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IS MONTENEGRO THE NEXT?

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Montenegro was one of the two former Yugoslav republics that remained loyal to the idea of Yugoslavism in the beginning of the endgame in the Yugoslav geography. What Belgrade did during the disintegration process primarily in Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia was shared by Podgorica as well. Although he had been in the throngs of the nomenclature that waged war against the rebellious republics of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), the current Montenegrin President Djukanovic now expresses his nation's regret for being an ally of the Belgrade regime in the crimes committed against the Croatian people during the civil war in the early 1990s.¹ Podgorica under the rule of its Western-oriented new élite, now seeks a new direction, when the very reason, namely the tyranny of Milosevic, that urged it to do so does not exist any more. Many experts see Montenegro as the last but not the least of the stones that detaches from the Yugoslav rocky mass. Just like in the beginning of the Yugoslav tragedy in the 1990s, this republic—or the last remaining republic that is a satellite of Serbia— seeking its independence is warned about the undesirable implications of its act. It is underlined that if Montenegro is separated, it will constitute a moral ground for the other detachments in Bosnia-Herceg Bosna, Republica Sirpska and Kosovo and even Sandzak as well as Vojvodina. Ironically, the same warnings on the grounds that the belligerents should sit around the negotiation table rather than rush to the independence whatever it costs, were made to the Croats and the Slovenes in the early 1990s, yet they did not listen, thereby giving way to the bloodshed that will never be erased from the collective memory of mankind.² This article aims to seek an answer to the question whether the recent developments demonstrated to the world that history repeats itself, and Montenegro is resolved to defy it against all odds, and to highlight the conditions that may change the sight of the events from the struggle for independence to an Yugoslav intra-élite power politics.

What urges me to ask whether the Montenegrin case should be seen within the perspective of a struggle for independence, or a Yugoslav intra-élite showdown on the verge of the inevitable process of reorganisation of the Yugoslav system is the existence of unbreakable or organic linkage between the Serbian and Montenegrin identities. It drives one to suspect that the Montenegrin case overlaps with the motives of the former independence movements within Yugoslavia, namely that of the Croats or Slovenes. Both of the independence—or separation— movements could be placed on a tangible basis once the fact that the Croats and Slovenes were completely defiant against the Serbs from the outset is recognised. Before the tyranny of King Alexander, the state of the south Slavs was named as the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and the Slovenes and even their imagined cosmos was divided between the West and the East, Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Nobody can deny the disturbing roles of the Cultural Associations of the Croats and the Serbs in the collapse of the Yugoslav partnership that avoided the desirable dormancy of the different ethnic consciousness under the cover of proletariat solidarity.³ What makes me see the case as a Yugoslav intra-élite struggle is the

absence of a defying Montenegrin identity. Yet, what this study primarily intends to underline is that the external conditions have so far played a pivotal role in turning the current conflict into the form mentioned above and it seems that in the future they will continue to do the same.

DJUKANOVIC: A TROJAN HORSE OR A REFORMIST WITHIN?

The NATO campaign that was launched on 24 March 1999 and targeted the Yugoslav army (JNA) military assets and facilities did not spare Montenegro. In fact, the NATO bombardment hitting the targets within the borders of Montenegro confused many Montenegrins who were confident that the alliance would not subject them to the same treatment as they accorded to Belgrade. Yet, the republic hosted many strategic facilities for the JNA, like the military airport at Golubovci near Podgorica, the army barracks in Danilovgrad where the munitions withdrawn from Croatia proper at the end of the war in 1995 were stored and some radar sites.⁴ However, that was all, and at the end of the seventh day, NATO ceased to punish the Montenegrins. In Podgorica, the NATO bombing was even beneficial to an extent to the government who intended to expose to the world its willingness to separate its way with Belgrade in this war as well as to strike a deadly blow on the political postulate of Montenegrin-Serbian unity. After NATO bombing started, Podgorica declared a civil state of emergency and issued a compulsory work order whose very aim was to avoid the conscription of the Montenegrin youths to JNA.⁵ According to Podgorica this war was not their own. Despite accusations that Djukanovic and colleagues embroiled in an acute Slovenian syndrome⁶—a euphemism for being pro-Western—Montenegro—ironically with the words of Zoran Djindić—seemed resolved to jump over Serbia for a fast entrance to Europe as long as this larger federation partner continued to constitute a big obstacle before this goal.⁷

