State-sponsored Populism and the Rise of Populist Governance – The Case of Montenegro

Jelena Džankić

European University Institute, EUDO Citizenship Observatory, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Badia Fiesolana (VPAD 07), Via dei Roccettini 9, 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy

Contact: jelena.dzankic@eui.eu

Soeren Keil

Canterbury Christ Church University, School of Psychology, Politics and Sociology, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, CT1 1QU, UK

Contact: soeren.keil@canterbury.ac.uk

Abstract

Ever since it became independent in 2006, Montenegro has steadily progressed in its ambition to accede to the European Union (EU). Even so, a new form of populism, dominated neither by a far-right nor a far-left discourse, but controlled by leading political elites in the country's government has developed in Montenegro. This form of populism is not a mechanism of ensuring the dominance of the Democratic Party of Socialists (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore, DPS) in Montenegro per se. Instead it is used as a tool to support and enhance other mechanisms that the party utilises in order to stay in power and remain the dominant force in the country. Hence, we can observe the growth of a new kind of populism, a state-sponsored populist discourse that is very different from populism as understood in Western Europe. What we find in Montenegro is a government that uses populist language and messages to support a clientelistic state system.

Introduction

The study of populism has mainly focused on developments in Western Europe and Latin America. Those that have been interested in Eastern Europe focus strongly on Central and Eastern European countries and/or on Russia. There has been very little academic engagement with populist movements in the post-Yugoslav states. [1] However, there has been a rise of populist parties in the area, including populist left-wing parties, radical right wing parties and *clientelistic* parties that use populist rhetoric. It

is this gap in the literature on populism in Southeastern Europe, to which this article hopes to make a contribution.

This article will focus on populism in Montenegro. It will be demonstrated that populist rhetoric and methods are used by the leading party in power, the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (*Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore,* DPS) and its long-time leader and former prime minister Milo Đukanović to create a discourse in which the DPS and Đukanović are portrayed as protectors of the Montenegrin nation and the independence of Montenegro. By doing so, all those opposing the DPS and Đukanović and their methods of governing are considered enemies of the state and are often labelled 'terrorists' and threats to the public order and Montenegro's independence. The DPS is a *clientelistic* party network, which uses a state-sponsored populist discourse to ensure its dominant position within Montenegrin society. It does so by capitalising on the identity conflict in the country and by pushing for a foreign policy which strongly distinguishes Montenegro from Serbia, the country it shared a common state with until 2006. We will use Paul Taggart's analytical framework.[2] He has demonstrated how populism is characterised by (a) a critique of the internal and external establishment; (b) a heartland for a 'core people' that the populist message refers to; (c) a lack of core values; (d) a sense of crisis and the need for more direct i.e. populist democracy; (e) a charismatic leader; and (f) its chameleonic nature and its ability to adopt to changing circumstances.[3] By applying Taggart's framework to Montenegro, it will be shown how populism has been used by the country's elite to ensure their grip on power, while at the same discrediting "Others" as enemies of the state. In doing so, this article will not only shed light on the mechanisms that the DPS uses to stay in power, but it will also contribute to a discussion of a new form of populism - a state-sponsored populist discourse that justifies one-party rule.

This contribution will progress in the following steps: First, we will provide an overview of the current discussion on populism and its multiple dimensions in contemporary politics. In the second step, we offer a backdrop for the analysis of populism by discussing the development of Montenegrin politics since 1997, when the ruling party of the country split. The third section will outline the mechanisms the DPS has developed in order to ensure its dominance in Montenegro, before the final section which will assess the role of populism in Montenegrin politics. We will reflect on the development of a new form of populism – a populist discourse, supported by the ruling Montenegrin elite to protect and enhance a *clientelistic* network of influence in the country's political, economic and societal sphere.

Populism- One Term, many Meanings

Populism as a term is traditionally hard to define. One of the first engagements with the term in the academic literature can be found in the works of Ernesto Laclau, who argued that populism is an articulation of popular themes in opposition to the power bloc. He specifically focused on what he called 'progressive left-wing' populism, which would mobilise the oppressed people (i.e. the working class)

against the dominant power bloc.[4] He later expanded his understanding of 'the people' as a driver for social change, and argued that populism is a type of politics that can replace Marxism as a the dominant theory to encourage social change from below.[5]

