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***FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA:
THE MONTENEGRIN DILEMMA***

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1. Introduction

Following the international celebrations around the post-Milosevic government in Belgrade, the Montenegro question continues to generate concern. The prospect of dissolution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) or of internal instability in FRY and Montenegro has not disappeared. Although the future of FRY is no longer an issue of war and peace, since all sides are committed to settle the matter at a political level, the potential for more tensions and divisions in the region remains.

In this paper, after a brief overview of recent political developments in Serbian-Montenegrin relations, we will explore the potential for future destabilization in and around Montenegro, and provide an analysis of the political fight around the status of Montenegro as the junior republic of Serbia in the FRY (Chapter 3). In addition to the constitutional debate there are also other potential hotspots that have to be taken into account, in particular relations with ethnic minorities. The position of the Albanian minority in Montenegro has been the subject of controversy, and we will present the available information and make an assessment on the basis of this (Chapter 4). Finally, we will briefly explore the economic challenges Montenegro is facing and the potential for growing tensions (Chapter 5).

2. Milosevic's Yugoslavia in Crisis

In this first chapter the recent history of Montenegro is explored in particular focusing on the last 10 years. We will describe how the Milosevic era affected affiliations to two historical traditions in Montenegrin society. From a period of illiberal democracy we enter a period where Montenegrin President Djukanovic has succeeded in conquering and developing an autonomous political space.

2.1 Two Historical Traditions

The current polarization of Montenegrin society can to a large extent be explained by an identity problem with ancient roots.¹ There are two historical traditions in Montenegrin history which function as background and reference points for today's conflict. The centre of Montenegrin ancestry and pride is to be found in the region of Cetinje, which more or less preserved its autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. This process finally resulted in an independent Montenegrin state, recognized in 1878 at the Congress of Berlin. According to this view, the Montenegrin identity was formed around the idea of a state that has developed slowly by grouping together various autonomous, local, Montenegrin tribes. There is also a second interpretation of these events. As the region around Cetinje expanded, some tribes with strong ties to Serbian lands were incorporated. Montenegrins integrating several aspects of Serbian culture began to identify strongly with Serbs, and finally eventually even called themselves "the best of the Serbs". These two tendencies have always been present in the political and cultural life of Montenegro.

¹ Stallaerts, R., Montenegro: Splitting the Federation, a Split in Society, in European Center for Conflict Prevention (ed.), *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peace Building Activities*, New York: Lynne Rienner, fc February 2002

This dualism can be recognized in the period around the First World War. The Montenegrin King Nikola had gone into exile and in 1918 the Montenegrin lands came under the control of pro-Serbian military forces. The Serbian politician Nikola Pasic intended to incorporate Montenegro into the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes by annexing Montenegro to Serbia. Local Montenegrin forces, not at all or only loosely connected to King Nikola, flocked together to resist pure annexation. They had the right to participate in the election of the deputies to the special Great National Assembly, the organ that was to decide on the political future of Montenegro. Their list of candidates was printed on green paper, which gave them the name “the Greens”. The pro-Serbian voters voted on white lists and would from then on be called “the Whites”. Even today reference is made to a Green or White political affiliation.

The present political position of President Djukanovic could partly be put in context by the historical background just referred to. Although he began his political career in the Communist Party, he left the pro-Serbian camp for a clear pro-Montenegrin stance. Milo Djukanovic originates from the Cevo, one of the old Montenegrin clans and traditionally with “green” affiliation. Moreover, Djukanovic’s parents were persecuted after the war by the “whites”, and this most likely influenced his opinions on Montenegrin autonomy and statehood. Whatever the significance of these personal data, Djukanovic’s political standpoints and those of his adversaries can be related to the main basic contradiction that had long been present in Montenegrin history.

2.2 Illiberal Democracy

From 1990 to 1997 Montenegro was a good example of what the ESI (European Stability Initiative) has called “illiberal democracy”: a political system that went from socialism to formal democracy without major changes either in its ruling elite or in the way political power was exercised.²

Instrumental to that end was the so-called “anti-bureaucratic revolution”. Massive street protests initiated an internal coup against the communist leadership of Montenegro, enabling a younger group of party leaders loyal to Serbian leader Milosevic to take over.³ This completed Milosevic’s effort to control the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), since the representatives of four out of eight federal units in the federal presidency were now loyal to him: Serbia, Kosovo, Vojvodina and Montenegro. However, since the other republics did not want to stay in a Yugoslavia dominated by Serbia, the tendency towards independence was increased in other republics, which meant the end of the SFRY. Momir Bulatovic and Milo Djukanovic had lead the revolution and became respectively president and secretary general of the Communist Party. This in turn opened to them the functions of President and Prime Minister of the Republic of Montenegro. For eight years, the Montenegrin communists - renamed the Democratic Party of Socialists (Demokratska partija socijalista - DPS) - retained political, economical and social control over the republic, confirmed by regular electoral victories.

² European Stability Initiative, *Autonomie, Dependency, Security: The Montenegrin Dilemma*, Brussels, 4 August 2000, <http://www.esiweb.org> [accessed 19 October 2001]

³ Magas, B., *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, London: Verso, 1993; Popov, N. (ed.), *The Road to War in Serbia*, Budapest: Central European University, 2000

Slovenia and Croatia opted for independence and the SFRY was declared dissolved by the European Arbitration Commission (the Badinter Commission), an organ installed by the European Community at the Yugoslav Peace Conference that started mid 1991. The EC Arbitration Commission also defined the criteria under which the republics of the SFRY could gain international recognition of possible independence claims. In 1992 the DPS agreed to the formation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), with two constituent units: Serbia and Montenegro. The DPS won the federal and Montenegrin parliamentary elections in 1992 and 1996.

While the Bulatovic-Djukanovic leadership maintained their loyalty to Milosevic throughout this period, there were occasional disagreements. In October 1991 Bulatovic supported the Carrington Plan for a settlement of the Yugoslav crisis, but backed down at the insistence of Belgrade. In July 1993, another disagreement with Belgrade became public, when Podgorica dissented from the federal decision to ban CSCE monitors from Kosovo, Vojvodina and Sandjak, following the suspension of FRY from CSCE membership. Also in 1993, when Milosevic moved to dismiss the then federal president, Dobrica Cosic, and the then prime minister, Milan Panic, Montenegrin deputies in the federal parliament initially supported them, but later gave in to pressure from Belgrade. Despite these differences, Milosevic was able to formulate policy for the whole FRY, until he was challenged by the Serbian population during three months of protest following the opposition victory in local elections at the end of 1996.

2.3 Breaking with Belgrade

In 1997, Djukanovic lead the Montenegrin government into a decisive break with the Belgrade regime. Unlike other challengers of Milosevic, Djukanovic succeeded in carving out and defending an independent political space, taking with him the greater part of the communist political establishment. Despite the lifting of sanctions following the Dayton peace agreement, a so-called “outer wall of sanctions” remained in place, excluding Yugoslavia from international financial support. The Serbian and Montenegrin economies were both characterized by hyperinflation, high unemployment and low salaries. The growing pressure on the political class to deliver some relief from the economic hardship, together with inter-elite conflict over diminishing resources,⁴ created a political opportunity for Djukanovic. In an interview with the Belgrade weekly *Vreme* in February 1997, Djukanovic aired harsh criticism against the Milosevic regime, characterizing Milosevic as a man of obsolete political ideas, surrounded by unsuitable individuals, following the time-tested methods of many authoritarian regimes.⁵ Djukanovic lost his position inside the DPS, but after a power struggle of several months, in July 1997, the main board of the DPS selected Djukanovic as its candidate for the forthcoming presidential elections in Montenegro. Momir Bulatovic was replaced as party president and forced to create his own party, the Socialist People’s Party (Socijalisticka narodna partija - SNP).

Djukanovic managed to defeat Bulatovic in the second round of the presidential elections, taking 50.8 per cent of the vote (5,488 votes more than Bulatovic). Bulatovic took three to six times more votes than Djukanovic in the northern

⁴ Currency Wars, *IWPR’s Balkan Crisis Report*, 6 August 1999

⁵ Interview with Milo Djukanovic, *Vreme*, 22 February 1997

municipalities of Andrijevica, Pluzine and Pljevlja, and a significant majority in most other northern municipalities. He won two thirds of the votes in the coastal municipality of Herceg Novi, and was slightly ahead in the urban centres of Podgorica and Budva. Djukanovic received an outright majority in only 8 of the 21 municipalities, ending slightly ahead in his hometown of Niksic and the coastal town of Kotor, and with larger victories in the port of Bar, in coastal Tivat and in Muslim-dominated Plav. Significantly, the most important Djukanovic strongholds were the Muslim-dominated northern municipality of Rozaje (92 per cent), the Albanian dominated Ulcinj (85 per cent) and Cetinje (84 per cent).⁶

On 14 January 1998, on the eve of Djukanovic's inauguration, Bulatovic supporters attempted to take over the government building. The action failed, mainly because the police stood by Djukanovic and the Yugoslav army (Vojska Jugoslavije - VJ) refused to become involved.

