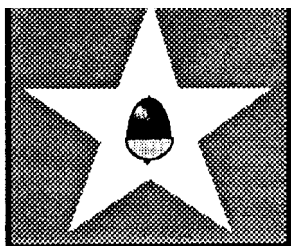


Conflict Studies Research Centre

James Pettifer

**2001: The Prospects
for a New Yugoslavia?**

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2001: THE PROSPECTS FOR A NEW YUGOSLAVIA?

James Pettifer

While the international isolation of FRY has been ended, a number of serious problems remain: support for President Kostunica's government, or for a reforming agenda, are not as wide as some estimates claim; relations with Montenegro have deteriorated; and the low intensity conflict in the Preshevo valley epitomises the extent to which the FRY could be destabilised by the action of different small groups of extremists.

Kostunica and the Milosevic Heritage

As the immediate euphoria surrounding the departure of ex-President Slobodan Milosevic from power in October-November 2000 fades, it is likely that the international community will be in a position to make a realistic appraisal of the political, economic and military potential in Serbia and Montenegro. There is a clear and unambiguous commitment from all the main international actors, particularly the Europeans, for a new Yugoslavia comprising Serbia and Montenegro to be formed within the existing 'FRY' boundaries. At the time of the exit of Milosevic in October 2000, there was a widespread assumption in the mainstream media and by some expert commentators that the advent of Kostunica would mean an easier transition to this new FRY, and that there was a realistic prospect of a quick agreement with the Montenegrins to facilitate this outcome. There was also a strong feeling, in many Western foreign ministries, that President Kostunica probably represents the last chance for a new FRY to be formed that would be democratic and have a reasonable chance of viability, and therefore all possible support should be given to the Kostunica project. This was naturally linked to the resumption of institutional diplomacy between Belgrade and outside powers, after a long period of years when there had been virtually no normal institutional diplomatic contacts, particularly European, and when such diplomacy as there was had been based on the Holbrooke/Albright/Milosevic top-level personal exchanges, usually in a crisis or wartime context.

In the time between Kostunica's assumption of power and the time of writing, more or less all the previous international sanctions regime on the FRY has been lifted, an International Monetary Fund team has reported from Belgrade, and FRY has gained admission to the United Nations and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and other previously closed international organisations. It should be noted here that the 'FRY' that has been recognised is seen by the International Community (IC) as the direct inheritor of the post-1995 FRY status and position, and includes both Kosovo and Montenegro. An international humanitarian aid package has been agreed, and a plethora of donor and IC organisations have opened offices in Belgrade. Negotiations with the World Bank are in progress to assess the possibilities of FRY membership, and to plan a

reduction of the huge debt burden on FRY. Thus, it can be concluded that the first absolutely concrete and undeniable achievement of the first three months of the post-Milosevic era has been to end the international isolation of the FRY. In the economy generally, accurate statistics open to independent verification are hard to find, but it appears that inflation is running at about 110% a year, an improvement on the autumn 2000 position, small businesses are picking up in some sectors, but production remains at a very low level in most large enterprises and in the important agricultural sector where energy shortages in mid-winter had a major effect.

Western policy has had a very 'Belgrade' focus, contributing to the perception that the priority, in policy terms, has been to build up a strong centralised – but democratic – FRY, and to restore 'Federal' political authority over what remains of the old FRY territories. President Kostunica has received considerable exposure in the international press, and has been presented as a sympathetic Christian of moderate conservative views on social and economic questions, with an outlook dedicated to a tolerant multiethnic society and a free market economy. The Milosevic era, by contrast, has been presented as riddled by criminality, 'communist', without the rule of law, and embodying intolerance and belligerent ethnonationalism. Thus a considerable burden of expectation has been created for Mr Kostunica, as he is perhaps the first recent Balkan President (apart possibly from the unfortunate precedent of Dr Sali Berisha of Albania between 1991 and 1995) to have used (or had used on his behalf) the full force of the Western public relations and 'spin' apparatus. His own ethnonationalist past has been obscured under the banner of 'anti-communism', particularly the reasons for his ejection from the elite in the early 1970s when he opposed the limited reforms of the old Yugoslav constitution which gave more freedom and political status to regions such as Kosovo and Vojvodina. This clash actually had little to do with 'communism' but was an early sign of his dedication to a strong central Belgrade, against a policy of devolving power to the constituent republics and the regions.

