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POLITICAL SITUATION OF ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS IN INDEPENDENT MONTENEGRO

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The relationships between the ethnic groups in Montenegro mirror the more complex ethnic divisions in the Balkan States. For many centuries the borders of Montenegro were not defined and so the makeup of its population was changed by a series of migrations, although not to the same extent as the rest of the Balkans. Montenegro, even more than Bosnia and Herzegovina, followed the model of “little Yugoslavia” because the composition of the society was multi-ethnic and multicultural with many religions and faiths within the one nation¹.

There are two branches within the Eastern Orthodox Church, Serbian and Montenegrin. The majority of the Montenegrin population are followers of the Eastern Orthodox Church. There are also small groups of Catholics. The Albanian minority is predominantly Muslim with a small Catholic minority. Montenegro, more than most other nations, has retained a multicultural character which has deep historical roots, but there is also a much weaker influence flowing from the Yugoslav era when the population of Montenegro experienced another phenomenon – a change in perception of identity. For centuries the Montenegrin identity was based on territory rather than nationality, but in 2006 when the country gained independence, many citizens who had previously considered themselves Montenegrin declared themselves Serbian and in some cases, Croatian. An additional problem that presented itself for Montenegro at that time was the need to constitutionally define the language of Montenegrins as the official language and national identification.

It is important to start by examining the political rights given by the Constitution to ethnic minorities in Montenegro. The Constitution prohibits every kind of discrimination

¹ Montenegro has forty registered religious groups. B. Milović, *Vjerske slobode u Crnoj Gori*. http://www.montenegrina.net/pages/pages1/religija/vjerske_slobode_u_cg_b_milovic.htm. Date accessed: 12.12.2016.



based on national or religion grounds (Article 8)². The ethnic minorities have rights to create organizations, associations and political parties. A ministry for ethnic minorities and human rights has been established. One problem, since resolved, was that the Constitution included an ambiguous definition which was capable of an interpretation which could erode the political rights of minorities. Article 79, paragraph 9 deals with an issue concerning the representation of minorities in Montenegro's parliament. It states that national minorities have the right to "authentic representation" in parliament. Those words have generated much debate as to their meaning. Clarification was needed. Did legislators envisage a tokenistic representation by simply allowing the existence of parties created by ethnic minorities, or were they suggesting real representation with ethnic minorities being authentically present on all election lists of all political parties³. "Authentic representation" differs from proportional representation.

Paragraph 9 of Article 79 ended up being vague probably not as the result of bad intentions on the part of the parliamentarians who created it, but rather of the haste and consequent lack of attention to detail which accompanied the creation of the legal structure of Montenegro. There is another example which backs this theory – until 2011, when it was corrected, the constitution was not consistent with electoral laws⁴.

Another phenomenon affecting ethnic minorities in Montenegro is the fact that there are two terms for describing the concept of citizenship. Again this phenomenon could be derived from the Yugoslavia era.

The first word, *državljanin*, could be translated as "a person belonging to this country" and the second, *gradjanin*, as "citizen". People in the first category are citizens of Montenegro in an established meaning of this word. People in the second category are people without citizenship but who have been living continuously in the same territory during the Yugoslavia era and the years 2003 – 2006 when The State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was in existence. In 2008, there were 41,364 people in this category (mostly Serbs living in Montenegro and Serbian refugees from Kosovo without Montenegrin citizenship)⁵.

The ethnic minorities in Montenegro have widely varying levels of political status. The differences are not the result of discrimination or preferential treatment of some groups by the government. The constitution gives the same rights to all ethnic and religious groups. The problem arises from multi aspectual differences within minorities combined with a key issue – the large variations in size among the minority groups. As an extreme example, the Serbian minority is almost 29 percent of the total population of the country, the Croatian only 1.04 percent⁶. This inequality in size equates to inequality of influence when dealing

² www.montenegrina.net/pages/pages1/politika/ustav_cg.htm

³ J. Džankić, *Montenegro's Minorities in the Tangles of Citizenship, Participation and Access to Rights*, Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe, Vol. 11, No 3, 2012, p. 45–46.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 43–44. Jelena Džankić, *Transformations of Citizenship in Montenegro: a Context-generated Evolution of Citizenship Policies*, CITSEE WORKING PAPER SERIES, 2010/03, p. 12–13.

⁶ The article does not deal with the Croatian minority group as it is extremely small. Neither does it discuss issues concerning the Roma and Egyptian minority groups. Their numbers exceed 2 percent of the population. They, however, are not involved in the political life of Montenegro.

with the Montenegrin Government. Nevertheless it is a fact that the Serbs absorb a disproportionate 70 percent of all expenditures allocated by government for the activities of minorities and the protection of their rights⁷. The paradox of this situation is that the majority of Serbs see Montenegro as an artificial creation and regard Montenegrins as Serbs. Rather than being seen as a minority group, they seek the same national status and the same rights in the constitution as Montenegrins. These demands are based not just on the size of the Serbian population but also on their and the Montenegrins common ethnic background. When Montenegro was created as one of the Yugoslav republics after the end of the Second World War, for people living there identifying with the territory was much more obvious than identifying with ethnicity: "I am Montenegrin as I live in the Republic of Montenegro". When the last population census was conducted in 1991 in the former Yugoslavia, this self-identification, modelled on the Yugoslav formula, was unquestioned: 61.86 percent of people declared themselves Montenegrins, 9.34 percent Serbs, and only 4.24 percent Yugoslavs⁸.

