

FOCUS

Balkans Brace for Troubled Time

Slobodan Milosevic's departure from power in Yugoslavia offers the Balkans a new chance to rebuild from the wreckage of a half-century of Communism and a decade of Europe's bloodiest conflicts since World War II. But success is by no means certain, writes Robert H Reid of AP from Vienna

DIFFICULT times lie ahead for Yugoslavia's people, perhaps for a generation or more, before the destruction of the past can be repaired. And as long as Yugoslavia remains unstable, the future of the entire Balkans will be clouded. Much will depend on both the West's response to the opportunity created by Milosevic's ouster and the ability of his successor, Vojislav Kostunica, to deliver on his promise to steer Yugoslavia and its main republic Serbia into the "family of democracies."

From Slovenia in the Balkan's north-west to Bulgaria in the south-east, the ouster of the man blamed by the West for starting -- and losing -- four wars in a decade was received with both euphoria and relief.

Those conflicts left Yugoslavia and neighbouring states that seceded from the Yugoslav federation economically crippled and socially traumatised. Ethnic tensions suppressed during the Cold War exploded into armed conflict, and even Balkan countries untouched by fighting -- such as Macedonia, Albania, Romania and Bulgaria -- suffered indirectly. Foreign investors feared sinking their money into countries that could have been drawn into the fray.

"The whole region is glad to see the back of him," James Ker-Lindsay of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies in London said of Milosevic.

With Milosevic out of power, the European Union have already lifted key economic sanctions against Yugoslavia and the United States is expected to fol-

low suit, possibly as soon as this week.

That will open the door to Western aid and investment. It also will pave the way for Yugoslavia to join the Balkan Stability Pact, which the West launched last year to build democratic institutions and economic structures in the former Communist countries of south-eastern Europe. Without including Yugoslavia, plans for Balkan regional development stand little chance of success.

Prominent Belgrade political analyst Bratislav Grubacic said the removal of Milosevic means the situation in Yugoslavia "is no longer the obstacle for foreign investment... that could stabilise the region."

Milosevic's departure also may speed the day when the United States and its allies could consider withdrawing their peacekeepers from Bosnia-Herzegovina and the southern Serbian province of Kosovo without fearing that the Yugoslav leader would stir up trouble there again.

American, Russian and other Western troops were sent to those areas under deals to end fighting which the West blames Milosevic for starting. However, the problems he left behind in both Kosovo and Bosnia will take years to resolve.

In Bosnia, where Serbs, Muslims and Croats waged Europe's bloodiest conflict since World War II, ethnic tensions are still smoldering five years after the Dayton peace agreement. They are kept below the boil only by the presence of 20,000 peacekeepers and an international administration which functions like a colonial

government.

In Kosovo, the situation is more explosive. Under UN resolutions, Kosovo remains legally part of Serbia. But ethnic Albanians, who make up 90 per cent of the province's two million people, dream of independence.

For them, Kostunica's rise is a setback. They fear the West will be less willing to support eventual independence for ethnic Albanians in the province now that Milosevic had been replaced by a democratically elected president.

In his inaugural address, Kostunica opposed any plan for loosening Kosovo's ties to Serbia and promised to urge the United Nations to let Serb refugees return to the province. That would enraged the ethnic Albanians and could put them in conflict not only with the returning Serbs but with the UN and NATO-led troops protecting them.

Kostunica's rise has sparked other worries as well. Governments in Albania, Romania and Bulgaria fear that the West will divert aid and investment earmarked for them to Yugoslavia to shore up the Kostunica administration as quickly as possible and prevent any chance of a Milosevic comeback. And Milo Djukanovic -- the president of Montenegro Serbia's smaller partner in the two-republic Yugoslav Federation -- fears he may be sidelined in the rush to embrace the new government in Belgrade. As long as Milosevic was in power, the United States and Western Europe showered pro-Western Montenegro with billions of dollars in aid.