2.4 The Political Contest Between 1998 and 2000

Since 1998 Montenegrin political life has been largely polarized between two powerful blocs, reflecting the sharp differences of opinion in Montenegrin society between pro-autonomy and pro-Belgrade viewpoints.

For the May 1998 parliamentary elections, Djukanovic's DPS entered into a coalition called "For a Better Life" (Koalicija "Da zivimo bolje" - DZB) with the Social Democratic Party (Socijal-demokratska partija - SDP) and the People's Party (Narodna stranka - NS). This coalition achieved a strong majority, obtaining 49.5 per cent of the vote to the SNP's 36.1 per cent, giving it 42 out of 78 seats in the parliament. Djukanovic's DZB coalition adopted a strongly pro-Western profile. Bulatovic, in addition to the role of pro-Serb opposition in Montenegro, was selected by Milosevic to become federal Prime Minister. Strains and difficulties increased further at the federal level. The delegation of the new Montenegrin deputies to the federal parliament was not ratified by Belgrade. The earlier deputies remained in place, which meant that the delegations consisted mainly of supporters of Momir Bulatovic. On these grounds, Djukanovic rejected all further collaboration with the Yugoslav federation and ignored all decisions of its organs. In August 1999 the Montenegrin government adopted a Platform to reformulate Montenegro's relations with Serbia: a loose confederation of two equal partners who would share some decision-making in matters such as foreign policy, defence and security. However, consultations with Belgrade about this confederation proposal did not yield any significant results.

The governing DZB coalition encompassed a wide range of viewpoints on many issues. The SDP criticized the DPS's economic policy and had pressed for an early referendum on the independence issue. The NS appealed to ethnic Serbs among Montenegro's population, while opposing the Milosevic regime in Belgrade.

Tensions between Belgrade and Podgorica culminated at the time of the Kosovo war in the spring of 1999. While Serbia was at war, Montenegro remained neutral. This added to the Yugoslav constitutional crisis, but also delivered considerable amounts

⁶ European Stability Initiative, *Autonomie...*

of economic assistance to Montenegro, since the survival of the Montenegrin government became a major security interest of the West.

The SNP put forward two major claims: first, that the ruling DZB coalition was betraying the Serb nation by allying itself with Western powers hostile to Serbia, and second, that Montenegro's economic interest are best served within the Yugoslav federation. However, a difference of opinion has been observed between party members based in Belgrade and active at federal level, such as the then federal Prime Minister Momir Bulatovic, and those based in Montenegro who participate in its daily political affairs, such as Pedrag Bulatovic.

In the spring of 2000 international analysts warned of the possibility of armed conflict around Montenegro.⁷ Incidents involving the Yugoslav army (VJ) and forces of the Montenegrin Interior Ministry (Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova - MUP) intensified in frequency and seriousness from December 1999. But confrontations were limited to shows of force and stand-offs.

Municipal elections in Herceg Novi on 11 June 2000 brought success for the SNP, which won control over the municipality, together with two other pro-Yugoslav parties, SNS (Srpska narodna stranka - Socialist People's Party) and SRS (Srpska radikalna stranka - Serb Radical Party). On 7 July 2000 President Milosevic brought about changes to the 1992 federal constitution, which created the possibility for him to accept another term of presidency, this time at the federal instead of the Serbian/republican level. At the same time the competencies of the Montenegrin unit within the federation were greatly reduced, endangering the equality of the two republics. On these grounds Djukanovic and the DPS refused to take part in the federal elections on 24 September 2000. This resulted in nearly all the Montenegrin seats in the federal parliament being won by the SNP.

3. The Constitutional Debate Today

Continuing our exploration of factors linked to possible instability in and around Montenegro, we will first focus on the current political debate on the status of Montenegro. In this chapter we will analyse the different proposals for constitutional reform, factors working for or against independence; the consequences of the April 2001 elections and the questions relating to a possible referendum on the status of Montenegro. Finally this chapter will deal with the attitude of the international community.

3.1 The Political Landscape in Serbia, Montenegro and the Federal State

The divergence between the Montenegrin authorities and the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS - Demokratska opozicija Srbije), has been growing steadily after the defeat of Milosevic and his coalition in the September 2000 federal elections.

Until the summer of 2000 the Serbian opposition and the Montenegrin leadership operated each within its own, separate political landscape, but had cordial relations.

⁷ Kusovac, Z., The Balkans Braces for Another Showdown, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 2000, pp. 10-13

During the Kosovo war the Serbian opposition leader Djindjic was the guest of President Djukanovic. The Serbian economic think tank G-17 advised the Montenegrin Government on reform processes. However, in July 2000, when Milosevic forced constitutional changes, they developed different approaches.

The constitutional amendments aimed at eliminating Montenegro's veto over federal legislation and therefore its status as equal partner in the federation.⁸ To avoid ratifying the constitutional "coup" the Montenegrin governing coalition decided to boycott the September 2000 federal elections. In the face of a perceived military threat from Serbia and given international pressure to use the opportunity of the elections to remove Milosevic, the Montenegrin Government permitted voting to take place on Montenegrin territory. The opposition party SNP, led by the then federal Prime Minister Momir Bulatovic, took part. As a result of the appeal for a boycott by the Montenegrin authorities only 25 per cent of the electorate participated, with the majority voting for the SNP. As a result, the Montenegrin opposition, the SNP, is holding almost all Montenegrin seats in the federal parliament.

The DOS leadership came to a different assessment as regards the September elections. Despite the international opinion that one could hardly expect free and fair elections, the DOS sensed the possibility of victory and campaigned for political changes in Serbia.

Based upon the same desire not to give any legitimacy to the July 2000 constitutional changes, the Montenegrin authorities did not recognize the election of Kostunica as FRY President, and referred to it as a change of leadership within Serbia. When the DOS formed a federal coalition government with the Montenegrin SNP (to which there was no alternative in the federal parliament because of the election boycott by the Montenegrin authorities), the gap between Belgrade and Podgorica grew even wider. The vice-president of the SNP, Zoran Zizic, was appointed federal Prime Minister, since - according to the federal constitution - a Serbian federal President must be matched by a Montenegrin Prime Minister.

The DOS coalition with the SNP, long-standing Milosevic loyalists, at the federal level provoked a change in leadership within the SNP. Until January 2001, the SNP had been led by Momir Bulatovic, who was also the federal Prime Minister until the September 2000 federal elections. After several months of discussion concerning the DOS-SNP coalition, on 29 January 2001 Predrag Bulatovic (no relation to Momir Bulatovic) took over as president of the SNP.⁹

3.2 Proposals for Constitutional Reform

During the last two years, new proposals for the reshaping of Serbian-Montenegrin relations have been tabled.

⁸ International Crisis Group, *Current Legal Status of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and of Serbia and Montenegro*, Brussels, 19 September 2000

⁹ British Helsinki Human Rights Group, *Montenegro Parliamentary Elections 2001*, Oxford, 2001, <http://www.bhhrg.org/montenegro/montenegro2001.htm> [accessed 19 October 2001]. See also International Crisis Group, *Montenegro: Settling for Independence?*, Brussels, 28 March 2001, p. 18

In August 1999, the Montenegrin Government adopted a Platform which proposed the transformation of Yugoslavia into a loose federation of two equal partners, with a common currency and some joint responsibilities in the fields of foreign affairs and military matters. The President of each republic would have control over military units stationed in that republic and appoint military commanders. This proposal envisaged a single state with one UN seat and very limited powers at the central level.

In July 2000, following the constitutional changes enforced by Milosevic, the DPS and the Serbian opposition signed a joint declaration, calling for the relationship between Serbia and Montenegro to be redefined, and taking as a starting point for discussions the Montenegrin Government's Platform of August 1999.

