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THE NATURE OF POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN  
MONTENEGRO IN THE EARLY 90S:  
*PROLONGATED TRANSITION AND HALTED  
DEMOCRATIZATION*

*ABSTRACT: Montenegro's political transformation from communism to liberal democracy was marked by remarkable political and social developments all of which severely damaged democratic consolidation and political transformation. Instead of following the pattern of other Central/Eastern European states, Montenegro was deadlocked with an unresolved national question and fragile democratic framework; prolongation of fundamental emancipation of society and state. The article examines major political developments starting the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the introduction of pluralism, and their implications on political and societal transformations in Montenegro.*

*KEYWORDS: Montenegro, transition, political transformations, post-communism, dissolution of Yugoslavia*

Throughout the communist period, Montenegro was one of the least developed republics of Yugoslavia (along with Macedonia and Bosnia), given its size and peripheral status in the union. Not differently than other Yugoslav republics, Montenegro was aiming to shape its path to escape the economic unprivileged status and development being a small country within a larger country.<sup>1</sup> Such circumstances remained an important factor in precluding political developments and adjusting the broader social dynamics. Given its position inside the Federation, growing economic and social crises emerging in the early 80s critically impacted the daily life of the Montenegrin population and boosted the overall spiraling disgruntlement. The financial

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<sup>1</sup> S. Malešević, G. Uzelac, A Nation-state without the Nation? The Trajectories of Nation-formation in Montenegro, *Nations, and Nationalism*, 13-4 (2007), 695-716.

crisis that was shaking Yugoslavia in the late 80s was detrimental to the boarded political developments, especially in Montenegro which economic dependency on the central government was greater compared to other republics.<sup>2</sup> Belated attempts to cure down the economic crisis and prevent social collapse were far from successful and largely catalyzed transformative processes. Together with the economic and social crisis endangering the viability of the Yugoslav Federation, the national question related to the position of the Serbian population in Kosovo came into the heart of media and political discourse.<sup>3</sup> That topic made headlines and shaped the social dynamics in Serbia and Montenegro. The necessity to transform the society was a matter of consensus among different social groups; both on the Federal and republics level. Nonetheless, even in the late 80s, it was not clear which course to take and how to navigate and model inevitable changes.<sup>4</sup>

Differently than in most other countries in Eastern Europe, the fall of the communist regime in Montenegro could not be related to bottom-up social pressures demanding a massive change within the existing political system. That is to say that the growing momentum for the transformation was not based on the omnipresent anti-communist sentiment and desire to transform into a full-fledged liberal democracy. Instead, it resembled a partially articulated growing dissatisfaction with the leadership and their stance towards the so-called national question and their handling of the economic crisis. The first gatherings and mass demonstrations were a clear indication that demands are more oriented towards achieving ethno-nationalistic goals,<sup>5</sup> and not necessarily transforming the system and fighting communism and its derivatives.

Thus, the mass gatherings served the purpose of putting pressure on the present Communist leadership to give up fundamentally before their younger colleagues. The leading narrative employed to support the cause was based on the feeling that the Republic's leadership is not stranding behind Slobodan Milošević's Kosovo policy<sup>6</sup> namely. In a nutshell, political iconography represented in those public protests was predominantly pro-communist including the imagery typical for the former day socialist Yugoslavia, but also an occasional display of a variety of nationalistic symbols<sup>7</sup> was commonly present and became an inevitable part of such gatherings. Furthermore, the leaders of mass demonstrations mostly came from the youth section<sup>8</sup> of the

<sup>2</sup> K. Morrison, *Montenegro: a modern history*, New York, 2009, 77.

<sup>3</sup> M. Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, New York, 1996, 124.

<sup>4</sup> K. Morrison, *Montenegro: a modern history*, New York, 2009, 85.

<sup>5</sup> S. Malešević, G. Uzelac, A Nation-state without the Nation? The Trajectories of Nation-formation in Montenegro, *Nations, and Nationalism*, 13 (4) (2007), 695-716.

<sup>6</sup> V. Koprivica, B. Vojičić, *Prevrat '89*, Podgorica, 1994, 65.