The discussion on 'who' or 'what' constitutes the people and how these are influenced by populist discourses has also been dominant in the works of Margaret Canovan. She highlights the link between 'appealing to the people' and being 'anti-elitist' as a key element of all populist movements.[6] In her own words, she argues that '[p]opulism […] is best seen as an appeal to 'the people' against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society.'[7] In her work, she focuses on the mobilisation of 'the people' by populist elites through a discourse that reacts negatively to existing power structures. In the populist discourse (or mood, as Canovan calls it), existing elites question the authority of the people and populists are able to utilise a new form of politics, which brings back popular sovereignty.[8] While Laclau and Canovan have substantially contributed to our understanding of populism as a political ideology, according to Nicos Mouzelis, what they have failed to do is looking at populism also as a social reality.[9]

Following this line of reasoning, populism needs to be studied as a strategy that actors (most notably political parties) utilise, in order to mobilise 'the people' against the existing elites. In this respect, distinctions are drawn between populist movements in different parts of the world, particularly in Western Europe and Latin America.[10]. According to Cas Mudde, populism focuses on a discourse in which society is divided into 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite.'[11] The ultimate aim, according to Mudde is 'that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale (general will)* of the people.'[12] Rensmann argues that populism is anti-pluralistic, anti-liberal, and anti-constitutional as a result of the strong focus on the collective sovereignty in comparison (and opposition) to individual rights.[13]

The six key features of populism that will be considered in this article go back to the work of Paul Taggart.[14] He argued that populism is always characterised by hostility towards the internal and external establishment. These can be political elites, certain political structures, political practices etc. Important here is to highlight that the critique of internal and external structures can be strongly inter-linked. As will be discussed in more detail below, one of the reasons for the split of the DPS in 1997, and the consequent dissociation of links with the Milošević regime in Serbia, lies in the fact that Milošević and his allies were seen as the establishment, responsible for Yugoslavia's international isolation and bad reputation after the wars in the early 1990s.

Taggart furthermore highlights the importance of a connection between 'the people' and a heartland, an idealised place for the people.[15] This is particularly important in the case of Montenegro, as ethnic engineering and the creation and strengthening of Montenegrin identity have been the nexus of the DPS' campaign, first for Montenegro's dissociation with Serbia and independence, and more recently to strengthen its grip on power and portray Montenegro as a new frontrunner in terms of political and economic reforms (and EU integration) in the post-Yugoslav space.

Third, Taggart highlights the importance of vagueness of populism and its lack of core values. In the case of Montenegro, the DPS is a party without a sharp ideological profile. Rather, it resembles a *clientelistic* network with many different interest groups represented within it. This is important because the DPS itself is not a populist party *per se,* but uses populist methods to keep control of this *clientelistic* network of competing interests.

Furthermore, Taggart points out that all populisms are characterised by an appeal to a sense of crisis. This can be an economic crisis, as has traditionally been the case in Latin America, or it can be an identity crisis, as is the case with many right-wing populist movements in Western Europe. The sense of crisis results in people feeling lost and losing faith in the political establishment to deal with the crisis and quickly improve the situation. In the case of Montenegro, the political crisis that resulted from the Yugoslav Wars in the early 1990s, the Kosovo War a few years later, and the feeling that Serbia dominated and held the joint Yugoslav state (and later the state union) back, all resulted in a crisis which the DPS exploited to push its independence agenda.

In addition, Taggart discusses the importance of political leadership in populism. While a political leader does not create a populist movement *per se*, but needs the socio-economic conditions in which people would support populist discourses, leadership is nevertheless very important in populist movements. In Montenegro this is visible through the dominance of Milo Đukanović, who has been President of the country, Prime Minister multiple times, and has been in charge of the DPS for many years. He has been the main driver of political change, and has been able to establish a network in which his family members own a substantial property and control major parts of the private sector in Montenegro, while he keeps tight control over the public sector.[16]

Finally, building on the previous two points, Taggart highlights that populism has a chameleonic nature; it can adapt to different and changing situations. This can also be observed in Montenegro, where there have often been very conflictual relations between the government and the opposition. However, in light of demands from the EU, Đukanović was able to come to an agreement with leading opposition leaders to implement important reforms, which would allow the country to progress in its integration into the EU. This needed to be done, as it was not only demanded by the majority of people, but also because many of the networks that are part of the DPS profit from intensified EU integration.

These six factors will be used to explain the use of populist rhetoric and methods by the DPS and Đukanović in order to protect, enhance and maintain their clientilistic system within Montenegro. The following section will provide a brief overview of the political development in Montenegro since the mid-1990s, before returning to these six elements of populism and applying them in more detail to Montenegro.

