

ZUZANA POLÁČKOVÁ – PIETER C. VAN DUIN

## **Independence lost and regained: Montenegro's contested identity and the failure of Yugoslavia (1918-2006)**

This article examines the political evolution of Montenegro during the era of Yugoslavia (1918-1992) and the subsequent years of political conflict that eventually led to the regaining of Montenegrin independence in 2006. The First World War and the formation of the Yugoslav state not only meant the end of independent Montenegro but also the emergence of a new political context in which internal Montenegrin antagonisms were played out. While a considerable proportion of Montenegrin Orthodox Slavs supported the multinational but Serb-dominated Yugoslav state, there was also a growing number of Montenegrins who wanted to restore the country's autonomous or even independent status. This was implemented to some degree in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia but then was endangered again during the crisis of Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition there was growing unrest among the Muslim minorities and civil protests against Montenegro's participation on the side of the Serbs in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. The final result was a stronger anti-Serbian stance not only among a part of the general population but also among a significant section of the old political elite. This eventually led to Montenegro regaining independence through a referendum in 2006. However, achieving independence meant that Montenegro's other serious problems, including corruption, uneven economic development and deficient democratisation, came even more emphatically to the fore.

**Key words:** Montenegro; Yugoslavia; national identity; political conflict; religious friction; democratic change

### **Introduction**

'The national question permeated every aspect of Yugoslavia's public life after 1918. It was reflected in the internal, external, social, economic, and even cultural affairs. It was solved by

democrats and autocrats, kings and communists. It was solved by day and unsolved by night. Some days were particularly bright for building, some nights particularly dark for destroying.<sup>1</sup>

The complex and confusing story of Montenegro in the twentieth century can be told in different ways. The most simple and illuminating way would probably be to say that Montenegro evolved, almost in a circular manner, ‘from independence to independence’, from an original national independence that was lost, to a renewed independence some ninety years later. The long intermezzo between its earlier era of state independence – which was ended by the First World War and then by the founding of Yugoslavia – and its recent period of restored independence, was dominated by the tragic experiment of the failed state of Yugoslavia, the entity that should have united all South Slavs except the Bulgarians. When Ivo Banac wrote down the observations quoted above, Yugoslavia still existed, but his sharp insights clearly suggested that it was by no means certain and in fact rather unlikely that the multinational state would last forever.

In 1914 Montenegro had been a small but self-conscious independent state in the western Balkans with remarkable regional ambitions, but also with a low level of social and institutional development; in 1918 it was no more. In 2006 Montenegro regained its independence after voting in a referendum following a period of more than ninety years of wars, foreign occupations, and civil wars as well as peace and co-existence; of problematical Yugoslav statehood, Serbian domination, and communist dictatorship; and of chronic political divisions and potential instability, including conflicts over national identity, political regime, and relations between different ethnic and religious groups. Between 1915-16 and 2006 there was no independent Montenegrin political entity even though after 1945, in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Montenegro had enjoyed the status of an autonomous republic under the monolithic communist regime. In 2006 it was felt by many that Montenegro’s historic independence of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had miraculously returned as the only serious option for the Montenegrin people. But the long period of the failed Yugoslav state (1918-1992), internal political divisions in Montenegro itself, and the lack of political democracy in both Yugoslavia and Montenegro had left their mark on the country, the people, and the political scene. So did a number of persistent religious and ethnic cleavages. While a majority of the Montenegrin people (at least 75%) are Orthodox Slavs with religious traditions similar to those of the Serbs, there are also small minorities of Croatian and Albanian Catholics and larger minorities of Slavic, Bosniak, and Albanian Muslims. But perhaps most crucially, during the Yugoslav era the Orthodox Montenegrins were often divided between those who strongly identified with the Serbs or even regarded themselves as Serbs, and those who may have felt affinity with the Serbs but basically saw themselves as a separate nation, politically and historically. After many decades of Montenegrin-Serb unification, the Montenegrin ‘separatists’ began to get the upper hand again in the 1990s. This happened

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<sup>1</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca/London, 1984), pp. 415-16.

after a tormenting twentieth-century history of national-political antagonisms, ideological divisions, and post-Yugoslav wars.

In this essay we will analyse Montenegro's evolution during the twentieth century by looking at six critical aspects of the country's politics and society. There is, first of all, the question of Montenegro's complex and ambiguous ('dual') national and state identity – the question of whether Montenegro and the Montenegrins are primarily a separate political and cultural nationality or part of a greater Serbian historical and ethno-cultural nationality. There is, secondly, the problem of Montenegro's internal regional divisions, which resulted in large measure from the process of territorial expansion of the Montenegrin state in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The political loyalties and local identities in different regions of Montenegro were remarkably diverse given the small size of the country. The original territorial core of 'Old Montenegro', including the historic capital Cetinje, was the region where people were most inclined to see the Montenegrins as a separate nation notwithstanding all the rhetoric about Great Serbia. Regions which had been annexed by Montenegro between 1878 and 1912, however, contained Orthodox Slavs who often felt more Serbian than Montenegrin. In addition, Albanians, Muslim Slavs, and Bosniaks (Muslim Slavs with a special sense of affinity to Bosnia) had their own ethnic or religious identities as well, which in practice were often difficult to reconcile with the Serb or even the Montenegrin national idea. Indeed, the third problem we have to pay attention to is the position of these ethnic and religious minorities in Montenegro, an issue which had a significant influence on the atmosphere and social features of Montenegrin society and on the stability of the political system. This issue is linked to another, our fourth problem. Montenegro traditionally had been a rather violent society, and the incidence of 'blood feuds' between rival clans or tribes and massacres of Muslims (the archetypal enemies for Orthodox Slavs) had to be reduced if Montenegro was ever to become a more modern or 'civil' society.<sup>2</sup> This brings us to our fifth problem, the question of political culture and political regime. Would the Montenegrin people be happy with the continuation of a form of autocracy (which could either suppress or encourage political violence) such as that of their old ruler King Nikola, the autocratic monarchy of the first Yugoslavia, the communist regime of the second Yugoslavia, or the post-communist regime of re-emerging Montenegro around 2000? Or would Montenegro be willing and able to develop a more democratic political system and a more liberal political culture after the crisis of Yugoslavia in the 1990s? The sixth question we have to look at is Montenegro's international orientation. The Montenegrins had to define their position not only vis-à-vis Yugoslavia and

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<sup>2</sup> As one historian notes, 'The blood feud had evolved as a customary means of settling disputes between tribes in the absence of any superior state or judicial authority. It persisted into the twentieth century, particularly in isolated mountain areas with tendencies to overpopulation, such as northern Albania and Montenegro.' See Philip Longworth, *The Making of Eastern Europe: From Prehistory to Postcommunism* (London, 1997), p. 285, referring to M. Durham, *Some Tribal Origins, Laws and Customs of the Balkans* (London, 1928), pp. 162-71. It may be added that while the blood feud was a phenomenon separate from religious or ethnic friction, it could overlap with the latter and then become even more violent. The mutual bloodshed between Orthodox Montenegrins and Muslim Albanians was an example of this.

dominant Serbia, but also vis-à-vis Italy (especially in the Second World War), Russia, and other regional and international players (especially after the 1980s). After the crisis years of the 1990s, and following its regaining of independence in 2006, Montenegro had to make decisions on its policies towards the European Union, the United States, and NATO. The EU and others tried to influence, or even manage as far as possible, the process of democratic transition and renewal of independence in Montenegro. In this essay we will not discuss these questions in a ‘topic-by-topic’ manner, but try to present a running narrative in which they are brought together in a chronological and organic way.