Serbs

In Montenegro today Serbs find themselves in a strange situation. In the previously mentioned census of 1991, only 57,453 people declared their ethnicity as Serbian compared with 380,467 who saw themselves as ethnically Montenegrin. The results of this census were greatly influenced by the character of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia where emphasis on national identification was diluted by the desire to create a monolithic and classless society. As mentioned before, the population of Montenegro identified itself much more with territory than with ethnicity and this created a huge discrepancy between the data from the census in 1991 and the following census in 2003. It was during this period between these referenda that the issue of ethnic identity reappeared, with references to the great traditions of the Kingdom of Montenegro which ceased to exist in 1918. Calls for an independent republic were increasingly being heard. Already in the 1990s, Montenegro had largely distanced itself from the politics of Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević and was slowly moving towards sovereignty. In this new atmosphere, the 2003 Census recorded 30 percent Serbs (201,892) and 40.6 percent Montenegrins (273,366)⁹. The figures from the next census in 2011 continued this trend: Serbs 28.73 percent (178,110), Montenegrins: 44.98 percent (278,865)¹⁰. This volatile data showed that the ethnic makeup of the Montenegrin population was not stable. Almost a third of the country's populace now saw themselves as Serbs. They do not consider themselves to be a minority group and resented being treated as one. An additional justification for this political stance is that Serbs and Montenegrins have common roots (with some linguistic differences), a common past where they lived together in a small republic which was part of a larger political identity.

⁷ N. Ružić, *Manjinski mediji u borbi za opstanak na crnogorskom tržištu*, <http://manjine.ba/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Crna-Gora-nacionalni-izvjestaj.pdf>. Date accessed: 12.12.2016., p. 2.

⁸ www.monstat.org/cg, Date accessed: 12.09.2016.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

The local Serbs see the concept of the ethnic distinctiveness of the population of Montenegro as some kind of absurdity¹¹.

Nothing about the political situation in Montenegro at the beginning of the transformation years following the collapse of Yugoslavia pointed to the coming Serbian contest. The governing Democratic Party of Socialists DPS (*Demokratska partija socijalista*), controlled by the leaders of the so called anti-bureaucratic revolution (Momir Bulatović and Milo Djukanović) brought together post-communist Serbs and Montenegrins. At the same time the opposition formed The Serbian People's Party SNS (*Srpske narodne stranke*) and The Serbian Radical Party SRS (*Srpska radikalne stranke*). It can be said that this was the beginning of the divisions between Montenegro's Serbs. One must agree with Dragan Petrović, who said that the lack of unity and the existence of political frictions within the population was and still is the main problem of the Serbian political scenario¹². To complicate the political situation even further, the Serbs desired to combine post-communist tendencies with the unique character of the Serbian political parties. In such a political environment, the Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (SNP CG) (*Socialistička narodna partija Crne Gore*) was formed by dissidents from within the DPS. Their leaders, however, firstly Predrag Bulatović and then Srdjan Milić, attracted few followers to this political party¹³.

In 1998 the Serbian leader Andrija Mandić joined the political party The Serbian People's Party SNS, which its founders had intended to be the voice for Serbs living in Montenegro. However in the last decade of the twentieth century this ethnic minority played a small part in the political and public life of Montenegro. In 2006, the same leader Andrija Mandić formed an alliance of fragmented political groups called Serbian List (*Srpska Lista*), a coalition whose objective was to become a strong political force. In 2009, the leader of SNS changed the name of the party to the New Serb Democracy (NSD) *Nova srpska demokracija*. In 2009, the parliamentary election ran independently and won 9.2% of the votes, and 8 seats in Skupština. Before the election in 2012, NSD became a member of a coalition, *Demokratski Front*, DF, and had twenty members elected to parliament. Since this time, however, their political power has been in decline. The main reasons for the weakening of the Serbs' position are their lack of unity and lack of leaders with the charisma of Milo Djukanović¹⁴.

The 2012 election brought even worse results for Serbs. Two parties with the prefix Serbian in their names, Serb Unity (*Srpska sloga*), and the Serb National Alliance (*Srpski nacionalni savez*) which ran in the election jointly received only 2.5 percent of the vote and didn't enter parliament. Ranko Kadić, leader of the Serb National Alliance, noted sadly afterwards that the results showed that Serbs voted against Serbs¹⁵.

¹¹ It is worth mentioning that during the discussion concerning the identity of the Montenegrins and Serbs, there was a Serbian proposition to call both the ethnic groups which live in Montenegro "Dukljan", which is a reference to the history of a Serbian tribe in the seventh century which settled in the most southern land around Lake Skader. Š. Rastoder, *Bošnjaci nisu jež u stomaku Crne Gore*, Bošnjačke Novine. Sandžak Press, 21.08.2011.