This favoured position for the pro-Kostunica coalition of ex-Opposition parties, the DOS, has been reinforced by the democratic process itself. In the national elections held on 24th December 2000, the DOS coalition won an expected victory, which was widely reported in the international press as a triumph for the reformist forces, and giving a mandate for rapid and major change in FRY. From the point of view of Western public perceptions there were few negatives in the election, and the date it was held, just before Christmas Day, meant that there was little detailed analysis of it made. All that mattered, from the point of view of mainstream opinion, was that DOS won an overall majority of a good size in parliament, and that the parties of Milosevic and the 'extremists' faded into oblivion. Except in a few opstinas (districts), the election appeared to be transparent and well conducted, with the DOS coalition enjoying almost universal media endorsement. The result was expected by the international community and warmly welcomed.

A number of serious problems remain, however, about legitimacy, stability and future prospects of this FRY, which are likely to be central to immediate and medium-term developments in the region. The perception in the international community about the strength, position and legitimacy of President Kostunica as leader of this FRY is not universally shared within Serbia itself, it is strongly opposed by a majority of the population of Montenegro, according to recent opinion polls, and has no political reality in Kosovo. From their point of view, the legitimacy of this FRY as an international entity has yet to be defined, let alone the personal authority of the President of it. At a personal level, Kostunica is seen as an

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ideological Serb nationalist rather than an opportunist nationalist like Milosevic, with a naturally dogmatic and rigid mental outlook, and thus more dangerous. There are also major economic and security question marks about the future from the point of view of internal Serbian political life. In order to try to make a realistic assessment of what may lie ahead, particularly for military and security actors in the region, some of these matters are examined below.

The Kostunica Inheritance

The attempt by the dying Milosevic regime to manipulate the results of the autumn 2000 election and the 'bulldozer revolution' that followed have generally been seen as the 'Serbian 1989', long delayed but inevitable, and symbolising the final 'domino' of that phase of historical development. Most of the reportage, for instance, in British newspapers was by people who had made their names in that period. 'Communism' had been destroyed, finally, in Serbia, the public was told. This analysis is highly questionable. Classical communist patterns of ownership and economic control had not existed in Yugoslavia since the early 1950s, agriculture had never been fully collectivised, and in the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution' of the late 1980s, when Milosevic took power, various remaining restraints on private sector development were also removed, leading to the 'gangster capitalism' of the later Milosevic era. It could be argued that the real problem with the Milosevic era was not too little capitalism, but too much, with a rapacious elite taking control of most worthwhile economic assets without any legal restraint. On the key issue of privatisation, for example, there had already been widespread 'privatisation' under the Milosevic regime, where numerous state enterprises had had 60% of their shares given to their workers and pensioners, and the remainder was sold off for cash. This privatisation method represented a compromise between capital and labour, with an effort to keep aspects of the old Titoist 'self-management' system intact. Major transfers of wealth to a new capitalist elite had taken place in the 1987-1993 period, as elsewhere in ex-Yugoslavia and in eastern Europe generally where new political elites were formed in this period. The fact that the main beneficiaries of this in Belgrade were kleptocratic cronies of the regime is not admirable, but is unspecific to Serbia and structurally very little different to developments in many other neighbouring countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria.

On other key determinants, a multi-party system had existed for many years before the final crisis of 1998-99, critical and oppositional media had existed, with varying degrees of tolerance, and elections were held regularly, although under poor conditions, and with general manipulation in favour of the regime. Freedom of travel was allowed. Mass protest against the regime was allowed within certain clearly defined limits, as the campaigns of winter 1996-7 showed. The Kostunica government itself came into power through elections, with street politics only taking over after the regime refused to recognise the result. The facts do not therefore entirely support the image being put forward of the previous regime, or Yugoslavia in general, as 'communist' or 'totalitarian', in any meaningful sense of the words, or the 'bulldozer revolution' as a revolution, if any of the traditional determinants are used. It was much more an organised transfer of power within the elite, where previously marginal elements of the Opposition took a central role in the new power structure, akin to the removal of the Romanian government in 1989 that left most of the old elite intact, and in a position to return to power once the 'evil dictator' who had abused their trust had been removed.

