

Political Dynamics of the Post-Communist Montenegro: One-Party Show

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Abstract. *Marked by the turbulent collapse of former Yugoslavia, democratic transition of Western Balkan countries was, as a whole, considerably different from the post-1989 political experiences of other former communist states in Europe. At the same time, within this particular group of countries, one represents an exception in terms of dynamics of the transition process. Montenegro, the smallest ex-Yugoslav republic, is the only state in the region governed by the same party – the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) – since the introduction of multipartism.*

The DPS's continuous political dominance over the last 22 years appears even more puzzling in light of the radical transformation it underwent during this period. On the one hand, once the pillar of the Montenegrin competitive authoritarian regime (Levitsky and Way, 2010), the party played the key role in the country's democratization, subsequent to the 1997 split within its leadership. On the other hand, being the most vocal advocate of state federation with Serbia for more than a decade, it became the main political force behind the renewal of the Montenegrin independence that took place in the 2006 referendum.

My paper seeks to contribute to better understanding of this unique post-communist political phenomenon. It thereby argues that the longevity in power of the Democratic Party of Socialists has been determined by two key factors. In the earlier, non-democratic phase of its governance, it was a considerably high level of the DPS's institutionalization (Panebianco, 1988) that brought about its political supremacy. In the following period, the party managed to monopolize the idea of Montenegrin sovereignty, thus acquiring significant amount of political legitimacy. The paper uses explaining outcome process tracing method that attempts to craft minimally sufficient explanation of an outcome by combining theoretical and case-specific mechanisms (Beach and Pedersen, 2011).

Introduction

The first democratic elections in political history of Montenegro took place on 9 December 1990. Receiving 56.2% of the vote and securing as many as 83 out of 125 parliament seats, the Montenegrin League of Communists (SKCG) - to be renamed the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) in July 1991 - won a landslide victory. Among the parties that triumphed in the initial multiparty elections in the republics of socialist Yugoslavia, its result was by far the best.² What is more, its candidate and the party head, Momir Bulatović, won the concominantly organized presidential election.³

One could, in my view, identify at least two important political circumstances that greatly contributed to the overwhelming electoral success of the Montenegrin neo-communists. One the one hand, it was the revolutionary legitimacy of their political

² The second-best was the result of the Socialist Party of Serbia which won 46.1% of vote in the December 1990 parliamentary election.

³ Winning 76.1% of vote, Bulatović was elected president in the second round,. His result in the first round was 42.2%.

leadership. In January 1989, in the atmosphere of severe socio-economic crisis, on the wave of months-long mass street protests, and with considerable logistic support of a new Serbian political establishment, a narrow circle of young SKCG officials forced the old communist elite out of office. While portraying its members as corrupt, detached from the popular base, and unsympathetic toward the problems of the Serb and Montenegrin minority in Serbia's predominantly-Albanian autonomous province of Kosovo, the newcomers promised moral, political, and economic renewal of the smallest Yugoslav republic. Although they gradually accepted a new political rhetoric – including terms such as democracy, multiparty system, human rights and freedoms etc. – the transition process thus unfolded in the name of the 'January revolution' rather than of democracy (Pavićević, 2007: 85). Slobodan Milošević who – mainly due to successful political manipulation of the Kosovo issue - had taken control over the Serbian League of Communists in September 1987, got a reliable political partner for the years to come. At the same time, with both de jure and de facto monopoly of political power as well as with a vast majority of population behind it, the new party leadership of Montenegro prepared ground for the official introduction of political pluralism.

