

Montenegro: The Difficult Rebirth of a Mediterranean State

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With Montenegro's independence resulting from a referendum held on 21st May 2006, Europe and the Mediterranean Basin gained a new State. In reality, it is the rebirth of a State, since the full independence of the small mountain principality had been recognised at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Montenegro was admitted to the League of Nations in 1918, despite its annexation that same year into the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Montenegro had enjoyed near independence for many years. Faced with serious environmental challenges and the weight of organised crime, this small country with a surface area of 13,000 square kilometres and 672,000 inhabitants must now reinvent its destiny.

The Long Road to Independence

The vote on 21st May closed a long process of distancing between Montenegro and Serbia that had been underway for a decade. At the time of the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the leaders of the small southern republic were followers of Slobodan Milosevic. They took power as a consequence of the "Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution" of 1988, orchestrated by the Belgrade leader. The two strong men of Montenegro, Momir Bulatovic and Milo Djukanovic, respectively President of the Republic and Prime Minister in the early 1990s, both paraded on the Dubrovnik front, providing their support to the Montenegrin conscripts mobilised for the war against Croatia.

After signing the Dayton Peace Agreement in December 1995, Milo Djukanovic began a process of progressive distancing. He began to approach the West as well as Montenegrin separatist movements headed by the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG). In the summer of 1996, the final rupture came with the break-up of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), successor of the former Communists League. Milo Djukanovic and his followers kept control of the party, obliging Momir Bulatovic to create a new party, the Socialist People's Party (SNP). At the presidential elections of autumn 1996, Milo Djukanovic defeated his rival.

The subsequent years, particularly marked by the Kosovo crisis and NATO bombings in the spring of 1999 – which did not spare Montenegro – accentuated this political evolution. Milo Djukanovic posed as an advocate of Montenegrin 'sovereignty,' even if he had not yet uttered the word independence.

Milo Djukanovic managed to assert himself as a privileged spokesperson for Montenegro with the West, which earned the small republic highly significant financial aid from the USA and the European Union. At the same time, he launched a process of reconciliation with Montenegro's neighbours, first and foremost with Croatia. Djukanovic cultivated the support of Montenegro's national minorities. By receiving some 100,000 Albanians expelled from Kosovo during the 1999 conflict, for instance, the Montenegrin government won the recognition and support of the Albanians in Montenegro. Djukanovic likewise acted as a protector of other minority communities, namely, the Croat community of Boka Kotorska (Bay of Kotor) and the Muslim Slavs in the north, alarmed by Serbian nationalism.

Milo Djukanovic or the Art of Synthesis

Milo Djukanovic's rallying to 'pro-Montenegro' postulates represented an unexpected turn with respect

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to positions he had assumed at the start of his political career, but this evolution is in keeping with his family's tradition. Since 1918, Montenegro has effectively been divided into two major political traditions, the 'Greens' (*Zelenasi*) and the 'Whites' (*Bjelasi*). The Whites advocated Montenegro's annexation into the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, approved in December 1918 by the Podgorica Assembly, an assembly whose legitimacy was contested by the Greens. The Greens, on the other hand, remained party to national independence and the Petrovic Njegos Royal Dynasty. In any case, King Nikola died in exile in Antibes without having abdicated. The effective annexation of Montenegro led to a bloody civil war, whereas during the Second World War, Green detachments fought against the Serbian Chetniks. These Green units were initially supported by the Italian occupying forces, though the majority of them rallied around the Communist followers of Tito.

Montenegro remains a clannish society. In 'Old Montenegro' (*Stara Crna Gora*), corresponding to the four districts (or *nahije*) that formed the heart of historic Montenegro around Cetinje, the majority of clans are Green. Both Milo Djukanovic and Ranko Krivokapic, the current President of Parliament, are from 'Green' families of the district, *Katunska nahija*.