Political Developments in Montenegro 1996-2015: A Snapshot

In order to understand how populist rhetoric underpins the long-standing rule of the DPS, it is essential to gain insight into the political developments in Montenegro after the Yugoslav disintegration. Due to scope and length limitations, this section cannot do justice to all the political events that to this date have marked the political course of this post-Yugoslav state. Hence, our objective is to sketch the context in which political actions of the ruling elite took place, which will subsequently help inform our analysis of the role of populism in Montenegro.

As noted in the Introduction, Montenegro became an independent state in 2006, adopted its Constitution in October 2007, and in 2015 is a candidate country for European Union (EU) accession alongside Serbia, the only other Western Balkan state that has opened accession negotiations. While the country's formal progress in terms of EU accession appears to be remarkable, ever since the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, Montenegrin politics have been dominated by the DPS, the successor to the League of Communists of Montenegro. The ruling elite of the DPS came to power during the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution', which installed Slobodan Milošević in power in Serbia and, in Montenegro, the 'young, beautiful and smart' trio of Momir Bulatović, Svetozar Marović and Milo Đukanović.[17] Since the Montenegrin elites remained loyal to Milošević's politics during the wars of Yugoslav disintegration (1991 – 1996), Montenegro sided with Serbia. Unlike in the rest of the former Yugoslav countries, the nationalist movement in Montenegro had no ambition of establishing an independent state in the early 1990s. Rather, Montenegrin nationalism flourished under the umbrella of Milošević's politics, and political opposition to the DPS was marginal and oppressed.[18] In April 1992, Montenegro joined Serbia in establishing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), whose politics became a catalyst for the political life of the DPS as led by Milo Đukanović after the 1997 DPS split.

The bifurcation of the DPS in the first half of 1997 ended the political monolith in Montenegro. One faction was led by the then President of Montenegro, Momir Bulatović, while the other was headed by the Prime Minister, Milo Đukanović. There is no firm evidence ofthe exact reason for the split. The two most cited causes are: a) the detachment of Đukanović's part of the DPS from Milošević's politics;[19] and b) the conflict within the DPS elites over the control of the shadow economy created during the wars in the former Yugoslavia.[20] In the public discourse, the political conflict revolved around the continuation of support for Slobodan Milošević – endorsed by Momir Bulatović's wing of the DPS - or the opposition to the regime in Belgrade – advanced by Milo Đukanović.

As the two factions divided the population, the electoral victories of Đukanović's wing of the DPS were underpinned by co-opting powerful individuals to stand for his cause. These influential individuals included, amongst others, Svetozar Marović (then Speaker of Parliament), Vukašin Maraš (then head of the secret service), Predrag Goranović (then Minister of Finance); and Filip Vujanović (then Minister of Interior), The co-option of these individuals gave Đukanović control over the party and the State's Security Agency (*Služba državne bezbjednosti,* SDB), along with the Ministry of the Interior's Secret Service. The newly acquired institutional resources were also supported through

external political and financial assistance for countering the Belgrade regime. In the period from 1999 to 2001, Montenegro received 765 million of Deutschmarks as unconditional financial aid from the United States (US) and the EU. While a significant share of this aid was used to cover the public debt, thus maintaining the appearance of socio-economic improvement,[21] a portion of it was channelled towards the DPS's policy of 'creeping independence'.[22] This policy implied Montenegro's gradual estrangement from Yugoslav federal institutions before the demise of Milošević in 2000, and included elements such as separate customs, citizenship policy, and currency.[23]

Yet, after the October 2000 changes in the government of Serbia, the axis around which the internal Montenegrin political conflict revolved had disappeared. As a consequence, the DPS reinvented itself as the leader of the Montenegrin independence movement, while the opposition sought to preserve the common state with Serbia. This shift in the DPS's political agenda resulted in the change in the meaning of national identities, as the Montenegrin national identity became associated with independence and the DPS political camp, while the Serb one was broadly related to preserving the common state.[24] Montenegro's minorities, including Albanians, Bosniaks, Croats and Muslims, were at the centre of the political debates. They were antagonised as 'outsiders' by the unionist bloc, who never managed to capture their votes due to its association with war and Milošević's policies. The pro-independence bloc 'instrumentalised' minorities: they used the rhetoric of inclusion and multiculturalism to appeal to minority voters.[25]

Three years after the transformation of the FRY into the short-lived State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the DPS camp emerged as the winner of the final political contest between the pro-independence and unionist camps - the 2006 referendum on independence. Passing the 55% threshold set by the EU by 0.5%, Montenegro became an independent state; the preservation of the union with Serbia was supported by 44.5% of the voters.[26] Obviously, the referendum victory allowed the DPS to capitalise on the results of the independence vote and to rediscover itself as the pioneer of Montenegrin sovereignty, national identity, and an advocate of EU integration. The defeat of the unionist position in the independence referendum fragmented the Montenegrin opposition, thus effectively further strengthening DPS rule after 2006. EU integration has taken place, both, because of the DPS's rule and its strong support for further progress towards EU membership, and despite of the DPS's grip on power, which in many aspects has undermined the democratic consolidation of the country. In other words, the DPS has established a number of mechanisms to ensure its hold on power, and these will be discussed in the next section.