Djukanovic has already served

the problems Kostunica faces are staggering. He inherits a moribund economy, a bureaucracy that does not function and a demoralised people injured to corruption and filled with unrealistic expectations. Pro-Milosevic parties are firmly entrenched in parliament and in the government of Serbia, whose president, Milan Milutinovic, has been indicted by the UN court for war crimes.

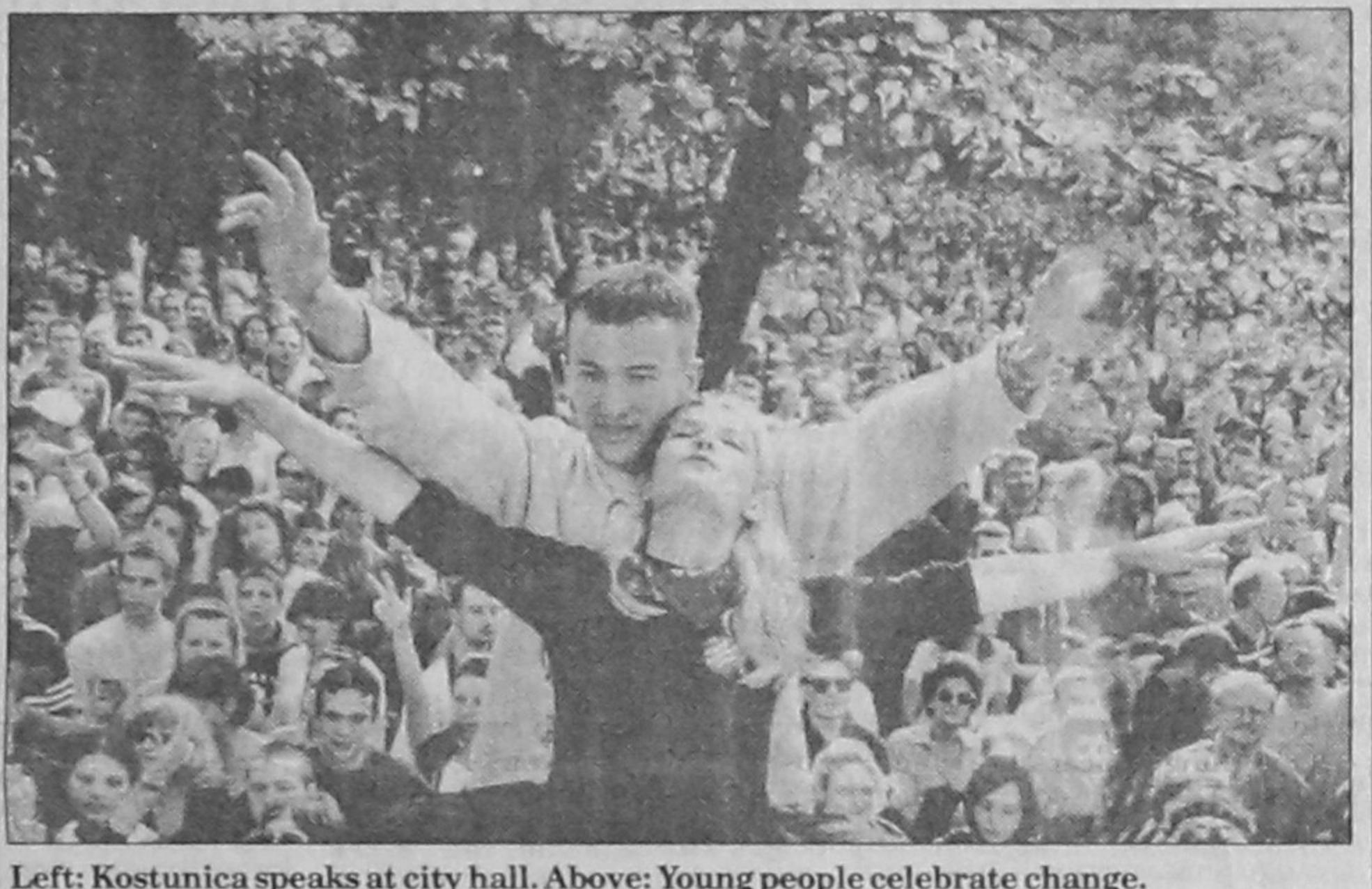
All the former Communist countries faced similar problems when their authoritarian regimes collapsed. Most of them shrank off authoritarianism a decade ago and have barely started on the path toward functioning, free-market economies and Western-style democratic institutions.

