

ALL QUIET ON THE SERBIAN FRONT?

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. IN THE BEGINNING	1
A. Organisation and Optimism	1
B. A Sidebar from the Hardliners.....	2
C. Serbian Renewal?.....	3
D. Wither Moral Support?	4
E. Frustrated Ranks	4
III. A TRAGEDY	5
A. A Traffic Incident	5
B. Not by Chance?	6
C. Simple and Clear-Cut?.....	6
IV. BALLOTS FOR BULLETS?	7
V. TROUBLE IN MONTENEGRO?	9
A. Serbia's Forced Unity.....	9
B. A Time to Meet.....	10
C. <i>De Facto</i> , not <i>De Jure</i>	12
VI. WESTERN RESOLVE	13
VII. MONTENEGRO REVISITED	15
A. Whose Windfall?	16
B. Sanctions and a Back Door	17
VIII. TOO MUCH FOCUS ON VIOLENCE	18
IX. A FINAL THOUGHT	20
X. RECOMMENDATIONS	21

Appendices:

- **About the International Crisis Group**
- **List of Selected ICG Reports**
- **List of Board Members**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As 1999 nears a close two questions about Yugoslav Strong-man Slobodan Milosevic stand out: How did he stay in power after the NATO action, beginning on 24 March 1999, and will he opt for bloodshed in Montenegro, at least before the end of January 2000? In this analysis, ICG argues that Milosevic managed to stay in power for several key reasons, despite factors which prompted some to speculate about his downfall in the wake of his bloody war in Kosovo.

In the first place, and despite some early predictions, the opposition failed to unite against Milosevic. Even a tragedy involving a key opposition leader, Vuk Draskovic of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) did not cement the kind of unity needed to pose a challenge to the dictator.

Secondly, Western resolve to deal decisively with the dictatorship has played into Belgrade's hands, making the corrupt and Hague-indicted power elite continue to feel themselves players in regional politics. It is in fact that continuing disunity, now coming to the fore in public, that may be giving Milosevic grounds for optimism in the sense of allowing him to think he will be a regional player for some time to come.

And as for Montenegro, signs suggest there will be no violent clashes this year, although it is not possible to maintain that conclusion will be valid for the long term. For his part, Montenegro's reform-minded President, Milo Djukanovic, continue to remind the international community that with Milosevic in power, one must never assume violence is safely out of the picture.

Firstly, it may be that Western resolve to take Montenegrin independence so far and so far only, meaning failing to take the step of sanctioning *de jure* independence, does allow Belgrade to believe a final break is not imminent.

Moreover, the measures taken thus far may actually be playing into Milosevic's hand. For example, the introduction of the German mark as a parallel currency in Yugoslavia's tiny sister republic may provide black market opportunities for the dictatorship that might permit a partial way around sanctions.

The conclusion of this report, which begins with a journey through recent history, is that an effective strategy vis-à-vis Milosevic must be predicated on a much better understanding of how the dictator plays politics. In the absence of international resolve to liquidate his tenure and his leadership, the first and last recommendation is linked to the observation that the international community IC become more adept at deciphering the dictator's political chess game.

From there, the IC must have a clearer picture of how it wants to cope with the dictatorship. If the aim is merely to unseat him, and to enhance the chances of the reformist opposition, then concrete steps must be taken to avoid open and public linkages with the opposition that will yield only propaganda dividends for the dictatorship.

Secondly, if the IC is bent on moving Montenegro towards *de facto* independence, it must be aware of the potential for Montenegro as a member of the mark zone to provide black market dividends for Belgrade. Thus the IC must seek to identify measures now that will keep Belgrade away from the cash.

Finally, the IC may be steering itself towards a strategy of supporting reformist politicians in and around the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). This encirclement, whether thought through or not, is fraught with unique pitfalls. If Montenegro goes its own path, what does the future hold for regions such as Serbia's northern province of Vojvodina? What of the majority ethnic Muslim population of Sandzak, who live in an area which straddles both Serbia and Montenegro? And with this proliferation of states and quasi or pseudo-states, thought has to be given to their long-term viability, both political and economic. If the resolve is not there to back them for many years to come, their mere existence will allow whatever is left of Serbia to thrust up politicians dedicated to raising the issue of political unity. Rather than stamping out the regional menace of Serbian ultranationalism, what has to be asked is the hard question of whether or not existing developments aren't in fact giving it a very long lease on life, and saddling Europe with a Serbian Question for at least a generation? In order to stave off the possibility that the Balkans may re-experience the disastrous consequences of a reawakened Balkan nationalism, it is imperative that the IC support political leadership that is dedicated to democratic values, and that irrespective of whichever way the FRY may or may not fragment.

Belgrade - Podgorica, 30 November 1999



ALL QUIET ON THE SERBIAN FRONT?

I. INTRODUCTION

In August 1999 optimism ran high that the regime of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was about to crumble. The NATO bombing had ended and opposition political leaders stood on the verge of channelling along a constructive course what was perceived as widespread social and political discontent with the dictatorship. Zoran Djindjic, leader of the Democratic Party (DS) and one of the guiding forces behind the Alliance for Changes (SzP), prepared to organise mass rallies, and this time with stated intent of ousting the Yugoslav dictator. Back on 21 September 1999 the SzP launched a series of daily mass protests,¹ all suggestive of the kind of political force needed to unseat the dictatorship.

December's end fails to mark the regime's ouster. If anything, Milosevic appears even more ensconced in power than previously. This leads to the two vital questions: How has he succeeded, like fellow dictator Fidel Castro, in defying expectations and clinging to office. Meanwhile analysts chronicling developments around the teflon dictator insist he is on the verge of suffering a fate, at any moment, not unlike Romania's communist-era leader, Nicolae Ceausescu? Milosevic's only answer to date, a mute homage to American humorist Mark Twain's reply to a newspaper editor upon learning that an obituary had been published, has been to suggest that reports of his untimely (political) death have been wildly exaggerated. Secondly, apart from the stock answer that unity has been the basic problem, why has the opposition been so woefully ill equipped to effect fundamental political change?

II. IN THE BEGINNING

A. Organisation and Optimism

Right from the start, the opposition failed to gather the steam that might be needed to topple Milosevic. After only three days, Western media coverage began stressing that leading opposition figures were "put[ting] a brave face on the

¹ See, for example, *Blic* and *Glas javnosti*, 22 September 1999.

weak turnout.”² Only a veritable handful of supporters braved the rallies. On the fifth day, the most generous estimates, arguably grossly inflated, said a mere 30,000 protesters showed.³ Other news agencies estimated the throng at between 10-20,000.

