

# Next step in carve-up of the Balkans: Montenegrin regime approves plan for statehood

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7 August 1999

The government of Montenegro, outside of Serbia the only remaining republic of the Federation of Yugoslavia, took a major step toward secession August 5 when it approved a plan to dissolve the federation and establish an independent Montenegrin state.

Under the plan, the tiny republic would establish its own currency, assume control over all Yugoslav troops within its borders and maintain its own foreign ministry. It would remain loosely linked to Serbia in an “Association of the States of Serbia and Montenegro.”

Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic and other top officials make little attempt to conceal the fact that the plan, which they forwarded to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, was intended to prepare the way for a formal declaration of independence later this year. Djukanovic said Milosevic would have six weeks to approve the proposal. If he failed to do so within the allotted time, Montenegro would proceed with a referendum on secession.

The plan has the character of an ultimatum which the regime in Belgrade cannot possibly accept. Besides the provisions listed above, it demands, for example, the replacement of the existing two-chamber Yugoslav parliament with a one-house parliament, in which Montenegro, with a population of 630,000, would have equal representation with Serbia, which has 10,000,000 inhabitants.

If the provocative character of the Montenegrin plan recalls the Rambouillet ultimatum that became the pretext for the US and NATO to launch their war against Serbia, this is more than accidental. Djukanovic and his government have for some time functioned as political assets of the United States, which was the driving force behind the Rambouillet sham. Just last week Djukanovic met with US President Clinton at the Balkan Stability

Summit in Sarajevo.

Zarko Vukcevic, a member of Montenegro's ruling coalition, said the plan “represents a major step toward a sovereign Montenegro because we are moving from the dead end called Yugoslavia.” Asked if the plan were not an actual declaration of independence, Montenegrin Deputy Prime Minister Dragisa Durzan said, “It sounds like that to me.”

The US and the European powers have embraced Djukanovic and portrayed him as an enlightened and democratic counterweight to Milosevic. This is a farce, one, however, that is dutifully cultivated by the Western press.

Prior to his election as president of Montenegro in 1997, when he ran with the backing of the US, Djukanovic was an ally of Milosevic. His politics differed in no essentials from the Serb chauvinist policies of the Yugoslav president. In its report on the new Montenegrin proposal, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* described Djukanovic as “a former communist and cigarette smuggler.”

Like his forerunners in the other former Yugoslav republics—Kucan in Slovenia, Tudjman in Croatia, Izetbegovic in Bosnia—Djukanovic came to the conclusion that the narrow and selfish economic interests of his clique could best be served by shifting alliances directly to the imperialist powers. His moves toward independence have no more to do with democratic principles than the secessionist path taken by his Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian, Macedonian and Kosovan counterparts. In all of the above cases, ruling cliques promoted by the West have established highly repressive regimes which function as more or less direct puppets of the great powers. The conditions of the masses—of all ethnic groups—have generally declined to levels of poverty and social desperation considerably worse than the

already depressed levels that existed prior to the breakup of Yugoslavia.

The essential content of Montenegrin independence is revealed in the economic platform drawn up by the Djukanovic regime. Last month the *Financial Times* of Britain reported that it called for “accelerated privatization, deregulation, protection of private property rights, equal treatment for foreign investors, and the establishment of a foreign trade regime open to world markets.”

Bluntly stated, the stunted, economically backward land of Montenegro is to become a semi-colony of the United States, whose corporations will have a free hand to plunder whatever natural resources and cheap labor reserves the new state offers, while US military and intelligence agencies employ it as a staging ground for new provocations against Serbia.

The proposal to split off Montenegro from Serbia is, in some respects, more reckless, retrogressive and potentially explosive than the Western-backed secession of the other republics. With its tiny, mountainous land mass (half the size of the state of Maryland), scant population and backward economy, Montenegro lacks any material basis for independent economic development. On the other hand, its secession would be a further, and perhaps crushing blow to Serbia. Montenegro provides Serbia's only access to the sea. Montenegrin ports on the Adriatic are Serbia's primary trade link to supplies of oil and other vital resources. Western encouragement of Montenegrin separatism underscores the fact that the great powers, spearheaded by the US, are pursuing a policy of strangling Serbia.

There is no Montenegrin “people.” The vast majority of the republic's inhabitants are Serbs, bound by history, tradition, language and religion to Serbia proper. By fomenting Montenegrin separatism and promoting the myth of Montenegrin nationhood, the US and its European accomplices are creating the conditions for a fratricidal conflict that could become even more bloody than the civil wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo.

The US, while prodding Djukanovic forward in order to use him against Milosevic, is at the same time seeking to head off a precipitous declaration of Montenegrin independence. Washington's caution in this regard is bound up with tactical calculations in its drive for domination of the Balkans. The Clinton administration may believe its client regime in Montenegro can, for the present, be more effective in producing the desired political changes in Serbia if it remains part of the

Yugoslav federation. Moreover, the unstable situation in Kosovo argues against provoking, at least for now, a new military clash with Belgrade.

Responding to the Montenegrin plan, US State Department spokesman James Rubin praised Djukanovic for showing “a measured and rational approach to political and economic reform,” which he said the US supported. Rubin added, however: “We think that they should continue to work within Yugoslavia to insure their rights are protected.”

But as the past decade of carnage has demonstrated, once imperialism has set in motion the process of dismemberment and communal conflict, it is not necessarily in a position to control the consequences. Those who pay the price are the masses of the entire region.

Ninety years ago, almost to the day, Leon Trotsky wrote in his profound essay “The Balkan Question and Social Democracy”: “The Great Powers—in the first place, Russia and Austria—have always had a direct interest in setting the Balkan peoples and states against each other and then, when they have weakened one another, subjecting them to their economic and political influence. The petty dynasties ruling in these ‘broken pieces’ of the Balkan Peninsula have served and continue to serve as levers for European diplomatic intrigues. And this entire mechanism, founded on violence and perfidy, constitutes a huge burden weighing down upon the Balkan peoples, holding back their economic and cultural development.”

With only a few changes to account for contemporary circumstances—substituting the United States for “Russia and Austria,” nationalist ruling cliques for “petty dynasties”—Trotsky's analysis stands as a penetrating assessment of the tragic condition of the Balkans at the end of the twentieth century.



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