On 5 August 1999, the Montenegrin government approved a detailed plan that ‘would abolish the Yugoslav federation and recast Podgorica-Belgrade relations as a loose association (zajednica) of two equal and sovereign “member states.”’⁸ The fundamentals of the plan that envisaged the establishment of an ‘Association of Montenegro and Serbia’ could be summarised as equal representation of the republics in the federal assembly, the acceptance of the rotating presidency between the presidents of Montenegro and Serbia; shrinkage of the bureaucratic apparatus in the federal level—its reorganisation into a maximum of six ministries—; allowance for the republics to pursue in a coordinated manner their independent foreign and economic policies as well as to possess their own armies and currencies along with the new and convertible federal currency; consensus on the priority of adherence to the Euro-Atlantic structures in the range of the common foreign policy of the federation; acceptance of the right of republics to exert their veto over joint decisions entailing the election of the federal president and declaration of war; establishment of a constitutional court that would supervise the legislature of the association (zajednica).

It seems that the demands of Podgorica heralded the rise of a new independent, or at least not so dependent Montenegrin state within a reformulated Yugoslav system. Yet, there is also some evidence that may urge us to see the mentioned set of privileges as a political manoeuvre against the rising new and concomitantly reformist élite in Belgrade after the topple of Milosevic regime. In reality, the most important evidence is the very political career of the Montenegrin president himself. Milo Djukanovic is now the youngest republican president around the world. This unprecedented ascent actually owes its existence to his pragmatism, shrewd populism and vision that seems to have been inspired from a Machiavellian philosophy that envisions the justification of the means for the sake of the ends.⁹ For instance, Djukanovic was very adept in coping with the economic dire straits

that the Montenegrin state ran into during the Kosovo crisis and subsequent international embargo over entire Yugoslavia. He was also known to have built his wealth from 'sanction-busting' during the Croatian and Bosnian wars.¹⁰ Djukanovic astonished even his ardent supporters in his skill in having the Montenegrin economy floated be it by legal or illegal ways.¹¹ During the Kosovo crisis, the boats loaded with smuggled cigarettes helped considerably to the survival of Djukanovic's regime. It was reported that about 700 containers of cigarettes were transferred annually through Montenegro to Italy thereby generating a two million DM revenue per month.¹² It can be thought that the illegal trade provided Djukanovic with the money he needed to form and maintain loyal security guards that managed to deter pro-Milosevic forces from launching a JNA-supported coup d'etat against him or that at least kept fresh the possibility of a bloody civil war that might instigate the West to interfere in favour of Podgorica if Belgrade attempted to stamp out the independence of Podgorica.

The Montenegrin President also managed to evaluate perfectly the international conjuncture and to utilise the posturing in his expense. He took very courageous steps particularly after the defeat of JNA in the hands of the NATO air force and dared to attend the Conference on Southern Europe as if he already attained the independence of Montenegro from Yugoslavia and with the support of the US, he managed to secure the membership to the Pact of Stability. During the conference Djukanovic presented a draft entailing the reformulation of relations with Belgrade under the title of 'Foundations of the Project for the New Order of State Relations between Serbia and Montenegro'. The provisions of the draft seemed to have been comprised of the issues in the name of which the West decided to interfere in the Yugoslav affairs in Kosovo such as respect for the international standards of human rights including those of the minorities.¹³ Yet, the diplomatic maneuver of Djukanovic created some sort of dilemma for himself. While underlining his democratic nature by stressing the necessity to create a democratic political system that would respect human rights, he never convinced his Western alliance that it was only for Montenegro or never tried to do so. In other words, Djukanovic was perceived by the West as a reformist who will touch on the dominoes in Yugoslavia as a whole¹⁴ along with the others like Djindic.