¹² Dragan Petrović, *Bilans izbora u Crnoj Gori 2012*, „Koreni” 21 X 2012, <http://www.koreni.rs/bilans-izbora-u-crnoj-gori-2012/>, Date accessed: 2.09.2016.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Mandić veruje da opozicija može na vlast!* www.telegraf.rs.15.10.2012. Date accessed: 6.02.2016

Indisputably, the presidential election of 2013 in Montenegro can be marked as the moment of change in the role of Serbs in the political life of this country. The opposition candidate, Miodrag Lekić¹⁶, a candidate representing the Serbian minority in Montenegro received a staggering 48.8 percent of the vote. Since those events of 2013, Miodrag Lekić has formed a new electoral coalition in which his own party, the Democratic Alliance (DEMOS), plays the central role. However, the most important change in the political scenario of Montenegro was the putting aside of mutual hostilities by the small ethnic groups in the country (Albanians, Bosnians, Croats and Muslims) and the Serbs. The new party called the “Great Coalition – The Key” (*Velka Koalicija “Ključ”*) gained a lot of support and on electoral lists there were representatives of all the ethnic groups of Montenegro. They had one common objective, to sweep Milo Djukanović and the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) from power. (More on this subject at the end of the article).

Concurrently, Serbs are trying to gain autonomy for the Serbian municipality in North Sandžak. They were using the example of another municipality, Petnica, which achieved autonomy because it was recognised that the majority of the population are Bosnian. The Serbs claim that in relation to autonomy, they just want to be treated like Bosnians and Albanians¹⁷.

The other focus of political activity of the Serbs in Montenegro is on the issue of their equitable representation in political, administrative and public service life. They feel discriminated against as “in the public service of state and local governments Serbs represent only 7.3 percent of all public personnel”¹⁸. A female Serbian parliamentarian in Montenegro has claimed that the Serbs have been removed from positions in most important public institutions in Montenegro¹⁹.

While politicians of the Republic of Serbia may not have put formal pressure on the Montenegrin government regarding the position of Serbs in the political life of Montenegro, they definitely keep the situation under intense scrutiny. Tomislav Nikolić, president of the Republic of Serbia, unofficially demanded changes in the constitution whereby Serbs would be described as an equal, co-governing ethnic group rather than an ethnic minority group²⁰. On the other hand, in November 2015, the prime minister of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, denied any Serbian government involvement in the formation of any of the Serbian political parties in Montenegro²¹. During the last election in Montenegro, in October 2016, the leader of *Stranke Srpskih Radikala*, the nationalist Vojislav Šešelj came several times to Montenegro²². However the actions of Serbian politicians in seeking to help the Serbian political parties in Montenegro, rather than helping them, actually worked in favour of prime minister Milo Djukanović.

¹⁶ Miodrag Lekić is former Yugoslav diplomat and former ambassador “Serbia and Montenegro” in Rome.

¹⁷ *Srbi iz Crne Gore: ‘Hoćemo i mi autonomiju opština u kojima žive Srbi na sjeveru Crne Gore*. „Elektrotronske Novine. Sandžak Press”, 29.11.2013.

¹⁸ Н. Бурић и Недеља, *Каква је будућност Срба у Црној Гори*, <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/322482/Kakva-je-buducnost-Srba-u-Crnoj-Gori>. Date accessed: 22.03.2015.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ <http://www.portalanalitika.me>. Analitika. Portalanalitika.me. Objavljeno: 30. 01. 2014.

²¹ *Vučić: Ne osnivamo partiju u Crnoj Gori*. DAN. Online.12.11.2015.

²² Balkan Insight. www.balkaninsight.com. 20.09.2016; Dimitrije Jovičević, *Šešelj ponovno medju Crnogorce*, Radio Slobodna Europa 11.08.2016. Date accessed: 20.09.2016

Albanians

The political situation of Albanians in Montenegro is important because of two main factors: the first is the relatively small and constantly decreasing numbers of this ethnic group, and the second their enormous support for the independence of Montenegro. The small Albanian population in this country means that they are “walk-on” rather than major players. Albanians live in a number of countries – Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. Montenegro’s Albanian population is the smaller than in these other countries.

The number of Albanians living in Montenegro has decreased since 1991, when Albanians made up 6.57 percent of Montenegro’s population. In 2003, the figure was 5.03 percent and in 2011, only 4.91 percent²³.

The inability of the very small Albanian population to have a significant influence on the political and public life of Montenegro is additionally weakened by their lack of a common religion. The population is divided between the Catholic and Islamic faiths. In the 2006 referendum on independence for Montenegro, the question “Do you want the Republic of Montenegro to be an independent state with a full international and legal personality?” was answered “yes” *en masse* by the Albanians. However, this unprecedented unity came more from a desire to break the connections with Serbia rather than from loyalty towards Montenegro²⁴. Nevertheless it can be said that these Albanian votes ensured Montenegro’s independence. The required threshold of participation in the referendum was 55 percent and was surpassed only by 0.4 percent. If Albanians had boycotted the referendum they would still live in The State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

The Albanians’ contribution to achieving Montenegrin independence is a contributing factor to their political situation in Montenegro. After the referendum, the Albanian population was convinced that their importance as a contributor to the political and public life of Montenegro would increase so as to be proportional to their numbers (or even greater). These expectations in part resulted from pre-election promises contained in a poster campaign specifically targeting the Albanian population.