<sup>7</sup> RTCG, *Prevrat 1989*, Podgorica, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Political leaders were mostly student leaders from the University of Veljko Vlahović, and

League of Communists of Montenegro<sup>9</sup> and other organizations strongly attached to the regime such as worker and union organizations. Even though the general narrative of protestors was long-standing dissatisfaction with the socio-political conditions in Montenegro, they were essentially inspired and fueled by the Serbian nationalistic ideas and claims that Serbs around Yugoslavia were disadvantaged. In such a context, the political elite of Montenegro was also described as traitors, and the personality of Milošević with his nationalistic ideas was raised to that of a savior.<sup>10</sup> Initially what started as the protests with workers demanding jobs and competitive salaries in their country ended up as ones where the same people dubbed their ruling party as anti-Serb: the message and requests changed overnight due to the manipulation of the Serbian nationalism.<sup>11</sup> Switching the tone from economic to ethno-nationalistic topics had been followed by the militarization of the conveyed messages and growing influx of religion epitomized in the role of Serbian Orthodox Church. The movement controlled by Belgrade was labeled “Anti-bureaucratic revolution”: such semantics aimed to establish a strong dichotomy between opposed sides. By means of this name, the striking opposition between them (the population) and the elite (the bureaucrats)<sup>12</sup> was highlighted. Events in Montenegro became inseparable from those happening almost simultaneously in Vojvodina and Kosovo. Thus, the events should be assessed not as a local articulation of dissatisfaction but a broader scope of intertwined political events aiming to replace technocratic communist elites with ones who are more pragmatic and national centric. The ultimate success of rallies taking place across Montenegro was the replacement of the leaders of the country, senior management of major companies, and heads of trade unions.<sup>13</sup> Seizing power from their senior colleagues proved to be easier than expected, as no significant sign of resistance was demonstrated. Despite the initial deployment of security forces and riots<sup>14</sup> in several places across Montenegro, more severe clashes between protestors and police were averted. Put in the wider European context, comparatively speaking the first

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younger members of the executive bodies of LoC of Montenegro

<sup>9</sup> C. Rogel, *The break-up of Yugoslavia and its Aftermath*, Westport CT, 2004, 118.

<sup>10</sup> F. Bieber, Montenegrin Politics since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, in: F. Bieber et al. (eds.), *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, Baden-Baden, 2003, 11-42.

<sup>11</sup> Events and gatherings across Montenegro witnessed a variety of messages about the endangerment of Serbs in Kosovo, occasional display of historical events.

<sup>12</sup> Elite was accused of being ‘odnarođena’ that is to say that lost the sense of reality and connection with ordinary people (*Pobjeda*, March 1989).

<sup>13</sup> D. Djuric, The Economic Development of Montenegro, *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, 139-158.

<sup>14</sup> ,The biggest incident occurred in Žuta greda when police tried to stop a group of workers from Nikšić heading to Titograd to attend the rally.

wave of changes in Montenegro appeared to be peaceful and plane. However, the changes which came about because of the Anti-Bureaucratic revolution were purely a matter of cosmetics in terms of their reflections on the overall political system. The demonstrations were indeed controlled by the elite of Milošević's government, who was seeking to mobilize the Montenegrin workers and disseminate the ideological propositions of the Serbian nationalism and brotherhood of Montenegro and Serbia.<sup>15</sup> As Djurić<sup>16</sup> argues, the mobilization of participants was driven by the followings reasons: 1) many people were discontent with the state of affairs in the political and economic areas, 2) nationalists started promoting the idea of mobilization, 3) the Serbian League of Communists instigated the mobilization, and 4) "the primacy of ethnicity" associated with the Communist regime of Yugoslavia was expressed.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the indispensable goal of the AB revolution was to install the pro-Serbian posture inside the Yugoslav federation in the short-run and to provide a solid ground for the regime's internal consolidation. Therefore, explicit traces of anti-communism at this stage of transformations remained absent from the Montenegrin context and one could easily attribute the whole matter to the inter-party rivalry where people (masses) played a secondary essentially minor role.