Another point is the fact that the West endorsed and even forced Djukanovic to play a role of mediator between the bifurcated and even polarised opposition of Milosevic in Serbia. For instance, he clandestinely met with Vuk Draskovic on 11-12 September 1999 to convince him to forge an alliance with his former rival Alliance for Changes of Djindic. After the Kosovo defeat, while the former ardent supporters of Milosevic like the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Academy of Sciences were beginning to turn their back to him¹⁵, Djukanovic became the most amiable ally of the current Premier Djindic. Yet, what was ironic and what raised suspicion even within the throngs of the allies of Djukanovic was that the two leaders issued a joint declaration for the democratisation of Serbia. It was astonishing because, if Montenegro was paving its way for independence from Yugoslavia, it must have had nothing to do with the democratisation of Serbia.¹⁶ If Montenegro was already resolved to break off Yugoslavia why the internal politics of Serbia was such a great concern to Podgorica? Obviously what prevented Djukanovic from engaging in the talks with Milosevic was not the disputed legitimacy of the Federal Parliament but the harsh reaction of the pro-independence flank of his coalition government headed by Novak Kilibarda to the notion of bargaining with Milosevic.¹⁷

Obviously, in this posturing, while assuming the role of mediator between the scattered dissidents in Serbia, Djukanovic pursued a very painstaking policy against Milosevic. Actually, many experts saw

the possibility of a pro-Milosevic coup d'état in Montenegro as the very reason behind this political stand. The Second Army of JNA held important strongholds¹⁸ in Montenegro and there existed a political group that would support such an action like the Montenegrin SNP of Bulatovic.¹⁹ Besides the Federal Army, Belgrade had already started to form a strong paramilitia unit whose staff was drawn from the veterans of the Slovenian war. This so-called VJ military police unit was specialised in sabotage, anti-guerrilla and terrorist operations and received the orders directly from the Security Department of the Yugoslav Army in Belgrade.²⁰ Yet, what rendered a design to destroy the pro-independence movement problematic was the existence of special forces which were loyal to Djukanovic as long as their salaries were paid regularly and moreover in DM funded out of the revenues coming from illegal trade as well as Podgorica's economic defiance against Belgrade. Upon the threats of Djukanovic to adopt a new currency and attempts to liberalise the economy of Montenegro, Milosevic closed the border and started to block trade between Serbia and Montenegro. In retaliation Djukanovic opened borders with Italy, turned a blind eye to the cigarette smuggling and illegal sale of oil to Albania. Montenegro became a centre for the marketing of the stolen cars brought by Bosniak and Croatian mafia. The budget was formed out of the taxes levied on such activities. Besides, he managed to draw tax revenues away from Serbia by cutting duties on customer goods too.²¹ Consequently, that was not only an economic warfare in the name of independence but it should be read as a requirement for Djukanovic to secure his post as well.

When the existence of the Yugoslav army as well as Milosevic's loyal VJ units was taken into account, the future of the Montenegrin defiance was not so promising indeed. Yet, many neglected another fact. The regime of Milosevic was ailing in Serbia; the opposition was raising its voice and the army rank-and-file was in reality divided between the pro-Milosevic and anti-Milosevic flanks.²² It was suspicious that the JNA staff would firmly abide by the directives of General Obradovic—the commander of the Yugoslav Second Army in Montenegro. A serious military confrontation with Montenegro would be both costly and psychologically debilitating. Hence, despite some shows of force by Belgrade, the parties managed to act with a cool head and the minor events did not escalate into uncontrollable levels.²³ Many experts considered that Milosevic would never send his armies inside Montenegro, yet use pro-Serbian paramilitia whose conscripts might be drawn particularly from the supporters of Bulatovic's SNP in northern Montenegro.²⁴ Yet, what many neglected in this posturing was that Djukanovic also held the control of a well-equipped, 15,000 strong force—the so-called Special Police Force (MUP)²⁵.

