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## **Serbia's "Bulldozer Revolution": Evaluating the Influence of External Factors in Successful Democratic Breakthrough in Serbia**

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In 1987, Slobodan Milosevic showed promise as a modern liberator. The former Yugoslav communist apparatchik rose to power swiftly, enjoying immense initial support but he ultimately retained the authority he achieved with violence, xenophobic propaganda, clientelism and misappropriation of the country's wealth as his popularity declined. He ruled as Yugoslavia's constituent republics devolved into separate nations, through four wars and a NATO bombing campaign that pitted his regime against the West. The stirring electoral victory of his opposition and subsequent protests that removed Milosevic from the presidency on October 5, 2000 came after thirteen years during which the autocrat often seemed invulnerable and incorrigible. His defeat was hailed inside and outside of Serbia as a decisive moment of revolutionary democratic change even though few of the individuals that played critical roles in the electoral breakthrough of 2000 characterize the subsequent consolidation of democratic gains after Milosevic's defeat as equally compelling or successful.

As is the case in most revolutions of this kind, Milosevic's fall was dramatic. Elections for the Yugoslav presidency and federal assembly took place on September 24, 2000. Parallel-vote counts revealed that Milosevic had tampered with the election and had lost to the rival *Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS)* candidate, Vojislav Kostunica. The regime refused to concede. Milosevic instead insisted on a second round of elections and then an annulment of election results. Street demonstrations and strikes ensued, including a pivotal slowdown in work at the Kolubara coalmines in central Serbia that provided 70 percent of the republic's energy reserves. International condemnation, even from Serbia's traditional ally Russia, crescendoed as Milosevic maneuvered. By mid-day on October 5<sup>th</sup> over 500,000 protestors converged on Belgrade, assisted and directed by opposition party activists, civic groups and student organizers. Opposition party operatives helped commandeer a bulldozer now famous as an icon of the revolution while organizing crowds to surround and occupy key institutions in the capital including the *Serbia Radio Television (RTS)* building, the Federal Parliament, the Central Bank, Belgrade city hall and Milosevic's party headquarters. Security forces and paramilitary

formations declined to act in the regime's defense and by nightfall *DOS* and their supporters were in de facto control on the ground. The following day, Milosevic yielded and by 7 October, Kostunica was sworn into office.

Mass movements of the "regime change" variety often originate with political and civic elites mobilizing the public, as witnessed in Russia, Ukraine and Georgia, for example. In Serbia, the work of free media outlets, civic activists and the political opposition were as responsible for mobilizing the public as they were, in turn, mobilized by it. Well into 2000, most civic and opposition leaders were nearly as distrusted as the regime. Moreover, they were unprepared to marshal growing anger over economic conditions, corruption and the severity of the extra-legal crackdown on regime critics during and after the 1998-1999 war in Kosovo. Only as a student movement called OTPOR (*Resistance!*) began to push civic and political leaders toward each other, helping define and mature their roles, did the public warm to their alternative leadership. Preparing to visit the Kolubara miners during the post-election crisis that fall, Kostunica remarked "...there are sometimes historic situations in which parties and political leaders do not lead the people, but the people to a large extent lead them. This is one such situation."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, it is unlikely that these internal developments would have had the same character or that the nature and timing of breakthrough would have occurred as it did without the influences of external factors. Direct democracy assistance supported OTPOR and the formation of *DOS* while lending durability to opposition parties and alternative media. Democracy aid also helped expose manipulation of election results and ensure that revelations about vote fraud reached large segments of the public after elections were held. Regional activists helped diffuse their knowledge of lessons learned from breakthroughs in neighboring countries, encouraging civic leaders to form an effective network of activists called *Izlaz* (*Exit!*), for example. Military intervention as well as economic, legal and diplomatic sanctions inconsistently, and sometimes counterproductively and at great cost, contributed to a sense of political decay around the financially exhausted regime. Even the defection of security forces on October 5<sup>th</sup> may be traced, in part, to the capability of the opposition to organize mass protests and to cultivate important allies in and around the regime; a capability marginally influenced by external factors.

External influences supported a struggle for democracy that was already prevalent inside Serbia, however. They did not independently originate this struggle nor create the courageous and creative community of activists that produced it. Nor did external forces create the kind of critical mass of public disaffection over conditions in Serbia in 2000 that the opposition eventually exploited. Breakthrough would likely have been accomplished without significant outside help although the character and timing of such an event is open to question.

The first section below provides a summary of historical events within Serbia that contextualize the efforts of both international and domestic opponents of the Milosevic regime. A second section focuses specifically on the role of external factors in regime change while a third section examines the causal relationships among these external factors and the internal influences contributing to breakthrough. A concluding fourth section examines the question of what breakthrough might have looked like in the absence of external influence.

### *1. Historical Context*

By 1990, Slobodan Milosevic's concentration of power within the Serbian republic of Yugoslavia was well underway. The republic of Slovenia would leave the Yugoslav Communist Party in response, collapsing the already moribund institution. Multi-party elections throughout Yugoslavia's constituent republics followed and, unsurprisingly, nationalist candidates won in every major poll, leveraging discontent with declining living standards throughout the 1980s and alarm over Milosevic's Serbo-centric policies in Belgrade. The populist and ethno-nationalist tensions that resulted would eventually provoke four wars that would tear the country apart and reduce Yugoslavia to a rump state of two former Yugoslav republics, a dominant Serbia and smaller Montenegro, over the course of Milosevic's tenure.

The first significant challenge to the Milosevic regime occurred in early 1991. On March 9, police lost control of a protest organized by students and the opposition politician Vuk Draskovic of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO). Army intervention was necessary to clear the streets but after the army withdrew despite orders from Milosevic to remain, protestors regrouped and succeeded in re-taking the city center of Belgrade for ten days. Milosevic was forced to grant tactical concessions including the release of jailed activists and the reassignment or resignation of five top officials. Milosevic would not entrust the army to quell dissent again. Instead, the

number of police within the republic would rise to over 80,000 by 1996 and new secret police units were established that were under Milosevic's direct control.

A second period of intensified resistance began in early 1996. Opposition parties formed a political coalition called *Zajedno* ("Together") to contest elections that November. The results of the polls at the federal level disappointed the opposition and *Zajedno* nearly dissolved in a muddle of recriminations over the loss of parliamentary seats. But the first round of local elections results offered hope with the surprising news of opposition victories in fourteen of the republic's largest towns and cities. The regime's awkward response and denial of these local gains inspired a growing and determined resistance. Street demonstrations throughout the winter forced Milosevic to concede and to finally recognize local election results on February 11, 1997 after seventy-eight days of protest. These new "platforms" in towns now controlled by the opposition and the lessons learned by protestors over the period would prove useful in later resistance to Milosevic. To Sonja Licht, then director of the Fund for an Open Society in Belgrade, it was the advent of pluralist politics and the beginning of "real democratic change" in Serbia".<sup>3</sup>

But events in Kosovo and in wartime Belgrade would draw the dividing line between this second and a third episode of resistance. By the spring of 1998, ethnic Albanian rebels pressing for the independence of the Kosovo region of southern Serbia had escalated their violent attacks on Serbian security forces in the territory. The regime's response was severe and indiscriminate, targeting both the militants and Albanian Kosovar civilians. For most Serbs, control over Kosovo was important for cultural and historical reasons and the political opposition, civic groups and resistance-minded students found it difficult to consolidate dissent even within their own ranks over the government's actions there. Moreover, even general criticism of the regime during the Kosovo crisis was quickly labeled traitorous and as international condemnation of Belgrade's moves in Kosovo grew, state media consistently equated dissent of all kinds with foreign-inspired subversion. An eleven-week NATO bombing campaign that targeted sites throughout Serbia between March and June 1999 ended Belgrade's political and military presence throughout most of the province.

What many activists remember of the period is how the politics of hope and victory evident in 1997 and early 1998 rapidly turned into desperate survivalism. Mass arrests, conscription and harassment of activists and opposition political figures occurred on an unprecedented scale. Nearly all alternative media outlets that were critical of the regime were closed or experienced suspicious technical difficulties with their signals. Assassinations of regime critics also took place prompting many key opposition figures and civic activists not already pressed into military service or under arrest to leave the country. The formerly legalistic and semi-autocratic regime had become despotic – not without consequences.

