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Preserving Peace in a Troubled Region: the Case of Montenegro

In the wake of the Cold War, Yugoslavia and its successor states were engulfed in a series of conflicts, including armed ones. In all of the republics - the newly independent states of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Serbia's then-province of Kosovo, but with the exception of Slovenia - these conflicts were primarily ethnically driven. The only former Yugoslav republic to avert armed conflict in the 1990s was Montenegro, which regained its independence peacefully in 2006. In this article, the authors respond to the research question of why, out of all of the republics of the former Yugoslavia, was it only in Montenegro in which there was no ethnic conflict during the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation? The authors apply the Randall Collins theory of social conflicts to the case study of Montenegro. This theory combines geopolitical and ethnic factors for the absence or outbreak of conflicts, something which has a strong explanatory potential for this case study. Through a multidisciplinary approach, based on a case study as a qualitative method, the authors analyse various factors so that they are able to reach concrete conclusions in a comprehensive manner. The analysis covers historical, demographic, political, and special ethical aspects in Montenegro. Our explanation of the most important causes which ensured the absence of ethnic conflict in Montenegro is based on perspectives of what can be referred to as the neo-Weberian and anti-foundationalism approaches which emphasise the behaviour of the state, as well as geopolitical circumstances, as prime examples for the emergence or absence of ethnic-based conflict.

Introduction

It was the processes of integration and disintegration which brought about the geopolitical changes of the 1990s. The Balkans region was severely hit by the resurgence of nationalism, plus ethnic and national conflict, over

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borders and territories both between and within the republics of the Yugoslav federation. The Yugoslav republics had to come to grips with unclear foreign policy orientations, issues with internal reforms and transition, the rise of nationalism, and interethnic tensions.

In the last few years, the issue of maintaining peace and security in the post-Yugoslav region has become a somewhat topical issue, bearing in mind the constant tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, the never-ending crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and political instability in (what is now 'North') Macedonia. Montenegro is not devoid of political crises either, but as previously they have not resulted in armed conflict and have not gone beyond the occasional protests or clashes between protesters and police. Even during the last decade, when it appeared that it was constantly in political turmoil, Montenegro remained a leading country in the European integration process, being able to join NATO in 2017. Given the common context and numerous similarities with its neighbours, as well as the continuing complex situation in the region, the question remains as to what extent the Montenegrin experience differs and why this might be the case. In explaining the most important circumstances and causes which seem to have made possible the avoidance of ethnic conflict in Montenegro, we implement the perspectives of the neo-Weberian approach. The modern neo-Weberian approach, which emphasises geopolitical factors as the most important of all factors in the potential emergence of ethnic conflict, is most highly elaborated in the works of Randall Collins. Influenced by Marx, Collins points out that the *unequal distribution of limited and scarce resources produces the potential for conflict between those who control those resources and those who do not*. By 'resources' Collins means not only material resources but also cultural resources. In other words, control over rituals which produce solidarity within one group through the use of group symbols and rituals. Once social stratification is set up in this way, potential conflicts can escalate into actual conflicts. Conflict realisation occurs to the extent that opposing groups within themselves mobilise in the realm of emotion, morality, and symbolism. According to Collins, those rituals which produce nationalism tend to appear in response to the perception of an external or internal threat (Collins, 2009). In the case of Montenegro, this would mean a level of risk in the threat of assimilation or of external aggression.

Apart from this, the behaviour of the state as well as geopolitical circumstances are prime examples of the emergence or absence of ethnic-based conflict. In our research, military factors will partially be addressed while the political factors and activities of the state which have contributed to avoiding a high degree of politicisation of ethnic identities will be emphasised and analysed in more detail (Malešević, 2004). In line with this, and relevant to

our topic, Collins elaborates on the geopolitical aspects of the conflict. Those aspects imply that the strengthening of the state can trigger ethnic divisions within state borders, and conflict over whose cultural identity will be at the core of the nation's identity. The state's ability to manage ethnic differences is linked to its geopolitical goals. According to Collins, the government will have to be ethnically tolerant at some point, while it will sometimes strive to reduce ethnic diversity. It will previously depend on its geopolitical goals. Following in Weber's footsteps, Collins also sees the disintegration of communist states in the ideological delegitimation of communism, which also influenced the delegitimation of power in communist countries (Collins, 1999).

1. Regional Context and Experiences

Never has this region been geographically, culturally, or conceptually homogenous (Bakić Hayden, 2006). Due to divisions which have been based on various grounds, the Balkans has always been a breeding ground for the emergence of extensively exploited terms such as Balkanism and Balkanisation, as a rule within the context of the bad, the bloody, the discordant, and the unfinished (Todorova, 2009).