However, following the end of Milosevic's rule, the Montenegrin authorities did not look towards rebuilding ties with Serbia and the federation but adopted a new position in favour of an internationally recognized state. On 28 December 2000 the Montenegrin Government adopted a revised Platform, prepared by the ruling parties, the DPS and the SDP, proposing a loose confederation between two independent and internationally recognized states.¹⁰ The Platform suggests that the two republics should first become independent, if that is the choice of the people expressed in a referendum. Once their internationally recognized status has been achieved, the two states could decide, again by referendum, to establish a Union. The Union would be given competency in three fields: defence and external security, foreign policy and the maintenance of a common market and currency. The two member states would retain separate armies and separate diplomatic representation, each with a seat in the UN General Assembly. Djukanovic's abandonment of the single-state solution for future relations between Serbia and Montenegro, as presented in the August 1999 Platform, was a bitter blow for the DOS leadership. "How was it possible", many Serbs asked, "that Djukanovic offered to the Milosevic regime a Platform envisaging the continuation of the joint state, and to the new democratic government in Serbia insisted upon separation?"¹¹

On 10 January 2001 President Kostunica issued a counter-proposal for a revived, functioning federation, which was endorsed by the DOS.¹² The proposal envisaged a highly decentralized state, with additional federal competency over the protection of basic human rights, transport and communications and the basis of the economic system. There would be five federal ministries - justice, defence, foreign relations, finance and transportation - while certain public functions in these areas could be delegated to the republics. The document states that the federation would adopt "framework laws", which would set out common principles for further elaboration by the legislatures of each republic. Additionally the joint state would have a President and a federal Court.

¹⁰ Platform of the Government of Montenegro for Talks with the Government of Serbia on New Relations Between the Two States, 28 December 2000, *CEPS Europa South-East Monitor*, No. 19, January 2001, <http://www.ceps.be> [accessed 19 October 2001]

¹¹ International Crisis Group, *Montenegro...*, p. 10.

¹² President Kostunica's Proposal for the Reconstruction of Yugoslavia, 10 January 2001, *CEPS Europa South-East Monitor*, No. 19, January 2001, <http://www.ceps.be> [accessed 19 October 2001]

There are a number of further differences between the two proposals. The Kostunica/DOS proposal refers to a two-chamber federal parliament, with a Chamber of the Citizens and a Chamber of the Republics. The latter would be composed of an equal number of delegates from both republics, to be appointed in proportion to the representation of the parties in the assembly of the republic, rather than all being appointed by the majority in the assembly of the republic. The Montenegrin proposal instead envisaged a single-chamber federal parliament, with an equal number of deputies for each republic, chosen through procedures determined by the republics. Moreover, the federal deputies would not be bound by instructions from their respective republics. This would mean that decisions could be taken at federal level with which the government in Podgorica did not agree.

Given the divergence of the two proposals, it is not surprising that a meeting on 17 January 2001 between Montenegrin President Djukanovic, federal President Kostunica and Serbian Prime Minister Djindjic, reportedly made no progress towards agreement.¹³ Djindjic indicated that there would be room for compromise in many areas, including the type and competency of the joint organs, but that there could be no compromise over the principle of a single, common state.¹⁴ However, the continuing differences of opinion are, as described by ESI, generating an atmosphere of *inat* (an expression of Turkish origin connoting a mixture of anger, pride and stubbornness) in Belgrade, leading some to suggest that Serbia should cut its ties to Montenegro altogether, if the latter persists with its independence plans.¹⁵

The option of a confederation of two independent states, as formulated in the 28 December 2000 proposal, had an important side-effect in that it caused a deep rift in the Montenegrin coalition “For a Better Life”, with the People’s Party leaving the government because it wanted to stay with the option contained in the August 1999 proposal. This left the DPS and the Social Democrats to run a minority government. The government could have taken up the offer of the Liberal Party to join a new coalition, but Djukanovic refused the offer and decided to call new elections in April 2001. The elections were portrayed as a battle between pro and anti-independence parties.

3.3 An Uneasy Status Quo

The election debate on independence took place within a complicated political landscape and a divided society. It is possible to identify a number of key factors within Montenegrin society, which increase the pressure for independence. At the same time other factors work in the direction of trying to keep federal functions in place. The consequence is that the status quo looks highly uneasy.

Pro-independence factors include the following:

¹³ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 17 January 2001

¹⁴ *Vijesti*, 7 March 2001

¹⁵ See European Stability Initiative, *Sovereignty, Europe and the Future of Serbia and Montenegro: A Proposal for International Mediation*, Brussels, 12 February 2001, <http://www.esiweb.org> [accessed 19 October 2001], p. 4

- In 1998, after the federal authorities ceased making contributions to the Montenegrin Pension Fund, Montenegro stopped payments to the federal budget, and began transferring former federal revenues to an account of its own.
- Customs administration on Montenegro's borders was taken over by Montenegro in August 1999. A Montenegrin Customs Administration has been established, although it is still dependent on the central computer system in Belgrade.¹⁶
- In November 1999, the Montenegrin Government introduced the German Mark as a parallel currency. The Podgorica Branch of the National Bank of Yugoslavia was converted into a Montenegrin National Bank. In November 2000 the German Mark became the sole currency in Montenegro. Payments between Serbia and Montenegro are settled in D-Mark.¹⁷
- In November 1999, the Montenegrin branch of the Payments Bureau (ZOP) was cut loose from the federal system.
- The Montenegrin Ministry of the Interior (MUP) has established a militarized police force, whose current strength is estimated at between 12,000 and 18,000, including 1,600 elite special forces.¹⁸
- Since 1998 Montenegro has been very active in external relations and established diplomatic representation in several countries. The Montenegrin Minister of Foreign Affairs broke off all official contacts with his Yugoslav counterpart in August 2001.
- The Federal Constitutional Court, composed of judges appointed by and loyal to Milosevic, remains a divisive factor. At the proposal of federal President Kostunica the federal parliament appointed four new judges, two from Serbia and two from Montenegro (September 2001). Djukanovic voiced his disapproval of the Montenegrin candidates, who he considers to be more loyal to the SNP.¹⁹
- Following the decision of the Serbian Government to transfer Milosevic to the Hague Tribunal on 28 June 2001, the federal government fell apart due to acute differences between the DOS and the SNP and between Djindjic and Kostunica. Federal Prime Minister Zizic was replaced by Dragisa Pesic, also a SNP official. This new federal government is not recognized by the government in Podgorica.

On the other hand, there are institutional links within the FRY that are still functioning or have been revived:

- Following the democratic changes in Belgrade, the FRY was speedily admitted to several international organizations, such as the UN, OSCE, IMF, Stability Pact for

¹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 6

¹⁷ International Crisis Group, *Montenegro...*, p. 5

¹⁸ Kusovac, p. 13

¹⁹ *V.I.P Daily News Report*, 10 September 2001

South-Eastern Europe. FRY has started negotiations with the World Bank and the Council of Europe.

- Montenegrins still perform military service in the Yugoslav army. The Supreme Defence Council met on 11 September 2001, with the participation of Montenegrin President Djukanovic.²⁰
- Montenegrins still use Yugoslav passports, albeit issued by the Montenegrin MUP.
- The Federal Air Traffic Control Agency in Montenegro is headed by former or current VJ staff and 60 per cent of their income is reportedly going to the VJ.
- There are close links with Belgrade in the fields of infrastructure such as the electricity sector management.
- There are strong social links between Serbs and Montenegrins, with Montenegrins living in central Serbia, Belgrade and Vojvodina and Serbs spending their holidays on the Montenegrin coast.

3.4 The April 2001 Elections and the Prospect of a “Combination Government”

The 22 April 2001 Montenegrin elections confirmed the profound split in Montenegrin society. The “Victory of Montenegro” coalition, composed of the DPS and the SDP, won 42.05 per cent of the votes (36 deputies). The “Together for Yugoslavia” coalition, composed of the SNP, the NS and the SNS, won 40.67 per cent of the votes (33 deputies). The Liberal League of Montenegro (Liberalni savez Crne Gore - LSCG) won 7.65 per cent of the votes (6 deputies). The two parties which attract Montenegrin Albanians, the Democratic Union of Albanians (Unioni Demokratik Shqiptar ne Mal te Zi - UDSH) and the Democratic League of Albanians in Montenegro (Lidhja Demokratike e Shqiptareve ne Mal te Zi - LDSHMZ), won each one per cent of the votes and will each get one seat in parliament thanks to a provision in the election law.²¹

President Djukanovic and his coalition had expected to gain a larger victory which would enable them to form a government on their own and to judge whether and when they would move forward towards a referendum on independence. The victory turned out to be too narrow for this scenario. All the pro-independence parties combined fall short of the two-thirds majority needed in parliament to ensure the passing of a bill calling for a referendum. Difficult coalition discussions were to be expected.

²⁰ The third meeting of the Supreme Defense Council since Kostunica became FRY President took place on 11 September 2001 in Podgorica, including FRY President Kostunica, Serbian President Milutinovic, Montenegrin President Djukanovic, Yugoslav Prime Minister Dragisa Pesic, Defence Minister Slobodan Krapovic, Chief of Staff Nebojsa Pavkovic and Council Secretary Rear Admiral Dusan Stajic. See *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 12 September 2001.