This is also the case with the economy. Foreign investment had been organised under Milosevic in some key 'new economy' sectors such as telecommunications, and even, to some extent, in 'old economy' areas such as mining and the extractive industries. The fact that the benefits of the investments went to a venal and tiny elite does not alter the fact that in their own terms these were positive developments for the general Yugoslav economy at the time, insofar as they represented normal patterns of partnership between a transition economy and outside partners in a world of free markets and globalisation. Thus a major British financial institution like NatWest Markets was an adviser to the Milosevic regime on privatisation in 1996/7. The international community may find that nostalgia for the Milosevic regime will soon grow if foreign investment cannot be attracted on an equal scale by Kostunica. The origins of some of the old Titoist industrial assets need also to be borne in mind, in that they would never have existed in a free market economy, or probably not under Moscow-type communism either, but arose from the special position of Titoist Yugoslavia in the Cold War which led to massive annual financial transfers from the West to Belgrade, averaging over US\$ 800 million a year, according to some estimates. A flourishing tourist industry also contributed substantial hard currency income. In a structural sense, the FRY economy has never recovered from the end of the Cold War and the end of these capital inflows. The critics of NATO's 1999 bombing campaign who have made various claims about the devastation of Yugoslav industry and infrastructure caused by the military action should perhaps bear in mind the nature and origin of the industrial assets concerned, and in many cases, their derelict and worthless nature.

The political and military inheritance is also highly determined by the Milosevic period. Although the army and military apparatus, as the only roughly functioning federal institution, is very much part and parcel of the Titoist and ultimately the Partisan past, it has been matched by the growth in scale and importance of the police and security apparatus under Milosevic so that by 1996, the numbers of people in the police and associated agencies exceeded those in the military. Plans have been announced by the new security minister, Dusan Mihajlovic, to make major police reforms to 'Europeanise' the police, and some changes have been made in the top positions in the military, although these have been criticised by the Montenegrins and others as largely cosmetic so far. The defence and security budget is a major burden on the economy. Even so, the army is largely dysfunctional, if very large.

In essence, the current mobilisation of IC support for Kostunica is a process of state formation of a new FRY 'from the top down', where the key decision of the United Nations admission of FRY in autumn 2000 has been followed by a great expansion of IC activity in Belgrade itself. The challenge will be in dealing with the entrenched and vested interests in the 'old' state, and in establishing the international legitimacy of the 'new' Yugoslavia. So far, the new government does not seem to have a dominant level of support in the traditional ethnic Serb heartlands. A critical issue is also likely to be the military, as the current FRY system most clearly represents the Partisan, and ultimately, the communist tradition in Yugoslavia. How strong is this tradition? It is not possible to take a view on this, either within the military or in society at large, without an examination of the December 24th election.

The Presentation of the December Election: 'Yugoslavia' or 'Serboslavia'?

The national election of December 24th 2000 was a landmark in the legitimisation of Kostunica, but hardly a sweeping victory on the scale some have claimed. The DOS coalition received 2,402,387 votes, or 64% of the ballots cast, and secured 176 seats in the parliament, while Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia won 515,845 votes, 13.7% of the ballots cast, and 37 seats, the Radical Party of Vojislav Seselj received 322,333 votes and 23 seats, and the Serbian Unity party of the late paramilitary leader Arkan won 199,847 votes and 14 parliamentary seats. The turnout was only a total of 3,748,623 votes out of a possible total of 6,493,672 registered voters, 57.72%. On a rough arithmetical estimate, it seems as though on December 24th, DOS had the active electoral support of about 37% of the electorate. However the numbers are analysed, and allowing for a normal pattern of 'political relaxation' after a major event like the fall of Milosevic, this represents a substantial drop in support for DOS from the autumn 2000 figure. Support for the hard Left JUL party of Milosevic's wife fell to single figures, and is irrelevant to the future.

