

## Montenegro: A Polity in Flux, 1989-2000

### Bullet Page

- The change of leadership in Montenegro in January 1989 was a consequence of the harnessing and channelling of popular discontent of pro-Belgrade forces under the guise of an 'anti-bureaucratic revolution'. But this was a change from *within* the Montenegrin League of Communists, which brought younger elites (loyal to Belgrade) to power. This would determine the trajectory of Montenegrin politics between 1989 and 1997.
- The Montenegrin government played a pivotal role in priming Montenegrins for war (with Croatia) by the use of propaganda, utilising both print and electronic media. This same leadership has subsequently endeavoured to underplay their own role in the debacle, deflecting responsibility toward Belgrade and the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), while arguing that Montenegro's role in the Yugoslav wars of succession was marginal.
- These same mechanisms were used to marginalise and persecute Montenegro's anti-war opposition and pro-independence parties, both of which were under significant pressure before and during the 'War Peace' and during the March 1992 referendum which led to the creation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY).
- Montenegro's ethnic minorities were under significant pressure during the early 1990s. The treatment of Muslims in the Montenegrin part of the Sandžak in 1992 and the 'Bijelo Polje Trials' in 1994 represent the clearest manifestation of the government's repression of the republic's minorities or, at the very least, its failure to protect them.
- Internal dynamics shifted significantly in 1997 following the split within the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS). Personified by conflict between Milo Djukanović and Momir Bulatović (and Slobodan Milošević), it was driven initially by pro and anti-Milošević dynamic, but evolved into a conflict over Montenegro's statehood. Muslims and Albanians, previously marginalised, became natural allies of the Djukanović-led government.
- The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 heightened tensions between advocates of independence and advocates of continued union with Serbia, and brought the republic to the brink of civil war. The acute divisions led to the parting of Serbia and Montenegro, thereby ending the last remaining union of former Yugoslav republics.