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Political dynamics of the post-communist Montenegro: one-party show

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Montenegro is the only European post-communist country governed by the same party – the Democratic Party of Socialists – since the introduction of political pluralism. Thought-provoking as such, this appears even more puzzling in light of the radical transformation that the party underwent during this period. Once the pillar of the Montenegrin hybrid regime, the DPS played the key role in the country's democratization, subsequent to the 1997 split within its leadership. Moreover, being the most vocal advocate of a state federation with Serbia for more than a decade, it became the main political force behind the renewal of Montenegrin independence. This article seeks to contribute to a better understanding of this unique and understudied post-communist political phenomenon. It argues that the DPS's longevity in power has been determined by two factors. In the earlier non-democratic governing phase, it was the considerably high level of the party's institutionalization that brought about its political supremacy. In the following period, the party managed to monopolize the idea of Montenegrin sovereignty, thus acquiring a significant amount of political legitimacy. The article uses the explaining outcome process tracing method that attempts to craft a minimally sufficient explanation of an outcome by combining theoretical and case-specific mechanisms.

Keywords: party institutionalization; political domination; hybrid regime; Montenegro

Introduction

The first democratic elections in the political history of Montenegro took place on 9 December 1990. Receiving 56.2% of votes and securing as many as 83 out of 125 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 (SFRJ), its result was by far the best.[1] Additionally, its candidate and the party head, Momir Bulatović, won the concomitantly organized presidential election.[2]

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One could identify at least two important political circumstances that greatly contributed to the overwhelming electoral success of the Montenegrin neo-communists. On the one hand, it was the revolutionary legitimacy of their political leadership. In January 1989, in the atmosphere of severe socio-economic crisis,[3] on the wave of months-long mass street protests, and with considerable logistic support from 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 towards the problems of the Serb and Montenegrin minority in Serbia's predominantly Albanian autonomous province of Kosovo, the newcomers promised the 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 – the transition process thus unfolded in the name of the "January revolution" rather than of democracy.[4] With both *de jure* and *de facto* monopoly of political power as well as with a vast majority of the population behind it, the new party leadership of Montenegro prepared the ground for the official introduction of political pluralism.

The conditions in which the 1990 elections were held were the second important determinant of their outcome. Whereas those at the top of the Montenegrin monolithic system of government had been changed a year earlier, the system itself remained intact. Therefore, adjacent to the infrastructure of still the only political party in the Republic,[5] the new political leadership took over the absolute control of the media, state institutions, and financial resources. With unconstrained use of the inherited power mechanisms, the new Montenegrin political elite, while formally establishing democracy, in effect sought to ensure the continuity of political supremacy. Thus, compared to its recently founded and poorly organized competitors, the Montenegrin League of Communists – under the original name – entered the campaign for the December elections from a very advantageous political position. Rather than as one of a number of participants, the SKCG/DPS acted like a "state party" in this political contest.[6]

In light of these facts, one could rightfully argue that the result of the first formally democratic elections in Montenegro might have been anticipated fairly easily. At the same time, however, the political dominance of the winning party, which has lasted 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 can such a long stream of political successes in such turbulent political times in Montenegro and the rest of the region be explained?

This article puts forward two potential determinants of the political invincibility of the DPS over the last two decades. First, 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 institutionalization.

Second, in the following years, the party managed to monopolize the idea of Montenegrin sovereignty, thus acquiring a significant amount of political legitimacy, critical for its survival in office.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. First, a summary 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 analysed in detail. The article uses the explaining outcome process tracing method which seeks the causes of a specific historical outcome in a single case.[7] It thereby attempts to craft a minimally sufficient explanation of an outcome by combining theoretical and case-specific mechanisms.

Political domination

In the early elections held in December 1992, the DPS managed to win enough votes (42.66%) to retain political dominance in Montenegro (46/85 seats). As a result, the DPS became the only party in the post-communist countries of south-east Europe to succeed in preserving an absolute parliamentary majority subsequent to the second election.[8] Moreover, after two electoral rounds, its leader, Bulatović, won the second presidential term.[9]

Four years later, in the November 1996 election, notwithstanding the serious socio-economic crisis that had struck Montenegro[10] as a result of the 1992–1995 international sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SRJ),[11] the incumbent party won not only an absolute majority of seats (45/71) but even an absolute majority of votes (51.2%). Among the ex-communist parties in the wider region, its result was, once again, unrivalled.[12] However, within the next few months, a sharp political conflict at the party summit started to emerge. Diverging views of the DPS's two key figures, president Bulatović and vice-president Milo Đukanović, on the political alliance with Milošević soon turned into an open political conflict. While Bulatović remained loyal to an old political friend, despite the extremely negative economic and political results of his rule, Đukanović gradually moved away from him towards new political partners – primarily, the United States and the European Union (EU). Following a period of fierce intra-party competition, Đukanović managed to win a majority of support from DPS members.[13] Moreover, after losing the first round of the presidential election, he scored a narrow victory over Bulatović in the second round held in October 1997. With the new leader, the DPS won the next and, according to the international observer missions, Montenegro's first free and fair parliamentary election in May 1998.[14] In a coalition with the two smaller parties – the Social Democratic Party of Montenegro (SDP) and the People's Party (NS), the DPS won 48.9% of votes and an absolute majority of seats (42/78).

