
The Determinants of Party Consensus on European Integration in Montenegro

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Summary

This article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the process of political competition during the European integration process in Montenegro. While unanimously endorsing the process of its EU accession, political parties in the country are at odds with each other regarding almost all other issues of substantial importance for its past and future, including Montenegro's state independence. This article intends to show what is in the European Union that brings divided Montenegrin political parties together, and asks if it is the EU at all?

The article argues that because of the late political transition resulting from the process of dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the main determinants of party contestation on EU integration in Montenegro differ from those in most Western and East/Central European countries. The article demonstrates that neither the ideological profile of Montenegrin political parties nor the EU's leverage on the country's political elite during the transition period can serve as adequate explanations of this process. Instead, it posits that embracing the pro-EU stance was the easiest and arguably the most effective way for the parties under observation to establish some discontinuity with their Milošević-era shady political past, providing them with a new source of the previously lost political legitimacy.

Keywords: Party Competition, EU Integration, Montenegro, Independence, Political Transition

1. Introduction

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. The campaign for the 2006 referendum on independence in Montenegro strongly confirmed the old proverb. The turn of the century brought about a clear division among political parties and citizens of this former Yugoslav republic over the issue of its statehood. Other political differences aside, they first and foremost represented either supporters or

opponents of Montenegrin sovereignty. The plebiscite was to finally clarify which of the two ideas, independence, represented by the Movement for Independent Montenegro, or union, represented by the Movement for the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, had a majority support.

At the two political camps' campaign rallies, either Montenegrin or the three-colored flag of the Serb-Montenegrin state federation were proudly waving. At the same time, the twelve star-banner of the European Union was present at all the gatherings. In addition, the parliamentary and presidential elections held in the aftermath of the referendum were marked by the same political symbolism. Once again, among considerably different political messages conveyed to the electorate by various political parties, one was common to all of them: the necessity of Montenegro's accession to the EU.

How is it possible, one could ask, that in a country that lacks internal political consensus on the most fundamental question of statehood, the party organizations are unanimous in support of the country's European integration? Or, to put it differently, what are the determinants of their positive attitude towards the accession process?

To date, two dominant theoretical approaches seem to have been developed to address the issue of domestic political competition on the issue of European integration. Focusing on the countries of Western and East/Central Europe, the first approach explains the process of EU accession on the basis of the ideological affiliation of the observed parties. Dealing primarily with East/Central Europe's new democracies, the second approach identifies as the key determinant of this process the EU's leverage on these countries' political elites during the period of post-communist transition. Despite these theories' valuable contribution to a better understanding of the phenomenon of domestic political contestation on the issue of European integration, we argue that they offer an insufficient explanation for the case of Montenegro and party consensus surrounding the issue of EU integration.

As a consequence of the political crisis that followed the process of disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, genuine political transition in Montenegro began nearly a decade after the collapse of communism. The effect of the country's late transition on the domestic political competition was twofold. First, the process of political parties' ideological framing was overshadowed by ethnic politics and thus effectively hindered. Consequently, in Montenegro, like in most countries of the Western Balkan region, there are still no "firm links between the ideological positions of voters or political parties, on the one hand, and social structures or basic values on the other" (Marks *et al.*, 2006: 158). Secondly, the level of influence of the European Union on the development of party competition in Montenegro – then a member state of Slobodan Milošević's internationally isolated Federal Republic

of Yugoslavia (*Savezna Republika Jugoslavija* – SRJ) – was exceptionally low throughout the 1990s during which Montenegrin political parties first defined their policies on European integration. The process of party positioning on the issue of Montenegro's EU accession had therefore been largely completed before the actual integration process began.

For these reasons, I argue that one needs to revisit the period of Montenegro's post-communist transition and identify the critical junctures of this process in order to understand the determinants of today's political competition on the issue of European integration.

This article is structured as follows. First, the two aforementioned theoretical approaches to the issue of party positioning in relation to the EU are further elaborated. The related puzzling Montenegrin experience is subsequently analyzed and accounted for against the assumptions of these approaches. Finally, an original argument about the determinants of party competition on the issue of European integration in Montenegro is presented.

2. Party Competition on the Issue of European Integration: Theoretical Perspectives

Over the last quarter century, the European Union expanded both functionally and geographically. Due to an accelerated structural development and the ensuing enlargement of its powers, the EU entered virtually every aspect of political life of its member states. Once seen as a matter of inter-state political relations, the process of European integration became a new reality of political relations within these countries. As noted by Steenbergen and Marks, “in the era following the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union has been transformed into a multi-level polity in which European issues have become important not only for national governments, but also for citizens, political parties, interest groups, and social movements” (2004: 1). The attitudes of voters and political parties towards these issues thus emerged as an important determinant of the domestic-level political game.¹

In addition, within less than a decade, the number of European Union member states nearly doubled. Apart from the smallest Malta and Cyprus, the EU's new members are all situated in East/Central Europe and had, throughout the post-WWII period, represented one-party socialist regimes. In the years that followed the collapse of communism, they defined EU membership as the key foreign policy goal. “Shortly after the revolutions of 1989”, Kopecky and Mudde write, “the idea of

¹ For more on the issue of politicization of European integration, see: De Wilde (2011), Green-Pedersen (2012), and the 2016 special issue (vol. 39, no. 1) of *West European Politics*.

‘Europe’ became an all-embracing concept which united the political elites and masses in their burning desire to join the EU” (2002: 98). In effect, East/Central European states marked the course of future political development and created the structural framework for party contestation. The political dynamics in the countries of this region have to a great extent been influenced by the issues related to the process of European integration.

The intense transformation of the European Union throughout the last twenty five years has attracted considerable academic attention. In this regard, the effects of the process of European integration on domestic political competition and, in particular, the positioning of political parties on issues related to this process have been studied extensively by numerous scholars. A variety of their answers to the basic question on “how is the conflict over integration structured” (Steenbergen and Marks, 2004: 1) may, depending on the observed region, be grouped within two theoretical approaches.