The conditions in which the 1990 elections were held, i.e. the DPS's absolute control of media, state institutions, and financial resources during that period, was the second important determinant of their outcome. Whereas those at the top of the Montenegrin monolithic system of government had been altered a year earlier, the system itself remained intact. Thus, with unconstrained use of power mechanisms they inherited, the new Montenegrin political elite - while formally establishing democracy - in effect sought to ensure the continuity of political supremacy. In that regard, Montenegro stands as one of the most blatant examples of the - typical for a wider region during the transition period - exploitative reconstruction of state by political establishment, defined by Grzymala-Busse (2007) as 'rebuilding the post-communist Leviathan'. As a result, says Bieber, 'the conditions for the elections were hardly free and fair; information about the political alternatives were limited and – where available – usually aimed at discrediting opposition' (2003: 16-7). In this multi-party contest, Darmanović concludes, the DPS did not simply act as one of a number of equal participants but much more like 'a state party using all the advantages brought about by a total control over the state apparatus and resources' (2003: 156).

In light of these facts, one might rightfully argue, the result of the first democratic elections in Montenegro might have fairly easily been anticipated. At the same time, however, political dominance of the winning party that lasts ever since was hardly predictable. During this period, to make its longevity in power even more puzzling, the DPS underwent a substantial political transformation from the main pillar of the hybrid regime in Montenegro and the most credible advocate of its state federation with Serbia into the leading political force behind the country's democratization and the renewal of its independence. So how could such a long stream of political successes in such turbulent political times in Montenegro and the rest of the region be possibly explained?

This paper puts forward two potential determinants of the political invincibility of the Democratic Party of Socialists over the last two decades. On the one hand, it contends that - apart from its privileged access to resources, media, and law - the DPS's political supremacy throughout its earlier governing phase resulted from a considerably high level of its institutionalization. In the following years, the paper further argues, the party managed to monopolize the idea of Montenegrin sovereignty, thus acquiring significant amount of political legitimacy, critical for its survival in office.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Firstly, a chronological resume of the DPS's electoral successes is presented. Subsequently, the party's aforementioned political metamorphosis is further elaborated. Finally, the impact of the two explanatory variables on its political dominance is analyzed in detail. The paper uses explaining outcome process tracing method (Beach and Pedersen, 2011) that seeks the causes of a specific historical outcome in a single case. It thereby attempts to craft minimally sufficient explanation of an outcome by combining theoretical and case-specific mechanisms.

Political domination

In the early elections held in December 1992, albeit with a significantly weaker popular support than two years earlier, the Democratic Party of Socialists managed to win enough votes (42.66%) to keep the monopoly of political power in Montenegro (46/85 seats). As a result, Goati points out, the DPS became the only party in the post-communist countries of the South-East Europe that succeeded in preserving an absolute parliament

majority after the second election (2001: 132). At the same time, after two electoral rounds, its leader, Bulatović, won the second presidential term.⁴

Four years later, in the November 1996 election, notwithstanding serious socio-economic crisis that had struck Montenegro⁵ as a result of the 1992-1995 international sanctions against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SRJ)⁶, the incumbent party won not only the absolute majority of seats (45/71) but even the absolute majority of vote (51.2%). Among the ex-communist parties in the region, its result was, once again, unrivalled (Ibid: 137). However, within a next few months, a sharp political cleavage at the party summit started to emerge. Diverging views of the DPS's political alliance with Milošević of its two key figures, president Bulatović and a vice-president Milo Đukanović, soon turned into an open political conflict.⁷ While the former remained loyal to the old political friend, despite extremely negative economic and political results of his rule, the latter gradually moved away from him, toward new political partners - primarily, the EU and the US. After a period of fierce intra-party competition, Đukanović managed to win a majority support of DPS's members. Moreover, after losing the first, he scored a narrow victory over Bulatović in the second round of the presidential election held in October 1997. With a new leader, and without a considerable number of former members who joined Bulatović's newly created Socialist People's Party (SNP), the DPS won the next - and, according to international observer missions, Montenegro's first free and fair⁸ - parliamentary election in May 1998.⁹

Three years later, following the NATO 1999 military intervention against SRJ and Milošević's overthrow in October 2000, another early election was called in Montenegro. As

⁴ After garnering 42.8% in the first round, Bulatović won 63.3% in the second.

⁵ In 1995, the country's GDP stood at 50.2% whereas its industrial output was only 41.1% of the 1990 level (Đurić, 2003: 140).