Three years later, another early election was called in Montenegro. As a reaction to the DPS's change of political course towards the idea of the country's independence, the pro-unionist NS left the government. In the election held in April

2001, the DPS-led coalition won 42% of votes, thus falling short of an absolute majority of seats in parliament for the first time since 1990.[15] Yet, endorsed by the traditionally pro-independence Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG), the coalition formed a minority government which only lasted one year. Pressured by the EU, which favoured the idea of keeping Serbia and Montenegro within a single political entity,[16] the latter's political leaders agreed to sign the Belgrade Agreement in March 2002, creating a new state union of the now semi-independent two countries.[17] Blaming them for the betrayal of national interests, the LSCG decided to withdraw its support from 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 votes, 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.[18]

The long stream of electoral triumphs of the DPS has been maintained in the period subsequent to Montenegro's "divorce" from Serbia in May 2006. In the parliamentary election organized in December that year, the first after the referendum on Montenegrin independence, the ruling coalition celebrated another convincing victory.[19] Three years later, in March 2009, the coalition even managed to win an absolute majority of votes (51.9%),[20] the same percentage with which Vujanović was, in the first round, re-elected president a year earlier. Aside from a minor political setback in the 2001 parliamentary election, the DPS continues to dominate Montenegrin politics to this very day.

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.[21] 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, however, the party played a key role in this process. On the other hand, throughout the 1990s, the DPS had stood firm on the position that Montenegro should live with Serbia as a single state. At the onset of the next decade, however, the party officially switched to the pro-independence camp and soon became its leading political force. This section of the article analyses 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. 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 Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, autocrats submit to meaningful multiparty elections but engage in serious democratic violations.[22] Still, instead of resorting to naked repression, electoral fraud, or other sorts of blatant power abuse potentially very harmful to their political image, they make use of incumbency to create and maintain an unlevel playing field, that is, unfair conditions of political competition so as to thwart opposition challenges.[23]

In Montenegro, as previously mentioned, the DPS kept a strong grip on the state apparatus, economy, media, and other centres 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".[24] As noted by Srdjan Darmanović:

> 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.[25]

Their inability to even jeopardize the political hegemony of the DPS brought together opposition parties with completely different political views. The LSCG, the party that politically established the idea of restoration of the country's independence, and the conservative NS, which vehemently advocated the transformation of the Serb-Montenegrin federation into a unitary state, thus formed the "People's Concord" coalition before the 1996 parliamentary election. However, united by a demand for the genuine democratization of Montenegro, the two parties gathered fewer votes than they had gained individually four years earlier.[26] Using the uncompromised monopoly of power, the DPS was able to conduct an extremely lavish campaign, "this time beating the opposition in terms of money spent by a margin of 10:1".[27] Beside, the ruling Montenegrin party was in a position to unilaterally change the electoral rules so as to maximize the prospects of political triumph.[28] "When I think about those times today", Đukanović told me in a recent interview, "I have no doubt that we had a serious advantage over our political competitors".[29] What is more, he even came to acknowledge that, for that reason, "it would be a caricatural plagiarism of history to say that an ambience for fair elections existed during this period in Montenegro".[30]

At the moment of the DPS's great electoral victory, the political earthquake that was soon to hit Montenegro was, for obvious reasons, completely unimaginable. Nonetheless, merely a few months later, 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 Montenegrin politics.

As a significant number of the DPS members joined Bulatović's newly created Socialist People's Party (SNP), a great deal of its political influence at both state and local level was gone. Consequently, albeit still in power, the party lost its hyperprivileged position relative to political competition. The conflict between the key figures of the country's most powerful political organization thus led to an end of the regime that they had built together. The result of the October 1997 presidential election was an unambiguous indicator of the political change taking place in Montenegro. After Bulatović narrowly won the first round (47.44% against 46.71%), Đukanović prevailed in the second by less than 5500 votes (out of 344,000 cast). What is more, one month before the election, the "Agreement on Minimum Principles for Development of a Democratic Infrastructure", with "free and fair elections" as one of the key elements, was signed by all party leaders in Montenegro.