The “Po” (“Yes” in Albanian) campaign encouraged a “yes” vote and promised that Montenegro would be a motherland to all its citizens, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds²⁵. Most Albanians responded positively to this campaign and wanted independence for Montenegro. When looking at the statistical spread of votes in different municipalities it shows that the municipalities populated by Albanians were more united in voting pattern than others. In the municipality of Plav, 78.92 percent of the population voted “yes”, and in Ulcinj it was a staggering 88.5 percent of the population²⁶.

However, the post-referendum years have brought Albanians disappointment and a never-ending state of waiting. In the words of Albanians researchers, this could be

²³ www.monstat.org/cg. Date accessed: 12.09.2016

²⁴ Gordon N. Bards, “Notes from the Balkans”, *The National Interest*, 90. July–August 2007, p. 67.

²⁵ K. Morrison, *Montenegro. A Modern History*, London 2009, p. 207.

²⁶ Preliminarni rezultati istorijskog referenduma u Crnoj Gori 21.05.2006, www.montenegrina.net/pages/pages1/politika, Date accessed: 13.08.2008. P. Hockenos, J. Winterhagen, *A Balkan divorce that works? Montenegro’s hopeful first year*, “World Policy Journal, Summer 2007, p. 40.

described as “waiting for Godot”²⁷. In this case Godot is greater Albanian representation within the country’s structures, in the administration, courts, prosecutors’ office, police and government run media²⁸. Currently, the government TV station runs programs in the Albanian language, of a duration of ten to fifteen minutes, only twice a day²⁹. Dritan Abazović, the Albanian parliamentarian representing the municipality of Skupština and an Albanian political activist, estimates that in the New York Police Department there are more Albanians than in Montenegro and predicts that Albanians will soon disappear from Montenegro entirely³⁰. Another expert, Prof. Sabina Osmanović from The University of Tirana, states that treatment of Albanians in Montenegro is unconstitutional as they are denied equal rights to participate in the social, economic and political life of the country³¹.

The political incoherence which manifests itself in a great number of political parties, and the instability of these parties are detrimental to the Albanian population. Parties can be divided into two types – mono ethnical and coalition type (parties which are prepared to work with the Democratic Party of Socialists of Milo Djukanović). The second group includes the Democratic Union of Albanians (*Demokratska Unija Albanaca DUA/ Unioni Demokratik i Shqiptarëve UDSH*), the Democratic Union in Montenegro (*Demokratski Sevez u Crnoj Gori DSCG/ Lidhja Demokratike në Mal të Zi LDMZ*), the Albanian Alternative (*Albanska Alternativa AA/ Alternativa Shqiptare*)³² and the existing “Ključ” coalition which includes some Albanian politicians.

Another problem for the Albanian population in Montenegro is the fact that the constitutional recreation of Montenegro was based on the legacy and symbols (flag, national anthem, etc.), of King Nikola I, 1860–1918, whose primary objectives were territorial expansion and the invasion of Albania. Montenegrins make up less than half of the population of this country (44.98 percent in 2001), but all concepts of the country including education are based on glorifying what is Montenegrin and dismissing what is Albanian. The education provided in the Albanian language is of an insufficient level and consequently aids the process of Albanians losing their ethnic identity³³. The Montenegrin authorities conceded that there was a shortage of teachers who could provide an education in Albanian and came up with the idea of setting up teacher studies in Nikšić. This city, however, is far from the areas where Albanians (and therefore prospective candidates for the teacher studies) live, and the plan was boycotted by the Albanian community. The authorities, however, argue that this is the appropriate location for the teacher studies because the Faculty of Humanist Studies of the University of Montenegro is situated in Nikšić³⁴.

²⁷ Cafo Boga, Stefan Wolff, *Albanians in Montenegro. Waiting for Godot?*, “Illyria” 12–14 Korrik 2011, p. 2.

²⁸ Nik Gašaj, *Principi i praksa. Evropske integracije i nacionalna diskriminacija*, “Revija. FORUM”, godina VII, Jul. 2012, No. 23, p. 21.

²⁹ Cafo Boga, Stefan Wolff, *Albanians in Montenegro*..., p. 2.

³⁰ <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/abazovic-bojim-se-nestanka-albanaca-u-crnoj-gori>. 20.04.2015

³¹ Sabina Osmanović, *Albancima se vlast ne odužila*, <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/albancima-se-vlast-nije-oduzila-835070>. Date accessed: 25.05.2015.

³² Jelena Džankić, *Montenegro’s Minorities in the Tangle of Citizenship, Participation and Access to Rights*, „JEMIE. Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe”, Vol. 11, No 3, 2012, p. 48.

