their referendum turnout low. Available at: <http://www.aftenposten.no/spesial/wikileaksdokumenter/article4133429.ece> (Accessed on 3 June 2011).
- ³⁵ Their overall number, according to this document, was 264,802.
- ³⁶ Political credibility of the Kostunica's government was, at that time, seriously impaired given that, in May 2005, the EU suspended the Stabilization and Association talks with Serbia over its failure to fully cooperate with the Hague Tribunal.
- ³⁷ Even the President of the Montenegrin Referendum Commission (MRK) was an EU official – Slovak diplomat Frantisek Lipka.
- ³⁸ Those were the old political allies, namely the Socialist People's Party, the Serb People's Party and the People's Party as well as several smaller pro-Serb parties.
- ³⁹ The main political parties of this Movement were the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists and Social Democratic Party, but also the Liberal Party of Montenegro, the Civic Party of Montenegro and the parties of the national minorities in Montenegro (Bosniaks, Muslims, Albanians and Croats). Therefore, unlike the Movement for European State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, this one had a strong multi-ethnic character.
- ⁴⁰ As written in the abovementioned ICG study, the basic intention of the EU's proposal of referendum formula was precisely "to avert the instability that might result from an independence referendum conducted in the face of an opposition boycott" (2006: 2).
- ⁴¹ The referendum question was: "Do you want the Republic of Montenegro to be an independent state with a full international and legal personality?"
- ⁴² Former Yugoslav republics, plus Albania, minus Slovenia.

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