Fundamentally, the new elite replaced the old moderate one when the nationalist wing of the League of Montenegrin Communists forced the officials out supported by the street protests in Podgorica. The success of "revolution" coupled with Milošević's populist movement set the foundation for further cooperation of Montenegrin and Serbian political regimes and greatly entrenched the ties between them. While the political protagonists changed, the situation in Montenegro remained practically intact. Although it resulted in the formal establishment of a pluralist political arrangement, the revolution was, actually, a continuation of the communist regime – the leadership turnover was at base a Serbian-engineered coup with strong nationalist overtones and not a democratic opening.<sup>18</sup> Differently than in other Eastern/Central European countries, Montenegro's revolution had not triggered the process to facilitate democratic consolidation as observed elsewhere; instead, it marked the generational change within the ruling elite who hesitantly engaged in democracy-building actions. Nevertheless, a

<sup>15</sup> S. Malešević, G. Uzelac, A Nation-state without the Nation? The Trajectories of Nation-formation in Montenegro, *Nations, and Nationalism*, 13-4 (2007), 705-706.

<sup>16</sup> D. Djurić, The Economic Development of Montenegro, *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, 139.

<sup>17</sup> F. Bieber, Montenegrin Politics since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> S. Darmanović, Montenegro: Dilemmas of the Small Republic, *Journal of Democracy* 14-1 (2003), 145-53.

handful of intellectuals and students gathered in the Democratic Alternative<sup>19</sup> did advocate more systemic and emancipatory changes that would establish a full-fledged democratic system.

Around the now separate republics, the elections were held in 1990, only two years after the waves of anti-bureaucratic revolution. Although it happened almost concurrently in all republics of the former Yugoslavia, the conditions at places were quite distinct. Thus, whereas Croatia and Slovenia proved to be willing to bring in free elections and vote for their government, Montenegro remained largely unchanged in its course of actions and mode of thinking.<sup>20</sup> The first multi-party general elections took place in Montenegro in early December 1990, shortly after the Parliament passed set legislation permitting multi-party elections. Accordingly, the Parliament opted for the single constituency proportional representation electoral system with fixed lists and a 4 % threshold.<sup>21</sup> That development formally paved the way for instituting pluralistic political life in Montenegro typical for Western democracies, leading to the establishment of different parties and political organizations.<sup>22</sup> The very first multi-party elections were called on December 9<sup>th</sup> and included presidential, presidency, and parliamentary elections held simultaneously. A short campaign was far from sufficient to feed the needs of an emerging democracy and was marked by smaller rallies across the country and excessive use of available media outlets. It would be adequate to say here that the dominant party was still the League of Montenegrin Communists (SKCG), which neither changed its name nor political program.<sup>23</sup> However, in the campaign senior officials of the SKCG referred to themselves as ‘reformed communist’<sup>24</sup> aiming to emphasize the difference from the previous elite replaced by the means of street protest during the AB Revolution. SKCG faced the greatest opposition from the center-left fairly progressive Union of Reform Forces of Yugoslavia (SRSJ) led by Ante Marković on the Federal level and Ljubiša Stanković in Montenegro. They argue for decisive and liberal reforms in Yugoslavia and counter the nationalistic narrative of the time<sup>25</sup> tackling SKCG’s willingness to maintain the status quo and not indicating fortitude to transform the Yugoslav Federation. Differently than SRSJ another opposition party that emerged, the People’s Party (NS) took a more right-wing approach and claimed the legitimacy of the same-name

<sup>19</sup> K. Morrison, *Montenegro: a modern history*, New York, 2009, 87.

<sup>20</sup> Ž. Andrijašević, Š. Rastoder, *Istorija Crne Gore od najstarijih vremena do 2003*, Podgorica, 2005, 65.

<sup>21</sup> “Usvojeni izborni zakoni”, *Pobjeda* (Podgorica), no. 8923, 04. X 1990, 1.

<sup>22</sup> “Lista partija i kandidata za izbore”, *Pobjeda* (Podgorica), no. 8987, 01. XII 1990, 5.

<sup>23</sup> F. Bieber, Montenegrin Politics since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> “Cetinje je bilo i biće crveno”, *Pobjeda* (Podgorica), no. 8970, 13. XI 1990, 7.

