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Uniting the opposition in the run-up to electoral revolution – Lessons from Serbia 1990–2000

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(1990 to 2007). Marlene's dissertation is part of an interdisciplinary project entitled "International Intervention, Democracy and Political Parties: The External Dimension of Democratization Processes in the Balkans and the Former Soviet Union". Prior to pursuing her doctoral studies Marlene spent several years in the former Yugoslavia, where she worked for local nongovernmental organizations and regional donors.

Abstract

Dieser Beitrag widmet sich denjenigen Elementen, die dazu dienen, politische Parteien angesichts von durch autoritäre Regime gesteuerten Unterdrückungsmaßnahmen zu vereinen. Er untersucht die Faktoren, die zur Kooperation pro-demokratischer Kräfte beitragen oder diese behindern. Dazu dienen die vergleichende Analyse sowie die Gegenüberstellung erfolgreicher wie erfolgloser Ansätze, die eine solche Koalition im post-kommunistischen Serbien hervorbrachten. Die Autorin sieht dabei die Wechselwirkung von sieben Hauptfaktoren als besonders wichtig an: einen geschärften Sinn von der Notwendigkeit des Wandels; die Wahrnehmung eines kritischen Moments; öffentliche Unterstützung für die Einheit (der Opposition); Druck und Unterstützung durch die Zivilgesellschaft; Unterstützung durch die internationale Gemeinschaft; eine klare, interne Hierarchie sowie die Erfahrungen der Vergangenheit.

That the consolidation of democracy in the post-communist world¹ occurred neither "quickly" nor "smoothly" is widely recognized.² This consensus is due, at least in part, to the tumultuous set of transitions that followed the revolutions of 1989. With Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union giving way to ethnic conflict and political stagnation, the onset of liberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe was taken to symbolize the crest of the third wave.³ By the mid-1990s attention had moved from democratic breakthrough to democratic setback.

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- 1 I wish to thank Mladen Joksić, Julia Poskakukhina, André Gerrits, Max Bader and two anonymous reviewers for their comments.
 - 2 Michael McFaul, Transitions from Post-Communism. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 16 (2005) 2, p. 5–19, here 5.
 - 3 For more on the wave theory see: Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma/London 1991.

Scholars warned of a “hollowing out” of democracy accompanied by the emergence of hybrid regimes that were neither wholly democratic nor fully authoritarian.⁴ To many, the prospect of further democratic transformation appeared bleak: liberal democracy was on the wane.⁵ Thus it was all the more surprising when in the late 1990s a series of electoral revolutions ignited a democratic revival in Europe’s eastern and southeastern quarters. Analyses of such revolutions suggest that where pro-democratic political parties succeed in forming united coalitions in opposition to hybrid regimes, such revolutions are often met with success. Yet the factors that enable coalition formation remain undefined. This paper seeks to identify the elements that serve to unite political parties in the face of regime-sponsored oppression. Which efforts contribute to coalition building? What conditions must be met before parties are willing to unite? Tentative answers to these questions are offered on the basis of an in-depth comparative analysis contrasting successful and unsuccessful attempts to form a united pro-democratic coalition in post-communist Serbia. In so doing, this paper aims to generate a series of propositions regarding the factors and actors enabling coalition formation in competitive authoritarian contexts.

I. Coalition formation

Coalition formation is widely believed to have been an essential element – if not always equally so – in each of the electoral revolutions that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In a comparative case study of electoral revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, Michael McFaul found that “a viable alternative to the incumbent leader seemed critical” and thus a united opposition may be “crucial” for such revolutions to succeed.⁶ Such findings were supported by a 2006 study conducted by Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik. In their analysis of the Slovakian, Serbian and Georgian revolutions, they identified a unified political opposition as one of a handful of core components of the electoral revolutionary model.⁷ Perhaps the most thorough analysis of such breakthroughs was offered by Marc Morje Howard and Philip Roessler. In conclusions drawn from a cross-national statistical analysis of fifty competitive authoritarian regimes, the authors found the formation of a coalition of pro-democratic forces in the run-

4 Larry Diamond, *Is the Third Wave Over?* In: *Journal of Democracy*, 7 (1996) 2, p. 20–37.

5 See for example: Fareed Zakaria, *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*. In: *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (1997) 6, p. 22–43.

6 McFaul, *Transitions from Post-Communism*, p. 9.

7 Valerie Bunce/Sharon Wolchik, *Youth and Electoral Revolutions in Slovakia, Serbia, and Georgia*. In: *SAIS Review*, 26 (2006) 2, p. 55–65, here 56.

up to national elections to be the single most significant factor enabling democratic breakthrough.⁸

In light of the importance attributed to pro-democratic coalitions in competitive authoritarian contexts, one would expect the means and methods through which such coalitions are established to be well elucidated. This is not the case however. This paper therefore examines the elements that enable pro-democratic political parties to form unified coalitions in competitive authoritarian contexts. The following section gives an overview of coalition formation.

In most cases of electoral revolution – in Serbia and elsewhere – coalition formation was not without precedent. To the contrary, in many instances the opposition embarked upon a series of failed efforts to form a coalition long before regime change was achieved. Such efforts often excluded key segments of the opposition or were prone to interparty bickering. In Ukraine, for example, attempts to form a coalition were regarded as only “halfhearted”.⁹ In Slovakia, oppositional parties “underwent much-needed transformation” before coming “to the realization that in order to confront the authoritarian tendencies of the incumbent government they would have to overcome their differences.”¹⁰ This was also the case in Serbia, where despite repeated attempts to form a viable coalition, the pro-democratic opposition was widely regarded as fractured and incompetent.¹¹ Such alliances cannot be regarded as a credible challenge to authoritarian incumbents: They were thus *unsuccessful* attempts to form a unified coalition. By contrast, a *successful* attempt to form such a coalition in a competitive authoritarian context succeeds in uniting the vast majority of pro-democratic political parties – including the most significant oppositional parties – behind a clearly delineated goal. In the case of facilitating regime change, the overarching goal of such a coalition would likely be that of electorally defeating an authoritarian regime. Parties’ support for this goal must be unequivocal; there can be little doubt in the minds of the public as to the coalition’s chief objective. Moreover, parties’ disaffection for the regime must exceed their animosity towards their fellow coalition members – they cannot profess a united front in their antipathy to the ruling regime and simultaneously berate their colleagues. By comparing successful and unsuccessful attempts to form such coalitions, it may be possible to identify the factors that contribute to coalition formation in competitive authoritarian contexts.