The voting register was over ten years old, and no doubt contained many local problems and discrepancies, but this cannot be used as an argument to alter the fact that a substantial block of very hardline nationalist support continues to exist in Serbia, if the votes of the anti-DOS parties are aggregated, and also that there was widespread abstention from voting in many parts of Serbia. The public as a whole remains deeply disillusioned with the political class. There are also important bases of regional influence and support for the extremist parties, a fact which the method of presentation of the results has partly disguised. It has been extremely difficult for analysts to obtain accurate data on regional patterns of voting, as every effort was made to suggest that the DOS coalition had received overwhelming national support. Even on the data actually made available so far, this is not a very true picture. In some quite substantial parts of the country, those adjoining Kosovo, for instance, the DOS coalition gained as little as 15% of those on the register and eligible to vote. Many refugees and displaced persons from outside central Serbia are not on the current voting register, and in general refugees support hardline parties if they are able to vote, particularly the Radical party, and Arkan's party. In other areas, such as Vojvodina, the old register allowed significant numbers of exiled ethnic Hungarians living in Hungary to return to vote on 24 December and to support DOS. Some ethnic minorities, such as the Roma, have a cultural pattern that does not normally mean much participation in elections. As far as it is possible to say, the leadership of the Kosovo Serbs still seems much closer to Milosevic in most places, particularly in the key northern opstinas, than to DOS. Thus the DOS victory is very much a victory for educated liberal Belgrade, ethnic minorities, and above all, the young, in all parts of the country.

The electoral system was highly centralised on Belgrade, where over 7000 polling stations reported directly to the central electoral authority. Opstina results have now been announced, but only giving the percentages of the vote cast for each party, and numbers of votes in all localities have not been disclosed. There is no data at all published on a few opstinas, mostly in the Danube valley adjoining Belgrade, such as Pancevo, and adjoining Romania. The reasons for this are not clear. It is likely the far east Danube opstinas would show significant support for the hardline parties, given patterns of known political loyalties in north east Serbia. It is nevertheless possible to draw some general conclusions about the real level of support for Kostunica, insofar as the published data does show the overwhelming

level of support for DOS in ethnic minority and mixed areas such as Sandjak and Vojvodina, where votes of as much as 90% of ballots cast, and over 75% of possible voters supported Kusturnica and DOS. An opstina such as Tutin near the Hungarian border recorded 90% for DOS, and nearby Kanjiza 87%. In both places there is a large ethnic Hungarian element in the population. At the opposite extreme, in Trgoviste in the Preshevo valley, extremist Serb parties dominated the limited number of votes cast, and DOS appeared to receive no support at all. Muslim majority opstinas in Sandjak also showed overwhelming DOS votes. But in central Serbia, the Christian Orthodox heartlands, the picture is much less healthy for DOS, with average figures of 50 or 60% on often low turnouts being the best that was achieved and as a result, DOS only received the support of 20% of eligible voters, or even less in some places. Western media coverage of the election concentrated on the urban voting figures – which always looked good for DOS – to the exclusion of votes from many adjoining small town and rural areas, where Milosevic and nationalist extremists retained much more support. Only in traditionally radical towns like Cacak did DOS poll as well, in a predominantly Serb Christian Orthodox town, and at the same level as in predominantly ethnic minority opstinas. The coalition seems to have been well aware of this waning of enthusiasm for their politics after the departure of Milosevic had been gained, and DOS poster propaganda stressed the value of voting to consolidate existing gains.

The presentation of the results in this way is significant, because it reinforces the 'Yugoslavist' image element in the Kostunica project, where the ethnic minorities (or, in Titoist terminology 'minority nationalities') in Serbia overwhelmingly support DOS, while mainstream Serbs do not do so to anything like the same extent. Using the available data, it would have been perfectly possible for Milosevic-inclined spin doctors (if they exist) to claim that Kostunica had been elected (at least by a large majority) on the basis on non-Serb votes, particularly if more information had been made available by the electoral authorities on some issues. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission was for electoral observation only, and played no part in electoral organisation or control of electoral data.

