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The dwarf and the giant: Montenegrin-Russian relations and Montenegro's 'cult of Russia', c. 1700-2015

This article tries to make an analysis of a rather special political and historical phenomenon: the, perhaps, unique relationship between Montenegro and Russia as it evolved during a period of three centuries. This connection can be described as one between a dwarf and a giant, as an asymmetrical relationship with an ideological as well as a pragmatic dimension that was attractive for both parties. The origin of direct Montenegrin-Russian relations can be found in the early years of the eighteenth century, the era of Peter the Great and of a new stage in Montenegrin political history and state consolidation. This 'founding period' has to be paid particular attention to, in order to understand the relationship that followed. In the special political and cultural conditions of an increasingly expansionist Montenegro, the 'cult of Russia' emerged as an ideological, but also functional, ritual to reinforce Montenegro's efforts to survive and to become a more important factor in the western Balkans region. But the tiny principality was dependent on the vagaries of international politics and Russian policy. The dwarf aspired to be a little Russia and to emulate the giant. A clear definition of friend and foe and a policy of territorial expansion were seen as part of this. On the level of national-cultural identity this led to a politicisation of the Orthodox faith. In the ideological sphere it also meant the building of a mythical past to legitimise an expansionist ethos of often-irresponsible dimensions.

Key words: Montenegro; Russia; Balkans; Ottoman Empire; Russophilism; Orthodox Christianity

The visitor to Montenegro (Crna Gora) in the year 2015 is struck by the large number of Russian visitors, tourists, and permanent or temporary residents, who now can easily enter the country, given that Montenegro has a visa-free regime for Russians since 2008. It is clear that the general attitude of the Montenegrin population to the Russians is rather positive, and that this phenomenon has a long-standing historical background. Custodians in the local museum of Perast (a historic town in the Gulf of Kotor), for example, will enthusiastically speak of the role of Russia in the history of Montenegro, and in that of Perast in particular. Some Montenegrins seem to believe that their small country can keep an ideal middle ground between the EU and the United States on the one side, and Russia on the other, but others doubt it. It is difficult to say how much political influence Russia has in Montenegro at the present time, but the economic role of the Russians is considerable. Apparently, about one-third of foreign business companies in Montenegro are owned or controlled by Russians. There are claims (by the Russian press itself) that Russian citizens own at least 40 percent of real-estate property in Montenegro. Croatian media do not hesitate to call Montenegro a 'Russian colony' and Montenegro's prime minister Milo

Đukanović a corrupt ‘manipulator’. All of this did not prevent the Russian consul in Montenegro, Vladimir Vaniev, to sarcastically declare some years ago, that ‘he did not know that Montenegro was the 51st state of the United States’, referring to the sale of a Montenegrin aluminium-production plant to an American company. Vaniev even accused the Montenegrin press of being funded by the United States in order to support a privatisation wave benefiting American interests.¹ Perhaps the Russians are not that certain about their position in Montenegro after all, and of course they fight back against what may be a growing Western influence. Some Montenegrins are apprehensive of an increasing American or Western influence, as well. While many say they want Montenegro to join the EU, a majority seems to be opposed to NATO membership.² The general impression of the visitor from an EU country is that matters have not crystallised yet, neither sentiments nor (perceived) interests, and that there is a lot of confusion among the Montenegrin population as to what they may expect of the future. One thing is certain, however: among a major part of the Montenegrins the traditionally warm feelings for Russia are still much alive. It is of some importance to try to understand this reality and how it came into being. An attempt to analyse Montenegro’s history and the evolution of its political culture during the past three centuries or so, may provide us with a clue. Such an analysis will have to look at what has been called Montenegro’s ‘cult of Russia’, a remarkable aspect of the Montenegrin-Russian relationship ever since the early eighteenth century.³ Alongside this cultural-political, ideological and religious dimension, there was also a more pragmatic and strategic dimension to the special relationship, which was always characterised by a certain asymmetry – that of the dwarf vs. the giant.

Contexts and foundations of the Montenegrin-Russian relationship

It is difficult to speak of a direct connection or relationship between Montenegro and Russia before 1700. Nevertheless, the oldest written evidence of early contacts between Balkan Slavs and Greeks on the one hand, and Russia on the other hand, seems to be from the mid-seventeenth century or, perhaps, even earlier. At Easter 1655, indeed, Tsar Alexis I, who ruled from 1645 to 1676, made a speech to some ‘Greek envoys.’ He declared, among other things, that ever since the days of his grandfather and his father, ‘patriarchs, bishops, monks and poor devils have continually visited us to give expression to the suffering imposed on them by their oppressors.’⁴ These envoys or visitors may have sought Russian protection or support in trying to resist the Ottoman regime in the Balkans, but Russia was as yet not in a position to offer them anything substantial. In the 1650s and 1660s there were occasional discussions between Moscow and the

¹ See for the data mentioned, for example, <http://www.pravdareport.com/hotspots/conflicts/06-04-2005/8020-montenegro-0/Pravda> (English): Russian consul calls Montenegro USA’s 51st state Retrieved April 6, 2005.

² See for Montenegro’s steps towards EU membership, Zuzana Poláčková and Pieter van Duijn, ‘Montenegro Old and New: History, Politics, Culture, and the People’, *Studia Politica Slovaca*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (2013), pp. 60–82, here esp. pp. 76–7.

³ The term ‘cult of Russia’ is used by some Montenegrin historians themselves: see in particular Živko M. Andrijašević and Šerbo Rastoder, *The History of Montenegro from Ancient Times to 2003*, trans. Olivera Kusovac and Uroš Zeković (Podgorica, 2006), e.g., p. 76. A ‘western’ historian like Elizabeth Roberts speaks of ‘cult of Mother Russia’: see Elizabeth Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro* (London, 2007), e.g., p. 16.

⁴ Stefan Dietrich, ‘Die montenegrinisch-russischen Beziehungen 1878–1918’, Seminararbeit, Institut für Osteuropäische Geschichte (Universität Wien, 2001), p. 2.

Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Walachia about Russia's assuming suzerainty in these Balkan lands, but Tsar Alexis was too preoccupied with the problem of Poland.⁵ It was only in the 1690s that Russia's situation and strategic outlook were beginning to change, with the historic reformer and expansionist tsar Peter the Great declaring in 1696 that 'the whole of Christianity' should make an effort to weaken 'the enemies of the Cross', in particular the Turkish Sultan. But this was done in the context of a European-wide political initiative – itself a novelty on the part of a Russian ruler – and based on broad political-strategic considerations and efforts to gain material and political support from other European Powers. Peter's anti-Ottoman initiative failed on the European political level. Austria, for example, was in the process of partly withdrawing from the Balkans following the expulsion of the Turks from Hungarian territory. This may have encouraged the Russians to develop the idea of looking for smaller but strongly motivated local Balkan allies and stressing the Orthodox religious and 'national-liberation' aspects of an anti-Ottoman campaign, even if the primary motive of Russian policy and territorial expansion towards the Balkans was military and strategic. What Russia was especially interested in – and Peter the Great obsessed by – as far as the Balkans was concerned, was building up Russia's naval power in the form of a Black Sea (and Mediterranean) fleet in addition to the Baltic fleet in the north. However, because of strong Ottoman and Crimean Tartar resistance and the long war with Sweden, Russia had to wait until 1710 before it could begin to develop a more consistent Balkan policy, which might include the mobilisation of Orthodox allies.

Nevertheless, already in the 1690s Peter the Great's policy of modernising Russia was not only aimed at expansion in the Baltic region, but also in the Black Sea region. The fleet-building programme in the north, as is well known, was supported by experts from the Netherlands and England. In addition, the fleet-building and maritime programme in the south was to be supported – which is less well known – by experts and advisers from Venice, at the time a major centre of galley building and of raising sailors for Mediterranean conditions. As early as the mid-1690s Peter appealed to the Doge of Venice to send him experts in the construction of galleys. Peter's dream of developing a Black Sea fleet led to anti-Ottoman military campaigns along the Lower Don and against Azov during the years 1695-98. Russia's partial victory in 1698 and the capture of Azov were not only important for the Russians, but also seem to have caused enthusiasm among the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans – the Serbs, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Moldavians, and Walachians – whose representatives now stepped up their appeals for Russian help against the Turks. But while the advance of Russia encouraged their dreams of liberation, they exaggerated their promises of active support if Peter's army penetrated the Balkans. For Russia the Venetian card seemed as yet more important to play, even if other factors, including the role of the Balkan peoples and indeed of the Dutch, were increasingly significant in Russia's policy as well. In 1696 the Russian envoy Peter Tolstoy travelled to Venice to study shipbuilding and navigation. He was followed in 1698 by a group of seventeen young Russian noblemen (boyars), likewise sent to Venice by the tsar to learn the arts of galley building and maritime skills. The Venetian Senate decided that the seventeen future Russian naval officers should train under the prominent captain Marko Martinović at the Venetian naval school of Perast in the Gulf of Kotor. Other Russians followed at a later stage, and Tolstoy went to have a look in Perast too, on which occasion he discovered the presence of an Orthodox population, presumably both in inland Mon-

⁵ Robert K. Massie, *Peter the Great: His Life and World* (New York, 1980), p. 552.

tenegro and on the coast. In a letter to Russia he wrote of them as follows: ‘Although very far from the motherland, there live a people with our same faith..., brave and loyal, with a coast which could well serve the cause of Russian military expansion.’ Cultural affinity and strategic interest could, of course, be perfect partners, and awareness of this could only be strengthened by the multiplication of contacts between Russia and the Gulf of Kotor. Thus, it was probably through their contacts with the Gulf mariners, that Russian policy makers became conscious of the fierce reputation of anti-Ottoman resistance of the Montenegrins. In the meantime, Tolstoy learned something of the maritime trades and the Mediterranean world, including the Italian language and patterns of Western life and culture. After 1700 he served as Russia’s first resident ambassador in Constantinople, mistrusted by the Turks who feared that he might incite his Greek co-religionists against them. According to Tolstoy, indeed, the Turks were also terrified of Russia’s fleet, including even the northern and Baltic fleets. He reported that the rumour had circulated that ‘seventy great ships have been built at Archangel and they think that when it is necessary these ships will come around from the Atlantic Ocean into the Mediterranean Sea and will sail up to Constantinople.’ Tolstoy was successful in building up an intelligence network in the city, partly based on the organisation of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire and partly on the assistance of Dutch merchants and diplomats. Interestingly, the latter were prepared to share some of their knowledge of Turkish affairs with the Russians.⁶