Initially, the strong police and high-profile security presence did not translate into regime repression, although that did follow.⁴ From the very outset, the pro-democracy advocates were on the defensive, and could not continue to blame their lack of support on bad weather alone. The regime wasted little time tarring and feathering the SzP and its top leaders in the state media. High-profile commentaries by the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) were given a prominent place in the independent media as well. Ivica Dacic, SPS spokesman, stirred the Serbian short-term memory, harking back to images of Serbia under NATO bombing. Out of the gate, he resurrected rhetoric very much en vogue following the 24 March 1999 allied air campaign and dubbed the SzP a fifth column, observing that “the Alliance for Changes is playing the role of NATO ground troops.”⁵ Commenting on the abysmal numbers, Dacic said, albeit indirectly, the situation to abstain was a thought out position the right-thinking Serbian public had made, underlining that low turn out showed only the SzP “could not collect together [all] that many traitors all in one place.”⁶

B. A Sidebar from the Hardliners

For his part, Vojislav Seselj, federal deputy prime minister and leader of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), promptly dismissed the idea of any early elections, stressing his and his party’s determination to uphold the dictatorship and the governing status quo. Seselj remarked the political climate in Serbia indicated not that the government was at fault at all, rather it showed “the fingers of those who wished the Serbian people ill-will were involved.” Drawing a parallel between the opposition and other political issues held dear by the Serbian nationalist community, he blurred rhetoric between the pro-democracy advocates and the issue of Kosovo, promising that there would be an attempt to retrieve the province under the auspices of a force for “the defence of Kosovo.” But, as with the SzP, Kosovo, where under given difficult political conditions no time line for involvement could be defined, that province, too, was the domain of the same international elements guiding the democratic opposition. Kosovo, said Seselj, was where “5,000 Shiptar terrorists are under American command.” Summing up all of Serbia’s political problems, he noted they were attributable “over the last ten

² Reuters, 24 September 1999.

³ Beta, 24 September 1999.

⁴ Eyewitness accounts throughout October stressed that police very often did intervene against peaceful demonstrators, using force against what were identified as “weak targets”, or individuals seen as capable of offering least resistance to beatings and clubbings.

⁵ *Blic*, 24 September 1999.

⁶ *Blic*, 24 September 1999.

years to pressures from outside, and to 50 years of governance of the communist regime.”⁷

C. Serbian Renewal?

Another ingredient conspicuous from its absence was the support of the controversial leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), Vuk Draskovic. The charismatic Draskovic had served in the federal government during the time of the NATO bombing, only to be dropped from the post of deputy prime minister in late April.⁸ As a member of government, he had been harshly critical, at the outset of the NATO air campaign, of allied efforts, offering up numerous statements about Kosovo being holy Serbian territory and denying knowledge of atrocities. Even following the war his tainted legacy continued to haunt him, as some reports linking the SPO chief to possible Hague indictments for his alleged participation in ethnic cleansing crimes during the Bosnian war.

Yet now out of the government, with the SzP badly in need of the backing of Serbia’s largest single opposition party, the SPO refused to offer a lifeline. Rather, Draskovic seemed to be positioning himself equidistant from the dictatorship and the SzP, a move that actually wound up bolstering the dictatorship as it guaranteed to fragment efforts to achieve the vital unity needed for a showdown. To be sure, Draskovic renewed his anti-Milosevic rhetoric, saying, on a visit to neighbouring Republika Srpska in Bosnia, the dismal governance provided by Milosevic would ensure that before long “not only Kosovo” but even “Serbia won’t remain in Serbia.”⁹ Having said that, though, he promptly lambasted the SzP, calling into question their tactics. He said they had grabbed “a totally erroneous strategy because they want to topple Milosevic from the streets, which has already demonstrated itself as ineffective....What they need to do is to set out the minimal electoral conditions [agreeable to the SPO to attract that party] ...so as to create the conditions to defeat Milosevic at elections.”¹⁰ Yet most recent coverage of the SPO’s leader’s politicking suggest he is hopeful of reaching a compromise with Milosevic and may be positioning himself to re-enter government ranks while rejecting the thought of entering a shadow cabinet government of democratic opposition parties.¹¹

⁷ For the full text of Seselj’s statement, see ‘Rekonstrukcija vlade zavisi od socijalista’ in *Blic*, 24 September 1999.

⁸ For full details of Draskovic’s role in government an appraisal of his fall from grace see ICG report *Milosevic’s Aims in War in Diplomacy*, 12 May 1999.

⁹ *Blic*, 25 September 1999.

¹⁰ *Blic*, 25 September 1999.

¹¹ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 6 December 1999.

D. Wither Moral Support?

And what emerges unclear is just to what degree the SzP had seen the important moral support of Montenegrin reformer and President, Milo Djukanovic, waver. By late October, evidence was accumulating suggesting that Djukanovic was distancing himself from the politics of the Serbian opposition, concentrating instead on political and economic reform in Montenegro. While visiting Radio Free Europe headquarters in the Czech capital on 20 October, the Montenegrin leader did assert that "that the federation's first problem is how to strengthen democracy, noting that no reform is possible as long as Milosevic remains in office, so Montenegro does what it can to help the Serbian opposition."¹²

Relations between Serbia and Montenegro will be explored fully in a later section, but suffice it to say for now that on a visit to the Czech Republic in October, Djukanovic also said "I am afraid it is the truth," in response to a reporter's loaded question which began with the premise that much of the Serbian opposition railed against Milosevic not because he went to war so often, but because he lost.¹³ Also important to note at this stage is that Serbian sources reported that the Czech media, in covering Djukanovic did not fail to mention he began as Milosevic's protégé. Also, just a day following the Montenegrin's Prague visit, Czech state television would air a documentary in which the leader of Montenegro's opposition Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LS CG) receives an open forum to expound on the thesis there is no "essential difference between the Djukanovic and Milosevic regimes."¹⁴ Just how bad from a public relations perspective was the visit? On 20 October 1999, news broke that independent Radio Free Montenegro, now back on the air again, had received word from the telecommunications ministry to cease broadcasts, owing to technical and licensing irregularities.¹⁵ Station management, however, claimed the closure was politically motivated, while Djukanovic attested to having no background knowledge of the case, except to say that no decisions were final.¹⁶

E. Frustrated Ranks

Time, moreover, has not been kind to opposition unity. By late October, key opposition players were voicing frustration. Two notable figures, Mile Isakov and Nenad Canak, on 29 October announced intentions to withdraw from opposition rallies. They alleged that rallies alone were a waste of time and energy and criticised the opposition for lacking a clear strategy when it came to the issue of providing and sticking to a blueprint for Milosevic's ouster.¹⁷ For his part, Canak

¹² *RFE/RL Newslines*, 21 October 1999.

¹³ *Blic*, 21 October 1999.

¹⁴ *Blic*, 21 October 1999.

¹⁵ *Montena-fax*, 20 October 1999.

¹⁶ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 21 October 1999.