8 Marc Morje Howard/Philip G. Roessler, Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes. In: *American Journal of Political Science*, 50 (2006) 2, p. 365–381, here 375.

9 Taras Kuzio, The Opposition’s Road to Success. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 16 (2005) 2, p. 117–130, here 122.

10 Joerg Forbrig/Pavol Demeš, Reclaiming Democracy: Civil Society and Electoral Change in Central and Eastern Europe, German Marshall Fund of the United States/Washington D.C. 2007, p. 27.

11 See for example: Serbia’s Inadequate Opposition. In: *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 27 July 2000.

This article embarks upon this effort by using post-communist Serbia as a case study. As shall be shown, in the first decade of its post-communist transition Serbia exemplified the competitive authoritarian regime-type. As did democrats in Slovakia, Croatia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, the Serbian opposition exploited national elections to achieve regime change. And as in each of these cases, Serbia's democratic forces united in the run-up to revolution. Not only did a united opposition prove essential for achieving electoral victory, but it pro-

Coalition*	Formed	Duration	Members**
AOS	June 1990	6 months	DS, SPO, NRP, DF, LP, SSSP
USDO	May 1991	3 months	SPO, SLS, ND-MS, DF
DEPOS	May 1992	1.5 years	SPO, SLS, ND-MS, SSS, DSS
DEKO	Nov. 1992	Few days	SPO, SLS, ND-MS, SSS, DSS, DS, GSS, SD
DEPOS II	Nov. 1993	3 months	SPO, ND, GSS
DA	Dec. 1995	4 months	DS, DSS, SLS, SNS
Zajedno	Nov. 1996	5 months	SPO, DS, GSS, DSS
AfC	July 1998	1.5 years	DS, GSS, DHSS
DOS	Jan. 2000	3 years***	ASNS, DA, DC, DS, DSS, GSS, DHSS, LŠ, LSV, ND, NS, PDS, RDSV, SD, SDU, SVM, VK, SDP

Figure 1: Coalitions attempted in Serbia, 1990–2000

* Associated Opposition of Serbia (AOS), United Serbian Democratic Opposition (USDO), Democratic Movement of Serbia (DEPOS), Democratic Coalition (DEKO), Democratic Alliance (DA), Alliance for Change (AfC), Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS).

** Democratic Party (DS), Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), National Radical Party (NRP), Democratic Forum (DF), Liberal Party (LP), Serbian St. Sava Party (SSSP), New Democracy – Movement for Serbia (ND-MS), Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), Serbian Peasant's Party (SSS), Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS), Social Democracy (SDP), New Democracy (ND), Democratic Christian Party (DHSS), Democratic Center (DC), Democratic Alternative (DA), Social Democratic Union (SDU), League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (LSDV), Reformist Democratic Party of Vojvodina (RSDV), Alliance of Hungarians from Vojvodina (SVM), Vojvodina Coalition (KV), Social Democracy (SD), Movement of Democratic Serbia (PDS), Sandjak Democratic Party (SDP), League for Šumadija (LŠ), Reformists of Vojvodina (RV), Serbian Congressional Party (SNS), Association of Independent Labor Unions of Serbia (ASNS).

*** The DSS left the DOS coalition in late 2001, after which coalition went by the name "DOS Minus".

vided the means through which to mobilize the masses when and where an incumbent refused to recognize its defeat. This was the case in Serbia, just as it was in each of the colored revolutions.¹² The Serbian case is instructive in so far as Milošević's opponents repeatedly attempted – and repeatedly failed – to form a unified coalition. Indeed, over a ten year period the leaders of Serbia's pro-democratic political parties attempted to take a united front against Milošević a total of nine times (see Figure 1). Many of the challenges inhibiting coalition formation in Serbia are symptomatic of competitive authoritarian rule and are therefore not isolated to the Serbian case. By comparing successful and unsuccessful attempts to form a unified coalition, it may be possible to differentiate the factors enabling coalition formation in Serbia and thereby shed light on the causes of coalition formation elsewhere.

II. Competitive authoritarianism and electoral revolution

The regimes which emerged after the collapse of communism were exceedingly diverse. On the one hand, countries including Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic followed a transitological course, moving swiftly from liberalization to democratization and finally, consolidation.¹³ Other states, such as Bulgaria, deviated from this linear path, approaching liberal democracy after a number of false starts. In many post-Soviet states, by contrast, the roots of authoritarianism grew further entrenched. Yet of all the regime types to develop after communism's demise, it was the rise of the competitive authoritarian regime which deviated furthest from scholars' expectations.

The term competitive authoritarianism refers to a variant of the hybrid regime-type.¹⁴ Like democracies, elections in competitive authoritarian regimes serve as the primary vehicle through which to obtain and employ political authority. Unlike genuine democracies, however, the rules of democratic practice are obstructed so thoroughly that the regime cannot be considered demo-

12 For more information on the Rose revolution, see: Charles H. Fairbanks, *Georgia's Rose Revolution*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 15 (2004) 2, p. 110–124. For insight into the role of the opposition in Ukraine's Orange revolution, refer to: Kuzio, *The Opposition's Road to Success*. For a good overview of Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution, see: Scott Radnitz, *What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?* In: *Journal of Democracy*, 17 (2006) 2, p. 132–146.

13 The theory of transitions was first introduced by Danwart Rustow and later expanded by Guillermo O'Donnell/Philippe Schmitter/Laurence Whitehead in: *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore 1986.