The semi-autocratic nature of the regime worked both for and against Milosevic. Over the decade, Milosevic allowed pockets of easily controlled, nominally open political space to expand and contract to reassure international interlocutors, co-opt his political opposition and portray himself as an aspiring democrat. But consistent and comprehensive control of social alternatives eluded Serbian authorities, witnessed in the rapid growth of a student movement called OTPOR by 1999 and the stubborn survival of alternative media outlets despite the hard dictatorship of the regime's last twenty-four months. Moreover, a reliance on legalistic authority inclined the regime to resort to the passage of repressive laws on civic activity, university education, and media expression when threatened, providing signature moments for mobilization of the opposition. As the regime became more tyrannical from 1998 onward, violations of the regime's own political norms only served to reveal its weaknesses, not its strengths.

It was during this time that it became clear the lengths the regime would go to in order to preserve itself. Democratic Party (DS) leader Zoran Djindjic would be particularly struck by how willing the regime was to use extra-legal means to survive. After the Kosovo war he would openly muse that the opposition may have to resort to bold measures to remove Milosevic, as it did during its post-election seizure of power on October 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>4</sup>

By late 1999, bitterness with Milosevic had grown intense. Deprivations brought about by wars in Croatia, Bosnia and in Kosovo, NATO bombing, the regime's unprecedented crackdown on its critics, unpaid salaries and a dismal economy led to poll numbers showing that nearly half of those responding were repelled by current political figures - within the government and in the

political opposition. Tellingly, the loss of control over Kosovo merited far less concern than issues of personal well-being closer to home.<sup>5</sup>

After a July 2000 announcement that elections for the Yugoslav presidency and the federal assembly would take place on September 24<sup>th</sup>, eighteen political parties and civic organizations eventually, and with great effort, formed the *Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS)*. The creation of the *DOS* and the selection of the relative unknown Vojislav Kostunica to lead the coalition was no small achievement given the dispiriting rivalries within the political opposition on display just months earlier. Kostunica was an inspired choice for many reasons, not the least of which were his ethno-nationalist credentials.

Ethnic-chauvinism and selective historical memory merged to create powerful, revisionist socio-political memes throughout the Balkans in the 1990s. In Serbia, populism and appeals to ethnic solidarity were indispensable to Milosevic as he consolidated his authority and ridiculed his critics. By 1995, however, increasing numbers of nationalist ideologues sensed betrayal in the regime's poor treatment of Serbian refugees from wars in Croatia and Bosnia and political neglect of Kosovo's Serbian population. Milosevic's disinterest in the plight of Serbs remaining in post-war Croatia and Bosnia also troubled the regime's nationalist allies. By the end of the war in Kosovo the regime was barely able to rally traditional bases of support with jingoistic appeals. The political opposition, however, was able to leverage the soft nationalism of an unassuming Vojislav Kostunica to attract attention away from the regime during the 2000 campaign.

*DOS's* parallel vote tallies on election night would show that Kostunica won with 51.71% of the vote to 38.24% for Milosevic on 24 September. Turnout was just over 70%.<sup>6</sup> As Milosevic unsuccessfully tried to discredit the results, civic and political resistance grew. On October 5<sup>th</sup> over 500,000 people were in the streets of Belgrade with hundreds of thousands more protesting in Serbia's other major towns and cities. The numbers were "a critical fact on the ground" says former Yugoslav army general Miroslav Hadžić. Many police units were ordered to defend government buildings and assets but ultimately did not. "Those were self-preservation decisions. The number of people was critically important."<sup>7</sup>



Leaders of the political opposition approached Milosevic allies after vote fraud was revealed, including the directors of Serbian State Security, the Federal Customs Administration and the head of the Yugoslav Army. On October 4<sup>th</sup>, Djindjic also met with Milorad Ulemek, one of the most notorious paramilitaries and henchmen of the regime that would later be convicted of Djindjic's 2003 assassination and the attempted murder of Vuk Draskovic. Ulemek struck a bargain with Djindjic that he and his secret police unit known as the Red Berets would stand down as long as the police were not attacked.<sup>8</sup> Djindjic returned from that meeting and others with Interior Ministry officials during the night enormously relieved, remembers Djindjic aide Aleksandar Joksimovic. "He said to me, on the morning of October 5<sup>th</sup>, 'Don't worry it's over'".<sup>9</sup> Ulemek was the wild card, not the police or the military. Djindjic had been signaled that the Army would remain in their barracks and that the resolve of loyal police units would weaken if he "had numbers in the street".<sup>10</sup> With Ulemek out of the picture, the challenge was to maintain discipline and ensure turnout, something Joksimovic remembers Djindjic having a high level of confidence about.<sup>11</sup> Without the support of key personalities within the army, secret police, interior ministry and paramilitary formations, Milosevic's ability to retain authority in the face of overwhelming numbers of organized protestors was lost within hours.

On June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Milosevic was subsequently extradited to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, headquartered in The Hague on charges of crimes against humanity and other war crimes. He died in his cell on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006, several months before his forty-eight month-long trial was to end.

## *II. The Role of External Variables*

Five external factors had a bearing on regime change that October. Direct democracy assistance provided the most cogent and sustained influence while diffusion follows in order of importance, trailed by the inconsistent influences of diplomatic and legal sanctions, economic and trade sanctions and military intervention. These will be examined in reverse order below with the greatest amount of attention being given to the two variables that are examined last, democracy promotion assistance and diffusion.

## Military Intervention

NATO airstrikes on targets throughout Serbia were initially conceived of as an air campaign of a few days duration that would quickly convince Milosevic to reduce the size his police and military operations in Kosovo. Instead, beginning in April 1999, Milosevic intensified his anti-insurgent activities in the province, eventually displacing 1.3 million Kosovar Albanians from their homes and 800,000 residents out of Kosovo altogether.<sup>12</sup> An eleven-week air campaign ensued that targeted electrical grids, water networks, telephone exchanges, security facilities, state-media infrastructure, roads and bridges in every major city throughout Serbia. It was NATO's first combat operation in fifty years of existence and it flew nearly 40,000 sorties in a war that proceeded without a UN resolution authorizing the attacks.<sup>13</sup>

The intent was to drive Milosevic from Kosovo, not from office. In doing neither initially, Milosevic not only escalated in Kosovo, he leveraged his response to airstrikes into war-time measures that effectively reversed nearly all opposition gains over the previous thirty-six months. "Collateral damage" killed upwards of 500 civilians in errant NATO bombardment of prisons, clinics, refugee convoys, residential areas, bus depots and train trestles. More than 100,000 lost work in factories destroyed or closed as a result of the NATO air campaign.<sup>14</sup> Critics in the civic and political opposition, including OTPOR, joined in a chorus of dissent over the bombing, less in solidarity with the regime as it was driven by outrage and, in some quarters, expediency. Few risked the condemnation and potential harm that would come in publicly blaming Milosevic for the airstrikes or in mentioning the regime's operations in Kosovo that precipitated the crisis. As Milosevic closed media outlets including the popular alternative radio station Radio B-92, director Veran Matic remembers thinking "It was the end. We were through".<sup>15</sup>

Yet, post-bombing anger at the west and at Milosevic were not mutually exclusive. The regime's expenditures on the war, capital arrogation of state industries and the exhaustive effects of war-related diplomatic and economic sanctions accelerated economic and political decline. Service delivery worsened, unemployment increased and salaries to public workers and reservists, including many with recent fighting experience in Kosovo, went unpaid. Almost as infuriating as airstrikes were the regime's transparently false post-war claims that Serbia had won the confrontation with the West, that war damage was being actively repaired and that

conditions were improving within the country.<sup>16</sup> State-controlled media's attempts to suggest victory and recovery were regarded as outlandish and combined with Milosevic's questionable war-time dictatorial behavior to erode credibility among many of his supporters.

At great cost and somewhat counterintuitively, western military intervention had a multiplier effect with other influences on breakthrough by helping to crystallize widespread anger at a number of worsening social and economic ills that the regime could not remedy and that the opposition eventually capitalized on. Growing dissidence and disaffection helped to reanimate the regime's opposition that, in turn, struggled to turn the public's anger into active resistance.

### Economic and Trade Sanctions

An arms embargo was in place around Yugoslavia (then composed of the two remaining republics of Serbia and Montenegro) as early as 1991 with the adoption of UN Resolution 713 condemning Yugoslavia's actions in Croatia. UN resolution 787 followed in 1992, imposing economic and trade sanctions and freezing the country's foreign assets in response to Milosevic's support for Serbian separatist forces in Bosnia. By 1993, most UN member states complied with these prohibitions, precluding access to industrial export markets, spare parts, raw materials and consumer goods. At the time, it was a rare display of broad international consensus toward an outlaw state. The blockade, however, was imperfect and led to the creation of a sanctions-evading nouveau riche criminal class with strong ties to the regime. After the signing of the "Dayton Accords" ending the Bosnia war in 1995, most restrictions were lifted with the exception of "outer wall" prohibitions against membership in international financial institutions and participation in multi-lateral organizations. By 1999 and the Kosovo war, however, nearly all previous arms, economic and trade restrictions were re-imposed with the addition of a prohibition on oil sales to Serbia and a ban on commercial air traffic.