There is evidence that between 1704 and 1710 at least four ‘Serb’ leaders – it is not clear which particular groups of Serbs they represented – arrived in Moscow to stir the Russians to action against the Turks. In return for such action they promised military support and recognition of the tsar as their highest suzerain. ‘We have no other tsar than the Most Orthodox Tsar Peter,’ one of them seems to have declared. For some of the Serbs, namely those who had sought refuge in Habsburg territory north of Belgrade and who owed loyalty to the emperor in Vienna, this may have been somewhat problematical. In the 1690s some tens of thousands of Serbs led by the Serbian Orthodox patriarch Arsenije Čarnojević III had fled to southern Hungary following the withdrawal of the Habsburg armies from the Balkans, the so-called First Great Migration of the Serbs. The historic seat of the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate, Peć in northern Kosovo, was left to Phanariote Greeks and Serbian clerics loyal to the Ottoman administration. The loyalist patriarchs in Peć were not recognised by a major part of the Serb bishops, including the Orthodox metropolitan of Cetinje in Montenegro, but other, more pragmatic clerics and Serb leaders may have taken a different stance. This complex situation also had an impact on the Russo-Turkish war that started in 1710. After the Russian victory against the Swedes at Poltava in the Ukraine in 1709, Tolstoy and other Russian agents in the Ottoman Empire began to prepare the ground for an uprising of the Orthodox peoples in support of the Russian war effort. War against Turkey was declared in 1710, and in February 1711 an impressive propaganda show was organised in the Kremlin in Moscow. Banners with a cross were displayed inscribed with the ancient watchword of the Emperor Constantine, whom Peter the Great pretended to regard as a historical

⁶ Ibid., pp. 143, 540-2, 550, 584 (p. 542 for Tolstoy’s report on Turkish fears of the Russian fleet); Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 139-40, who quotes Nicoló Carnimeo, *Montenegro: A Timeless Voyage* (Milan, 1999), pp. 56-7. Apparently, Peter the Great also sent a delegation to Malta under boyar Boris Sheremetev to investigate the maritime abilities of the Knights of Malta and the possibility of joint action against the Turks and of establishing a Russian naval base there. Seventy years later, the Russians did in fact send a fleet into the Mediterranean from St Petersburg and the Baltic (see below).

predecessor: 'By this sign you shall conquer'. Peter proclaimed a holy war 'against the enemies of Christ'. It is open to debate how far Peter took this religious propaganda seriously, being after all the moderniser of Russia and a pragmatic and strategic thinker. But political modernisation and cultural tradition could well go hand in hand, and religious propaganda was seen as the most effective way of getting the Christian Balkan peoples behind Russia, including Roman Catholics. Moreover, the ultimate defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the re-establishment of a Christian Constantinople were a historic Russian dream. In the Kremlin ceremony of 1711 Peter issued a proclamation openly presenting himself as the liberator of the Balkan Christians and calling on all of them – Catholics as well as Orthodox – to rise against their Ottoman masters. He even declared that 'the descendants of the heathen Mohammed' were to be 'driven out into their old homeland, the sands and steppes of Arabia.' In the spring of 1711 the Russian army distributed printed messages from the tsar to all the Balkan Christians they could reach, containing phrases like, 'the fight for the faith, for the church', and so on. When the Russians entered Moldavia, many Turks were killed by the local population. However, Walachia betrayed the Russian cause and remained on the Turkish side. Russia ended up as the defeated side in the war and had to give up Azov and the incipient Black Sea fleet, which did not appear on the scene until the 1780s. But although the war of 1711 ended in a failure, it opened a new era, because it saw the first Russian invasion of the Balkans. Peter the Great's appeals to the Balkan Christians to rise against the Ottomans and welcome the Russian liberators, was a precedent for later developments. As Robert Massie writes, it 'planted a hardy seed.' The idea that Russia should act as the Orthodox champion of the Balkan Slavs and Christians took root and began to grow.⁷

The penetration of the Balkan world by Russia was partly the result of Russia's own initiatives, partly of the initiatives of Balkan Orthodox leaders and other interested parties, including Venice. But Russia learned it had to be cautious. Peter's military plan of 1711 had been overoptimistic because he expected to be welcomed as a liberator and to be massively supported, first by the Christian population of Moldavia and Walachia, then by the peoples of the southern and western Balkans as well. Things turned out to be not that simple both because Ottoman military power was still formidable and because the effective support of potential Orthodox allies was questionable. Montenegro was far away in the western Balkans, and played a minor role in the events of 1710-11. But collaboration with the powerful Venetians seemed as yet of greater significance. There was a long history of relations between Muscovy and Venice, a history which had begun in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and which had reached a new stage even before the formation of an anti-Ottoman alliance in the days of Peter the Great. The training of future Russian mariners in Venice or Perast was a later consequence of this. In fact, the third quarter of the seventeenth century, the era of Tsar Alexis, already had been a time, not only of commercial exchange, but also of direct diplomatic contacts between Russia and Venice. This was helpful during the first stages of Muscovite political, military and economic modernisation and assisted Russia in becoming a European Power to reckon with.⁸ Another country, if one of a different

⁷ Massie, *Peter the Great*, pp. 548, 550-1, 553-6, 565; also Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 17, 138. Incidentally, the adjectives 'Serb' and 'Serbian' appear to be used in a rather inconsistent manner in the English-language literature. Here we will use the first when the people, their ethnicity, nationality, lands, or leaders are referred to, while the second is used to refer to institutions, politics, and history (the Serbian Church, patriarch, state, throne, power, prince, past, etc.).

⁸ Philip Longworth, 'Russian-Venetian Relations in the Reign of Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 1986), pp. 380-400.

dimension, whose process of political transformation was similarly associated with the Venetian connection, was Montenegro. Its links with Venice dated back to even earlier times than those of Muscovy, but its religious, political and military ethos had also led to frequent tensions with the Venetians, especially in their imperial territory of the Gulf of Kotor and the Adriatic coast. It is interesting to look at the evolution of Montenegro in terms of a special form of regional modernisation, one that answered the conditions of the western Balkans and Montenegro's identity as a 'die-hard enemy' of the Ottoman Empire. What makes the Montenegrin case even more interesting is that the Russian connection was seen by the Montenegrins as an additional crucial factor in this process. The eighteenth century saw the laborious but steady process of Montenegro's political transformation set on track.

In the course of the seventeenth century the office of Montenegrin metropolitan, bishop, or *Vladika* (clerico-political ruler) had begun to be transformed from a purely ecclesiastical to a more political and centralising one, a process that was also supported by the new tendency for it to become hereditary. Thus emerged the institution of the Montenegrin prince-bishop, who usually continued to be referred to as metropolitan or *Vladika*. In 1696-97 Danilo Šćepčević, later known as Danilo I Petrović Njegoš after his family and clan respectively, became the first hereditary prince-bishop of the Petrović dynasty, ruling from the Montenegrin capital Cetinje. Danilo I, a warrior rather than a monk even though he started his career in the Cetinje Orthodox monastery, called himself 'Vladika of Cetinje and Warlord [duke, *vojevodič*] of the Serb land.' This self-chosen title demonstrated that he actually claimed the leadership of the greater Serb people or the various Serb peoples, and that he had the ambition to create a Greater Montenegro as the centre of a restored Serbian power. While Danilo was a proud Montenegrin, he also regarded himself as the successor to the different Serbian political traditions, including the Zeta principality of medieval Montenegro and the Serbian Empire of the fourteenth century. To illustrate the historical, cultural, and political unity of the Montenegrins and the Serbs, Danilo went in 1700 to southern Hungary to be consecrated as metropolitan of Cetinje by the anti-Ottoman Serbian patriarch in exile, Arsenije Čarnojević III, who had removed there as mentioned above. Danilo proclaimed Montenegro an independent principality, refusing to recognise the Sultan as overlord. By 1700, indeed, Turkish power had almost disappeared from Montenegro, although officially the country was part of the Ottoman Empire. With Montenegro rejecting Turkish suzerainty and the Turks failing to return the Montenegrins to their administrative system, Danilo's refusal to be consecrated by a pro-Ottoman patriarch in Peć was yet another political deed. When after 1700 Venetian financial and military support for Montenegro was reduced, while Peter the Great developed a more active interest in the Balkans as part of his expansionist programme, a stronger orientation on Russia became a natural course to follow. Establishing close links with Russia became an essential part of Danilo's project of political transformation, state consolidation, and territorial expansion. The expectation of receiving Russian support was more than just a strategic or financial matter. It was also a question of religious and cultural affinity, political psychology, and of what could increasingly be called 'Slav Orthodox ideology.' In return for its support of various kinds and posing as Montenegro's big brother or mother, Russia was seen as being entitled to receiving 'a loyalty unparalleled among the other South Slavs', as the Montenegrin historian Šerbo Rastoder has phrased it. Not only in political but also in religious matters the Montenegrin leaders developed a strong orientation on Russia, with later *Vladikas* visiting

St Petersburg to be consecrated as metropolitans under Russian patronage. In 1715, 1754, and later years they even tried to persuade the Russians to establish a protectorate over Montenegro.⁹