14 Steven Levitsky/Lucan Way, *Elections without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2002) 9, p. 51–65, here 52. For more on hybrid regime types, see Larry Diamond, *Thinking about Hybrid Regimes*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2002) 2, p. 21–36.

cratic. While careful to maintain a semblance of competition, such regimes often seek to shift the balance of power away from their opponents. Hence, while they respect a nominal degree of political pluralism embodied in multiparty elections and alternative sources of information, they monopolize national media outlets, compromise election results, violate citizens' political and civil liberties, and torment the pro-democratic opposition. By the mid-1990s, eleven cases of competitive authoritarianism had arisen throughout post-communist Europe and the former Soviet Union.¹⁵

Paradoxically, it is in the strength of the competitive authoritarian regime that its greatest weakness lies. Indeed, its unique admixture of pluralism and oppression is susceptible to electoral revolution. Towards the end of the 20th century a handful of seemingly entrenched competitive authoritarian regimes – Mečiar's Slovakia, Tuđman's Croatia, Milošević's Serbia, Shevardnadze's Georgia, Kuchma's Ukraine, and Akayev's Kyrgyzstan – were ousted through democratic means. In each of these cases, opponents of the regime exploited democratic openings in one or more of four arenas, including the electoral, legislative, judicial, and media, to bring about regime change.¹⁶ The electoral arena has proven to be the most significant of these because it provides a vehicle through which oppositional parties may unseat an incumbent. Where elections facilitate a transfer of power from an authoritarian to a democratic regime, we speak of electoral revolution. Because competitive authoritarian regimes may differ in regards to the extremity of their oppression – Mečiar's Slovakia being less oppressive than Milošević's Serbia, for example – electoral revolutions do not always take the same form. In some cases, authoritarian regimes will accept electoral defeat and promptly relinquish power to democratic rivals. In others, the regime may refuse to recognize such defeat, thereby sparking a massive popular protest the scope of which ultimately compels the regime to stand down.¹⁷ Since 1996, eight electoral revolutions have taken place in post-communist Europe and the former Soviet Union, the latter of which are colloquially referred to as colored revolu-

15 In Central and Eastern Europe this included: Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. In the former Soviet Union this included: Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine. Lucan Way, *The Sources and Dynamics of Competitive Authoritarianism in Ukraine*. In: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 20 (2004) 1, p. 143–161, here 143.

16 Levitsky/Way, *Elections without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism*, p. 54.

17 While the former occurred in Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Croatia, the latter was witnessed in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine. This definition of electoral revolution owes much to the work of Valeria Bunce, Sharon Wolchik, and Michael McFaul. See: Valeria Bunce/Sharon Wolchik, *Transnational Networks, Diffusion Dynamics, and Electoral Revolutions in the Post-Communist World*. In: *Physica A*, 387 (2007), p. 92–99. See also: Michael McFaul, *The Orange Revolution in a Comparative Perspective*. In: Anders Aslund/Michael McFaul (ed.), *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2006, p. 165–196.

tions.¹⁸ This article examines just one of the factors which contributed to electoral revolution in Serbia: That of coalition formation. To better understand the causes of coalition formation in Serbia, unsuccessful efforts to form a coalition are juxtaposed against successful attempts in the hopes that determinants of the latter may be isolated. The following pages thus present a comparative analysis of eight failed attempts to form a unified pro-democratic coalition in Serbia and one ultimately successful attempt to form such a coalition. Before doing so however, the nature of Milošević's rule is briefly examined in the section below.

III. Milošević's Serbia

By the time of Slobodan Milošević's rise to prominence in the late 1980s, Yugoslavia was regarded as the communist world's most liberal state. Boasting a comparatively strong economy, open borders and the freest media in the communist world,¹⁹ few predicted the hardship that would accompany Yugoslavia's transition to pluralist politics. Yugoslavia's first multiparty elections were staged in 1990 and saw a series of nationalist parties come to power. Rather than ease the transition to liberal democracy, many sought to consolidate their victories. As would leaders throughout the former Soviet Union, political elites set out to rid their electorates of credible political competition. Thus began Yugoslavia's journey into the gray zone.²⁰

In Serbia, the largest of Yugoslavia's six republics, the road to competitive authoritarianism was paved by Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). In the republic's first multiparty elections held in December 1990, the SPS was victorious, winning 46 percent of the popular vote.²¹ Much of the SPS's success owed to advantages it accrued as the successor of the League of Communists of Serbia. The monopoly on state institutions and national infrastructure belonging to the communist party was placed in SPS hands. Milošević and his allies did not hesitate to exploit this advantage to the fullest. As did Mečiar, Tuđman, Kuchma and other democratic imposters, Milošević began by reigning in fledgling sources of alternative information. Independent media faced a series of hurdles – financial, physical, and otherwise – designed to ensure their political irrele-

18 The eight electoral revolutions include Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Bunce/Wolchik, *Transnational Networks*, p. 92.

19 For more on the state of communist Yugoslavia's media see: Mark Thompson, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, i Bosni i Hercegovini, Mediji Centar Radio B-92/Belgrade 1995*, p. 5.

20 Thomas Carothers uses the term the political 'gray zone' to refer to hybrid regimes. See: Thomas Carothers, *The End of the Transition Paradigm*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2002) 1, p. 5–21.