The fall of the communist system which was itself epitomised in the character of Josip Broz Tito was triggered by several underlying causes, the most significant of which were the following: the death of the very system's creator and the re-examination of his role; a severe economic crisis; and nationalism, which revealed its destructive and militant character only eventually to bring about the dissolution of the federal state (Krempton, 2003). All of the republics were locked into various armed conflict based on ethnic and national differences - with the exception of Montenegro - even Slovenia if we consider the ethnic nature of the conflict. Since the history behind the various Yugoslav conflicts has already been much discussed, we will not go into detail here, but it is important to understand the context.

According to its 1946 constitution, the second Yugoslavia (1945-1991) was a federal people's republic. This form of national establishment was multinational and multi-religious in nature. It was as early as the late 1960s that the first ardents of national specificity and demands for greater autonomy emerged. The awakening of the Croat national sentiment was brought about through demographic circumstances which, due to frequent departures of young people to work abroad, drove down the federation's natural population increase to zero. Issues which were related to the peculiarities of the Croatian language gathered themselves together as part of the mass-move-

ment which became known as 'Maspok', and which was led by the reform forces of the 'League of Communists of Croatia'. Following pressure being exerted by the Yugoslav state leadership, the 'Maspok' efforts of the Croats were thwarted in what was later known in historiography as the 'Croatian Spring' (Krempton, 2003).

The issue of Kosovo's status within the federation showed that national and ethnic issues were a key dividing factor in Yugoslavia. The equalisation of Kosovo's status through its possible reinforcement until it attained the status of a republic was a significant issue, but the demonstrations in 1981 were suppressed by the deployment of the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) in Priština. The 1974 constitution paved the way for the arrival of confederalism and devolved key competencies for the republics, while making the autonomous provinces integral federal elements of the state (Petković, 1998). Kosovo enjoyed a significantly better status than before, but even so it was largely Serbs and Montenegrins who dominated police structures and state security services in Kosovo, while the ethnicity structure showed a constant decline in the number of Serbs in the region, which stood at 23.5% of the overall population in 1961 but had fallen to 9% by 1991 (Krempton, 2003).

During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, after initial expectations that the situation would develop in favour of Kosovo's independence, the more extreme elements of the Kosovan Albanian population began to advocate, openly and strongly, for a more decisive and even military-based confrontation with Serbia. Clashes between the Serbian police and military forces in Kosovo and paramilitary forces escalated in 1998. This was the trigger for intervention by Nato forces and the bombing of the FRY in 1999 (Savić, 2017).

At the very beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, economic reforms were undertaken by the federal prime minister, a Croat named Ante Marković, but the internal situation was exacerbated by the lack of strong fiscal and budgetary cohesion amongst the republics, which further deepened internal political divisions (Simić, 2010), as well as generating an increase in the unemployment rate which rose as high as 60% in members of the population who were under the age of twenty-five (Lempi, 2004).

When the Yugoslav crises started, it seemed that the only Yugoslav republic which could remain intact was Slovenia, due to its different culture and history and its ethnically-homogeneous population in the far north-western corner of Yugoslavia (Glenny, 2012). However, following the proclamation of independence in Slovenia, a conflict between members of the 'Territorial Defence of Slovenia' and the YPA broke out, known as the Ten-Day War. Although one cannot point to any exclusive involvement of Serbs or any other ethnic minority in this conflict due to the homogeneity of the Slovenian

population, it has been mentioned due to the relevance it bore to subsequent events (Lempi, 2004).

Following the proclamation of independence and the war in Croatia, one which was marked by war crimes on both sides, plus the mass expulsion of the Serb minority, and also the shelling of Dubrovnik, Vukovar, and other war-related events, the general conflict moved to Bosnia and Herzegovina. This republic, which was characterised by its heterogeneous ethnic composition, suffered levels of destruction of the largest scale. The Dayton Peace Accords ended the war in 1995, thanks to significant US engagement.

Macedonia was also not spared from ethnic conflict.¹ The biggest problem for internal functioning in Macedonia was its Albanian minority. Accounting for almost 25% of the population and living in the western part of the country and the capital Skoplje, the Albanians were trying to better their position. Their demands were indubitably influenced by demands for independence which had been voiced by Albanians in Kosovo, with this acting as a powerful magnet for the Macedonian Albanians, who for the first time were able to envisage the contours of a so-called Greater Albania. The Ohrid Agreement was signed in August 2001, regulating the political, cultural, and linguistic status of Albanians in Macedonia.

2. The Political Circumstances in Montenegro during the Decade of Wars in the Rest of Former Yugoslavia

Marked by the aforesaid ethnic composition of its population, Montenegro followed the official Serbian policy in the newly established two-member federation, which itself created following the referendum in Montenegro in 1992. This was controversial because of the way it was organised (in just a week) and then conducted in the middle of the war in the region. On the eve of the coup in Montenegro and the overthrow of the old communist regime in 1989, the bonds with Serbia's official policy could already be discerned, as protestors emphasised the 'betrayal of the leadership' of Croatia and Slovenia, underscoring the problem of 'separatists from Kosovo', all on the grounds of the populist politics of Slobodan Milošević.² However, even under these conditions the quasi-new leadership which emerged from the younger echelon of

¹ Since the 2018 'Prespa Agreement' with Greece the official name of this country has been North Macedonia.