⁶ Created on the ruins of socialist Yugoslavia, the new federation of Serbia and Montenegro was officially proclaimed in April 1992. Merely a month later, SRJ was placed under political and economic embargo of the UN Security Council as a consequence of its political leadership's failure to implement previously adopted UN Resolution (no. 752) demanding that all parties involved in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina end the fighting immediately.

⁷ Đukanović's famous interview to a Serbian weekly *Vreme*, in which he discarded Milošević as 'a man of obsolete political ideas', set the stage for a political battle within the leadership of the ruling Montenegrin party (interview available at: <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=327446>).

⁸ In the OSCE/ODIHR report on the election, the following is stated: 'The Election Observation Mission is pleased to note that most of the recommendations issued by OSCE Election Observation Mission in 1997 and by the OSCE/ODIHR Technical Assistance Team in February 1998 have been implemented. The legal framework and administrative procedures were adopted by consensus among all parliamentary parties, and the voting was carried out without any major problems on election day. The parties should be commended for their calm behaviour after the elections, and for accepting the results' (report available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/montenegro/15101>).

⁹ In a coalition with two smaller parties - the Social Democratic Party of Montenegro (SDP) and the People's Party (NS), the DPS won 48.9% of vote and absolute majority of seats (42/78)

a reaction to the DPS's alteration of political course toward the idea of the country's independence, a pro-unionist People's Party (NS) left the government. In the election held in April 2001, the DPS-led coalition won 42% of vote, thus for the first time since 1990 falling short of an absolute majority of seats in parliament¹⁰. Yet, endorsed by the traditionally pro-independence Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG), the coalition formed a minority government. It would, however, last only a year. Pressured by the EU which, in light of the recent negative experiences with creation of new state borders in the region, favored the idea of keeping Serbia and Montenegro within a single political entity, the latter's political leaders agreed to sign the Belgrade Agreement in March 2002, creating a new state union of now semi-independent two countries.¹¹ Blaming them for betrayal of the national interests, the LSCG decided to withdraw its support to the Montenegrin government. However, according to the result of the parliamentary election held later that year, a majority of voters in the country perceived the politics of its leadership quite differently. Winning 48% of vote, the DPS-SDP coalition regained control of the parliament (39/75 seats). In addition, the incumbent party's candidate, Filip Vujanović, won a resounding victory in the presidential election in May 2003.¹²

The long stream of electoral triumphs of the Democratic Party of Socialists has been maintained in the period subsequent to Montenegro's 'divorce' of Serbia in May 2006. In the parliamentary election organized in December that year, first after the referendum on Montenegrin independence, the ruling coalition celebrated another convincing victory¹³. Three years later, in March 2009, the coalition even managed to win an absolute majority of vote (51.9%)¹⁴, the same with which Vujanović was, in the first round, re-elected president a year earlier. With a minor political setback in the 2001 parliamentary election, the Democratic Party of Socialists thus continues to dominate the Montenegrin politics to this very day.

¹⁰ The coalition won 33 out of 72 seats.

¹¹ Albeit willing to compromise with Brussels, the Montenegrin officials were, as Vuković reminds, everything but ready to abandon the concept of an independent state. At their insistence, a 'temporality clause' was built into the Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) guaranteeing the right to the constitutive members to opt out of it via referendum after three years (Article 60). The legal framework was thus set up for a future plebiscite on the independence of Montenegro (2010: 69). For more on the topic, see: van Meurs (2003).

¹² Vujanović won 64.2% of vote.

¹³ The coalition won 48.6% of vote and 39 out of 76 parliament seats.

¹⁴ 48 out of 76 seats.

Political transformation

Thought-provoking as such, the DPS's dominance of the Montenegrin political scene throughout the last 22 years seems even more striking given the scope of change that the party underwent during this period. On the one hand, until the aforementioned split within its leadership, the omnipotent DPS had been the major obstacle to the country's democratization. In the following years, quite contrary, the party played the key role in this process. On the other hand, throughout 1990s, the DPS had stood firm on the position that Montenegro should live with Serbia in a single state. At the onset of the next decade, however, the party officially switched to - thus to become the main political force in - the pro-independence camp. This section of the paper analyzes in detail the two-fold political metamorphosis of the Montenegrin ruling party.