³³ Cafo Boga, Stefan Wolff, *Albanians in Montenegro*..., p. 2–3.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

Struggle for the Independence of Tuzi

The town of Tuzi is an urban municipality, a subdivision of the Podgorica Municipality. Albanians are the major ethnic group in the town. Since 1997, the Tuzi Albanian population have demanded the granting of full independent municipality status to Tuzi. Milo Djukanović, the last prime minister of Montenegro (prime minister of Montenegro on several occasions) signed a declaration with representatives of the Albanian population assuring the creation of an independent Tuzi³⁵. The government of Montenegro dismisses the idea of the independent municipality, arguing that both the area and the population are too small to sustain an independent administrative identity. There is also another psychological reason why the government is postponing the implementation of the promise of independence – when created, this Albanian municipality would have a common border on the east with Albania. However the conversation regarding this issue is still alive and while it is possible that the Albanians' demands will one day be met, it is not going to be easy.

In August 2015, a group of Albanians, residents of Germany, came to Ulcinj, a Montenegrin city bordering Albania, and started street protests. Their slogan was “Ulcinj to Kosovo”. They were fined by police as they had entered Montenegro illegally³⁶. It is possible that the inspiration for this slogan came from Koço Danaj, a politician and journalist, creator of Natural Albania, a nationalistic party whose main objective is to propose a peaceful, softer solution to the establishment of a Greater Albania and which is trying to influence Albanian activists in Montenegro³⁷. Unfortunately, those types of events are not helping the autonomy of Tuzi to become a reality.

A side effect of the struggle for Tuzi's autonomy was Albanians' boycott of the local election in 2014. The Democratic Forum of Albanians (*Demokratski forum Albanaca*) expressed the Albanian position in the statement: “We contributed greatly to this country but the country created a society in which Albanians are not welcomed. This is the last moment for the country to start showing us respect”³⁸.

A more important problem, one which seriously impacts the attitudes of Albanians towards Montenegro, is the issue of the ownership of land where Albanians live. In spite of the collapse of communism, the reprivatisation of land and property that previously belonged to Albanians, and which now should go to their inheritors, has not occurred.

Ulcinj is the only municipality where Albanians make up the majority of the population and the only municipality in Montenegro where Albanian is an official language. However, according to the Albanians, the government not only neglects the region, which could live from tourism (the hotels and the tourist infrastructure are old and dilapidated) but also prevents Albanian initiatives for enterprises. In Ulcinj, the government decided that a 2.5 kilometre wide strip of land from the shoreline has to stay in government hands

³⁵ V. Kadić, *Tuzi punopravna opština?* <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/planeta.300.html:614625-Tuzi-punopravna-opstina>, 12.07.2016. Date accessed: 30.09.2016.

³⁶ <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Ex-YU/513108/CG-Albanci-psovali-Srbiju-i-vikali-Ulcinj-je-Kosovo>

³⁷ Koço Danaj, *Albanci u Crnoj Gori žele „Prirodnu Albaniju”*, <http://mondo.rs/a739729/Info/Ex-Yu/Albanci-Crne-Gore-zele-Prirodnu-Albaniju.html>. Date accessed: 18.09.2016.

³⁸ <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/1019723-albanci-u-crnoj-gori-mi-smo-stvorili-ovu-drzavu>. „Telegraf”-online, 7.04.2014.

even though everywhere else in the country only 6 metres is kept in government hands³⁹. It seems that this policy has been adopted to allow the government to rent the beaches to people connected with the government camp. This issue of access to beaches, so important for the economy of Montenegro which is based on tourism, was taken up in the election campaign of the “*Ključ*” coalition.

The process of privatization is permeated by corruption. The name of Milo Djukanović appears constantly in this context as his relatives acquired some of the land and buildings previously belonging to Albanians. The privatization of “Solana”, a company producing sea salt, is a good example of corruption. In the Balkans there are no salt deposits, so the salt business is seen as very lucrative. This is mirrored in the language. The expression “to let someone to salt” means “to give someone a share in a good business”. “Solana” was acquired by a close relative of Djukanović⁴⁰. Such events are the reason for the growing tension between Montenegrins and Albanians. Albanians sarcastically say that “Solana” survived the Second World War but not the Djukanović leadership⁴¹.

Bosnians

Without doubt the situation of Muslim Bosnians in Montenegro is rather uncomfortable from an historical point of view. The greatest epic of Montenegrin literature is “Mountain Wreath” (Gorski Vjenac). The poem glorifies the heroic battle with the ‘Turcitals’ (turned-Turks) the people living in the Balkans who had converted to Islam. The poem was written by Prince–Bishop Peter II Njegoš, Montenegro’s greatest national hero. Some Bosnians think that Njegoš’ poem glorifies the genocide of Muslims⁴². However, in the current political situation, the majority of Bosnians are loyal to Montenegro. The census of 2003 indicates that 63,272 Bosnians live in Montenegro, 9.41 percent of the country’s population, and the next census, in 2011, 53,605, 8.65 percent of the population⁴³.