² Slobodan Milošević himself, as well as the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadžić, were ethnic Montenegrins, another significant example of the complexity of Montenegrin-Serbian relations.

the former communist leadership signalled a desire for system reform through the introduction of multipartyism, something which followed the general trend in Eastern Europe. This was shown in practice when, in the period after 1990, a large number of parties were founded which included amongst their number various minority parties. One of these minority parties, the 'Democratic Union of Albanians', played a significant role as an ally of Milo Đukanović (the then-prime minister, and today's president of Montenegro) during his political and ideological departure from Milošević, upon which he embarked in 1997. This veering away from the establishment helped the ruling party to remain the only reformed communist party in Europe which has continuously been in power since the introduction of a multi-party system (Vujović & Tomović, 2019), ie. practically since 1945 (Bieber, 2018), and until 2020. Đukanović did not remain immune to ethnic nationalism but was still able to curb its influence through cooperation with national minorities (Serwer, 2019).

Certainly, the political alliance of the Montenegrin leadership with Milošević's regime led to Montenegro's involvement in the war and international economic isolation. If we consider all the ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, it can be seen that they all arose with the purpose of being able to undertake great state-level projects. As a rule, conflicts arose because a minority in the former Yugoslavia - whether Serbs, Croats, or Albanians, depending upon the republic in question - supported a certain type of secession in order to join the 'motherland', and thereby establishing what has been referred to as Greater Serbia, Greater Croatia, or Greater Albania. Montenegro was and still is, extremely heterogeneous in the national sense, as indicated by the aforesaid statistics, although in this it does not seem to differ from the other four (post)-Yugoslav states in which ethnic conflicts raged, Montenegro averted armed interethnic conflict both during the 1990s and in the process of restoring its state independence in 2006. Various factors contributed to this but, above all, it seems that a major ethnic conflict in Montenegro itself was averted owing to the policy of the leading political figures within the country.

The Montenegrin government, as stated previously, actively supported Serb efforts after 1989 in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, and was directly involved in the attack on and shelling of Dubrovnik in Croatia, which caused outrage across the civilised world. But since Montenegrins were essentially aligned with Serbs during this period, Montenegro was protected from its own ethnic conflict which might have been initiated by Serbs since Serbs already felt as though they formed the dominant majority in Montenegro, so there was no need for any further action by them to overthrow the government or to secede a part of the Montenegrin territory. Moreover, given that Montenegrins and Serbs together made up the dominant majority of the population

(over 70%), room for other national groups was narrowed in terms of them potentially being able to foster instability should they embark on such an action. Although some parts of Montenegro were often involved in the great-state Croatian project, the number of Croats in Montenegro stood (and still stands) at about 1% of the total. In addition, the number of Albanians in Montenegro in the 1991 census was 6.6% (this number is set to fall to below five percent in coming decades). Therefore Albanians, although relatively compactly situated in three Montenegrin micro-regions, were not in a position to be significant political players at that time, bearing in mind the fact that, during the wars in the first half of the 1990s, Kosovan independence had not yet been attained. The largest 'non-Orthodox' minority, Montenegrin Muslims,³ made up one-seventh of the population. However, the lack of a clearly defined great-state project among the Bosniaks and, above all, the fact that their compatriots in Bosnia and Herzegovina were focused on the problem of their survival, meant that they posed no threat in terms of making any serious attempts to destabilise the government or to secede part of the territory to a break-away state. At the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis, the Bosnian Muslim leader asserted a claim to Sandžak,⁴ calling it 'occupied' (Calic, 2019). However, when the war began in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sandžak was no longer a focal point. After the 1991-1995 period, and after veering away from Milošević's politics, the Montenegrin government revealed a tendency to present Montenegro as the first victim, rather than the first ally, of the Milošević regime, somewhat similarly to what post-war Austria did in 1945 (Bukey, 2000).

Following the internal political changes of 1997-1998, Montenegro distanced itself from the regime in Serbia and began an all-out confrontation against Milošević. Such distancing was emphasised in Montenegro's neutral stance during the Nato bombing of the FRY when it was largely preserved from military destruction,⁵ although mention should be made of the victims in the village of Murino in the north of the country, where six people were killed (including three children) out of a total of ten victims of the Nato bombing of Montenegro. However, the number of victims in Serbia, a figure which has not been precisely determined to this day, was probably at least a hundred times higher. Moving away from Milošević's policy did not result in the

³ In 2003 they opted for the name 'Bosniaks', as had Muslims in BiH since 1993, along with the majority of Muslims in Croatia and Serbia (and Kosovo).