¹⁷ *Reuters*, 29 October 1999.

maintained “The point is not to hold rallies but to participate in the toppling of Milosevic's regime.”¹⁸

Recent declarations made by the Serbian émigré community indicate also an awareness in those quarters of the debilitating effect opposition disunity is having on efforts to promote even the hope of democracy in Serbia. According to one report: “Prominent Serb expatriates offered at least \$US 1 million Saturday [13 November 1999] to help oust Slobodan Milosevic—if the opposition can end the infighting that has long undermined efforts to get rid of the Yugoslav president....The offer was made on the second day of a three-day Serb convention held in Budapest, Hungary, attended by expatriates and 50-plus leading opposition activists from Serbia....But the assistance is conditional. First the opposition must pledged to end divisions that have plagued their ranks....The exiles also said the opposition must become more efficient in anti-Milosevic planning, step up consultations with Western officials and refrain from any secret deals with Milosevic.”¹⁹

III. A TRAGEDY

A. A Traffic Incident

A tragedy occurred on 3 October 1999 that might have had a key impact on the state of Yugoslavia's opposition. On that date, driving along a rural road, relatives and body guards of Serbian Renewal Movement leader Vuk Draskovic were involved in a collision which claimed the lives of four people in the entourage. Among the victims was the brother of Dancia Draskovic, wife of the SPO leader. The others killed were bodyguards.

While circumstances of the incident remain sketchy to this date, what apparently does seem to be irrefutable is that the driver of the oncoming vehicle, a truck, slammed into one of the cars driven by the Draskovic group. While swerving into the oncoming entourage, causing the car Draskovic was in to respond quickly, changing lanes. The passengers in the vehicle following the lead car were not so fortunate, suffering the tragic casualties. Reports indicated that the truck left no tire skid marks, prompting some to speculate brake failure.

The SPO leader suffered only minor injury. Yet the incident itself went far beyond the parameters of a mere personal calamity. No sooner had the accident taken place than it was thrust into the realm of politics. Was this going to be the spark that would propel Draskovic into the opposition camp? At first there was a spark of hope that out of this tragedy, unity might be forged.

¹⁸ Cited in *RFE/RL Newslines*, 1 November 1999.

¹⁹ See piece by Misha Savic, AP, 13 November 1999.

B. Not by Chance?

Almost immediately following the accident the SPO leader went very public alleging that the truck was little more than an assassin's tool. Almost as quickly, major opposition voices chimed in to agree. At first DS leader Djindjic expressed reserved and indirect support for the dark forces conspiracy theory, stating, for the record, that entertaining thoughts of a murder attempt might be in accordance with best available evidence. "I expect the authorities to come up with a convincing explanation of the incident as soon as possible. If they don't, there will be suspicion that something abnormal has happened," said Djindjic.²⁰

Initially, the DS head's voice of relative reason and calm was drowned out by the stampede of other opposition claimants willing to go on record pointing out very directly how the incident scented of murder. New Democracy (ND), a relatively minor party that had in the past supported Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), aligned itself abruptly with the opposition and Draskovic's train of thought. In a statement, ND denounced "the attempt to assassinate SPO leader Vuk Draskovic and his aides," calling it a "dangerous precedent which could cause unforeseeable consequences for political life in Serbia."²¹

Politicians' voices, moreover, were not the only ones fanning the flames of dark forces conspiracy. On 5 October, one major daily reported that police investigators at the scene refused to allow journalists to approach, noting also that detectives could offer no plausible explanation as to why the truck carried no license registry plates. Going at least one step further, the account noted that the assailant more than likely fled the scene in a second vehicle.²²

On 1 November 1999 Draskovic appeared in court to offer his testimony concerning the traffic accident and events surrounding the incident testimony. There the SPO leader wasted no time alleging the road accident was orchestrated by the Serbian secret police and was a plot to erase his opposition clout from the political spectrum.²³

C. Simple and Clear-Cut?

While the assassination theory cannot be ruled out completely, and seems to have had the beneficial effect of prompting Draskovic to at least for now to tone down his long standing differences with Djindjic, a number of difficult questions remain outstanding. Firstly, might the lack of tire marks at the scene indicate only that the vehicle causing the accident had faulty brakes? Secondly, anecdotal evidence attests to the difficulty of navigating the stretch of road in question on even the best of days, complicating that at any moment might be the propensity

²⁰ Cited in *V.I.P.*, 5 October 1999.

²¹ Cite in *V.I.P.*, 5 October 1999.

²² *Glas javnosti*, 5 October 1999.

²³ *Beta*, 1 November 1999.

of more than several Serbian drivers to brave the roads after severe drinking bouts. Thus, can a case of drunk driving be ruled out entirely, with the guilty party having sought safe haven from the authorities and perhaps the wrath of public opinion? Finally, just how might Milosevic benefit from attempting to assassinate Draskovic, realising that even if it were successful, the members of the SPO might rally behind an opposition movement?

The regime's handling of the incident proved either adept or insidious.²⁴ Not only did the state and pro-regime media merely cover the accident, it expressed sympathy with the Draskovic family and appeared to hold out an olive branch. Understanding that conspiracy theory forms the prism through which much of the Serbian, if not Balkan, public comes to terms psychologically with cataclysms, the regime media did not attempt to quell the possibility that the incident was part of a sinister master agenda. Indeed it not only upheld that as an explanation, but also promoted it. What was unique was the feature that absolved of all blame in such a scenario would not be just the regime, but members of the Serbian public. With the experience of the NATO bombing fresh in the collective psyche, there was little stretch in vilifying Washington, stressing that it and its powerbrokers ultimately stood behind any assassination, if and only if that in fact was what transpired. State media accounts played up remarks such as those made by Ljubisa Ristic, a leader of the governing party the Yugoslav United Left (JUL), controlled by Milosevic's wife, Mirjana Markovic. Ristic observed: "Those who ordered and carried out this criminal act, if indeed that's what it was, can only be found amongst those who have already expressed their intentions clearly...A regional US envoy, Robert Gelbard, said his goal was to come here and trigger a civil war, shedding as much blood as necessary, after which [the US] would come and bring order."²⁵

What also must be raised is the spectre that this type of regime propaganda may have had at least some impact on Draskovic's psychology. While toning down his anti-opposition stances, the SPO leader has not overwhelmed the opposition with his support. He maintains arms-length relations with the opposition.²⁶ Moreover, as mentioned above, some reports suggest he is attempting to cut a deal with Milosevic and re-enter government.

IV. BALLOTS FOR BULLETS?

Increasingly, speculation is surfacing that 1999 may be a relatively calm year for the FRY. Calm, that is, by Serbian standards. While police have engaged in beating peaceful demonstrators, emerging signs suggest the regime may hold

²⁴ See, for example, comments by SPS spokesman Ivica Dacic, cited in *Glas javnosti*, 5 October 1999.

²⁵ *Vecernje novosti*, 8 October 1999.

²⁶ Radio B 92 reported on 9 December 1999 that SPO leader Draskovic has not joined with the leaders of the democratic opposition in round table discussions focusing on responses to elections.

back from invoking conditions that may erupt in another full scale regional war, at least before the end of the first few months of 2000.