In turn, this method of presentation relates to the fierce determination of the international community and Kostunica government to maintain a 'Yugoslavia', rather than a 'Serbia-Montenegro' confederation, as had originally appeared possible, which Kostunica himself seemed willing to discuss and which was widely aired in late October and early November 2000 in the media. This is a very prominent and central issue in the controversy with the Montenegrins, and the current radicalisation in Montenegrin attitudes to Belgrade can be dated from this period and the keynote and arguably very premature decision of the United Nations to give recognition to FRY and exclude the Montenegrins from the possibility of membership. Yet adherence to the FRY, as such, was a decision ultimately forced on the DOS leaders by the nature of their support, and no doubt encouraged by international community advisers who play a major policy making role in many Belgrade ministries. They, understandably, saw the election result and October 'revolution' as a way to cap Serbian nationalism once and for all. It is clear that this project has some considerable way to go. Given the government dependence on ethnic minority support, it is arguable how far the DOS coalition would have been able to secure general agreement to a 'Serbia' as their respected state. The central priority of local and regional leaders such as Canak in Vojvodina is to secure parity for their people with Belgrade, over economic issues, mainly, and in the absence of it, he has said in February 2001 that he is willing to fight for a referendum on the future of Vojvodina in the 'federation'. In the eyes of the IC, with Balkan geopolitics in mind, a strong Belgrade-centred FRY may appear a desirable ideal, in the eyes of

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many citizens in the regions, it seems a return to the lack of democracy of the Titoist and Milosevic periods and an expensive, over-privileged capital which lives too well off the fruits of their labour and natural resources.

Thus, although the departure of Milosevic was a great potential step forward for democracy in the region, the current government will still have to face the fact of very significant support among Serbs for the traditional expansionist nationalist agenda, exemplified by the electoral support for the extremists and Milosevic's parties. Another fact to be cited in support of this view is the growing trend in many parts of Serbia for ex-members of the Milosevic elite to join Kostunica's party, even including prominent ex-members of the hard left JUL party of Milosevic's wife, Mira Markovic. According to the authoritative Belgrade journal 'VIP News'¹, membership of his DSS party has risen from 15,000 in autumn 2000 to a figure of about 100,000, with the official spokesman of the party, Miodrag Jovanovic admitting 'a rash of turncoat new members'. Other DOS coalition parties such as the Democratic Alliance and the Christian Democratic party of Serbia have also seen the same process. The dialectic of the 'centre' (Belgrade/FRY) versus the 'regions' will not become resolved by this election, with so many of the old political elite still in situ, and it may be hard to keep Western media support 'on message' for the Kostunica project when the facts on the reality of his support are more widely known.

Relations with Montenegro

It is as yet unclear whether Montenegro will remain a constituent part of the FRY, and if so, on what basis. The great majority of Montenegrins originally welcomed the downfall of Milosevic as much as anyone else, but the atmosphere has steadily deteriorated since, with talks on the future of the Federation between Kostunica and Montenegrin leader Milo Djukanovic not achieving much and a personal antipathy developing between the leaders. There is also the considerable and very specific personal animus of the great majority of Montenegrins against DOS Prime Minister Djindjic who took refuge in Montenegro during his difficulties under Milosevic, and in 1999, and who is now considered to have betrayed their hospitality and trust. The stated position in Belgrade is that the government will not attempt to prevent the Montenegrins leaving the Federation by force, unlike the Milosevic regime where the threat of war over this issue hung over the region throughout 1999 and until October 2000, particularly through summer 2000. Elections have been called for 22 April 2001 after the partial disintegration of the Podgoritsa government, and it is likely an independence referendum will follow soon after. Opinion polls show a small but slowly increasing majority for independence, although as in all referendums, much will depend on the exact wording of the question and the nature of the government campaign. Polls show less than a quarter of voters are willing to countenance a future within a 'federal' Montenegro, an indication of the growing gap between local and IC opinion on the future. The pro-Milosevic leader Momir Bulatovic has resigned from leadership of his party in February 2001, and it remains to be seen what will happen to his block of traditional pro-Belgrade support, especially in the north adjoining Serbia. Without a high pro-FRY vote here, it is difficult to see anything but a referendum victory for the pro-independence people. In an important economic decision, tax payments from Montenegro to Belgrade ceased at the end of January 2001. In retaliation, customs controls were reimposed by the FRY authorities on 1 February 2001. It is easy to think of numerous possible scenarios involving Montenegro and the FRY but there are few easy options left and it is hard to see the immediate picture as