The Russian-Ottoman war of 1711 saw the first military action taken by Montenegro in support of Russia. Apart from some of the Hercegovinians and other highland tribes bordering on Montenegro, other South Slavs do not seem to have responded to Peter the Great's call to rise against the Turks. Early 1711 can be seen as the moment when Montenegrin-Russian relations were actually established, beginning with Peter's proclamation which appealed to the Montenegrins to rise up in arms and to aid him in his war against the Turks. This proclamation, and letters addressed to Danilo and other local leaders, were delivered by envoys sent by the tsar to Montenegro and other Balkan lands. They called on the Christians to rise against their Muslim overlords, but also promised liberation under Russian protection. Among these envoys were two Russian army officers who were originally from the region, Ivan Lukačević from Podgorica and Mihailo Miloradović from Hercegovina. They seem to have been among the first South Slavs recruited by the Russians; many others would follow. Another important figure in this Balkan operation was Sava Vladislavić (Vladislavich), whose remarkable role will be discussed below. Apparently the arrival of the Russian emissaries met with great enthusiasm in Montenegro. Danilo and the Russian officers organised units of armed men to attack Turkish forts and nearby cities. Although not very significant in military terms, it was a token of allegiance to the tsar and unique among the Balkan Christians at that time. The Montenegrin uprising and heavy Ottoman reprisals continued until 1714. Even at this early moment it seemed already evident that, of all the Balkan countries, Montenegro was developing the strongest ties and sense of affinity with Russia. In December 1714 Danilo fled to Venice to escape Ottoman punishment. In April 1715 he arrived in St Petersburg, a journey he had wanted to make already years ago and which resulted in the establishment of what appeared to be permanent political ties between Montenegro and Russia. Danilo requested Peter the Great to represent Montenegro's political interests vis-à-vis the Turks and others and to proclaim Montenegro a Russian 'protectorate'. In return, he said, 'Montenegrin people would always be ready to shed their blood at the Russian Emperor's request.' It was the beginning of what became a tradition of Montenegrin Vladikas and, apparently, also of other Serb and Balkan leaders: making the journey to Russia to secure or renew the alliance with this great Orthodox and Slavic Power. Montenegro's proud reputation seems to have ensured Danilo a warm reception in St Petersburg and financial and moral support to prop up the Montenegrin Church and people. But although Peter pledged political aid 'whenever possible', he declined to give unconditional support for Montenegro's struggle for independence. Nevertheless, as the Montenegrin historians Živko Andrijašević and Šerbo Rastoder claim, Danilo's visit to St Petersburg 'laid the cornerstone to the two-century political alliance between Montenegro and Russia', a relationship with Russia that no other nation in the Balkans enjoyed. This did not prevent Danilo, on his way back home, to talk to Austrian officials in Vienna about material support for Montenegro. The country was forced by circumstances to seek aid from Venice and Austria in addition to Russia. In return, in 1717, Montenegro had to accept the appointment by Venice of a civil 'governor', a Montenegrin from a rival local family who was less powerful than the Vladika but powerful enough to cause occasional conflict between the two offices. The office of Governor, which existed until 1830, was used by Venice as a counterweight

⁹ See note 10.

to the Russophile metropolitan. As a *quid pro quo*, Venice accorded Danilo in 1718 ‘spiritual power’ over the Orthodox population in the Gulf of Kotor region.¹⁰

Some additional factors: personalities and ideologies

An instructive example of how political relationships between western Balkan personalities and influential Russians develop during the early eighteenth century, is the remarkable figure of Sava Vladislavich (1669–1738). Vladislavich was known as a Serb (Hercegovinian) merchant-adventurer, ‘count’, and diplomat in the service of Peter the Great, and as the author of a number of pamphlets, monographs and letters concerned with ‘liberating’ the Slav lands in the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. His Orthodox family hailed from Hercegovina, where his father had been a landlord before driven out by local Turks or Muslims, causing the family to settle in the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik). Sava Vladislavich had the opportunity to enjoy a good education and to learn commercial skills. He was sent for a higher education to Venice, where he studied Italian, Latin, philosophy, law, and commercial and maritime sciences. Thereafter he went to Spain and France to take further courses in international law and commerce, which proved of crucial importance for his father’s mercantile activities and later for his own ones as well. One of these business undertakings brought him to Constantinople, where he came into contact with Russian representatives and was entrusted with various business operations for the Russians, in the meanwhile not forgetting his own interests. In 1702 he met Peter the Great in Azov and not much later he visited Moscow, where he obtained some commercial privileges from the tsar. He then returned to Constantinople, where he represented Russia’s interests together with Peter Tolstoy. In 1708 he removed to Moscow and, not much later, he was given some land in southern Russia, from where he continued his commercial activities. Vladislavich began to style himself an ‘Illyrian Count’ and kept maintaining trade relations with Ragusa and several Balkan Serbs. He believed that the Balkan peoples would rise against the Ottomans as soon as the Russians began their invasion of the Danubian Principalities. In 1711 Peter the Great sent him, first to Moldavia, and then to Montenegro to help incite the local population against the Turks, but at the end of the day little good came of these efforts of Vladislavich and his collaborator Mihailo Miloradović. Montenegro was prepared to fight, but with disastrous results. Between 1716 and 1722 Vladislavich resided as a Russian envoy in Italy, mostly in Venice, where he promoted his own interests in addition to those of the tsar. He mixed with Venetian and European aristocrats, supervised the education of Russian nobles, and even prepared some secret political treaties between Pope Clement XI and Russia (presumably regarding a common front against the Turks). Not the least interesting activity of Vladislavich was his publications. The most famous of them was his Russian translation of Mavro Orbini’s *Il regno degli Slavi* (The Realm of the Slavs; first ed. 1601) which appeared in 1722. It seems to have been a sensation both in eighteenth-century Russia and in the Balkans, attracting attention and generating discussion in political and educated circles. Copies of Vladislavich’s translation of Orbini’s ‘pan-Slav classic’ could apparently be found in

¹⁰ Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 15–17, 137–143; Šerbo Rastoder, ‘A Short Review of the History of Montenegro’, in Florian Bieber (ed.), *Montenegro in Transition* (Baden-Baden, 2003), pp. 107–37, here p. 115 (‘a loyalty unparalleled’); Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 68, 71–4 (p. 73 for ‘the cornerstone to the... alliance’); WE, ‘Danilo I, Metropolitan of Cetinje’, contains some useful data as well.

all major libraries after its publication.¹¹ Mavro Orbini, Juraj Križanić (to be discussed below) and others were instrumental in developing a broader Slav consciousness and ethno-cultural ideology, one that could embrace both Catholic and Orthodox Slavs. In some ways this view differed from the more narrow Slavic Orthodox perspective, which was not surprising given that men like Orbini and Križanić were Roman Catholics. Nevertheless, the ideology of an all-embracing, ‘ecumenical’ Slavdom played a role in the Montenegrin-Russian relationship as well.

Indeed, an example of a prominent Catholic personality from Montenegro’s Gulf of Kotor who played a part in the rise of such a broader Slav and South Slav (perhaps ‘Serb’) consciousness, was the author, theologian and archbishop Andrija Zmajević (1628–1694). The Zmajević family came originally from inland Montenegro, from where they moved to Kotor and Perast around 1600. As they acquired some wealth and status the family abandoned the Orthodox religion and went over to the Catholic Church. This may be seen as typical of the socially more successful group among the highland migrants that moved to the Venetian-controlled coastal areas.¹² A brother of Andrija, Krsto, became a leading citizen of Perast, the maritime centre where Andrija was born as well. Andrija Zmajević enjoyed a higher education in Rome and, in 1671, became titular Archbishop of Bar and ‘Primate of Serbia’, a historic Catholic office whose significance had declined under the Ottoman regime. Perast had become the actual place of residence of the archbishop and of Zmajević’s new episcopal palace. Although a Catholic prelate, Zmajević had a tolerant attitude towards, and was esteemed by, Orthodox believers, including the Serbian patriarch Arsenije Černojević III (who, moreover, happened to be of the same Njegoš clan as Zmajević). During the war against the Turks in the 1680s and 1690s, the Pope tried to improve his contact with the Serbian patriarch by using the Vladika of Montenegro and Archbishop Andrija Zmajević as intermediaries. Catholic interest in the Slavic world – and papal efforts at closer Catholic-Orthodox unity, preferably on Roman terms – were features of a complex relationship, of which confessional competition or even attempts at conversion were only one aspect. Literature could be another example of a broader Slavic orientation. Andrija Zmajević was the author of a work on ‘Slavic Dubrovnik’ and transcribed works of Dubrovnik poets in the Cyrillic script. His own work *Od pakla* (Hell) was later published in Venice (1727). His decision to write his Slavic (*slovenski*) language in Cyrillic as well as Latin script he justified by arguing that ‘the whole of our nation uses it’, referring to a broader Serb, South Slav, or even pan-Slav identity which could include Russia as well. Indeed, a nephew of the author-archbishop, Matija Zmajević, also from Perast, became a prominent figure in the Russian navy. After travelling to Ragusa and Constantinople, he made the acquaintance with Peter Tolstoy, Russia’s ambassador in the Ottoman capital, who sent him to Russia in 1712 with a recommendation. Zmajević’s education and maritime skills impressed Peter the Great, who offered him a position with the Baltic fleet. His successful actions against the Swedes during the years 1714–20 induced the tsar to send another group of Russians to Perast to acquire maritime skills. Matija Zmajević was promoted

¹¹ Јован Дуџић, Гроф Сава Владиславић: један Србин дипломат на двору Петра Великог и Катарине I [Jovan Dučić, Grof Sava Vladislavić: jedan Srbin diplomat na dvoru Petra Velikog i Katarine I] (Belgrade, 2007), esp. chapters IV and V on his experiences in Moscow and chapter VI on his role in the Balkan war of 1711; WE, ‘Sava Vladislavich’, for a useful summary of his life and activities.