Instead, the dictatorship may opt to play another card, that of diffusing opposition momentum by gearing up for elections. While voting at the national level does not have to take place certainly within the upcoming calendar year, evidence is surfacing that the authorities are embarking on the campaign trail. In recent weeks, infrastructure destroyed by NATO bombing, which began on 24 March 1999, has been subject to repairs. That enabled regime officials to make public appearances, with increasing regularity, in commemorative ceremonies designed to show how officialdom has acted responsibly to rebuild the damage inflicted by foreign powers.²⁷ As one report noted, Slobodan Milosevic and other government members dedicated "almost on a daily basis objects destroyed....in the NATO bombing."²⁸

At times, the exercise has proved less than a straightforward feat. On 14 October 1999, Serbian President Milan Milutinovic, an indicted war criminal, appeared at a bridge reopening ceremony in Nis, saying that the country needed more than infrastructure rebuilding to secure its future. What was crying out, he stressed, was the need for "a modern market economy and inter-ethnic equality, and to strengthen and develop democratic institutions."²⁹ In an incident notable by its absence in state coverage, some 6,000 protesters turned out for the event, to throw rocks at the president and hurl verbal abuse.

Meanwhile, Serbia's opposition parties have planned a response in anticipation of a call for elections, thereby seemingly forging some common unity. Party representatives, on 14 October, signed an agreement outlining demands under which early balloting were to be held. According to one report, that event marked "the first time in 10 years that the opposition has agreed on a common electoral platform."³⁰

The question that remains wide open is whether or not new-found opposition unity can be sustained through the critical interval while elections are anticipated. In the past, the opposition response to the government has been to decline to wage extraparliamentary actions against the regime if it were guaranteed that balloting was about to be held. Are, then, Milutinovic's and Milosevic's bridge openings being regarded at least by some in early circles as the means that will convince the opposition electioneering is on the horizon, forcing it to return their age-old response of legal challenges to the regime?

²⁷ See, for example, *Glas Crnogoraca*, 12 October 1999.

²⁸ *Vjesnik*, 18 October 1999.

²⁹ Reuters, 14 October 1999.

³⁰ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 October 1999.

V. TROUBLE IN MONTENEGRO?

A. Serbia's Forced Unity

Throughout the year, authorities in Montenegro, Serbia's sister republic in the Yugoslav federation, have held up the spectre of an independence referendum if the fundamental nature of the political glue holding the two together were not redefined. The Montenegrin President, the reform-minded Milo Djukanovic, has on numerous occasions called for the democratisation of FRY, thereby underscoring his commitment to a parting of the philosophical ways with Milosevic. Moreover, conventional wisdom has said that the FRY dictator would be prone to treating any sincere independence moves by the Montenegrins as a pretext for launching another bloody regional war against the tiny mountainous republic.

Yet the overall picture, when mounting evidence is put to scrutiny, continues to be muddled, failing to show decisively that 1999, and early 2000, will be the time frame for an anticipated showdown between Montenegrin authorities and the dictatorship. Of course, provocative rhetoric continues to flow from Belgrade, and this must be viewed as a potential indicator of social and political volatility. In a recent sampling of this type of discourse, it was on 17 October 1999 that federal premier and former Montenegrin president, Momir Bulatovic, said that the military and the people of the republic will rally against Djukanovic and his allies should they press ahead with independence.³¹ Bulatovic used the occasion to once again lambaste the government of Montenegro, invoking the calls of cowardice, and arguing that the Montenegrin authorities were so for having failed to side with the Serbian dictatorship during the NATO bombing.

The tired speeches stressing Montenegro's integral role within a federal Yugoslavia also continue to receive prominence, and, not unexpectedly, in the republic's pro-Milosevic media. Rallying the loyalists was a task assigned recently to Professor Jovan Cadjenovic, addressing 'the Bratonozić people's assembly' held at Pelev Brijeg on 17 October. In language now familiar to every resident of Belgrade hostage to the state media, Cadjenovic denounced the West and upheld Serbian-Montenegrin unity, declaring: "The USA has made enormous investments buying up the opposition and its media just to overthrow a legally elected government. This amounts to nothing short of the forceful intervention, by a superpower, into the internal affairs and legal status of an independent and peaceful European country....We reject the destruction of our country and the plan for re-defining relations with Serbia. We support the unity of Yugoslavia, because we do not have an alternative country."³²

³¹ AP, 17 October 1999.

³² *Dan*, 18 October 1999.

B. A Time to Meet

All the heated language notwithstanding, politicians on both sides of the referendum issue continued to meet, offering the possibility that talks may at least for the time being delay either an actual vote or an intervention by Belgrade that may signal a republic-wide bloodletting. A delegation of Montenegro's main governing party, Djukanovic's Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) were to hold talks with representatives of Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) in Belgrade on 26 October 1999.³³ The opportunity, a forum in which the proposal offered by the Montenegrin government for a redefinition of relations between the republics, was used to explore the possibility that some common ground for compromise may be sought. The Montenegrin government's proposal, referred to as *The Platform for Redefining the Relations within the Federation*, grants the coastal republic "the right to maintain its own army, foreign ministry and currency while remaining loosely linked to Serbia in a confederation called the Association of the States of Serbia and Montenegro."³⁴

Even the members of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), led by the accused war criminal and FRY deputy premier Vojislav Seselj, were not to be shut out of the bargaining process. A 25 October 1999 meeting between SRS officials and members of the DPS did prompt recriminations as soon as the Radicals announced before hand that leading their delegation to Sveti Stefan, on the Montenegrin coast, would be Seselj.³⁵ He used the occasion of announcing the meeting to condemn in advance any Montenegrin plans or expectations of holding a referendum, resorting to his familiar provocative linguistic stylings. A response from the DPS camp came swiftly. Milica Pejanovic Djuricic, member of the party presidency, claimed it was, for her, "under no conditions" possible "to sit at the same table with the Leader of the Radicals, Vojislav Seselj".³⁶

Nevertheless, the fact that as yet neither side has completely slammed shut the door to talks may portend that no violent resolution to the question of Montenegro's status is in the immediate offing, and that the stalemate may continue well into early 2000, or until elections are held. End of October talks did take place, predictably assuming a stop-start quality, with no side ultimately giving any ground but at the same time not claiming that future meetings were entirely out of the picture.

Moreover, even should any kind of bilateral contacts produce no results in 1999, some mounting evidence is pointing to a face-saving reprieve for all. Predrag Bulatovic, vice-president of Momir Bulatovic's pro-Milosevic Socialist People's party (SNP), was on record back in August 1999 urging party members to restrain themselves and resist any temptation to possibly break with Djukanovic. At the

³³ Montena-fax, 18 October 1999.

³⁴ Cited in ICG briefing paper, *Montenegro Briefing: Calm Before the Storm*, 18 August 1999.

³⁵ Montena-fax, 18 October 1999.

³⁶ *Vijesti* (Digest), 18 October 1999. See also Montena-fax, 18 October 1999.

time, Predrag Bulatovic floated the idea that while independence may be out of the question, there was certainly no reason for the SNP, and presumably by extension the Belgrade regime, to refrain from talking with the Montenegrin authorities.³⁷ Once again it is Predrag Bulatovic who has hinted how authorities may in the end opt to deal with the question of Montenegrin independence. Toughening his stance, appealing to party loyalists, and referring to Djukanovic's government as imposing "a police state" on the citizens of Montenegro, Bulatovic stressed that the SNP was as united as it had ever been and prepared to trounce Djukanovic's supporters in upcoming elections.³⁸ "There will be no referendum before honest and democratic parliamentary elections," said Predrag Bulatovic.³⁹ It is, therefore, tempting to speculate that perhaps, for the moment, pro-Milosevic political interests will continue to pressure, cajole and coerce the Djukanovic government, taking relations to the brink, but failing to initiate outright hostilities.