The clans of the *Brda* (or 'Mountains') Region to the north of Niksic and Podgorica are primarily 'White,' as are the Vasojevici, the members of a large confederation of tribes from northern Montenegro, who are always defined as Serbs and never considered Montenegrins. Along the coast, particularly at Kotor Bay, tribal allegiances and therefore political orientations constitute a complex mosaic, changing from one village to the next.

Historically, the 'White' tradition is related to Serbian, anti-communist nationalism based on the Orthodox Church and the Chetnik tradition. The 'Green' tradition, on the other hand, combines two political lines – the

Montenegrin monarchists and the communists. The Greens will never forget that Tito recognised a distinct Montenegrin Nation different from the Serbian Nation. The most radical Green movements, represented in particular by the writer, Jevrem Brkovic, exiled in Zagreb in the 1990s, go as far as to suppose an ethnic Montenegrin origin different to that of the Serbs: the Montenegrins would thus be the descendents of the 'Red Croats' of the High Middle Ages. By the same token, certain 'pro-sovereignty' movements were behind the 'rebirth' in 1993 of a Montenegrin Autocephalous Orthodox Church, which contests the legitimacy of the Serbian Orthodox Church, presented as the 'usurper' of the churches and monasteries of Montenegro, but its influence remains essentially limited to the region of Cetinje and 'Old Montenegro.' The political skill of Milo Djukanovic has consisted in successfully uniting the different components of the Green tradition, while securing the support of national minorities as well as educated urban social strata and profiteers who managed to get rich during the period of sanctions that afflicted Serbia and Montenegro in the 1990s. During this period, the Djukanovic regime was directly engaged in certain large-scale trafficking activities, such as cigarette contraband, and 'granted' different groups specific sectors of the 'grey market.' Thus the Albanian criminals from the coastal municipality of Ulcinj had control of illegal traffic with Italy, in particular transport of illegal migrants, whereas the Albanians of Tuzi, near Podgorica, got rich through trafficking in petrol with neighbouring Albania.

Serbian or 'Yugoslav' Dissent

The opponents of Milo Djukanovic also vacillate between two ideological traditions. The 'White' movement has a clearly nationalist discourse and is associated with the Serbian Orthodox Church and its local metropolitan,

The final results could not have been reached, however, without the support of ethnic minorities. Hence, for the first time in the region's recent history, the ethnic minorities of a country rallied around a political project that allied them with the majority community

Amfilohije, very much a politician. Mgr. Amfilohije had strong ties with the chief of the Serbian militia, Arkan, of Montenegrin ascent, who repeatedly protected him. Mgr. Amfilohije was also reputed to have offered hospitality at Montenegrin monasteries to Radovan Karadzic, former leader of the Bosnian Serbs, who was found guilty of crimes by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague and has been in hiding since 1995. In addition to these Chetnik movements, there were also firm believers in 'Yugoslavia,' advocates of a joint State who saw Slobodan Milosevic as a champion of such unity.

After Milosevic's fall (October 2000), relations between Serbia and Montenegro did not cease to deteriorate. Relations between Milo Djukanovic and Vojislav Kostunica were atrocious. Montenegro viewed the international subsidies and other aid pouring into Serbia with irritation and could not accept losing all strategic interest for the West. Diplomats who had been waiting patiently for an audience in Podgorica turned away from Montenegro after the summer of 2000. Montenegrin leaders then radicalised their 'pro-sovereignty' discourse, explicitly advocating independence. The European Union managed to defer said independence through the replacement of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia by the provisional "Union of Serbia and Montenegro," proclaimed on 4th February 2004.

At the same time, the unionist opposition was increasingly turning away from Yugoslav nostalgia to rally to an exclusively Serbian vision. This process reached its culmination during the census of 2003. The ethnic structure of Montenegro emerged from this census wholly modified. The Serbs represented 10% of the population in 1991, whereas they would henceforth comprise 30%. In fact, individuals are free to declare their ethnicity as they see fit, and unionist parties as well as the Serbian Church had launched a campaign to convince individuals to declare themselves 'Serbs' and no longer 'Montenegrins.' Under these conditions, the 'Montenegrins' only comprised a rather weak majority in relation to the country's entire population (41%). As has often been the case throughout Balkan history, the census became a form of political expression: declaring oneself Serb was equivalent to 'voting' against independence while registering as Montenegrin was akin to advocating it.

