

Montenegro Rubbishes Milosevic Reforms

Author: [Srdjan Darmanovic](#)

Montenegro has dismissed Milosevic's recent constitutional changes as an attempt to prevent it from having any influence in the Yugoslav federation

The unlawful constitutional amendments, passed last week by the Yugoslav 'parliament', came as a result of Milosevic's need to extend his presidential mandate.

He simply abolished the constitution that did not permit him to stay in office another term and, at the same time, he raised the stakes in his struggle against Podgorica's authorities.

The constitutional amendments were prepared illegally and were implemented hurriedly. It was done without any public debate and behind the back of Montenegro, theoretically an equal partner in the Yugoslav federation.

The Yugoslav parliament - a body crucial to the equality of the republics - lost its legitimacy in 1998.

Following parliamentary elections in May of that year, the Montenegrin assembly sent 20 deputies of the anti-Milosevic coalition "For better life", to the upper house of parliament, The Council of the Republics. Belgrade prevented them from taking their seats and the balance of power within the federation was never restored.

The latest constitutional changes, although not substantial at the first glance, are transforming the character of the FRY political system.

The role of the federal president is significantly strengthened. Instead of being elected by parliament, the president is appointed directly through the ballot box. And instead of one four-year mandate, the he's granted two such terms.

The constitutional changes in FRY are the result of one man's unlimited thirst for power. Should Montenegro accept the reforms, its position in the federation would be considerably weakened.

Each of the constitutional changes betray an intention to sideline Montenegro.

Getting the electorate to vote for a federal president means that he's unlikely to ever come from Montenegro, since its population is much smaller than Serbia's.

Moreover, electing deputies to the upper house through the ballot box will deny Montenegro any influence in the running of the federation. Under the previous constitution, the assemblies of both republics appointed deputies to the federal parliament.

Milosevic knew his changes would be unacceptable to Montenegro and that Djukanovic's government would reject them.

The Podgorica authorities stopped short of calling for independence. However, they were forced to state that the changes would not be valid in Montenegro and to freeze all the decisions and actions implemented without legally elected Montenegrin representatives in the federal parliament.

In other words, the Montenegrin government and parliament sent a message to Belgrade that even though its army remains in Montenegro, it doesn't have any control or authority over the republic. And if it wished to exercise such power, it could not do so by peaceful means.

Following the constitutional changes, Djukanovic announced he would boycott forthcoming federal elections.

This is precisely what Milosevic wants. He is likely to press ahead with the so-called ballot in Montenegro despite protests of the majority of its citizens. He'll declare himself the winner, allowing his Montenegrin loyalists to gain seats in the federal parliament.

At the same time, Milosevic will deal a decisive blow to the Serbian opposition - without the support of Djukanovic in the federal parliament they are unable to play any serious role.

The constitutional changes were necessary to for the survival of the federal president, but the political struggle between Serbia and Montenegro will continue regardless of the amendments.

Montenegro's fate is a prolonged and tense political fight with Belgrade, which might sporadically erupt into a crisis and precipitate another Balkan war.

Serbia's democratic forces, meanwhile, face a daily struggle against one of the most dangerous and obstinate authoritarian regimes in this region.

Srdjan Darmanovic is director of Cedem, the Centre for Democracy in Podgorica

Location: Serbia

Focus: Balkans: Regional Reporting & Sustainable Training

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/montenegro-rubbishes-milosevic-reforms>