⁴ A region in the north of Montenegro and to the south-west of Serbia which is inhabited by a significant number of Muslims.

⁵ Distancing from Slobodan Milošević's politics played a key role in this. The changed course of the Montenegrin government was recognised in the west and, therefore, especially due to the efforts of the French President Chirac (Mulchinock, 2017: 126, 128), only a small number of targets in Montenegro were bombed.

questioning of the legitimacy of Montenegro's government by its ethnic Serb population. By following Collins' explanation, we find acceptance of Montenegro by Montenegrin Serbs as a legitimate state throughout history, while also discovering that there has been no significant shift in the ethnic distribution of cultural and material resources in the country. This refers to the absence of any persecution of Serbs and the similar absence of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, even after the split with Milošević.

During the various conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the Montenegrin ruling elite showed a degree of weakness when under pressure from Belgrade's centres of power. In that period, certain events left a bad mark on multi-ethnicity in Montenegro. Not too much mention needs to be made of that here, other than pointing out various facts which include the deportation of a total of 157 Bosnian refugees to their war-ridden country, plus the establishment of the Morinj prison camp for Croatian civilian prisoners and PoWs, sporadic cases of the harassment of Bosniaks in villages in northern Montenegro, and the abduction of twenty passengers (including eight Montenegrin citizens) from the Belgrade-Bar train in Štrpci (a location which was then under the control of Bosnian Serbs) (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006).

Montenegro showed both its pacifist and its humane side despite its involvement in the war. The outbreak of the conflict in Yugoslavia led to a large number of refugees; even in the early 2000s there were still about a million refugees in the region (Belloni, 2020). In the first wave of refugee migration in 1990 and 1991, Montenegro took in refugees from Slovenia and Croatia. After the outbreak of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, even by 1992 as many as 63,050 refugees were registered, which then accounted for 10.5% of the total population of Montenegro. Following the actions which had been undertaken by the Croatian army in the form of operations 'Flash' and 'Storm', over 4,000 refugees from Croatia fled to Montenegro. After the Dayton Agreement, almost 2,000 more refugees left Bosnia and Herzegovina for Montenegro. The 2003 Montenegro census registered over 21,000 refugees (Remiković, 2011) or slightly more than 3% of the total population.

A significant influx of refugees, although of different ethnicities, did not affect the change of ethnic relations in Montenegro. The refugees accepted the existing multiethnic framework, predominantly based on the rituals of communist Yugoslavia. This did not call into question by ethnic groups the legitimacy of the authorities in Montenegro, with those ethnic groups becoming significantly more numerous with the influx of refugees.

The veer away from Milošević, the strengthening of ties with the west and, above all, with the US, made Montenegro the largest recipient of US aid *per capita* after Israel between 1999 and 2001 (Simić, 2002), amounting to \$430.9

million of unconditional aid (Džankić, 2014). Also, during the Nato bombing, Montenegro took in a large number of refugees from Kosovo. Unlike the first half of the 1990s, when refugees were predominantly ethnic Serbs, this time the refugees were mostly ethnic Albanians. At the time, between 70,000 (Chomsky, 2018) and 80,000 ethnic Albanian refugees fled to Montenegro, ie. a number which equalled more than one-tenth of the country's entire population (Morrison, 2018). According to the UNHCR office in Montenegro, in 1998 and 1999, at the peak of the crisis, Montenegro accepted a total of 110,000 refugees, equivalent to almost one-fifth of the country's population at the time (UNHCR, 2018). At a time at which power in the country was split between the civil government which had control over the police, and a military which was answerable to Milošević, a declaration of peace and tolerance was signed in Montenegro by all parliamentary political parties, and a civil war was avoided while the country 'crossed a psychological barrier which testified to its slow but inevitable political maturation' (Rastoder, 2011). As we have seen, political action was of decisive importance in order to be able to avoid dire consequences in Montenegro during the wars of the 1990s, and the country's demographics were crucial for such political action. However, without grasping the influence of historical circumstances, as well as specific Montenegrin codes of ethics, neither the political situation in Montenegro during the 1990s nor its contemporary political reality can be comprehended.

3. The Peculiarities of Montenegro in the Yugoslav Milieu: Demographic Predispositions

Montenegro, as is the case with most countries in the Balkans, has continually been a place of conflict and a region in which the influences and interests of various civilisations have clashed. Its atypical development of statehood, one which has been built upon constant struggles, attempts to preserve territorial integrity and its geographical position, and also the effects of the presence of various foreign powers on Montenegrin soil, have all given rise to today's Montenegro as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. It is the only country in Europe in which no ethnic group makes up the majority, although Montenegrins are the largest ethnic group, making up almost 45% of the population (Vukićević & Savić, 2015). The information in Table 1 corroborate this, having been collected in the most recent census, of 2011, with this being the first census to be undertaken following the renewal of Montenegro's independence in 2006.