21 All data regarding election results have been drawn from: Vladimir Goati, *Partije i Partijski Sistem u Srbiji, Nis 2004*, p. 249–261.

vance. The remaining 'free' media was placed in the hands of the regime with political coverage skewed accordingly.²²

With its hold on the media secure, Milošević proceeded to tighten his grip on Serbia's political institutions. As would Akayev in Kyrgyzstan, Aliiev in Azerbaijan, Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, and most recently, Putin in Russia, Milošević modified electoral system laws to further augment his power base. Over the course of Milošević's rule, Serbia boasted three different electoral systems, none of which respected total parity.²³ This was not without reason. As Pippa Norris notes, the choice of electoral system is "designed to bring about certain objectives."²⁴ In the run-up to Serbia's first parliamentary elections, the republic's one-party parliament adopted a majoritarian system known to harshly penalize smaller parties. Because such systems exaggerate the share of seats in the largest party's favor, the SPS's 46.1 percent of the popular vote translated to 77.6 percent of seats in parliament, thereby creating what Milan Jovanović aptly entitles a 'manufactured majority' (see Figure 2).²⁵

Election	% of Vote	% of Mandates
December 1990	46.1	77.6
December 1992	28.8	40.4
December 1993	36.7	49.2
September 1997 ²⁶	34.2	44.0

Figure 2: SPS results in Serbian parliamentary elections

Power in parliament soon translated into the coercion of the judicial and executive branches, as Serbia's parliament has the power to appoint and dismiss republican judges, as well as to form the ruling government. Where electoral manipulation failed to bring about the desired result, Milošević would resort to electoral fraud, the severity of which increased as Milošević's popularity waned.²⁷ In 1997, for example, the regime refused to recognize the opposition's

22 For more on media oppression under Milošević, see: Eric Gordy, *The Culture of Power*, Pennsylvania 1999, p. 61–102. For an in depth look at one media outlet's struggles, see: Matthew Collin, *Guerilla Radio: Rock 'N' Roll Radio and Serbia's Underground Resistance*, New York 2001.

23 These included a two-round majoritarian electoral system; a proportional electoral system with nine large electoral units; and a proportional electoral system composed of 29 electoral units of varying sizes. For more on this topic see: Milan Jovanović, *Izborne Reforme – Slučaj Srbija*. In: *Nova Srpska Politička Misao*, 9 (2003), p. 67–86, here 67.

24 Pippa Norris, *Choosing Electoral Systems: Proportional, Majoritarian and Mixed Systems*. In: *International Political Science Review*, 18 (1997) 3, p. 297–312, here 305.

25 Jovanović, *Izborne Reforme – Slučaj Srbija*, p. 70.

26 In the 1997 parliamentary elections the SPS ran in a coalition with JUL and ND.

27 For a sound analysis of the difference between degrees of electoral fraud, see: Joshua Tucker, *Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions*. In: *Perspectives on Politics*, 5 (2007), p. 535–551.

municipal victories during local elections despite preliminary results reflecting an oppositional victory.²⁸ In 2000, the regime ignored Vojislav Koštunica's Presidential victory in the face of exit polls demonstrating Milošević's defeat.

Given the extremes to which Milošević went to preserve his authority, the vibrancy of the opposition was remarkable. Anti-regime protests were a regular occurrence, often uniting tens of thousands in opposition to the regime's heavy handed practices. Heeding the calls of the electorate, Serbia's oppositional parties repeatedly challenged the Milošević regime. Yet it was only in late 2000 that such efforts reached fruition. This is due not merely to Milošević's iron fist, but also to the failure of the political opposition itself. Indeed, if the unity of Serbia's democratic forces was the source of Milošević's demise, then its discord was the source of his decade-long rule.²⁹ The following section examines the opposition's failure to form a united coalition against Milošević's rule.

IV. Attempted coalition formation in Serbia

The history of Serbia's post-communist opposition begins in the summer of 1990. Serbia's fledgling oppositional parties sought to show a united front in their demands for an early start to pluralist politics. This six-party coalition, the Associated Opposition of Serbia (AOS), called for multiparty elections, a new democratic constitution, an extended campaign period, and a host of other guarantees designed to level the political playing field.³⁰ Shortly after the first of these demands was met, the AOS collapsed amidst a series of power struggles, policy disagreements, and personality clashes.

The next attempt to form an alliance occurred in May 1992, when the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) and two smaller political parties formed the United Serbian Democratic Opposition (USDO).³¹ The alliance proved untenable however, as Serbia's second largest pro-democratic oppositional party – the Democratic Party (DS) – refused to participate. In May 1993 Serbia's opposition again attempted a united front. On this occasion, five parties, including the SPO and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) formed the Democratic Movement of

28 Robert Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, New York 1999, p. 285–316.

29 In the words of Dušan Pavlović, “Constantly in disarray and divided over the question of leadership, the Serbian opposition often acted as a pillar of Milošević's regime rather than a real alternative to it.” Dušan Pavlović, *The Populist Lock*. In: *Politička Misao*, 5 (2000), p. 122–127, here 123. For more on the failures of Serbia's opposition see: Florian Bieber, *The Serbian Opposition and Civil Society: The Roots of Delayed Transition*. In: *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 17 (2003) 1, p. 73–90.

30 Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, p. 69–79.

31 These parties included the Serbian Liberal Party (SLS) and New Democracy – Movement for Serbia. The coalition originally included the Democratic Forum, but the party quickly pulled out of the alliance citing parties' lack of pragmatism as the cause.

Serbia (DEPOS).³² Like its predecessor, DEPOS suffered from DS's absence. Moreover, friction was apparent between party leaders. While DEPOS competed jointly in parliamentary elections, public attacks amongst DEPOS members, as well as regular bickering between DEPOS and the DS, hardly resembled a united pro-democratic front. When in November presidential candidate Milan Panić invited all oppositional parties to form a single alliance against Milošević – the Democratic Coalition (DEKO) – the response was a resounding ‘no’.

A revised DEPOS II was formed in December 1993, composed of the SPO, New Democracy (ND), and the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS). Again, despite repeated efforts on the part of Milan Panić, both the DS and DSS refused to partake in the coalition, opting instead to compete independently in Serbia's parliamentary elections. DEPOS II unraveled in the aftermath of these elections after ND and six DEPOS politicians joined a coalition government with Milošević's SPS.

In December 1995, the Democratic Alliance (DA) was formed, consisting of four parties including the DS.³³ The alliance's members shared little unity of purpose, however. Not only did they lack a joint policy, but they had no clear electoral strategy in mind. The Alliance finally collapsed when the DS took its exit to form *Zajedno* with the SPO, GSS, and DSS. Unity proved short-lived, however. With a handful of local, albeit symbolic, victories behind them, *Zajedno* collapsed just months before Serbian parliamentary elections were held.