Understanding the DPS's Rule in Montenegro

Being in power since the early 1990s (and even before that, if it is taken into account that the DPS is the successor of the League of Communists of Montenegro) has enabled the DPS to develop a number of mechanisms to ensure its continued dominance in Montenegrin politics.

First, as the party in charge during the turbulent 1990s, the DPS was effectively in control of Montenegro's economy as well as the black market, which played a key role when sanctions were put on the FRY as a result of its involvement in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and its later actions in Kosovo. Đukanović himself was indicted for involvement in cigarette smuggling in Italy, but the charges were later dropped.[27]

Second, as discussed above, following the detachment from Milošević's politics after 1997, Montenegro, and Đukanović's government specifically, received extensive support from Western embassies. In a country of little more than 600,000 inhabitants and with a GDP of €3.3 billion, the receipt of substantial financial aid gave a lot of power to those who distributed them – in this case the government of Montenegro under the leadership of Milo Đukanović.[28] These two developments – control over Montenegro's economy, and after 1997 also over the process of economic liberalisation - and access to a substantial amount of financial support from Western countries, have allowed Đukanović and his allies to develop strong patronage and *clientelistic* networks. With the support of leading Montenegrin politicians and the state security apparatus Đukanović and his supporters in the DPS were able to position the party right at the centre of political developments in Montenegro. They controlled economic activity and assets of the substantial state-owned industries and decided who will be able to buy what at what price. Furthermore, they have been able to control the welfare system to ensure that access to parts of the economy and state benefits has become connected to political allegiance to the DPS.[29] This strong connection between the DPS and the economic sector is visible in Montenegro until today, as the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) report on the country highlights: 'strong political influence on the market still exists.'[30]

Third, the long rule of the DPS has also enabled the party and its leadership to position their members and allies in key state institutions. Both, the BTI and the 2015 Freedom House Report on Montenegro highlight the political influence of the DPS on the judiciary and important administrative appointments.[31] The BTI report concludes, '[t]he long-lasting dominance of the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) impairs the functionality of the institutions.'[32] This access to institutional resources was particularly important in the first half of the 1990s, when the party was de-facto able to take full control of the institutions, the media and the state bureaucracy. Its early grip on power went in line with a number of illegitimate and undemocratic means, which have been recognised by leading figures in Montenegrin politics:

> 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 the manipulations of the electoral system.[33]

Fourth, corruption has also become a key issue to ensure the DPS's rule. Several reports, including from Freedom House, the BTI and the European Commission (EC) highlight the inability and unwillingness of the DPS to fight corruption effectively.[34] As the EC argues, 'Corruption remains prevalent in many areas and continues to be a serious problem.'[35] Uzelac[36] established a direct link between corruption and the ruling party and Freedom House describes the unwillingness of the government to progress with sufficient anti-corruption legislation.[37] Transparency International scores Montenegro in its Corruption Perception Index 76 out of 175 countries (Croatia 61, Romania 69, Serbia 78), one of the lowest ranks for a European country.[38] This in turn has not only strengthened the DPS's influence over economic activity and state contracts, but has also resulted in numerous private-public partnerships, which are not regulated by law and outside of direct judicial oversight. Corruption remains strongly linked to patronage, and party members and DPS supporters receive preferential treatment when looking for jobs in the civil service.[39]

Fifth, it has been argued that the DPS's ability to adapt and change its discourse has contributed to its grip on power.[40] This applies to the party's ability to respond to changing demands of the population. It first captured public support by supporting Serbia during the process of Yugoslav dissolution, before the party changed its discourse to disassociate itself from Milošević and his allies. It then adopted the discourse of Montenegrin sovereignty and led the campaign for Montenegro's independence.[41] Since Montenegro's independence in 2006, the party has become the champion of the country's membership in the EU and has successfully positioned itself as the main driving force for further progress towards eventual EU accession.