### From independence to Yugoslavia

During the nineteenth century Montenegro had gained a reputation as a small nation of tough and courageous fighters against the Ottoman Empire. In Britain and Western Europe some politicians even tended to glorify the Montenegrins as a unique race of martial tribesmen, rather similar to what the Montenegrins loved to proclaim about themselves.<sup>3</sup> In 1878 Montenegro was recognised by the major European Powers assembled at the Congress of Berlin as an independent state along with Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Montenegro tried to play the role of a ‘Piedmont’ for a future Great Serbian or South Slav state, but Serbia obviously saw itself as more fit to do so. This led to increasing tension between the two ‘brother’ Orthodox South Slav nations, both of whom claimed to represent the legacy of medieval Serbian statehood. Montenegro could compete with Serbia until 1903, when a political and dynastic revolution in Belgrade brought to power Petar Karadjordjević as the new King of Serbia, supported by a more radical, modern, and self-assertive type of Serbian political figures and semi-illegal or secret networks. Serbian underground organisations like Black Hand (*Crna ruka*) and National Defence (*Narodna obrana*) began to undermine the position of Montenegro’s Prince Nikola (after 1910 King Nikola), working for a revolutionary unification of Serbia and Montenegro which in fact meant incorporation of Montenegro into a Greater Belgrade-controlled Serbian state. Montenegrin students in Belgrade were involved in attempts to topple Nikola, and in Montenegro itself a divide was emerging between more modern and younger Montenegrins who wanted immediate unification with Serbia and accepted the leadership of Belgrade, and more traditional Montenegrins who wanted some kind of unity as well but on the basis of ‘equality’, retaining a degree of Montenegrin sovereignty and institutional autonomy. The first parliamentary elections in Montenegro in 1905 only helped to exacerbate political tensions and to strengthen Nikola’s critics. The latter included young Belgrade-educated, pro-Serbian activists who had been influenced by the Serbian historian and

<sup>3</sup> See for the enthusiasm of some nineteenth-century British politicians for Montenegro’s noble fighters, Zuzana Poláčková and Pieter van Duin, ‘Montenegro Old and New: History, Politics, Culture, and the People’, *Studia Politica Slovaca*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (2013), pp. 60-82, here p. 69.

political thinker Jovan Skerlić, an important figure in the consolidation of Serbian national ideology.<sup>4</sup> In 1907 an attempt to assassinate Nikola led to Montenegrin accusations of Belgrade's involvement and to Nikola severing relations with Serbia. The Serbian press started a smear campaign trying to discredit Nikola, which caused the latter to complain to the Russians. In 1909 another attempted coup followed, organised by a group of young revolutionaries. It failed like the attempt of 1907, and thereafter a period of relative calm helped Montenegro to prepare for the First Balkan War in 1912. Montenegro lost a large number of troops fighting the Turks and the Albanians, but won additional territories including part of the Sandžak region in the north, which included a large number of Slav Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

In the First World War Montenegro managed to keep on fighting against the Austrians until January 1916. The Montenegrins helped the Serbian army to withdraw to the Albanian coast and to Corfu. But then the Montenegrins capitulated and King Nikola fled to Italy. The Serbian prime minister, Pašić, now began a campaign of propaganda against Nikola accusing him of having made a deal with the Austrians. When the war ended in October/November 1918, the arrival of Allied and Serbian troops in Montenegro enabled the provisional Serbian authorities to take over local administration and hastily enforce the unification of Montenegro with Serbia. This happened through the so-called Assembly of Podgorica in November 1918, where a majority was created in favour of unification on Serbian terms. Those Montenegrins who supported this move became known as Whites (*Bijelaši*), and those who opposed it as Greens (*Zelenaši*). Just a few days later the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was proclaimed, largely under Serbian political leadership. The concept of a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia was justified – sometimes quite openly – by the claims that Serbia had bled heavily for South Slav freedom during the war and that it was the largest state and the natural leader of the South Slav territory. A statement made by King Nikola at the end of 1918 stood in stark contrast to this: 'there can be no mention of any unification. I cannot permit it.' He added: 'I say Serbdom shall not be unified, that is just an idea for hotheads.'<sup>6</sup> By this time Nikola and the Serbs had broken with each other. The division between Whites and Greens in Montenegro split entire families and laid the basis for a potential civil war. A majority of Montenegrins may have been in favour of unity of Montenegro and

<sup>4</sup> Ivan Čolović, *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia. Essays in Political Anthropology*, trans. Celia Hawkesworth (London, 2002), pp. 89-111 on Skerlić. It should be noted that Skerlić's historical work is by no means simplistic but rather sophisticated in terms of analysing ideological change. Skerlić is little known among European historians, but is briefly mentioned in Kenneth Morrison, *Montenegro: A Modern History* (London/New York, 2009), p. 33, an important publication on twentieth-century Montenegro. However, Morrison's book is especially useful for the period between the 1980s and 2006, and his examination of post-Yugoslav political change in Montenegro is probably the most detailed in the English-language literature.

<sup>5</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 28-35; Elizabeth Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro* (London, 2007), pp. 258-301 for a more detailed discussion of the period 1878-1914; also Živko M. Andrijašević and Šerbo Rastoder, *The History of Montenegro from Ancient Times to 2003*, trans. Olivera Kusovac and Uroš Zeković (Podgorica, 2006), pp. 115-45.

<sup>6</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 41 quoting Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War 1914-1918* (London, 2007), p. 284.

Serbia, but the way in which unification was enforced by the Serbs and pro-Belgrade Montenegrins caused a permanent sense of disaffection. Milovan Djilas (1911-95), the communist turned dissident who grew up in Montenegro, later observed that ‘the thesis of Montenegrins as a separate nationality appeared and gained strength, after the unification with Serbia in 1918, as an expression of the dissatisfaction of the popular peasant masses with the new state of affairs.’<sup>7</sup> The Serbs could also enforce their policies because the Allies let them do it. Only Italy opposed the liquidation of the sovereignty of Montenegro. In Montenegro itself the events led to an armed uprising by the Greens in the early months of 1919, led by Jovan Plamenac and Krsto Popović. After initial successes and a lot of terrible violence the movement petered out. Plamenac went to Italy to lead a Montenegrin government in exile, but it could not accomplish much. The trend of events became clear when in the first Yugoslav census of 1919 the term ‘Montenegrin’ as a definition of nationality was simply absent. Montenegrins and Macedonians were defined as Serbs. In 1920 the Yugoslav king himself ensured the abolition of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, which was incorporated into the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>8</sup>

The 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of at least two political movements that expressed the dissatisfaction of many Montenegrins with the political realities of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Opposition to Belgrade centralism and Serb domination was voiced by the Montenegrin Federalist Party on the one hand, and the Montenegrin section of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia on the other. The ideologist of the Federalist Party Sekula Drljević propagated the idea of a separate Montenegrin ethnicity, that the Montenegrins were not of Slavic but of Illyrian descent, and that the Serb and Montenegrin cultures and mentalities were irreconcilable.<sup>9</sup> At least as important were the Montenegrin communists who dropped their initial support for Yugoslav unitarianism, referring to Lenin’s principle of national self-determination. Their slogan of an ‘independent Soviet Republic of Montenegro as part of the future Balkan Federation’ brought them the support of many Greens and 38% of the popular vote in Montenegro in the Yugoslav elections of 1920. But the Communist Party was outlawed in 1921, and democracy in Yugoslavia failed completely. The Serbs’ insistence that they should lead the state, and the Croats’, Slovenes’, and part of the Montenegrins’ arguments for an alternative federal structure, led to increasing bitterness. It was a pro-Serb Montenegrin, Puniša Račić, a member of the governing Serbian Radical Party, who shot five Croats including the leader of Croat Peasant Party, Stjepan Radić, in the Yugoslav parliament in 1928 (Radić and two others died). In January 1929 King Aleksandar, the successor to the old King Petar who died in 1921, imposed a dictatorship. One of the measures taken to suppress nationalist sentiments was the redrawing of Yugoslavia’s internal borders, which meant for Montenegro that it was incorporated into the new province of Zeta. The

<sup>7</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich (New York, 1966), p. 421.

<sup>8</sup> Andrijašević and Rastoder, *The History of Montenegro*, pp. 147-72; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 302-27; Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 35-46; Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, pp. 280-9.

<sup>9</sup> Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p. 290.

assassination of the king by Croatian fascists in 1934 and other disastrous events in the 1930s led to a gradual political disintegration and increasing violence across Yugoslavia. The arrests of Montenegrin Federalists and communists provoked demonstrations in several Montenegrin cities in which dozens of people were killed or injured.<sup>10</sup> When the Italians invaded Montenegro in April 1941, the political divisions and culture of violence in the country led to conditions of civil war in addition to anti-Italian resistance.