Would not both gunfights and a referendum be made obsolete if Milosevic's allies could steal elections in Montenegro? Perhaps. Yet another question that remains wide open is whether or not Djukanovic and his backers will opt for a referendum, an action that, if executed, and especially prior to federal elections, might prompt violent clashes? At least one factor is restraining the Montenegrin president for now, and that is the knowledge that Western governments have gone on record as saying they are not averse to the preservation of the territorial integrity of the FRY.⁴⁰ The thought that surely must have crossed his mind was that he may not be in a position to expect western support, or at least enough of it, even in a scenario where a pro-independence vote has been won. That considering such a variable must be of foremost importance for the Montenegrin President is borne out by more than the possibility that Milosevic may inject armed force against the democratically elected government. Within the republic, evidence suggests, there is enough support for the dictatorship that any sudden political moves to break political ties may invoke a fifth column response, relegating even the use of the Yugoslav army to same date well after the explosion of intra-republic clashes.

By late September, some accounts began to emerge suggesting that "tribal gatherings" were gaining momentum, and constituted little more than efforts to organise opposition, with veiled threats of an armed intervention against Podgorica in case of serious moves towards Montenegrin independence. One report summed up developments, noting "Tribal gatherings continued in Montenegro during the weekend. Threatening messages to the Montenegrin authorities were sent from these gatherings, addressed at their possible efforts to turn Montenegro into an independent state, or to carry out the stands of the Platform for re-defining relations between Serbia and Montenegro....[S]uch tribal gatherings were held in Crmnica, Ljesnjanska nahija, Grblje and Zupa Niksicka.

³⁷ *V.I.P.*, 16 August 1999.

³⁸ Montena-fax, 18 October 1999.

³⁹ Montena-fax, 18 October 1999.

⁴⁰ See Djukanovic's interview with the Sarajevo-based *Dani*, 13 August 1999.

Similar gatherings were held during the past few weeks in Kuci, Rovci, Zeta, Vasojevici, Drobnjaci, Piperi, and Monastery Moraca.⁴¹ That some of those in attendance were supporters of former Montenegrin President and Milosevic ally, Momir Bulatovic, does point to Belgrade having some organising role.

The international community's apparent unwillingness to back firmly an independent Montenegro has also undoubtedly weighed hard on Djukanovic. In August 1999 he went firmly on the record observing that all the signs from the international community pointed to a commitment to refrain from offering support for the objective of Montenegrin independence.⁴²

The republic's leading independent weekly alluded very starkly to the Montenegrin socio-political divide, posing an interviewee question: "At the moment there are two Montenegros, polarised politically and huddled around two people: the President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic and the formal head of the so-called federal government, Momir Bulatovic. How do you see this division and is a further separation inevitable so as to lead to conflict?"⁴³ The respondent, writer Mirko Kovac, in answer to another query, assessed politics in the republic as being marred by paralysis. He observed:

Having high hopes for the referendum only is not sufficient, as a referendum is a confirmation of a process in the society.... What you hear from Montenegro these days is: we would like to..., but the international community does not support us. Someone launched that belief and now it is circling around and it is acting as an obstacle. The international community does not decide about the will of a people who have their right to independence...If the people who are in power in Montenegro were a brave and determined group, who knew what they wanted, there would be no force or power which could question the independence. The Montenegrin government is occupied with a kind of exhibitionism, they are poking the dictator and doing it well verbally, but from that rhetoric I cannot draw what their next move will be. Or it is all about cowardice. Montenegro should have already been prepared for it, it has thousands of reasons for independence and none for staying in the country called Yugoslavia, headed by a man accused for crimes against humanity.⁴⁴

C. *De Facto, not De Jure*

Thus while Montenegrin authorities plan for greater autonomy, in a society some would argue is dangerously divided, and even take some action towards making the eventuality a reality, it is possible that not enough of a push has been provided for from the Podgorica side. True, on 25 September 1999, news circulated that in one of many similar actions taken over the course of the year,

⁴¹ *V.I.P.*, 27 September 1999.

⁴² In Djukanovic's interview with Sarajevo's *Dani*, 13 August 1999.

⁴³ *Monitor*, 15 October 1999.

⁴⁴ *Monitor*, 15 October 1999.

the Montenegrin government had resolved to cut back customs duties on food imports. The Republic's agriculture minister, Vojin Djukanovic, told media the decision was foisted on the authorities, owing to the fact that Serbia had halted food deliveries to the republic.⁴⁵ Moreover, Milo Djukanovic, on a recent visit to the Czech Republic told reporters that "the Yugoslav federation 'de facto does not exist'"⁴⁶ When queried about the political influence that those in Montenegro who thought of themselves as "Serbs," he said the strength of his "government's policy was in the '[fact] that all the residents of Montenegro stop making decisions on the basis of national policies...but on foundations of norms upheld by the civilised world.'"⁴⁷ He stepped well back of commenting on the possibility of existing *de jure* independence, clearly ruling in "a redefinition of relations within the federation."⁴⁸ But as they move towards the brink, Montenegrin political leaders have shown a remarkable propensity to step back before playing their last hand. For example, on 19 October 1999, Minister for Social Affairs, Predrag Drecun said that Montenegro, after threatening for some time to introduce its own currency tied to the mark, was now, while pursuing the goal, in no hurry to get there just yet.⁴⁹

But then was the Rubicon crossed? In early November news broke that the Podgorica authorities had opted to introduce the German mark. The implications of this decision will be taken up in short order, and within the context that the kind of shift towards independence a parallel currency offers actually may be precisely what Milosevic is seeking.

VI. WESTERN RESOLVE

Among Milosevic's main allies has been Western indecision, and the inability to achieve a consensus on the means needed to force the dictator's ouster from the political scene. Since the NATO action against FRY, and on the eve of the fourth anniversary of the Dayton Accords which brought an end to war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, commentaries in major dailies revealed a sense of dismay. Their authors, only barely screening a sense of frustration, belie the point of view that the West really seems to lack a vision, a strategy for ongoing Balkan engagement. This begs the question: will political inertia and a lack of goal formulation merely aid Milosevic in his staying in power? That is, if there exists in the West no or little ability to see past Milosevic, is it not possible the Yugoslav dictator may remain safe in power as collective inertia only reinforces the wisdom that the FRY dictator is at least a bulwark of regional stability, if not someone to be trusted or negotiated with.

⁴⁵ *Glas javnosti*, 25 September 1999.

⁴⁶ Cited in *Blic*, 21 October 1999.

⁴⁷ Cited in *Blic*, 21 October 1999.

⁴⁸ Cited in *Blic*, 21 October 1999.

⁴⁹ Montena-fax, 19 October 1999.