2.1. Ideological Affiliation of Political Parties

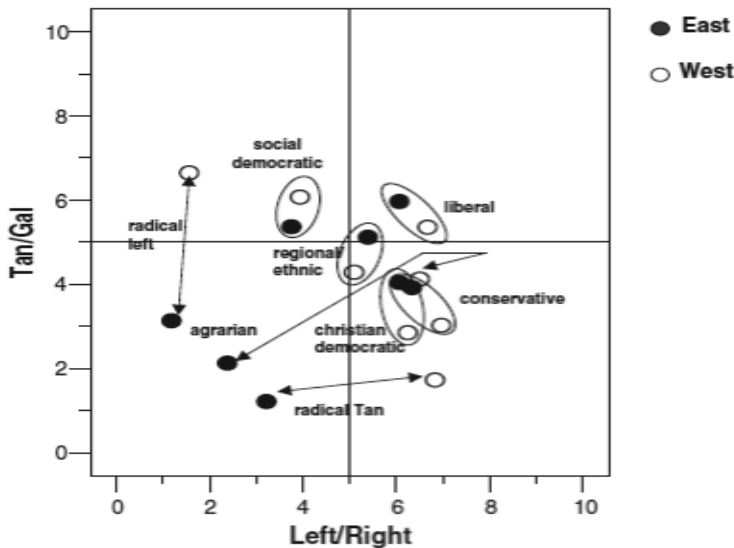
The first approach analyzes the way in which political parties in Western and East/Central European states position themselves vis-à-vis European integration. Although some explain this process by factors such as the strategic contest of parties, their participation in government, or the position of their supporters, the majority of scholars regard ideological location in domestic political competition as the most reliable indicator of party attitude towards EU integration (Aspinwall, 2002; Kopecky and Mudde, 2002; Hooghe *et al.*, 2002; Gabel and Hix, 2002; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004; Whitefield *et al.*, 2007).² To define this location, they usually employ the two-dimensional model of political space composed of economic (Left-Right) and cultural (GAL-TAN) elements,³ in which they place a party in question. Using this model, scholars have been able to comparatively examine party positioning on European integration in the two aforementioned regions.⁴

And while identifying different structures of party competition in Western and East/Central European states, they came to the conclusion that the logic underlying this process was the same across the two regions (see *Figure 1* on the next page). Thus, “in the West, where the status quo is capitalism, there is an affinity between

² The basic idea behind this approach is comprised in the following statement by Marks *et al.*: “although European integration is a new issue on the political agenda, parties strive to encapsulate it within their established ideologies” (2002: 586).

³ Green-Alternative-Liberal vs. Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist. Similarly, in an earlier attempt to structure it along the lines of ideological affiliation, Kitschelt (1994) identifies two dimensions of political competition space: socialist vs. capitalist and libertarian vs. authoritarian.

⁴ See, for instance: Rovny and Edwards (2012).

Figure 1. Dimensions of Party Competition in Western and East/Central Europe

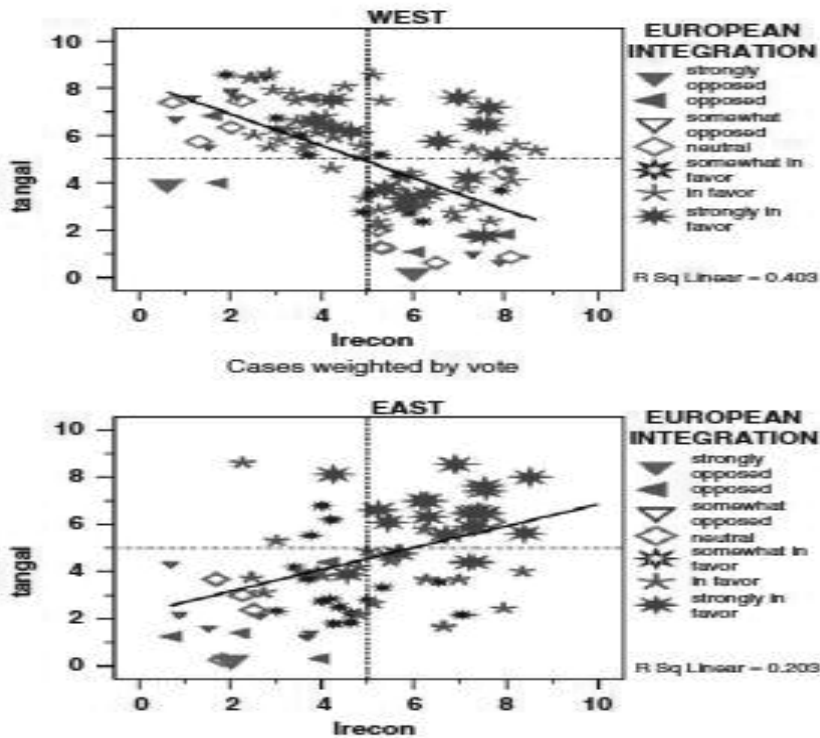
Source: Marks *et al.* (2006)

the pro-market Right and [...] TAN values and between the Left, which favors political regulation, and libertarian or GAL values” (Marks *et al.*, 2006: 160). At the same time, this ideological axis of party competition in Western Europe stands orthogonally to that in East/Central European countries where “defenders of non-market distribution are TAN and those anticipating benefits from marketization are GAL” (*ibid.*). As a result, while Euro skepticism is found to be “prevalent among radical Left parties and among radical TAN parties” in both regions, radical Left and radical TAN tend to combine in the same parties in East/Central Europe, which is not the case in the West (*ibid.*: 167).⁵

Building upon their work, Vachudova and Hooghe also argue that a “single logic accounts for party positioning on EU integration across the East and the West” even though its outcome could not differ more owing to the diverging histories of political party development in the two regions (2009: 180). They demonstrate that in Western European politics an opposition to European integration is bundled at the extremes of the ideological space. At the same time, the opponents of European integration in East/Central Europe converge to the Left-TAN corner while the sup-

⁵ The results of the most recent Chapel Hill expert survey underlying such analyses are presented in: Bakker *et al.* (2015).

Figure 2. Party Competition on European Integration in Western and East/Central Europe



Source: Vachudova and Hooghe (2009); 'Irecon' represents the economic (Left-Right) ideological dimension

port for this process comes from the opposite ideological pole (see *Figure 2*), which the authors regard as a consequence of East/Central European states' experience of the unraveling of the communist system in the process of economic and political transformation (*ibid.*: 188).