Table 1. Montenegro's population by ethnicity, expressed as a percentage, 'Population Census 2011' (Statistical Office of Montenegro, Monstat, 2011).

Ethnicity (population by national or ethnic affiliation)	Percentage of the total population
Montenegrins	44.98%
Serbs	28.73%
Bosniaks	8.65%
Albanians	4.91%
Muslims	3.31%
Roma	1.01%
Croats	0.97%
Others	2.39%
Regional qualification	0.19%
Does not want to declare	4.86%

One of the peculiarities which are visible here is the division into identity which is reflected in two dominant national groups, those who declare themselves as Montenegrins and those who declare themselves as Serbs. The fact needs to be taken into account that the division between Montenegrins and Serbs is primarily ideological, ie. political, because Serbs are not immigrants from Serbia but Montenegrins who believe that they are part of the Serbian ethnic corpus (Vukićević, 2017). This stems from the fact that Montenegrins, under the centuries-old leadership of the Petrović Njegoš dynasty, were generally considered part of the Serbian nation in a broader sense. Furthermore, the information shows that modern Montenegro, which has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation - Nato - since 2017, manages to maintain its multi-ethnic structure. Under these circumstances, Montenegro restored its independence in a referendum in 2006 with the dominant support of its minority peoples, hence it managed to meet the threshold of 55% of those who voted in favour of the option for independence, with that threshold having been imposed by the international community. This electoral formula is the result of the aforesaid division of the population. Moreover, Table 2 indicates the persistence of the Albanian and Croatian ethnic groups in Montenegro, which have not changed drastically even after the war in the 1990s. Another peculiarity is the change within the Islamic population, whose adherents, after 1993, across the entire region began to declare themselves as Bosniaks. It should be noted that the aforementioned national demands within the republics of the former Yugoslavia were almost always joined by members of those nation's ethnic groups which were living in Montenegro, primarily Albanians who identified with the demands of the Albanian population in Kosovo, but this still did not lead to conflict within Montenegro itself.

Table 2. **Ethnic groups in Montenegro**
(Statistical Office of Montenegro, Monstat, 2011).

Ethnic affiliation	Expressed as a percentage of Montenegro's total population		
	1981 census	1991 census	2003 census
Montenegrins	68.54%	61.86%	43.16%
Serbs	3.32%	9.34%	31.99%
Albanians	6.46%	6.57%	5.03%
Muslims	13.36%	14.57%	3.97%
Bosniaks	0	0	7.77%
Croats	1.18%	1.02%	1.10%

Until the 1948 census, people did not declare themselves based on national affiliation. The key categories were citizenship, religion, and language. In the first post-war census in 1948, Montenegrins accounted for 90.7% of the total population, with the second-largest ethnic group being Albanians who accounted for 5.2% of the population, with a further 1.8% identifying as Serbs. The latest information, as well as that presented in Table 2, reveals that there have been changes in the population's national structure for several reasons, including freedom of national affiliation, the process of national self-identification, the prevailing political environment, trends in the Yugoslav state, and trends within Montenegro itself, with all of these processes being a consequence of the social and political environment in the wartime circumstances of the ethnic conflict (which predominantly took place outside the territory of Montenegro) (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006).

The information which was collected in the population censuses tends to corroborate the fact that the issue of nationality in Yugoslavia held a central place in terms of examining the population's ethnic structure. Historical circumstances have, in a sense, determined the spatial arrangement of the peoples of the Yugoslav federation according to the '*national key*'. Such a distribution also determined the position within the federation of the borders for the republics. The statistical information which was obtained from the censuses reveals the relative compactness of the population which was enclosed within the borders of the federal republics. According to the 1971 census, Serbs made up 71.2% of the population in Serbia (with Albanians making up 73.7% in Kosovo), Croats constituted 79.4% of the population in Croatia, Slovenes made up 94.0% of the population in Slovenia, Macedonians made up 69.3% of the population of Macedonia, and Montenegrins comprised 67.2% of the population of Montenegro, whilst 37.2% of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina declared themselves to be Serbs, 20.6% as Croats, and 39.6% as Muslims (the latter of

whom were recognised as a separate group in 1971, while since the 1990s they have predominantly used the term 'Bosniaks'). When it comes to ethnic minorities in Yugoslavia, Albanians were in the lead with a share of 6.4% of the total population ('The population of Yugoslavia', 1974). Albanians were the largest non-Slavic national group. Their levels of dissatisfaction with the fact that they were part of Yugoslavia were high from the very beginning (Boškovska, 2017).

The peculiarity of Montenegro within Yugoslavia was that it had the least nationally-coloured communist leadership of all of the states ('We are communist-internationalists by nationality'). Throughout the period of development until the 1990s, the 'equidistance towards both *Montenegrin* and *Serbian*' was accentuated (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006). We deem this to be yet another reason for the absence of ethnic conflict since, for almost half a century, it was 'Yugoslavism' which was insisted on in Montenegro, precisely due to an awareness of the population's ethnic structure.