Now competing under international scrutiny and more or less the same conditions as the opposition parties, the DPS failed to secure an absolute majority of seats in the 2001 parliamentary election, which, up until five 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 an electoral democracy.[31] At the same time, beside altering the nature of the 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 in which Milošević was preparing for a new war, this time in Kosovo, Đukanović came to be widely recognized as a new chance for regional stability and political progress. And, indeed, during the 1999 NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) military campaign against Yugoslavia, despite strong pressures from the Serbian leader and his political followers in Montenegro aimed at actively involving the smaller republic of the SRJ into the conflict, the Montenegrin government managed to keep it neutral. Moreover, despite the later conceptual disagreements with the EU's highest representatives regarding the independence issue, Montenegro's political 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. Equally dramatic 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, a referendum on independence was organized in Montenegro. A vast of majority of its citizens, in contrast to the people of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, voted in favour of the preservation of "a united Yugoslavia"

with Montenegro as its "equal part".[32] Given that all other republics had already chosen differently, it was clear that the Montenegrins actually opted for the creation of a joint state with Serbia. On 27 April 1992 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. Moreover, regardless of the extremely negative political and socio-economic consequences of living in Milošević-dominated SRJ, they would stay firmly on this political course until the end of the decade. Hence, in the programme adopted by the DPS Congress in October 1998, "reaffirmation of the Federal State as a community of equal republics and citizens" was listed as one of the party's political priorities.[33]

In fact, only subsequent to the next congress summoned three years later did the DPS officially change its orienation as regards the statehood question.[34] Albeit welcoming the beginning of the new, post-Milošević political era in SRJ, the political leadership of Montenegro thus said no to the idea of turning back the wheel of Serb-Montenegrin joint political history.[35] In the following period, notwithstanding the aforementioned EU scepticism, the DPS would press forward with a referendum on independence, which finally took place on 21 May 2006. As a result, with the appoval 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 DPS 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 article offers two potential explanations of its longevity in power.

Formula for political 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 DPS. In that sense, for instance, one could mention the political culture of the country in which the government has never been changed in elections, its size that allows incumbents to rather easily establish and maintain clientelistic networks,[36] the "aura of invincibility" around the DPS as well as the charismatic leadership of its president Đukanović, six-time prime minister and the head of the independence movement,[37] the inability of the opposition parties to come together behind a competitive political platform, and Western support for the Montenegrin ruling elite. 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".[38] 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 have been able to survive in power for so long.

High-level institutionalization

Since Samuel Huntington introduced the concept in 1968,[39] the body of literature on party institutionalization has been growing steadily. Throughout the following decades, a number of prominent authors sought to develop and operationalize the concept.[40] Summarizing their findings, Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand identify four basic elements of party institutionalization: systemness, decisional autonomy, value infusion, and reification.[41] And while thereby offering an all-encompassing conceptual framework for the analysis, the authors still failed to provide us with a comprehensive tool for measuring the scale of party organization institutionalization.

Building upon their work, with an ambition to venture beyond normative interpretation boundaries, I put forward a simple two-dimensional model of party institutionalization, consisting of an *internal (organizational)* and an *external (affectional)* element. The former relates to the composition of power within party ranks. It shows the level of power (de)centralization in a party organization. Focusing on party organizational strength, most authors tend to ignore its structure and take its amount as the only analytically relevant category.[42] To the contrary, I believe that a full understanding of the functioning of political parties also requires knowledge about the organization of their power. Moreover, I hold that such knowledge is crucial for the successful analysis of political parties in countries without a longer tradition of political pluralism.

Namely, there is strong empirical evidence that, regardless of their power capacity, parties in newly created (formally) democratic systems regularly serve as "little more than the personal mobilization instruments for ambitious politicians".[43] Moreover, whereas such personalistic leadership may "contribute at the initial stages to party cohesion and survival", in the longer run, and in the absence of effective routinization, "it could seriously inhibit institutional development".[44] For that reason, to comprehend a party's given political purpose and there from infer about the course of its political development, one should first look inside of its organizational structure rather than measure the amount of its power.

The external element refers to the popular perception of party organization. It shows the extent to which it becomes established in the public imagination as "a factor shaping the behavior of political actors".[45] In recently pluralized political systems, like the one that I am focusing on, parties are, as mentioned above, often "more like entourages around party leaders than real party organizations with party programs".[46] In effect, the content of – and the success in – their political communication with the electorate is determined by the ensuing "pathological fixation on their leaders' characteristics".[47] I therefore hold that, in such a political context, the best way to assess a party's real political "weight" is to juxtapose its electoral results in an observed time period with those of its leader.