¹² See on this process of migration and social transformation, Zuzana Poláčková and Pieter C. van Duin, ‘Montenegro’s Gulf of Kotor as a historical border region: Political rivalry, cultural competition, and local co-existence in a long-term perspective’, *Studia Politica Slovaca*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (2014), pp. 21–42, here pp. 31–2.

to the rank of a Russian vice-admiral and put in charge of building a new fleet on the River Don. In 1727 he was even made an admiral by Peter the Great's widow, Catherine I. Matija made numerous donations to his hometown Perast, showing that the connection between the western Balkans and Russia was beginning to develop along various lines. The fact that he was buried in a Catholic Church in Moscow may be seen as an example of the relatively open relationship of Catholic and Orthodox Slavs at this time, notwithstanding all the mistrust towards the outside world prevailing in Russia.¹³

If the Ragusan Mavro Orbini (1563–1614) – whose *Il regno degli Slavi* almost became a standard text – was an influential ‘pan-Slav’ author who helped to create a number of mythical notions about the Slavs in the wider Slavic world, the Croat Juraj Križanić (1618–1683), who belonged to a later generation, was an even more fascinating, although less influential, example of the same Slavophile personality. Both men – and there were more of them – were Catholics who looked far beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Slavic lands. Križanić, a Benedictine who attended the Greek College of St Athanasius in Rome where Catholic missionaries were trained for work in the Orthodox world, developed a strong desire to travel to Russia with the aim of helping to unite the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches. He arrived in Moscow in 1659 and was assigned the duty of translating Latin and Greek documents into Russian and other linguistic tasks. Križanić seems to have known some ten languages. In 1661 he was exiled to Siberia, possibly because of his criticism of Russian social and political institutions and of the Orthodox Greeks. During his fifteen-year stay in Siberia he wrote several political and theological treatises in a self-devised ‘common Slavic language’. Many of the administrative, social, economic, educational, and cultural reforms he dared to recommend were later carried out by Peter the Great, but it is not clear if there was any direct link between Križanić's proposals and Peter's policies. Most important in the context of our subject-matter is the Slavic idea expressed by Križanić, which may have reflected sentiments held by a wider intellectual and political group of people in the Balkans, Russia, and Slavic Central Europe. He wanted, among other things, to unite the Slav nations under the Russian tsar and the Slavic Catholics and Orthodox against ‘the German Protestants’ and ‘the Turkish Muslims.’ The Russian State should undergo a process of reform to make it more absolutist and effective but also more flexible and socially modern.¹⁴ Other Catholic pan-Slavic thinkers were admittedly less Russophile, but on the level of both ideology and politics and diplomacy there emerged a growing number of links and networks connecting different individuals and political actors of Slavic background. When viewed in this wider context, the rise of Montenegro as a political factor in the western Balkans was not an entirely isolated phenomenon. The forging of relations between Montenegro and Russia can be seen as just one element in a broader set of developments. But Montenegro was a special or ‘unique’ case as far as its significance as an autonomous political subject was concerned. The chances of reinforcing the position and influence of Montenegro, however, were dependent on its ability to mobilise Russian support and to emulate, in the manner of ‘a dwarf imitating a giant’, the example of

¹³ Antun Sbutega, *Ljudi iz Boke* (Kotor, 2012), pp. 115-23, 161-9; WE, ‘Andrija Zmajević’, and WE, ‘Matija Zmajević’, are useful as well.

¹⁴ Ante Kadić, ‘Križanić and his Predecessors – the Slavic Idea among the Croatian Baroque Writers’, in Thomas Eekman and Ante Kadić (eds.), *Juraj Križanić (1618-1683): Russophile and Ecumenic Visionary* (The Hague/Paris, 1976), pp. 147-64; WE, ‘Mavro Orbini’, and WE, ‘Juraj Križanić’, are useful summaries.

Russia as a rising Slavic and Orthodox Power. In the course of this process, features of political 'modernisation' and cultural 'traditionalism' could go – or even had to go – hand in hand.

An era of turbulence: eighteenth-century developments

The age of metropolitan Danilo and Peter the Great was of crucial importance for the evolution of Montenegro and the establishment of Montenegrin-Russian relations. Perhaps it is true to say that the first phase of transformation of Montenegro during this period was a miniature version of sorts, of the transformation of Russia under Peter. The secular ruler Peter the Great used the Church and religious ideology to further his political ends, while Danilo, the founder of a hereditary political theocracy, did much the same thing, even if he was officially a bishop (metropolitan) rather than a prince. Danilo was the originator of the idea of 'restoring' Montenegrin independence and the first Montenegrin ruler to view his political goals as having a deeper historical legitimacy. The Cetinje metropolitans were represented as the political successors to the Crnojević rulers of late medieval Zeta, a principality partly overlapping with Montenegro and itself, perhaps, a successor to the medieval Serbian Empire. Danilo used the coat of arms of the Crnojević dynasty as the coat of arms of his own petty state. This historical and cultural consciousness was part of the emerging political culture and political ambitions of Montenegro. It encompassed a Slavic Orthodox identity and ideology, a programme of territorial expansion, and a conscious imitation of big brother Russia. Montenegro's handful of leading spirits held common ground with Slavic ideologists like Orbini, Križanić, and others, even if the latter were Catholics. Like these ideologists they turned to the distant past (Alexander the Great, for example, was a Slav); to their mythical origins and ideas about the ancient homeland of the Slavs (perhaps this was Illyria, perhaps Russia or Sarmatia); and at the same time to the idea of a great future for Montenegro, for the Serbs, and for all the Slavs under the wings of mighty Russia. Political interests and ideological notions easily overlapped in the Balkans and in Montenegro during the early decades of the eighteenth century. But much depended also on the quality of individual rulers and on the nature of changing circumstances. When Danilo died in 1735, his successor Sava appeared to have less political talent than his uncle and not the same kind of strong political will. In the early 1740s, with Venetian support for Montenegro being reduced, Austria keeping away from the Balkans, and Montenegro itself hard-pressed, Sava decided to seek help from Russia again and to offer Montenegrin troops for the Russian army in return for Russia's proclaiming Montenegro a protectorate. In 1743-44 Sava visited St Petersburg to discuss these questions with Empress Elizabeth, who promised financial aid without ensuring political or military protection. Meanwhile Sava's cousin and factual Co-Vladika, Vasilije, became ever more powerful, having greater political resolve than the more spiritually minded Sava. Vasilije pushed Sava to the political margins and into his beloved monastery, and in 1750 he was consecrated as a bishop by the Serbian patriarch Atanasije II, which made him Sava's equal. Vasilije decided to test the willingness of the Austrians to give more effective support and to take Montenegro more seriously as a political factor. In 1751 he sent a memorandum to Maria Theresa asking her to take the Montenegrins in her 'supreme service' and claiming simultaneously that Montenegro 'was not subject to anyone.' Indeed, 'since the time of Alexander the Great', Montenegro had been 'a pure virgin' and a separate republic over which her metropolitan ruled 'not only in religious affairs but in all worldly things.' The memorandum seems to have met with indifference in Vienna,

for which there may have been more than one reason. Montenegro was seen as a part of the Ottoman Empire and as rather insignificant; Vasilije's political and historical claims were unlikely to be taken seriously by educated Austrian policy makers; and perhaps the claim regarding the time of Alexander the Great was simply considered preposterous. South Slav historians and ideologists, including Vinko Pribojević (early sixteenth century), Orbini, and Križanić, had cultivated the claim that Alexander entertained special relations with the ancient Slavs (Illyrians). But this was not believed by all Slav intellectuals – Matej Bel, for example, had his doubts – and the presentation of historical claims like this may have been counterproductive.¹⁵ However, political and strategic motives were undoubtedly far more important in deciding why the Austrians, for example, were not interested in an alliance with Montenegro.

Vasilije concluded that not much could be expected from Austria or indeed from Venice, which pursued a policy of peace and co-existence with Turkey during most of the eighteenth century. The only way forward for Montenegro as a would-be regional power was to continue and extend the Russian connection. At the end of 1752 Vasilije travelled to St Petersburg and then spent more than two years in Russia, only returning to Montenegro in 1755. He seems to have received a great deal of attention and various promises of aid, which reinforced his tendency to think and behave like a zealous adherent of Mother Russia. To the Empress Elizabeth and Russian officials he kept explaining that Montenegro was an independent state ruled by metropolitans who were the legitimate heirs of medieval princes. He requested that the title 'Prince of Montenegro' be included in the list of titles of the Russian tsar as highest suzerain, in other words, a formal affirmation that Montenegro was to be seen as a protectorate of Russia and not of the Ottoman Empire. The Russian government refused to do this, but promised again financial and, possibly, some political aid. The Russians also donated a few hundred ecclesiastical books. This suggests that the Russians felt that the Montenegrins needed more education and proper religious instruction. Perhaps in reaction to this, but also to strengthen his case for a Russian protectorate with historical and ideological arguments, Vasilije published a *History of Montenegro* in Russian (St Petersburg, 1754). The author described himself in this work as 'the Metropolitan of Montenegro, Skadar [Shkodër] and the Coastland and heir to the Serbian throne, Vasilije Petrović', an indication of his political and territorial ambitions. The book had 43 pages and was in fact a political and mythological tract rather than a history, depicting the Montenegrins as a race of heroes. It was the first 'history' of Montenegro ever published and was meant to give the Russians an insight into Montenegrin conditions from the twelfth century to 1750. It may have contributed to the fame of Montenegro, for while the official Russian response was lukewarm, Vasilije's endeavours, combined with the presence in St Petersburg of a sizeable number of Montenegrins, seem to have caused enthusiasm for Montenegro in Russia.¹⁶ After his return to Montenegro in 1755, Vasilije began to develop the 'cult of Russia' to an unprecedented

¹⁵ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 74-6, and p. 76 for the quotation of the memorandum to Maria Theresa; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 147-8; Kadić, 'Križanić and his Predecessors', pp. 149-51 for the myth of Alexander the Great being a Slav or having granted a special 'Privilege to the Slavs', i.e. the Illyrians, who were supposed to be Slavs as well.