²¹ Duranovic, D., *Montenegro after the Elections: Between Referendum and FRY*, Podgorica, AIM, 24 April 2001

The psychological effect of the elections was clear: the pro-Yugoslavia bloc, which did not win the elections, was nevertheless euphoric, since they had the impression they had blocked the prospect of a quick road to independence. Yugoslav President Kostunica, whose party officials had actively supported the SNP election campaign, welcomed the results and reaffirmed the need for a joint state.²²

After the election results were in, Djukanovic's DPS entered into talks with the pro-independence Liberal Union Party, whose six seats proved crucial in obtaining the required majority in the 77-seat parliament. But while the Liberals want to proceed with the independence process immediately, Djukanovic is under increasing international pressure to keep it on hold. The fall of Milosevic six months earlier had already made public perception more adverse in view of the questionable economic benefits of secession. Djukanovic was further weakened by a series of articles in the Croatian news weekly *Nacional* which first appeared in spring 2001, alleging that he is connected to an organized cigarette smuggling ring in the Balkans. A parliamentary commission to look into the matter has been established.²³

Following the April elections, Predrag Bulatovic stressed that his pro-Yugoslav bloc would boycott any referendum unless it was organized by a broad coalition government.²⁴ He has further insisted that a fair vote could only be guaranteed if a non-partisan administration were to take over the powerful ministry of internal affairs, open secret intelligence files to scrutiny and free the state media to represent equally the views of both sides in the independence debate. He also called for a reform of the current voter lists.

The Liberals have lobbied for the continuation of a minority government, with the precondition that it organizes the referendum no later than the beginning of 2002. They say that the current minority government is able to organize a fair and democratic referendum without forming a broader coalition.

However, it now looks likely that President Djukanovic will be seeking to form a broad coalition government to avoid a boycott of the referendum by the opposition.²⁵ The topic was discussed during a series of meetings in August with leaders of the republic's political parties, which also explored a tentative timetable for holding a referendum on Montenegro's independence.²⁶

3.5 A Possible Referendum

If and when a referendum on the status of Montenegro is decided on, a number of issues must be clarified. Amongst others are the exact wording of the referendum question, the possibility of multiple questions, the timing and preparation of the referendum, rules concerning the minimum numbers of eligible voters required for a referendum vote to be valid, transparency of counting and tabulation of voting results,

²² Tadic, M., Montenegrin Independence on Hold, *IWPR's Balkan Crisis Report*, 24 April 2001

²³ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 17 August 2001

²⁴ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 13 August 2001

²⁵ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 29 August 2001

²⁶ Tadic, M., Montenegrin Rivals Consider Coalition, *IWPR's Balkan Crisis Report*, 31 August 2001

etc. From this wide range of divisive issues we will focus on a few particularly sensitive ones.

According to the Montenegrin constitution a change in the status of the republic would have to be proposed by a two-thirds majority of the parliament, and then put to a referendum. Following an eventual referendum result in favour of independence, the decision would need to be ratified by a two-thirds majority of a newly constituted parliament. A referendum would therefore have to be followed by further parliamentary elections, and a two-thirds majority of the new parliament would then be required to confirm the independence decision.²⁷

According to the Law on Referendum, adopted on 19 February 2001 by the Montenegrin parliament, participation by a simple majority of registered voters and a simple majority of those voting are necessary for a referendum to be valid. This makes it possible that 25 per cent of registered voters could decide upon the future status of the Republic. Although international law and OSCE commitments include no standard on the issue, OSCE/ODIHR's assessment of the Law refers to best international practice in conducting referendums, and suggests that a degree of weighted or qualified majority is preferable in order for the outcome of the referendum to be less contestable and stability safeguarded. Under the current constitution and with the current Referendum Law a constitutional crisis might result from a referendum approved by a more slender margin than is expressed by a two-thirds majority in parliament.²⁸

Another particularly sensitive issue relates to the question of whether people with Montenegrin citizenship living permanently in Serbia are entitled to participate in the referendum. Their exact number is hard to estimate, but it is assumed they would largely vote against Montenegrin independence. Although certain political parties are calling for their inclusion, according to the actual legislation they would not be able to take part. ODIHR did not recommend such participation, giving several reasons, amongst others that in the 1992 referendum to approve the current federation (FRY) the same rule applied; in addition citizens of the FRY born in Montenegro but permanently living in Serbia are voting in elections there - if they were also to be allowed to vote in Montenegro they would be given a double franchise within the same state; an attempt to register these citizens may encounter insurmountable logistical difficulties. On the other hand, it remains unclear if these Montenegrins living in Serbia might opt for Serbian citizenship or not. Part of the ongoing political negotiations on the subject of a "combination government" focus on introducing amendments to the referendum law in order to address these issues.²⁹

After lengthy negotiations the Montenegrin parliamentary commission responsible for drafting the new referendum law completed its work on 10 October 2001. The commission decided by majority vote that only one question should be posed at the

²⁷ International Crisis Group, *Montenegro...*, p. 13

²⁸ Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Assessment of the Referendum Law: Republic of Montenegro/Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, Warsaw, 6 July 2001, http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election_reports/yu/ [accessed 19 October 2001]

²⁹ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 16 August 2001; 30 August 2001

referendum: “Are you in favour of the Republic of Montenegro becoming an independent and internationally recognized state?” The LS, the SDP and the UDSH agreed to this, while the DPS favoured having two referendum questions, the second seeking the opinion on a confederation-federation proposal. The pro-Yugoslavia coalition refused to take part in the work of the commission.

A further change refers to the majority required for the outcome of the referendum to be valid - now proposed to be a majority of those voting, regardless of the turnout. The DPS was in favour of retaining the provision contained in the February 2001 Referendum Law, for fear of otherwise jeopardizing international recognition of the referendum results. However, the other parties did not want a possible boycott by the pro-Yugoslavia coalition to generate an invalid referendum result.

On the issue of eligibility to vote in the referendum the commission agreed on the following criteria: a voter must be a Montenegrin citizen, over 18 years of age, and resident in Montenegro for at least 24 months before the referendum day.

Finally it was agreed that the draft law would not be confirmed until it had been assessed by OSCE, whose Podgorica office is expected to be critical of the removal of the provision for participation by a majority of voters for the referendum to be valid.³⁰

3.6 Crisis of the Federal State

The coalition discussions in Podgorica and the prospect of a possible referendum in Montenegro are to be seen in connection with the ongoing discussions at the federal level between the DOS and the SNP as well as the power struggle within the DOS.

The relations between the governing DOS and the SNP at the federal level faced a major crisis after the extradition of Slobodan Milosevic to the Hague Tribunal on 28 June 2001. The former FRY president was extradited on the basis of a decree adopted by the Serbian Government, while the Federal Constitutional Court took the decision to freeze all action concerning the possible extradition of Yugoslav citizens to The Hague, until the court decided whether or not the federal decree on cooperation with ICTY was in line with the Yugoslav constitution. Federal President Kostunica objected to the extradition, the SNP withdrew from the federal government and federal Prime Minister Zoran Zizic resigned.

The prospect of new federal elections was looming. However, in order to ensure participation of the Djukanovic-led bloc in federal elections and to ensure that the newly elected federal bodies would be recognized by Podgorica, new constitutional relations between Belgrade and Podgorica would first have to be agreed. Since these new constitutional arrangements were not ready, new federal elections were considered not to be an option and a new federal government with the same coalition partners, the DOS and the SNP, was formed. The new Prime Minister was the SNP official Dragisa Pesic. However, this new federal government was not recognized by the authorities in Podgorica.

³⁰ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 18 October 2001; 19 October 2001

Soon after this major political crisis on the federal level, the Serbian Government faced a serious political crisis when the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS - Demokratska stranka Srbije) of federal President Kostunica left the Serbian Government, led by Prime Minister Djindjic. This happened amidst accusations of involvement of Serbian government officials in corruption and organized crime, following the murder of the former high ranking official of the Serbian State Security (Resor drzavne bezbednosti - RDB), Momir Grailovic.³¹ Following these and previous harsh discussions within the DOS, the DOS MP caucus in the Serbian parliament is falling apart into different groups.