While urging a proactive western policy vis-à-vis the Balkans, one prominent columnist also cautions that failure to adopt one may well result in further regional crises. Simon Jenkins, writing in *The Times*, has urged: "Go in now. [British Prime Minister] Tony Blair must offer troops to Montenegro at once. He must not wait for a 'humanitarian disaster' or a CNN camera crew or the collapse of some fudged deal with Slobodan Milosevic. The message screams at him from Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. If he and NATO mean to set up puppet states across the Balkans, the moral and honourable course is to act before, not after the massacres begin. If Britain dithers over Montenegro until after Belgrade seeks to crush its elected Government, London's whole Balkan adventure will be shown up as a cynical playing to the gallery...Meddling delayed is meddling made murder."⁵⁰

But the real, subtle, and underlying question Jenkins and, with increasing frequency, others pose is whether or not getting involved in the very first place had been constructive. He continues, implying that the possibility of further disintegration of the FRY state beckons western powers to have a long-range policy strategy: "What is clear is that progressive 'Balkanisation' has been the consequence of each British move in the region. British troops are now policing protectorates in Bosnia and Kosovo, officially to stop ethnic cleansing and install democracy. They have done neither. The most 'democratic' part of former Yugoslavia is today probably Serbia itself...NATO may yet have a third protectorate on its hands in Montenegro. If Vojvodina, the partly-Hungarian and strongly anti-Milosevic province in the north of Serbia, develops ideas of grandeur, it may follow. Nor is that all. I assume that Foreign Office and Defence Ministry planners have their contingencies in place for an Albanian separatist war in Macedonia. Having crushed Greater Serbia and richly rewarded Albanian revanchism, NATO must now wrestle to contain the no less predatory it has unleashed, Greater Albania. And take no comfort from Nato's optimists. They said if they bombed Bosnia it would deter Mr. Milosevic from attacking Kosovo."⁵¹

Others, meanwhile, have been even less subtle about calling for a fundamental revision to Balkan strategy. On 11 October 1999, Roberts Owen, a US negotiator in Bosnia in 1995, defended the Bosnian peace as defined in Dayton, but did so in response to alleged calls for the de facto partition of the country. Writes Owen: "At Dayton, lacking a perfect solution, the United States supported an effort designed to have Bosnia emerge as a multi-ethnic democracy. Mr. [Charles] Krauthammer now calls [in a 17 September 1999 editorial] that 'noble' effort 'a failure,' arguing that it should be rejected in favour of an immediate three-way 'separation' of Bosnia among the Croats, Muslims and Serbs."⁵² Effectively partitioning Bosnia, may serve to accomplish little more than to make martyrs of indicted war criminals such as former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his main Yugoslav accomplice, Milosevic. After indicting him, the great irony now

⁵⁰ "Apocalypse Soon" in *The Times*, 15 October 1999.

⁵¹ "Apocalypse Soon" in *The Times*, 15 October 1999.

⁵² *The Washington Post*, 11 October 1999.

appears that some Western commentators urge that Milosevic effectively be appeased with the partition of Bosnia. Should partition or 'separation' of Bosnia occur, it would scarcely take a vivid imagination to come to the conclusion that the next logical step for the Bosnian Serbs would centre on union with Serbia.

Equally disconcerting, however, is a recent trend which shows that allied leaders themselves were divided going into the campaign against Milosevic. While that may not be news, the fact that they are no longer silent on the issue is. Right from the start, ground troops were ruled out. At this point, the wisdom and efficacy of such a strategy can only be surmised, as the detailed on-the-record testimony from ranking military officials making clear the defects of such planning is lacking. While some are on the books noting the decision was costly, few have ventured to explain whether or not such a decision meant, for example, that the on the ground special forces needed for precision targeting were conspicuous by their absence in Kosovo, perhaps explaining why allied bombers rendered inoperable only roughly as dozen of the dictator's tanks. Instead, a disconcerting trend has been finger-pointing among allies. Air Force Lieutenant General Michael Short, for example, blamed publicly France for vetoing proposed targets, suggesting that divisive national politics blocked the 19-member alliance from acting with the greatest military efficacy and causing the war to be unnecessarily prolonged. "I'd have gone for the head of the snake on the first night. I'd have turned the lights out the first night, I'd have dropped the bridges across the Danube; I'd hit five or six political, military headquarters in downtown Belgrade. Milosevic and his cronies would have waked up (sic) the first morning asking what the hell was going on....I understand how strongly the French feel their national positions, but I felt the United States of America was in a position to leverage our being the 'big dog.'"⁵³

VII. MONTENEGRO REVISITED

On 1 November Montenegro's Deputy Prime Minister Novak Kilibarda confirmed that the republic would, the following day, introduce the German mark as a second currency, ending speculation that would be the first move towards the introduction of a separate Montenegrin money.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, news spread quickly that salaries and pensions were to be paid out in the new official currency.

Almost as soon as the news of the Montenegrin move became public, speculation once again surfaced that the regime would act against Djukanovic in a hostile and decisive fashion, with the spectre of inter-republic war being raised. News reports that senior FRY military officials conducted official visits near the Montenegrin border appeared to increase concerns dramatically. No less than

⁵³ Cited in "Yugoslavia: France Faulted For Limiting Targets During Kosovo Conflict" by Andrew F. Tully, *RFE/RL Report*, 22 October 1999.

⁵⁴ *Vijesti*, 1 and 2 November 1999.

the army chief of staff, Dragoljub Ojdanic, conducted a review of troops responsible for Montenegro right at the time the decision concerning the usage of the mark was being made public. Official Belgrade media, however, stressed the visit was a review of housing conditions for the military forces withdrawn from Kosovo.⁵⁵ Needless to say, Belgrade has not yet reacted to Montenegro's seeming independence moves by fomenting the breathlessly-anticipated Apocalypse Now. A Belgrade court decision declaring Montenegro's adopting of the parallel currency to be unconstitutional has certainly not deterred Podgorica's resolve, nor has it triggered Belgrade-backed military action.

The question that emerges most salient is: Is the Belgrade regime preparing for a showdown? First of all, it would be foolhardy to assume that the preparation has not been done. Events following the outbreak of war in Kosovo in March of this year showed clearly that Belgrade had long prepared to put in place its campaign of ethnic cleansing. The question, then, is how likely is Belgrade to unleash hostilities in the *very near future*?

For the time being, circumstances suggest that the eventuality is unlikely. In the first place, Montenegro is as yet a long way away from independence. Moreover, speculation is increasingly suggesting that anything akin to a formal referendum on the political status of the republic is not likely to be held before February or March 2000, at the earliest. Finally, it is even possible to envision a scenario under which Milosevic might actually benefit from Montenegro's move.

A. Whose Windfall?

Briefly, with marks circulating throughout the Montenegrin economy, is it not possible to see that at least a percentage will leak north across the border, providing a means for Milosevic to buy social peace this winter? This is what the West needs to be concerned about, and must help Djukanovic in his attempt to stabilise the Montenegrin economy. The mark can certainly provide a means for integrating Montenegro in world institutions, notably into establishing and consolidating trade ties with Europe.