The main findings of these analyses may be summarized in the claim that in both old and new EU member states, ideological position in domestic political competition determines parties' attitude toward the European integration process. As noted by Kopecky and Mudde, "there are good grounds to argue that ideology is the crucial factor in explaining the positions that political parties adopt on issues surrounding the current process of European integration" (2002: 321). In the case of East/Central European states, this argument is mediated by political parties' specific

historical experience. Therefore, notwithstanding the same logic of party positioning on European integration, the result of this process in the two observed regions is completely different.

2.2. *The EU Political Leverage*

The second approach to the problem of domestic political competition on EU integration focuses on the way political elites in the countries of East/Central Europe position themselves vis-à-vis this process. It considers the leverage of EU enlargement on potential candidate countries in the region to be the main determinant of the elites' attitudes (Schimmelfennig, 2000; 2001; 2003; 2007; Jacoby, 2001; Schimmelfennig *et al.*, 2003; Moravscik and Vachudova, 2003; Grzymala-Busse and Innes, 2003; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002; 2004; Haughton, 2007). Following the collapse of communism, these countries defined the EU accession as their main foreign policy objective. By making such a choice, they undertook the commitment of meeting the democratic standards of the European Union and thus widely opened the domestic political space for EU influence. As put by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, "the desire of most CEECs [Central and Eastern European countries – I. V.] to join the EU, combined with the high volume and intrusiveness of the rules attached to membership, allow the EU an unprecedented influence in restructuring domestic institutions and the entire range of public policies in the CEECs" (2005: 1).

The relationship of "asymmetric interdependence" between the credible member states and the EU was created as a result whereby the latter's democratizing influence was twofold (Vachudova, 2005: 63). During the early stage of these countries' accession, the EU had an impact on them by presenting the political and economic benefits of membership as well as the costs of exclusion (*ibid.*). Subsequently, the EU's influence took a form of "active leverage" through an insistence on the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria and the adoption of the *Acquis communautaire* as conditions *sine qua non* for membership (*ibid.*: 105). As stated by Vachudova, "the enormous benefits and demanding requirements of EU membership created conditions for the substantial influence of an international institution on the domestic policy choices of aspiring member states" (2002: 2). The attitude of their political elites toward the process of European integration, motivated by their resolute ambition to join the EU, was therefore determined by the ensuing leverage from Brussels.

Similarly, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier identify two different stages of the accession of the East/Central European states to the EU (2005: 210). Initiated by the onset of the post-communist transition, the first was characterized by the EU's strategy of "democratic conditionality" aimed at inducing these states to comply with its principles of legitimate statehood (2003: 496). Throughout this period, the

EU insisted on the adoption of the general rules of liberal democracy as the basic requirement for membership. The basic method employed with this goal was “reinforcement by reward” whereby the EU “reacts to the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of its conditions by granting and withholding rewards but does not engage in coercion or large-scale support of non-compliant states” (*ibid.*). Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier argue that political elites of the states influenced by the EU decided whether to comply with its democratic criteria depending on the domestic political cost of their adoption. During the later stage of the integration process, the EU’s leverage mainly related to “the content of legislation that the CEECs had to adopt as preconditions for membership” (2005: 211). The level of adoption of the *Acquis* norms increased dramatically as the EU made them “subject of its conditionality”, which demonstrates the domestic impact of the Union and, in particular, the causal link between European integration of these countries and the positioning of their political elites on this process.

3. Montenegro: the Puzzle of Party Consensus on the EU

I hold that neither of the two previously elaborated approaches to the issue of party competition on the issue of European integration can be applied to the recent political experience of Montenegro. Instead, taking into account the specific character of the country’s post-communist transition, I contend that one needs to shed light on the critical junctures of this process – shaping the structure of political life and defining the route of its future political development – in order to understand the logic of party positioning vis-à-vis European integration.

I focus on the following party organizations in Montenegro: the Democratic Party of Socialists (*Demokratska partija socijalista* – DPS), the Socialist People’s Party (*Socijalistička narodna partija* – SNP), the New Serb Democracy (*Nova srpska demokratija* – NSD), the Movement for Changes (*Pokret za promjene* – PZP), and Positive Montenegro (*Pozitivna Crna Gora* – PCG). As demonstrated by the results of the parliamentary elections held in this period, the five parties have dominated Montenegro’s political life subsequent to the renewal of its state independence. The DPS-led coalition won the September 2006 elections, securing 41 (out of 81) seats, the NSD-led coalition won 12, while the SNP and the first-time running PZP garnered 11 each. In March 2009, the governing coalition won 48 seats against the SNP’s 16, the NSD’s eight, and the PZP’s five. The results of the last parliamentary elections, organized in October 2012, were as follows: the DPS-led coalition – 39 seats, the NSD-PZP coalition – 20, the SNP – nine, and the newly established PCG – seven. Thus, in each of the three Parliament convocations in independent Montenegro, these parties have individually or in coalitions secured more than 90 per cent of the mandates, which is why I consider them a representative sample for the present study.

3.1. Parties on European Integration

During the process of European integration, each East/Central European state went through a period of fierce party contestation over this issue. While a vast majority of parties in these countries endorsed their EU accession, there were still some important political organizations opposing the process. What is more, as the negotiation process advanced, the level of Euro skepticism, as well as the intensity of the political debate in candidate countries grew steadily (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002). In contrast, political parties in Montenegro wholeheartedly and without an exception support the country's European integration. At the same time, it is their mutually disputed capacity to contribute to this process that is at the core of the European debate in this country. In other words, political competition is about "the parties' *modus operandi* rather than over substantive programmatic alternatives and ideological commitments" (Grzymala-Busse and Innes, 2003: 67).