Probably, all the aforementioned conditions were considerably effective and spurred Belgrade to act very painstakingly. Yet, obviously the muscle of the West was the most decisive factor that dissuaded Milosevic from plunging into a new adventure in Montenegro. Many experts prophesied that Milosevic would try to separate the northern part of the country which was the stronghold of the pro-Serbian SNP or encourage it to declare its autonomy.²⁶ On the other hand, that would be an act that was to silence even the diplomatic circles who opposed to the Montenegrin independence from the outset. Concomitantly when the scenarios that Milosevic would spark the fire firstly in the northern Montenegro leaked out, the idea of diplomatic recognition of Montenegro's independence without waiting Djukanovic to hold a referendum for it and to prevent a new Bosnia, began to gain a common parlance. Such a setting was much more perilous for Milosevic now that the Yugoslav army within the borders of Montenegro was to turn into an army that was a de-facto occupier of a sovereign state's territories.²⁷ Milosevic had so far played the bully-boy with his tanks as well as the army. The same was this time adeptly used to cripple the revenues that were spent for the sustenance of the armed forces and prestige of Djukanovic among the Montenegrin voters. For instance, the

Yugoslav troops posted near the Albanian-Montenegrin border gate at Bozaj to prevent the infiltration of the KLA militants into Montenegro during the clashes in Kosovo continued patrolling the area thereby preventing a lucrative trade possibility for Podgorica.²⁸

While Milosevic made a *démarche* by behaving as if Montenegro was still ruled by the federal agencies, Djukanovic responded by either denying or liquidating their actions.²⁹ Yet, in the face of a strong Montenegrin opposition backing Djukanovic, Belgrade seemed to have paid only lip service to the supremacy of the federal organs. Actually, there was neither any autonomously operating federal agency under the strict rule of Milosevic, nor Podgorica recognised them as legitimate. Yet, this war of nerves did not end with a serious confrontation. It follows that the continuation of the status quo was as beneficial for Milosevic as for Djukanovic. Besides, Milosevic had to wait for the proper moment to act against rebellious republic. The by-elections in Herceg Novi and Podgorica was a litmus test for Belgrade. However, unfortunate for Milosevic, the opinion polls conducted before the elections indicated that around 70 percent of the Montenegrin voters tended to support the call for referendum due to the rising violence in Serbia.³⁰

On the verge of the elections scheduled to be held in October 2000, Milosevic's decision to make some constitutional amendments that would allow him to extend his tenure in the federal presidency provided Djukanovic with a robust pretext to take the expected courageous step, namely referendum for independence. From another perspective, it was obvious that the amendments meant the eternal loss of the probability of a bright political career for Djukanovic on the Yugoslav arena once the involved constitutional amendments stipulated that the president shall come to power directly by elections but not by appointment by the Federal Parliament. Hence, the amendments ruled that the Montenegrins were no longer equal with the Serbs, once they would not be able to influence the fate of presidential elections and a Montenegrin would never have the chance to be elected as federal president due to demographic inferiority of this republic against Serbia.³¹

Upon the disclosure of the amendments, Podgorica announced that it would boycott the federal elections. On the other side, that was a good opportunity for Milosevic to fill the seats in the federal assembly with his Montenegrin supporters thereby acquiring an indisputable dominance even against his opponents in Serbia.³² Ironically, these developments procured another and unexpected opportunity for Djukanovic. On 11 July, the Montenegrin President met with his Croatian and Slovenian counterparts in Prague. During the talks the leaders never touched on the matter of the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia in defiance to the West.³³ However, this action was more than a defiance and gained a Yugoslav character once again when the Serbian opposition leaders who convened at Sveti Stefan disclosed their intention to see Djukanovic as a candidate for presidency against Milosevic in the December elections.³⁴ Actually, Montenegro had long acquired the position of a shelter to the dissident political leaders, journalists, authors and so forth.³⁵ While, the reports claiming that Milosevic placed Djukanovic at the top of the list of 'wanted' at any expense were on air on the verge of the early elections on 24 September, the victory of Kostunica and the subsequent collapse of the Milosevic regime brought to the fore the question of the future of the relations between Belgrade under the control of democrats and Podgorica once again.

KOSTUNICA REGIME AND DJUKANOVIC: A NEW DILEMMA FOR PODGORICA

Podgorica had already announced that it would boycott the federal elections on 24 September 2000

because they were completely related to the internal affairs of Serbia. It was reported that many Montenegrins could not see any difference between Milosevic and his electoral rival Kostunica since the latter was considered as nationalist as the former.³⁶ On the other hand, the factor of Milosevic had helped Djukanovic to lure some political groups affiliated with the notion of a more democratic Yugoslavia into his throngs. Hence, it was expected that as soon as the electoral results that heralded the triumph of Kostunica were disclosed, the defiant coalition of Djukanovic would begin to crumble. Such an expectation was inherited in the fact that Kostunica managed to retain the loyalty of some partners stressing that Montenegro could not wait for the democratisation of Serbia, a fair reality indeed for the suffering Montenegrin people. Yet, many wondered what would happen if Serbia decided to democratise herself.