Yugoslavia started the journey Saturday with Kostunica's inauguration. Yugoslavs are hoping the euphoria lasts, at least for a while.

"People are feeling like a big burden was taken off their shoulders," Grubacic said.

Left: Kostunica speaks at city hall. Above: Young people celebrate change.

Photo courtesy: The Newsweek



Limited Power to Clear Unlimited Mess

New Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica has limited powers faced with old system of the deposed strongman Slobodan Milosevic, writes Alexandra Niksic of AFP from Belgrade

WHILE riding a crest of massive popular support, Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica enjoys limited powers in his new post, which under the federation's constitution is largely ceremonial. The real power in Yugoslavia resides in the parliaments of the two constituent republics, Serbia and Montenegro.

And the president of Serbia, by far the dominant partner, is Milan Milutinovic, a key ally of ousted President Slobodan Milosevic and his close associate indicted by a UN tribunal for war crimes.

The constitution allows Kostunica to promulgate federal laws by decree and issue instruments for the ratification of international treaties. Besides that, he nominates a candidate for federal prime minister and his cabinet, and still needs the approval of the federal parliament.

The president also recommends members of the federal constitutional court, the federal court, the federal public prosecutor and governor of the National Bank of Yugoslavia.

But for all of this he needs the backing of the federal parliament.

Since Kostunica's Democratic

Opposition of Serbia (DOS) failed to win a majority in the two-chamber federal assembly in last month's elections, it has to count on the support of the Socialist People's Party (SNP) of Milosevic's rule.

The SNP is another old friend of Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), although it was the first of his allies to congratulate Kostunica on his victory while Milosevic refused to step aside.

Thanks to constitutional changes adopted by the old parliament, the federal assembly will be in charge of the activities of the government itself, including foreign policy, customs, the budget and security issues.

The constitution stipulates that the Yugoslav army is under the command of the president of the republic, but pursuant to decisions by the Supreme Defence Council.

That Council is comprised of the presidents of the two republics, together with the commander of the Yugoslav army, although the president may appoint, promote or dismiss army chiefs.

Therefore Kostunica could hardly order rebellious Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic or pro-Milosevic Milutinovic to follow his rules.

Since Djukanovic took power in 1998, Montenegro has gained all but real independence -- introducing its own monetary system, control of its borders, international relations and refusing to support the federal budget and other costs incurred during Milosevic's rule.

If not, each republic could order its police forces against the Yugoslav army, or empty the federal budget by failing to pay duties or taxes into it.

The rights of the post of the Serbian president, which Milosevic held for seven years, are

quite autonomous in their rights including the right to self-determination often mentioned by the reformist Montenegrin leadership during Milosevic's rule.

And thanks to the vagueness of the constitution, a member republic "shall be sovereign in matters which under the present constitution are not reserved to the jurisdiction of Yugoslavia."

Each republic can also maintain relations with foreign states without the approval of the federal authorities and join international organisations.

The Serbian police are currently estimated to number around 120,000 including various security services.

To enable a transition of power in Serbia as well as at the federal level -- necessary to avoid a Montenegrin-style boycott of the federal institutions -- the DOS has focused on the republic's legislature, insisting on early elections to oust the current government, still dominated by Milosevic's allies.

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