The identity and symbols of Bosnians in Montenegro are linked with the Sandžak of Novi Pazar, an Ottoman administrative unit that existed from 1864 until the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, and today is in the territory of both Montenegro and Serbia. This region is now known as Sandžak and even the Bosnians concede that these days the region is in a difficult position. It is difficult to say that Bosnians from Montenegro have a motherland, as Bosnia and Herzegovina is a multi-ethnic federation. However, this is not an obvious fact for all Bosnians from Sandžak. The small population of this minority is one issue and their religion affiliation is another. In “Tito’s Yugoslavia”, a detriment to Bosnians achieving the status of a nation was their religion. In Montenegro Bosnians and Albanians are a Muslim minority in a country where the Eastern Orthodox Church is the dominant religion (in Montenegro there are 600 Orthodox churches and 100 Catholic churches⁴⁴). However there is a considerable group of Bosnian atheists following the tradition of

³⁹ Čafo Boga, Stefan Wolff, *Albanians in Montenegro...*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁴¹ Dritan Abazović, <https://www.facebook.com/koalicijakljuc/>. Date accessed: 28.09.2016.

⁴² Š. Rastoder, „Bošnjaci nisu jež u stomaku Crne Gore”...

⁴³ www.monstat.org/cg. Date accessed: 12.09.2016.

⁴⁴ Š. Rastoder, Ž. Andrijašević, *Istorijski leksikon Crne Gore. Crkve u Crne Gore*, Podgorica 2006.

“Yugoslav” rational thinking, for whom these divisions based on religion are of lesser importance. Small numbers of Bosnians on both sides of the Serbia – Montenegro border have urged both sides to work cooperatively to protect and advance their heritage and defend their ethnic minority rights. On the January 23, 2016, a declaration of cooperation between the Bosnian National Council in Montenegro and the Bosnian National Council in Serbia was signed. The document covers cooperation in relation to Bosnian culture, the preservation of language and traditions, and efforts to achieve autonomy⁴⁵.

It is obvious that this is a natural aspiration of every community, particularly ethnic communities, to define its identity, but in the case of Bosnians in Montenegro this is connected with choosing an exact political option. The Bosnian elites occupy themselves with discussions about which Bosnians should be citizens and with whom their primary loyalty should lie, a discussion which is clearly academic⁴⁶. In reality, cooperation with the Serbian minority in Montenegro was impossible, so in spite of their desires, the Bosnian population had to liaise with the Montenegrin government in Podgorica as the “guarantor” of their rights as a Yugoslav nation. But this liaison is in the Bosnian interest according to the President of the Bosnian National Council in Montenegro – Šerbo Rastoder⁴⁷. Even though Bosnians as citizens were not satisfied with the government and the “permanent prime minister” Milo Djukanović, close cooperation with the Serbian minority in Montenegro was difficult, almost impossible due to their bad experiences with Serbs during the war following the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991⁴⁸.

It seems however that the main problem for Bosnians from Sandžak is not their participation in political institutions but the poverty in the northern part of Montenegro. The municipality of Plav (Opština Plav) has long experienced considerable migratory movement. The diaspora from towns like Plav and Gusinje have established a very effective organization in New York. In March of 2016, this organisation and Bosnian population suffered the loss of Gusinje Ekrem Jevrić, local bard, community activist and advocate for culture of the Plav region died suddenly from a heart attack at the age of 54.

The last two years has seen Bosnian migration from Sandžak to Germany. Some villages are now completely desolate, in others only a small number of old people remain and in many settlements schools were closed, there were no longer enough children to keep them open. In two months alone (March and April of 2015), one thousand families migrated from Montenegro. At the beginning of 2015, two hundred families left just one town, Bjelo Polje⁴⁹. The process has already been described as the exodus of Bosnians from Sandžak. Parliamentarian, philologist and political leader Rifat Vesković who is involved with the Party of Democratic Action SDA (*Stranke Demokratske Akcije*), a division of the

⁴⁵ S. N., *Zajednički nastup prema državnim organima*, Danas, 23.01.2016. It is a paradox that an activist of the Bosnian Council in Montenegro is the most renowned Montenegrin historian with an international reputation – Šerbo Rastoder, Professor of the Humanities Faculty at the University of Montenegro.

⁴⁶ Muhamed Čeman, *Ko su Bašnjaci Crne Gore?* Bosnjaci.net. “Web magazin”. <http://www.bosnjaci.net/prilog.php?pid=39374>. Date accessed: 27.10.2010.

⁴⁷ Š. Rastoder, „Bošnjaci nisu jež u stomaku Crne Gore”...

⁴⁸ In 2015 the forum Bošnjaka Crne Gore published Rifat Rastoder’s book *Hronika zločina (1991–2001)*, (knj. I-II, pp. 972, Podgorica 2015) documenting the war crimes against Bosnians committed by Serbs during the war in the former Yugoslavia. “Revija. FORUM”, R. IX, XII 2015, No. 34, p. 29–30.