In the short run, sanctions and a weakened economy were a net positive for Milosevic. Economic decline created dependency on the regime for infrequent wages and benefit payments. The sense of foreign persecution that Milosevic sharpened through his control of the media as a basis for regional wars and ethnic solidarity were well served by the sense of isolation imposed by UN Resolutions and bi-lateral prohibitions. The opportunities the gray and black market afforded helped create a loyal and obedient insulating layer of enterprising retainers around

Milosevic with an interest in keeping sanctions in place. The government under Milosevic could export capital without close scrutiny and move large amounts of funds internally to shore up lagging support in sectors and areas of the country where dissent began to emerge. Internal critics were accused of being vassals to foreign centers of power – the same powers that were blamed for the immiseration of the public.<sup>17</sup>

By 1999, however, three phases of capital arrogation had largely run their course and the regime's beneficiaries would begin to believe that it was no longer possible to extract much more out of the system. Hard currency accounts of Serbian citizens had been confiscated and exhausted by 1994. From 1995 onward an intensification of high level corporate theft and expropriation of public funds resulted in sharp declines in formal employment and public service delivery. By 1997 and the third round of expropriation, Milosevic resorted to selling state assets like Serbia Telecom in order to raise the resources necessary to maintain his patronage networks.<sup>18</sup> Additional plans to sell breweries, the state power company, a department store chain and the national airline to foreign investors were only stalled by new sanctions and the ensuing inflation with the Kosovo war.<sup>19</sup> When a new Serbian civic group of economists called G17 gained access to critical financial documents after Milosevic's defeat, they found that only \$250 million remained in state reserves.<sup>20</sup>

This exhaustion of liquidity had the effect of creating tension and doubt within Milosevic's trusted circle of allies. By November 1999, it appeared fear of unrest and betrayal as a result of this relentless decline in spoils motivated Milosevic to dismiss Air Force chief Ljubisa Velickovic, Army Chief of Staff Momcilo Perisic, Socialist Party chief Milorad Vucelic, head of State Security Jovica Stanisic and more than a dozen top officers in the security services. Figures like Perisic would later turn on Milosevic and assist the opposition in organizing both an electoral challenge and successful demonstrations on October 5<sup>th</sup>.

By late 1999 and 2000, the cumulative effects of inequalities of wealth between a circle of rich elites and average citizens, confiscated foreign currency accounts, unpaid benefits and salaries, inflation and a lack of access to consumer goods began to incite health workers, teachers, bus and train drivers as well as Kosovo war veterans. G17 economists and financial experts were uncovering and publishing the tragic dimensions of Serbia's economy and how little actual

reconstruction was actually taking place after NATO airstrikes, despite regime claims to the contrary. Radio B-92 and its network of associated radio stations also produced compelling programming revealing the growing gap between the Serbian government's claims and economic reality, amplifying overall dissent and contributing to the erosion of the mythos surrounding the regime in the process. This gap in opposing claims about economic reality may have been a reflection of Milosevic's own delusional understanding about domestic economic conditions. Richard Miles, then U.S. Chief of Mission to Yugoslavia describes how he pressed Milosevic on the high price of basic staples during a meeting in 1998. "We ended up having a furious argument about the price of eggs" with the Serbian president maintaining that they were much less expensive than they really were.<sup>21</sup>

By 2000, the ill effects and causes of poor economic performance and capital flight from Serbia were increasingly undeniable. "As we understood these things we prepared for our own Gdansk", says Danko Cosic, a founder of the Belgrade-based Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID). "Serbs learned that the enemy was within that year and it was not sanctions and bombs but the regime that was responsible for how we lived."<sup>22</sup> Milosevic called for elections that September instead of waiting until they were required the following year for a number of reasons. The political opposition was in disarray, the regime's ability to leverage its economic control into critical patronage was weakening and few resources existed for the repair of critical infrastructure that was damaged from the Kosovo war or was deteriorating from long-term neglect. Milosevic also knew that his government's ability to ensure adequate electrical supplies for the coming winter was uncertain. Ultimately, economic decline caused by both internal expropriation and external pressure contributed to the accelerated timing of the election and to the levels of anger and dissatisfaction that helped the opposition *DOS* coalition prevail in breakthrough elections.<sup>23</sup>

### Diplomatic and Legal Sanctions

Prior to 1997, much of the West still valued Milosevic as a guarantor of stability and security in the Balkans as a result of his assistance in brokering the 1995 "Dayton Accords". In May of 1997, however, U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright signaled that the U.S. would no longer continue to ignore the behavior of the regime toward its internal critics. Subsequent diplomatic and legal sanctions by the U.S. and others that followed suit began to diminish the regime's

internal cohesion and constrain its political alternatives abroad. These sanctions were not without controversy, however.

Many figures in the Serbian opposition complained that the May 1999 Hague indictment of Milosevic and four others for actions in Kosovo foreclosed a chance for Milosevic's negotiated and peaceful exit from power. Also a source of contention was the not-so-private discord between U.S. envoys Robert Gelbard and Richard Holbrooke about how and whether to engage Milosevic, even after Albright began to put distance between the U.S. and the regime. Other confusing signals were sent by the U.S. State Department as it attempted to pick a horse in the Serbian opposition to support. Their attention would pendulum between a preference for Draskovic or Djindjic until June 2000. Impatient and unsuccessful efforts by the U.S. and Britain to "create a decisive moment" in 2000 before elections were announced in July were also confusing and often overrode the sensibilities of the opposition. The delay of any significant engagement with the civic and political opposition until 1997 and the evacuations and bombing that followed just 24 months later made the use of soft power and diplomatic persuasion more difficult in any case.

On the positive side, a Hague indictment gave Milosevic an expiration date and made him an international outlaw. After the indictment was issued, the U.N. was more easily able to penetrate the labyrinth of bank accounts Milosevic and his allies used in Cyprus, although this proved less fruitful than anticipated. A travel ban on nearly eight hundred individuals in Milosevic's coterie, threats of financial ruin for Milosevic allies and direct contacts with several Milosevic associates and family friends successfully peeled away support as well, as in the case of TV Pink proprietor Zeljko Mitrovic.<sup>24</sup>

Diplomacy also became more byzantine after 1998. It was a poorly kept secret that the British and Americans had developed a larger, extensive "white list" and a "black list" of individuals that might (or might not) expect to face criminal charges, bankruptcy and a permanent loss of travel privileges if they did not distance themselves from Milosevic. This alarmed many of the regime's business and media allies as Milosevic's ability to improvise and revive his political standing diminished. Adding to this uncertainty was the effort by the British Foreign Office to bring together nearly all major figures in Milosevic's civic and political opposition beginning in

1999. The initiative, called the “New Serbia Forum”, created a comprehensive plan for a post-Milosevic Serbia, including provisions to punish the corrupt and those who committed atrocities under the ancien regime.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to sticks, carrots were also used. Following the indictments, promises by the U.S. and European countries of easily obtainable travel visas, the lifting of outer wall sanctions, easier access to Europe’s markets and improved relations were also made, all in the event of an opposition victory in any upcoming poll. But in the wake of NATO bombing the intended impact of these gestures was deflected by the insular political culture of the moment within Serbia that regarded such overtures and commitments as unreliable.

While the influence of diplomatic and legal sanctions were variable overall, their most potent contribution was to impart a growing sense of entropy surrounding the regime. As international consensus for regime change hardened and international critics appeared to number Milosevic’s days, patronage networks and the aura of invincibility surrounding the autocrat weakened, making the September 2000 election as much a referendum on Serbia’s future as it was a plebiscite on Milosevic’s ability to continue in office.

### *Diffusion*

Diffusion was the most consistent external influence on breakthrough in Serbia over the decade, factoring in as early as 1991. While it was the most sustained influence, it was not the most important. Direct democracy assistance would prove most influential largely due to the intensity and breadth of assistance from 1997 onward. Valerie Bunce and Susan Wolchik define diffusion as a “process wherein new ideas, institutions, policies, models or repertoires of behavior spread geographically” from one country to another.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Serbia, being in the neighborhood of several other instances of regime change encouraged diffusion among activists and countries sharing post-communist structural similarities as well as the same existential questions about their economies, security and sovereignty.