Populism is not the sixth mechanism that the DPS uses to stay in power. Instead, it is a tool used by the government to emphasize the five other mechanisms it utilises to ensure its continued dominance in Montenegrin politics. In other words, the DPS is *not* a populist party, it exploits a populist discourse in order to highlight the different mechanisms it has developed over time to ensure its sustained dominance in the country. The link between these different mechanisms and the use of populist rhetoric, using Taggart's framework as discussed above, will be the content of the next section.[42]

Elements of Populism in Montenegrin Politics

As highlighted in the Introduction, the DPS is not a populist party *per se*. However, the analysis shows that many elements of populism were present in establishing and maintaining the two-and-a-half decade long rule of Đukanović's DPS.[43] The 'Othering' of political opponents both internal and external, the emphasis on the heartland, the lack of the party's ideological profile, reproduction of crisis, charismatic

leadership and chameleonic nature are all characteristic of the DPS's politics since the Yugoslav breakup.

'Othering'

Even though the major internal antagonisation of political opponents by the DPS characterised this party's politics since 1997, it is important to highlight that hostility towards the internal and external establishment was also significant in the first half of the 1990s. : During this period, the creation of the imagery of enemies helped the DPS to capture the Montenegrin institutional framework, suppress minorities, and undermine the independence-minded Liberal Alliance of Montenegro and the conservative People's Party. Externally, the collapse of Yugoslavia involved both the Montenegrin government and a vast share of the population in support of the operations of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army (JNA) in the territory of Croatia in 1991. As highlighted by Andrijašević[44] and Pavlović,[45] the antagonisation of the 'Others' was predominantly carried out through the local media which helped to underpin the wartime activities. Influenced by the media in perceiving the need to 'liberate Dubrovnik from the *ustaše* [the Croatian nationalist movement from WWII]', Montenegrin soldiers in the JNA attempted to revive the myth of heroism.[46] The 'enthusiastic participation of Montenegrin soldiers', in the attacks on Croatia resonated back to the domestic political scene and created the perception of threat by the external environment.[47] Equally, such perceptions hardened the position of the local minority population, which were marginalised in the political life.

From 1997 to 2000, for Đukanović's supporters the 'anti-' were Milošević and his rule. The most manifest examples of this were the electoral campaign advertisements in the Pobjeda Daily ahead of the 1998 Parliamentary elections. The DPS's advertisement featured a full page, split in two columns, whereby one side showed the progress that the DPS stood for, and the other listed isolation, oppression and backwardness as elements characterising the opposition. Following his departure from power in Belgrade, Milošević ceased to be the obvious 'anti-'for Đukanović's camp. The memory of 'anti-Milošević-ism', however, continued to be engrained in the identity of the pro-independence camp. It remained a trait which aimed to appeal to the population on grounds that the support for Đukanović stood in opposition to international isolation, conflict and autocracy. Instead of Milošević, the common state with Serbia and the promoters thereof developed into the new 'anti-'.[48] After the referendum on independence, in the DPS rhetoric, associations with Serbia or the Serbian identity were subject to 'Othering' as potential challenges to the Montenegrin state and identity. Hence the creation of the anti-imagery has been an important element of the continuity of the DPS's rule in Montenegro. It constantly reproduced the lines between 'us' and 'them', created mistrust between groups and towards the external environment, and helped reinforce the rhetoric that the DPS is the only political choice 'for a better life'.[49] The DPS's focus on nation- and state-building in Montenegro is strongly linked to the process of 'Othering'. The creation of 'anti-' groups, first Serbia's Milošević, and after 2000 the Union with

Serbia as a whole, has enabled Đukanović and his allies to portray themselves as saviours of the nation and guarantors of an independent Montenegro.

'Heartland'

Similar to the process of 'Othering' political opponents, the notion of the link between 'the people' and Montenegro as the 'heartland' has been at the centre of the DPS's political rhetoric. Even in the first half of the 1990s, when the party supported the wartime activities, it presented the image of Croatia as a 'snake', maintaining that Montenegrin soldiers were engaging in a 'war for peace'.[50]

The emphasis on external enemies as a catalyst for the connection with the 'heartland' changed after the 1997 split. Rather, the party focused on presenting Montenegro as a democratic oasis in the autocratic FRY system ruled by Milošević. In his February 1997 interview with the Belgrade weekly *Vreme*, Đukanović described Milošević as 'a man with obsolete political ideas, lacking the ability to form a strategic vision of the problems the country is facing'.[51] This allowed him to establish the identity of the DPS as a reformist party, capturing the support of the pauperised population and Western democratic countries that opposed Milošević.