On 30 August 2001 the federal government adopted its starting position for a joint Platform on a constitutional redefinition of the FRY. As was the case with the DOS platform from January 2001, this federal government platform is also based on the non-negotiable premise of a single-state concept, and subsequently has been rejected by the DPS and the authorities in Podgorica, reiterating that the Platform adopted by “the illegitimate federal government was absolutely in no way binding for Montenegro”.³²

Federal President Kostunica scheduled negotiations on relations within the federation for 19 September 2001. However, Djukanovic has refused to take part in negotiations in which the federal Prime Minister would also have a say. He insists that only representatives of the governments of the two republics and Kostunica should take part in a dialogue on relations between Serbia and Montenegro.³³

In the middle of October 2001, President Djukanovic and Prime Minister Vujanovic agreed to hold talks in Belgrade, in which also Miroljub Labuc, the federal Deputy

³¹ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 10 August 2001 to 4 September 2001

³² The “Platform for the FRY Constitutional Reorganization” provides for the future common state of Serbia and Montenegro to have a federation structure, consisting of two member states, with the status of federal units. The document proposes common state jurisdictions to include the areas of fundamental rights and freedoms, protection of special minority rights and a unified foreign policy, with the possibility for each member state to establish special international cooperation arrangements.

The Platform provides for single defence and state border controls, with parliamentary control of the defence forces, a single market, single customs, monetary and foreign trade systems, and single transportation and communications, in accordance with the defence system and international conventions. Federal competence would be either exclusive or shared. Exclusive competence would apply to foreign policy, defence, monetary and customs systems, transportation and communications, law of obligations and stocks and bonds. Shared competence would apply to fundamental rights and liberties and the protection of minorities, ownership relations, taxation, banking and foreign trade systems, pensions, and property and personal insurance.

According to the Platform, institutions of the federal state would be the federal parliament, the federal president, federal government, federal court, national bank and ombudsman. The federal parliament would include the member state chamber, with equal numbers of delegates from both federal units, and the chamber of citizens, comprising people’s representatives from both federal units. The president of the republic would represent the country locally and abroad, and would be elected and recalled by the federal parliament. Recall would be based on the opinion of the federal court that the president has violated the constitution. A recall initiative could be filed by either chamber of the parliament. The president of the republic heads the supreme defence council. The president of the republic and the federal prime minister must not be from the same republic. Source: *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 21 and 31 August 2001

³³ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 21 September 2001

Prime Minister and leader of the DOS, would take part, together with FRY President Kostunica and Serbian Prime Minister Djindjic. However, the talks on 26 October 2001 merely confirmed that the opposing views regarding the issue of whether to opt for a federal single state or a confederation of two states, remained the same. Nevertheless it was agreed, after the failure of the Belgrade-Podgorica talks, that the question of an independent state would be put to the citizens of Montenegro in a referendum in the spring of 2002. Tired of the ongoing debate with Podgorica, a number of politicians in Serbia, amongst them Justice Minister Batic, are arguing for a referendum to take place in Serbia as well, on the issue of continued links with Montenegro.³⁴

3.7 Yugoslav Army Between Kostunica, Djindjic and Djukanovic

Since 1997 the potential for a violent crackdown by Belgrade has been hanging like a dark cloud over almost every aspect of Montenegrin life. Uncertainty over the possible role of VJ in relation to the Montenegrin authorities was fed by repeated threatening statements by VJ officers as well as by some incidents between VJ and MUP units. The creation of a special VJ unit, the Seventh MP Battalion, caused great concern since it reportedly consisted exclusively of pro-Belgrade Serbs and Montenegrins and was based in the north of Montenegro.

Since Milosevic's departure, Belgrade has taken steps to reassure the Montenegrin government. On 25 December 2000 Djukanovic attended a session of Yugoslavia's Supreme Defence Council. At this meeting, a number of personnel changes were made in the military stationed in Montenegro, including the removal of the commander of the Second Army (whose area of responsibility includes Montenegro), General Milorad Obradovic. Reportedly the disbanding of the Seventh Battalion was ordered.³⁵

The meeting of the Supreme Defence Council on 11 September 2001 was officially aimed at discussing the reorganization of the VJ. However, the meeting also offered an opportunity for Kostunica and Djukanovic to meet and discuss the persistent difficulties experienced in finding a formula for negotiations on reshaping relations within the FRY. This meeting of the Defence Council formalized the unspoken postponement of the reorganization of the VJ, which has not undergone any fundamental changes in more than nine years of existence. The fate of the VJ will depend on the balance of political power between Kostunica, Djindjic and Djukanovic. The federal authorities, headed by Kostunica, are trying to preserve the current VJ structure, because they do not want large-scale personnel changes. The key to this approach is the relationship between Kostunica and VJ chief of staff General Nebojsa Pavkovic. They met soon after the fall of Slobodan Milosevic and their acquaintance grew into a firm alliance. Kostunica needs to have influence over the VJ and has persistently blocked every attempt by the majority political forces in the DOS, including Serbian Prime Minister Djindjic, to oust Pavkovic and his associates. Officers who were in ranking posts under the Milosevic regime have survived in most key posts in the VJ. According to *Defense and Security*, Kostunica is the only man the

³⁴ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 29 October 2001

³⁵ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 27 December 2000

army chiefs trust. To many of them he represents the ideal compromise between the necessary formal democracy and the survival of the hard-line political option based on nationalism and influence on the bureaucratic apparatus.

Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic seems no longer very interested in the fate of the VJ, since he has begun to focus his activities on achieving independence. Unlike during the last months of the Milosevic regime, when the VJ was prepared for armed intervention if the Montenegrin authorities tried to quit the federation, now most of the relevant power brokers in Belgrade are assuring Podgorica that there will be no use of force.

Reflecting the balance of forces between the three key players, an agreement has been reached not to implement changes in the VJ until changes to the constitution have been adopted, which would provide a final definition of the Serbia-Montenegro federal union. Membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace will reportedly also have to wait until then. The VJ forces based in Montenegro do not seem anxious, while waiting to learn their fate, even though a possible division of the armed forces would lead to problems for many professional soldiers who will have to decide which side to choose. The problem of the Navy is especially difficult because Serbia, without a coastline, has no reason to seek control of it, and Montenegro does not have the resources to finance it in its current form.³⁶

3.8 International Community Objections to Independence of Montenegro

While Djukanovic and his government were considered a useful instrument in weakening the Milosevic government and providing a safe haven for Serbian opposition leaders at that time, the international community was also carefully measuring its support, keeping it both politically and economically just below the threshold that would allow Montenegro to declare its independence.³⁷ Following the change of leadership in Belgrade on 5 October 2000, the attitude of the international community towards the leadership in Podgorica became even more reluctant and careful. On 22 January 2001 the EU Council of Ministers, later followed by the US, urged a solution of Serbian-Montenegrin differences within the framework of the FRY. However, different variations on this opinion can be found among representatives of the international community, ranging from advocating "a democratic Montenegro within a democratic Yugoslavia" to expressing "respect for the will of the Montenegrin people".³⁸

Opposition to Montenegrin independence within the international community is based on fear of instability in Montenegro itself, as well as uncertainty over its impact on Serbia and great concern for the consequences it would have for the future status of Kosovo. The attempts to form a "combination government" and to reach political

³⁶ Rift in DOS Splits Army and Police, *Defense and Security*, No. 32, 23 August 2001; No VJ Reorganization before Constitutional Changes, *Defense and Security*, No. 34, 20 September 2001

³⁷ Kusovac, p. 12

³⁸ The US Ambassador to Yugoslavia, William Montgomery, argued that it was in the best interest of all FRY citizens that a democratic Montenegro should remain in a democratic Yugoslavia. His strong position in the debate has obviously caused mixed comment. *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 15 October 2001.

consensus on a possible referendum formula relate to fears about possible unrest inside Montenegro, while the agreements between the FRY and the international community on assistance for economic reform have more to do with Serbian fears. Another expression of concern in this respect was the statement by Serbian Prime Minister Djindjic, on 12 September 2001, when he proposed talks with his Montenegrin counterpart on the division of powers and competencies in the sphere of international obligations, in case the survival of the federal state becomes uncertain.³⁹ However, on 14 October, Djindjic opposed the idea of talks on the level of the two republics only, without Kostunica's presence.