The response soon came from Dragan Soc's Democratic Party (NS) which announced that Djukanovic government's decision to recognise Kostunica's victory was pointless as this would push Montenegro into isolation.³⁷ The NS was known for its traditional commitment to the Yugoslav federation, yet it had deserted this stand when Milosevic's rule turned into an overt tyranny. The party leadership had always considered the democratisation goal within the spectre of the Yugoslav politics and in the same vein, it announced its opposition to the Platform document prepared by Montenegrin government by underlining that it did not have the support of majority in Montenegro. After Kostunica's triumph the NS decided to revert to its former pro-Yugoslavia position. The tensions between the Djukanovic's 'For a Better Life' coalition and the NS rose due to the former's objection to the document which reorganised the relations between Serbia and Montenegro on the basis of a looser federation structure, yet, the refusal of Podgorica to acknowledge the legitimacy of Kostunica's electoral victory was the last straw breaking the camel's back and stamped out the majority position of the ruling coalition under the roof of the Montenegrin parliament.³⁸

Upon the defection of the NS, survival of the coalition government in power was now dependent upon the conditional support of the Liberals from without. Actually, the Liberals had always been critical of the clumsy operation of economic transformation policies by the coalition, they now conditioned the sustenance of pro-independence policies against Serbia in return to their support of the fragile government thereby leaving no chance to Djukanovic.³⁹ On the other hand, even Djukanovic's own party harboured a political clique headed by the Montenegrin Parliament Speaker Svetozar Marovic, supporting strong ties with Serbia. This clique was also advocating the forging of cordial relations with the pro-Serbian SNP as Montenegro needed them in setting up a robust federal government.⁴⁰ Another factor that complicated the problem for the pro-independence movement in Podgorica was the former statements of the new Yugoslav President underlining that the Montenegro problem should be overrun within the Yugoslav political system. Ironically, Kostunica was considered by many Montenegrins as a Serbian nationalist like Milosevic yet it was estimated that only 20 percent of the Montenegrin voters heeded the warning of Djukanovic not to participate in the elections.⁴¹ Obviously this setting encouraged Kostunica to remain confident to the idea of the integrity of Yugoslavia, and to his capacity to bring Djukanovic under his heels if it was necessary. For this reason, despite the refusal of Podgorica to recognise the post of Kostunica after the elections, Kostunica behaved leniently and extended his hands to Djukanovic and offered his DPS some ministerial posts in the federal government. Djukanovic declined the offer.

Probably, what encouraged even forced Belgrade's new ruling élite to feel confident was that the US came to express clearly its discontent for the Montenegrin independence projects⁴² as well as that a possible independence would spark some crises with the other unpleasant minorities of Yugoslavia,

i.e.; Sandjak and Vojvodina.⁴³ Besides, Belgrade also confronted a time-bomb ticking at the expense of Yugoslavia. In other words, Kostunica's coming to power and the dismantling of the despotic ruling apparatus of Milosevic, opened the way for Yugoslavia to reintegrate the European and global financial and political institutions as the sole outlet to redress the devastating impact of the war with the NATO. Yet, Montenegrin intransigence not to recognise Yugoslavia's having the right to say anything in its behalf complicated the situation. Because, now 'Yugoslavia' —not Serbia— appealed to return to those organisations like UN, IMF and World Bank, and Podgorica went to the authorities concerned to request a halt to the process of reintegration now that Montenegro and Serbia still could not reach a compromise on the form of their future partnership.⁴⁴