After 2000, the rhetoric on the meaning of the 'heartland' shifted and was manifested through the discourse on independence. Commonly, the Montenegrin newspapers highlighted that Montenegro was 'a hostage of Serbian politics'.[52] By arguing that the 'heartland' was 'chained', the Montenegrin government justified its pro-independence course to the people, who are particularly susceptible to the imagery of 'capture'. The latter is well captured in the anecdote about Prince Bishop Peter II Petrović Njegoš, who, declining to kiss the chains of St. Peter, said "Montenegrins do not kiss chains." Hence reinforcing the sense of capturedness, the DPS appealed to the historical memory of the population, thus strengthening the support for the independence cause.

In the post-independence period, the DPS has recreated the connection between the people and Montenegro as the 'heartland' not only through nationalising policies, including language, state symbols, etc., but also by highlighting the country's progress in EU accession.[53] Headlines emphasising that 'Montenegro is the regional leader in EU integration' have been another element of populist rhetoric that underpins the long standing rule of the DPS.[54]

'Valuelessness'

As highlighted by Bieber, the DPS does not have a clear ideological profile.[55] It emerged from the League of Communists of Montenegro, and thus ostensibly appears as a reformed communist party. At the same time, its economic policies and agenda regarding national identity in Montenegro are far from characteristic of a left-wing party. This ideological mixture can be detected in the 2011 Statute of the party, which lists its key objectives as:

> The enhancement of human rights and freedoms; republicanism and parliamentary democracy; preservation and affirmation of the state identity and sovereignty of Montenegro; regional

cooperation and integration in European and Euro-Atlantic structures; the rule of law; the development of market economy and the preservation of property; the affirmation of antifascism as a value in the contemporary world; social justice and social solidarity guaranteed by the state and the protection of marginalised groups; sovereignty of citizens; minority protection in line with international standards and the tradition of international relations in Montenegro; protection and enhancement of the environment; decentralisation and equitable regional development; and the affirmation of gender equality.[56]

In addition to the statutory ambiguities, the DPS's 2011 Program does not clearly stipulate the values that underpin the party. Instead, it lays out rather vague claims, such as 'We have always appreciated the past in order to be able to see the future better. This is the only way to preserve the values that endure the winds of time and that conquer new achievements of humankind'.[57] The Program further elaborates on 'equality', 'freedom', 'right to life', 'justice' and 'solidarity' without specifically referring to them as 'values' or 'objectives'. Hence, the absence of values and ideological vagueness help the DPS to change its rhetoric and contribute to the longevity of its rule in Montenegro. This vagueness has also allowed the DPS to portray itself as the protector and saviour of the Montenegrin people in times of change and crisis.

Crisis

In circumstances of political and economic instability, citizens' security becomes a salient issue at the societal level.[58] People tend to affiliate themselves to ideas that provide them with a greater guarantee of well-being and their loyalties as a result become changeable. In the case of Montenegro, the first signs of dismantled security appeared in the late 1980s, with the failure of the project of Yugoslav socio-economic reconstruction. The socialist economy that guaranteed people a sense of stability suffered from rapid decay. This process intensified with the collapse of the common state at the beginning of the 1990s.[59] The wars in the neighbouring republics and the hyperinflation in 1993 evoked a societal crisis and increased the people's dependency on the decisions taken by the political leadership.

In addition, the DPS split occurred in 1997, when the political and economic situation was still unstable, thus allowing Đukanović's wing of the party to effectively capitalise on the support from Western countries. That is, in a crisis-struck environment, the DPS presented itself as reformist, cementing its dominance in Montenegro's politics. The environment of crisis was further emphasised by the status question until 2006 and the perpetuation of instability opened up the possibilities for the reconstruction of political and national identities. In fact, the statehood and identity divide in Montenegro consumed public life to the extent that it deprived any other political issue of its substance. According to Milan Popović, populism, which was induced in Montenegro by the divide into pro-independence and unionist camps, reflected the 'abnormality of total polarisation to such extent that any dissonance was unnoticed'.[60]

Even in the post-independence period, the DPS operates in an environment of crisis, which it effectively uses to present itself as a 'problem-solver'. This is evident in the party's Program, which emphasises that

> [w]e live in turbulent times, the era of globalisation. It brings unknown things and new opportunities. The global economic crisis has left harsh consequences, and nothing is as it used to be before the crisis. The global financial markers and new information technologies diminish national sovereignty. Environmental devastation, climate change, and natural catastrophes trouble the world, both the developed and the developing countries. Crime and terrorism are becoming a global occurrence.[61]

After having described the difficult global environment, accentuating a number of crises and threats, the same Program stipulates that the DPS has the role and the purpose of 'ensuring the good for all the citizens of Montenegro; creating job opportunities for everyone; that everyone creates better living conditions for themselves; security; health and social welfare'.[62] The use of 'crisis' as a proxy for political ambitions clearly indicates the presence of this element of populism in the DPS discourse.