Judged against the two criteria, the DPS stands as an example of highly institutionalized political organization. On the one hand, as mentioned in the introduction, a narrow circle of SKCG/DPS officials took over control of the party subsequent to the January 1989 coup. Political power in Montenegro was thus

effectively distributed within its top ranks. The resulting principle of cooperative decision-making at the party elite level was, because of its personal structure as well as complex political and socio-economic circumstances in which it operated, constantly reaffirmed in the following years. Launched into high politics at a very young age,[48] and hence not having much political experience and leverage, the members of the party leadership were inclined to work together so as to justify the enormous popular trust and consolidate the newly acquired positions of authority. The need for their close collaboration was augmented by the worsening political situation in the Yugoslav federation and, in particular, the legalization of domestic political competition. Finally, the Belgrade authorities were, throughout the early 1990s, steadily increasing the pressure on the Montenegrin political elite as a result of its "political disobedience",[49] which gave another strong impetus to the process of its inner-party cooperation.

For this reason, compared to a great number of political organizations in the region in which we find a monocratic form of headship, "defined by the prime role of a single person in the shaping of a group's decision",[50] the structure of power of the ruling party in the Montenegrin hybrid regime looked substantially different. Within its leadership, put simply, no one emerged as a supreme political authority.[51] Instead, how the DPS was characterized throughout these years is as an oligarchic type of leadership in which "a limited coalition of people tend to exercise disproportionate share of influence over a group's collective decisions", whereby "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".[52] Bulatović, the first party president, hence played a role of *primus inter pares* rather than its charismatic and indisputable leader.[53] When I recently asked him about the decision-making procedures in the DPS during the period of his presidency, Bulatović accentuated the crucial importance of regular consultations with the party associates: "Everything went through the party. Vice-presidents would come to my office on Mondays and Fridays and this is where everything would be discussed and decided".[54]

In addition, he emphasized "an intensive intra-party political life" at that time: "We used to spend a lot of time in debates, factions [within the party] were allowed as well as individual dissenting opinions, and the party was an exceptionally strong organization precisely because of that".[55] In the aforementioned interview, notwithstanding the bitterness of their political divorce, Đukanović – then a vice-president of the party – strongly corroborated Bulatović's claims: "Bulatović would rarely allow himself to make a decision individually. It [the decision-making] would, as a rule, involve consultations and shared responsibility".[56]

And while in numerous cases across the wider region charismatic leaders (re)defined political parties in accordance with their personal political ambitions, those of the DPS leadership members were, on the contrary, defined by their party. Throughout the 1990s, the highest representatives of Montenegro's leading political force remained, without an exception, effectively subordinated to its political interests.[57] "When we look at the comparative [party] practice in

the region", Đukanović told me, "this is something that really differentiates us".[58] As a result, political power in the Montenegrin hybrid regime was, albeit distributed within its leadership, concentrated entirely inside the structures of the ruling party. Accordingly, the entire "menu of manipulation",[59] guaranteeing the hyper-privileged political status of the DPS, was to be used for the purpose of perpetuating its rule. Therefore, despite its bad political and economic record, a high level of internal structural coherence rendered the DPS's political domination almost unchallenged.

At the same time, when assessed against the abovementioned criterion, the level of popular support enjoyed by the DPS during this period clearly implies that the country's political public perceived the ruling party as a political value per se. Namely, in the elections organized throughout these years, the DPS actually did somewhat better than its presidential candidates. In the 1990 general elections, with a high turnout of 75.7% (304,947 votes cast), the party won 1034 votes more than its head running for the presidency. Two years later, with the turnout at 67.3%, the margin of votes in favour of the DPS was even bigger (2900). Moreover, even after the democratic changes in Montenegro, the electoral results of the DPS and its presidential candidates have remained very much in line. Running against Bulatović in 1997, Đukanović won only 4665 votes more than his party in the 1998 parliamentary election. Finally, in the 2008 election, the incumbent president Vujanović won 2828 votes more compared to the DPS's result from a year later.

The analytical value of the data on the power structure and public perception of the DPS becomes fully apparent when placed in a wider empirical context. In Serbia and Croatia, to mention the most similar cases,[60] Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman established themselves in the early 1990s as suprapolitical figures whose respective party organizations – the Socialist Party of Serbia and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) – were merely to serve their political ambitions. Being the country's undisputed political and national leader at the moment of introduction of political pluralism, Milošević was able to arbitrarily model the internal power structure of the SPS so as to monopolize decision-making at the summit of its political hierarchy. Throughout the decade, even though it had inherited a considerable organizational power from its communist predecessor party,[61] the SPS thus simply complied with Milošević's personal political views. The exercise of power in the ruling Serbian party during this period was, in essence, a one-man show.