The Democratic Party of Socialists has been the ruling party in Montenegro since the 1990 introduction of multi-party competition and is the leading political force in the process of its state revival and the accession to the European Union. The DPS's program defines the country's membership in the EU as "the key political goal".⁶ Accordingly, DPS-led governments have initiated and been in charge of Montenegro's European integration process.⁷ The opposition parties strongly support the country's political course as well, while questioning the DPS's willingness to implement democratic reforms linked to the EU integration process. "Montenegro as a full-fledged member of the European family" is one of the basic principles in the program of the Socialist People's Party.⁸ Currently in the coalition named "The Democratic Front" (*Demokratski front*), the New Serb Democracy and the Movement for Changes are also pro-EU oriented. As emphasized in the party program, the NSD is "dedicated to the membership of Montenegro in the European Union".⁹ Similarly, the PZP's manifesto states at the very beginning that "the activities of the party are informed by democratic principles and undertaken within the

⁶ Available (in Montenegrin only) at: <http://www.dps.me/images/DPS/docs/program%20prioriteta%20%20-%20dps%20jun%202015.pdf>.

⁷ Montenegro signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union in October 2007. The country was granted candidate status in December 2010 whereas the official accession negotiation process with the EU was launched in June 2012. To date, Montenegro has opened 22 and provisionally closed two negotiation chapters. For more detailed information on the country's EU accession process, see: <http://www.delme.ec.europa.eu/code/navigate.php?Id=56>.

⁸ The program (in Serbian) is available at: <http://www.snp.co.me/strana.asp?kat=1&id=4085>.

⁹ The text (in Cyrillic) is available at: <http://www.nova.org.me/node/20>.

framework of the European integrations”.¹⁰ The document appeals to those Montenegrin citizens “who desire to live in a stable society based on the respect for laws, and who envisage Montenegro as economically prosperous and socially responsible state with full membership in the European Union”. Likewise, the program of Positive Montenegro recognizes “the accession and full membership in the EU” as “the main priority of Montenegro”.¹¹

In a nutshell, both governmental and opposition parties in Montenegro strongly favor the country’s European integration. Yet, their unanimity in this regard might seem surprising considering deep political cleavages dividing them, in particular the one that relates to the question of Montenegro’s statehood. As explained in the following sections of this article, the DPS led the political movement that advocated the restoration of the country’s independence. In contrast, the SNP and the Serb People’s Party (*Srpska narodna stranka* – SNS) played key roles in the rival political camp endorsing the maintenance of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (*Državna zajednica Srbija i Crna Gora* – SCG). At that time operating as a political NGO, the PZP took a neutral stance in the referendum process. Finally, the strongly pro-independence Positive Montenegro was established only in 2012 and hence did not partake in the referendum campaign.

3.2. *The Determinants of Party Positioning on European Integration*

As mentioned in the previous section, a majority of scholars analyzing the issue of party positioning on the issue of European integration suggest that a party’s attitude in this regard is for the most part conditioned by its ideological profile. Moreover, they demonstrated that in both Western and East/Central European countries the opposition to the integration process was derived from two ideological sources – the radical Left (economic dimension) and radical TAN (cultural dimension). In the West, however, these values were found to be upheld by parties at the opposite political poles, whereas in the European post-communist states party organizations tend to combine them in their political programs. Although the underlying logic of party positioning on the issue of European integration is the same in the two regions, the way in which this process interacts with their axes of political competition substantially differs.

In Montenegro, nonetheless, the same logic cannot be used to explain the (lack of) party competition on the issue of European integration. According to the model outlined above, political parties located in the right pole of the economic dimension

¹⁰ Available at: http://www.promjene.org/images/documents/Programe_MFC.pdf.

¹¹ See the document (in Montenegrin) at: <http://www.pozitivnacrnagora.me/images/dokumenta/ProgramPozitivneCrneGore.pdf>.

tend to support this process. Given that the leading Montenegrin parties are all pro-EU oriented, we would therefore expect them to take the position of economic Right, which however is not the case. In fact, only two – the New Serb Democracy and the Movement for Changes – out of the five observed parties might, based on their economic policies, be considered right wing parties. The NSD’s vision of economic development thus envisages “the affirmation of tax politics that would allow for new investments and imply entrepreneurial creativity”.¹²

Similarly, the PZP’s program clearly emphasizes the party’s liberal economic orientation:

The market relations in Montenegro should be governed by the principle of competitiveness. The principle of regulatory action should be introduced only when absolutely necessary to protect the interests of the state and the citizens and prevent the formation of monopolies and cartels.¹³

In contrast to these parties, the Socialist People’s Party upholds leftist economic beliefs. Clearly prioritizing economic equality over economic freedom, the SNP promotes the welfare state concept based on the government’s regulation and redistribution policies. As stated in the party program, the SNP “advocates a strong social function of the state which has to be the guarantee of freedom and social security for all the citizens, regardless of their individual abilities”.¹⁴ Albeit positioned closer to the ideological center than the SNP, Positive Montenegro also promotes leftist economic beliefs. Recognizing Norway and Sweden as economic role-models, the party program advocates “socially responsible economic policies” and calls upon the state to “assume the role of active economic manager, reject the currently ruling economic theory, and accept the imperfections of self-regulated market economy”.¹⁵

Finally, whereas the four opposition parties’ programs undoubtedly speak for their economic policies, the ideological position of the Democratic Party of Social-

¹² See footnote 9. The party’s economic orientation was more clearly articulated in the earlier program of the then Serb People’s Party: “The SNS advocates the greatest possible internal and foreign trade liberalization of Montenegrin economy as precondition for the creation of competition that will raise the quality and lower the prices for the consumers[.] The fundamental role of the state in the economy is not to trade, sell, lease out and to incur debt, but to legally protect property, free commerce, contracting and the trade of property rights – first and foremost from itself and then from every form of encroachment – and to compensate its expenses by a reasonable taxation” (once available at: www.sns.co.me/program.php, the SNS’s program is no longer available on line).

¹³ See footnote 10.

¹⁴ See footnote 8.