The violent character of Montenegrin society had never ceased to torment the country, even after the suppression of the Green uprising. One victim of this often spontaneous violence was the Muslim minority in northern Montenegro. Milovan Djilas, himself from this region, has described how in a massacre in the autumn of 1924 several hundred Muslim men were slaughtered in the area of Bijelo Polje and Šahovići. This happened in revenge for the assassination of a prominent Montenegrin clan leader, Boško Bošković. It soon turned out that Bošković had not been murdered by local Muslims at all but by a Montenegrin rival, and that the massacre of large numbers of Muslims had therefore taken place for no good reason. It rather was another instance of almost ritual and symbolic killing. In his autobiographical account of Montenegrin life during the inter-war years, *Land without Justice*, Djilas describes the 'incident' of 1924 as follows:

'The destruction of Moslem settlements and massacring of Moslems assumed such proportions and forms that the army had to be sent to intervene; the police authorities were passive and unreliable. The incident turned into a small-scale religious war, but one in which only one side was killed. (...) Holding to the tradition of their fathers, the mob killed only males above ten years of age – or fifteen or eighteen, depending on the mercy of the murderers. Some three hundred and fifty souls were slaughtered, all in a terrible fashion. Amid the looting and arson there was also rape, unheard of among Montenegrins in earlier times. (...) After that the Moslem villages slowly withered. The Moslems of that region began to migrate to Turkey, selling their lands for a trifle. The district of Šahovići, and in part, also, Bijelo Polje, were emptied, partly as the result of the massacre and partly from fear. The Moslems were replaced by Montenegrin settlers. (...) Expressing abhorrence at the crimes, Father nevertheless saw in it all something that my brother and I would nor could see – an inevitable war of annihilation, begun long ago, between two faiths. Both were fated to swim in blood, and only the stronger would remain on top.'<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Andrijašević and Rastoder, *The History of Montenegro*, pp. 179-207; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 336-43; Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 47-9; Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven/London, 1997), pp. 108-12. Longworth comments dryly that the Montenegrin deputy/assassin of 1928, "resorted to the law of the mountains", and then went to gaol taking pride in his "act of patriotism" to the end of his days; see Longworth, *The Making of Eastern Europe*, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Land without Justice: An Autobiography of his Youth*, trans. Michael Boro Petrovich, introd. and notes William Jovanovich (San Diego, 1958), pp. 207-8.

The Second World War brought violence and slaughter on an even larger scale, but not only between Orthodox Montenegrins and Muslims. The violence now became more politically motivated and assumed the character of a civil war, or rather a combination of several civil wars and power struggles. Pro- and anti-Italian Montenegrins, communist Partisans, Serb nationalist Chetniks, and Muslim militias became entangled in a complex and unpredictable struggle. This was part of the wider Yugoslav wars and liberation struggles but also had its own Montenegrin features.

After the capitulation of the Yugoslav army and government in April 1941 the Italians occupied the Bay of Kotor and the major towns in Montenegro's hinterland, while parts of Montenegro with a large Albanian population were annexed by Greater Albania, a vassal state of Italy. The Italians nevertheless tried to win the hearts and minds of the Montenegrins, pointing among other things to the fact that former King Nikola's daughter Elena was the wife of the Italian King Victor Emmanuel III. The re-establishment of a form of Montenegrin autonomy overseen by Italy appealed to some of the Greens, among whom two potentially collaborationist factions existed. One faction was led by Krsto Popović, one of the leaders of the 1919 uprising; the other by Sekula Drljević, the idiosyncratic ideologist. While the first group was soon disappointed by Italian policies, the Drljević group continued to show more good will to the Italians and wanted to accept an autonomous Montenegro linked to Italy, for which they were willing to fight against their Montenegrin enemies. An anti-Italian uprising starting in July 1941 was dominated to some extent by the communists, but some of the Greens rejected collaboration with the Italians as well. The Italians managed to suppress this first spontaneous uprising, and now a complex pattern of Montenegrin infighting and civil war began to unfold. Violent actions of the communists against their enemies or alleged enemies, including supporters of the Serbian royalist Chetnik movement and Montenegrin nationalist Greens, led to a situation in which the fighting between communists and different nationalist groups was often more conspicuous than fighting the Italian invader. There followed a period of Chetnik-Italian collaboration and nationalist attacks not only on communist Partisans but also, for example, on Sandžak Muslims. The situation changed after the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, when the communists managed to seize large quantities of Italian military supplies and the Chetniks and other non-communist groups were increasingly weakened. The communists' commitment to the right to self-determination for Yugoslavia's different nations proved very helpful for strengthening their position in Montenegro. In November 1943 the Communist Party proclaimed that Montenegro would be recognised as an equal unit within a socialist and federal Yugoslavia.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 344-91; Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 50-66; Andrijašević and Rastoder, *The History of Montenegro*, pp. 209-27; for the communists' national policy, also Paul Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question* (New York, 1968).

### From communism to post-communism

The communists finally managed to seize power and to lay the basis for a second Yugoslav state in 1945 – the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The important part played by the Montenegrin Partisans in the war effort and the revolution led to Montenegro being ‘rewarded’ with recognition as a separate nation and republic within the new federal state. But while the communists denounced the old policy of Serbian hegemony as a crucial factor in the failure of the First Yugoslavia, they proceeded to create another form of dictatorship based on the one-party system. This did not cause immediate problems in Montenegro, however. In the Communist Party structure Montenegrins were over-represented, and in Montenegro a higher percentage of the population belonged to the party than in any other Yugoslav republic. In a communist context the Montenegrins were now to enjoy their national autonomy to some extent. In 1946 Milovan Djilas wrote an article on the ‘Montenegrin National Question’, explaining why the Yugoslav communists awarded Montenegro the status of republic alongside Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia. Although the Montenegrins ‘were Serbs’, he said, and part of the wider Serbian nation, they had experienced a different historical and political state evolution. For ‘political reasons’, it was necessary that Montenegro be given the status of a republic. But, Djilas added, ‘God forbid’ that it would lead to ‘the recognition of a separate nation.’ He admitted quite openly that the recognition of a Montenegrin republic was a temporary measure to ‘pacify Montenegro.’ It was a compromise intended to bridge the gap between Greens and Whites.<sup>13</sup> If, indeed, it was a matter of communist political strategy rather than real recognition that the Montenegrins were a separate nation, this showed that the question of Montenegrin national and state identity had by no means been resolved.

As yet the Montenegrins seemed to be satisfied with their position in Socialist Yugoslavia, and there were scarcely voices arguing in favour of Montenegrin national or cultural distinctiveness as compared with the Serbs. But tension between those who regarded the Montenegrins as Serbs and those who saw them as a separate nation resurfaced in the early 1970s, if not earlier. Antagonism arose over the mausoleum of the great nineteenth-century poet and Montenegrin ruler Njegoš near Montenegro's old capital Cetinje. The removal in 1974 of the original chapel, rebuilt by King Aleksandar in 1925, and its replacement with a new mausoleum was interpreted by Montenegrins who regarded themselves as Serbs as an anti-Serb move, because of the different cultural emphasis (specifically Montenegrin rather than Serb) of the new monument and the Montenegrin patriotic profile of the people responsible for it. The revision of the Yugoslav Constitution in the same year, 1974, paved the way not only for a more decentralised state but also for a more decentralised party, which increasingly became a coalition of various republican parties. This reform-minded political trend enabled Montenegro to develop a greater sense of

<sup>13</sup> Milovan Djilas, ‘O Crnogorskom nacionalnom pitanju’, quoted in translation in Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 67.

distinct national identity again, which could even be expressed in new cultural institutions. In the historic year 1974 the University of Montenegro was established in Podgorica, followed by a Montenegrin Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1976. In addition, new and specifically Montenegrin media emerged.<sup>14</sup> It was the beginning of a whole new set of political and cultural developments in Montenegro. However, the death of Yugoslavia's leader Josip Broz Tito in May 1980, and the gradual weakening of the federal and communist architecture of the country, caused a number of contradictory trends with mixed consequences for the Montenegrin people.

The death of Tito set in motion a process of multinational disintegration caused by structural economic problems, state debt, and growing unemployment in addition to political tensions and a rise in national sentiment in the different republics. One expression and probably the culmination of this, was the rise to power in Serbia of Slobodan Milošević in the late 1980s. Using the argument of the oppression of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo, Milošević tried to concentrate power in Belgrade again, which led to the collapse of the Yugoslav state in the early 1990s. In the late 1980s Montenegro, like other parts of Yugoslavia, experienced the so-called 'anti-bureaucratic revolution', which was actually an attempt by Serb nationalists to seize power and replace the communist system and ideology with a system of Serbian nationalist hegemony. Serb nationalist intellectuals in Belgrade began to write articles arguing that the Montenegrins were simply a branch of the Great Serbian nation, and that the communists had helped to cultivate the idea of a separate Montenegrin nation in order to 'tear Montenegro from its Serb roots.' In the latter half of the 1980s Serb cultural events were held in Montenegro to raise Serb ethnic and cultural awareness and to promote the idea of Serbian national-political unity. Both the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro and Serb nationalist intellectuals stressed the Serb ethnic identity of Montenegrins and the historical importance of Montenegro (the 'Serbian Sparta') to the Greater Serbian nation.<sup>15</sup> In 1988 Milošević's supporters in Montenegro seized power from the old-style communists – most of them, of course, were former communists themselves – a process in which Kosovo Serbs played a part as well. Social and economic grievances were exploited and transformed into a pro-Serbian nationalist revolution. In January 1989 the Montenegrin government was effectively replaced by a younger political elite influenced by Milošević. The new leadership included Momir Bulatović (who became president the following year) and Milo Đukanović (Montenegro's future prime minister) among others, with Bulatović being at first the principal figure. Within this group there was a division between the more doctrinaire post-communists and nationalists, and those who wanted democratic and economic reforms rather than focus exclusively on a nationalist agenda. The latter were purged from what was still called the League of Communists of Montenegro, but the formation in Montenegro of the Democratic Alternative and the disintegration of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in January 1990 – only the Montenegrin party kept its old name – increased the pressure on the Montenegrin authorities to establish or

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<sup>14</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 72-4.