¹⁶ Three years later, another Montenegrin residing in St Petersburg, J. S. Balević, wrote a second work on Montenegro entitled, 'A Brief and Objective Description of the Present State of Montenegro'. Balević had become a major in the Russian army, and it has been suggested that his book (written in 1757, but not published) may have been commissioned by the Russians to receive a more accurate picture of the situation in Montenegro. See Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, p. 149. Vasilije's grandiloquence was undoubtedly recognised as such by many Russians.

extent, assuring the Montenegrins that they were protégés of the Russian Empire and not obliged to pay taxes to the Ottomans. This was largely wishful thinking, and Montenegro's refusal to pay tribute led to a Turkish attack in 1756. Vasilije fled to Venetian territory and from there went again to Russia, where he stayed during the period 1757-58. As during his first visit, he tried to convince the Russians to proclaim a protectorate over Montenegro, stressing how important the country was in the struggle for Christian and Slav liberation and for keeping hope alive among the Balkan peoples. However, in the eyes of certain other Montenegrins living in St Petersburg Vasilije was too pretentious, and they began criticising him. The Russians themselves probably deemed the risks of a policy of active support for Montenegro too great, the country's behaviour too unpredictable, and Montenegrin realities too uncertain. Only on Russian conditions, and if it was considered to be in Russia's short-term interest, were they prepared to give active political or military support to the loyal but somewhat irresponsible Montenegrin dwarf. However, they gave additional financial aid and also sent an envoy, S. J. Puchkov, to accompany Vasilije on his way home. Puchkov was instructed to write a report on conditions in Montenegro. This he did and his very critical report reached St Petersburg in 1760. It expressed doubt about the common Montenegrin's pro-Russian and anti-Turkish attitude – the people were described as politically ignorant, unreliable, chaotic, violent, and primitive – and denounced Vasilije as egotistical and duplicitous. Worst of all, the clergy were uneducated and corrupt and Russian assistance for the Montenegrin Church was 'distributed among the Bishop's cousins'. The report seems to have had a damaging impact in St Petersburg, weakening Russia's faith in the Montenegrins. But the death of Elizabeth in 1762 presented new opportunities for Vasilije. In 1765 he gained permission from her successor Catherine II ('the Great') to visit Russia for a third time. He died in St Petersburg the following year and was buried with the highest honours in the Russian capital. Apparently, Puchkov's report had not changed Russia's willingness to regard Montenegro as a loyal and useful friend. Catherine, averse to chaos and political adventurism, issued an 'ukase' assuring the Montenegrin people of her imperial good will but advising the principal chiefs of the country 'to eliminate all cause for discord, hate or warfare.' She sent another envoy to report on Montenegro, who composed a more favourable judgement than his predecessor had done. This made Catherine decide to continue the regular financing of the Cetinje monastery as at least a minimal programme of aid.¹⁷

Vasilije had adopted Danilo's political concept of independence from Turkey, territorial expansion, and loyalty to Russia. This also included the historical notion of 'restoring' the medieval Montenegrin state: Vasilije propagated the idea of creating a viable and sovereign Montenegro within its 'historical frontiers,' i.e. what he claimed had been the frontiers of the late medieval Crnojević principality. In reality the territory of the state he had in mind was much larger than that of its medieval predecessors Duklja and Zeta. Vasilije's written statements reveal that Montenegro should strive to incorporate the entire coastal region between Shkodër and Kotor, parts of northern Albania and other highland regions, and the whole of Hercegovina. This was very ambitious if not megalomaniac, but the Montenegrin metropolitan consistently saw himself as the legitimate heir to the Crnojević 'duke' and his purported historical territory. Vasilije also saw developing the cult of Russia, and completely relying upon her, as the only way forward and

¹⁷ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 76-8; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 149-52. Both authors give data on the Puchkov report.

the only chance of political survival for Montenegro. ‘Offensive’ and ‘defensive’ policy was the same thing. Cultivating a ‘deep respect and love of Russia’ was part of his political programme, both in terms of ideology and strategy. Vasilije’s death in 1766 brought another moment of political vacuum, but this time it had even more serious consequences than after the death of Danilo, because now a complete outsider managed to penetrate Montenegro’s inner power circle. The rumour had spread that the assassinated Russian tsar Peter III was still alive and had fled to Montenegro. A herbalist from Dalmatia or Hercegovina known as Šćepan Mali (Stephan the Small) assumed the identity of the tsar, gradually building up his position as an impostor in Cetinje. Many Montenegrins, indoctrinated as they were by the cult of Russia, believed Stephan’s story, and by the end of 1767 Stephan was accepted as ruler of Montenegro and even addressed as tsar. He set up an authoritarian but rather effective regime and seems to have regarded himself as a leader with a divine mission to make Montenegro a stronger state. The fact that he styled himself ‘tsar’ caused some concern in Venice, the Ottoman Empire, and indeed in Russia. Catherine II instructed her envoy in Vienna to have him eliminated, but he failed. When in 1768, during another Turco-Russian war, Catherine wanted to ask Montenegro to participate in an anti-Ottoman uprising, she sent Prince Vladimir Dolgorukov as her emissary to convince the Montenegrins to expel Stephan first, but this attempt failed as well. Only in 1773 came Stephan’s reign to an end. He was murdered by his servant, who was bribed or otherwise influenced or intimidated by a local Ottoman ruler, the pasha of Shkodër. Meanwhile, during the entire period after the 1730s the old metropolitan Sava had stayed alive, dying only in 1781. In 1784 a new powerful leader, Petar I Petrović Njegoš, could at last take the spiritual and political power into his hands, being consecrated as metropolitan by the Serbian patriarch in Sremski Karlovci in southern Hungary. Remarkably enough, Petar had enjoyed four years of schooling in Russia (in 1762–66) and later in 1784 he already visited St Petersburg. But in 1785 the Russians forced him to leave, not being interested at that moment in an anti-Turkish alliance with Montenegro or anyone else. The only beneficial thing Petar could take home from Russia that year was the potato, an important novelty indeed. Only in 1787 did Catherine II offer support to Montenegro again as Russia was at war once more with the Ottoman Empire. During Petar’s absence Montenegro had been attacked by an Ottoman army and in 1796 there followed another attack. However, both times the Montenegrins fought back effectively and managed to prevent a defeat, which made them feel stronger and more secure than ever before. By the late 1790s, therefore, Petar felt that Russia might be willing at last to place Montenegro under the formal patronage of the tsar, the Turks having to admit that Montenegro was de facto independent. But a request to this effect was not granted by Tsar Paul (1796–1801), because it might set a dangerous precedent in international relations at a time when Russia had actually entered into an anti-French coalition with Turkey. Nevertheless, the Russian government and the tsar himself gave orders to the Russian envoys in Dubrovnik, Naples, Vienna, and Constantinople that financial aid be given to Montenegro on a regular basis. Moreover, a solemn declaration was issued that Russia would always protect Montenegro from Turkish or Austrian pressure. Indeed, Tsar Paul even pledged to send a Russian fleet to protect the Orthodox population if necessary. Russian financial aid was needed not only for the Church but also to help establish new state institutions. A new Montenegrin law code, for example, specified harsh penalties for murder, theft, and other undesirable features of the era of clan rule.¹⁸

¹⁸ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 78–81; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 153–64, 169.

Montenegro's nineteenth-century expansionism and Russia

The Napoleonic period inaugurated a number of new developments that were crucial for the rising status of Russia as well as for Montenegrin-Russian relations. The old Russian dream of a Black Sea fleet had been realised during the years after 1783, and in the late 1790s the moment came for this fleet to enter the Mediterranean and get into action. This was in fact the second time that Russian warships sailed into the Mediterranean, but the first time that it happened from the Black Sea. During the war against the Ottoman Empire of 1769-73 Russia had sent its Baltic fleet to the Eastern Mediterranean with British support, conducting a naval campaign against Turkey around the Peloponnesus and in the Aegean Sea. At that time the Russians did not succeed in penetrating the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. The period 1798-1807 saw the rise of Russia as a naval power in the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Adriatic, this time facilitated by a Russian-Ottoman alliance that enabled the Russians to pass through the Bosphorus. In 1798-99 a joint Russian-Turkish fleet captured the Greek Ionian Islands, including the strategic Corfu, from the French, who had occupied them in 1797 following the liquidation of the Venetian Republic. Prominent Russian naval commanders like Fyodor Ushakov and Dmitry Senyavin demonstrated what the Russians were capable of by this time. The so-called Septinsular Republic of seven Ionian Islands existed until 1807 under Russian protection, with the local population regarding the Russians as their friends and Orthodox co-religionists. At the same time, the reign of the Tsar Alexander I had started in 1801 with new problems in the Russian relationship with the ambitious and rather independent-minded Montenegrin Vladika Petar. The Russians were even involved in a power struggle over the position of Petar, who at one point sent a declaration to St Petersburg that Montenegro 'was not under the jurisdiction of the Russian Church' (this would change under his successor). The Russians opened a consulate in Kotor, then in Austrian hands, but the tsar also sent a personal envoy, S.A. Sankowsky, to Montenegro to calm things down. By 1806, after a second Russian Mediterranean expedition, the withdrawal of the Austrians from Kotor and Dalmatia, and the arrival of the French who tried to take their place, the Russians were in control of the southern Adriatic, capturing some Adriatic islands as well as Kotor and the town of Herceg Novi. Russian operations on land around the Gulf of Kotor and near Dubrovnik were executed in alliance with the Montenegrins, which aroused their expansionist dreams to unprecedented heights in naïve disregard of Russian pragmatism. Petar sent an enthusiastic letter to Alexander proposing the creation of a large Slav State including Montenegro and the Gulf of Kotor, Hercegovina, southern Dalmatia with Dubrovnik, and part of Albania. But the tsar declined the idea and soon the European political constellation changed. Several tough battles were fought with the French, who tried to occupy southern Dalmatia and the Montenegrin coast. But the Treaty of Tilsit, concluded between the tsar and Napoleon in July 1807, meant the end of the Russian naval and military campaign in the region, a historic episode which had begun in 1798 with the Russian Black Sea fleet sailing into the Mediterranean for the first time ever. A period of French rule began in the western Balkans, followed in 1814 by a century of Austrian

183; Milovan Djilas, *Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich (New York, 1966), pp. 374-5 on the cultural and psychological conditions surrounding the Šćepan Mali episode. Djilas, of Montenegrin background himself, writes that the cult of Russia led the credulous Montenegrins (used to cultivating a 'quasi-religious mythology') to revere the quasi-mystical qualities of a Russian tsar. He also writes there were at least four other impostors at different moments in the history of Montenegro, while in Russia there were at least seven people who claimed to be the murdered Peter III.

rule in Dalmatia, the Gulf of Kotor, and part of the Montenegrin coast. The years 1797–1805 had already seen a first Austrian occupation of the former Venetian territories in collusion with the French. When the French themselves took over the Adriatic coast in 1806, Russia had tried to stop them near Dubrovnik, supported by Montenegrin fighters who must have felt like acting in a dream. When in 1813 the French regime collapsed, Petar saw another opportunity. The presence of potentially unreliable Croat and Italian soldiers in the French garrisons was one reason why he dared to launch an attack on Kotor and the coast. Petar wanted to unite the Gulf of Kotor with Montenegro and to continue the policy of territorial expansion. However, in 1814 the Russian tsar ‘advised’ him not to resist the Austrian occupation of Kotor and the Gulf. For Russia the post-Napoleonic agreements of the European Powers were more important than extending solidarity to the dwarf Montenegro.¹⁹ But in other circumstances Russia might be willing to play the role of an ally of Montenegro once again, helping to strengthen its political and military position.