<sup>25</sup> “Program SRSJ”, *Monitor* (Podgorica), no. 1, 19. X 1990, 4.

party operating in the Kingdom of Montenegro.<sup>26</sup> Despite feverous opposition from both wings of a political specter, SKCG secured the landslide victory winning 56% votes and the majority of seats in the Parliament (83/125).<sup>27</sup> It was the best score of Communists in any of the Yugoslav republics. Besides them, only three more lists managed to secure the seats<sup>28</sup> in the Parliament. Such fragmented opposition, ideologically rather homogeneous but considerably altered from the incumbent party both in terms of economic policies and national attitudes, could not undermine the supremacy of SKCG and its political dominance. The head of the party Momir Bulatović was then elected concomitantly as president<sup>29</sup> after the second round of elections.<sup>30</sup> His secret of triumph mostly hindered him from being significantly endorsed by Milošević and his propaganda.<sup>31</sup> Shortly after Bulatović appointed then only 29-year-old Milo Đukanović as the country's prime minister. Despite having a different background their political agenda and visions converged, and they were perceived as a strong political duo who could easily navigate the course of action in Montenegro. Đukanović, who himself was an active member of SKCG shared Bulatović' ideas of the anti-bureaucratic revolution and assisted his older colleague in the backing for Milošević.<sup>32</sup> Their landslide victory was easily anticipated given that the party fed on the ideas of the revolution, a strong discourse of a necessity to keep Yugoslavia united, and rising nationalist sentiment. All of that was promoted as a political package that would secure a safe future for Montenegro but also guarantee the maintenance of a unified Yugoslavia. Moreover, the social and political climate in the country boosted the party's rating which could easily mobilize all available state resources including media and press. While the party itself seemed to be newly formed, one should not forget that only the top heads therein who had been replaced while the party itself inherited existing membership and political infrastructure. The party's ideological paradigm and agenda remained majorly the same; since they had been in existence for a long time, they had no serious competitors and, thus, took control over the media and finances to use them to their advantage under the pretense of democracy.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the party could easily gain the support of ethnic minorities, excluding Muslims, who opted for ethnic representatives.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Narodna Stranka, *Program stranke*, Podgorica, 1990, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Republička Izborna Komisija, 12. XII 1990.

<sup>28</sup> That included SRSJ 17, NS 13, and SDA-DS 12 seats

<sup>29</sup> Republička Izborna Komisija, 12. XII 1990.

<sup>30</sup> Bulatović won more than 76% votes.

<sup>31</sup> V. Goati, *Elections in FRY. From 1990 to 1998. Addendum: Elections 2000*, Belgrade, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> R. Bideleux, I. Jeffries, *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History*, London, 2007, 477.

<sup>33</sup> S. Darmanović, Montenegro: Dilemmas of the Small Republic, *Journal of Democracy* 14-1 (2003), 156.

<sup>34</sup> L. Sekelj, *Parties and Elections: The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—Change Without*

Therefore, SKCG became a prototypical *catch-all party* that could effortlessly mobilize electorates with substantially different backgrounds and wider its voter base to amass the number of ballots. After the first elections, SKCG adopted a new name Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), and program direction that would resemble their new pro-Yugoslav course of action. More concrete reformist agenda was employed mainly in the field of economy and privatization. Such development had no practical implication for the political developments in the country,<sup>35</sup> one should understand it as a way to further distance party image from the previous leadership. According to many authors including Darmanović (2003), the newly established country and regime experienced a major transition that lasted several years (between 1989 and 1996). It was the time when the multi-party system was being implemented however in practice the democratic process had been severely obstructed by a limited and incomplete transition in the first place, both legislatively and practically. Therefore, the initial positive signs of democratic tendencies in the early stage of democratization were easily surpassed due to dominance of the incumbent party but equally, nationalism and war were taking over. In essence, Montenegrin society remained closed and not brought any closer to resemble societies and democracies in other parts of Europe. At the beginning of the 1990s, DPS supported the agenda<sup>36</sup> of Milošević and his Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) which was rather visible in terms of re-creating Yugoslavia in 1992 but also during the war campaigning following the dissolution of the former country. In the first phase of rule DPS as the party exemplified the book-case example of the competitive authoritarian party and regime:<sup>37</sup> it preserved its democratic image by not resorting to direct fraud and explicit violations of standard democratic principles. However, its grip of the press and other media resources as well as similarity to the SPS in control of the economy was obvious.<sup>38</sup> The Montenegrin support of Milošević implied the country's share in the 1990s wars across former Yugoslavia. Although the dominant party's relation with Belgrade was strong, Podgorica did not boast of the strict authoritarian regime that was observable in Belgrade, which helped the former eventually engage in the second transition stage – that of electoral democracy.<sup>39</sup> This

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Transformation, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52-1 (2000), 62.