In July 1998, Serbia's opposition again attempted to establish a durable coalition. The Alliance for Change joined four parties, among them the DS.³⁴ Both the DSS and the SPO refused to join the alliance and as a result, it soon faltered. By 2000, however, the mood of the opposition had changed. In January, 18 political parties called upon Milošević to hold new elections.³⁵ Thus began the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), the coalition which facilitated Milošević's downfall.

For the first months of its existence, DOS exhibited many of the flaws that proved fatal to its predecessors: it was fragile, prone to rivalry, and offered little substantive alternative to Milošević's socialist agenda. What distinguished DOS from its forerunners was its ability to overcome such problems. To understand how this was possible, it is necessary to clarify the challenges confronting coalition formation as experienced by DOS and its predecessors.

32 DSS formed as an offshoot of DS in large part due to the latter's refusal to join DEPOS. In addition to DSS and SPO, the SLS, New Democracy – Movement for Serbia, and the Serbian Peasant's Party (SSS) joined the coalition.

33 In addition to the DS there were: the DSS, SLS, and Congressional National Party (SNS).

34 This included GSS, NS, and the Christian Democrats (DHS).

35 Serbia: Opposition Unites to Call for Early Elections. In: Radio Free Europe, 11 January 2000.

V. Unsuccessful attempts to form a coalition from 1990–2000: what went wrong?

Of the nine coalitions that Serbia's opposition attempted in the 1990s, eight proved unable to withstand the numerous compromises demanded of political unity. As a result, the majority of such alliances either excluded significant members of the Serbian opposition or were so fractured that they collapsed at the first sign of setback. As shall be demonstrated, many of the challenges confronting the pro-democratic opposition in Serbia appear to have had similarly deleterious effects on coalition formation in other instances of competitive authoritarian rule. Amongst the problems inhibiting effective coalition formation in Serbia from 1990 to 2000 were the following:

Policy: As was the case in Slovakia, Croatia, Ukraine and Georgia, opposing views on key political issues helped terminate at least half of Serbia's coalition attempts. Policy differences encouraged members of AOS to run on separate tickets for Serbia's first parliamentary elections and they also shaped the ultimate demise of the USDO, DEPOS, and *Zajedno*. Of particular importance were differing positions on the so-called 'national question', the constitutional order, and the role of the Orthodox Church. While the extent of such differences was often exaggerated, they served to legitimize disunity.³⁶ A similar pattern can be witnessed in Russia today, where oppositional parties go to lengths to distinguish their own political agendas from that of their oppositional counterparts, rather than stressing their united opposition to the Putin regime.³⁷

Tactics: A second bone of contention in Serbia was that of political strategy. Of particular concern was the matter of electoral participation, with some parties opposed and other in favor of electoral boycotts. In the case of DEPOS, the DSS supported a boycott of republican elections on the grounds that the rules of engagement were neither sufficiently free nor fair to justify participation.³⁸ Arguments over the same elections proved similarly detrimental during negotiations to form DEKO. A second source of conflict was that of parties' relationship to the regime. While some favored a strategy of total opposition to Milošević, others believed it was possible to reform the regime from within. One of the primary reasons DS refused to join DEPOS, for example, was its leaders' belief that existing institutions provided adequate means through which to bring about change. Vojislav Koštunica disagreed, arguing that compromise "could not apply in Serbia where the institutions were fashioned in order to preserve the domi-

³⁶ A prime example of this occurred in 1993, when DSS justified its decision not to enter a reconstituted DEPOS on the grounds that the policy differences between itself and SPO and GSS hampered the formation of a joint platform. See: Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, p. 183.

³⁷ See for example: *The Opposition: Tugging at Russia's Hem*. In: *Transitions Online*, 27 November 2007.

³⁸ Nenad Stefanović, *Pokrstanjanje Petokake*, Bigz/Belgrade 1994, p. 309–311.

nant position of the ruling socialists.”³⁹ Similar concerns caused discord again in 1994, when some DEPOS II members abruptly jumped ship to form a coalition government with Milošević’s SPS.

The problem of cooptation is not confined to the Serbian opposition; in competitive and other semi-authoritarian contexts – particularly those in Central Asia – regimes often coax oppositional parties, or particular factions thereof, into power-sharing arrangements. A prime example hereof is the Rakhmonov regime, which employed precisely such tactics against its competitor, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan. By recognizing only one wing of the party, Rakhmonov set forth a wave of interparty discord that is evident to this day.⁴⁰

Ego and Rivalry: The most significant factors inhibiting the formation of effective coalitions in Serbia were those of ego and rivalry. Oppositional parties often regarded their colleagues more as competitors than as potential partners in the struggle against Milošević. Much of this had to do with ego: Each leader longed to lay claim to the coveted role of ‘king of the opposition’.⁴¹ Inflated egos were exacerbated by the fact that no single oppositional party was the clear electoral favorite. Had one party boasted a significant majority of the anti-Milošević vote, clear lines of authority may have emerged, thereby enabling the dominant party to set the tone of the alliance. This was not the case however. Apart from a brief period in the early 1990s, there was no clear leader of the pack. While the SPO was certainly a frontrunner, its leader Vuk Drašković, was divisive and offered little appeal to Serbia’s rural masses.⁴² The DS was Serbia’s second largest pro-democratic oppositional party, but it too had little hope of achieving national status. As a result, each party sought to secure its own preeminence. Rivalry was not unique to the Serbian case. In Belarus, for example, tension between Milinkevich and Kazulin was reminiscent of that between Drašković and Đinđić of the DS, with each putting personal ambition ahead of national interest.⁴³ Ego played no less a debilitating role in Georgia or Ukraine, and has had a markedly negative impact on oppositional unity in Russia, where public bickering between pro-democratic parties has become commonplace.