¹⁵ See footnote 11.

ists with regards to the economy is difficult to locate. On the one hand, the party's name and membership in the Socialist International imply a left-wing character of its economic agenda. On the other hand, economic priorities listed in the DPS's program as well as the economic policies of the DPS-led governments make a rather different impression. The party thus advocates the creation of "an economic system free of constraints" and "conducive to the development of a new entrepreneurial system of values and an inflow of foreign direct investments", private-state partnership in education, health and other traditionally state-managed sectors, and "deregulation and an increase in the competence and efficiency of the public administration system".¹⁶ At the same time, pro-business policies including significant tax cuts,¹⁷ the gradual establishment of a free-trade zone in Montenegro, intensive privatization (including the entire banking system, state telecommunications company, etc.), and the liberalization of the health, social security and pension systems, are at the core of the incumbent government's economic agenda. For these reasons, despite the party label, we categorize the DPS as a center-right political organization.

Furthermore, the Montenegrin experience of party positioning on European integration seems to challenge the generalizability of the aforementioned domestic political competition model when it comes to the second, cultural dimension too. As previously mentioned, across Europe, parties located at the TAN ideological pole tend to be Eurosceptic. In Montenegro, nonetheless, we find a party – the New Serb Democracy – which, albeit clearly TAN-oriented, supports the EU integration process. The NSD's program puts an emphasis on the "protection and development of Serb national identity in Montenegro", advocates a "national upbringing and spiritual revival of our people", insists on "an important place in these processes of the Serbian Orthodox Church", etc. Unlike the NSD, the other four parties under observation follow the GAL ideological principles such as equal rights (human, social, political, economic, and cultural) for all the citizens of Montenegro regardless of their nationality and religion, gender equality, environmental protection, and sustainable development.

Finally, the EU political leverage – regarded by a number of scholars as the key determinant of political elites' attitudes in post-communist states toward the process of European integration – is also insufficient in determining an explanation in the case of Montenegro. In the Milošević-dominated state federation with Serbia, Montenegro, as thoroughly elaborated in the following sections, remained politically subjugated, internationally isolated and as such too far from the European

¹⁶ See footnote 6.

¹⁷ As a result, Montenegro has the lowest corporate tax rate (9 per cent) in Europe, and one of the lowest personal income (12 per cent) and value added taxes (19 per cent).

Union to be significantly influenced by its political leverage (Vuković, 2010: 60). At the same time, the basic structure of the Montenegrin multi-party political system, including the pro-EU attitude of the political elite and the aforementioned party consensus on European integration, were created during this period. By the time the European Union officially entered independent Montenegro's political scene in June 2006,¹⁸ it had already taken its current form.

To understand the process of its formation and, in particular, the attitude of its main constituents in regards to the EU accession issue, one therefore needs to look at Montenegro's political development prior to the referendum on independence. I identify and analyze in the remainder of the article three main stages of this process – hybrid regime (1990-1997), democratic transition (1997-2001), and independence debate (2001-2006). The outcome of the political conflicts dominating these periods in Montenegro's post-communist transition brought about its democratization, the restoration of its independence and – with the support of the main political parties – the beginning of its accession to the European Union.

3.2.1. Hybrid Regime in Montenegro

Contrary to the political experiences of most states in East/Central Europe, the collapse of the communist regime in Montenegro was not caused by bottom-up democratizing pressures. Instead, the regime change process started with a transfer of political power within the structures of the country's then only party organization. While those representing the political system altered, the system itself was left intact. Although it led to the formal creation of a pluralist political arrangement in mid-1990,¹⁹ this political change did not bring about a genuine discontinuity with the *ancien regime*. With the new leadership and under the original party label, the League of Communists of Montenegro (*Savez komunista Crne Gore* – SKCG) – a year later renamed the Democratic Party of Socialists – won a convincing triumph in the country's first multi-party elections, held in December 1990. The SKCG got an impressive 52.6 per cent of the vote, thus securing 83/125 parliamentary

¹⁸ On 12 June, in the wake of the renewal of Montenegro's independence in the 21 May 2006 referendum, the EU Council concluded that “the European Union and its Member States have decided that they will develop further their relations with the Republic of Montenegro as a sovereign, independent State” (decision available at: http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_6031_en.htm).

¹⁹ The new bill on political association was passed by the Montenegrin Parliament on 11 July 1990. A few weeks later, the Parliament adopted the amendments (nos. 64 to 82) to the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Montenegro, abolishing the existing delegate model of representation and allowing for direct multi-party parliamentary elections (Vuković, 2014: 197).

seats.²⁰ To complete the great political success, the SKCG's candidate and the party head, Momir Bulatović, won the concomitantly organized presidential elections (Vuković, 2014: 200).²¹

With the power mechanisms inherited from the one-party system, the DPS remained the predominant political force in Montenegro until 1997. As noted by Darmanović, the ruling party used the hyper-privileged political position to render the opposition politically uncompetitive:

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

Notwithstanding the 1990 formal democratic reforms, the nature of Montenegro's political system remained predominantly authoritarian. In the early phase of transition from non-democratic rule, the country thus witnessed the creation of a text-book example of a hybrid (semi-authoritarian) political regime (Levitsky and Way, 2010). Due to the incumbent party's monopoly of power, both *de jure* and *de facto*, the conditions for political competition in Montenegro were "hardly free and fair" during this period (Bieber, 2003: 16). The SKCG/DPS simply did not act as one of a number of equal participants in the multi-party contest, but much more like "a state party using all the advantages brought about by a total control over the state apparatus and resources" (Darmanović, 2007: 156).

In the early elections held in December 1992, in the face of the exceptionally bad political and economic results of its two-year rule,²² the Democratic Party of Socialists succeeded in garnering enough votes (42.7 per cent) to stay in power (46/85 seats). The DPS thus became the only party in the South-East European post-communist countries that managed to maintain an absolute parliament majority after the second election (Goati, 2001: 132). At the same time, the party leader,

²⁰ Among the parties that triumphed in the initial multi-party elections in the republics of socialist Yugoslavia, the SKCG's result was by far the best. See more in: Vuković (2010).

²¹ Bulatović garnered 76.1 per cent of the vote in the second election round.

²² In the years that followed the DPS's 1990 electoral triumph, the socialist Yugoslavia collapsed and the new state federation with Serbia – named the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – was created and almost instantaneously put under the international sanctions. Montenegro's industrial output dropped as a consequence by more than 30 per cent, while the unemployment rate rose to 23.6 per cent (Djurić, 2003: 140).