The introduction of multipartism did not bring about a genuine political change in Montenegro. Notwithstanding formal democratic reforms, the nature of its political system remained predominantly authoritarian. Here, as in many other countries in transition from non-democratic rule during the post-Cold War period, a specific form of hybrid political regime emerged, combining the elements of democratic and authoritarian governance in a way that formal existence of the former masked the reality of the latter. In these regimes, labelled 'competitive authoritarian' by Levitsky and Way (2010), autocrats submit to meaningful multiparty elections but engage in serious democratic violations. Still, instead of resorting to naked repression, electoral fraud, or other - potentially very harmful to their political image - sorts of blatant power abuse, they make use of incumbency to create and maintain unlevel playing field (Schedler, 2002), i.e. unfair conditions of political competition so as to thwart opposition challenges. As a result, the authors write, state institutions are abused for partisan ends and incumbents are systematically favored in the access to resources, media, and the law 'to the extent that the opposition's ability to organize and compete in elections is seriously impaired' (Ibid: 10).

In Montenegro, as previously mentioned, the Democratic Party of Socialists kept a strong grip on the state apparatus, economy, media, and other centers of power once controlled by its communist predecessor. Just like Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia, the DPS represented a 'cosmetically retooled political vehicle that retained a monopoly of power in a manner resembling the old regime' (Goati, 1996: 120). In the following years,

Darmanović explains, the party successfully used the privileged position to render the opposition politically uncompetitive:

'The DPS held the system together by assiduously using its complete control over state organs and resources in order to squelch critics and rivals and win elections. The usual range of methods was employed, including party domination of the state-owned media; the packing of offices with party favorites; the maintenance of slush funds; occasional intimidation of adversaries; the abuse of police authority to influence the electoral process; and manipulations of the electoral system. Backed by these kinds of tactics, the DPS easily bested its dispirited opponents and retained an absolute majority of seats in the Montenegrin parliament' (2003: 147).

Their inability to even jeopardize political hegemony of the DPS brought together opposition parties with completely different political views. The Liberal Alliance of Montenegro, the party that politically established the idea of restoration of the country's independence, and the conservative People's Party, which vehemently advocated the transformation of the Serbo-Montenegrin federation into unitary state, thus formed the 'People's Concord' coalition before the 1996 parliamentary election. However, united in demand for genuine democratization of Montenegro, the two parties gathered less vote than they had gained individually four years earlier.¹⁵ Once again, Bieber writes, the DPS's dominance allowed it to unilaterally change the electoral rules¹⁶ and conduct an extremely lavish campaign, this time beating the opposition in terms of money spent by a margin of 10:1 (2003: 28).

At that moment, the political earthquake that was soon to hit Montenegro was, for obvious reasons, completely unimaginable. Nonetheless, merely a few months after the great electoral victory of the DPS, its two leading figures would, as outlined above, open a new political front in the country. The division between Bulatović and Đukanović over the issue of political partnership with the Serbian ruling elite put an end to the absolute domination of their party over the Montenegrin politics. Its character, more importantly, would change substantially as a result of the triumph of the Đukanović-led Western-oriented progressive party faction. In its wake, Darmanović rightfully argues, 'we can see that the

¹⁵ The coalition won 19 out of 71 seats, that is around 27%. By comparison, in the 1992 parliamentary election, the two parties got 27 (NS – 14 and LSCG – 13) out of 85 seats, or 32%.

¹⁶ The new electoral law introduced 14 electoral districts at the national level. Previously, the entire country represented single electoral district. As a result, with 51.2% of vote, the DPS got 63.4% of seats (45/71). At the same time, even though the electoral census stood at 5%, the Social Democratic Party did not get into the parliament because of the district organization despite winning 5.7% of vote.

second transition was beginning, and that semi-authoritarianism and dominant-party politics were on their way out' (2003: 148).