4. Historical Background of Montenegrin Interethnic Relations

Part of the reason for Montenegro not being locked into ethnic conflict in the wars which followed the break-up of Yugoslavia lies in the special historical development of its statehood, an area which includes the following:

- An inclusive state policy towards ethnic minorities;
- An institutional framework to ensure the equality of all nations and religions;
- No historical burden of revenge against ethnic minorities, which is reflected in the absence of revanchism towards the non-Orthodox population following international recognition in 1878.

During the reign of Prince Danilo (1851-1860), religious and secular powers were separated in Montenegro. The country broke away from using a specific centuries-old tradition of Montenegro being ruled by Orthodox metropolitans who exercised both religious and secular power. With Danilo's Code of 1855, which provided for legal solutions which were highly progressive for the times in which they were codified, Prince Danilo strengthened statehood and brought Montenegro closer to the enlightened European nations. The code guaranteed freedom of religion for the non-Orthodox and the protection of asylum seekers ('Prince Danilo's Code', 1998).

Upon gaining full international recognition as an independent state at

the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Montenegro truly became a multi-confessional state. It spread to parts where the tradition of Montenegrin statehood had not existed before, growing into large enough a state to be both vital and sustainable but, at the same time, its religious identity became less monolithic and more diverse as it grew to include other confessions (Morrison, 2009).

The Islamic Community of Montenegro was founded in 1878. At the close of the nineteenth century, about 12,500 Muslims lived in the principality of Montenegro (Rastoder, 2010). The reasons for the decrease in the number of Muslims included frequent emigrations, but political reasons for emigration were present only during the period in which authority was being established in the newly obtained areas in which a certain number of Muslims emigrated away as they did not want to live under a Christian ruler. During the emigration of the Muslim population, as was the case with the Muslims of Nikšić, Prince Nikola appealed to them to stay. There is no source which speaks of any maltreatment of the defeated opponents by Prince Nikola (later to be king) (Rastoder, 2010). If we compare the information on the number of Muslims in those areas which Montenegro received in the period between 1878-1880 with similar information from Serbia, the differences become apparent in terms of the policies which were being applied by these two countries. Muslims almost disappeared from the Principality of Serbia in 1867, and from south-eastern Serbia until 1882, and numerous actions were undertaken which were aimed at encouraging emigration (Bandžović, 2001).

Muslims who stayed behind to live under the new government managed to obtain their civil and religious rights in the following years. Montenegro took vigorous and specific action to facilitate the status of Muslims, by passing laws which recognised and protected their religious rights, but also their civil and property rights in general. Prince Nikola publicly pointed out that Muslim subjects were equal to Orthodox subjects (Rastoder, 2010). In all parts of Montenegro in which Muslims lived they participated in government, and in those regions in which there was a Muslim majority there was also a Muslim head of that territorial unit. The development of the legislative system led to the adoption of the constitution in 1905, which also guaranteed religious freedoms. Although the Orthodox faith was recognised as the state religion in the constitution, other religions were guaranteed freedom, while all three religions were protected by law. The 1906 'Criminal Code' prescribed prison sentences for insulting religious feelings or preventing the performance of religious rites (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006). With the addition of territories which joined the country after the Balkan wars (1912-1913), Montenegro gained an even larger Muslim population. When, during the Balkan wars, the Montenegrin army entered Shkodra which was predominantly inhabited by

Albanians, a proclamation was issued which firmly guaranteed respect for all laws, customs, and religions 'according to the tradition of tolerance for which Montenegro is known' ('Voice of Montenegrin', 30 April 1913).

Following the Congress of Berlin, areas which were inhabited by Roman Catholics were joined to Montenegro, giving it a population of over 6,000 Roman Catholics at the end of the nineteenth century. Montenegro entered the process of negotiations with the Holy See, which resulted in the signing of the concordat in 1886. This agreement with the Holy See was the first of its kind to be concluded with a Slavic and predominantly Orthodox country (with the exception of the 1847 agreement with Russia). Montenegro saw it as a means of strengthening its reputation in the west (Jakulj, 2013). The concordat with Montenegro set a pattern for concluding similar concordats with Serbia and Romania (Kakamo, 2005). Through the efforts of Prince Nikola, in 1887 the pope allowed religious services in the Old Slavonic language in all Catholic churches in Montenegro, which made Montenegrin Catholics the first in the Balkans to obtain this right (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006). Following in the tradition of the 1886 agreement, Montenegro concluded the 'Fundamental Agreement' with the Holy See in 2011. This agreement was the first agreement to have been signed with a single religious community in Montenegro since the restoration of independence and, as such, it paved the way for subsequent agreements with the Islamic and Jewish religious communities (Vukićević, 2019).