Similar to Milošević, Tuđman managed to impose himself as the protector of the national interest and, in light of the upcoming political crisis in Yugoslavia, acquire the status of the "untouchable charismatic leader with almost messianic meaning for his followers".[62] Throughout the decade, the ruling HDZ was under the absolute political control of its president and informal circles around him. As a result, the party was arbitrarily ruled by Tuđman, its formal leadership did not have any independent influence on the decision-making processes, while the officially adopted party rules and procedures were regularly ignored.[63]

As demonstrated by the electoral results from this period, the absolute political supremacy of Milošević and Tuđman within the SPS and the HDZ respectively was not without a popular mandate. In fact, the personal political appeal of the two leaders greatly exceeded the boundaries of their parties' constituencies. Thus, in the 1990 general elections, Milošević's presidential candidacy was supported by 965,212 (19.2%) votes more than the parliamentary list of his SPS. Two years later, the margin was as high as 1,155,961 (24.4%) votes. Similarly, in the 1992 Croatian general elections, Tuđman got 342,663 (12%) more votes than the HDZ. In 1997, running for president one last time, Tuđman won 244,587 (16.2%) votes more compared to his party's result in the 1995 parliamentary election.

In other words, both in terms of power structure and public perception, the ruling parties in the Serbian and Croatian hybrid regimes were essentially dependent on their leaders. In effect, the course of their political development was determined by the power of the personal charisma of Milošević and Tuđman respectively. Albeit a considerable political asset in the early phase of governance of the two parties, this turned out to be their major functional disadvantage. Throughout the 1990s, the SPS and the HDZ thus remained at a low level of institutionalization. For that reason, albeit with abundant power resources at their disposal, the two parties had serious difficulties in ensuring the continuity of political rule during this period.[64] More importantly, following their leaders' descent from power, the SPS and the HDZ suffered heavy losses in the elections that put an end to the existence of the two hybrid regimes.[65]

At the same time, quite to the contrary, the DPS represented a highly institutionalized political organization. Because of the substantially different internal power structure, the DPS itself was the key actor on the domestic political scene. With the entire power capacity of the Montenegrin hybrid regime vested in the ruling party, the stability of its political governance was barely threatened. In addition, whereas the SPS and the HDZ, similar to a great number of other parties in recently pluralized political systems, served as mere transmission belts of their leaders' political will, the DPS even enjoyed somewhat bigger popular support than its head.

However, the question remains why in the first place the DPS was so organizationally different from the SPS and the HDZ. Or, put differently, why did we not, ahead of the introduction of multipartism, witness an emergence of a Milošević- or Tuđman-like charismatic political figure in Montenegro as well? I believe that the explanation relates to the nature of the processes of sociopolitical mobilization that resulted in the initial turnover in power in the three states.

On the one hand, the road to the political changes, which at the end of the 1980s took place in Serbia and Croatia, was paved by wide-ranging nationalist movements. Throughout the second half of the decade, the processes of national homogenization of the political and general public unfolded in both countries. Originally emanating from Serbian and Croatian intellectual circles, there was a growing sense of dissatisfaction concerning their political and economic rights in the Yugoslav federation. In Serbia and Croatia alike, the stage was thus set

for a political leader who would be willing to publicly defend and advance a national programme. The necessary fusion between the "opinion" and "power" in the two countries was achieved precisely through the rapid ascent of Milošević and Tuđman to positions of supreme political authority. In this regard, speaking about the Serbian politics of that time, Đukanović pointed out that "Milošević soon surrendered before the need of the Serbian general public to totemize his personality and create his cult".[66]

On the other hand, contrary to the dominant political trends in the Yugoslav federation during that period, playing a "national card" in Montenegro was not nearly as politically beneficial as in the other countries. Namely, due to ambivalent attitude and the lack of a clear policy of all of the post-World War II generations of its political leaders, underscoring Montenegro's socio-economic and cultural underdevelopment,[67] the national question in the smallest Yugoslav republic was left essentially unanswered. Consequently, only Montenegrins were, at the onset of the Yugoslav crisis, without an unambiguous political alternative for the socialist federation. A national programme like those already put forward by the political and intellectual elites in Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia, could therefore not serve as a solid political platform for broad-based popular mobilization in Montenegro.[68] Instead, people with diverging political motives and ambitions were brought together in January 1989 by the sense of discontent with the socio-economic and political situation in the republic and the resultant opposition to its leadership. Unlike their compatriots throughout Yugoslavia politically and nationally uniting during this period behind what they wanted, Montenegrins of different "political colours" jointly stood up against what they did not want anymore. At that moment, the need for the particular type of political leadership mentioned by Đukanović was hence not nearly as big in Montenegro. As a result, none of the members of the country's post-1989 party elite was in a position to acquire nearly as much political influence as Milošević or Tuđman.