Bulatović, won the second presidential term.²³ Furthermore, in the November 1996 elections, the incumbent party scored another victory despite the further aggravation of the socio-economic situation in Montenegro.²⁴ Moreover, albeit challenged by a coalition of the two biggest opposition parties – the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (*Liberalni savez Crne Gore* – LSCG) and the People’s Party (*Narodna stranka* – NS) – that, notwithstanding completely different political views,²⁵ formed an alliance due to each party’s individual inability to even threaten the ruling party’s political hegemony,²⁶ the DPS won not only an absolute majority of seats (45/71) but this time even an absolute majority of the vote (51.2 per cent).²⁷ Among the ex-communist parties in the wider region, its electoral performance was once again unmatched (*ibid.*: 137).

3.2.2. Montenegro’s Democratic Transition

The non-democratic rule of the Democratic Party of Socialists followed by the opposition’s inability to politically restrict it marked the first phase of Montenegro’s post-communist transition. Still, the country’s further political development was determined not by this political conflict but by the one within the ruling party (Vuković, 2010: 63). In 1997, merely a few months after the above mentioned landslide electoral triumph, the DPS formally split up as a consequence of an internal disagreement between the two most powerful party members – president Bulatović

²³ Bulatović won 63.3 per cent of the vote in the second electoral round.

²⁴ In 1995, the country’s GDP stood at 50.2 per cent, whereas its industrial output was only 41.1 per cent of the 1990 level (Djurić, 2003: 140).

²⁵ The progressive, pro-European LSCG was the party that politically established the idea of renewal of Montenegrin independence, whereas the conservative NS stood at the position of Serb nationalism, thereby vehemently advocating the transformation of the Serb-Montenegrin federation into a unitary state (Vuković, 2015: 78).

²⁶ Interestingly, compared to their individual performances four years earlier, the two parties jointly made a worse electoral result. In 1992, they got 27 (NS – 14 and LSCG – 13 respectively) out of 85 mandates (32 per cent), whereas in the 1996 elections, their ‘People’s Concord’ (*Narodna sloga*) coalition won 19 out of 71 seats (27 per cent) (*ibid.*).

²⁷ Using the uncompromised monopoly of power, the DPS was able to conduct an extremely lavish campaign for the 1996 elections, “this time beating the opposition in terms of money spent by a margin of 10:1” (Bieber, 2003: 28). Besides, the ruling Montenegrin party was in a position to unilaterally change the electoral rules so as to maximize the prospects of political triumph. The new electoral law introduced 14 electoral districts at the national level. Previously, the entire country represented a single electoral district. Hence, as mentioned above, the DPS got 51.2 per cent of the vote and as much as 63.4 per cent of seats. At the same time, even though the electoral census stood at 5 per cent, the opposition Social Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska partija* – SDP) – despite winning 5.7 per cent of the vote – did not get into the parliament because of the district organization.

and vice-president Milo Djukanović. Their conflict over the issue of political partnership with the Serbian political establishment led to the end of the regime which they had successfully built together (Vuković, 2015: 79). From that moment on, “the political game in Montenegro changed completely” (Darmanović, 2003: 148).

The key to understanding the reasons behind the breakup of the long predominant Democratic Party of Socialists is the party’s political relationship with Slobodan Milošević. The Serbian strongman made a decisive political contribution to the aforementioned 1989 leadership turnover in the Montenegro’s League of Communists. As a result, he got a reliable political partner for the project of reorganizing the Yugoslav socialist federation in line with the Serbian national interests. The close political cooperation continued throughout the years to come, notwithstanding the tragic consequences of Milošević’s political ambition which soon became strikingly obvious. In the wake of the collapse of Yugoslavia, Montenegrin political officials thus estimated that it was in their state’s best interest to continue living with Serbia within a single political entity. In the referendum organized on 1 March 1992, their initiative was given an overwhelming popular support.²⁸ Less than a month later, the new Serb-Montenegrin federation was placed under severe UN Security Council’s sanctions owing to the Serbian government’s involvement in the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Considering the absolute political domination of the Democratic Party of Socialists in Montenegro, it was clear that the country would not move out of the stalled transition and international isolation as long as the ruling party was on the pro-Milošević political course. Arguably in view of that, Milo Djukanović, Montenegro’s Prime Minister and DPS vice-president decided to turn his back to the old political ally and instead look for new ones in the West. His occasional and, as a rule, relatively moderate criticism of Belgrade’s politics evolved during 1996 into an open confrontation with its main protagonist.²⁹ The final act of Djukanović’s political transformation, formulated in an interview in which he dismissed Milošević as “a man with obsolete political beliefs”, took place at the beginning of the next year.³⁰

Unlike the Prime Minister, President Bulatović remained loyal to the Serbian counterpart, which made a conflict between the two most influential figures in

²⁸ The total of 62 per cent of Montenegrin voters (96.65 per cent of the vote cast) agreed to stay in a state federation with Serbia.

²⁹ Djukanović thus supported the massive anti-Milošević protests of the Serbian political opposition and civic associations organized in November 1996 due to the Serbian authorities’ refusal to acknowledge the defeat in the local elections.

³⁰ The interview given to the Serbian weekly *Vreme* in February 1997 is available at: <http://www.tol.org/client/article/17621-interview-milo-djukanovic-milosevic-is-an-obsolete-politician.html>.

Montenegrin politics unavoidable. As mentioned above, the formal split within the leadership of the Democratic Party of Socialists happened only months after another demonstration of its absolute political dominance. By the will of a majority of the DPS's Main Board members,³¹ Djukanović came out of the conflict as the winner leaving Bulatović no choice but to leave the party. Followed by a significant number of DPS representatives, the former party president soon established a new political organization – the Socialist People's Party. Thus losing a great deal of political influence at both the state and local level, the DPS, albeit still in power, was no longer in the hyper-privileged position relative to political competitors (Vuković, 2014: 217). This was the critical moment of Montenegro's post-communist political development as “the second transition was beginning and dominant-party politics were on their way out” (Darmanović, 2003: 148). What is more, the division within the DPS set in motion the process of redefining Montenegrin national identity by making a clear – and, by many, previously questioned – distinction between those in Montenegro who declared themselves as Montenegrins and those who declared themselves as Serbs (Dzankic, 2013; Jenne and Bieber, 2014; Vuković, 2015).