39 Vojislav Koštunica interviewed by Bogdan Ivanisevic, NIN, 3 April 1992.

40 See: New Eurasia, <http://tajikistan.neweurasia.net/?p=127>, last accessed 30 November 2007.

41 At no point was this more evident than in Vuk Drašković’s betrayal of the Zajedno alliance. In explaining his decision to stand elections alone, the SPO leader remarked that his decision could be attributed to the “fact” that he had been “recognized as leader of the democratic opposition” by Milošević. As quoted in: Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, p. 345.

42 Until mid-1991, SPO was widely regarded as the symbol of Serbia’s opposition. After Vuk Drasković’s arrest in March of that year, however, the DS became a political force in its own right.

43 See for example: Vitali Silitski, *Belarus Learning from Defeat*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 16 (2006) 4, p. 138–152.

VI. Successful Attempts to form a Coalition: List of Contributors

At the outset, DOS suffered from many of the problems described above. Policy differences between the DSS and several of Serbia's minority parties seemed set to destroy the coalition. The lack of a clear DOS platform hinted at parties' inability to unite.⁴⁴ As in previous years, DOS members belabored the question of participation, unable to agree on a boycott, let alone a joint presidential candidate to run in their name. When in June 2000 Drašković refused to sign a charter committing SPO to contesting federal elections, many predicted the coalition's collapse. Paradoxically, it was not until SPO parted paths with DOS that the latter united. Only then did DOS put forward a joint platform offering voters a clear alternative to the status quo.⁴⁵ By the time Milošević called for presidential elections to be scheduled for September 2000, the alliance was united behind a single presidential candidate: Vojislav Koštunica of the DSS. What enabled DOS's successful transformation from problem-riddled alliance to effective coalition? In contrasting the DOS coalition to its predecessors, one sees that seven factors were of vital importance, among them:

Increased Urgency: Following the NATO bombing of Serbia in the spring of 1999, the regime's use of oppression became more pronounced.⁴⁶ In March 2000, the independent daily *Večernje Novosti* was placed under state control, and various local radio stations were closed on the basis of irregularities. By May, larger media outlets – including *Radio B92*, *Studio B*, and *Blic* – were shut down or taken over by the regime. Serbian activists regularly faced arrest and physical violence for the mere expression of political dissent. During the summer of 2000, police arrested over 1,000 members of the youth movement, *Otpor*. Also in 2000, a series of assassination attempts littered the political landscape. In June, an attempt on Drašković's life had effectively forced him into political exile. And in August, Ivan Stambolić – a critic of the regime – mysteriously disappeared.⁴⁷ Of additional concern during this period was the proposed *Law on Terrorism*. Though ostensibly a tool in the fight against Kosovar separatism, the Law's passing would have effectively banned all forms of political opposition to the regime. Although the proposal was ultimately withdrawn, it was indicative of the growing lengths to which the regime would go to suppress political competition.⁴⁸ By late 2000 Milošević seemed poised to cross the line into fully-fledged

44 The weakness of its platform was exhibited in the opposition agreement signed in early January. See: Joint Statement of the Serbian Opposition. In: Betaweek, 13 January 2000.

45 See for example: G17plus, Program Demokratske Opozicije Srbije za Demokratsku Srbiju, Belgrade 2000.

46 Some scholars argue that the NATO bombing in fact contributed to Milošević's downfall by undermining the public's confidence in the regime. See for example: Sarah Birch, The 2000 election in Yugoslavia: the 'bulldozer' revolution. In: *Electoral Studies*, 21 (2002) 3, p. 499–511.

47 Adam Lebor, *Milošević: A Biography*, Bloomsbury/London, 2002, here 307.

48 Serbian Terrorism Bill Withdrawn. In: BBC, 30 June 2000.

authoritarian rule. In the words of one DOS member, the regime was engaged “in a transition from concealed to open dictatorship.”⁴⁹

Perception of Critical Moment: Milošević’s decision to call for elections in September 2000 provided Serbia’s opposition with the opportunity to facilitate regime change. Were DOS to prove victorious, Milošević would be forced from power. Were he to win, however, Milošević would very likely eliminate all remnants of political pluralism in Serbia. Impending elections served to galvanize the opposition, providing a clear end-goal. The often-cited slogan *Sad ili Nikad* (Now or Never), which civil society organizations used to mobilize the masses on Election Day, was testament to the opposition’s conviction that this was indeed a critical moment.

Public Support for Unity: The Milošević regime boasted a high level of public support for only the first half of its rule. By the late 1990s support for the SPS had declined dramatically. In the fall of 1999, for example, public opinion polls showed that over 70 percent of the population favored political change of some sort.⁵⁰ But while voters were unhappy with Milošević, they were equally dissatisfied with the choices on offer amongst Serbia’s opposition. As a result, support for the SPS continued to exceed support for any other party in Serbia well into the second half of the 1990s. Thanks in part to assistance provided by the United States, Serbian oppositional parties were well aware of this fact. They were also aware of the one major exception to this rule: polling data showed that if given the choice, Serbs would rather vote for a single oppositional candidate than for Milošević himself.⁵¹ Were the opposition to unite in the run-up to presidential elections, Milošević could face defeat. This knowledge provided great incentive for Serbia’s opposition to unite. For those who were unconvinced by such polls – namely, Vuk Drašković – the case for unity was unpersuasive.

Civil Society: The fourth factor strengthening the DOS alliance was that of increasing pressure from civil society. For much of the 1990s relations between civil society organizations and oppositional political parties were marred by tension and mutual suspicion.⁵² In the aftermath of the NATO bombing, however, animosity gave way to a sense of shared purpose: that of defeating Milošević. Civil society organizations worked, on the one hand, to support DOS efforts to overthrow Milošević, and on the other, to pressure the coalition to maintain its unity in the face of adversity. Organizations like *Otpor* were particularly adept in

49 Vladan Batić as quoted in: Beta News Agency, 14 March 2000.

50 Public opinion polls were conducted by the Center for Policy Studies, the National Democratic Institute, and the Strategic Marketing and Research Center.