If what has happened in neighbouring Bosnia is any indication, then the possibility of a windfall for the dictator cannot be ruled out. Rajko Tomas, a professor in the Republika Srpska at Banja Luka's faculty of economics, has explained the dynamics of a currency trade which defines relations between the RS and Yugoslavia. According to Tomas, the underground exchange rate for Yugoslav dinar favours their being bought in the RS. Thus black marketers routinely come from Serbia to buy dinar which are in turn sold in the FRY in exchange for marks. "...[T]he black market rate [for dinar] is lower in Serbia than in RS, so far the black market dealers it is more profitable to bring marks to RS from Serbia and make the exchange for dinar, as this exchange gives them more

⁵⁵ Tanjug, 1 November 1999.

dinar than if they were to make the deal in Serbia. Subsequently these dinar are resold on the Serbian black market, and so the cycle continues," observes Tomas.⁵⁶

The other half of this story, one might suspect, is that Serbia has a shortage of foreign exchange, and RS, with its currency board, lacks such problems. If as a black market trader one is in need of marks to import goods that are in short supply in Belgrade, it's easier to get them in RS, thereby driving up their price in dinar terms in RS. Would this happen in Montenegro, with that republic serving as another haven for black market smugglers and as a source of hard currency? With the RS model, such an eventuality cannot be ruled out. Reports have emerged suggesting the beginnings of such currency trading are already underway. In a rare display of co-operation, authorities on both sides of the Serbia-Montenegro border arrested, in the early days of December 1999, black market speculators.⁵⁷ Montenegrin officials denied that the police actions were in any way co-ordinated,⁵⁸ but both parties have articulated an interest in the crack down. Belgrade claims it wants to shore up the value of the dinar (which in Serbia is set at an official rate of 6:1 with the mark) while Podgorica maintains it has no interest in cheap dinar flooding its markets. Sources say that a mark now buys up to 20 dinar in Montenegro.⁵⁹

But another question is does the introduction of the mark have the potential to spur future conflict? Deputy Prime Minister Dragisa Burzan⁶⁰ has indicated that Montenegro will probably outlaw the dinar as a means of payment sometime in the spring, mentioning April or May. At that point the Yugoslav Federal government can still legally pay its employees and soldiers in dinar. However, those dinar will no longer be legal tender in Montenegro. It is at this point there is a potential for a break down. All military salaries, expenditures for groceries (costs associated with feeding an army), fuel for vehicles, not to mention utilities will be in question. In particular, officers and civil servants will find their salaries are useless. So too, they may find they are turned out of their apartments as they are unable to pay the monthly nominal fee for maintenance, not to mention utilities. Could such developments lead to conflict, or will a black market find a means of thriving, despite Podgorica's efforts to keep the currency out of its markets?

B. Sanctions and a Back Door

And apart from the question of Montenegro's possible or potential role of back door for Milosevic's economic interests, humanitarian considerations have appeared as a concern, prompting some leverage on the questions of sanctions

⁵⁶ *Vecernje novine*, 27 September 1999.

⁵⁷ Reuters, 6 December 1999.

⁵⁸ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 7 December 1999.

⁵⁹ TV Montenegro, 7 December 1999.

⁶⁰ Deputy Premier Dragisa Burzan, in conversation with ICG.

against FRY. While US objections to a general lifting of the sanctions regime continue, Europe has embarked on a path of supporting and sustaining opposition held municipalities by delivering basic humanitarian aid. Lest the winter months cause untold social harm or chaos, heating fuel deliveries have been declared a priority.⁶¹ Again, this strategy has potential to boomerang, affording the dictatorship the chance to pilfer the aid or possibly to link recipient opposition political leaders to hostile outside interests and governments. The regime has already gone on record as saying that what the West has destroyed in the war it ought to rebuild, already crafting the propaganda line that might just turn ordinary aid recipients away from a show of gratitude.

VIII. TOO MUCH FOCUS ON VIOLENCE

While speculation persists rife in some quarters that Milosevic will spring into bloody conflict with Montenegro, counter arguments are increasingly being made. According to one school of thought, not only is Milosevic not going to stop Montenegro from achieving independence, but also it is actually a goal that he is seeking to advance. In brief, the logic goes thus:

[T]here are signs that Milosevic might even encourage Montenegro to leave the Yugoslav federation. The Yugoslav Army is the only institution operating at the federal level at present. Milosevic's great legal problems are the effective severance of relations between Serbia and Montenegro since the victory of the For a Better Life coalition of Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic at the early parliamentary elections in 1997 and the non-functioning of all federal institutions from the parliament to the Supreme Defence Council. The decisions of the federal government, not recognised by Montenegro, are carried out only in Serbia while Montenegro has nearly completed its own legal and economic systems. ...If Montenegro declared independence and [Serbian President Milan] Milutinovic retired, most probably on health grounds, Milosevic could solve his current problems by stepping into the vacant post vacated by Milutinovic. Milosevic's term of office as federal president expires next year and cannot be prolonged under the Constitution. As Serbian president again he could have two more terms totalling eight years in power. Such a prospect does not carry excessive risks for Milosevic because so far street protests in Belgrade and Serbia have shown that the political forces demanding Milosevic's removal are not strong enough.⁶²

⁶¹ Beta reported on 7 December that at last, after a 13 day delay, all 14 trucks carrying heating fuel from the European Union Energy for Democracy aid program arrived in Nis, following long delays at the Macedonian border. At one point, the delayed convoy was forced to pay parking fees, reported at just over 60 marks per day per vehicle, to a proprietor alleged to be representing the son of Yugoslav dictator Milosevic.

⁶² See *V.I.P.*, 4 November 1999.

Where the above line of speculation perhaps stops short is in failing to entertain the idea that with Montenegrin independence one again has a redrawing of the map of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. With a new set of political variables, why would Milosevic feel the need only to cling to old constitutional norms? Why would he consider limiting his grip over Serbia for only eight years, and no longer? What would preclude a whole re-haul of the constitutional order? Nevertheless, one unsettling premise is given prominence. It claims Milosevic's tactics hinge on waiting, and doing so for as long as it might take for international political circumstances to shift in the dictator's favour: "Milosevic must be counting on a change in world politics in the next year or two, on deep political changes in Russia and on the electoral victory of a more friendly administration in the United States that would accept him, an indicted war criminal, as a political factor."⁶³

While not addressing the issue of Milosevic's relations with Montenegro, some observers in the West have begun to open the analytical terms of reference to the possibility that the FRY dictator is preoccupied with other priorities, notably, as author Steven Erlanger suggests, with the issue of elections:

Those who see him [Milosevic] frequently say he is beginning to believe that fresh elections, much as Draskovic has called for, not only can be won, but will be an answer to Serbia's postwar isolation. If the ruling coalition now of his Socialists, his wife's Yugoslav United Left party, and Seselj's ultranationalist Radicals, running a single slate of candidates, can win the next Serbian elections, there will be new legitimacy, his officials say. Even if they do not win a majority, as is more likely, given his political weakness and the fatigue of 12 years of Government, they believe that the opposition will not win a majority either. They believe that some part of the opposition - in particular Draskovic, who started the war as a deputy prime minister - will be willing to make a deal with Milosevic.⁶⁴

Speculation that the great dictator is preoccupied more with electioneering than with a showdown with Djukanovic has spilled over into the regional media. In Bosnia, reports that electioneering is reaching a critical stage in Serbia have circulated, implying that none other than ultranationalist leader and accused war criminal Vojislav Seselj may be the dictator's anointed. According to one account, the SRS leader is "ready to become the next president of Serbia" and that he is "preparing intensively" to close on a deal on a slate of backers that will include his own party, Markovic's JUL, and Milosevic's SPS.⁶⁵

⁶³ See *V.I.P.*, 4 November 1999.