Leadership

In Montenegro, the politics of personality have always played an important role in gaining popular support. This is mostly due to the dense social links and the remembrance of the historical need of a leader that would unify and guide the population. Such was the case with the Prince Bishops during the dynastic reign, especially Petar I and Petar II Petrović in their efforts to unite the tribes; with King Nikola, who mixed his authoritarian rule with the modernisation of Montenegrin society; or Tito, during his rule in socialist Yugoslavia. After the split in the DPS, Đukanović emerged as the charismatic leader, which contributed to his political longevity and the longevity of the DPS.

The 'cult' of Đukanović grew out of his opposition to Milošević. It gradually became coupled with the idea of Montenegrin independence and with Montenegrin national sentiments. Due to the extensive state capture of Đukanović and his closest aides, the DPS is associated with crime, corruption and nepotism. According to both domestic and international sources, some of these claims had been present on the Montenegrin political scene since the break-up of the DPS in 1997, whereby criminal activities, such as cigarette smuggling and human trafficking, dated back to the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia in the early 1990s.[63] In 2002, the former UK Ambassador to the FRY, Charles Crawford depicted Montenegro as a 'dangerous combination of weak institutions and strong criminals'.[64]

However, domestically, by reverting to the rhetoric of 'westernisation', Đukanović created an image of himself as a reformist politician. For example, ahead of the 1998 elections, the government of Montenegro published a book entitled *The Premier of a Victorious Spirit*, and advertised it to the wider public through the state-owned press. The cover page of the book featured the image of Đukanović against a bright background. Furthermore, during all electoral rallies, the DPS supporters display the image of the party leader. His political influence and charismatic style of leadership is also mirrored in

the fact that he had retired from the position of Prime Minister twice, only to return after allegations of internal crisis in the DPS and possibilities of the existence of different factions. Hence, his personal leadership style has greatly contributed to the long rule of the DPS in Montenegro.

Chameleon

No other party in the region has survived the adaptation to different contexts and situations as the DPS has. While siding with Milošević's nationalist rhetoric in the first half of the 1990s, the DPS turned to the West after the 1997 split. Additionally, while marginalising and oppressing minorities in the first half of the 1990s, from 1998 onwards the DPS effectively included them in the government, thus shifting towards the rhetoric on multiculturalism and tolerance. Bieber noted that the key objective of this shift was to capitalise on minority votes.[65]

From 1998 to 2001, the political support from the Western countries to Đukanović's government was intended to keep 'a democratic Montenegro in a democratic Yugoslavia', a point emphasised by former US President Bill Clinton and his Foreign Minister Madeleine Albright in their statements.[66] Interestingly, this view coincided with Đukanović's 1998 electoral platform, which initially did not envisage references to independent Montenegrin statehood. Attesting to this is the 1998 coalition government, where the DPS aligned with the anti- Milošević and unionist People's Party. In practice, however, the inflow of funds helped sustain Đukanović's government. It was an incentive for Đukanović to establish his political camp as the one adherent to the Euro-Atlantic space. That, in turn, gave him an indirect push towards independence, and resulted in a (short-lived) coalition with the independence-oriented Liberal Alliance in 2001.

After the fall of Milošević, the DPS reinvented itself through championing Montenegrin independence, while trying not to alienate Western support for the party. In 2001, the political analyst Janusz Bugajski said that 'Đukanović's recent observation that the West has a vested interest in preserving Yugoslavia's territorial integrity suggests that he is uncertain of whether and in what circumstances the West might come to his aid and what form such aid might take'.[67] This was one of the reasons why Đukanović did not play the independence card openly during that period. Furthermore, as the independence of Montenegro was expected to 'provide ammunition to Kosovar Albanians seeking independence for Kosovo and to Serb nationalists wishing to reunite the Bosnian Serb entity, Republika Srpska, with Serbia',[68] the international community pushed the Montenegrin government to remain within 'a more devolved and democratic FRY'.[69] As a consequence, the DPS pushed the independence agenda through an EU-mediated framework, which included not only the transformation of the FRY into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003, but also accepting the 55% independence threshold.