<sup>35</sup> J. Bugajski, *Political Parties of Eastern Europe: A Guide to Politics in the Post-Communist*, Armonk NY, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> It appeared in public that Montenegrin leadership is highly subordinated to Milošević's regime and him personally (Morrison, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> S. Levitsky, L. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*, Cambridge, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> I. Vuković, Political Dynamics of the Post-communist Montenegro: One party Show, *Democratization*, 22 -1 (2015), 73-91.

<sup>39</sup> S. Darmanović, Montenegro: Dilemmas of a Small Republic, *Journal of Democracy*, 14

dichotomy of own self-perception and lack of unity in their country has been reflected in numerous political processes taking place in Montenegro, where the people's sentiments for Yugoslavia and their alleged belonging to the Serbs prevented them from building their state that would not be affected by Serbnationalist ideals and confederation-based pressure. On part of the Serbs, they still view Montenegro to a large extent as a holiday place and a coastal paradise rather than a viable independent country due to years of its dependence on the Serbian government and small size and population.<sup>40</sup> The specific duality within the state between the majority of the population over the national identity was a key political determinant in the early stage but prove to be long-lasting up to this day. The dichotomy between Serbian heritage and Montenegrin statehood remained to be the main factor in influencing political dynamics. While DPS aimed to balance between the two sides two major opposition parties maintained a hardline stance towards that issue.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the political transformations in terms of rule of law and democracy-building were well marginalized from the public discourse and political deliberation.

The first part of the war, in which the country engaged vigorously, was that occurring shortly after the December elections with the Montenegrin operations in Southern Croatia. The Croats, who declared themselves independent in 1991, faced the conflict among their army, the Yugoslav military forces, and the Serbian minority in Croatia.<sup>42</sup> Despite not facing a direct threat to its territorial integrity, Montenegro did decide to mobilize its army officers and voluntary recruits to preemptively attack the southernmost Croatian town of Dubrovnik. Under the pretext of the imminent threat of Croatian forces waging war on Montenegro, the public was manipulated to support the war cause. Propaganda activities reached its peak after the state-owned daily *Pobjeda* wrote about thirty thousand Croatian *Ustasa* amassing on Montenegro's border with Croatia'.<sup>43</sup> Such narrative and climate resulted in almost overall support and a high level of voluntary conscriptions. Attempts to rationalize the war campaign in Croatia and advocate peace by a few intellectuals and LSCG faced suspicion and was exceedingly ill-perceived by Montenegrin leadership. The political atmosphere and warmongering discourse during the siege of Dubrovnik in 1991 were further detrimental to any emancipatory and/or transformative moves in Montenegrin society.

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(1), 2003, 148.

<sup>40</sup> R. Keane, The Solana Process in Serbia and Montenegro: Coherence in EU Foreign Policy, *International Peacekeeping*, 11 - 3 (2007), 498.

<sup>41</sup> LSCG argued for the independence and exclusivity of Montenegrin nation while NS and other Pro-Serbian parties perceived Montenegrins as an integral part of Serbdom.

<sup>42</sup> F. Bieber, Montenegrin Politics since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, 18.

<sup>43</sup> "Rat za Mir 1", *Pobjeda* (Podgorica), 05. X 1991, 5.



Instead, it brought a higher level of distrust among social groups, condemn and isolation by the international community, and escalation of the economic crisis. Nevertheless, understanding the catastrophic nature of the war theater in Croatia, Montenegrin leadership opted for the exit strategy. A chance came with the draft of the Lord Carrington plan,<sup>44</sup> that envisaged a legal dissolution of Yugoslavia into six independent states. Nominal acceptance of such a document by Bulatović was welcomed violently by the Serbian political leadership as well as pro-Serbian opposition parties inside the country. He was labeled a traitor of Serbdom<sup>45</sup> and an ultimate coward to save the Yugoslav Federation: Milošević, who waited for the Montenegrin support, was disappointed that Bulatović declared his open stance for the sovereignty of the former republics and withdrew his soldiers from Croatia.<sup>46</sup> Events surrounding The Hague conference was the first major discord between the two political elites, which had substantially political implications on the inter-state relations. At the same time, it shed light on Milošević's perception of Montenegro, which was not deemed an equal partner in the spirit of 'brotherhood and unity'. Bulatović, consequently, found himself in an uncertain position and was not decisive enough to withstand the pressure from Belgrade. Thus, the final stance was corresponding to that of Serbia: Yugoslavia must be in existence and welcome the participation of those willing to stay in.<sup>47</sup>