A Society as Yet Divided

Three municipalities were the 'keys' to referendum

results. Cetinje, the former capital of the kingdom, voted 85% in favour of separation, yet this ever pro-independence stronghold was surpassed by two other municipalities: Ulcinj, a primarily Albanian coastal city, voted 88% in favour and Rozaje, a 'Bosnian' Muslim Slav enclave in the northern sector of the country voted 91% in favour. The final results could not have been reached, however, without the support of ethnic minorities – the country's 7% Albanians, 13% Muslim Montenegrins who at times call themselves 'Bosnian' and at others 'Muslims in an ethnic sense' and 1.5% Croats.

Hence, for the first time in the region's recent history, the ethnic minorities of a country rallied around a political project that allied them with the majority community. Croatian independence was based on the exclusion of the Serbian minority in the country, the Albanians of Macedonia never supported the project for an independent Macedonian State and the independence of Kosovo is a mono-ethnic project advocated only by Albanians. The proponents of Montenegrin independence, however, championed the idea of a multi-ethnic, civic Montenegro. They won their bet – Montenegro cannot exist as a State without the support of its ethnic minorities.

Therefore, Montenegro's independence is anything but a new 'nationalist spasm,' as certain commentators, concerned by the 'proliferation' of new States, would have one believe. Quite on the contrary, it has represented the most serious refutation of ethnic nationalism in the Balkan region for fifteen years now. Another point to keep in mind is that this independence does not represent any 'legal precedent' whatsoever. Montenegro was a federated republic of socialist Yugoslavia. As such, it had the right to secede, recognised by the Badinter Arbitration Committee in 1991, as did the other republics comprising part of former Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union. The case of Montenegro has no direct legal impact on the status of Kosovo or on

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the Republika Srpska (Serb Republic) of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Challenge of Combating Organised Crime

It is clear that the European Union did everything in its power to prevent the independence of Montenegro, in particular by imposing an electoral system requiring 55% of the votes for a majority in the referendum on independence. This attitude can be ascribed, not only to a fear of regional consequences, but also to the fact that Montenegro has a very poor image – the small country is considered a racketeering haven.

The direct involvement of Montenegrin leaders in European cigarette contraband goes back to the years of international sanctions and embargoes. Those in high government circles under Djukanovic have acknowledged their participation in such contraband, explaining that it was a 'question of survival' for Montenegro at the time. For five years now, Milo Djukanovic has been summoned to appear in court in various proceedings instituted not only in Italy, but also in Switzerland, Germany and the USA. Nevertheless, Montenegro's leader does not seem to be concerned about his legal future. After the elections of 10th September 2006, moreover, he relinquished his responsibilities as head of state, retaining only his position as President of the DPS.

Cigarette contraband is rapidly decreasing and the State of Montenegro has partially broken with mafia activities, even if other trafficking activities continue to enjoy a high degree of tolerance on behalf of the authorities, in particular arms trafficking with Albania and Kosovo. Montenegro is thus attempting to reverse its image as a small racketeering State, while capital acquired in the 1990s is reinvested in other sectors, primarily the tourist industry, which has been experiencing an explosion for the past few years. In the country's new political and economic configuration, the main investors are Russian, which poses other problems.

The Challenges of Development and the Environment

The primary foreign investor in Montenegro is, in fact, Oleg Deripaska, the owner of the Rusal Group and a Russian oligarch who is very influential in the Kremlin. Rusal bought out the Podgorica Aluminium Plant (KAP), by far the most important company in Montenegro.

The production of aluminium requires huge amounts of electricity, in particular for the process of electrolysis. KAP could be profitable if it can obtain electricity at a low price. Nevertheless, Montenegro, as the remainder of the Balkan countries, suffers from a chronic energy deficit. The government has already guaranteed preferential rates for KAP, whereas the company's consumption represents nearly half of the country's overall energy consumption. This was not enough for Oleg Deripaska, who in autumn of 2006, purchased the lignite mines and the thermoelectric power plant of Pljevlja, and who is pressing Montenegro to build more hydraulic power plants.