Of particular concern to the international community appears to be the possibility that independence for Montenegro would complicate matters for Kosovo. It is argued that UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which established the UN protectorate in Kosovo, states that Kosovo remains a part of FRY, but does not refer to Kosovo as part of Serbia. On different occasions Serbian politicians have warned Djukanovic that in demanding independence for Montenegro he should have in mind the interests of Serbia as well, since it could pave the way for Kosovo's independence. However, Djukanovic has rejected this thesis, pointing out that the status of Kosovo will ultimately be resolved between Pristina, Belgrade and the international community over a longer period and that Montenegro could not be held hostage to such a process.⁴⁰ Another argument is that if two nations with close ties through ethnic origin, language, culture and history, such as Serbs and Montenegrins, cannot live together in one common state, it will be hard to insist on a common state for Kosovo and Serbia. However, FRY President Kostunica views the legal and actual state of Kosovo after a possible separation of Montenegro differently, arguing that Kosovo's legal position would remain practically unchanged by Montenegro's separation, since Serbia is the legitimate successor to Yugoslavia.⁴¹

The political efforts of the international community in Kosovo are primarily directed towards establishing institutions of self-government. Following the election of local municipal authorities, elections for a Kosovo-wide parliament are scheduled for 17 November 2001. The legal basis for the Kosovar parliament and government was outlined in the "Constitutional Framework" for Kosovo, which enabled the postponement of the debate on the final status of Kosovo.⁴² A widely held assumption seems to be that early Montenegrin independence, in signifying the end of the FRY, would force the issue of Kosovo's final status to the top of the diplomatic agenda before the international community is ready to tackle it.⁴³

For some diplomats, the underlying assumption is that the outcome will follow the model of a three-republic confederation of Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

⁴⁰ Djukanovic, M., Introductory Speech, Conference on The Future of Montenegro, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels, 26 February 2001, <http://www.ceps.be/Research/SEE/Monteneg/Monteneg10.htm> [accessed 19 October 2001]

⁴¹ Rexhepi, F., *Independence of Montenegro and Kosovo: A Long Painstaking Process*, Podgorica: AIM, 4 May 2001

⁴² De Vrieze, F., Conflict Management in Kosovo, in: European Center for Conflict Prevention (ed.), *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peace Building Activities*, New York: Lynne Rienner, 16 February 2002

⁴³ International Crisis Group, *Montenegro...*, p.20

However, as the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London has argued, the problem with this vision is that Kosovo's Albanians would rather take up arms than have any link with Belgrade again. If Montenegro opts for independence, IISS states, far from destabilizing the region it could have the opposite effect. It could concentrate minds on the future of Kosovo, and above all, on the need to create regional institutions modelled on those of the EU and aiming to follow the European integration of the West-Balkans region.⁴⁴

4. Ethnic Minorities in Montenegro

In 1991, more than 20 per cent of the Montenegrin population were Muslim Slavs (Bosniacs) or Albanians. Despite the potency of ethnic conflict in neighbouring Bosnia and Kosovo, Montenegro has largely escaped the kind of extreme and violent polarization of the ethnic groups that has occurred in other parts of the former Yugoslavia. Since 1997 the support of Muslims and Albanians has been decisive for the election victories of the DPS, and the Djukanovic government includes members of ethnic minorities in senior positions.

In turn, Montenegro's willingness to accept tens of thousands of Kosovo Albanian, Serb and Roma refugees at the height of the Kosovo conflict in 1999 has brought considerable credit to the government.

4.1 Muslim Slavs

The largest ethnic minority group is that of Muslim Slavs, some of whom describe themselves as Bosniacs, identifying with their fellow Muslims in Bosnia. With 15 per cent of the population, their numbers are particularly significant in the north-east of the republic, in and around towns such as Plav, Rozaje, Bijelo Polje and Berane, where they form a local majority in certain areas.⁴⁵

Among the Muslim Slav population, the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije - SDA) and the International Democratic Union in Montenegro (Međunarodna demokratska unija u Crnoj Gori - MDUCG) are ethnically based parties, the former sharing its name with the main Bosniac party in Bosnia. Election results show that the minority political parties do not attract the automatic support of the minority group they purport to represent. Although there is some correlation between ethnicity and voter behaviour, the population is not generally mobilized along ethnic lines, and the support base of the governing coalition crosses ethnic lines.

Many Muslim Slavs fear the independence of Montenegro, since it would lead to the division of the Sandjak region, on the border between Serbia and Montenegro.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Future of Montenegro*, IISS Strategic Comments, Vol. 7, Issue 2, London, March 2001

⁴⁵ European Stability Initiative, *Autonomie...*

⁴⁶ Halilovic, E., *Fears, Migrations and Divisions in Sandjak*, Podgorica: AIM, 10 March 2000

4.2 Montenegrin Albanians

Ethnic Albanians number 50,000 or seven per cent of the population (1991 census), around 65 per cent of whom are Muslim and 35 per cent Catholic. They are concentrated in areas bordering on Albania. There are significant Albanian minorities in the southern coastal areas, forming a local majority in Ulcinj, in the northern municipality of Plav, and in Podgorica, which includes a mainly Albanian-inhabited district.

In Ulcinj, which is overwhelmingly inhabited by ethnic Albanians (85 per cent), power is shared by the two specifically ethnic Albanian parties, the LDSHMZ and the UDSH. However, the head of police and head of the municipal court are not of Albanian ethnicity. Albanians are also underrepresented in the local police.⁴⁷

The key problems of the Albanian community in Montenegro are underemployment in the public sector, education and culture. Only 0.03-0.05 per cent of Albanians are employed in state bodies and public services and although there are three Albanian-held positions in the Montenegrin government, there are no Albanians holding positions in the judicial or internal affairs sectors of the government.

Albanians attend Albanian language primary schools. But educational curricula, notably in language, history and the arts, have very few references to the Albanian community. Currently there is not a single Albanian language journal subsidized from the state budget.

The first proposal put forward on behalf of the Albanians in Montenegro for regulation of their status was the Democratic League's Memorandum on the Special Status of Albanians in Montenegro (1992). That document was ignored by the then authorities. In November 2000 the Democratic Union of Albanians submitted to the Montenegro Government a proposal for a "Political and Legal Framework of Self-Management of National Communities in Montenegro". Some of the main claims spelled out in this document are for amendments to the Act on Local Self-Rule, reinstatement of status of municipality to Tuza (which was previously independent, but now merged within Podgorica), introduction of the institution of Ombudsman, the establishment of a bicameral Republican parliament, etc.

In September 1997 the DPS signed an agreement with the leading Albanian parties, which amounted to a commitment by the government to fully respect minority rights. After the 1998 elections Albanians were allocated one ministerial post, one deputy minister post and one deputy secretary post in the Montenegrin government. In the 1998 elections Albanians backed Milo Djukanovic's policy. However, the fact that the current Montenegrin government has failed to deliver many of the promises given to Albanians, or to tackle their key problems, resulted in more conditional backing for Djukanovic's coalition from Albanian leaders in the April 2001 elections.

Although much remains to be done to achieve real integration of the Albanians into the political and economic scene in Montenegro, they are firmly backing

⁴⁷ Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, *Albanians in Montenegro*, Belgrade, May 2001, <http://www.helsinki.org.yu> [accessed 19 October 2001]

independence for Montenegro.⁴⁸ Montenegrin Albanians did not support the third Yugoslavia, partly because of their distrust of Serbia. One might say that Montenegrin Albanians see Montenegro as their state, in that an independent Montenegro would represent the most acceptable framework for resolution of their status. Their political leaders demand for Albanians in Montenegro the same status as that enjoyed by minorities in Western, developed countries, viz. regulation of their status under a new constitution and introduction of legal mechanisms protecting their individual and collective rights. They also maintain that they would only campaign for their rights within the framework of Montenegrin institutions.⁴⁹

4.2.1 The Albanian Issue during and after the Campaign for the April 2001 Elections

During the April 2001 election campaign representatives of the Coalition “Together for Yugoslavia” suggested that it would be dangerous for Montenegro to let its minorities take decisions about the fate of the country. By extension they widely promoted their thesis about an alleged Albanian threat and Albanian attempts to destabilize Montenegro.⁵⁰ The problem of the Albanian national issue and the concept of Greater Albania/Kosovo was introduced into the pre-election campaign by some Belgrade politicians and representatives of the coalition “Together for Yugoslavia”. According to SNP assessments any separatism on the part of the Montenegrin authorities would only encourage Albanian separatists. However, the fact that they choose to raise this issue could be interpreted as an attempt by the SNP and its coalition partners to undermine the cooperation which Albanian parties have established with the DPS.

Some press sources warned that conflicts in southern Serbia and Macedonia might spill over into Montenegro in case of break-up of the federation. The proclamation of Montenegrin independence might have a domino effect and generate claims for separation of the Albanian parts of Montenegro. In mid-March 2001 the media in Serbia extensively covered the presence of armed Albanians in areas of the municipalities of Plav and Gusinje and the appearance of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) graffiti on the walls of some schools in Podgorica. Moreover, following the April elections, two pro-Yugoslav daily papers, *Dan* and *Glas Crnogoraca*, continued to warn about an Albanian terrorist threat. An ethnic Albanian uprising was to begin in the city of Plav, as part of the ethnic Albanians’ aspirations to create a Greater Albania.