A first wave of breakthroughs in the region occurred between 1988 and 1992 and included East Germany, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. A second wave from 1996 to

1998 saw Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia shake off their own autocrats in electoral breakthroughs. Serbia was a tougher case, however. For most of the decade Milosevic was adept at pirouetting around his international critics and blunting the force of his domestic opponents, giving him a longevity in office that other regional autocrats lacked. Moreover, after 1998 Serbia became increasingly isolated, especially after the evacuation of most aid groups and embassies the following year. No outside monitors observed elections and networks of contacts among civic actors with the outside world diminished as the confrontation with NATO radicalized Serbian politics and xenophobia eroded both an ability and willingness to embrace outside help, especially from western sources.

Regional activists from breakthroughs in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Croatia were well placed to pierce the insulation surrounding Serbia. They could more easily enter the country and they were more trusted and safer to deal with than western contacts. These activists and advisors also enjoyed credibility from their own struggle and a history of being influenced, in turn, by Serbia's protests in 1996/1997. The International Republican Institute (IRI) helped bring in the Slovak Marek Kapusta of the Pontis Foundation to work with OTPOR. In a rare acknowledgement of outside influence, two founders of OTPOR, Srdja Popovic and Ivan Marovic, maintain it was Kapusta that helped refine and develop the complementary two-pronged "Vreme Je!" (It's Time!) and "Gotov Je!" (He's Finished!) campaigns that OTPOR and Izlaz 2000 so effectively deployed.<sup>27</sup> "We invented the two track approach on Kapusta's advice about what the donor's would like – one easy campaign for the civic groups, not hard edged, and one advocating an extra-constitutional change of government" admitted Marovic. The Slovak Pavol Demes of the German Marshall Fund helped Izlaz 2000 organizers understand and emulate the Slovak OK98 civic movement and experience. Demes, Kapusta and the Slovakian ambassador to Serbia at the time helped mediate and fundraise with western donors as well as negotiate the gulf between Serbian civic groups and the Serbian political opposition as well.

After CeSID organizers traveled to Bulgaria and Poland in 1997 and 1999 to witness elections and speak with civic organizers there, Kapusta and Croatian activists worked alongside the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) to help CeSID develop the vote tallying mechanisms the organization employed to protect polling data in September. Additionally, the East-West Foundation brought regional civic and political leaders together to compare experiences,



including one famous meeting in Bratislava in July 2000 when the announcement of September elections was made. According to Steven Grand, then the German Marshall Fund's (GMF) director of programs, key Serbian figures in the room wanted to boycott but regional activists and political leaders in attendance helped them to reconsider.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, influences like these convinced the political opposition to eventually unite and contest elections.

Pressure to work in a united fashion, amplified by similar efforts by international donors, may have been one of the most important contributions of these regional activists and politicians. They were able to leverage their credibility to advance an inclusive social movement model that overcame the sometimes caustic relationships between civic and political leaders in Serbia. Most importantly, they were on the ground and spent long periods with Serbian opposition actors when most representatives of international organizations could not. They were “affirmers” and “refiners” that could speak of their own successes and failures of unity, like the Slovak debacle in 1994 when opposition gains collapsed as consensus among the victorious parties unraveled.

In over eighty interviews with Serbian opposition political leaders, media professionals and civic activists, the importance of diffusion was consistently cited. Regional breakthroughs and actors reminded them “they too could do it”, that there were proven ways to go about regime change, that they were not alone and that it was okay to tailor the advice and encouragement received from regional allies and international sources to the Serbian context. Kapusta, for one, was impressed by OTPOR's use of humor against the regime; it was something new for the veteran of Slovakia's struggle for democracy.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Direct Democracy Assistance*

As the most influential of all external factors, direct democracy assistance deserves a more lengthy treatment. While small amounts of democracy promotion assistance from the U.S.-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the George-Soros financed Fund for an Open Society became available in 1988 and 1991 respectively, it was not until 1997 that significant democracy aid flowed to those in the opposition community within Serbia and Montenegro. By 1999, the amount of these resources more than trebled. Democracy-promotion assistance from all sources totaled nearly \$150 million in the period 1988 – 2000, including the value of consulting, training, polling and direct aid composed of goods and support costs. Nearly two

thirds of this amount was expended in 1999 and 2000 alone. Four features of this assistance were most responsible for making this variable the most convincing external factor contributing to breakthrough.

*Coordination:* Five major international democracy promotion conferences among aid providers active in Serbia took place after 1997. Among funders supporting independent media in Serbia, coordination meetings took place every six months. In 1999 and 2000, the GMF began regular coordination meetings in Washington that were attended by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), State Department personnel and representatives of several implementing organizations. Coordination among foreign assistance professionals in the field was also unusual. Expatriate staff of embassies, donor agencies and implementing organizations that were evacuated from Serbia to Budapest and Szeged, Hungary as well as Skopje, Macedonia just prior to NATO airstrikes constituted informal and congenial “off-shore” communities where tactical and strategic information was regularly exchanged after March 1999.

The results of consensus among capitals and coordination in the field included a single application form that Serbian media outlets and civic organizations could use to apply for grants from most funders as well as general agreement on reporting formats. Multi-donor collaboration on large media support projects, elections training and civil society support was also made easier with this frequent consultation. Consensus also made it possible to avoid exhausting the human and diplomatic capital that is often consumed in the struggle to develop strategic coherence in high profile aid venues. As a consequence there was very little turnover in the personnel of embassies, donor agencies or implementing organizations throughout the period despite the hardships of these posts and their temporary, “off-shore” offices. This valuable reservoir of institutional knowledge and the relationships these professionals developed in Serbia prior to their evacuation provided continuity and the basis for enduring partnerships with Serbian activists during the absence of most aid providers through the breakthrough period.

*“Venture Capital” Assistance:* International consensus on regime change as of 1999 came as an enormous relief for many Serbian activists. An emphasis on more confrontational anti-regime initiatives and on “whatever worked” also encouraged the growth of “venture capital” approaches to aid initiatives. By design, much of the aid provided by the NED, USAID’s Office

of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and the Fund for an Open Society was already of this type. But other more traditional forms of aid also became entrepreneurial. Typical reporting and accounting mechanisms for most types of assistance were relaxed and grant processing times shortened by early 2000. To Paige Alexander of the U.S. based International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), an implementer of media assistance in Serbia, this flexibility and a willingness to suspend some of USAID's more cumbersome approval processes "made it possible to effectively and reactively target opportunities as they arose even when we were not in Serbia".<sup>30</sup>

*"Arms-Length" Engagement:* In fact, the expatriate democracy promotion community was absent from Serbia during the most intense period of breakthrough mobilization. Many embassies and foreign organizations experienced two brief evacuations before a third and final exit took place in March of 1999. Most western embassies and aid offices would not return until 2001. These withdrawals from Serbia under tense circumstances had the effect of prompting international assistance providers to rely more on the judgment of their courageous local staff that remained in the country and their local partners' descriptions of opportunities and appropriate priorities. Moreover, beneficiaries like OTPOR sometimes reprogrammed the fungible aid they received to new emerging challenges inside Serbia – often with their donors' assent. OTPOR activists and financial managers would often reorient the OTI funds they obtained to the demands of the moment, for example, whether it was for operations costs or for demonstrations, legal aid, printing, materiel expenses and travel costs.

*Creative Financing:* The regime sharpened its scrutiny of western assistance and traditional funding channels as international antagonism toward Milosevic grew more intense. By the time the evacuation of western embassies and organizations was completed and NATO airstrikes began, many Serbian partners requested greater circumspection in the way they received support to avoid the criminal penalties and social stigma associated with western aid. As Michael Dobbs of the Washington Post would write in 2000, it was an informal but well understood rule within many organizations never to talk about western support. "To have done so would have played straight in to the hands of the Milosevic propaganda machine, which routinely depicted opposition leaders as 'traitors' or 'NATO lackeys'."<sup>31</sup> Most groups still requested aid but

insisted that it be discrete. As a result, the provision of some types of democracy assistance became more clandestine.