In addition to the dominant Slavic population in Montenegro, there is also an Albanian ethnic minority. Most of those territories which are populated by Albanians became part of Montenegro after its territorial expansions in 1878-1880, and in 1912. In the immediate neighbourhood of Montenegro, in Kosovo, the conflict flared up precisely as a conflict between the Slavic and Albanian populations, while the conflict in Macedonia had the same characteristics. Therefore it should be emphasised here that, among other circumstances (such as minor demographic significance, involvement in political processes and, practically, a quarter of a century-long involvement in government), the history of friendly relations and alliances between Montenegrins and Albanians in the late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth also contributed to the avoidance of conflict whilst laying the foundations for the aforementioned acceptance of a large number of Albanian refugees from Kosovo in 1999. Montenegro supported Malisori revolts (involving Albanian Catholic tribes) against the Ottomans in the early twentieth century, and received a larger number of Albanian refugees. During the Balkan wars there was also an idea which regarded Montenegro as a state protector of the autonomous Catholic Albanian state (Raspopović, 2009).

5. Montenegrin Ethos: Defend Another from Yourself

Although Montenegrins are related to many of the other peoples around them, especially Serbs to whom they are kindred in many areas: ethnic, religious, and cultural, the history of the country, its geographical location, and the peculiarities of Montenegrin tradition, such as the existence of a tribal organisation, have meant that Montenegrins have developed a specific system of values, especially moral norms, which can be seen as being different from those of other Yugoslav peoples.

Many epics, songs, panegyrics, and enthusiastic speeches have been sung, written, or spoken about the struggles of the Montenegrin people for freedom from foreign invaders. In 1877, Lord Tennyson published a poem which was dedicated to Montenegro in which he praised the bravery of Montenegrins in the struggle to preserve their freedom. The preface to these verses was written by the British statesman, William Gladstone, a great friend of and propagandist in the west for Montenegro (Knežević, 2001). Merimee, Pushkin, Tolstoy, Joyce Carey, F S Fitzgerald, and others also wrote about Montenegro and Montenegrins, mostly with admiration for their heroism.

However, in addition to mentioning Montenegro's constant resistance, the Montenegrin national spirit developed and cherished yet another important dimension. This was best articulated and described by the warrior, and writer, Marko Miljanov Popović. While he linked Montenegro's struggle for freedom, and the courage shown in it, to the notion of *heroism*, he referred to this other dimension of the Montenegrin ethos as *čojstvo*, a difficult-to-translate term which has been translated into English through the translations of his major book, 'Examples of Heroism and Manliness', as 'humanity, honour, chivalry', and sometimes even as 'manly virtue' (Boehm, 1987). This quality was seen in Montenegro as an essential value of its Hegelian *Volksgeist*, the very foundation of the Montenegrin *l'esprit de la nation*. The *čojstvo* ethos was the inspiration for numerous Montenegrin epic poems and legends about moral role models (Đurić, 2018).

While the label 'heroism', as Marko Miljanov put it, means to defend oneself from another, the definition of *čojstvo* is to *defend another from oneself*. This was a fundamental value which was respected, cherished, and nurtured in a traditional, conservative, and tribal/clan society. In such a society, enemies were respected, as were the various prisoners, and the Montenegrins never harmed the women and children of the people against whom they were at war. Freedom was also emphasised as a value which Montenegrins placed before their own lives (Đurić, 2018). These codes were passed on from Montenegrin warriors to the entirety of Montenegrin society, becoming its moral

yardstick. 'They underpin the popularly-accepted stoic worldview, and still have a great deal of resonance amongst the Montenegrin population' ('Ethnic Groups of Europe', 2011: 267). *Čojstvo*, honour, and freedom are therefore seen as values by which one lives and dies, with *čojstvo* as a *differentia specifica* of the Montenegrin people (Racković, 1994). It is also defined as a special moral principle, a criterion for evaluating actions in one's private and public life, and as an original folk philosophy (Tomović, 2006). The famous Croatian writer, Ivan Mažuranić, in his most important literary work presented an image of Montenegrins which prevailed amongst Croatian progressive thinkers of the nineteenth century, who saw Montenegro 'as a Slavic stronghold of freedom in a sea of oppression' (Milković, 2010). Although they share different common values with other Slavic peoples, the strong commitment of Montenegrins to win their freedom left the longest-lasting and most significant impression on other Southern Slavs (Bennett, 1978).

There have been numerous examples of tolerance amongst Montenegrins, both during their struggle for freedom and after, when ethnic minorities became a reality of the Montenegrin state. This attitude was challenged in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (such as in terms of the crime against Muslims in Šahovići in 1924), or some of those events which took place during the Second World War. But it contributed to a different interethnic relationship in Montenegro than that which was common in the Balkans during the wars of the 1990s.