Actually, the end of war as well as the gradual normalisation of the relations between the West and Belgrade turned some advantages of Podgorica into disadvantages.⁴⁵ The Westerners had turned a blind eye to the major breaches of sanctions and smuggling activities allegedly controlled even by the state officials as long as they served to cement the power of defiant Djukanovic. After Milosevic was toppled, upon the reduction in its revenues, Podgorica encountered another dilemma; it should compensate its losses by utilising financial funds furnished by World Bank or other creditors. Yet, it required the official recognition of Montenegro as a sovereign state, as was in the case of the Macedonian independence. Ironically, it seems that West cannot even stand hearing the word of the Montenegrin independence, and by maintaining its intransigent insistence on opposing the reintegration of 'Yugoslavia' into the international institutions, Podgorica seems to have gone on cutting the very branch it is seated on. Since the staunch support to the Montenegrin independence is inherited in the constant economic hardships that the partnership with Serbia under tyrannical rule of Milosevic brought about, as well as in Djukanovic's ability to steer his ship successfully through the economic dire straits of war, it may be expected that the Montenegrins may tend to the pro-Yugoslav forces if the West decides to punish its naughty boy by crippling its financial aid and by recognising Belgrade as the sole legitimate interlocutor speaking in Podgorica's behalf. Consequently, it seems that Podgorica has created an impasse both for Belgrade and itself. Such an impasse could force Djukanovic to come to the terms of the game with Belgrade at last.

REFERENDUM CRISIS AND THE CONTINUATION OF THE CONUNDRUM

The pro-independence Montenegrins believe that their petty mountainous country will some day be a new Monte Carlo by the Adriatic Sea. The idea of independence was packed flamboyantly and the referendum was sold to the daydreamers as the point of the ribbon that would open the package. Yet, Montenegrins had long been divided into two as to whether the ornamented package covers a real gift or a ticking bomb. Obviously, what irritated the pro-independence flank was that the referendum case might turn into a fait-accompli that Belgrade could not bow to and furthermore provide it with a strong pretext on the grounds that the majority was not consented on the independence, to use even armed force to keep Montenegro in the federation. Djukanovic had long been under the pressure of his minor but vital liberal allies to push for referendum before the general elections in Montenegro. Yet, he also knew that such a bold decision might jeopardise the probable consent of the anti-independence flank in case the votes for independence outvoted those for remaining within Yugoslavia at the end of the referendum.

In fact, the public opinion polls that indicated the support for Djukanovic amounted to above 50 percent⁴⁶ seemed to have prepared Belgrade to wait calmly for what was inevitable. After the announcement of the dates of the elections and referendum, Belgrade seemed to have acquiesced to

the rolling of the stone down the slope though this increased the resentment on the part of the Serbian people against the Montenegrins. On the other hand, the angry Serbs clearly saw that the end of Yugoslavia meant the stamping out of the legal claim of Serbia over Kosovo, since the relevant UN Security Council Resolution No: 1244 envisaged the protection of 'the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia' Montenegro was now assumed as a traitor inside that enabled the Albanians to score decisively against the Serbs.⁴⁷

THE 22 APRIL ELECTIONS AND THE FATE OF THE MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE

If the elections in Montenegro were held while Milosevic grasped the reins of Yugoslavia, the outcome would have been clear. Yet, in such a political setting it was very difficult for the political experts to make accurate estimations about the results. On the eve of the elections opinion polls indicated that the pro-independence bloc of Djukanovic under the title of the Victory for Montenegro was ahead of the pro-Yugoslav bloc —so called Together for Yugoslavia— in a ratio respectively 40-53 percent to 30-37 percent.⁴⁸ The results were in line with the stand of the West assuming Djukanovic as a brilliant 'Yugoslav' political leader now that Djukanovic had managed neither to obtain the required majority in the Montenegrin assembly in order to hammer out the long debated political, economic and social reforms in an exclusively Montenegrin spirit, nor to push for the holding of a referendum for independence. The current posturing in which Djukanovic's Victory for Montenegro won 42 percent of the total vote; two points ahead of its rival Together for Yugoslavia, and obtained 37 out of 77 seats in the assembly, rendered a political alliance with outsiders inevitable. Actually, when one glance at this political riddle, there was no problem in terms of holding a referendum on the breaking away of Montenegro from Yugoslavia, because the only alternative for Djukanovic was the Liberal Alliance which was well known with its advocacy for the Montenegrin independence. Yet, that the Liberals put the referendum for independence as a sine qua non for forging a coalition with the bloc of Victory for Montenegro, complicated the situation further.⁴⁹ The Liberals having six valuable seats in the parliament presented a six-page document to Djukanovic and announced that they would extend their support on condition that the parliament enact a legislature for the holding of the referendum in a six-month period.⁵⁰