In the 1820s metropolitan Petar I sent his intended successor to Russia to study at the St Petersburg Theological College. When this nephew of the Montenegrin Vladika decided in 1829 to change his plans and to enrol at the Russian Military Academy, Petar had to choose another nephew as his successor, who became the new ruler Petar II in 1830. The Montenegrin Governor (a civil office instituted by the Venetians in 1717), apparently supported by the Austrians, tried to take advantage of the youth and inexperience of Petar II to reduce his power, but this manoeuvre backfired. Not surprisingly, the Montenegrin assembly of principal chiefs saw it as a threat to the influence of Russia; they simply decided to abolish the office of governor. Instead, some other new institutions of central government, including a senate, a judicial court, and a police force, were established in 1831 with the help of two Russian envoys, Ivan Vukotić and Matej Vučićević, Montenegrins who had returned home after a long residence in Russia. They brought a considerable sum of money to Cetinje to cover the expenses of the reforms. In addition Vukotić recruited the experienced Dimitrije Milaković, a man who had been educated in Novi Sad and Vienna, as Petar’s secretary. The essential role of Russia in the reforms, indeed, appeared from the fact that both the salaries of the new officials and other state expenses were chiefly paid from Russian subsidies. Petar II now began making preparations for visiting Russia to be consecrated as metropolitan, ignoring the Serbian patriarch. This happened through the mediation of the Russian consul in Dubrovnik, the Serb exile Jeremija Gagić, underscoring the significance of this office in the evolution of the Russian-Montenegrin relationship.²⁰ In 1833 Petar arrived in Russia, where he was consecrated in stately manner by the Metropolitan of St Petersburg, with Tsar Nicholas I, several Russian government ministers, and the Russian Holy Synod in attendance. Petar II indeed was the first head of the Montenegrin Church and State to be consecrated in Russia instead of the seat of the Serbian patriarch. Perhaps this was even more important as a political fact than it was as a church affair, but Petar was both (a Montenegrin version of) a Greater Serbian nationalist and a convinced Russophile. From St Petersburg he wrote

¹⁹ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, Vol. I: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 119–22; WE, ‘Dmitry Senyavin’, ‘Fyodor Ushakov’, ‘Septinsular Republic’, ‘Kotor’, and ‘Adriatic campaign of 1807–14’ provide useful data on this relatively unknown episode in Adriatic and Russian naval history; Poláčková and Van Duin, ‘Montenegro’s Gulf of Kotor’, pp. 37–9 for a further account of some of these events; also Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 82–3; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 19, 169–73.

²⁰ Jeremija Gagić had belonged to the political opposition in Serbia and was forced to emigrate. In 1815 he was appointed Russian consul in Dubrovnik, a post he apparently held for forty years. See Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, p. 250.

to the Serbian language reformer and Greater Serbian ideologist Vuk Karadžić, who had become a close friend, that the city was ‘the capital of a truly great tsar who is one with us in religion and race...’ Petar returned to Montenegro with gifts of money, books, icons, and the first printing press Montenegro had possessed since the late fifteenth century. Only a small number of Montenegrins could read these books, but Petar established the first two elementary schools for boys in the country. His family’s prestige was further enhanced by his decision in 1834 to canonise his uncle and predecessor Petar I. This may have been another example of imitating Russia, but more significant was the fact that by the late 1830s almost two-thirds of Montenegro’s annual revenue was provided by Russian aid. In the military field Russia’s influence was crucial, too – either one way (active support) or the other (curbing Montenegrin recklessness). In 1836 Montenegro supported an anti-Ottoman rebellion of Orthodox Hercegovinians and tried to annex the Grahovo border area, which led to a protracted conflict with the Ottoman authorities and, finally, a Montenegrin defeat. The Russians criticised Petar’s provocative conduct towards the Turks and his squandering of Russian money. The affair might cause political and diplomatic damage to Russia and Jeremija Gagić in Dubrovnik was instructed to help negotiate a peace agreement. Each time the Montenegrins tried to find out how far they could go in shifting the state frontier to their advantage, Russia had to decide how to wield its influence. In 1837 Petar received permission to visit Russia again. On his way back home, he was accompanied by a Russian agent, Iakov Ozeretskivskii, probably to restrain him. The importance of Petar II (or ‘Njegoš’) for Montenegro and the Orthodox South Slavs lay not exclusively in his political efforts, but also in his literary work, especially in the 1840s. He was the author of the notorious *Gorski vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath, 1847), a book on ‘the false tsar’ Šćepan Mali (1851), and other poetic works.²¹

Petar’s death in 1851 led to conflicts and the threat of a power vacuum, as had become usual in Montenegro. But this time the Russian consul in Dubrovnik intervened at an early stage, urged on by the Russian government, which also warned the Montenegrins that political chaos was undesirable. The next ruler was Danilo II (1851–60), who went to Russia in 1852, but not to be ordained as a priest or consecrated as a metropolitan. Now something changed in the constitutional basis of Montenegro, because Danilo decided to break with the theocratic tradition and to assume not the title of bishop, but that of a secular prince. This step had been prepared by Petar II, but it was Danilo who definitively separated the new office from the metropolitan, henceforward a purely ecclesiastical office held by another individual. Danilo and the Montenegrin Senate asked the tsar for recognition of the new form of rule, even though they had already prepared it before Danilo’s departure for St Petersburg. The Russian Orthodox hierarchy was actually opposed to it, but eventually Tsar Nicholas I gave his approval and accepted the resolution of the Montenegrin Senate which had been forwarded to him and which proclaimed Montenegro a hereditary principality. Nicholas declared that Montenegro had the right to choose its own form of government. Danilo II was not only a novel secular prince, but soon proved warlike and extremely ambitious. As early as 1852 he used another uprising of the Orthodox population in Hercegovina to draw the attention of the European Powers to what he called the ‘Montenegrin question’, trying to force them to yield to Montenegro’s political and territorial demands. But like in 1836, this adventurist policy might be unexpectedly dangerous and, more important, not

²¹ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 83-7; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 193, 195, 197–202; Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, pp. 249-51; see for a brief analysis of *The Mountain Wreath*, Poláčková and Van Duin, ‘Montenegro Old and New’, pp. 66-8.

to the liking of Russia. When the Montenegrins conquered a Hercegovinian town, they soon had to abandon it under pressure of St Petersburg. However, when in 1853 a massive Turkish military offensive threatened to destroy Montenegro, the Russians saved the country by demanding that the Turkish punitive campaign be suspended. Austria supported the Russian demand, being afraid that a full-scale Montenegrin-Ottoman war might cause another uprising in Bosnia and Hercegovina and destabilise the Balkans. In the 1830s and 1840s, Petar II had – mostly in vain – sought Russian backing for his goal of annexing Ottoman areas like the Zeta valley, using, as his predecessors had done, the historical argument that the Petrović Njegoš rulers were the legitimate successors to the Crnojević princes and Montenegro an offshoot of medieval Zeta. In the 1850s indeed, Prince Danilo II developed the habit of referring to this historical principality as ‘Ivanbegovina’, the ‘realm of Master Ivan’ (Ivan Crnojević, 1465–90). To Danilo, the renewal of this entity of Zeta or Ivanbegovina not only meant a policy of territorial expansion, but also of ‘restoration’ of the full sovereignty of the Montenegrin State, including international recognition and the status of ‘international integrity’. Montenegro was not to be seen as a rebellious part of the Ottoman Empire, but as a free, historic, and sovereign state. But with Russia in a weak position during the Crimean War (1853–56), Danilo tried to strengthen his relations with France and accepted that Napoleon III provided him with an adviser and ‘secretary’, Henri Delarue. In 1856 Danilo sent a memorandum to the Congress of Paris claiming that ‘over a 466-year long period’ the Montenegrin people had not been subject to any power and had ‘not recognised any rule over it.’ The exaggerations of this claim sounded similar to the earlier ones presented to Maria Theresa and the Russians, but Danilo may have felt that now he had a chance of being admitted to what he called ‘the group of European states’.²² In fact, the memorandum also included four specific demands: diplomatic recognition of Montenegro as a sovereign state; changes in Montenegro’s frontiers to incorporate parts of Hercegovina and Albania; a clear demarcation of the frontier with Turkey; and incorporation of the Adriatic port of Bar (at the time in Turkish hands). In 1857 Danilo visited France to seek stronger support from Napoleon III, who showed some sympathy for Montenegro but also advised Danilo to resolve territorial issues through negotiations with Turkey. Indeed, he advised him to recognise the supreme power of the Sultan and follow the example of Serbia, which recognised Ottoman suzerainty while enjoying an autonomous status. The proud Montenegrin prince did not consent and returned to his Russophile policy in an attempt to gain more favourable frontiers.²³

Danilo’s fight for a greater ‘Ivanbegovina’ entity meant striving to obtain new areas of fertile soil, trade centres, and an Adriatic port. He believed that expansion towards Hercegovina, Zeta (the Podgorica area), Albania, and the Adriatic coast would resolve the Montenegrin ‘question’: it would make Montenegro viable as a state and inaugurate a new era of glory, liberation, and development. The Russian consul in Dubrovnik, this always crucial figure in the region who wanted Montenegro to stay in the grip of Russian influence, supported and explained the Monte-

²² The Congress of Paris ended the Crimean War in which Russia had been humiliated (but the position of the Romanian principalities strengthened). Russia’s defeats and diminished prestige must have been a shock to Montenegro and a reason for Danilo to seek support with France and its, perhaps, ‘tsar-like’ emperor. In the Treaty of Paris of 1856, France, Britain, and Piedmont took on the role of protectors of the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire, and one protocol even denied Russia the right of protection over Montenegro. That the effect of this was limited was shown by subsequent events.