<sup>15</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 82.

allow political pluralism. In October 1990 the Montenegrin parliament passed a law legalising multiparty elections, and in November and December elections took place throughout Yugoslavia. In December 1990 the Montenegrin Communists won an absolute majority in parliament, backed by a population who did not want to challenge its leaders or may have felt secure under their regime. Only in June 1991 did the Montenegrin party change its name to Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS).<sup>16</sup>

The party continued to tolerate the rise of Serbian nationalism in Montenegro, although a minority of party members was uncomfortable with certain aspects of it. One of these was the limitation of Montenegrin autonomy in what was still Yugoslavia. Another was the presence in Montenegro of extreme Serbian nationalist groups like the People's Party of Montenegro and the even more radical Montenegrin branch of the Serbian Radical Party led by Branko Kostić. They declared that Montenegrins and Serbs were one nation and warned of the dangers posed by Montenegro's 'internal enemies', i.e. the Muslims, Albanians, and Croats. During 1991 the DPS, allied with Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia, remained in control of Montenegro, apart from Serbia the only republic that wanted to preserve Yugoslavia or what was left of it. The simultaneous rise of nationalism in Croatia led Serb nationalists in Montenegro to argue that a resurgent Croatian 'fascism' was endangering the Montenegrins, many of who were in favour of defending Yugoslavia and 'Serbdom.' In September 1991 Montenegrin troops invaded southern Dalmatia to 'legitimately defend the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia', as Montenegrin president Momir Bulatović explained. The destructive and wanton behaviour displayed by Montenegrin soldiers and volunteers in Croatia, and subsequently in Bosnia and Hercegovina, attracted world-wide condemnation and international isolation imposed by United Nations sanctions. Especially the 'Dubrovnik campaign' significantly damaged Montenegro's international reputation and the wider Serbian and 'Yugoslav' cause. Bulatović and Montenegrin prime minister Milo Djukanović tried to justify the operation with defensive and questionable historical arguments while creating a climate of fear and hysteria among the Montenegrin population to whip up anti-Croatian sentiment. Government propaganda in Montenegro's state-controlled daily newspaper *Pobjeda* made the population believe that Croatia wanted to incorporate the Bay of Kotor. The Croatian minority in the Bay area was attacked in the Montenegrin media and by paranoid parliamentary delegates, some of who claimed that the German 'Fourth Reich' was backing the 'Croatian fascists.' While many Montenegrins believed that they were not aggressors but defenders of Montenegro and Yugoslavia, many Catholic Croats fled the Bay of Kotor. However, after the public relations disaster of the attack on Dubrovnik some of the Montenegrin

<sup>16</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 75-88; Ivo Banac, 'Post-Communism as Post-Yugoslavism: The Yugoslav Non-Revolutions of 1989-1990', in Ivo Banac (ed.), *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (Ithaca/London, 1992), pp. 168-87; Mark Baskin and Paula Pickering, 'Former Yugoslavia and Its Successors', in Sharon L. Wolchik and Jane L. Curry (eds.), *Central and East European Politics: From Communism to Democracy* (Lanham, MD, 2008), pp. 281-315 for a useful essay on the wider process of political transformation in Yugoslavia.

leaders began to wake up and to distance themselves from the Serb nationalist warmongers. Both Bulatović and Djukanović began to strike a more moderate tone and to try to manoeuvre out of the war. Bulatović even tried to engage with the peace plan for Yugoslavia proposed by Lord Carrington in The Hague in October 1991. It was supported by the European Community and envisaged a loose association of independent states in the former Yugoslavia. Bulatović actually signed the draft document of the plan. This meant in effect that he opted for Montenegrin independence and not for a Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia, which shocked the Serbian leadership in Belgrade. Italy played a crucial role in the European contacts with the Montenegrin president with the Italian foreign minister declaring that Bulatović ‘considered Italy as Montenegro’s way into Europe.’<sup>17</sup> Bulatović’s actions independent of Belgrade and of pro-Serbian Montenegrins was seen as treason by the latter. A major part of Montenegrin opinion turned against him, and in the Montenegrin parliament DPS members who supported him were attacked by a pro-Serbian opposition bloc. On the other hand, they were backed by a second opposition bloc – the anti-Serbian political forces of the Albanians, the Muslims as well as ‘the Montenegrins who believe that we have nothing in common with Serbia.’<sup>18</sup> Djukanović also supported Bulatović and like the latter saw the signing of the The Hague document as a possible exit strategy for Montenegro. But at the end of the day the Montenegrin leaders were not strong enough to chart an independent course and oppose the Milošević government. After painful negotiations the Serbian and Montenegrin leaders decided that a referendum would be held in Montenegro (but not in Serbia) in March 1992 on the establishment of a new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the successor to the old Socialist Federal Republic. The majority of Montenegrins voted in favour, and one month later, in April 1992, war broke out in Bosnia and Hercegovina.<sup>19</sup>

Bulatović tried to find a compromise between subordination to Serbia and Montenegrin independence. In practice this meant the continuation of an authoritarian political regime and political culture. The Montenegrin democratic opposition, which slowly became stronger, tried to prove the essentially undemocratic character of the March referendum. The Montenegrin voters had again been indoctrinated by a biased press and demagogy of the ruling DPS, and intimidated by disruption of oppositional activities. Muslim and Albanian parties had boycotted the referendum. Although Bulatović, himself intimidated, now spoke again of Montenegro continuing to be a ‘bastion of Serbdom and Yugoslavism’, the new Federal Republic soon proved a failure. It was no more than a rump state after all the other Yugoslav republics had declared independence, from Slovenia in the north to Macedonia in the south. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was damaged by UN sanctions, on the one hand, and – partly as a result of the sanctions – the activities of criminal networks of smugglers and corrupt Montenegrin and Serbian politicians, on

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 99.

<sup>18</sup> Momir Bulatović in October 1994, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 100, 249n63: interview with Bulatović, ‘Death of Yugoslavia Archive’, London.

<sup>19</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 92-102; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 429-44.

the other hand. In this unpredictable and volatile situation tensions in the relationship between Montenegro and Serbia, and between Bulatović and Milošević, were becoming manifest again. In the parliamentary and presidential elections in Montenegro in December 1992, Milošević's ruling Socialist Party of Serbia actually supported the presidential candidacy of Montenegro's hard-line Serbian nationalist Branko Kostić against Bulatović. But Bulatović became president again after two rounds of voting, and the DPS won a majority again in the Montenegrin parliament. At this stage the Montenegrins seemed to be in favour of a moderate federal policy and a form of autonomy instead of hard-line Serbian nationalism. Djukanović became prime minister again and now formed a multiparty government which even included the liberal LSCG (*Liberálni Savez Crne Gore*), Liberal Alliance of Montenegro. The LSCG was a gathering of various groups and individuals including pro-independence Montenegrins, anti-war activists, and oppositional journalists and intellectuals. It was led by the former public prosecutor Slavko Perović, and its declared aim was to establish an independent multicultural Montenegrin state based on 'European values.' Although some of the Liberals played a part in Djukanović's new government, they continued to be attacked in the state-controlled media as a fifth column of agents of the West, Croatia, and the Vatican who wanted to destroy Serbdom. New opposition parties like the Social Democratic Party were also in favour of Montenegrin independence but used a more cautious rhetoric than the LSCG did. Other increasingly relevant opposition parties were those of the Muslim and Albanian minorities, in particular the Muslim Party for Democratic Action (SDA) led by Harun Hadžić, which was concentrated in northern Montenegro, and the Albanian Democratic Alliance of Montenegro. They wanted to defend the religious and ethnic minorities, preferably by a form of cultural autonomy, work together with other Montenegrins against the war, and achieve a more democratic Montenegro. Anti-war activists like Slavko Perović and other oppositional figures were frequently threatened with physical violence. Nonetheless it was estimated in 1992 that a minority of 7-10 per cent of the Montenegrin population supported the so-called United Opposition.<sup>20</sup>