In reality, the demands of the Liberals were in line with the policies of Djukanovic. Yet, the threat of referendum was a useful leverage card in the hands of rational Montenegrin president against Belgrade that did not come to terms with the game Djukanovic wished to play. Now, it seemed that the threat was to be fleshed out, if Djukanovic chose to form a coalition with the Liberals. Yet, the course of events was still determined by the two significant factors. Firstly, it was not so clear that Djukanovic would wholeheartedly support the efforts in the parliament to push for a legislature for referendum as long as he wished to retain this leverage card in his hand in a greater game; namely in Yugoslav politics. In other words, this game is played not only among the Montenegrin élite but also among the Yugoslav élite. Secondly, as long as the West opposed the Montenegrin secession, it could be expected that Djukanovic liquidate the work of parliament to take such a vital decision though the pro-independence bloc seemed to have outnumbered the pro-Yugoslav bloc further with a ratio of 56 to 44.⁵¹

SERBIAN INTRA-ÉLITE STRUGGLE AND MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE: A TIME BOMB

The game of Montenegrin independence seems to be inextricably bound with the power struggle between Djindic and Kostunica in Serbia. Although his charisma escalated into climax after the toppling of Milosevic, Kostunica is still the symbolic head of the state whereas Djindic, as premier, has the mandate to control finance, police and interior affairs. It is obvious that the prolongation of the Montenegrin problem procures different and contrasting implications for the political careers of these two politicians. Although, both Djindic and Kostunica advocate the idea of a 'minimal federation' in which the republics would share the right-to-say in foreign, internal and monetary issues, the former is not so eager in the materialisation of the project whereas the latter pushed harshly for it.⁵²

The reason behind Kostunica's impatience on the solution of the Montenegrin problem as soon as possible and by whatever means is that firstly, he does not want to be the sacked president of a non-existent federal state and secondly, as the problem lingers, the reins he holds in Yugoslavia are relaxed in favour of Djindic.⁵³ If Montenegro secedes and Yugoslavia is stamped out, a new and harsh struggle awaits Kostunica for the post of Serbian presidency, now under the mandate of Milutinovic. Time is ticking because after Montenegrin independence, Serbia ought to go to the elections in which main rivals for the presidential post will probably be Djindic and Kostunica and the Yugoslav President has still the chance to be elected with his current political charisma.⁵⁴ On the other hand, time is running in favour of Djindic, who has been waiting patiently to take over the power by all means after the dispersal of the clouds of the latest revolution in Yugoslavia that created the saga of Kostunica.

Besides, Djindic may be beneficial in the prolongation of the decision of referendum. Djukanovic may give him time to ease the tensions between the pro- and anti-Yugoslav blocs in Montenegro⁵⁵; and furthermore he may wish to draw the boundaries of the game with Djukanovic by adopting together a different plan for it. In line with the aforementioned expectations, Djindic reacted against the idea of forging a coalition with the Liberal Alliance, while Kostunica made mild statements about the common sense of the Montenegrin people thereby giving way to the Montenegrin independence by and large.⁵⁶ In this context, it seems that Djukanovic may find a good fellow in the personality of Djindic rather than Kostunica and may embark upon the liquidation of the referendum case as much as possible by offering to his junior partner some important administrative posts like the ministry of justice and finance as political bribes, and even by dissolving the coalition and calling for new elections on the pretext that a strong reformation can not be operated with the small but intransigent Liberals⁵⁷, thereby allowing Djindic to buy the required time to grasp the reins efficiently in Yugoslavia.

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2 Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel, The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to Ethnic War*, Oxford: Westview Press, 1996, p. 37.

3 Ibid. pp. 99-101.

4 Slavoljub Scekic, 'Between the Bombs and Belgrade', BCR No: 14-15, 1 April 1999, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_19990401_2_eng.txt

5 Ljubinka N. Cagorovic, 'Making Concessions, Buying Time', BCR No: 28, 1 May 1999, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_19990501_2_eng.txt

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