²³ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 93–7; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 215, 218, 222–3.

negrin programme. He declared it was Danilo's ultimate wish, 'to stick the Montenegrin sword back in the scabbard after an incessant four-century battle for religion and freedom, and steer the warlike Montenegrin youth towards the fruitful occupations of peaceful citizens: farming, trade and industry.' This was an optimistic perspective on Montenegro's potential for becoming a more stable and civil society, but the precondition, supposedly, was expansion of the Montenegrin state territory. How was this to be achieved, and at what price? Danilo believed that creating instability inside the Ottoman Empire was the only way to attract the interest and concern of the European Powers, and perhaps their intervention in behalf of Montenegro. This could be done in particular with regard to Hercegovina, the Ottoman province where Montenegro had already shown it had sufficient influence among the Orthodox population to stir up trouble. Montenegro might become important enough as a political factor in Hercegovina to make any resolution of serious problems there impossible without her. This would make Montenegro more important on the European level and might create an opportunity for her demands to be accepted. France, Britain and Austria on the one side, and Russia on the other, would have to take the Montenegrins more seriously as a factor in Hercegovina and the western Balkans. The existing tension between the Orthodox ('Serb') population and the Ottoman authorities had made Bosnia and Hercegovina a powder keg. About 70 percent of Hercegovina's population of about 200,000 was Orthodox. Montenegro's population was hardly 100,000, but its political leaders had a great influence among the Orthodox population and the insurgency leadership in Hercegovina, consistently pledging support for the liberation struggle against the Turks. Indeed, in the 1850s Hercegovinian clan chiefs were granted rank, money, and an armed guard obedient to the Montenegrin prince. In 1857 a massive uprising broke out, steered and controlled by Montenegrin armed elements. But the following year, after protests of several European consuls in the Hercegovinian capital Mostar, a Montenegrin military force of 4,000 men led by Ivo Radonjić was forced to retreat to Montenegro. In 1858 Montenegro also provoked conflicts at the border with Albania, demonstrating her influence and significance. In negotiations between the Turks and the Montenegrins, the latter were represented by Danilo's French secretary Delarue, who replied to the Ottoman demand that Montenegro stop meddling in Hercegovinian affairs that Montenegro should be given the part of Hercegovina that rightfully belonged to her. New fighting resulted in a Montenegrin victory with several thousand Turks killed. A fresh Turkish military campaign was prevented, again, by pressure from Russia and from Montenegro's second most important ally France, who helped to set up an international commission to demarcate the Montenegrin-Hercegovinian frontier. Montenegro submitted evidence to the commission intended to prove that certain areas in Hercegovina had belonged to her since 'ancient times'. Such arguments were dismissed by Turkey, but a conference of the major Powers in Constantinople finally defined an internationally recognised frontier separating Montenegro and the Ottoman Empire. This was a remarkable step towards official recognition of Montenegro's sovereignty and the first time that some of its territorial claims were formally accepted.²⁴

Thus, in 1858, Montenegro gained an increase of about 25% in terms of population. Understandably, this success was seen as a precedent and acted as a stimulus for further adventures. However, in 1860 Danilo was assassinated by a Montenegrin political emigrant when visiting

²⁴ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 97-102, and p. 98 for the quotation of the Russian consul in Dubrovnik; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 225-9.

Kotor. His successor was Prince Nikola, who had enjoyed an education in Trieste and Paris and who was to exercise absolute power after some years of assistance by his father, Duke Mirko. The success of Danilo's Hercegovina campaign encouraged Mirko in 1861 to embark on a new Hercegovinian initiative in a bid to grab more territory. But this time both Russia and France expressed their disappointment at Montenegro's irresponsibility and megalomania, a critical attitude that was caused among other things by the unrest engendered by the Italian unification movement. Apparently unable to grasp the European political reality of that moment, and indeed 'romantically awaiting the landing of Garibaldi's followers on the Adriatic coast' (thus Andrijašević and Rastoder), Duke Mirko and Prince Nikola proceeded with their Hercegovinian adventure. The result was that in 1862 a huge Ottoman army threatened to annihilate Montenegro for good, but once again the European Powers saved her by exerting pressure on the Ottoman government to stop its military advance. The Turkish demand that Montenegro cease interfering with Hercegovina and other Ottoman areas was ignored by Nikola, however. The Montenegrins could only do so thanks to the diplomatic support of Russia and France, who seemed to use Montenegro to keep the pressure on Turkey while simultaneously restraining the bellicose dwarf to prevent a large-scale war. Because of the restraint imposed by the two Powers, but also because of various difficulties in preparing a broad-based anti-Ottoman revolt in the Balkans, the period 1862-76 was one of relative quiet. A Serbian-Montenegrin agreement concluded in 1866 spoke of instigating an uprising and the unification of all Serb people (including those in Montenegro, Bosnia, etc.) in a single state under a Serbian prince in Belgrade. But in the meantime Montenegro went its own way. In 1868, and again in 1869, Nikola visited Russia. The visits were a success and it was agreed that four daughters of the prince would be educated in the Smolny Institute for Women in St Petersburg. When in 1875-76 another uprising broke out in Hercegovina, Montenegro entered the war with the intention of ensuring territorial expansion towards Hercegovina as well as Albania and the Adriatic coast. The second objective was full recognition of its international status as a sovereign state. During a pause in hostilities in early 1877, Montenegrin envoys were sent to Constantinople with a list of territorial demands. The Turks refused to discuss them and April 1877 saw the beginning of a second phase in the Montenegrin-Turkish war. But now Russian involvement in the Bulgarian and Balkan crisis had become a critical aspect of the overall situation in both military and political terms. In July the bulk of the Ottoman forces withdrew from the Montenegrin front to fight the Russians in Bulgaria, and between September 1877 and January 1878 important towns like Nikšić, Bar, and Ulcinj were occupied by Montenegrin soldiers. Although the Russian attempt to redraw the map of the Balkans failed, in 1878 the Congress of Berlin recognised the complete independence of Montenegro, Serbia, and Romania. Montenegro's territorial gains were partly recognised as well, but the country was obliged to give equal treatment to its new non-Orthodox subjects, one of the first international stipulations of this kind. Of about 25,000 Muslims in the new Montenegrin territories, about half fled (from Nikšić, Ulcinj, and other places) and many were massacred. By 1900 there were some 12,000 Muslims left and 5,500 Catholics. With the incorporation of the new territories in 1878-80, the size of Montenegro approximately doubled and yet this was only a part of what the Montenegrin leadership claimed. A restriction imposed on Montenegro by the Berlin Powers was that 'foreign warships' were forbidden to put into the port of Bar. This was directed, of course, against Russia,

expressing an old fear of Austria and others. What made it even more urgent was that Russia did not seem to care about keeping stability in what was left of the Ottoman Empire.²⁵

Towards the twentieth century and beyond

Although military activity abated for some time, political activity did not. By the late 1890s at least one weekly newspaper was published in Montenegro aiming to spread political propaganda in Bosnia and Hercegovina, always a principal target for Montenegrin aspirations. Serbia had designs on the region as well, but both politically and in terms of its autocephalous Orthodox Church Montenegro was as yet an independent actor. Relations between Montenegro and Serbia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were remarkably strained, with mutual mistrust, political disagreements, and competition for the favours of Russia a permanent feature. The 1866 treaty mentioned above had been drafted to regulate the relationship between the two allied but rival nations. Serbia tried to use it to restrain Montenegro's ambitions and to harmonise the Montenegrins' 'national liberation' policy with its own. It was only thanks to intense Russian pressure that Prince Nikola could be persuaded to sign this document. The two principalities indeed would prepare for a large-scale anti-Turkish insurgency, but Montenegro had to act in agreement with Serbia, so the treaty stipulated. It ran counter to Montenegrin feelings and therefore remained ineffective. After the wars of the late 1870s the relations between the two 'Serb brother nations' remained uneasy, especially since in the 1880s and 1890s Serbia followed a rather cautious – allegedly even 'pro-Austrian' – policy under the Obrenović dynasty. This enabled Montenegro to pose as the true champion of Greater Serb or South Slav liberation. Now that Montenegro had become an internationally recognised state, its prestige was growing and Cetinje came to host a number of foreign embassies. Not surprisingly, the first official diplomat was a Russian, to wit the former consul in Dubrovnik A.S. Jonin, who became Russia's highest diplomatic representative during the years 1878-83. He was followed in Cetinje by nine other Russian envoys, the last of whom left in 1915. As long as Serbia continued its 'Austrophile' orientation Russia was flattering and benefiting Montenegro, the country that was 'always loyal to Russia'. Montenegro could try to play the role of a political centre of the oppressed Balkan peoples, with Nikola being told by the Russians that he was the ruler Russia counted upon in the event of the creation of a Greater Serbian state. In return Nikola was supposed to help undermine the pro-Austrian Serbian government. As Russia's favourite Nikola had the honour, during a visit to St Petersburg in 1889, to hear Tsar Alexander II propose a toast on him as 'Russia's only true and faithful friend'. This compliment was given on the eve of a royal wedding between one of Nikola's daughters and a cousin of the tsar.²⁶ Montenegro had to comply with Russia's diplomatic instructions, which sometimes caused an uncomfortable feeling but may have prevented further irresponsible adventures. The large Russian subsidies were crucial for keeping the country afloat, even if Montenegro was also dependent on economic and financial aid from Austria.

²⁵ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 102-6, 111-2, 118, and p. 103 for the term 'megalomania' (regarding the events of 1861) and the claim of Montenegrins awaiting Garibaldi; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 231, 236-7, 239-47, 250-6, 270.

²⁶ Two of Nikola's daughters married into the Romanov family and became known as the 'black princesses', at one point possibly also in a rather special sense given their early association with Grigory Rasputin.

When after 1900 the pro-Russian Radical Party became dominant in Serbia, this changed the political constellation and Montenegro's role in it. In 1896 Nikola had visited Belgrade, the first time that a Montenegrin ruler did so. But Montenegrin-Serbian relations continued to go through unpredictable ups and downs, both before and after the Serbian anti-Obrenović revolution of 1903. Serbia now became Russia's favourite, while Montenegro began to look somewhat atavistic, a change of roles which created even greater tension than before. In 1907 an attempt was made to kill Nikola, apparently by a member of the Montenegrin opposition working for the Serbian Secret Service. In 1909 another conspiracy was discovered, supported by Montenegrin emigrants in Serbia (including radicalised 'Greater Serbian' students) and, according to Montenegrin accusations, the Serbian government itself. Political absolutism – the Montenegrin Parliament was a sham – and economic stagnation led to growing disaffection and massive emigration to the United States and Serbia. In 1910 Montenegro was proclaimed a kingdom in order to achieve equality with rival Serbia and, so it was declared, 'to restore the dignity of the Old Kingdom of Zeta.' According to the British ambassador in St Petersburg, 'the Emperor looked at the event chiefly from the humorous point of view.' Nevertheless, the tsar honoured Nikola by making him a field-marshal in the Russian army. Montenegro also received a new Russian subsidy of 600,000 roubles, but Nikola had to promise not to conclude alliances without Russia's consent.²⁷ It would seem that Russia wanted to prevent Montenegro from turning for support to another Power. The old policy of honouring the Montenegrins, alongside the more important Serbs, was seen as the way to achieve this.