Ideational metamorphosis

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, that is, "to well perceive political processes and, relative to its political competition, initiate necessary changes much faster and more comprehensive",[69] is, I hold, another key determinant of its political success. On the one hand, we could see that the leadership-managed democratic changes in Montenegro "coincided" with the political radicalization in Milošević's Serbia. Subsequent to the 1997 split within the DPS, 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".[70] The effect of such a decision on the domestic political scene was, as

indicated by the exceptionally close result of the 1997 presidential election, impossible to foresee. Hypothetically at least, the situation in which Bulatović-led political forces prevailed in Montenegro was also easily imaginable. Moreover, given the heavy presence of the federal army commanded by Milošević in the smaller Yugoslav republic, Đukanović's decision to break with him might have had grave consequences for its overall security. Yet, this political manoeuvre, however initially risky, turned out to be very successful, as the most important international political actors strongly endorsed the new course of Montenegro's official politics. 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 to the method 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-independence political force. Again, the timing of the major political change could have hardly been better for the party.[71] From the time of the NATO intervention in the first half of 1999, all opinion surveys confirmed that a stable though not overwhelming majority of Montenegrins favoured independence.[72] Already in 1998, the DPS initiated political cooperation with the SDP, 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 Liberals' unwillingness to share the hardly earned political credit. Despite the fact that the LSCG was clearly unable to form a strong enough coalition to bring about independence, its charismatic leader, Slavko Perović, made it clear that his party would never make a political alliance with the DPS. Such an uncompromising position would, however, soon backfire on the LSCG 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% of votes, the LSCG got merely 5.8% in the 2002 parliamentary election. Three years later, 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 DPS became the flag bearer of the independence movement. 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.[73]

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to contribute to a better understanding of the 22-year-long continuous rule of the DPS in Montenegro, a unique and understudied political phenomenon in post-communist Europe. It identified two elements – one structural and one contextual – that, in the author's view, determined the DPS's longevity in power. On the one hand, it demonstrated the party's unusually high level of institutionalization. Throughout the observed period, the DPS represented a very solid political organization whose interests were never subject to those of any of its key figures. In addition, the level of public support for the presidential candidates of the ruling Montenegrin party was largely determined by the level of public support for the party itself.

In this regard, the DPS's experience stands in stark contrast to that of most of the parties in the wider post-communist political space, including the SPS and the HDZ. During the decade of their rule, the two parties, as elaborated above, served as mere political tools in their leaders' hands. In the case of the HDZ, this may not seem so unexpected given that Tuđman created the party literally from scratch. "Where parties cannot build on a pre-existing organizational base and established identity", Randall and Svasand write, "it is not surprising that they often consist of ephemeral vehicles for politically ambitious individuals with charisma and/or access to the necessary resources".[74] At the same time, the diverging patterns of power organization of the DPS and the SPS are much more difficult to explain given that both parties not only grew out of political organizations that had a political monopoly during the *ancien regime* period, but even maintained ideological continuity with their political predecessors throughout the 1990s. The organizational dissimilarity which determined the contrasting courses of their political development was, in the author's view, conditioned by the different characters of the processes of popular mobilization that paved the way for the political promotion of their leaders.[75]

In addition, the article analysed the politically successful ideational metamorphosis of the DPS during the observed period. Following the years of its political alliance with Milošević's infamous regime, the party succeeded, in the wake of the 1997 split between its highest officials, in recreating itself as the leading pro-democratic political force in the country. What is more, owing to its political pragmatism, the DPS managed to impose itself as the most credible advocate of Montenegro's independence and, while maintaining good relations with its sceptical Western political partners, successfully bring the project of its renewal to an end. As a result of these factors, the party was able to survive in power after the 1997 split within its leadership and, notwithstanding the ensuing loss of the hyper-privileged position compared to its political competition, stay in office to date.