anything other than highly problematic from a Belgrade and international community point of view.

Kosovo and the Preshevo Conflict

At the time of writing violence is spreading in the Preshevo/Kosova Lindore valley, and the FRY armed forces have taken their first casualties in this conflict. The ethnic Albanian guerrillas of the Liberation Front for Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja (UCPMB), are generally believed to be made up of three or four constituent organisations and to have over 1500 armed men in the Preshevo valley and surrounding villages. Some are concentrated in the 5km wide demilitarised zone, others in the Preshevo towns and villages. The Preshevo crisis has its origins in the decisions taken in Titoist Yugoslavia to alter the traditional border of Kosovo that had existed under the Ottoman vilayet and then later under Royalist Yugoslavia between 1918 and 1944.

The Preshevo valley was removed from Kosovo as part of the central Belgrade plan to make the road route to the Socialist Republic of Macedonia more secure from Moslem and Albanian influence, and to take a specifically radical region out of Kosovo and place it under full Serb control. The Preshevo area had been one of the most Islamic, Albanian nationalist and vigorously anti-Serb areas of Kosovo under Royalist Yugoslavia, dating from bloody events in the post-1878 period, when thousands of mostly Albanian Moslems moved south from ethnic cleansing by Serb forces after Nis was taken into Serbia, and from Kumanovo after the fighting there in the Balkan Wars in 1912-13 led to massacres of Moslems by advancing Serb forces. In the conflict for control of the area as the Axis occupation collapsed after 1944, a strong local Albanian nationalist resistance movement led by Idris Shah was not finally quelled by Titoist forces until 1951. Thousands of people from Preshevo area were deported to Turkey.

The Serb forces so far have shown some restraint in countering the attacks of the Albanians, and have sought to characterise the Albanians as a purely terroristic movement. In turn, the Albanians have claimed widespread human rights violations on the part of the Serb forces, and in essence the logic of the conflict is very similar to that of the main Kosovo ground war between 1996 and 1999, where lightly armed Albanians use hit and run tactics against the heavy vehicles and armour of the Serbs. In the last year, the training and military skills level of the Albanian forces has been improved and is superior to the old KLA, and substantial arms supplies have been built up in Kosovo and in the Preshevo towns and villages themselves.

At the time of writing a long low-intensity conflict seems to be in prospect, partly because neither side is capable of 'winning' in military terms, and also because a small war in this region suits many regional political interests. In FYROM/Republic of Macedonia, the security threat is bringing renewed support for the Macedonian armed forces from NATO members and promises of economic aid to maintain the stability of the state. In Belgrade the war helps promote national unity and a sense of a shared threat to Serbia that will distract the attention of the population from the dire economic situation. In Albania and Kosovo, and to some extent Montenegro, the war is a useful way of showing the outside world that the Kosovo problem is not yet solved and that the Albanians will not accept a future inside 'Yugoslavia'. In Bulgaria the war offers profitable opportunities for weapons supply and to put pressure on FYROM against Serbia and FRY.