Before their final evacuation, the British embassy used its diplomatic pouch to provide important satellite decoder equipment to Radio B92 for its network affiliates. Civic groups also describe how they would send trusted individuals to the German and Dutch embassies to pick up grant funds under the guise of seeking a visa. After evacuation, the Norwegian and Hungarian embassies carried local staff salaries, grant funds and equipment for USAID grantees in their diplomatic vehicles over the border from Budapest to Belgrade. Other western support to partners inside Serbia was routed to their foreign bank accounts to avoid detection by the regime's financial police. Another method entailed wiring funds to the foreign accounts of Belgrade-based travel agencies that would then launder these donor funds into hard currency made available over the counter to grantees inside Serbia. OTPOR's financial manager Slobodan Homen frequently forwarded the western funding his organization received in their bank accounts in Vienna to the foreign accounts of supporters living in Belgrade with currency on hand that, in turn, made cash available to OTPOR inside Serbia.

The EU, USAID, Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA) and the Fund for and Open Society procured and then protected communications and data processing equipment for use during the 2000 election campaign and subsequent protests, including the staging of a back-up, high powered terrestrial radio transmitter at Radio Pancevo, nine miles distant from Belgrade. There was also extraordinary international cooperation on initiatives to circumvent the regime's blockade of Serbian airwaves including the development of the controversial Ring Around Serbia (RAS) and Platforms for External Broadcasting ("Pebbles") systems of radio transmitters located in neighboring countries that beamed alternative information programming into Serbia.

By no means was all western democracy assistance conducted by hidden means but this discretion and the multiple streams of funding that did come into Serbia helped ensure that assistance would continue even in the face of hard dictatorship and in ways that would not compromise local partners. Training of election monitors and municipal officials, public opinion research, political party development and media production activities often proceeded as before – either conducted from offices such as USAID's temporary location just over the border in

Szeged, Hungary or inside Serbia using local expertise or third country nationals. More often than not, however, less than overt means were employed to support the requests for assistance that came from inside Serbia in the regime's final eighteen months.

Together these sources of aid constituted a multi-front, redundant and ad hoc arrangement of providing support that contributed to the durability of the assistance effort. A high level of coordination among these assistance providers, their arms-length partnerships with Serbian counterparts and a general agreement on the singular goal of regime change kept such a diverse array of international organizations from otherwise creating havoc in Serbia.



Each of these four characteristics enhanced the effectiveness of democracy aid. Yet it was the persistence of many in the political and civic opposition, the commitment of free media professionals, as well as the courage of citizens that provided many of the ideas, priorities and opportunities meriting assistance. Democracy assistance broadened and deepened opposition to Milosevic but, as Thomas Carothers suggests, “the aid campaign was a facilitator of change, not an engine of it”.<sup>32</sup> Several examples of this facilitation are worth mentioning.

#### OTPOR

The student-based resistance movement, OTPOR, appeared in 1998. It was as much a reaction to the failure of students that year to roll back restrictive university legislation as it was to be an inspired new attempt to overcome the shortcomings of past resistance efforts and channel the public's readily visible and growing discontent with the regime into social action. The organization did not begin to actively recruit large numbers of activists until after NATO airstrikes subsided in June 1999. By August 2000, OTPOR counted eighty-thousand members in 130 branches and the student initiative had become more of a people's movement composed of pensioners, academics, laborers, housewives and veterans as well as youth.<sup>33</sup>

Many of OTPOR's most effective mobilization tactics entailed humorous, choreographed street theater-style events calculated to avoid creating an "us" versus "them" attitude with other citizens or critical parts of the regime. On holidays OTPOR had members of the organization bring cakes and sweets to police stations. OTPOR also did the same for conscripts and officers in barracks on Army Day. When the pensioners had strikes, OTPOR joined them. When the Serbian State Information Minister labeled the organization a "neo-fascist terrorist group" in May 2000, OTPOR activists made light of how diminutive youths in t-shirts fell short of the terrorist stereotype. When a confrontation with police was necessary, women were in the front ranks of such marches instead of toughs. As part of the training for actions, protestors were advised that, if arrested, they should gently engage police during captivity. "This is how we knew, since May (2000), that there was wavering loyalty in the police and army. He was finished by then," maintains Popovic. "It was all over but the technical part."<sup>34</sup>

OTPOR became a critical "third way" between a political opposition and a civic sector regarded by OTPOR's founders and many citizens as inept and enfeebled. As OTPOR grew in influence

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*"The day I saw my OTPOR t-shirt on the clothesline that my mother had previously refused to wash I knew he was finished"*

-OTPOR activist, as relayed by Rich McClear, Country Director (IREX) Serbia, 1999.

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inside Serbia so did the value of the international support they received. The total amount of funding provided to OTPOR in the two month period of August and September 2000 reached \$1.5 million, much of it offered with little to no supervision and for initiatives that originated among a close-knit group of creative activists.<sup>35</sup>

Foreign assistance did alter OTPOR's course. The founders of OTPOR claimed some inspiration for their mobilization approach from the peace researcher Gene Sharp, but primarily as affirmation of something they intuitively grasped from earlier episodes of resistance and were already applying before they became aware of Sharp's work. Their largest funders were the NED, OTI, the Fund for an Open Society and the British Embassy but support they received from all sources enabled the movement to expand its training and outreach efforts, maintain a growing number of support staff, plan and hold increasing numbers of protest events and print and distribute larger runs of posters, leaflets, t-shirts, stickers and branding symbols like the clenched fist logo that became their ubiquitous icon. Illustrative of this support was USAID's provision of 80 tons of adhesive

paper to produce the stark “Gotov Je!” (“He’s Finished!”) and clenched-fist logo stickers that appeared in the cities and towns of Serbia prior to the September 2000 election in one of OTPOR’s boldest and best remembered campaigns. OTPOR had the presence, innovation and insight to effectively mobilize the public. External aid enabled them to operate in a capacity and on a scale they otherwise would have had difficulty attaining.

### The Political Opposition

The Serbian public could hardly be blamed for regarding their political opposition as feckless. Attempts to form coherent coalitions to challenge Milosevic including *DEPOS* in 1992, *Zajedno* in 1996 and the *Alliance for Change* in 1998 and 2000 failed and revealed how parties allied in their opposition to Milosevic were poles apart in their positions on leadership, election boycotts, outreach and policy. Often the failures resulted from petty bickering and unsuccessful efforts to broker a truce between the two main opposition parties, the *Democratic Party of Serbia* (DS) and the *Serbian Renewal Movement* (SPO).

By late 1999, international observers and civic leaders inside Serbia worried that despite the public’s growing resentment of the regime, Milosevic would prevail in any upcoming election if a viable bloc did not emerge to challenge him. NDI public opinion polling that year revealed two countervailing trends. The percentage of respondents that held Milosevic responsible for the deplorable conditions inside Serbia had risen to 70 percent; yet a majority of respondents also “felt that the parties in the opposition ‘were self-interested, uncooperative, likely to fall apart, temporary’.”<sup>36</sup> Neither the DS leader Zoran Djindjic nor the SPO leader Vuk Draskovic registered as strong alternative candidates in the polls. Convincing them of this was another matter.

In October 1999, NDI public opinion polling consultant Douglas Schoen presented his conclusions to leading members of the Serbian opposition in Budapest. As Schoen writes, the polling “showed that a truly united opposition would best Milosevic’s ruling Socialist Party (SPS) by a thumping 46 percent to 26 percent.” “It was time to unify behind a common candidate or risk four more years of Milosevic as president,” he added.<sup>37</sup> According to NDI’s Chief of Party at the time, Paul Rowland, the meeting did not go well; especially after Schoen

reminded them that the chances of opposition victory would be greatly reduced if any of the established opposition figures were to lead an opposition bid.<sup>38</sup>

Schoen and NDI continued to poll, sometimes on a weekly basis, and to share their findings with the major opposition parties that remained in disarray well into 2000. Data included information on which topics would resonate with voters, the fluctuations of opinion among Serbia's major cities and towns and which political figures might lead a viable opposition challenge. Only with the galvanizing July 2000 announcement of upcoming elections in September did the opposition rally, however, forming the *Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS)* and selecting the little known but respected Vojislav Kostunica as their leading candidate. Kostunica was not charismatic but he enjoyed surprising popularity in NDI's surveys. He brought focus, calm dignity and incorruptible, nationalist credentials to the indocile opposition.<sup>39</sup>

Schoen's last pre-election poll showed Kostunica ahead at 56 percent to Milosevic's 26 percent, a margin that both comforted the opposition and made it clear that Milosevic would not win in a fair election. The NDI and the IRI quickly reoriented the majority of their resources to get-out-the-vote initiatives, advising the Kostunica campaign, developing parallel vote count capacities and election monitoring training in anticipation of a contested election.