Notes

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

2. Winning 76.1% of votes, Bulatović was elected president in the second round. His result in the first round was 42.2%.
3. Bieber, "Montenegrin Politics," 15.
4. Pavićević, "The Electoral System of Montenegro," 85.
5. Most of the other parties participating in the 1990 elections were established merely a few months earlier.
6. Darmanović, "Montenegro: Dilemmas," 156.
7. Beach and Pedersen, *Process Tracing*.
8. Goati, *Partije Srbije i Crne Gore*, 132.
9. After garnering 42.8% of votes in the first round, Bulatović won 63.3% in the second.
10. In 1995, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) stood at 50.2% whereas its industrial output was only 41.1% of its 1990 level (Đurić, "The Economic Development of Montenegro," 140).
11. In May 1992, merely a month after its establishment, the SRJ was placed under political and economic embargo by the United Nations (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.
12. Goati, *Partije Srbije i Crne Gore*, 137.
13. At the meeting held on 11 July, 62 out of 99 members of the DPS main board stood by Đukanović. Milica Pejanović Đurišić, a high party representative, became a new party head, whereas Đukanović, who would replace her a year later, was voted its candidate for the upcoming presidential election.
14. OSCE/ODIHR, "Republic of Montenegro," 3.
15. The coalition won 33 out of 72 seats.
16. In light of the recent negative experiences with the emergence of new state borders in the region, the EU was, in principle, very sceptical about political initiatives favouring their creation.
17. At the same time, at the insistence of the Montenegrin officials, a "temporality clause" was built into the Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) guaranteeing the right of the constitutive members to opt out of it via referendum after three years (Vuković, "The Post-Communist Political Transition," 69).
18. Vujanović won 64.2% of votes.
19. The coalition won 48.6% of votes and 39 out of 76 parliament seats.
20. The ruling coalition won 48 out of 76 parliament seats.
21. For more on the topic of political transformation of the communist successor parties, see: Bozoki and Ishiyama, *The Communist Successor Parties.*
22. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.
23. Schedler, "Elections without Democracy."
24. Goati, *Stabilizacija demokratije*, 120.
25. Darmanović, "Montenegro: Dilemmas," 147.
26. The coalition won 19 out of 71 seats, that is, 27% of votes. By comparison, in the 1992 parliamentary election, the two parties obtained 27 (NS – 14 and LSCG – 13) out of 85 seats, or 32% of votes.
27. Bieber, "Montenegrin Politics," 28.
28. The new electoral law introduced 14 electoral districts at the national level. Previously, the entire country represented a single electoral district. As a result, the DPS got 51.2% of votes and as much as 63.4% of seats.
29. Interview (Đukanović), June 2012.
30. Ibid.
31. See: Freedom House's Nations in Transit 2005 report on Montenegro (available at: http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2005/montenegro).

32. With the turnout of 66%, more than 95% of the electorate voted positively.
33. Demokratska partija socijalista Crne Gore, "Istorijat" (available at: http://www.dps.me/o-nama/istorijat).
34. Ibid.
35. Vuković, "The Post-Communist Political Transition," 67.
36. According to the last census, the population of Montenegro is 625,266, with a total area of 13,812 km^2.
37. The notion borrowed from Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy.*
38. Mackie, "Causes and Conditions," 245.
39. Huntington, *Political Order.*
40. See: Janda, *Political Parties*; Panebianco, *Organization and Power*; Mainwaring and Scully, "Introduction"; Levitsky, "Institutionalization and Peronism."
41. Randall and Svasand, "Party Institutionalization," 13. In addition, the authors point to an erroneous tendency in the related literature to elide the issue of party institutionalization with that of party system institutionalization. The latter, they explain, is the outcome of a range of developments, only some of which have to do directly with the constituent parties themselves (Ibid., 6–8).
42. See, for instance, Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.
43. Ibid., 19.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 23.
46. Amundsen, "In Search of a Counter-Force," 293.
47. Ihonvbere, *Economic Crisis*, 21.
48. In April 1989, at the time they were elected the party president and the secretary-general, Momir Bulatović and Milo Đukanović were 32 and 27 years old respectively. Most of the other members of the new SKCG leadership were also in their late 20s and early 30s.
49. As earlier mentioned, the Montenegrin leadership was then facing a dire economic and political situation in the country. This brought about gradual moderation of its political discourse, most apparent in its efforts to normalize political relations with its neighbors. At the same time, politically dominant Serbia sought to obstruct this process. Bieber thus reminds us that "in response to [Montenegro's] rapprochement with Albania [...] the Serbian authorities stopped trucks crossing the Montenegrin-Serbian border," justifying the trade embargo by "a ban on the export of goods from Serbia, which were deemed strategic during the times of crisis" (Bieber, "Montenegrin Politics," 24).
50. Schonfeld, "Oligarchy and Leadership Stability," 231.
51. Goati, *Partije Srbije i Crne Gore*, 146.
52. Schonfeld, "Oligarchy and Leadership Stability," 231.
53. Goati, *Partije Srbije i Crne Gore*, 156.
54. Interview (Bulatović), January 2012.
55. Ibid.
56. Interview (Đukanović), June 2012.
57. One relatively recent political episode indicates that the decision-making within the DPS has remained very inclusive. Namely, subsequent to the 2006 parliamentary election, Željko Šturanović, a high DPS official, became a new Montenegrin prime minister. Interestingly, ahead of his promotion, the party leader Đukanović had openly suggested that Igor Lukšić, another high DPS representative, would be the best candidate for the new head of the government. Yet, a majority of the party main board members disagreed with his proposal and endorsed Šturanović instead.
58. Interview (Đukanović), June 2012.
59. The notion borrowed from Schedler, "Elections without Democracy."