⁴⁸ Agence France Presse, Barbier, J.-E., *Montenegro-Albanians Reject Violence, Support Independence of Montenegro*, 17 April 2001

⁴⁹ Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, p. 3

⁵⁰ At a campaign rally of the Coalition “Together for Yugoslavia” in Mataguzi, the president of the SNP, Predrag Bulatovic, stated: “Kudos to Montenegrin Albanians, they know we must cohabitate, but they are firebrands who want to destabilize Montenegro. I would not like to scare Montenegrins with stories about spill over of terrorism into our country.” (12 April 2001). The president of the Popular Party, Dragan Šoc, stated: “Why would Muslims and Albanians take decisions on future state-legal status of Yugoslavia, for only the majority Orthodox people are entitled to take such decisions.” (1 April 2001) See Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. In March 2001, the UK politician Paddy Ashdown also warned that ethnic Albanian extremists from Kosovo might try to stir up a Macedonia-style insurrection in Montenegro. See Agence France Presse, *Albanian Rebels Could Spark Crisis in Montenegro*, 21 March 2001

However, Albanian leaders in Montenegro insist that the Albanians only want to obtain and exercise their rights within the state where they live, Montenegro, without any territorial pretensions, or ambitions for separation or annexation. Ferhat Denosha, representing the Albanian parties in the Montenegrin parliament, dismissed the allegations as “fabrications and hallucinations”. Also according to Srdjan Darmonovic, a Podgorica-based political analyst, assaults on Montenegrin territorial integrity are highly unlikely.⁵¹ However, part of the Montenegrin public took the information and allegations very seriously. They were disturbed and worried about it, which, according to the same analysts, is what those putting forward the allegations wanted to achieve. At the beginning of August 2001, the Montenegrin Police and the Yugoslav army issued a joint statement denying the existence of terrorist groups in northern Montenegro.⁵²

4.2.2 *The Controversy in August 2001*

On 24 August 2001, a forest worker of Serbian origin was killed and another wounded during a robbery by Kosovo Albanian criminals in Jelenak (in the Plav municipality near the Kosovo boundary). The murder victim, Nenad Markovic, had come to Montenegro with his colleague Damjan Bozic from Bosnia and Herzegovina to earn money during the summer, felling trees in the border area. After killing Markovic and severely wounding Bozic, the Albanians fled with their cash to Kosovo.

Subsequent statements by the Montenegrin Ministry of the Interior (MUP), both unilaterally and jointly with the Yugoslav army (VJ), have described the incident as a criminal act, stating explicitly that it was neither a terrorist act nor ethnically related. However, the incident was immediately seized on by the federalist opposition parties as an opportunity to repeat their old allegations concerning the spread of ethnic Albanian radicalism into Montenegro. The suggestion that the incident indicated a threat of an uprising was strongly disputed by supporters of President Milo Djukanovic.⁵³

More fuel was added to the fire when the press reported a gathering, on 28 August 2001, of about 400 inhabitants in the Kuci Region (just outside Podgorica, towards the Albanian border) who were protesting against the relocation of VJ border control units from the area. The Chief of Staff of the VJ Second Army, General Momcilo Radevic, was reported to have stated that the VJ had daily clashes with terrorists in Plav and Gusinje, as a justification for the relocation. On 30 August 2001, the VJ issued a clarifying statement, published in the daily *DAN* on 31 August: “There are still reasons for caution and vigilance but not for anxiety. There are no indications

⁵¹ Koprivica, V., *Is Montenegro Threatened by the Albanians? Who Wants Albanian-Montenegrin War?*, Podgorica: AIM, 22 June 2001, <http://www.aimpress.org> [accessed 19 October 2001]

⁵² *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 8 August 2001

⁵³ Milutin Vujosevic, a senior official of the People’s Party from Plav told IWPR, “I think Nenad Markovic’s murder had nothing to do with Albanian terrorism. This was an armed robbery.” Adem Dzurlic of the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action, also from Plav, agreed. Dzavid Sabovic, a Social Democratic Party official and director of a Plav cultural centre, said speculation about terrorism was laughable, but he expressed concern that the robbery would be used to stir up trouble for Albanians. See Komnenic, P., *Hysteria over Albanian ‘Plot’*, *IWPR’s Balkan Crisis Report*, 4 September 2001; *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 27 August 2001; 28 August 2001

that the terrorist groups have made incursions into this region.”⁵⁴ The president of the Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA) also expressed the belief that a Macedonia scenario could not develop in Montenegro, and pointed out that with only seven per cent of the population the Albanians of Montenegro could not be a factor for instability.⁵⁵

In addition to the murder case and the controversy around the VJ statements, the third significant event during the summer of 2001 was the sharp increase in Kosovo-Albanian tourists coming to Montenegro, in particular to the coastal town of Ulcinj. Estimates put the number of summer visitors to Ulcinj at a record figure of more than 100,000. Two years after the end of the Kosovo conflict, instead of choosing the Albanian coast, the majority of Kosovars went to Montenegro because they felt safer there than travelling along the northern roads of Albania, ruled by local gangs. The massive tourist invasion in Montenegro gave a boost to the domestic economy and demonstrated cordial relations between the ethnic groups, speaking each others language.

4.2.3 Worrying Developments

However, a warning of possible disturbing developments seems to be justified, for three reasons.

A first concern relates to the judgement of the domestic press and politics. The apparently continuous practice of taking incidents with however remote connection to ethnic Albanian radicalism completely out of context and drawing very firm conclusions is extremely worrying. In particular, using the fear of possible Albanian unknown intentions to win points in the ongoing political battle over the status of Montenegro risks alienating the indigenous ethnic Albanian minority from the political process. It may indeed draw the attention of militants elsewhere in the Balkan region, thus becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Secondly, it appears that Albanians in Montenegro at present see their future more in terms of affiliation with the DPS and the pursuit of an independent Montenegro, than in terms of any affiliation with either Albania or Kosovo. This could change in the future, particularly if the DPS does not give the Albanians a greater role and responsibility in the government or respond to their concerns. It is easy to imagine that the DPS will take Albanian support for granted without meeting any or very few of their concerns. If this level of frustration were to be reached, then the Albanian nationalism might develop more strongly.

⁵⁴ *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 31 August 2001; Ethnic Albanian Extremists Moving from Macedonia to Montenegro, *Defense and Security*, No. 33, 6 September 2001

⁵⁵ “Besides Albanians in Montenegro have shown to be the factor of stability, creating of good multi-ethnic climate and democratization and we shall be glad to help in making Montenegro democratic state in democratic Europe. Albanians in Montenegro succeeded in realizing part of their collective rights especially in the sphere of informing. We have finally got the law on free usage of national symbols, we have ministry that is engaged in the problems of minorities and the election law is completely adapted since without the positive discrimination Albanians would never succeed entering the parliament.”, Seven Percent of Albanians Cannot Be Factor of Instability, *MNNNews: Daily News Services on Montenegro*, 11 September 2001, quoting *Vijesti*

Thirdly, it should be emphasized that although relations between Albanians and Montenegrins are quite good for the moment, and even if the August murder was an ordinary crime, relations between the two groups might get disrupted by incidents initiated by Albanians from outside Montenegro with their own agenda. According to *Defense and Security*, during August 2001 there were increasingly frequent cases of infiltration by armed men stealing cattle, cutting trees or burning shepherds' huts. The most serious incident to date was the above mentioned robbery, killing and wounding of foresters in the Jelenak area. A tactical group from the VJ Second Army is deployed along the administrative boundary with Kosovo in Sector Charlie West of the ground safety zone, but armed gangs and other armed men find ways to get across the high mountains and thick forests. The VJ took control of part of the zone in mid-June when VJ soldiers reached the boundary on Bogicevci mountain. Those heights are almost impossible to patrol or guard from forward posts most of the year because of heavy snows and a harsh climate.

A number of incidents have taken place. On the night of 28-29 May, a VJ border guard unit stopped a group of ethnic Albanians trying to cross the border in the area between Lake Skadar and the Bojana river with a column of pack animals carrying loads containing 7.62 mm ammunition for Kalashnikov assault rifles. That ammunition was Chinese-made which shows that it came from regular Albanian army stockpiles.⁵⁶ The French news agency AFP claims that NATO has observed suspicious activity between Macedonia and the Plav/Gusinje area in Montenegro.⁵⁷ On 30 August 2001, the Yugoslav Navy prevented the smuggling of ammunition from the territory of Albania into Montenegro.⁵⁸

5. Socio-economic Challenges

The economic performance of Montenegro has been analyzed by many institutions, one of them the project MONET, "Montenegro Economic Trends".⁵⁹ According to MONET Montenegrin industry performed rather poorly in 2000 and owes its small positive growth to the aluminium sector. In the service sector, many sub-sectors show better performance than industry. Activities in tourism, transport and trade show significant increases in 2000 as compared to 1999. For next year there are high expectations for the integration of Montenegro into the Eurozone's economic space.