It is unlikely that this aid alone, originating primarily with U.S. sources, served as the tipping point for the creation of *DOS* and the selection of Kostunica. What is clear is that the external resources that were provided to the opposition before and during the campaign certainly enhanced the effectiveness of the opposition after *DOS* was formed. The accumulation of technical and human capital within party organizations as a consequence of polling data, campaign advising, material and operational support as well as preparations to increase turnout, monitor the election and to protect the vote contributed to the success of breakthrough, shaping both the timing and character of regime change that October.

#### Media Assistance

By the early 1990s, Milosevic had managed to consolidate control over most print and nearly all broadcast outlets with a few notable exceptions. At least five alternative print publications had small circulations but loyal readers. Alternative voices in radio included Radio Bajina Basta,



Radio Smederevo, Radio Kragujevac, Radio Boom 93 (Pozarevac), as well as Radio Television Studio B, Radio Index and Radio B92 in Belgrade. Radio B92 was particularly vital with its irreverent and defiant prankster ethic that mimicked the young *rokeri* street milieu of its audience in the early 1990s.

It wasn't until the civic protests of 1997 that audience share for alternative media outlets began to grow, however. Public suspicion of state-controlled media's poor coverage of the elections controversy that year created greater interest in alternative sources of news and information. In addition, nineteen municipal-owned radio and television stations emerged from the shadow of regime influence by May after the opposition took control of the towns it had won in local elections. A newly formed Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) would incorporate many of these radio stations into its membership. Operating largely around the hub of Radio B92 and its director Veran Matic, ANEM affiliates began to use the internet and a few donated satellite decoders to rebroadcast four hours of B92-produced news and Serbian language BBC World Service programming in 1998. B-92 would email an encrypted copy of its program to the BBC that in turn would uplink the stream to a satellite over Serbia that affiliates could downlink through decoders for local broadcast. For the first time, independent media could rival the reach of the regime. "It was a reawakening – the real beginning", says Sonja Licht, then director of the Fund for an Open Society in Belgrade. "For the first time in a long time it looked like we had a real chance".<sup>40</sup>

Media assistance increased in 1997, prompted by the opposition's political gains and the success of Radio B-92 and its ANEM affiliates. Additionally, Rich and Suzy McClear, respected media professionals that served as advisors to the U.S.-based International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) helped sell Matic's idea for an expanded ANEM to the U. S. Embassy's Democracy Commission and OTI, giving technical legitimacy to B-92's ambitious yet undeveloped goals for a radio network. The U.S. increased media grant funding to almost \$2 million, five times what was provided in 1996. Support from the Fund for an Open Society offices in Belgrade and Budapest along with EU and bi-lateral donors easily doubled this amount. The U.S. provided early grants of assistance to free media that year through the Democracy Commission and OTI. Additional sources of significant assistance that came later were typically channeled through the NED, NDI, IREX and Internews.

The priority of most funders was to develop broadcast media in Serbia, especially radio. Print outlets were too incapacitated by the regime's control of newsprint and distribution networks to displace their state-connected counterparts. ANEM became a favorite partner. By June 1998, ANEM's radio broadcasts had reached 33 stations thanks to technical upgrades, operational support, the provision of additional satellite link equipment and programming assistance that leveraged the capacities and creative abilities of B-92 and the network's affiliates.

By October 1998, however, the heightened tensions and radicalization of Serbian politics during the confrontation with the West over Kosovo shifted the trajectory of free media into reverse. The regime closed three ANEM affiliates after charging them with taking part in the "psychological war by Western forces". An additional twenty ANEM stations would struggle with various forms of legal and financial harassment. In March 1999, shortly after NATO bombing began, B-92's offices were seized and would remain in regime hands until after breakthrough. By August, Matic would start B2-92 in its place with operations based in small offices and private homes in Belgrade.

Donors retrenched, reorienting much of their media assistance to ensure the availability of independent news and information inside Serbia and the survivability of alternative media outlets. The "Ring Around Serbia" system of FM transmitters based in the surrounding territories of Kosovo, Bosnia, Croatia and Romania was established to broadcast content from Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, the BBC, Deutsche Welle and Radio France International into Serbia. Later, international advisors helped Matic negotiate access to Romanian and Bosnian transmitters to relay Serbian-origin broadcasts terrestrially back into Serbia. IREX, Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA) and British sources stocked spare terrestrial transmitters as well as satellite link equipment inside Serbia to replace those that the regime confiscated and to use, as needed, to disseminate news of street violence and word of a regime crackdown. The EU, OTI, Soros and the Swedish Helsinki Commission continued to underwrite the operations costs of the Belgrade Media Center and to use it as a resource and venue for donor programs offering legal advice, technical assistance and technical training for journalists and civic groups during period.

By late 1999, Matic continued the internet stream through the BBC to the few stations still operating within the ANEM network and he received support to develop a second stream of 24-hour satellite programming that would be available to anyone in Serbia with a satellite dish. Internet equipment upgrades, like switching equipment allowing streaming audio and video, were critical. This external assistance and their own perseverance and expertise helped ANEM regain a broadcasting footprint of 32 radio stations by May 2000 using B2-92's internet and satellite downlink capabilities. "With the internet we knew we could not be stopped," said Matic reflecting on his station's use of the medium. "We felt safer. It was a great feeling".<sup>41</sup> ANEM affiliates and the independent Radio Index would be instrumental in relaying the results of parallel vote counts and evidence of electoral manipulation. A network of taxi radios and a previously neutral sports radio station were also used to relay logistical information for the Belgrade protests on October 5<sup>th</sup>.

It is unlikely that the courageous and creative professionals that staffed and maintained media outlets in Serbia would have attained the same degree of durability, impact and reach without external assistance, despite their innovation and resolve. The ability of indigenous outlets to survive and claim sufficient media space in the lead up to and in the midst of breakthrough meant free media would contribute to the accumulation of revolutionary potential and become a catalyst of that potential as coverage of electoral results mobilized mass protests that October.

### Civic Campaigns

Civil society groups in Serbia were nearly as divided and distrusted as the political opposition. Not until early 2000 did a coordinated front of civic groups begin to join in a campaign to mobilize voters throughout Serbia. Until that time, most donors provided small grants to an atomized civic community that included powerful organizations such as the Humanitarian Law Center, the Center for Anti-War Action, the Belgrade Circle, the Center for Development of the Non-Profit Sector, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, the Autonomous Women's Center and others. But it was difficult for any single or small group of organizations to make an impact despite international support for operational costs, training, materials and other technical assistance.

Yet, in August 2000, at the height of the civic campaign then known as “Izlaz (Exit) 2000”, one hundred and fifty NGOs and media outlets were participating in a coordinated get-out the vote and voter education effort. It was an unprecedented development in Serbia among many organizations that were typically wary of being “politicized”. What accounted for the collaborative endeavor?

First, a longer term learning process fueled by the diffusion of lessons from other democratic transitions in the region contributed to a growing understanding of a common interest in the democratization of the country. Second, the constellation of forces that involved a united opposition, a profoundly unpopular autocrat, popular unrest and a real chance of regime change was an irresistible alignment for many groups intent on democratizing political process in Serbia. Third, the campaign’s activities were to officially be political but not partisan, encouraging citizens to participate in upcoming elections and to understand and protect the electoral process. Fourth, the campaign was initiated by a diverse cadre of capable and respected Serbian organizations including the Foundation for Peace and Conflict Management, the Trade Unions “Independence”, Civic Initiatives and CeSID. The gravitas of these founding groups lent credibility to the enterprise. Finally, the campaign’s primary international supporters included the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Fund for an Open Society, the Know How Fund of Great Britain, the Dutch and Swiss Embassies in Belgrade, the German interest section in Belgrade, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, NDI, OTI, IRI and USAID’s E & E Bureau. Many of these donors had consistently advocated the joining of civic forces in the past and now worked through the Izlaz campaign’s “Donors’ Forum” and “Campaign Coordination Board” to centrally fund civic action related to the election. Together donors provided an estimated \$8 million toward civic campaign activities, including the “Vreme Je!” (It’s Time!) initiative.<sup>42</sup>

CeSID was particularly important in the breakthrough effort in 2000. From past experience in the 1992 and 1997 election debacles, both international and domestic observers knew Milosevic would steal the vote particularly if the expected result promised to be uncertain. CeSID, with a budget of \$1.8 million from the NED, NDI, OTI, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the Australian and German embassies, directed several get-out-the-vote initiatives and media campaigns as well as recruitment drives for election workers. Along with

the Yugoslav Lawyers Committee for Human Rights and the Belgrade Center for Human Rights, CeSID developed handbooks and manuals for election monitors and poll workers. But it was CeSID's preparations for gathering and protecting election results, together with *DOS*'s own parallel vote tallies, that verified the opposition's victory. While the IRI funded the training of nearly 16,000 election monitors and helped *DOS* develop its own poll watching system, it was primarily NDI that helped CeSID develop a network of seven backup locations and servers to secure election data provided by poll watchers deployed throughout the country.