⁴⁹ <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/planeta.300.html:546497-Bosnjaci-odlaze-sa-severa-Crne-Gore>, Milutin Sekulović, *Bošnjaci odlaze sa severa Crne Gore*, Večerjeje Novosti-online, Date accessed: 5.05.2015.

same party in Bosnia, has predicted that soon there will no longer be any Bosnians left in Montenegro. Although this minority group supported the Milo Djukanović coalition in the 2012 election, they were greatly disappointed. Vesković also observes that Bosnian political, cultural and religious organisations are very passive⁵⁰.

The Last Parliamentary Election and the Current Situation of Ethnic Minorities

The last Montenegrin election, on 16 October 2016 brought the possibility that the situation of ethnic minorities could change dramatically. Milo Djukanović weighed heavily and negatively on the politics of his country. Milo Djukanović commenced his political career while Slobodan Milošević was still in power. He was 29, a young, active and talented politician connected with the Communist Party. In 1991 when he became prime minister of Montenegro for the first time it was still part of Yugoslavia and he was still prime minister when the country was part of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Politicians Momir Bulatović and Svetozar Marović, activists from the previously mentioned “anti-bureaucratic revolution” campaign (1988) which instigated changes in the Yugoslav communist movement, entered the political arena at the same time as Djukanović. The alliance of these politicians had consequences later on. Djukanović’s political strategies during the war in the former Yugoslavia aimed at a slow separation from Serbia and Slobodan Milošević in order to gain more independence, and above all, to avoid becoming involved in the war and its economic consequences. Djukanović consolidated his political position in Montenegro and together with his allies, colleagues and “veterans” of the first transformative years he built a vast and solid political platform with strong business, media and corruption links. Their role in the country was growing and Milo Djukanović became untouchable. The strength of his position was in stark contrast to the weakness of the internally fragmented Serbian opposition parties in Montenegro which represented the only viable alternative to Djukanović and his team. However, the legendary divisions amongst the Serbs, an issue the Serbs themselves acknowledged, allowed Djukanović to monopolise political power in Montenegro for such a long time. He remains the dominant persona in Montenegro political life until today. However he has increasingly become a liability even for people connected with the autonomy movement and who fully identify with Montenegro. Milo became the unmovable “King” of Montenegro, the person who wins elections by all possible means, with a group of his friends behind him, rich people who are strong and influential in business and who to a great extent acquired their fortunes thanks to corrupt connections with Milo Djukanović’s administration.

At the time of the Montenegrin independence referendum in 2006, the ethnic minorities *en masse* supported the idea of independence as they didn’t want be in the same country as Serbs. Consequently, parties and coalitions of ethnic groups, admittedly with small memberships, created additional support for the leadership of Milo Djukanović and the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and benefited afterwards when governmental

⁵⁰ *Večerne Novosti*, 5.05.2015. Due to a lack of funds, the Bosnian Council runs *de facto* as a volunteer’s organisation. Consequently many young people leave the organisation. N. Ružić, *Manjinski mediji...*, p. 11.

positions were filled. As long as there was hostility between the Serbs and the other ethnic minorities, Djukanović was able to count on the unconditional support of Bosnians, Albanians and Croatsians.

Under the leadership of Milo Djukanović, Montenegro adopted a Euro-Atlantic direction. This course of politics satisfied all of the ethnic minorities except the Serbs. Montenegro is well on its way to becoming a member of NATO. This would mean a change of historical direction in the foreign affairs of the country – leaving the close relationship with Russia (these days mostly historical and cultural) and moving towards cooperation with the US.

The parliamentary election on 16 October 2016 in the Republic of Montenegro had the potential to resolve the future of the proposed political directions of Montenegro as well as entire politics of Milo Djukanović. The Democratic Party of Socialists (*Demokratska Partija Socijalista*), DPS, together with supporters created coalitions, who by using the slogan “Firm step forward” (“Sigurnim korakom – DPS”), was trying to convince voters that Montenegro would be able to proceed along the safe path, which would conclude with safety (NATO), and prosperity (The European Union) only under the wings of this coalition.

On the other side, however, there were two opposition groups – the Democratic Front (*Demokratski Front*) and the “Great *Ključ* Coalition” which combined three main opposition parties, but also included many prominent people who were not party members. One of the previously mentioned coalition affiliates was Professor Šerbo Rastoder, a renowned historian and Chairman of the Bosnian Council in Montenegro. The political groups making up the “*Ključ*” coalition were the following parties: DEMOS, led by Miodrag Lekić, the People’s Socialist Party of Montenegro (*Socijalistička Narodna Stranka*) with Srdjan Milić, and *Gradjanski Pokret URA* – the United Reform Action (*Ujedinjena Reformska Akcija*) with Žarko Rakčević. The leadership of these three parties was Serb. The “*Ključ*” coalition was led by Miodrag Lekić, presidential candidate at the 2012 election who lost by only a few thousand votes (2.42 percent) to current president Filip Vujanović, the candidate of Milo Djukanović and the DPS. This strong showing encouraged the creation of a people’s coalition that would put aside antagonism to the Serbs (the strongest opposition force) in order to remove Djukanović from government and reform the corrupt political system⁵¹. The “*Ključ*” coalition had Serbs, Albanians, Montenegrins, Bosnians and Croatsians as candidates and in a pre-election opinion poll got to 23.3 percent while “Sigurnim korakom – DPS” polled at 36.1 percent. As the alternative to the governing faction, the “*Ključ*” coalition for the first time did not structure their political forces with representatives exclusively from the Serbian ethnic group. The coalition was able to count on support from voters tired of voting in elections without real alternatives.