The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 were an ideal escape route from Montenegro's internal political and economic crisis. Nikola's goal was partitioning the Ottoman Empire and rounding off Montenegro's state territory. In 1911 secret negotiations had been started between the Balkan states, instigated by Russia which hoped to benefit from a final disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. In the First Balkan War, the different Christian states, notably Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece, appeared to be united. It was both the first and the last time that this was the case, because the Second Balkan War saw the same states flying at each other's throat. National-romantic, historical, and religious rhetoric was used to legitimise brutal policies of annexation. Russia could, sometimes, be restrained in its support for Montenegro by Britain, Austria, and others, in particular when Montenegro tried to incorporate the Albanian city of Shkodër, one of its annexationist obsessions. Montenegro's territory expanded again in a spectacular way, this time by almost 50 percent, with part of the Muslim population in the occupied territories fleeing (perhaps up to 20,000 people). But even this was not the end of the story of Montenegrin expansionism yet, because Montenegro tried to engage in another campaign of annexing land and people during the first stages of the First World War. At first, it seems, Nikola had his doubts about the approaching war, but on 1 August 1914 Montenegro, galvanised into action by the news of Russia's general mobilisation, decided to fight alongside Serbia. The plan was to incorporate the Shkodër region, the Gulf of Kotor, Hercegovina, and part of Bosnia. The justification for this policy was given in ethnic and historical terms. In 1915 Montenegro occupied Shkodër against the will of the Entente and even Serbia, which saw it as a waste of military means in a situation where more important strategic objectives were on the agenda. Nikola ignored warnings from Russia

²⁷ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 117-20, 125-7, 131-5, and p.125 for Tsar Alexander's toast on 'Russia's only true and faithful friend'; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 263, 273, 275-8.

and Britain not to attack Albania at a time when the conflict demanded a concerted campaign against Austria-Hungary, but Montenegro was typically preoccupied with its own short-term interests. Russia backed an Allied memorandum stating that the seizure of Shkodër could not be acknowledged. By 1916 Russia came openly out in favour of a Greater Serbian state – which should include Montenegro – under Serbian leadership. It ended its subsidies to Montenegro and, when the fortunes of war turned against Serbia and Montenegro, it refused King Nikola's request to be allowed to take refuge in Russia. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, it was especially France that continued to play the role of principal supporter of Serbia and its strategic aims, as it had done earlier with regard to Montenegro. The programme of creating a Greater Serbia, perhaps disguised as a South Slav federation or 'Yugoslavia', had existed since the 1840s. It included incorporation of Montenegro, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Macedonia, and northern Albania. After Serbia abandoned the 'Austrophile' policy pursued by the Obrenović dynasty until 1903, it was recognised by Russia as the 'Piedmont of the Balkans' (France seemed at first more cautious). This compelled Montenegro to tone down its ambitions and in 1913, following the Second Balkan War, unification of Montenegro with Serbia began to be discussed more seriously. Montenegro said it wanted unification 'on the basis of equality', but Serbia thought in other terms. After the military disaster of 1915-16 and the establishment of a Serbian government in exile on Corfu, an anti-Nikola propaganda campaign was started which claimed, among other things, that King Nikola had turned his back on Russia and signed a secret agreement with Austria-Hungary. In March 1916 Montenegro requested Russia to guarantee its independence and to support its territorial claims (in fact, a 'Greater Montenegro' policy), but the fact that the Allies did not appreciate this and that France supported Serbian policy was significant. It was the beginning of the end for Montenegro's ambitions and pretensions. However, it was not the end of the 'cult of Russia'. When after the First World War and the establishment of a Serbian-dominated Yugoslav state a Montenegrin army of anti-Serbian exiles in Italy was disbanded in 1921, many wanted to go to Russia. As late as 1923 former Montenegrin soldiers and exiles tried to get to Communist-ruled Russia; more than sixty of these Montenegrins arrived in Constantinople, for example, with the aim of finding their way there. The former Montenegrin diplomat Dr Ivo Jovičević travelled to Moscow to get permission for this group to enter Russia, but his mission failed. The Montenegrins finally returned to their Serb-controlled homeland.²⁸

It was the communist movement, indeed, which offered an opportunity for Montenegrins to join a new social and political radicalism with their old love for Russia. It has been observed that the rise of the Communist Party in Montenegro was promoted by the traditional ties with Russia and by the idea, 'what is good for them [the Russians], must be good for us, too.' In the first Yugoslav election of 1920 the Communists won 38% of the vote in Montenegro. Many Montenegrins saw support for the Communist Party as a means of expressing their opposition to Serbian hegemony. Montenegrin Communism had a special flavour, influenced by the strong Russophile sentiments and rigid traditional values of the Montenegrin people and leading to a tendency blindly to follow Stalinist policies in the 1930s and 1940s. The centuries-old devotion to Russia was translated into admiration for the Soviet Union. In Montenegro traditional mores – a combination of dogmatism and idealism, as Ivo Banac and others have described it – gave

²⁸ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 139-42, 147-8, 151-3, 157-9, 167-8, 173; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 281-98, 305, 307, 316.

rise to a more rigid view of Communism than elsewhere in Yugoslavia, while continued resentment of Serbian dominance helped to produce a naive and uncritical attitude towards the Soviet Union. Spectacular, therefore, was the stance of many Montenegrin Communists in 1948, the year of the Tito-Stalin split but also of an internal split in the Yugoslav party itself. This split was the fiercest in Montenegro, where a majority of local party leaders were on the Soviet side; four out of nine members of the Regional Party Committee supported Stalin against their own party leadership; and a third of the total party membership, some 5,000 people, aligned themselves with the pro-Soviet tendency. This was a level of support for the Soviet Union far beyond that existing anywhere else in Yugoslavia. Groups of party members even rebelled and hid in the woods. A special division of the Yugoslav Security Service was sent to Montenegro to suppress the rebels and party members who had started a fight against the authorities. By 1950, more than 5,000 people had been arrested in Montenegro; some were executed and many were imprisoned. Nevertheless, in 1963 Montenegro had the highest ratio of party membership per head of the population (6.7%), and on the Executive Committee of the Communist Party, Montenegrins were disproportionately represented.²⁹

Thirty years later the Communist monopoly of power was no more. But this was not the end of the story as far as Montenegrin Russophilism was concerned. On the contrary, neither the change from ‘real-existing socialism’ to what was supposed to be democracy and market economy, nor the change from Yugoslavism or Serbianism to the newly independent Montenegro, could change Russophile attitudes or the ‘cult of Russia’ among Montenegrins. Of course, there is more to Montenegrin sentiments and attitudes than just that. There is the Orthodox religion and related cultural traditions whose re-evocation is able to maintain a degree of stability and continuity in Montenegro. Not only in Montenegro but perhaps almost everywhere in the Balkans religious traditions and symbolisms – sometimes in a rather old-fashioned, sometimes in a more modern shape – help to define the national, cultural, and historical identity of the people and, indeed, of the region’s different, sometimes mutually antagonistic, peoples or nationalities. The political implications, historical backgrounds, and cultural meanings of this are a source of never-ending debate.³⁰ One of the ‘national’, ‘religious’ or otherwise identity-shaping traditions in Montenegro is, undoubtedly, the country’s deeply rooted and persistent Russophilism, perhaps a unique feature even in the Balkans. Admittedly, countries like Serbia, Bulgaria or Greece have a similar ‘tradition’ or at least a certain degree or specific form of it. But the Montenegrin case may be something special insofar as the ‘tradition of the cult of Russia’ seems to have been cultivated in a uniquely dramatic and consistent way. Maybe this was because it was highly functional in both

²⁹ Andrijašević and Rastoder, *History of Montenegro*, pp. 198, 236-7 (p. 198: ‘what is good for them, must be good for us, too’); Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, pp. 332, 338-9, 405-7, 423; Kenneth Morrison, *Montenegro: A Modern History* (London/New York, 2009), pp. 67-71 on Montenegro and the ‘Cominform crisis’; see for this crisis in particular Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca, NY, 1988), esp. pp. 164-5; see for a characterisation of Montenegrin Communism also Milovan Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, trans. John F. Loud (San Diego, 1985), passim.

³⁰ See, for example, Michaela Moravčíková (ed.), *Náboženstvá na Balkáne. Religions in the Balkans* (Bratislava, 2007) for a collection of essays on this question. Moravčíková’s essay, ‘Tri obrazy histórie, tri predstavy o budúcnosti. Bosna a Hercegovina ako multietnické náboženské laboratórium’, pp. 278-300 in this volume, is an interesting contribution to the debate on the interrelationship of historical myths, religious identities, and ethno-political conflicts. Russophilism – or its opposite, Russophobia – is arguably a part of this Balkan context too, comparable to the Turcophile and Turcophobic attitudes described on pp. 285-6 of Moravčíková’s essay.

a symbolic (ideological) and a material (strategic) sense. Our subject illustrates that the question of singularity and comparison in political science is a difficult one. Unlike historians, political scientists usually do not like the idea of uniqueness or singularity when analysing political or political-historical phenomena but rather tend to argue that they should be interpreted by means of generalisations and comparisons. ‘Russophilism’ is possibly such a ‘comparative political phenomenon’ as well. A more detailed and thoroughly comparative study of Russophilism in Europe might be interesting to carry out as a topic in the history of political ideas, political sentiments, and political cultures. It is, perhaps, not only the case of Montenegro that could inspire us to do so but also the complexity of political sentiments in a country like Slovakia and in other European countries. In fact, the question of Russophilism and Russophobia is highly topical at the present time.

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