External actors helped persuade other civic groups to join in the Izlaz 2000 campaign once it was established by local organizations. By channeling support through the initiative and sharing experiences from other breakthrough efforts in the region, they helped the campaign achieve the proportions its founder's envisioned. And without additional external aid facilitating the work of election monitors and CeSID, definitive knowledge of the stolen elections may not have transformed the revolutionary potential of Milosevic's critics into a revolutionary situation, a situation where the organizational capacities of the political opposition, media and civic groups could then effectively contribute to a breakthrough outcome.<sup>43</sup>

### *III. Causal Analysis*

While most of this analysis has concentrated on the five external influences described above, internal factors were critical to breakthrough in Serbia. Any analysis of causation must examine the interaction of internal and external variables, look to see if effects accumulated over time, investigate economic, social and political features of the environment that may have contributed to breakthrough and also determine if any catalysts were responsible for igniting revolutionary potential. To do this it is useful to categorize external and internal factors into four types: those that have *cumulative influence*, *structural influence*, *concurrent influence* and *catalysts*.

*Cumulative influences* are additive over time, even if the impact of such factors does not accumulate by regular degrees or additions. *Structural influences* are inherent characteristics of the social, economic, political and cultural environment that contribute more to revolutionary potential than they may take away from it. *Concurrent influences* are developments that originate either at or shortly before the moment of breakthrough. These are factors that may tip the balance of revolutionary action in favor of success or failure and might involve the cleaving of a regime

into more moderate elements, assassinations or the defection of key allies or institutions. In Serbia, an extraordinarily important *concurrent influence* was the defection of formal and informal security forces. *Catalysts* are events or actions that rapidly accelerate the mobilization of revolutionary potential.

Internal factors contributing to breakthrough in Serbia traverse all four categories of influence while external contributions to breakthrough may generally be characterized as being *cumulative influences*, with some distinctions able to be drawn over when and how their influence on breakthrough was most pronounced.

Diagram 1: Internal and External Contributors to Breakthrough, by Type

Internal Factor	Type	External Factor	Type
Civic Action & Democratic Opposition	Cumulative influence	Direct Democracy Assistance	Cumulative influence
Free Media	Cumulative influence	Diffusionary Effects	Cumulative influence
Economic Failure	Structural influence	Economic & Trade Sanctions	Cumulative influence
Semi-Autoocracy	Structural influence	Diplomatic & Legal Sanctions	Cumulative influence
Nationalism and Historical Memory	Structural influence	Military Intervention	Cumulative influence
Defection of Security Forces	Concurrent influence		
1. Sept 24 Elections (called July 2000) 2. Voting Fraud Revelations	Catalysts		

Among external factors, *direct democracy assistance* and *diffusionary effects* made the most straightforward contributions toward breakthrough. Their impact accumulated over time, with diffusion having incremental influence over the decade and direct democracy assistance beginning to have substantial influence only after 1997. By 2000, the effects of both factors were maximal due to the increased sophistication of Milosevic’s rivals, the arms-length engagement of external actors, the attentiveness of regional activists to civic mobilization within Serbia and the availability of increasing amounts of foreign democracy assistance. Both factors were particularly important, for example, in the successful efforts of CeSID, Izlaz 2000, *DOS* and free media outlets in getting out the vote and then protecting and broadcasting election results. Revelations of Milosevic’s defeat and vote fraud had a catalytic effect, escalating the

potential for breakthrough and contributing to Milosevic's removal from power eleven days later.

The influences of these two cumulative external factors were greatest on the two internal factors that were also cumulative; namely, the growth of *civic action and the democratic opposition* and the development of *free media*. Both internal factors benefitted from increases in foreign democracy assistance and consistent exposure to regional activists and professionals. As a consequence, they were able to deepen the well of revolutionary potential in Serbia by the time elections were announced in mid-2000. Even the internal, *concurrent influence of defections among security forces* can be traced to the capabilities of regime critics and free media in 2000; both were augmented by external democracy assistance and experienced, regional activists.

The other external factors of *economic and trade sanctions, diplomatic and legal sanctions, and military intervention* had an inconsistent influence on internal factors, and on breakthrough in general. *Economic and trade sanctions* and *military intervention* contributed to *economic failure* and the general sense of entropy surrounding the regime in its last twenty-four months. *Diplomatic and legal sanctions* also contributed to the sense of political decay around the regime as indictments and covert efforts to peel away support from Milosevic enjoyed some success. In addition, diplomatic pressure over the decade contributed to Milosevic's decisions to maintain lacunae of democratic expression in Serbia – *semi-autocracy* - at least until the war in Kosovo. All three of these external *cumulative influences* may have also contributed to the timing of the catalytic announcement of September elections in July 2000. Milosevic knew that his political options were shrinking, that his circle of allies was closing and that his regime would be insolvent well before his term expired.

Among all internal factors, *nationalism and historical memory* is the least influenced by any external factor. Milosevic's ability to successfully use ethnic chauvinism to his advantage had diminished by 2000. Ethnic nationalism, still a salient characteristic of Serbia's political culture that year, was far more ably employed by Kostunica to capture the imagination of the voting public and his campaign made use of this advantage. External influence had little to do with this development.

What then is the balance of external and internal influences on breakthrough in Serbia? Internal *structural influences*, even with the added value of the two *catalysts*, would have been insufficient to trigger breakthrough. The internal *cumulative influences* of *civic action and the democratic opposition* as well as *free media* were required to instrumentalize their structural contributions. Discontent with economic conditions, disillusionment with hard dictatorship, and the perception that Milosevic's nationalist credentials were disingenuous created conditions that were ripe for mobilization by the regime's critics. Once this growing anger was given voice by movements such as OTPOR, Izlaz 2000, the *DOS* coalition and free media, *catalysts* were better able to ignite the revolutionary potential that internal influences helped to create.

Yet, while it is likely that the sum total of influence from all of these internal factors would have amounted to breakthrough eventually, it is unlikely that breakthrough would have had the same character or timing without the contributions of external factors. External factors helped to intensify public dissatisfaction with the regime and contributed to the endurance and capabilities of the two internal *cumulative influences*. External factors also ensured revelations about vote fraud reached the public and contributed to the mass mobilization that helped convince security forces to defect. It is also likely that Milosevic's catalytic call for elections resulted because of the decay of his regime and his perception that the opposition could not mount a coherent challenge to his candidacy or easily frustrate vote fraud. External influence contributed to reversals of fortune on both counts.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

External factors shaped the character of breakthrough, supplying the kinds of resources that ultimately contributed to a peaceful transition of power. These external influences supported a struggle for democracy that was already prevalent inside Serbia, however. They did not independently originate this struggle nor create the courageous community of activists that produced it. Nor did external forces single-handedly create the degree of public disaffection over conditions in Serbia that the opposition eventually exploited. Breakthrough would likely have been accomplished without significant outside help although the character and timing of such an event is open to question.



But what would such a breakthrough have looked like? An examination of counterfactual scenarios is instructive.

This did not have to be an electoral breakthrough. While elections provided an opportunity to depose Milosevic in September 2000, a showdown was in the works over that summer. One alternative breakthrough scenario would have mass protests emerging that Fall, less an outgrowth of opposition mobilization than a spontaneous public expression of desperate dissent. External aid, without the galvanizing event of prospective elections or an organized political opposition would have been much reduced. A regime crackdown using police and security forces under Milosevic's control to dissipate protests would likely have followed. Police may have withdrawn if the army hinted they would intervene on behalf of protestors, avoiding a "rock, paper, scissors" situation resembling events in Romania where the army clashed with police after the latter had attacked protestors in 1989.<sup>44</sup> Milosevic could have then been forced out through the combined efforts of citizens in the streets and regime insiders disturbed over the autocrat's inability to govern. Without the unity-inducing effects of an election campaign, however, the role of civic leaders and the political opposition would have been uncertain and the breakthrough might have come at great cost, been violent and created an ambivalent result that would have complicated subsequent efforts to consolidate gains after regime change.