51 In October of 1999, 20 opposition leaders participated in a seminar held at the Marriott Hotel in Budapest, Hungary. The focal point of the seminar was the results of polling data commissioned by the American consultancy firm, Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates. US Advice Guided Milošević Opposition. In: New York Times, 11 December 2000.

52 Serbia’s Embattled Opposition. In: International Crisis Group Balkans Report, 30 May 2000.

this regard. In mid-2000, Otpor introduced the slogan, *ko izda pizda* (very roughly translated into English as “who betrays, pays”).⁵³ The phrase was branded in everything from televised commercials to leaflets and posters. It was also promoted by *Otpor* members during DOS events in an attempt to pressure DOS members to maintain unity. Similar, if less brazen, initiatives were launched by other organizations in the months leading up the presidential elections of September 2000. Yet, civil society did more than merely pressurize the opposition. It also actively supported the coalition’s efforts to defeat the regime. A prime example of this was the Serbian think tank *G17*, which spearheaded a programmatic platform upon which all DOS members could agree.

International Community: Together, European and American donors spent approximately \$ 80 million during the 18 month period leading up to Milošević’s ouster.⁵⁴ Some, though not all, of that amount was targeted at efforts to unite the opposition. Both the American party institutes – *National Democratic Institute* (NDI) and *International Republican Institute* – and the German party foundations (for example *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*), implemented projects with the aim of bringing the Serbian opposition under one roof. According to Goran Svilanović, former president of the GSS, “the foreign initiative was decisive”.⁵⁵ Public opinion polls funded by the United States proved to be an excellent resource. During an NDI seminar held in March 1999, for example, American pollsters urged the opposition to unite on the basis evidence drawn from public opinion data. American consultants appealed to the leaders of Serbia’s democratic opposition to forgo internal strife and concentrate instead on the goal before them.⁵⁶ Foreign support was also dedicated to civil society organizations, including *Otpor* and the *G17* (siehe oben), in support of their efforts to unite the opposition. Grants from the *National Endowment for Democracy*, the *Center for International Private Enterprise*, and the *Open Society Institute* provided the funds through which such activities could be realized.⁵⁷ Diplomacy was another tool used to keep the opposition united. Considerable diplomatic leverage was applied on DOS leaders, including Zoran Đinđić, Goran Svilanović, and to a lesser extent, Vojislav Koštunica. DOS members met regularly with Western diplomats and authorities, the vast majority of which preached the desirability of unity.⁵⁸

53 It should be noted that this is the politically correct adaptation of the phrase, the literal translation being a tad too provocative for scholarly publication.

54 Thomas Carothers, *Ousting Foreign Strongmen: Lessons from Serbia*. In: Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C. 2004, p. 3.

55 Personal interview conducted by the author in Belgrade, Serbia on June 28, 2007.

56 US Advice Guided Milošević Opposition. In: *New York Times*, 11 December 2000.

57 For more on this issue, see: Carothers, *Ousting Foreign Strongmen*.

58 Personal interviews conducted with members of the diplomatic community and Serbian politicians throughout January 2007 to September 2007.

Clear Hierarchy: Altered internal relations between its members also played a role in DOS's transformation. When on August 6, 2000 Drašković announced his intention to contest federal Presidential elections independently, DOS's ruin seemed all but certain. However, Drašković's departure had the opposite effect: 24 hours after his exit, DOS parties put forward a single Presidential candidate to act in their name: Vojislav Koštunica. Without the SPO, a clear hierarchy emerged within DOS ranks, based primarily of Koštunica's perceived popularity and the DS's – which was the largest party in DOS – pragmatic organizational skills. Without SPO's excessive demands, DOS coalition members were better able to construct power-sharing arrangements. Indeed, previous divisions amongst DOS members owed much to Drašković's (mistaken) conviction that he alone was the rightful leader of the opposition. As a result of his own political miscalculations⁵⁹, Drašković demanded control of DOS's decision-making that far exceeding his party's actual strength. Unfortunately for Drašković, by the time DOS formed in early 2000, his party's support had declined considerably, owing to its federal alliance with the Milošević regime. Thus, by 1999 the SPO was perceived as having “abandoned opposition politics”⁶⁰ and being little more than “a Trojan horse for the regime within opposition ranks.”⁶¹ As a result of the SPO's declining status, DOS members were unwilling to accept Drašković's conditions. Few, for example, were convinced by Drašković's call for an electoral boycott. Fewer still believed Drašković to have large enough appeal to warrant his nomination as DOS presidential candidate. With neither DOS nor Drašković willing to submit to the other's demands, there was little prospect for fruitful cooperation. Once Drašković left DOS, however, the door to negotiation was opened. It was not long before a power-sharing arrangement was struck between DOS members, the most important of which was an agreement between Vojislav Koštunica and Zoran Đinđić. Owing to the former's popular appeal, Koštunica was awarded the position of DOS presidential nominee. In return, Zoran Đinđić of the DS would lead the future DOS parliamentary faction, thereby cementing Đinđić's role as prime minister should Koštunica defeat Milošević in September 2000.

Hindsight: By 2000, Serbia's opposition had been struggling against the Milošević regime for over a decade. It had become clear that when and where the opposition was divided, the regime was victorious. By contrast, electoral revolutions in neighboring countries demonstrated that a coalition of oppositional parties could facilitate regime change. In Croatia in 1999 and Slovakia in 1998, ideologically divergent political parties had formed joint platforms in opposition to the ruling party. Such examples provided a model which the Serbian opposi-

59 Drašković believed DOS parties could gather no more than 500–600,000 votes, as compared to his party, the SPO, which he estimated would easily achieve 800,000 votes on its own. Like Milošević, Drašković had little faith in public opinion polls, the majority of which pointed to DOS's rising popularity.

60 Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia*, p. 21.