5.1 Donors' Concerns

However, following the political changes in Belgrade in October 2000, Montenegro's strategic importance to the West has diminished. Donor priorities are changing and Montenegro can no longer count on external subsidies continuing at the extraordinary level of the past years.

⁵⁶ Ethnic Albanian Extremists ...

⁵⁷ Naegele, J., *Montenegro's Mountain Murder Sparks Concern*, *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine*, 28 August 2001, <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/> [accessed 19 October 2001]

⁵⁸ I*Net News Agency, *Do Albanian Terrorist Groups from Kosovo Exist in Montenegro?*, 31 August 2001

⁵⁹ MONET is a joint initiative of the Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognoses in Podgorica and CEPS, Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels. See *Montenegro Economic Trends*, April 2001

In 1999 and 2000 the European Union and the United States pledged some 485 million DM in assistance to Montenegro. Another 280 million DM has been announced for 2001.⁶⁰ Assistance levels in 2002 are certain to be considerably lower.

Moreover, the money earmarked for the 2001 budget arrived months later than expected, with the first instalments only appearing in mid-summer. This has caused huge problems, delaying the issue of state pensions by at least a month. Refugees and displaced persons have also suffered.

Because of the independence issue many Montenegrins fear the West is punishing the government by slowing down the disbursement of assistance. It was planned that 20 per cent of this year's budget would be covered by foreign donations, which becomes doubtful as time is passing. Therefore, the government is trying to earn more domestic revenue. It adopted a plan for checking the grey economy, at the beginning of August 2001, which is to contribute to the more efficient collection of tax and excise revenues from products such as cigarettes and alcohol. It is estimated that 40 to 60 per cent of economic activity in Montenegro is connected to the black market and that around 50,000 to 100,000 people earn their living from the black economy. Because of this and because of suspicion of links to the state apparatus, the government's crackdown on corruption is perceived with scepticism.⁶¹ Investments in state-sponsored infrastructure projects are being cut. The government also took the unpopular measure of cutting state subsidies for milk and bread.

As funds and subsidies dry up, internal pressure is growing. Montenegrin trade unions have called for an increase in the minimum wage, from 80 DM to 96 DM, threatening a general strike. It looks very likely that social unrest will increase during the coming months.⁶²

5.2 Economic Reforms

If Montenegro is moving towards being on the brink of financial ruin, what are the reasons for this? Apart from diminished or delayed external financial assistance, part of the reason might be found in domestic factors. According to ESI no real economic reform has taken place during the last three years. Nor has any substantial change taken place in the field of judicial reform, administrative reform or local government reform. One might claim that the rhetoric of change has become a substitute for the reality.

At the same time employment by the Montenegrin authorities is huge. According to ESI, some 60 per cent of Montenegro's official workforce are now employed by the state or in public companies.⁶³ The cost of supporting the administration absorbs two-

⁶⁰ European Stability Initiative, *Rhetoric or Reform: A Case Study of Institution Building in Montenegro 1998-2001*, Podgorica, 28 June 2001, <http://www.esiweb.org> [accessed 19 October 2001]

⁶¹ Radulovic, Z., Closing Down Smugglers' Paradise, *IWPR's Balkan Crisis Report*, 24 August 2001

⁶² Radulovic, Z., Montenegro on Brink of Financial Ruin, *IWPR's Balkan Crisis Report*, 28 September 2001

⁶³ According to estimates mentioned by V.I.P. News Services, a third of those officially employed in Montenegro work for government services or its administration. See V.I.P. News Services, *Weekly Economic Bulletin*, 13 September 2001

thirds of the Montenegrin budget, and is met only through massive and until now largely unconditional foreign assistance. The consolidated budget deficit is a striking 15 per cent of total GDP.

ESI stresses that the stability of Montenegro rests much less on the question of its status inside or outside Yugoslavia than on its ability to pursue serious reform. Failure by Montenegro to tackle its own internal shortcomings will constitute a serious problem both for the pro and the anti independence agendas. Montenegro's institutions might not be effective enough to allow it either to function as an independent, European state or to prosper within a loose federal or confederal arrangement. However, Montenegrin government officials believe the opposite.

In the event of a worsening economic and social situation in the near future, there is a danger of "conflict entrepreneurs" emerging from within dissatisfied parts of the political establishment, denouncing the status quo and the compromises it contains. Their banner would not be reform but polarization, exploiting existing social, regional, political and ethnic cleavages.

As the risk of Montenegro entering a further spiral of social decline looks real, it is crucial that the international community does not take the political and social stability of Montenegro for granted but actively engages the Montenegrin authorities in efforts to address the root causes of future instability. In that respect, it is crucial to design and implement a credible public administration reform strategy including transparency, to introduce and enforce judicial reforms, to adapt the Montenegrin police forces to new circumstances and to support civil society development.

6. Conclusion

As FRY's President Kostunica, Serbian Prime Minister Djindjic and the Democratic Opposition of Serbia attempt to guide the FRY through the transition to democratic rule in the post-Milosevic era, one of the biggest challenges is coming from Montenegro, Serbia's junior partner in the FRY, seeking to gain independence. Although no one any longer fears war in Montenegro, since all relevant actors have committed themselves to a political solution, the Montenegro question is not solved and might be on the table for quite some time.

The status quo might not keep at bay the rising instability and growing tensions, and therefore looks unsustainable. In this paper we have analysed three factors for possible instability around or in Montenegro.

Firstly, we considered the political fight around the status of Montenegro. Different proposals have been tabled. The crucial difference between them is whether one opts for a single-state concept with two constituent republics or for a confederation of two independent states. The unusual mix of increased pressure inside the Montenegrin society for independence, on the one hand, and the continued or revived functioning of FRY institutions, on the other hand, is making the current situation highly uncomfortable. The April 2001 parliamentary elections made crystal clear how internally divided Montenegro is about its future. In order to overcome these divisions and to find a referendum formula acceptable to the two main blocs, talks about a

“combination government” are being conducted. A possible referendum might contribute to clarity on the relations with Serbia and the FRY institutions.

While talks between Serbia and Montenegro have failed to achieve any meaningful result so far, within Serbia the frictions in the DOS are affecting the discussion on federal level as well. Energy and attention is being distracted from necessary reforms in both Serbia and Montenegro. The uncertain status of the federation is impeding the reform efforts in both republics. The process to define a new relationship between Belgrade and Podgorica needs new attention. One could claim that stubborn opposition to Montenegrin independence, without a constructive approach to the mechanisms to define a new relationship, would increase the likelihood of an acrimonious separation.

Secondly, we looked into the position, demands and dynamics (real or perceived) concerning the Albanian minority in Montenegro. We concluded that the press articles and controversies around unclear events, portrayed as an Albanian threat to Montenegro, might alienate Montenegrin Albanians, attract the attention of militants from outside Montenegro and become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rather than taking the loyalty of Montenegrin Albanians for granted, the Djukanovic government should address some of the Albanian socio-economic demands. We also noticed some worrying incidents, which need to be clarified.

Thirdly, we explored the economic challenges Montenegro is facing. Whatever the status of Montenegro will be, it is evident that not many economic reforms have been implemented so far. With a clearly decreasing flow of international funds for the Podgorica authorities, one might expect growing social unrest in the republic.

7. Glossary

CSCE	Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe
DOS	Demokratska opozicija Srbije (Democratic Opposition of Serbia)
DPS	Demokratska partija socijalista (Democratic Party of Socialists)
DSS	Demokratska stranka Srbije (Democratic Party of Serbia)
DZB	Koalicija “Da zivimo bolje” (Coalition “For a Better Life”)
ESI	European Stability Initiative
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
G-17	Group of 17 Economists
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
LDSHMZ	Lidhja Demokratike e Shqiptareve ne Mal te Zi (Democratic League of Albanians of Montenegro)
LSCG	Liberalni savez Crne Gore (Liberal League of Montenegro)
MDUCG	Medjunarodna demokratska unija u Crnoj Gori (International Democratic Union in Montenegro)
MUP	Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova (Ministry of the Interior)
NS	Narodna stranka (People’s Party)
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RDB	Resor drzavne bezbednosti (Serbian State Security)
SDA	Stranka demokratske akcije (Party of Democratic Action)
SDP	Socijaldemokratska partija (Social Democratic Party)
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SNP	Socijalistička narodna partija (Socialist People’s Party)
SNS	Srpska narodna stranka (Serbian People’s Party)
SRS	Srpska radikalna stranka (Serb Radical Party)
UDSH	Unioni Demokratik Shqiptar ne Mal te Zi (Democratic Union of Albanians)
VJ	Vojska Jugoslavije (Yugoslav Army)

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