### **National-cultural and religious antagonisms**

Of major importance for the future of Montenegro was the establishment of alternative cultural institutions to try to break the pro-Serbian dominance in the sphere of the media and cultural and intellectual organisations. In 1990-91 an independent weekly newspaper called *Monitor* began to appear, which tried to counter the propaganda of the official media. Its founder Miodrag Perović (no relation of Slavko Perović) later explained that its editorial policy was 'anti-war, restoration of the European identity of Montenegro, and the equal position of Montenegro among South Slav nations.' He was treated by the 'regime' with great hostility and 'as

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<sup>20</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 108-110.

a spy for the West and part of an “anti-Serbian coalition.”<sup>21</sup> In 1990 a number of Montenegrin ‘dissidents’ established an independent writers’ association, the Montenegrin PEN Centre. On the more national side of things, the Montenegrin cultural association *Crnogorska Matica* was established in 1993. Its members wanted to preserve the cultural and historical identity of Montenegro and promote the idea of a separate Montenegrin state. If it were possible for liberalisation and democratisation to go hand in hand with a modern political and cultural patriotism, so the idea may have been, it would be a good thing for Montenegro. In 1994 the Montenegrin PEN Centre made an important contribution to redefining the Montenegrin nation as well. It published a ‘Declaration on the Endangerment of Montenegrin Culture, People and State’, claiming that ‘Great Serbian chauvinism and hegemony’ aimed to ‘abolish and assimilate the Montenegrin nation, its history and culture.’ The short-sighted Montenegrin authorities were said to support this process, thus ‘seriously endangering the thousand-year-old state, culture and national identity of the Montenegrins.’<sup>22</sup> The Declaration compared Serbia’s policy towards Montenegro with the German *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938, criticised the ‘medieval dogmas’ of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and argued that Montenegrins were being forcibly assimilated by the Serbs. It was also claimed that the Montenegrin language was unique.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps this can be seen as a reaction to the fact that the Montenegrin Constitution of 1992 officially proclaimed the language of Montenegro to be Serbian (instead of Serbo-Croatian as before). As anti-Serb sentiments in Montenegro were growing, Serbia also tried to force Montenegro to abolish its rather impotent but potentially troublesome defence and foreign ministries.

While these new patriotic, national-cultural, and democratic tendencies were emerging among a part of the majority Orthodox population, Montenegro’s Muslim minority began to raise its voice as well. This was especially the case in the Sandžak region in the north, which had the largest concentration of Slav Muslims. In the early 1990s Montenegro’s Muslims became the target of increasing physical aggression, and the outbreak of war in neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992 had a significant impact on Montenegro and especially on the Sandžak. The Montenegrin part of the historic Sandžak region with its large Slavic Muslim population – almost a second Bosnia – had been annexed by Montenegro in the First Balkan War in 1912. When Montenegrin forces entered the area they murdered civilians and tried to forcibly baptise some 12,000 Muslims. In 1914 some 16,750 Muslims left Montenegro for Turkey, but large numbers stayed behind. The massacre of several hundred Muslims in 1924, mentioned above, was another horrific incident. During the years 1941-43, a complicated situation of civil war, a Muslim militia was one of the fighting parties in the Sandžak, engaged in internecine conflict with communist Partisans and pro-Serbian Chetniks. Repressive measures against Sandžak Muslims during the early years of communist Yugoslavia led to another wave of emigration to Turkey. From the late

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Miodrag Perović by Kenneth Morrison (17 June 2007), quoted in *Montenegro*, pp. 111, 251n55.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Poláčková and Van Duin, ‘Montenegro Old and New’, pp. 74-6.

1950s Yugoslavia, which became a leading member in the international 'Non-Aligned Movement', began to project an image of tolerance to Muslims. In 1971 the concept of a Muslim nation – in addition to the already existing Bosniak nation – was formalised in the Yugoslav census of that year.<sup>24</sup> In 1974 a constitutional change was carried through in the Montenegrin Republic whereby the term 'nationality' was replaced with 'national group' as far as the status of minorities and the protection of their special rights (with regard to schools, language use, and religion) was concerned. There were now a number of recognised national minority groups (Muslims, Bosniaks, Albanians) alongside 'the Montenegrin people' as a whole.<sup>25</sup> In the conflicts of the early 1990s Muslim identity became more self-conscious and explicit in a defensive reaction. In 1991-92 the Muslims lost the cultural and political status that Tito had awarded them between 1968 and the early 1970s. It is probably true that, despite undeniable problems, Montenegro's Muslims had been better integrated, socially and politically, than the Muslim minority in Serbia. Therefore, the deterioration of their position led to political resistance. In October 1991 Sandžak Muslims held a referendum in an attempt to gain greater (perhaps even territorial) autonomy. The reaction of the Serbs and Montenegrins, again, was such that by April 1992 the status of the Muslims had been reduced to that of a minority without rights in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, even though the Montenegrin Constitution continued to contain 'special rights' for minorities on paper. These constitutional provisions made it possible at a later stage to help improve the position of the Muslims back to normal. Their political significance was considerable given that, according to the census of 1991, 14.6 per cent of the Montenegrin population were Slavic Muslims and 6.6 per cent Albanians (among whom there was also a Catholic minority).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Bodhana Dimitrova, in an essay in *Southeast European Politics* (October 2001), speaks of 'one nation with two names,' Bosniak and Muslim. But there were also disagreements about the meaning of these concepts, and in the early 1990s the debate between those who identified themselves as Montenegrin Muslims, and those who defined themselves as Bosniaks, continued; see Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 124, 252n89. According to Baskin and Pickering, 'Former Yugoslavia and Its Successors', p. 311n11, the Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals officially adopted 'Bosniak' ('Bosniac') as the name for the people in 1993 and 'it has been generally accepted among all Slavic Muslims.' However, in Montenegro the situation may be more complicated. See on the Bosniaks, Francine Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial of a Nation* (Boulder, CO, 1995). Milan Podunavac (ed), *Challenge of Multiculturalism*, Serbian Political Science Association and Heinrich Boell Foundation, (Belgrade, 2013), 302p., Olivera Komar, *Politička kultura u Crnoj Gori: političko odlučivanje građana*, In Sonja Tomović Šundić, *Crna Gora u XXI stoljeću – u eri kompetitivnosti: Pitanja vrijednosti*, Crnogorska akademija nauka i umjetnosti, (Podgorica, 2010), ISBN 978-86-7215-250-0; (Political Culture in Montenegro: political decision making by citizens" in Montenegro in XXI century – era of competitiveness: Values, published by Montenegrin Science and Arts Academy).

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Marko, *Der Minderheitenschutz in den jugoslawischen Nachfolgestaaten* (Bonn, 1996), p. 219. With regard to school laws, the Albanians were not explicitly mentioned anymore as before, apparently to avoid any suggestions of a 'privileged' status. Milan Podunavac (ed), *Challenge of Multiculturalism*, Serbian Political Science Association and Heinrich Boell Foundation, (Belgrade, 2013), 302p., Olivera Komar, *Politička kultura u Crnoj Gori: političko odlučivanje građana*, In Sonja Tomović Šundić, *Crna Gora u XXI stoljeću – u eri kompetitivnosti: Pitanja vrijednosti*, Crnogorska akademija nauka i umjetnosti, (Podgorica, 2010), ISBN 978-86-7215-250-0; (Political Culture in Montenegro: political decision making by citizens" in Montenegro in XXI century – era of competitiveness: Values, published by Montenegrin Science and Arts Academy).

<sup>26</sup> Marko, *Der Minderheitenschutz*, p. 217.