In 2004, a project was proposed to build a new hydroelectric power plant at the confluence of the Tara and Piva Rivers, at the border between Montenegro and Bosnia's Republika Srpska. The dam would have flooded the Tara Canyon, the largest canyon in Europe. Strong citizen protest forced the government to give up the project, but it has resurfaced over the past few months, whereas another power plant project is well under way on the Moraca River, upriver of Podgorica. In a highly seismic region, all specialists agree that this power plant will put the Montenegrin capital in a highly risky situation.

In theory, tourism under proper administration could represent a major resource for developing small Montenegro

These energy projects are therefore fraught with environmental risks, while the Montenegrin coast is currently being sold off to Russian businessmen, who now own all the country's major hotels from the towns of Kotor to Ulcinj and are continually building new ones. To make matters worse, there is a generalised growth of urban sprawl along the coast characterised by unbridled construction in which all urban planning regulations are violated and there is no specific law to protect the coastline. At the Tivat Airport, regular

ELECTIONS IN BOSNIA. FIRST ELECTIONS WITHOUT INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

The 1st October general elections were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They were the first elections to be fully administered by the BiH authorities and represented further improvement in the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law. These elections were conducted in a manner that can be considered in line with international standards for democratic elections. International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) regretted, however, that, due to constitutional ethnicity-based limitations to the right to stand for office, these elections were in violation of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) as well as the commitments made to the Council of Europe for universal and equal suffrage. Citizens who do not identify themselves as one of the three “constituent peoples”—Bosniak, Croat, Serb—are effectively barred from standing State and Republic of Srpska (RS) presidencies. Voters registered in the Federation of BiH are limited in their choice of presidential candidate to either a Bosniak or a Croat, and RS voters can only vote for a Serb presidency member. Save for the constitutional limitations just mentioned, the election legislation provided a sound basis for the conduct of democratic elections and the campaign was dominated by nationalistic issues and rhetoric.

54.48% of the voters went to the polls, which is in line with those who

voted at the previous elections.

The opening of the polling stations was assessed as “good” or “very good” by IEOM observers in 92% of cases. Voting during election day proceeded smoothly, although overcrowding and group voting were noted in many places by observers. Procedural problems were observed, especially voters not receiving a proper explanation as to how to fill in ballots, voters not always marking their ballots in secrecy, and signatures not being checked against ID number. On a positive note, there were no observations of multiple voting or carousel voting. However it was noted that in 55% of polling stations observed, voters were turned away due to either not being on the list where they are registered or for being at the wrong polling station. Polling station committees offered helpful assistance to the voters in locating their correct polling station. A deterioration of the process was noted during the count, which was assessed negatively by 26% of the observers due to procedural irregularities. However, no significant infringements of the OSCE 1990 Copenhagen Document were pointed out.

For Further Information:

www.oscebih.org/documents/6465-eng.pdf

and charter flights to Moscow and Saint-Petersburg are multiplying. Montenegro is surrendering to the temptation of easy money, essentially of Russian origin, running the risk of squandering its natural capital in a short time.

The Constitution adopted in 1992 defined Montenegro as “an ecological State,” but this stipulation is simply an empty formula, as no coherent environmental protection policy has even been sketched out and the pillage of natural resources is dangerously accelerating. In theory, tourism under proper administration could represent a major resource for developing small

Montenegro. Such rational tourism should be combined with a coherent regional planning policy in order to smooth out the development inequalities between the Mediterranean south and the middle and high mountain regions farther inland. Unfortunately, it is obvious that independent Montenegro is not taking this road.

For further information:

Le Courrier des Balkans <http://balkans.courriers.info/>
ANDRIJASEVIC Zivko, Serbo RASTODER, *Istorija Crne Gore*, Podgorica, CICG, 2006.