61 *Serbia's Embattled Opposition*, p. 13.

tion might replicate.⁶² Serbian politicians learned not only from the example set by others but also from their own experiences. The failure of the Alliance for Change to challenge Milošević's power convinced its leaders that a more inclusive coalition was a requisite for political transformation. Similarly, Drašković's failure to force Milošević to call for new elections in 1999 was equally indicative of a divided opposition's impotence. By 2000, Goran Svilanović of DOS admitted that "our unity is produced by these two failures."⁶³ This contrasts noticeably with statements made in the summer of 1999, when political parties claimed not to "have time to unite all the opposition."⁶⁴ Lessons learned through failure in practice helped ensure that Serbia's opposition would not make the same mistakes thrice.

Each of the aforementioned factors enabled DOS's transformation from rocky alliance to effective coalition. It was in fact the combination of such factors that helped bolster the alliance, with each contributing to and/or reinforcing the other. Thus, were it not for strong public support in favor of oppositional unity, it is unlikely that the efforts of civil society organizations would have been met with success. Likewise, without the growing sense of urgency confronting the opposition in 2000, it is doubtful that elections would have been perceived as a critical moment. Had the opposition not benefited from ten years of activism, even the most telling of polling data may not have convinced Serb leaders to forego personal ambition. It was thus the interplay of these seven factors that proved decisive. Had any single factor not been present on the eve of electoral revolution, DOS may very well have proved to be no more successful than its eight predecessors.

VII. Conclusion

By the mid-1990s, a marked sense of skepticism pervaded scholars' predictions regarding democracy's future expansion throughout the post-communist world.⁶⁵ The electoral revolutions which swept through southeastern Europe and the former Soviet Union seemed to repudiate such skepticism, however briefly, and have therefore come under increasing scrutiny. Given that opposi-

62 For more on the issue of diffusion dynamics, see: Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, *International Diffusion and Post-communist Electoral Revolutions*. In: *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 39 (2006) 3, p. 283–304.

63 As quoted in: *Serbia's Bickering Opposition Plans Rally Against Milošević* (2000). In: *The New York Times*, 14 April 2000.

64 As quoted in an interview with Ray Suarez, *Opposing Milošević*. In: PBS, 4 November 1999.

65 See for example: Diamond, *Is the Third Wave Over?*; Zakaria, *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*.

tional unity is now widely regarded as a key facilitator of electoral revolution,⁶⁶ this article has sought to offer tentative propositions regarding the factors and actors which contribute to pro-democratic coalition formation in competitive authoritarian contexts. It has done so on the basis of a comparative case study examining successful and unsuccessful attempts to form a pro-democratic coalition in Milošević's Serbia. As the Serbian opposition's unsuccessful attempts to form a coalition demonstrate, differences regarding policy and tactics, as well as interparty rivalry were major impediments to the formation of unified coalitions. To overcome these hurdles, the interplay of seven factors were crucial: 1) an increased sense of urgency; 2) the perception of a critical moment; 3) public support for unity; 4) pressure and support from civil society; 5) support from the international community; 6) a clear internal hierarchy, and finally; 7) past experience. Had any of these factors been absent, the DOS coalition may have disintegrated long before a serious challenge to Milošević's reign was launched. But just how telling are such findings for the larger post-communist area? To what extent can we draw parallels beyond Serbia? Having established their importance for the Serbian case, the general relevance of such factors takes on new significance.

Clearly, further research on individual cases is needed before we can speak of general preconditions for coalition formation in competitive authoritarian contexts. The case investigated here has provided an initial basis against which to compare future findings. There is, however, reason to suspect that some of the factors which enabled coalition formation in Serbia may have played a role in coalition formation elsewhere. In Slovakia, for example, the government's decision to override a national referendum on presidential elections and Slovakia's NATO accession "shook public opinion and the opposition into action",⁶⁷ just as Milošević's increasing encroachment of Serbs' political and civil liberties did in Serbia. As in Serbia, there is evidence that Slovak, Croatian, and Ukrainian elections provided the critical moment through which to justify unity. Only after elections were called in these cases, did oppositional unity begin in earnest. Public opinion in favor of oppositional unity may have been similarly encouraging in other instances of electoral revolution, particularly where the American party institutes invested heavily in polling data.⁶⁸

66 See for example: Bunce/Wolchik, *Youth and Electoral Revolutions*; Roessler/Howard, *Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes*; McFaul, *Transitions from Post-Communism*.

67 Martin Butora, *OK '98: A Campaign of Slovak NGOs for Free and Fair Elections*. In: Joerg Forbig/Pavol Demeš (eds.), *Reclaiming Democracy*, German Marshall Fund, Washington D.C. 2007, p. 21–52, here 27.

68 In both Croatia and Slovakia for example, public support for the ruling regime was low, as was confidence in individual parties of the opposition. This differed sharply with the public's overwhelming desire for political change, which could only be achieved through coalition formation.

Yet other factors may have played a more predominant role in the Serbian case than elsewhere. One example of this is the role played by civil society. In Slovakia, Croatia, Georgia, and Ukraine, nongovernmental organizations provided invaluable support to the opposition, but they often played a less critical role in pressing the opposition to unite. In Croatia relations between civil society and political parties remained distant.⁶⁹ In Ukraine, while civil society organizations such as *Pora* helped mobilize the electorate, they were less active than their Serb counterparts in shaming the opposition into unity.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, such propositions remain tentative and thus more research must be conducted before parallels to the Serbian case can be verified. For these to be confirmed, scholars must continue their investigations into the origins of coalition formation in other cases of electoral revolution.

69 Sharon Fisher/Biljana Bijelić, Glass 99: Civil Society preparing the Ground for a Post-Tudman Croatia. In: Joerg Forbig and Pavol Demeš, *Reclaiming Democracy*, German Marshall Fund, Washington D.C. 2007, p. 53–78.

70 Taras Kuzio, *Civil Society, Youth, and Societal Mobilization in Democratic Revolutions*. In: *Democratic Revolution in Post-Communist States*, 39 (2006) 3, p. 365–386.