According to Bieber,<sup>48</sup> the discourse over the Montenegrin identity was further enduring at that time. The Croatian war created the dichotomy of Serbian and Montenegrin views of nationalism: the supporters of the former stood for the war, and the followers of the latter did not.<sup>49</sup> Therein, the newly formed LSCG, the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro, started to declared ideas of independence as early as 1991 and never ceased to do so, basing them on a strong identity of the people of the country and condemning the war in Croatia. The head of the LSCG called the union with Serbia a forced stage of Montenegrin history and an outcome of Milošević's manipulation, citing the situation of the smaller partner in this union as far from partner-like.<sup>50</sup> After all, Montenegro was indeed physically 15 times smaller than Serbia, which

<sup>44</sup> "Serb rejected plan posed by Europe", New York Times (New York), 26 X 1991.

<sup>45</sup> "SOLO ili SAO", Monitor (Podgorica), 15. XI 1997, 7.

<sup>46</sup> L. Sekelj, Parties and Elections: The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – Change Without Transformation, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52-1 (2000), 59-60.

<sup>47</sup> R. Bideleux, I. Jeffries, *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History*, London, 2007, 480.

<sup>48</sup> F. Bieber, Montenegrin Politics since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, Baden-Baden, 2003, 19.

<sup>49</sup> E. Jenne, F. Bieber, Situational Nationalism: Nation-building in the Balkans, Subversive Institutions and the Montenegrin Paradox, *Ethnopolitics*, 13-5 (2014), 431-60.

<sup>50</sup> B. Huszka, The Dispute over Montenegrin Independence, *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, 43-62.

meant it was hard to create parity of any level.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the Alliance stood against the Orthodox Church and instead offered to create a distinct Montenegrin Orthodox Church as a way towards autonomy from Serbia<sup>52</sup> and building its own national identity. At the same time, the People's Party advocated a connection with Serbia and even promoted the discussion on the merging between the two republics. While criticizing actions by Bulatović, it did not want to accept the plans of Milošević. In other words, while staying mostly away (at least, during the later stages) from the extreme nationalism represented by the Serbian side, the party still stood for the Montenegrin-based Serb identity.<sup>53</sup> All these events constantly invited the question of whether to stay close with Serbia or try distancing from it, and the possibility of a referendum was discussed.

The final stage of the early transformations in Montenegro came to an end with the establishment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SRJ) and the referendum that precluded the process. The political processes in later 1991 and early 1992 were predominantly determined by the war erupting in neighboring Bosnia and Croatia. Such dynamics forced both elites in Montenegro and Serbia to seek a new institutional and political solution for their co-existence.<sup>54</sup> The envisaged constitutional framework proposed a federal union between two countries, a move that sought to give Montenegro its political and national visibility. However, such proposals were greeted enthusiastically neither by the opposition in Belgrade nor in Podgorica,<sup>55</sup> more controversial was a fact that the referendum was to be organized only in Montenegro and not in Serbia. In that context, DPS and its leader Bulatović were able to exercise political Machiavellianism and to demonstrate the capacity of the ruling elite to seek compromises. Faced with bitter opposition from both ends, Bulatović argued for a symmetrical union to pacify more liberal voters in Montenegro but also to please those traditional that favored ties with Serbia and more importantly bluntly supported Milošević.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, Bulatović only partially succeeded in elevating both countries equally and his stances had been derogated under the pressure from Milošević and his associates.<sup>57</sup> The referendum to be held in Montenegro occurred in

<sup>51</sup> W. Van Meurs, The Belgrade Agreement: Robust Mediation between Serbia and Montenegro, in: F. Bieber (ed.), *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, Baden-Baden, (2003)63-82.

<sup>52</sup> J. Bugajski, *Political Parties of Eastern Europe: A Guide to Politics in the Post-Communist*, Armonk NY, 2002, 503.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 506.

<sup>54</sup> The constitutional negotiations and talks remained rather secretive and public failed to gain viable insights into the process.

<sup>55</sup> F. Bieber, Montenegrin Politics since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, 16.

<sup>56</sup> K. Morrison, *Montenegro: a modern history*, New York, 2009, 100.

<sup>57</sup> B. Jović, *Poslednji dani SRFJ*, Beograd, 1996, 229.