The October 1997 presidential elections were an undeniable indicator of the political change underway in Montenegro. After Bulatović narrowly won the first round (47.44 to 46.71 per cent), Djukanović triumphed in the second by less than 5,500 votes (out of 344,000 cast). In addition, a month before the vote, the “Agreement on the Minimum Principles for the Development of a Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro” (*Dogovor o minimumu principa za razvoj demokratske infrastrukture u Crnoj Gori*) – with “free and fair elections” as one of the key elements – was signed by the leaders of all parties represented in the Parliament. This marked the official beginning of a new age of Montenegro's political development and “something like a set of roundtable negotiations held seven years late” (*ibid.*: 149). At the same time, widely acclaimed by the international community, the 1997 electoral triumph of a reform-oriented presidential candidate was also Milošević's first political setback in Montenegro since 1989.³²

With the absolute victory of the DPS-led coalition (48.9 per cent of the vote; 45 out of 73 seats) in the October 1998 parliamentary elections, the country's first in-

³¹ At the meeting held on 11 July 1997, 62 out of 99 members of the party's highest body stood by Djukanović (Vuković, 2014: 217).

³² In this regard, a symbolic connotation of the violent riots in Podgorica on the night of 13-14 January 1998 on the occasion of which the followers of the outgoing president, unwilling to accept the electoral result, attacked the Government building, and, on the other hand, the presence of the ambassadors of the United States and the European Union member states at the inauguration of the new one, two days later, was exceptionally strong (Vuković, 2010: 64).

ternationally observed, free and fair balloting,³³ the ruling party made another major step on the new political course. At the same time, it became clear that Milošević had irreversibly lost political control over Montenegro. In the following period, with open support from the U.S. and the most important European countries,³⁴ the pro-democratic Montenegrin leadership began taking over function after function from the federal state level (Vuković, 2010: 65).³⁵ The government's political credibility and pro-Western orientation got a powerful confirmation during the 1999 NATO campaign against the Yugoslav federation when it managed to keep Montenegro neutral in the face of strong pressures from Milošević and the opposition parties loyal to him (including the SNP and the Serb People's Party out of which the NSD was later created), both of which intended to drag the state into the armed conflict.

With Milošević's removal from power a year later, Montenegro was finally free from a major security threat. Yet, even with a new democratic government in Belgrade, the problem of the two disproportionately sized states' federation functioning remained. Subsequent to the 1998 parliamentary elections, Montenegrin authorities had, as mentioned above, considerably expanded the scope of the Republic's powers. At the same time, their enthusiasm for the joint political life with Serbia was seriously – and, as it turned out, irreparably – damaged after the years of Milošević's disastrous rule. Arguably due to the same reason, for the first time since the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, a majority of Montenegrin citizens were expressing support for state independence.³⁶ Now that the political struggle of Djukanović's pro-Western government against the former Serbian/Yugoslav president and his Montenegrin political followers came to a conclusion, the statehood issue emerged as a new line of political division in this country (*ibid.*: 66).

3.2.3. Independence Debate in Montenegro

Before the 1997 conflict in the Democratic Party of Socialists, the prospects for any political success of the idea of Montenegro's independence were extremely unlikely. In the 1992 parliamentary elections, running on this political platform, the

³³ See the OSCE/ODIHR report at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/montenegro/15101?download=true>. In this regard, it is also very important to mention that the biggest opposition party in Montenegro, Bulatović's SNP, officially accepted the result of the elections.

³⁴ Measured per capita, the direct U.S. financial aid to Montenegro during this period was exceeded only by the American support to the state of Israel (Darmanović, 2003).

³⁵ As a part of this process, subsequent to the takeover of the taxation system and foreign trade, Djukanović's administration decided in November 1999 to change the official currency from the Yugoslav Dinar to the Deutschmark (*ibid.*).

³⁶ For the opinion polls on this particular issue, see: <http://cedem.me/en/programmes/empirical-research.html>.

Liberal Alliance of Montenegro won only 13 out of 85 parliament seats. Four years later, as previously mentioned, the LSCG went on to form a pre-election coalition with the unionist People's Party as a political alternative to DPS's non-democratic governance. Under the conditions of the ruling party's political hegemony, the statehood cleavage in Montenegro was indeed "of small political relevance" (Goati, 2008: 297). Therefore, the Bulatović-Djukanović split symbolized a true moment of hope for pro-independence oriented Montenegrins. Moreover, the development of the political situation in the Yugoslav federation in the final years of Milošević's rule was, as indicated above, "extremely favorable for the idea of Montenegro's independence" (Vuković, 2010: 66).

However, the October 2000 Serbian democratic breakthrough completely changed the political circumstances in the country. With the formation of a new reformist government in Belgrade, Montenegro lost the status of the Western world's "darling" in the Balkans. In addition, the international support for its leadership's politics of gradual distancing from Serbia would soon be replaced with the concern for the region's political stability. As noted in the International Crisis Group report on the Montenegrin referendum, "the EU worked very hard to counter, or at least postpone, any prospect of Montenegrin independence, which it felt would have a negative spillover effect in Kosovo and force a decision on its final status before the international community had a consensus on that question, and have a wider destabilizing effect in a still fragile region".³⁷ Accordingly, the EU's representatives showed no enthusiasm for the initiative by Montenegro's government launched in December 2001 with the aim of transforming the Yugoslav state federation into a confederation of two independent states.

Previously, in the parliamentary elections held on 22 April, the coalition of the Democratic Party of Socialists and the Social Democratic Party won a majority of seats (36 out of 77) on the promise of organizing a referendum on independence. They would soon form a minority government with the support of the traditionally pro-independence LSCG. A few months later, on the occasion of the DPS's Fourth Congress, the party adopted a new program in which the renewal of the state sovereignty was defined as the key political goal. On the other hand, most opposition parties in Montenegro remained firmly on the course of state unity with Serbia. In the aforementioned elections, the SNP, the SNS, and the NS thus ran in a coalition named "Together for Yugoslavia", winning 33 seats.

