On 5 October 2000, the first rays of democratic change came to Serbia, around a decade after the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. The decisive elements in the revolution that removed Slobodan Milošević from office as President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro – FRY) and from power were the will of the people on the streets and the changing of the guard. The latter was crucial. This was not a change of personnel in the guard. It was a change of that which they were guarding. Both the Yugoslav Army and Serbian Interior Ministry Forces had received orders and had been mobilized to use force against the protesting Serbian people and to protect Milošević, who, against all assumptions, had lost the elections he had called as a precursor to launching an attack against Montenegro. Instead, both forces protected themselves and the people. The army’s Chief of Staff, General Nebojša Pavković, previously regarded as a pro-Milošević hard-liner, went to Milošević with a squad of special forces soldiers and told him to get out of office. This was the remarkable civil–military transformation that brought to an end a decade in which Milošević had repeatedly sent his various armed forces into generally losing battles. It was the culmination of something that can be described as the ‘European exception’. The end of Milošević, requiring military intervention in politics, was as exceptional and against the grain of the democratic transition that had occurred elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of communism.
The international context and democratic control of the military: the threefold exception

The FRY presents an exception to the trends and patterns of civil-military relations in the rest of Europe. Its unique position has three aspects: the absence of a clear break with communist power structures and the past pattern of civil-military relations; the correlation of armed forces to statehood; and an uncertain national-international context. The second and third of these are only shared in any way by one other country – Bosnia and Hercegovina, where the contours of the same generic problem are very different and depend, in part, on the evolution of civil-military relations in Belgrade.

First, until the end of 2000, democratic control of the military in the FRY was an absurd topic. Without democracy: there could be no sense of democratic control – and in Serbia, the larger of the FRY’s constituent parts, there was no democracy: despite a veneer of democratic features, the practices of communist rule remain, spiced with nationalist ideology and Mafia customs. In the other part of the federation, Montenegro, there was also no question of democratic control, but the situation was different. The development of democracy and pro-western policies there had given rise to civil-military tension between the Montenegrin government and the FRY army that still had the shadow of the hammer and sickle on its soul, the Serbian cross with four S’s in its breast and deeply anti-western values running through most of its arteries. Despite this, it was an irony of civil-military relations in the FRY that the military, or rather elements within it, provided one of the main hopes upon which a transition to democracy in Serbia – and so in the FRY as a whole – could be achieved. It was an irony for anyone engaged with the project of democratic and civilian control of the armed forces in former communist countries after the end of the Cold War that the only case of military intervention in politics – so much feared in western circles – occurred in Belgrade and its purpose, in the end, was to foster a change to democracy.

Second, nowhere is the importance of ‘stateness’ more important in civil-military relations than in the former Yugoslav lands, especially in the FRY and Bosnia, where the absence of a clear correlation of armed forces and statehood has created fundamental problems. Noting Martin Edmonds’ truism that ‘every state has one’, there is a fairly clear principle: one country, one armed force. The reality for Bosnia and the FRY is different. In Bosnia, there are three armed forces (two of which are extensively controlled or influenced from outside the country), two