On the one hand, unlike the earlier ones, the outcome of the 1997 presidential election¹⁷ as well as all the elections subsequently held in Montenegro was entirely open.¹⁸ Now competing under the international scrutiny and more or less the same conditions like the opposition parties, the DPS thus came a step away from losing incumbency after the 2001 parliamentary election, which, up until 5 years earlier, had been nearly impossible. The same party that had, for almost a decade, been blocking an actual political transition of Montenegro was, as its leading political force, now managing its transformation into electoral democracy.¹⁹ At the same time, beside altering the nature of political game, the outcome of the 1997 conflict within the DPS brought about a complete change of the country's political orientation. Thus far serving as a principal reservoir of support for Serbia's troublesome politics, Montenegro found new political allies in the EU and the US. In the situation where Milošević was preparing for a new war, this time in Kosovo, Đukanović came to be widely recognized as a new chance for the regional stability and political progress. And indeed, during the 1999 NATO military campaign against Yugoslavia, despite strong pressures from Milošević and his political followers in Montenegro aimed at actively involving the smaller republic of the SRJ into the conflict, the Montenegrin political leadership managed to keep it neutral.²⁰ In spite of the later conceptual disagreements with the EU's highest representatives as regards the independence issue, the Montenegrin leadership has to date remained one of the Western governments' most reliable political partners in the region.

The split within the highest ranks of the DPS thus resulted in its substantial transformation from the guardian of the non-democratic and internationally isolated regime in Montenegro into the country's leading pro-democratic and pro-Western political force. This, however, was not the only change that the party underwent in the post-1997 period.

¹⁷ After Bulatović's triumph in the first round with 0.7% margin, Đukanović won the second by 1.6% which, in absolute numbers, was less than 5.500 votes (out of 344.000 cast).

¹⁸ Free and fair elections was one of the key elements of the September 1997 "Agreement on Minimum Principles for Development of a Democratic Infrastructure" signed by all party leaders in Montenegro.

¹⁹ In this regard, Bieber reminds that the five principles upon which the DPS-led coalition was formed before the 1998 parliamentary election were: democratization, rule of law, privatization and economic reforms, social justice and security, and international links in the economy (2003: 32).

²⁰ Moreover, in the aftermath of the fighting, a number of leaders of the Serbian democratic opposition, who were blacklisted by the Belgrade authorities because of their 'national trahison', i.e. criticism of the Milošević's war adventure, found refuge in Montenegro.

Equally dramatic, one could say, was its ideational reorientation from the main supporter of the state federation with Serbia to the most important political advocate of the renewal of Montenegrin sovereignty.

On 1 March 1992, after most of the Yugoslav republics had decided to leave the federation, referendum on independence was organized in Montenegro. A vast majority of its citizens, in contrast to the people of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, voted in favor of the preservation of 'a united Yugoslavia' with Montenegro as its 'equal part'.²¹ Given that all other republics had already chosen differently, it was clear that the Montenegrins actually opted for creation of a joint state with Serbia. On April 27, following a series of talks between political elites and legal experts of the two states, a new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia thus officially came into being.

The DPS leaders took an active part in the referendum campaign, promoting the idea of a state unity with Serbia. From political point of view, one could argue, such course of action was somewhat problematic. Namely, as Darmanović notes, 'Montenegro's decision and the cooperation with Serbian war policy that it involved, made Montenegro subject to UN sanctions', which, he points out, was 'a unique case of a political elite and a population deciding to remain within a country[...]that at the very time of its formation had been placed under sanction by the world community' (2003: 146). Nonetheless, in spite of the extremely negative political and socio-economic consequences of living in Milošević-dominated SRJ, the DPS would not give up the concept of state federation of Serbia and Montenegro until the end of the decade. Even after the abovementioned split, the party stayed firmly on this political course. Thus, in the program adopted by the DPS's Congress in October 1998, 'reaffirmation of the Federal State as a community of equal republics and citizens' was listed as one of its political priorities.