Apart from the clear line of division between supporters and opponents of Montenegro's independence, the 2001 electoral contest also made visible a political consensus on European integration in the country. In the new program, appro-

³⁷ The full report is available at: http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/b042_montenegro_s_referendum.pdf.

privately named “Along with Europe”, the DPS proclaimed the goal of “European integration of the Montenegrin state and society”.³⁸ And while the ruling party thus merely formalized its post-1997 pro-European stance, its main opposition rival, the Socialist People’s Party, substantially altered the position on this particular issue right before the elections (Vuković, 2010: 68). At the Congress convened in February 2001, the party elected new leadership, replacing Bulatović and other officials loyal to Milošević. This came a few months after the SNP – Milošević’s most loyal political partner in Montenegro until his very last day in office – switched political sides and formed a coalition in the Yugoslav Parliament with the Serbian opposition parties.³⁹ In addition, the 2001 Congress adopted a resolution expressing wholehearted support to the process of Montenegro’s European integration as an integral part of the federation with Serbia.

A year later, the Serb People’s Party also witnessed a change of the conservative party leadership and a definite turn towards pro-EU rhetoric. Previously, standing on the positions of Serbian nationalism, the SNS supported Milošević’s “patriotic” politics and, during the last two years of his rule, was represented in the federal Yugoslav government which he controlled. The SNP’s political shift thus marked the beginning of a new trend among the Montenegrin opposition parties as a part of which they “changed leaders and began expressing a newfound appreciation for Europe and the European rules of the game” (Darmanović, 2007: 156).

The next, early parliamentary elections in Montenegro were organized in October 2002. Previously, faced with the growing political pressure from the European Union whose officials strongly believed that Serbia and Montenegro together would advance faster towards full membership, the Montenegrin authorities were forced to postpone the organization of the promised referendum on independence. A compromise between the political ambitions of Montenegro and the EU was found in the creation of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, initiated in March 2002 and concluded a year later. Yet, at the insistence of the Montenegrin side, a “temporality clause” – guaranteeing the right of the SCG constituent members to hold a referendum on independence after three years – was built into the Union’s Constitutional Charter (Article 60).⁴⁰ For the LSCG, its establishment was an act of

³⁸ See: <http://www.dps.me/o-nama/istorijat>.

³⁹ In return, SNP vice-president Zoran Žižić became the new Prime Minister of the Serb-Montenegrin state federation.

⁴⁰ As stated in the Charter, “upon the expiry of a three-year period, member states shall have the right to initiate the proceedings for the change in its state status or for breaking away from the state union of Serbia and Montenegro[;] the decision on breaking away from the state union [...] shall be taken following a referendum[;] the law on referendum shall be passed [...] bearing in mind the internationally recognized democratic standards”. The full text is available at: http://www.worldstatesmen.org/SerbMont_Const_2003.pdf.

treason against the national interests by the state leadership. Accordingly, the party decided to withdraw the support to the DPS-SDP government, which led Montenegro into the above said elections.

Its outcome demonstrated that the Democratic Party of Socialists – now in coalition with the Social Democratic Party – was still the country’s predominant political force;⁴¹ that the lack of the EU’s understanding for the DPS’s key political goal – state independence – had no impact on the party’s strong pro-EU position;⁴² and that a solid majority of Montenegrin citizens were at that point pro-independence oriented (Vuković, 2010: 69).⁴³ Four years later, on 21 May 2006, 55.5 per cent of those who took part in the referendum on Montenegro’s independence voted in favor of its renewal. The EU-monitored referendum campaign was, as mentioned above, fought between the two political blocs led by the DPS, on the one side, and by the SNP and SNS, on the other. The Movement for Changes, the country’s most influential political NGO (officially constituted as a party organization in July 2006), did not actively participate in the referendum. The same goes for Positive Montenegro, founded six years later.

Throughout the years that followed the 2006 plebiscite, the Democratic Party of Socialists has remained the dominant political force in Montenegro. Moreover, the statehood issue has continued to divide the country’s political scene as the main opposition parties proved reluctant to accept its independence in its full legal and political capacity.⁴⁴ At the same time, the political consensus in Montenegro still exists only in relation to the necessity of its European integration.

4. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the domestic political competition on European integration in Montenegro resembles the Moon observation – from a distance, its surface looks perfectly flat while actually hiding an interesting landscape of high mountains and lengthy craters. On the one hand, the most relevant political parties in this country

⁴¹ The DPS-SDP electoral list secured an absolute majority of parliament seats (39 out of 75).

⁴² Thus, the aforementioned list was appropriately named “For European Montenegro”.

⁴³ Taken together, political parties supporting the idea of Montenegrin state independence won 45 seats.

⁴⁴ Thus for instance, seven years after the 2007 adoption of Montenegro’s Constitution, the SNP and the New Serb Democracy (previously SNS) still demand a major revision of the articles in which the country’s symbols and the official language are defined. In addition to the Montenegrin national flag, they insist on the introduction of the so-called “people’s” tricolor flag that would essentially replicate the national flag of Serbia. At the same time, they require that, alongside Montenegrin, Serbian becomes the country’s second official language (*ibid.*). For more on the topic, see: Džankić (2015).

unreservedly support the process of its accession to the EU. On the other hand, they are deeply divided even on the politically fundamental issue of Montenegro's independence. Departing from the general findings of the related literature, I sought to offer a plausible explanation of this political paradox.

I demonstrated that the party positioning on European integration in Montenegro took place in the period during which, due to its international isolation and the unresolved statehood question, the country's political development remained largely unaffected by the EU's political leverage. Accordingly, I showed that neither the ideological affiliation of the political parties in question nor the EU strategy of democratic conditionality in relation to the domestic political elite during the post-communist transition could serve as guidelines for a better understanding of the Montenegrin party consensus on European integration. Instead, I presented some evidence indicating that, with an exception of the latecomers Movement for Changes and Positive Montenegro, the observed parties' political shift towards Brussels was first and foremost meant to demonstrate their political shift away from Belgrade, i.e. from their shady political past marked by the tacit support of Milošević's disreputable reign.

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