⁶⁴ *New York Times*, 30 October 1999.

⁶⁵ *Dnevni avaz*, 12 November 1999.

IX. A FINAL THOUGHT

Those who understand how Milosevic operates as a political figure are well aware of the fact that he succeeds best in crisis management; best when he himself opens a conflict and involves the international community, only to have a solution imposed that can be manipulated in such a way that can strengthen the dictator's grip on power. Kosovo ironically afforded precisely that. In the words of one observer, what would be the most destructive thing for Milosevic is a multiethnic Kosovo, which would open the question in the Serbian public mind: why was there a war in the first place? As Steven Erlanger notes:

A democratic, multiethnic Kosovo would have hurt Milosevic badly, making Serbs wonder what the war was all about. There is in the population considerable knowledge and some shame over the deaths of at least 10,000 Kosovo Albanians, by Western estimates, and the expulsion of some 800,000. But the current state of Kosovo and the mistreatment of even innocent Serbs let the regime argue that Washington forced the war on Belgrade, which could not win. The inability of the West to bring order to Kosovo or to control Albanian crime underlines the message sent by most Serbian news media that Milosevic had no option but to fight the rebel Kosovo Liberation Army, even if the war was fought with all the atrocities that Bosnia made so familiar.⁶⁶

How might Milosevic open up a military conflict in Montenegro at this point and involve outside powers in such a way that it might strengthen his image as defender of ethnic Serb interests? In a phrase: not at all. In the Montenegrin case, the ethnic card is difficult to play, with much data continuing to indicate that perhaps as much as, if not more than, half the population regards itself as Serb. Arguably this dynamic played out in the republic's last vote when a whisker under half the electorate opted to go with Momir Bulatovic, the staunchly pro-Milosevic former Montenegrin president and current federal prime minister. Moreover, how could anything akin to a war at this time involve the international community in such a way that it's intervention could be manipulated by Belgrade in such a way to bolster the dictatorship's abuse of power. That also appears unlikely, if not impossible. Even the logical reading of Milosevic's options, then, suggests the dictator is likely to play a waiting game, and it must be ruled out that he believes the political winds in western capitals will change in such a way, and perhaps in the not too distant future, that may allow him to reopen questions such as the status of Republika Srpska and relations with Montenegro.

⁶⁶ *New York Times*, 30 October 1999.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Evidence is suggesting that Milosevic may not have conflict with Montenegro as his first priority right at the moment, setting his sights more towards possible elections in 2000. This gives the West a respite, opening the door to a proactive approach vis-à-vis the dictator. The first thing that has to be done is to support the Serbian opposition in its bid to come to power. This goal may be helped along by focusing on three strategies: a) Granting political advice, discreetly, to the opposition, which must maintain a co-ordinated and unified effort when balloting comes. b) The media must be harnessed to support the opposition. As the dictatorship controls the state press and broadcasters, and is able to wage a war of propaganda and dis-information, free media and surrogate broadcasters must be supported. At this juncture, this is made even more critical by the fact that the regime, in yet another sign of pre-electioneering, has begun to target the free press, and this time with the age-old tactic of filing harassing legal claims against editors and dailies.⁶⁷ c) Interests opposing the dictatorship ought to be encouraged to co-operate in the common goal of unseating the Belgrade authorities. This means supporting efforts by the Serbian opposition and governing authorities in Podgorica to shape common policies--both in order to defeat Milosevic, and to encourage the growth of democracy throughout the territory of the FRY.
2. With the Montenegrin authorities introducing a parallel currency with the German mark, there are opportunities for the republic to begin the process of fending off any threat of inflation from Belgrade and integration into a Europe-wide trade system. Alternatively, there are pitfalls. Perhaps there will be a point of friction between Belgrade and Podgorica as Montenegrin authorities demand payment for housing the military in the hard currency, fuelling friction with Belgrade. But that is likely to happen in the future. For the time being, the issue appears to be black market trading, with the problem being keeping the marks in Montenegro and not allowing them to flood into Serbia. To that end, ICG recommends the international community give the Djukanovic government unequivocal support in terms of political and economic advice as to how to go about maintaining control over the currency supply.
3. ICG warns that programs designed to aid the people of Serbia but isolate the dictatorship, notably the Energy for Democracy efforts of the European Union, must be monitored carefully and closely, and that any failings and shortcomings be used to implement changes that rectify defects. The recipients of such aid, the opposition mayors and their supporters must be

⁶⁷ On 9 December 1999 news broke that Studio B TV along with the dailies *Blic* and *Danas* were fined approximately \$US 50,000 for violating the Public Information Act. Charges were brought by Seselj, who alleged their coverage of the tragedy involving members of the Draskovic entourage was malicious, linking the SRS leader to "state terrorism." See 9 December 1999 coverage of the story by Radio B 92 and Onasa.

allowed to express openly any shortcomings that may become evidenced during the implementation of the program.

4. With political tensions always capable of erupting into violent clashes, it is incumbent upon the international community to forge a united strategy vis-à-vis the democratic Djukanovic government.⁶⁸ ICG recognises that the eventuality may come, and urges that the international community understand, that Montenegrin reform and democracy will need the committed intervention of Western capitals to stave off Belgrade's force.

⁶⁸ On 9 December 1999 TV Montenegro reported that an all-night stand-off at Podgorica's airport, involving republic police forces and federal troops, was resolved without altercation. The issue does, however, highlight tensions between Belgrade and Montenegro. Montenegrin officials explained the temporary closure of the airport was owing to a "misunderstanding" and continue to downplay the day's events. The federal army, however, responded with a statement saying that the Montenegrin police were to refrain from building helicopter hangars, as that would lead to "provoking a situation likely to lead to an incident, [and] could have unfathomable consequences for peace and stability in Montenegro," RFE/RL's South Slavic Service reported on 9 December 1999. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Madelaine Albright expressed her concern about the situation in Montenegro while NATO commander U.S. General Wesley Clark remarked on 9 December 1999 that developments were being monitored closely, *RFE/RL Newsline* reports on 10 December 1999. Finally, *Time* speculates the invasion of the airport was in fact a Belgrade trial balloon, in the form of attempting to surmise how far the West might go in defending reform in the tiny FRY republic. "Slobodan Milosevic may have a nasty little surprise waiting for NATO in the New Year - all nicely timed to coincide with the lead-up to the American presidential election. Wednesday's seizure of Montenegro's main airport by Milosevic's troops looks like a dry run to test Western resolve to defend the territory's pro-Western government," notes *Time* on 9 December 1999.