As Montenegro's Muslims and Bosniaks in the Sandžak, along with other Muslim communities, began to be attacked as (potential) traitors by an increasingly aggressive Serbian nationalism, they looked towards Bosnia for support or even as their cultural and political homeland. Those who lost hope – approximately 60,000 Muslims from both the Serbian and the Montenegrin part of the Sandžak – fled to Turkey, Macedonia, or Western Europe in the early 1990s, having lost their jobs and a sense of basic security. At the same time, a Montenegrin branch of the Bosnian Party of Democratic Action (SDA) was established, and another branch in the Serbian Sandžak. However, the Bosnian SDA leader Alija Izetbegović was a somewhat controversial figure among Muslims in Montenegro with some seeing him as too extreme, and the Muslim referendum of October 1991 on political and territorial autonomy for the Sandžak was supported by only a minority of Montenegrin Muslims. Nevertheless the relations between Orthodox and Muslim communities became more strained as the armed conflict in Bosnia escalated and paramilitary groups crossed the border into Montenegro. In the summer of 1992 the Muslim inhabitants of the Montenegrin town of Pljevlja close to the Bosnian border, a locality with a 30 per cent Muslim population, were intimidated and physically attacked by Serb paramilitary units from eastern Bosnia. A leader of the Pljevlja Muslim community appealed to the Montenegrin president Bulatović to stop the Serb paramilitaries from Bosnia crossing into Montenegro by tightening border controls. Shortly afterwards Montenegrin Muslims living in the village of Bukovica near the Bosnian border were terrorised for days by local pro-Serbian extremists, Montenegrin policemen, and Yugoslav soldiers. According to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, some 800 Muslims were banished, kidnapped or murdered in Bukovica. The Montenegrin authorities were unable or unwilling to control pro-Serbian extremists and Serbian irregulars. In June 1993 Muslims were attacked in the Montenegrin city of Nikšić and the city's mosque was destroyed. Later that year a number of Muslims and one Croat were executed at a train station in northern Montenegro. In January 1994, twenty-six members of the SDA were arrested because they were associated with SDA plans for an autonomous status for the Sandžak. In 1996, when the political situation in Montenegro began to change, they were given an amnesty by President Bulatović. Indeed, the following year the ruling party DPS split, which meant that the Montenegrin prime minister Djukanović was forced to seek political support among the Muslim and Albanian communities to remain in power. The Montenegrin Albanians were suffering in the early 1990s as well. In 1992 the Albanian population of Ulcinj and other Albanian population centres was intimidated by the paramilitary units ('White Eagles') of the extremist Serbian Radical Party of Vojislav Šešelj. A few months later Albanian organisations presented a memorandum on a 'Special Status' for the Albanians of Montenegro.<sup>27</sup> However, by 1997, when the political situation in Montenegro improved, both the Albanians and the majority of the Montenegrin Muslims opted for re-integration into Montenegro's mainstream political life.

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<sup>27</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 114-27.

One factor which helped to soften the context surrounding majority-minority relations was the struggle of reform-minded Montenegrins for an independent (autocephalous) Montenegrin Orthodox Church and separation from the Serbian Orthodox Church with which the Montenegrins had been forcibly unified in 1920. It was a struggle between two concepts of national-political identity – Great Serbian v. Montenegrin – rather than a church or religious conflict per se. The leader of the Montenegrin Liberal Party LSCG, Slavko Perović, argued in December 1993 that the Serbian Orthodox Church was ‘working on the assimilation of the Montenegrins’, and that the Montenegrin patriarch of the Serbian Church, Amfilohije Radović, was vulgarising this process by telling the Montenegrins among other things that the term ‘Montenegrin’ itself was a ‘Comintern-Vatican-Bolshevist’ invention.<sup>28</sup> Two months earlier, in October 1993, an autocephalous Montenegrin Orthodox Church had in fact been re-established in Montenegro’s old capital Cetinje with some 15,000 people attending. There were now two Orthodox Churches in Montenegro. The LSCG as well as other Montenegrin opposition forces like the Social Democratic Party and independent journalists and intellectuals, ‘knew that there would be no political and national existence of Montenegro or the Montenegrin people without a free and independent Montenegrin Orthodox Church,’ as Stanka Vučinić, a leader of the LSCG, explained in 2007.<sup>29</sup> At this stage the Montenegrin authorities distanced themselves from the as yet informally constituted independent church. The Serbian Orthodox Church was well established in Montenegro, had the support of the Patriarchs of Moscow and Constantinople (Istanbul), and had its Montenegrin base in the historic Cetinje monastery of the old Montenegro Vladikas (prince-bishops). However, by the late 1990s the Montenegrin Church had gained possession of more than two dozen churches and other religious buildings in Montenegro. There were a number of sometimes violent conflicts between supporters of both rival churches, especially in Cetinje.

### **A Djukanović revolution?**

By 1996-97 Montenegro entered a new stage of political dynamics as a result of internal conflicts in the ruling party DPS, which eventually split in 1997. Part of the DPS leadership began to take more distance from Milošević and the Serbs and to follow the strategy of striving for Montenegrin independence to protect their special interests but also to ensure a better future for Montenegro. This time President Bulatović remained loyal to Belgrade but Prime Minister Djukanović took the lead in actively opposing Milošević, starting with a speech in the Montenegrin parliament in July 1996. The struggle gradually developed into an open confrontation between two concepts of Montenegrin national identity – the rather aggressive Great Serbian nationalist idea and the alternative and more defensive Montenegrin national idea. It was the old

<sup>28</sup> Report in the Croatian newspaper *Rijeka Novi List*, 4 December 1993, quoted in Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 129.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Vučinić by Morrison (June 2007), quoted in *Montenegro*, pp. 131, 256n13.

national controversy of Montenegro that now took hold of the present political elite as well, and thereby forced the issue to a climax. It certainly was a question of defending elite interests and a specific constellation of political power. But in the context of the years after 1995, when peace returned to neighbouring Bosnia and Hercegovina, this also inevitably meant defining a new Montenegrin attitude to bankrupt Yugoslavia and unpredictable Serbia. In July 1997, a year after his provoking speech, Djukanović, supported by a number of influential individuals in the DPS and the state institutions, wrested control of the ruling party group. Two months later presidential elections were held in which Djukanović as the official DPS candidate stepped forward as the candidate of democratisation and European modernisation of Montenegro. His presidential rival Bulatović of the pro-Serbian party faction was largely supported by voters in Montenegro's 'Serb north' and in the rural areas, while Djukanović managed to win the support of a majority of younger, urban, and better educated Montenegrins. The latter advocated Montenegrin independence and breaking away from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and were mainly concentrated in the central and coastal areas of Montenegro. In Old Montenegro's historic capital Cetinje the liberal party LSCG appeared to be the strongest political force, and after the DPS split and the presidential election some LSCG leaders wanted to continue supporting Djukanović. They began to believe he might be able to deliver Montenegrin independence, which they saw as the precondition to achieving a democratic society. Djukanović finally won the presidential election in the second round, but the pro-Serbian bloc tried to prevent his taking over as president for several months, organising street protests until at least January 1998. Djukanović was denounced as a 'Turk' and the like, and at one point a bloodbath was narrowly averted in Montenegro's capital Podgorica. However, the Djukanović faction of the DPS won this political civil war. In March 1998 the pro-Serbian faction re-established itself as the Socialist People's Party, while the pro-Djukanović majority retained the name DPS. As yet Djukanović's DPS remained cautious with regard to the objective of Montenegrin state independence but by opposing Milošević it began to attract the support of Montenegro's minorities in addition to some of the liberals and other advocates of independence. The Montenegrin parliamentary elections in May 1998 consolidated the pattern of political polarisation. A political bloc of the DPS, the Social Democratic Party and others, reinforced by the indirect support of the LSCG, took 60 per cent of the vote. Bulatović's Socialist People's Party took just over one-third and 29 of the 72 seats in parliament. The SPP's crude political attacks on Muslims, Albanians, Croats, and pro-independence Montenegrins limited its attractiveness to a majority of the electorate and enhanced the support of the minorities for the DPS.<sup>30</sup>

The outbreak of the war in Kosovo in 1998 led the Montenegrin government to declare that it would not support Serbia in its conflict with the international community over the issue, but that it would remain neutral. When the government adopted the *Deutschmark* as Montenegro's

<sup>30</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 144-65; Robert Thomas, *Serbia under Milošević: Politics in the 1990s* (London, 1999), pp. 379-86.