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The only significant regional losers are Greece, which has a large financial stake in the future resurrection of a Yugoslavia and has made large investments in FYROM that appear to be based on the assumption of rapid progress of this region towards Europe and 'normality', and KFOR itself, who see a growing loss of credibility with Serbia in security terms, and the possibility of direct military involvement in the conflict if it suddenly spreads into Kosovo for some reason. For this reason, the Serb peace plan put forward by Deputy Prime Minister Nebojsa Covic to narrow the demilitarised zone to 1km seems unlikely to find unconditional favour with NATO and the UN, as it would increase substantially the risk of direct military contact between Serb and KFOR forces. It would give pro-Milosevic paramilitary elements a major opportunity to make mischief with KFOR in a disorderly and possibly spreading conflict, and in some scenarios spread more violence into Kosovo itself. It is also doubtful whether this would have the major effect on the UCPMB that its proponents claim, as if reports are accurate of high weapons stocks and solid support for the war in Kosovo itself and the Preshevo valley villages, the demilitarised zone is much less important than it was a year ago in their operations.

What will be the effect of the Preshevo conflict on the Kostunica project? At the moment, it seems that it will be bad for the public image of FRY and deter investment, but by acting as an issue that promotes national unity across the political spectrum, may help Kostunica from being outflanked on ethnonationalist issues on the political agenda, and on Kosovo in particular. The main current danger in this regard is that Milosevic or other ultranationalists will take the view that the army and Interior Ministry (MUP) are not doing enough against the Albanians and begin to form paramilitary organisations to protect local Serbs. The areas near Kosovo have little specific loyalty to the DOS coalition, Kostunica has little or no personal authority there, and in some places nearby, such as Vranje, there is a long history of Serb chauvinist political extremism and support for paramilitary activity.

Conclusion

Although there are some signs of economic revival in FRY, Bosnia is quiet, the currency is fairly stable and inflation is falling, and the middle class and liberal intellectual population has greatly benefited from the removal of the Milosevic regime, there is little or no sign of the underlying pressures of disintegration of the old FRY having ended; in fact many of them have intensified in the last six months. The complex nature of the DOS coalition has meant that many government decisions have been delayed, and it is clear that there is considerable reliance on foreign advisors in many key areas. It does not appear that the Serb public is yet aware of this dependence. As well as the wider questions about the legitimacy of this government in many Montenegrin eyes, and the total alienation of the Kosovar Albanians, it has yet to establish strong credibility in the key Orthodox nationalist heartlands, and among more conservative elements in the Belgrade bureaucracy. The country has a heavy energy dependence on Russia. The arrest of Milosevic and trial by the Hague tribunal would open the possibility of a violent backlash from extremists and war criminals who still have substantial influence in the security apparatus and also have direct parliamentary representation. In these circumstances, it is possible that the Western military and security forces in the region, in Kosovo in particular, may bear the burden of the over-optimism engendered by euphoria in diplomatic circles and the media reporting on the BBC and elsewhere of the 'bulldozer revolution' last October, as the Milosevic regime, however venal and evil, did represent, from the purely Realpolitik point of view, a

known quantity, with a clear, effective and organised 'command and control' system down from the top. The DOS coalition does not yet have this capacity, with the ever-present rivalry between Kostunica and Djindjic a major factor. The main immediate danger in the present situation is that the security climate in Kosovo, or Montenegro, or Preshevo, or within Serbia itself could be drastically destabilised by the actions of very small groups of extremists, with major implications for Western security forces on the ground in many cases. In the medium term, it remains to be seen whether the economy will pick up sufficiently to satisfy the promises made to the electorate in the September and December 2000 campaigns, and whether major institutional reform and democratisation will be possible. The Kostunica project represents a leap into the unknown, with a heavy dependence on media 'spin' around the personality of the President himself, where a government with an ostensibly liberal and reforming ethos has to try to democratise a Serbia surrounded by external threats to the framework of the 'FRY' imposed on it by the international community. The 'periphery' actors in the FRY drama, like the Montenegrins and the Kosovar Albanian leaders are likely to take the opportunity this offers to test the real strength of the 'centre' in Belgrade with vigour and determination.

ENDNOTES

¹ No 1967, 16 February 2001.

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**The Conflict Studies Research
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Directorate General Development and Doctrine
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 4PQ
England

Telephone : (44) 1276 412346
Or 412375

Fax : (44) 1276 686880

E-mail: csrc.dgd&d@gtnet.gov.uk
<http://www.csrc.ac.uk>

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