Another alternative scenario might have included a pacted breakthrough where a compromise resulted from "stalemate and dissensus" among regime and opposition elites.<sup>45</sup> As Adam Przeworski describes it, democracy may prevail when it becomes "the only game in town".<sup>46</sup> Although in the case of Serbia, a stalemate may have simply signaled a return to more robust semi-autocracy. Strategic concessions would have probably split and turned the civic and political opposition in on itself once more, undermining its attractiveness to the public. But with the regime suffering a crisis of legitimacy and liquidity it is likely the opposition would have slowly gained on Milosevic, forcing significant compromise and possibly regime change at the next best opportunity. A coup by the regime's remaining soft-liners could also not be ruled out, bringing about a new leadership that could then more easily negotiate shared powers, a transfer of authority or elections.

Yet another scenario would have included a situation where the opposition and civic actors

received much of their funding from opposition-inclined diaspora sources, Serbian business interests and other domestic patrons. Serbian activists did generally see this as “Plan B” in the event of international withdrawal or disinterest, but it was regarded as a less than satisfactory alternative. Such sources typically offered funds with serious strings attached and in smaller sums than could be obtained through aid channels. Moreover, this kind of assistance did not include difficult to procure equipment and technical support for media initiatives or for protecting the vote, and it did not include external pressure on the regime contributing to Milosevic’s vulnerability. It would have helped with party outreach and much of the work of OTPOR and initiatives like Izlaz 2000, however. In the event of an election, and even without an election, significant forces could have rallied with such resources to challenge and undermine the authority of the regime. The outcome, however, would have been far more uncertain.

As it was, however, the election was close. With all the external and internal pressures noted contributing to breakthrough and with turnout over 70 percent, Kostunica received only 51.7 percent of the vote, barely over the threshold that would necessitate a run-off with Milosevic. The constellation of internal and external influences present was sufficient to win the election that September, safeguard its results and to remove Milosevic through mass protests in October. But it was only through this partnership of factors that the Bulldozer Revolution occurred in the manner and at the time that it did, belatedly adding Serbia to the waves of democratic breakthroughs in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Jennings was Country Director of the United States Agency for International Development, Office of Transition Initiatives in Serbia and Montenegro from 1997-2000.

<sup>2</sup> For context see Lenard J. Cohen, Serpent in the Bosom: The Rise and Fall of Slobodan Milosevic, Rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002) p. 422. Original quote by Kostunica in *FoNet* News Agency Bulletin, October 2, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Sonja Licht, now Director of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence. Author interviews in June 2006 and April 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Aleksandra Joksimovic (former aide to Zoran Djindjic) interview, April 2007.

<sup>5</sup> See Lenard Cohen, Serpent in the Bosom, p. 357 for greater detail on survey results.

<sup>6</sup> For turnout figures and background on the presidential vote tallies see International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) data and sourcing at <http://www.electionguide.org/results.php?ID=949> (accessed on 8-1-2007).

<sup>7</sup> Former Yugoslav Army general Miroslav Hadžić, Belgrade interview, April 2007. Hadzic now heads the Serbian Center for Civil Military Relations.

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- <sup>8</sup> Others features of the bargain were rumored to be general amnesty for Ulemek and his organization as well as non-interference in the Red Beret's future activities. It was an agreement that Djindjic may have paid for with his life once he moved against Ulemek several years later.
- <sup>9</sup> Aleksandra Joksimovic, interview, Belgrade, April 2007
- <sup>10</sup> Corroborated by both Joksimovic and Hadžić in interviews, April 2007. Quote by Hadžić.
- <sup>11</sup> Discipline was imperiled at one point when a highly placed DOS operative, Nebojsa Covic, lead several protestors up the steps of the Parliament building prematurely and off script, injuring several policemen. While this did not rally regime defenses, this move and the subsequent burning of the Parliament building sealed Covic's reputation as being unpredictable.
- <sup>12</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees, cited in Elizabeth Becker and David Rhode "Refugees are Skeptical of Pledges", *New York Times*, June 4, 1999," pp 1, 3, 31.
- <sup>13</sup> Ivo Daalder and Michael O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo*. Brookings Institution Press, 2000. p.4
- <sup>14</sup> "Economy: Serbs Face Bleak Future After War", Steve Erlanger in *The Guardian*, 4 May, 1999 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/1999/may/04/2> accessed 13 July 2009)
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with Veran Matic, April 2007
- <sup>16</sup> See Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Bloomington, IN Washington, D.C.: Indiana University Press; Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005). p. 520
- <sup>17</sup> See Michael Palairt, "The Economic Consequences of Slobodan Milosevic" in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 53, no.6, 2001, 903-919.
- <sup>18</sup> Palairt, p. 914
- <sup>19</sup> Chuck Sudetic, *Serbia: The Milosevic Factor*, p. 14. ICG Yugoslavia Project, February 24, 1998 draft report.
- <sup>20</sup> See Louis Sell, *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (2002) p. 334 on this point. The G17 would eventually form a political party from amongst its members.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview, Richard Miles, former U.S. Chief of Mission to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1993-1998). July 2007.
- <sup>22</sup> Danko Cosic, interview April 2007.
- <sup>23</sup> See Damjan de Krnjevic-Miskovic, "Serbia's Prudent Revolution" in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2001. pp. 96-110.
- <sup>24</sup> Interview, U.S. Balkans Envoy James O'Brien, March 2006.
- <sup>25</sup> See "The New Serbia Forum: A Programme for the Reconstruction of Yugoslavia" British Association for Central and Eastern Europe, October 2000.
- <sup>26</sup> Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, "International and Post-Communist Electoral Revolutions", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 39, no.3 (September 2006) p. 285
- <sup>27</sup> Interviews with Srdja Popovic and Ivan Marovic, April 2007.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with Steven Grand, September 2007
- <sup>29</sup> See Fredo Arias-King, "Revolution is Contagious: Interview with Marek Kapusta" in *Demokratizatsiya*, January 2007.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview, Paige Alexander; Vice President of International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). July 2006
- <sup>31</sup> See Michael Dobbs, "US Advice Guided Milosevic Opposition." *Washington Post* 11 Dec. 2000: A01.
- <sup>32</sup> Tom Carothers, *Ousting Foreign Strongmen: Lessons From Serbia*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 28 July 2008 p. 4
- <sup>33</sup> General background interviews with Srdja Popovic, Ivan Marovic and Slobodan Homen; three of the dozen original founders of OTPOR. Interviews in Belgrade, April 2007.
- <sup>34</sup> Srdja Popovic, interview, Belgrade, April 2007. Date "(2000)" inserted within quote.
- <sup>35</sup> Slobodan Homen, former international liaison and financial director of OTPOR, interview April 2007.
- <sup>36</sup> See Douglas E. Schoen, *Power of the Vote*. New York: Regan Books, 2007, p. 131
- <sup>37</sup> Schoen p. 136
- <sup>38</sup> Interview with Paul Rowland, April 2007.
- <sup>39</sup> Milosevic likely did not count on a rapid response and the selection of an opposition candidate for the Yugoslav presidency when he announced elections that July. DS leader Djindjic had to be convinced to take a secondary, operational role in DOS – "and it was not easy" Paul Rowland, National Democratic Institute, phone interview, June 2006.
- <sup>40</sup> Sonja Licht, interviews June 2006 and April 2007.
- <sup>41</sup> Interview with Veran Matic, April 17, 2006

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<sup>42</sup> Pavol Demes and Joerg Forbrig, "Civic Action and Democratic Power Shifts: On Strategies and Resources" in Joerg Forbrig and Pavol Demes (eds.), *Reclaiming Democracy. Civil Society and Electoral Change in Central and Eastern Europe* (Washington DC and Bratislava: German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2007), 175-190. Available online at [http://www.gmfus.org/doc/ReclaimingDemocracy\\_web5.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org/doc/ReclaimingDemocracy_web5.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Mark Thompson and Philip Kuntz, "Stolen Elections and the October Revolution" in Serbia" in Democratic Revolutions: Asia and Eastern Europe, Routledge, 2004. p. 86 for one explanation of this transformation.

<sup>44</sup> See A.L. Binnendijk and Ivan Marovic, "Power and Persuasion: Non-Violent Strategies to Influence State Security Forces in Serbia (2000) and Ukraine (2004)" in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 39 (2006), p. 426

<sup>45</sup> O'Donnell, Guillermo and Schmitter, Phillippe C., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). p. 72.

<sup>46</sup> Przeworski, Adam, Democracy and the Market (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).