currency in 1999, this was another crucial indication of Montenegro's insistence to attain greater independence. Although the number of refugees streaming into Montenegro from Kosovo – first Albanians, later Serbs – rose to 80,000, and although pro-Milošević and pro-Serbian groups in Montenegro were mobilising, Djukanović managed to keep the situation under control. He used the growing tension in Montenegro to strengthen the Montenegrin police force and other groups and institutions that were loyal to him. Fears of a military coup by the Yugoslav army and strategic moves made by the army in Montenegro led to counter-moves by Montenegrin protestors and a local militia in Cetinje. By 1999, after the Kosovo war and the NATO bombing had ended, the Montenegrin government began to think of further steps to strengthen its autonomous position within the still existing Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. New intimidating moves by the Yugoslav army in Montenegro in early 2000 and anti-government actions by supporters of the oppositional Socialist People's Party in northern Montenegro led to increased tension. The pro-Serbian forces began to revive old tribal loyalties in northern Montenegro at quasi-spontaneous tribal gatherings to step up the political pressure on the Djukanović government and perhaps start a rebellion against it. Members of the notoriously pro-Serbian Kuči tribe warned the Muslim and Albanian population not to meddle in Montenegro's state affairs. Members of the Rovci clan declared that 'the call for sovereign Montenegro is the same as a call to arms,' and that there had never been 'a Rovci man converting to Islam or Catholicism, or declaring himself a Montenegrin!'<sup>31</sup> This gave the government the opportunity to present itself in a modern and responsible light and to state that the re-emergence of tribal groups represented pre-civic social formations utilised by Serbian nationalists to subvert the democratic process. Indeed, the authorities began to construct and consolidate Montenegro's state framework, which included further extending Djukanović's system of political and economic patronage and awarding important government posts to crucial and influential individuals. Another measure was establishing a Montenegrin foreign service headed by the diplomatically experienced Branko Lukovac, who became in January 2000 Montenegro's first foreign minister since 1918. Djukanović himself, during a visit to Zagreb in July 2000, apologised to the Croats for Montenegro's role in the attack on Dubrovnik in the early 1990s.<sup>32</sup> He also announced that the Montenegrins would not participate in the Yugoslav federal elections in September 2000. On 5 October of that year, after an electoral victory of the Serbian democratic opposition, mass rallies in Belgrade forced Milošević to relinquish power.

When the new Serbian leader, Vojislav Koštunica, visited Montenegro in October 2000, Djukanović told him quite clearly that his purpose was Montenegrin independence. The United States and the European Union wanted the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to continue because they were afraid of further Balkanisation and instability, but Djukanović and the DPS openly proclaimed their goal of independence while tactfully manoeuvring to bring it within reach. The

<sup>31</sup> Statements made in *The Final Battle of Yugoslavia*, BBC broadcast, 5 August 2000, quoted in Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 175, 264n42.

<sup>32</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 180.

Montenegrin parliamentary elections in April 2001 were won by the coalition of the DPS and the Social Democratic Party, but with a smaller majority than in the previous elections. The liberal LSCG refused to join the coalition when its rather extreme demands in terms of power sharing were rejected. But Djukanović managed to further consolidate his position, to become the leader of the Montenegrin independence project, and even to attract a number of critical intellectuals and independent media who saw that he was the only political figure who could implement Montenegrin state independence. Their pragmatic idea was to achieve 'independence first, democracy second.'<sup>33</sup> In March 2002 the joint state of 'Serbia and Montenegro' was formed (as a kind of temporary compromise) under pressure from the EU and others, an unworkable structure which allowed for the scheduling of a referendum after three years (a crucial concession secured by Djukanović). In an open letter to the EU one hundred Montenegrin intellectuals protested at the EU's policy of refusing to support Montenegrin independence, but the reality was that independence was only postponed. Djukanović was accused by many, including a former Italian finance minister (Ottavio del Turco), of having close links to organised crime. However, his project of working towards a referendum on Montenegrin independence ensured his popularity among at least one half of the Montenegrin population. The Montenegrin census of 2003 showed the politicisation of the concepts of Montenegrin and Serbian identity and the disappearance of the notion and reality of dual Montenegrin-Serbian national identity in Montenegro. In 2003, 40.5 per cent defined themselves as 'Montenegrin' and 30.3 per cent as 'Serb.'<sup>34</sup> The two concepts had now essentially become mutually exclusive identity definitions. In 2004 the Montenegrin parliament passed a law on Montenegrin national symbols. The old Montenegrin flag of the pre-1918 period was re-introduced; the day on which Montenegro had been recognised as a sovereign state in 1878 was declared a 'national day'; and an old Montenegrin national hymn was proclaimed the new national anthem. One version of the latter had been arranged by Sekula Drljević during the days of the Italian-backed Montenegrin regime in the early 1940s, which caused the pro-Serbian voices in Montenegro to speak of 'fascism.' Also in 2004, the Montenegrin Educational Council proposed changing the official language of Montenegro from 'Serbian' to Montenegrin 'mother tongue', which was supported by Jevrem Brković, president of the newly styled Dukljan Academy of Arts and Sciences (this name referred to the medieval Montenegrin principality of Doclea or Duklja).<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the Montenegrin authorities were stressing the 'civic' and multiethnic character of the Montenegrin state in the making, which was regarded as propaganda by the pro-Serbian parties. It was a fact that Montenegrin nationalists like Brković who were forced to flee Montenegro in 1991, were now rehabilitated. They and various Montenegrin cultural organisations helped to tie the independence project to the political position of Djukanović,

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Miodrag Perović by Kenneth Morrison (17 June 2007), quoted in *Montenegro*, pp. 187, 265n19.

<sup>34</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 191-2.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Poláčeková and Van Duin, 'Montenegro Old and New', p. 76.

who now could play his new role of liberator of Montenegro instead of his old role of unifier of Serbs and Montenegrins.

By 2005 the pro-Serbian forces in Montenegro were forming a united movement to oppose Montenegrin independence if a referendum were held. They accused Djukanović and his political group of wanting to create an independent Montenegro for the sole purpose of consolidating their elitist economic interests. The Serbian Orthodox Church actively supported this campaign. One thing the Serbian Church tried to do was to take over and monopolise the inter-confessional place of pilgrimage at Mount Rumija near the port of Bar, a site of worship for both Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim Montenegrins. Mehmet Bardhi, a leader of the ethnic Albanians, called this act 'the biggest provocation against Albanians in the past fifty years.'<sup>36</sup> Marko Špadijer of the Montenegrin *Matica* said it threatened to damage relations between the different religious and ethnic groups, but this, and provoking the government, was precisely what Amfilohije Radović and the Serbian Orthodox Church were trying to do. However, the pro-Serbian movement's portraying of Albanians and Muslims as constituting a danger to Montenegro ensured that the minorities would vote for independence in a referendum. The Montenegrin pro-independence movement indeed was working to gather all pro-independence parties, individuals, and ethnic groups under one political umbrella. The drive for independence and the need to include as many groups as possible had the potential to help improve interethnic and inter-confessional relations in Montenegro. After months of contacts and negotiations with the EU on the one hand, and Montenegro's political opposition groups on the other, the government could finally set the referendum on independence for May 2006.

### **Regaining independence**

The EU acted as arbiter throughout the referendum process with two Slovaks, Miroslav Lajčák and František Lipka, being in charge of the referendum committee and decisions that might have to be taken in disputes. For a 'yes' or 'no' vote on the question of Montenegrin state independence to be decisive, 55 per cent of the valid votes cast was required, and in addition 50 per cent plus one of the registered voters had to participate in the referendum. The referendum campaign on both sides was revealing of what was at stake and of the prevailing political emotions. The pro-independence bloc argued that the Montenegrins had a unique historical opportunity to correct the injustice of the loss of independence in 1918. The era of the old independent Montenegro of 1878-1918 was represented as a romantic golden age, and contemporary Montenegrins as descendants of the heroes who unfortunately had lost their state independence due to Serbian aggression. The pro-independence campaign was notable for its inclusion of the minori-

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 202.

ties – Muslims, Bosniaks, and Albanians – who had suffered from the excesses of Serb nationalism in Montenegro. The pro-independence bloc was strongly supported in the municipalities with a large number of these minority citizens, for example in Ulcinj, Plav, and Rožaje with their substantial Albanian and Muslim population. The Albanian language was specifically used in the pro-independence print and electronic media alongside the Serbian/Montenegrin language. But of even more critical importance for the final victory of the pro-independence bloc turned out to be the Montenegrin diaspora vote in Europe, the US, and Australia. While a man like Slavko Perović, the former leader of the now defunct LSCG, did not participate in the pro-independence campaign, the grandson of Montenegro's former King Nikola came to Montenegro to give his support. The pro-union (Serbian-Montenegrin) and anti-independence bloc was most strongly supported in the pro-Serbian northern municipalities of Šavnik, Berane, Kolašin, Pljevlja, and Andrijevića as well as in the pro-Serbian enclave of Herceg Novi in the Bay of Kotor region. A typical detail was that the pro-union campaign material was written in the Cyrillic script, as opposed to the Latin script generally used by 'ethnic Montenegrins' and by the Muslim and Albanian minorities. Also telling was the pro-union bloc's anti-Albanian propaganda and their warning of the danger of a 'Greater Albania' since an independent Montenegro would be too weak to resist Albanian aggression. However, the pro-union forces also used rational economic arguments, and it is true that a large number of young voters supported continuation of the union with Serbia because they may have been afraid of economic marginalisation and Montenegrin isolation. At the same time, in Belgrade voices were heard claiming that the Montenegrin nation was a 'communist fiction' and that Montenegro was 'Serbian ethnic space.' Serbian newspapers also printed stories about Croatian and Albanian plans to carve up independent Montenegro in the future.<sup>37</sup>