March 1992, where the question was *Are you in favor of Montenegro, as a sovereign republic, continuing to live in a common state - Yugoslavia, fully equal to other republics that wish the same?* Although the turnout only reached 66%, 96% of them voted for the remaining part of Yugoslavia.<sup>58</sup> This was mainly due to a silent boycott from the opposition parties in Montenegro which viewed the whole matter as a ‘brutal serving of Milošević’. The main opponents of the SRJ could be found in the voters of parties emerging from the SRSJ that were LSCG and SPD; and the majority of ethnic minorities in Montenegro who almost unanimously opposed the idea of a joint state. The democratic character of the referendum and its legitimacy are highly doubted, as neither monitoring missions were present nor any kind of viable democratic standards were employed to secure a free and fair referendum.<sup>59</sup> Many regarded it as a pure formality, but it also had another often-neglected dimension. It had served the purpose of i) demonstrating political power, ii) further consolidating regime, iii) unifying, and the homogenizing electorate. However, after seeing the strength of Milošević’s regime and priority that he gave to Serbia as well as the need to serve in the army and participate in Serbia-induced wars, the Montenegrin population found themselves in grievance. Thus, they started demanding from their president to exist the FRY in 1994-1995.<sup>60</sup> They finally realized that Serbia would always be seen as a bigger part of the union and that Montenegro would only be reduced to “the statistical error” due to its size, the number of citizens, and lower contribution on all levels.<sup>61</sup>

After the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequent changes, the majority of countries in Eastern/Central Europe systemically transformed themselves into a full-fledged liberal democracy in a short period. None the less early political transformations in Montenegro demonstrate a rather unique case compared to the other states emerging out of communism. A traditional political trajectory witnessed in other comparable states was absent from the Montenegrin case. Instead of a decisive cut with the previous socio-political system, Montenegro embraced a limited slow-paced transition which significantly prolonged required reforms and left society in a dead-locked position for a substantial amount of time. Rapid democratization and liberalization as observed in Eastern Europe failed to occur in the early stages and were made possible only in the late 1990s. Contrary, Montenegro experienced a cosmetic transition all with the same party which changed its name, but also different than other Yugoslav republics it opted for a joint

<sup>58</sup> R. Bideleux, I. Jeffries, *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History*, London, 2007, 477.

<sup>59</sup> K. Morrison, *Montenegro: a modern history*, New York, 2009, 124.

<sup>60</sup> R. Bideleux, I. Jeffries, *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History*, London, 2007, 480.

<sup>61</sup> D. Djuric, *The Economic Development of Montenegro, Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, F. Biber, Baden-Baden 2003, 156.

state. It would be wrong to say that the first waves of transformation until 1992 failed to bring any democratic consolidation, but their range was rather limited. The country was turned into a hybrid semi-authoritarian regime where a single party holds a grip control over the whole political and social system. Nominally, the communist system was dismantled but its internal socio-political structure remained in place throughout the early 1990s, simply changing its visible forms and shapes. Coexisting into a complex Federal state, Montenegro was rather limited in its transformative efforts. The third wave of democratization as postulated by Samuel Huntington failed to reach the 'shores' of Montenegro.

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THE NATURE OF POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN  
MONTENEGRO IN THE EARLY 90S:  
*PROLONGATED TRANSITION AND HALTED DEMOCRATIZATION*

*Summary*

The article examines the political transformations occurring in Montenegro at the beginning of its political transition, spanning from the Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution up to the 1992 Montenegrin independence referendum. That period is marked by unprecedented but regulated and incremental changes which effects and impact are being evaluated. Montenegro's political transformation in the early 90s significantly departure the linear transitional model observed within the other communist states and makes a rather unique case. The transition from the command economy and communist political system towards a western-modeled liberal democracy had been severely obstructed by unsettled national and statehood question, and equally important negative consequences of the Yugoslav wars. Such a context was detrimental to the plane transformation in the early stage and greatly shaped the political dynamics in the country throughout the 90s. Nevertheless, the political transformation had an unprecedented tune from the very beginning as it failed to follow any set patterns that would categorize either to be the clear-cut bottom-up or top-down case. Instead, the political process occurred to be a distinct combination of the two models combined with an incremental approach determined by the aforementioned factors, where the former communist elite gradually embraced the reforms. Thus, instead of the decisive and pivotal cut with the former political and social system, Montenegro withstood deferred transition substantially challenged by the power transfer among the ruling elite.