The Supporting Democratic Front (*Demokratski Front*) and the “*Ključ*” coalition involved the risk of a move away from NATO and the EU. In the event of a win by the opposition, Serbs, who would set the political agenda had given no indication they intended to continue in the Euro-Atlantic political direction. The opposite was the case. Montenegrin Serbs were united in their resistance to Montenegrin membership in NATO, with Miodrag Lekić being the strongest opponent.

⁵¹ Leaders and supporters of the “*Ključ*” coalition stated that they didn’t know the Montenegro in which people were killed every day. <https://www.facebook.com/koalicijakljuc/>, Date accessed: 29.09.2016.

The election on 16 October 2016 however, brought victory to the “Sigurnim korakom” – DPS coalition. In the parliament of 81 members this coalition received 35 seats, while the Democratic Front (*Demokratski Front*) received 18, and the “*Ključ*” coalition only 9, in spite of great hopes for a better result. The citizens of Montenegro, allied with their government in complex interdependency, once again decided to support Djukanovic, to take the safe slow steps required for Montenegro to secure the full membership of NATO which they saw as the priority for the country at this time in their history. Milorad Popović, leader of the independent movement in Montenegro for many years, argued that the country is endangered by two aggressive nationalistic forces: Serbian and Albanian and, not having their own military base, their safety must be constructed on membership in NATO⁵². The DPS victory is very insecure. In spite of the fact that the DPS created a government with other ethnic minority parties [the Bosnian party – *Bošnjačka Stranka* (BS), the Croatian party – *Hrvatska Građanska Inicijativa* (HGI), the Albanian coalition “Albanci odlučno”, *Socijaldemokrate* (SD) and *Liberalna partija* (LP)⁵³] and that Milo Djukanović decided to vacate the prime minister seat (Duško Marković was elected prime minister) the big opposition parties announced a boycott of parliamentary sittings. They decided that governmental manipulation and intimidatory techniques during the election process had distorted the election results. They decided to continue with their boycott until a new election was announced⁵⁴.

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⁵² Milorad Popović: 'Ako u Crnoj Gori pobijede prosrpske snage, izgubit ćemo suverenitet, a njome će vladati mitropolit Amfilohije i srpski ambasador u Podgorici'. <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/milorad-popovic-ako-u-crnoj-gori-pobijede-prosrpske-snage-izgubit-emo-suverenitet-a-njome-ce-vladati-mit>. Date accessed: 3.05.2013.

⁵³ <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/crna-gora-nova-vladajuca-koalicija-potpisala-postizborni-sporazum/bks650f>

⁵⁴ *Crna Gora: Bojkot traje dok ne bude saopšten datum novih izbora*. 9.12.2016. <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/crna-gora-bojkot-traje-dok-ne-bude-saopsten-datum-novih-izbora/43h46kq>; *Bojkot Skupštine do datuma ponavljanja izbora u razumnom roku*. <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/bojkot-skupstine-do-datuma-ponavljanja-izbora-u-razumnom-roku-915525>, Date accessed: 9.12.2016.

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Mirosław Dymarski

Political Situation of Ethnic Minority Groups in Independent Montenegro

Summary

The situation of the ethnic minorities in Montenegro is quite complex. Although they enjoy full civic rights, a lot of discontent is on record. Serbs, the largest minority (29% of population of Montenegro), want their position enshrined in the constitution. They believe in their basic ethnic and cultural identity with the Montenegrins and claim that 1/3 of the people of Montenegro cannot be regarded as a mere minority. In 2006 the Serbs of Montenegro were totally opposed to the proclamation of independence. For this reason they alone have not shared power in Montenegro. The smaller minorities (Albanians, Bosnians, Croats, Muslims) were adamant in their support of the independence of Montenegro. They have coexisted with the central authorities of Montenegro and members of these minorities have been participating in public office. Their enmity to Serbs dating to the war in former Yugoslavia has made the position of Milo Djukanović secure for over two decades. The election scheduled for 16 October 2016 could change the status quo. The activists of ethnic minorities, in recent years disillusioned with the policy of the government of Montenegro, have built a multi-ethnic coalition with some ethnic Montenegrins which aims at removing the team of Milo Djukanović, in their opinion corrupt and criminal, from power. A quarter of a century after the war in Yugoslavia, the new generation has come of age for whom the future of the country rather than the memory of the fratricidal war is the primary concern.

Keywords: ethnic minorities, Montenegro, elections, Albanians, Serbs, Bosnians, political parties, political activity.