In the post-independence period, the chameleonic nature of the DPS is most obvious in the management of the party agenda, amidst the reconstituted opposition, and the balancing of domestic politics in order to meet the accession requirements. For example, in 2012, in order to change the

Election Code, required by the EU for the opening of accession negotiations, the DPS negotiated a package of legislative changes with the Montenegrin opposition. This enabled the party to reinforce its pro-EU rhetoric, and confirms the chameleonic nature of the DPS rule, which has persisted in Montenegro ever since the Yugoslav breakup.

Conclusion

The DPS, and with it the wider politics of Montenegro remain a unique phenomenon in the post-Yugoslav space. The party has remained in power since the early 1990s, and has survived internal splits, Montenegro's independence and more recent obstacles in the process of EU integration. In fact, as we have demonstrated, these processes were not only driven by the DPS, but the party has also been able to address new challenges and remain at the centre of Montenegrin politics.

By doing so, the DPS has used an array of mechanisms. Taking control over the state and major segments of the economy has enabled the DPS to portray itself as "the state party" of Montenegro, which is in charge of political progress and economic development. Populist discourses have underlined the DPS's grip on power. From the instrumentalisation of a charismatic leader to the open defamation of opposition to the party's rule, elements of the DPS power-nexus clearly symbolise populist rhetoric and populist mechanisms. However, the DPS is not a populist party as such.

Unlike populist parties in Western Europe, the DPS has been in government and in charge of Montenegrin politics for more than 25 years. Hence, their populist discourse has used processes of 'Othering' and references to the 'Heartland' not to distinguish itself from the ruling elite (which is the DPS), but to identify internal and external opposition to the DPS's self-portrayed role as the protector and saviour of the Montenegrin nation. Populism theory struggles to explain this form of populism, which is not only promoted by a party in government (as has been the case in Latin America), but has also been persistent and successful for nearly three decades. Populism, in other words, is utilised by the DPS to underline its dominance and leadership in Montenegrin politics. The kind of populism used by the DPS can hardly be positioned on the left-right spectrum, which is usually used to categorise populism. Instead, it contains elements of a strong right-wing discourse on the Montenegrin nation, its independence and the threats it faces in a globalised world. In this respect, the DPS uses a discourse that is very familiar to similar debates in far-right wing parties in Western Europe.[70] Processes of 'Othering' and references to the 'Heartland' help to undermine this form of right-wing, nationalist populism. At the same time, the analysis above has demonstrated that the DPS refers to social welfare, the protection of the people from economic changes, and is critical towards the economic effects of globalisation. The state, and the DPS as a state party, is essential in the protection of the people from economic liberalisation and economic crisis, a discourse utilised by many populist movements and parties in Latin America. This form of populism is closer to left-wing ideals, or economic populism, as

Cas Mudde refers to it.[71] The populism used by the DPS includes therefore elements of both, right-wing and left-wing populism.[72]

The DPS is not a populist party, and should instead be understood as a network of different interests, held together by a small elite (most importantly Milo Đukanović). The party sees itself as the true protector of Montenegrin independence and as a force for the future good of the country and its people. The discussion above has provided a snapshot of Montenegro's specific populism, which is used as an instrument to keep the DPS's tight control of Montenegrin politics and society. What has been demonstrated is that the DPS and Đukanović use elements of populism in their quest to manifest and extend their own regime. By doing so, they have proven to be flexible, adaptable and willing to change to those positions which will ensure their continued dominance of the country's politics, economy and society.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

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[72] The DPS is not the first party that uses a populist discourse, which cuts across different ideological lines. Ben Stanley has argued that populism is a very thin ideology, which has to rely on other ideologies to form some kind of coherent framework, see: B. Stanley, 'The Thin Ideology of Populism' *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13(1), pp. 95-110.
In a similar vein, the work by Franco Venturi has highlighted how different movements in 19th century Russia (which would later lead to the October Revolution) have used both nationalist rhetoric and agrarian and economic populism. These movements, too, utilised right-wing and left-wing arguments simultaneously in their populist discourse. See: F. Venturi, Roots of Revolution: *A history of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.

Notes on Contributors

Jelena Džankić is a Research Fellow at the European University Institute (EUI) and the coordinator of the EUDO Citizenship Observatory. Previously, she was a Jean Monnet and a Marie Curie Fellow at

the EUI. Her book Citizenship in Bosnia Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro Effects of Statehood and Identity Challenges has been published with Ashgate in 2015.

Soeren Keil is Reader in Politics at International Relations at Canterbury Christ Church University. He has written, edited and co-edited six books, the latest being *Understanding Federalism and Federation* (co-edited with Alain Gagnon and Sean Mueller) *and State-Building and Democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (co-edited with Valery Perry), both published in 2015.