

Remnants Of An Opposition

Author: [a journalist](#)

During the winter of 1996-97 Serbia's opposition appeared on the verge of ousting Slobodan Milosevic. Those days are long gone.

Despite international hopes that an internal opposition would emerge in Serbia to topple the regime of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, the handful of opposition figures are more marginalised than ever.

Two and a half years the three most prominent opposition leaders--Zoran Djindjic of the Democratic Party, Vuk Draskovic of the Serb Movement for Renewal (SPO) and Vesna Pesic of the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS)--marched together as members of the Zajedno (together) coalition in daily street protests against the Milosevic regime. Now their support appears to have all but disappeared.

The biggest loser is Zoran Djindjic, the former mayor of Belgrade. Before the beginning of the NATO bombing campaign, he predicted that the regime would use it as a pretext to turn on the internal opposition. Yet he has failed to find a way to turn what was a correct prognosis into political capital.

In practice, the popularity and influence of Djindjic's Democratic Party, which advocates a programme of integration with Western Europe, has been on the wane since Djindjic decided it should boycott Serbia's last parliamentary elections.

In the absence of parliamentary representation, the party has been ignored by the media. Its residual influence is limited to the handful of municipalities which it continues to control, despite the disintegration of the Zajedno coalition and Djindjic's falling out with Draskovic.

While the NATO air strikes have made conditions worse for all political opposition, Djindjic has also not done himself any favours. He failed to condemn the NATO "aggression" immediately, a sine qua non for a Serbian politician during the war, and he made a couple of careless remarks to Western reporters, saying that he is ready to become Yugoslav president after the war--a statement the regime media has used to demonise him.

Rumours that Djindjic has fled the country abound. Worse still, state television has targeted both him and Vuk Obradovic, the former general who heads the Social-Democratic Party, labelling them traitors.

Djindjic's public endorsement of a European solution for Serbia and the Balkans does not win him any popularity in the current climate. However, political analysts note, Djindjic may be successfully positioning himself as the man to deal with the West, depending on the outcome of the war. Already fluent in German, it is said that he is intensively studying English.

In spite of a brief and unsuccessful period in government, Draskovic and his SPO remain the most powerful opposition force in Serbia.

Many potential opposition voters are critical of Draskovic for his role in the disintegration of the Zajedno coalition and the way in which he sold out to Milosevic by joining the government. But Draskovic can always count on support a hard core of loyalists attracted by his personal charisma.

Many of his critics viewed his January elevation to the post of deputy prime minister as a betrayal of all opposition ideals. But even for them, Draskovic's recent performance, being bounced out of the government for publicly urging political compromise with the West, has helped him redeem himself. Nevertheless, most analysts view him as too unreliable an ally and too immature a politician to lead Serbs to the democratic future his rhetoric promises.

The third and smallest party in the Zajedno coalition, the GSS, should emerge from the current conflict with its patriotic credentials enhanced, even though the party opposed the earlier wars in both Croatia and Bosnia and thus got used to accusations of betraying the national interest long ago.

The change in public perception of the GSS does not reflect any about-face in party policy, but the fact that party president Goran Svilanovic is currently in uniform, having been mobilised in the wake of the bombing campaign. This is in marked contrast to the three political parties in government--Milosevic's Socialists, his wife Mira Markovic's United Yugoslav Left and Vojislav Seselj's Radicals--who have largely managed to keep their members out of the army.

Svilanovic succeeded Vesna Pesic as head of the GSS just days before the air strikes were launched when Pesic moved to the United States. As yet, however, he remains largely unknown and the party has never commanded much support from the electorate.

The profile of Vuk Obradovic, leader of the Social-Democratic Party, has grown in the course of the war as a result of the attacks on him in the regime media for comments he allegedly made to foreign journalists. Although his party is the youngest of Serbia's opposition parties and has only fought one election, it is now well-known across the country, albeit for the wrong reasons.

By contrast, Nebojsa Covic, leader of the Democratic Alternative and a former mayor of Belgrade, appears to have disappeared from public life since the beginning of the NATO bombing campaign, a fact which may count against him after the war.

Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) is the only opposition party which, for some reason, has access to state media, including Radio-Television Serbia, but is yet to express any opinion about Serbia's post-war political configuration.

In its public statements, the DSS has focused instead on insisting that the mandate of the future international mission in Kosovo should be precisely defined, so as to avoid a situation akin to that "in Republika Srpska, where the jurisdictions of the mission would be above the civilian authorities."

Parties representing the interests of Serbia's ethnic minorities--the Alliance of Hungarians in Vojvodina (SVM) and the Democratic Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians, and the ethnic Muslim Sandzak Coalition--have decided to keep a low profile for the duration of the war.

As SVM leader and mayor of Subotica Jozef Kasa says: "When the bombs are falling, it is not appropriate to talk about self-rule."

The author is an independent journalist in Belgrade.

Location: [Balkans](#)
[Macedonia](#)
[Albania](#)
[Serbia](#)

Focus: [Balkans: Regional Reporting & Sustainable](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/remnants-opposition>