60. For a detailed comparative analysis of the political dynamics of the three countries during the 1990s, see: Vuković, "Diverging Party Outcomes."
61. In this regard, Levitsky and Way remind us that the SPS inherited its predecessors' developed organizational structure, including a wide network of local branches and "workplace organizations" in all major factories, as well as the $160 million worth of material and financial assets (Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 37).
62. Čular, "Political Development in Croatia 1990–2000," 30.
63. Kasapović, *Hrvatska politika 1990–2000*, 21–2.
64. Already in the second parliamentary election, held in December 1992, the SPS failed to win a majority of seats. Moreover, until the end of its rule, the party would not manage to reestablish an absolute political dominance. In addition, after the 1996 local elections, the socialists lost political control of Belgrade as well as a number of other big Serbian cities. On the other hand, in the election for the Chamber of Counties of the Croatian Parliament held in 1993, that is, in the midst of the war for independence led by President Tuđman, his party won fewer votes than the coalition of opposition parties (45.5–48%). What is more, the HDZ lost the 1995 election for the local assembly of the capital city of Zagreb, held at the peak of national euphoria stirred by successful ending of the military operations against the Serb rebels.
65. In Serbia, subsequent to Milošević's defeat in the September 2000 Yugoslav presidential election, the SPS suffered an embarrassing loss in the December parliamentary election. The party won merely 13.2% of votes, losing 48 out of 85 seats. In Croatia, after winning three consecutive parliamentary elections under Tuđman's rule, the HDZ was heavily defeated in January 2000, only a month after his death. The party won 26.8% of votes, almost 20% less than in the 1995 election.
66. Interview (Đukanović), June 2012.
67. In this regard, one should bear in mind that, notwithstanding the decades of generous allocations from the federal state level, Montenegro remained the poorest republic of the socialist Yugoslavia until its very end. In addition, it got the most important cultural and educational institutions (National Theater – 1969; National Academy of Sciences and Arts – 1973; University – 1974) decades and even centuries after the other Yugoslav republics.
68. This was, perhaps, most convincingly demonstrated by the electoral results of those political parties and coalitions that campaigned for the renewal of Montenegrin independence throughout the early 1990s. Advocating the transformation of the Yugoslav federation into a confederation of the six sovereign states, The Union of Reform Forces won 14% of votes (17/125 seats) in the 1990 parliamentary election. Two years later, the pro-independence Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (12%) and the Social Democratic Party of Reformists (4.1%) got merely a few percent more.
69. Interview (Đukanović), June 2012.
70. Darmanović, "Montenegro: A Miracle," 153.
71. This, however, is not to say that the change of DPS's attitude towards the statehood question was without considerable political risk. Quite the contrary, the opinion polls conducted during this period by the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM), Montenegro's leading think tank, showed that the level of popular support for independence was not high enough to guarantee the success of the political project (available at: http://www.cedem.me/en/programmes/empirical-research/political-public-opinion.html). In addition, the EU was generally not supportive of the idea of creating another state in the turbulent Balkan region. Finally, as elaborated above, the respectable political "weight" among pro-independence voters of the Liberal Alliance and, in particular, its strong anti-DPS attitude stood as another major obstacle to the newly chosen political path of the Montenegrin ruling party.
72. Darmanović, "Montenegro: A Miracle," 154.

73. Thus, for instance, five years after the 2007 adoption of the new Montenegrin constitution, the two biggest opposition parties – the SPS and the New Serb Democracy (NOVA) – continue to ask for major revision of its articles that define the country's symbols and official language. In addition to the Montenegrin national flag, they demand the introduction of the so-called "people's" tricolour flag that would to a large extent resemble the national flag of Serbia. At the same time, the opposition parties require that, alongside Montenegrin, Serbian becomes the country's second official language.
74. Randall and Svasand, "Party Institutionalization," 19.
75. Following the 2000 electoral defeat, the SPS managed to politically consolidate, ostensibly owing to the well-developed organizational infrastructure. Moreover, in the last parliamentary election, held in May 2012, the party came third, which allowed it to play the pivotal role in the process of government formation. Yet, even in the coalition with two other parties, one of which was the broad-based Party of United Pensioners, the SPS could not win more than 14.5% of votes, less than a third of its best-ever electoral result.

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