The referendum on 21 May 2006 resulted in a narrow majority of 55.53 per cent in favour of Montenegrin independence with the generally pro-independence diaspora vote, which represented some 4 per cent of the total, being decisive for the pro-independence victory. The turnout of 86.49 per cent was extremely high. In the municipalities of Bar and Cetinje the pro-independence majorities were over 65 per cent, while Podgorica, Tivat, Budva but also the northern municipality of Bijelo Polje produced pro-independence majorities as well. However, the highest level of support for independence came from the predominantly Muslim municipalities of Plav and Rožaje in the north-east (91 per cent) and from the predominantly Albanian municipality of Ulcinj in the south. It is perhaps not surprising that pro-unionists used these figures to argue that only thanks to the minorities and the diaspora vote Montenegrin independence could be accomplished, and that a majority of the Orthodox population had actually voted in favour of preserving the state union with Serbia. Aside from this, the political-geographical divide in Montenegro was broadly confirmed by the final referendum result, with most municipalities in the

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<sup>37</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 205-17.

north and Herceg Novi voting in favour of Montenegrin-Serbian union and most of central and southern Montenegro voting for independence. After the victory of the pro-independence bloc, Djukanović hinted that the 'Montenegrin language' would be constituted as the official language of Montenegro and that the status of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church would be carefully revised as well. On 3 June 2006 the Montenegrin government declared formal independence. The drive towards Montenegrin independence had apparently inspired other small European nations as well, as was shown, for example, by the presence in Montenegro of a Basque delegation during the referendum days.<sup>38</sup>

### Some conclusions

The Djukanović leadership had travelled the road from Great Serbian nationalism in the early 1990s to revived Montenegrin nationalism ten years later. It had finally adopted the anti-war and pro-independence programme of the liberal and national opposition groups of the 1990s, using it for its own ends as a political and economic elite with special interests. The use of corruption and clientelism, but also a legitimate Montenegrin nationalism, were combined to achieve a result that saw an old elite stay in power by manoeuvring in a manner that seemed sometimes unique. Of course, there are many examples of post-communist regimes in Eastern Europe that were using the techniques of (sometimes more apparent than real) political transformation, economic modernisation, and especially re-invented nationalism to consolidate their hold on power.<sup>39</sup> In Montenegro the influx of foreign investment, both Western and Russian, helped to strengthen the regime economically. Meanwhile, adopting the role of defender of the historic Montenegrin nation enabled the regime to strengthen its position from a political and psychological point of view. This was in some ways more spectacular than what happened elsewhere, and in particular the long period during which Djukanović and his allies managed to stay in power and practise their political techniques must be considered exceptional. This had to do with the qualities of Djukanović himself as a leader, with the special political and cultural realities of Montenegro, and perhaps above all, with the almost uniquely complex historical trajectory of the Montenegrin nation. While this complexity was often a source of confusion and antagonisms, it also provided possibilities for a flexible response to changing circumstances. One of these possibilities – and probably the most significant one – was to refer back to Montenegro's past as a small but admirable independent nation. There were always patriotic individuals, groups, and even historical institutional features in Montenegro helping to preserve the memory of the country's 'glorious past.' Historical consciousness and revived patriotism could then be used to construct a more

<sup>38</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 217-20.

<sup>39</sup> See Wolchik and Curry (eds.), *Central and East European Politics: From Communism to Democracy*, for a whole series of them, enabling students and political scientists to make detailed comparative analyses.

modern or even democratic version of Montenegro's national identity. This is what small Montenegrin opposition groups did between the 1970s and the early 1990s, and what Djukanović decided to do from the later 1990s.

But even so, this road was not without problems and serious obstacles, especially given the existence in Montenegro of a second political tradition, Great Serbian nationalism. When parliamentary elections were held in Montenegro in September 2006, less than four months after the independence referendum, the oppositional 'Serbian List' was remarkably successful both in terms of the percentage of the vote taken (reflecting its strong showing of almost 45 per cent in the referendum) and in terms of its ability to form a strong political bloc and articulate specific demands. These increasingly defensive demands included the right to use Serbian national symbols, recognition of the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet, and the demand that in accordance with the census results of 2003, 30.5 per cent of state employees should be Serbs.<sup>40</sup> These demands suggested that a minority Serb nationality was delimiting itself in Montenegro. They found their counterpart in demands for more minority rights made by the Muslim, Bosniak, and Albanian minorities. Representatives of these minorities argued – just like the pro-Serbian minority! – that Montenegrin independence would not have been gained without their support. The postponement of new minority rights legislation caused some of Montenegro's Muslims and Bosniaks to protest vehemently and to shift their support to ethnic political parties instead of Djukanović's DPS. While Muslims, Bosniaks, and Albanians tended to see Montenegro as their state-political home, they also continued to make demands for greater autonomy in the cultural and administrative sphere. For Muslims and Bosniaks this is mainly a question of religious freedom and equal civic rights, but also of educational opportunities. Ethnic Albanians want Albanian-language textbooks – not just Serbian/Montenegrin ones – to be available in primary and secondary schools attended by Albanians. They also insist that university education in their mother tongue should be available in Montenegro itself (at present many Montenegrin Albanians go to study at the University of Pristina in Kosovo).<sup>41</sup> Another Albanian demand is that the predominantly Albanian Tuzi area, now a part of Podgorica municipality, should become a separate municipality. The arrest of several Albanians accused of terrorist intentions just before the parliamentary elections of September 2006 caused part of the Albanian voters to give their support to more radical ethnic Albanian parties instead of the DPS-Social Democratic Party coalition supported by moderate Albanians.<sup>42</sup>

Some Montenegrins who supported Djukanović in the independence referendum, but did not belong to the old DPS elite, were co-opted by being awarded positions within the state system. But others went back into opposition because of their dissatisfaction with the clientelist and corrupt elite system and with the lack of real progress in building democracy in Montenegro. Some

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<sup>40</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 223.

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. Poláčková and Van Duin, 'Montenegro Old and New', p. 81.

<sup>42</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, pp. 224-5.

of the more independent journalists and intellectuals, for instance Jevrem Brković of the Dukljan Academy of Arts and Sciences, became victims of political violence again. Criticising the links between high-ranking officials, leading politicians, and prominent criminals is not without risks, but the remarkable level of economic development in post-independence Montenegro may have made the situation more bearable.<sup>43</sup> It is understandable that some critics of Montenegro's clientelist political system argue that national identity politics is used by the corrupt elite as a smokescreen to mask the process of untransparent and sometimes criminal privatisation. The key figure in all of this remained Milo Djukanović, who became prime minister again in 2007. With his pragmatic and determined personality he managed to keep his clan-like regime intact for many years, giving the appearance of presiding over a democratic system while simultaneously controlling the patterns of elite patronage and clientelism. As Miša Djurković observed in 2006, Montenegro holds the unenviable record of being the only state in Southeast Europe since the collapse of communism with an uninterrupted ex-communist government, and with many of the same individuals remaining in power ever since 1989.<sup>44</sup> But while many of the basic features of the old system remained in place, especially politically and sociologically, Montenegro also changed, especially economically and in terms of regaining national independence. As the question of independence demonstrates, it cannot be denied that there actually was an important dimension of political change as well. But this can also be seen as an expression of political-historical continuity given that Montenegro returned to its old independent status! Perhaps it is true to say that this state restoration after 90 years was a special form of political change happening within the broader context of historical continuity.

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<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Morrison speaks of a 'turbo-capitalist culture' (*Montenegro*, p. 227).

<sup>44</sup> Miša Djurković, *Montenegro: Headed for New Divisions*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Balkans Series, 07/11, 2006; quoted in Morrison, *Montenegro*, p. 230.