In fact, only subsequent to the next congress summoned 3 years later will the party officially change its orientation as regards the statehood question. Albeit welcoming the beginning of the new, post-Milošević political era in SRJ, the political leadership of Montenegro, the country long time paying the price of political decisions that it effectively could not have influenced, thus said no to the idea of turning back the wheel of Serbo-Montenegrin joint political history (Vuković, 2010: 67). In the following period,

²¹ Albeit with the relatively weak turnout of 66%, more than 95% of the electorate replied positively to the following referendum question: 'Would you like Montenegro to remain a part of a united Yugoslavia, as a sovereign republic and fully equal to all other Yugoslav republics that wish to remain in unity?'

notwithstanding the aforementioned EU scepticism²², the DPS would press forward with a referendum on independence, which finally took place on 21 May 2006. As a result, with the approval of 55.5% of the voters, Montenegro reestablished its sovereignty.

In less than 15 years, like no other country in the post-communist Europe and beyond, Montenegro had two referenda on independence. The Democratic Party of Socialists thereby stood for diametrically opposed solutions for its legal status. Yet, just as in 1992 and 2006, the DPS still rules the country. In the next section, this paper offers two potential explanations of its longevity in power.

Formula for success

Focusing on different aspects of political life in Montenegro, it is possible to come up with a list of reasons for the continuous rule of the Democratic Party of Socialists. In that sense, for instance, one could mention political culture of the country in which the government has never been changed in elections, its size²³ that allows incumbents to rather easily establish and maintain clientelistic networks, the 'aura of invincibility' (Magaloni, 2006) around the DPS as well as the charismatic leadership of its president Milo Đukanović, six-time prime minister and the head of the independence movement, the opposition parties' inability to come together behind a competitive political platform, and Western support to the Montenegrin ruling elite.²⁴ My ambition, however, is to craft a minimally sufficient explanation of this particular outcome, 'with sufficiency defined as an explanation that accounts for all of its important aspects with no redundant parts being present' (Mackie, 1965). Thus, bearing in mind the scope of the DPS's political transformation in course of the last two decades, I assert that we must analytically focus on the party itself to be able to explain its political dominance. Without a high level of institutionalization and a solid basis of political legitimacy, I argue and further elaborate in the remainder of this section, the changing DPS would not be able to survive in power for so long.

²² As noted in the 2006 International Crisis Group (ICG) analysis on the Montenegrin referendum, 'the EU worked very hard to counter, or at least postpone, any prospect of Montenegrin independence, which it felt would have a negative spillover effect in Kosovo and force a decision on its final status before the international community had a consensus on that question, and have a wider destabilizing effect in a still fragile region' (report available at: http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/b042_montenegro_s_referendum.ashx).

²³ According to the last census, the population of Montenegro is 625.266, with a total area of 13.812 km².

²⁴ For more on the topic, see Komar's 2011 doctoral dissertation

Since Huntington introduced the concept in his 1968 well-known piece *Political Order in Changing Societies*, a body of literature on party institutionalization has been growing steadily. Janda (1980), to mention some of the most relevant related works, emphasizes importance of public perception of this process, arguing that an institutionalized party is one that is 'reified in the public mind'. Mainly focusing on parties in established democracies, Panebianco explains institutionalization as 'the way the organization solidifies', i.e. 'slowly loses its character as a tool and becomes valuable in and of itself' (1988: 49). Similarly, Mainwaring and Scully (1995) write that institutionalized political organizations are those that are not subordinated to the interests of their ambitious leaders. Along the same lines, Levitsky (1998) understands party institutionalization as, on the one hand, 'value infusion', i.e. the process by which an organization becomes 'infused with value beyond technical requirement of the task in hand', and, on the other, 'behavioral routinization', that is the process by which 'rules of the game' that shape social interaction within an organization become entrenched (1998: 79-80). Summarizing these analyses, Randall and Svasand (2002) identify four basic elements of party institutionalization: systemness, value infusion, decisional autonomy, and reification.

In order to measure its level in the given case, this paper proposes a simple two-dimensional model of party institutionalization, consisting of internal (organizational) and external (attitudinal) element. The former relates to the composition of power within the party ranks, ultimately determining its political purpose. In the new democracies in which, as pointed Randall and Svasand, parties often serve as 'little more than the personal mobilization instruments for ambitious politicians', whereby 'such personalistic leadership could contribute at the initial stages to party cohesion and survival but in the longer run, and in the absence of effective routinization, it could seriously inhibit institutional development' (Ibid: 19), understanding their power structure is, in my view, *conditio sine qua non* for their successful analysis. Thus, to learn whether a party represents political value as such or a mere political tool in the hands of its leader, one should first look inside of its power organization. The latter element refers to the popular perception of party organization. It shows the extent to which it becomes established in the public imagination and as a factor shaping the behavior of political actors (Ibid: 14-23). In view of the aforesaid 'pathological fixation on the leaders' (Ihonybere, 1996: 21) characteristic for the political parties in young

democracies, I believe that the best way to measure their real political 'weight' is to juxtapose their electoral results in an observed time period with those of their leaders.

Measured by these two criteria, the Democratic Party of Socialists stands as an example of highly institutionalized political organization. On the one hand, as mentioned in the introduction, a narrow circle of party officials took over control of the DPS after the 1989 revolution. The initial power dispersion within its highest ranks would prevent emergence of a politically supreme charismatic leader in the party. Instead, what we have had in the DPS ever since is the oligarchic type of leadership in which, as Schonfeld explains, 'a limited coalition of people tend to exercise disproportionate share of influence over a group's collective decisions', and where 'the titular head of the organization may be...more powerful than any of his colleagues, but they collectively are significantly more influential than he is' (1981: 231). Bulatović, the first party president, was hence *primus inter pares* rather than its charismatic and indisputable leader (Goati, 2001: 156).²⁵ In addition, the leading political posts in the country were distributed among the highest party representatives: Bulatović became the President, whereas Đukanović and Marović - the two equally powerful vice-presidents of the party - took offices of the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament. Thus, in contrast to Serbia and Croatia – to mention the most similar political regimes - where the ruling party leaders Milošević and Tuđman established themselves in the early 1990s as suprapolitical figures whose respective party organizations were merely to serve their political ambitions, the incumbent party itself represented the main actor at the Montenegrin political scene.²⁶ Same as before the split within its leadership, the DPS highest officials have remained politically subordinated to the party interests in the post-1997 period.

Furthermore, the results of the elections held in Montenegro during the last two decades clearly imply that the country's political public perceives its ruling party as highly institutionalized. Namely, throughout this period, the level of popular support for the DPS in

²⁵ One political episode from the early 1990s shows the real amount of his power. Namely, at The Hague Conference on the future of Yugoslavia, held in September 1991, Bulatović voted in favor of the plan according to which the country was supposed to become a confederation of six independent states. Milošević, his main political ally, opposed the plan, allegedly worried about the protection of the Serbs living in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. At that point, the majority of the Montenegrin public and, more importantly, the ruling DPS shared the view of the Serbian leader. Therefore, upon the return from the Conference, Bulatović was put under an enormous political pressure to change his 'unpatriotic' decision. As a result, the Montenegrin president soon withdrew his initial support for the plan.

²⁶ See Vuković (2011) for a comparative analysis of the political dynamics of the three countries during the 1990s.

the parliamentary elections has been in line with that for its presidential candidates.²⁷ Thus, for instance, in the 1990 elections, with a high turnout of 75.7%, the party won merely 1.034 votes more than its head. Two years later, with the turnout of 67.3%, the margin of votes in favor of the DPS was insignificant 2.900. Moreover, running as its presidential candidate in 1997, Đukanović won only 4.665 votes more than his party in the 1998 parliamentary election. Finally, in the 2008 election, the incumbent president Vujanović won 2.828 votes more compared to the DPS's result from a year later. In a word, both in terms of the power structure and the public perception, it could be argued that the Democratic Party of Socialists represents a well-institutionalized political organization.

However, given the dynamics of transformation of both the form and content of the Montenegrin politics since 1990, the DPS's organizational power alone could, in my opinion, not guarantee its political domination over such a long period of time. The party's extraordinary ability to adapt to the changing political conditions in the country is, I hold, another key determinant of its political success. On the one hand, we could see that its leadership-managed democratic changes in Montenegro 'coincided' with the political radicalization in Milošević's Serbia. Darmanović writes that, subsequent to the 1997 split within the DPS, the Prime Minister Milo Đukanović and his party, 'upset by Milošević's authoritarianism and the potential international costs of being associated with his rule, began to shift toward a policy of independence from Belgrade and its dictator' (2007: 153). Considering the level of support of the most important actors at the international political scene for the new course of the country's official politics, this - initially rather risky - political maneuver turned out to be very successful. What is more, the DPS's political profit was considerably increased by the determination of the main Montenegrin opposition parties to stay loyal to the Serbian leader until his very political end. For that reason, in contrast to the smooth 'image transition' of their major political rival, they faced great challenges on the way of rebuilding political legitimacy in the following years.

On the other hand, given its original stance on the Montenegrin statehood issue, even more impressive was the successful transformation of the DPS into the leading pro-

²⁷ In contrast, in the 1990 Serbian elections, Milošević won 965.212 (19.2%) votes more than the Socialist Party of Serbia. Two years later, the difference was as high as 1.155.961 (24.4%) votes. Similarly, in the 1992 Croatian elections, Tuđman got 342.663 (12%) more votes than the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). In 1997, last time running for the president, Tuđman won 244.587 (16.2%) votes more compared to his party's result in the 1995 parliamentary election.

independence political force. Again, the timing of the major political change could have hardly been better for the party. As reminded by Darmanović, from the time of the NATO's armed intervention in the first half of 1999, all opinion surveys confirmed that a stable though not overwhelming majority of Montenegrins favored independence (Ibid: 154). Already in 1998, the DPS initiated political cooperation with the Social Democratic Party, one of the two sovereignist parties in the country. Yet, incorporating the Liberal Alliance - throughout the 1990s the only parliamentary group advocating the renewal of the Montenegrin independence - into a DPS-led political bloc proved to be impossible due to the LSCG's unwillingness to share the hardly earned political credit. Such uncompromising position would, however, soon fireback on the party as the DPS gradually started taking over its voters and establishing itself as the most credible political option for all the others supporting the independence idea. As a result, a decade after winning a respectable 12.7%, the LSCG got merely 5.8% in the 2002 parliamentary election. Three years later, in the situation when it was obvious that the DPS would lead the pro-independence referendum bloc, the LSCG leadership made an unprecedented decision and formally dissolved the party.

At that moment, given the pro-Serbian orientation of the main opposition parties in Montenegro, the Democratic Party of Socialists was left without any competition on the sovereignist side of its political spectrum. The DPS's landslide victory in the September 2006 parliamentary election, a few months after the successful referendum on independence, thus came with no surprise. The subsequent one, in the March 2009 election, could have also been anticipated in view of the reluctance of the leading opposition parties in Montenegro to accept its independence in the full legal and political capacity.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to contribute to better understanding of the 22 year-long continuous rule of the Democratic Party of Socialists in Montenegro, a unique political phenomenon in the post-communist Europe. It thereby identified two elements that, in the author's view, determined the DPS's longevity in power. On the one hand, it demonstrated for the new democracies an unusually high level of institutionalization of the party organization both in terms of the internal power structure and its external – public perception. On the other hand, the paper explained the politically successful ideational

methamorphosis of the DPS into the leading pro-democratic and pro-independence political force in the country. As a result of these factors, the author argues, the party was able to survive in power the 1997 split within its leadership as well as the ensuing loss of the hyper-privileged position compared with its political competition.

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