Conclusions - Relative Stability in a Sea of Conflict

During the turbulent period which began with the collapse of real-socialism at the beginning of the 1990s, and which lasted until the beginning of the twenty-first century (in many aspects, the legacy of the conflict is still very much alive), Montenegro stands out against the backdrop of the complex Balkan mosaic, as an example of the peaceful overcoming of ethnic and religious conflicts. Although it is true that, either through the involvement of its citizens in the surrounding conflicts or through various incidents on its territory, Montenegro was a participant in the Balkan crisis. But, despite a very heterogeneous religious structure and an equally complex and multi-layered national structure, an armed conflict was averted. Collins' theory provides a potent explanation of the reasons for the absence of conflict in Montenegro. The multiethnic character of the 'League of Communists of Montenegro' (SKCG), the communist government in Montenegro until 1991, persisted even after the introduction of multipartyism under the rule of the 'Democratic

Party of Socialists' (DPS), which was for the most part just a new name for the former 'League of Communists'. The DPS inherited the legitimacy of the SKCG, which was present in all ethnic groups in the country. Due to the continuation of an inclusive policy towards minorities, there has been no change in the distribution of resources in society based on ethnicity, thereby taking away the potential for interethnic conflict. This was not the case in Serbia due to the absence of Albanians from managerial positions within Kosovo's authorities, although the former 'League of Communists' continued to rule in Serbia, but without a pronounced multiethnic composition, as was the case in Montenegro. In addition, the legitimacy of the new government in Montenegro was reflected in the participation in the elections of political parties which consisted of national minorities (Goati, 1999). The continuity of anti-fascist rituals has contributed to the legitimacy of the authorities in Montenegro due to undivided support for the anti-fascist character amongst all ethnic groups (Prekić, 2020). We have seen that this was influenced by various factors, and that their connection resulted in the preservation of peace and relative harmony in inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations. The complex Montenegrin history, which led to the establishment of a state which was virtually engaged in a constant, day-to-day struggle for survival until its full international recognition at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, had an indubitable influence on later events, especially in the territory which makes up the Balkans. In the Balkans, as is portrayed in the films of the celebrated Macedonian director, Milčo Mančevski, the past and the present live side-by-side. The way in which the Montenegrin government established relations with ethnic minorities in the newly acquired territories was one of the foundations for the development of multiculturalism in Montenegro. This relationship also differed from the experience of some other countries in the region. In part, this historical experience is associated with a specific Montenegrin ethos, one which developed in a specific, tribal context which, however, set certain solid moral codes as the cornerstone of everything. There were times when these codes which, when sublimed into one word, could be defined as Montenegrin *čojstvo*, were set aside. In many moments, though, even during the darkest period of the 1990s, they would come to the fore again (such as in terms of the country taking in Serb refugees in 1995, or Albanian/Kosovo refugees in 1999). The population structure in Montenegro cannot be overlooked, ie. the importance of the demographic factor in terms of the preservation of peace. The complexity of Montenegrin-Serbian relations, although it sometimes led - and still leads - to political conflict, nevertheless could be regarded more as a contribution to the avoidance of armed conflict during the Yugoslav crisis than as a potential instigator. The smaller percentage of the Albanian population and its disper-

sion into three of the country's regions, along with the small percentage of the Croatian minority, and the disunity and identity search of the Muslim Slavic population (which is divided into Bosniaks, those who declare themselves as Muslims by ethnicity, and Muslim Montenegrins) have also played a role in the contribution to reducing the potential for conflict.

We can also point out the political factor, which is based upon the aforementioned factors. The political context in which Montenegro found itself, and the actions of political stakeholders - both those in power and those in opposition - have contributed and decisively influenced the preservation of peace and relative stability in Montenegro. Although Montenegro played the role of Milošević's first ally, thereby harming itself politically and economically, some basic principles of coexistence and tolerance of diversity still fundamentally functioned within Montenegro's borders. After that, in the second half of the 1990s, Montenegro veered away from Milošević's politics, thereby preserving itself again when the time came for the Serb-Albanian showdown in Kosovo and then the war between Nato and the FRY.

When applying Collins' theoretical principles we come to the following conclusions: Montenegro did not have a potential external threat in the period being observed due to the coordination of its political regime with the regime in Serbia, from where the potential threat could have come. Due to Montenegro's limited geopolitical capacity, it could not materialise support for Milošević in Kosovo through military action. Therefore the Albanians in Montenegro did not question the legitimacy of the country's government even during those years in which the DPS openly supported the Milošević regime. The threat from Albania could not materialise due to the lack of a single national ritual amongst Montenegrin Albanians. We first showed that Montenegrin Albanians early on became an integral part of the social community, without requiring ethnic assimilation by the central government in Montenegro. Ethnic assimilation was also lacking due to the absence of Montenegro's geopolitical ambitions, especially during the conflicts of the 1990s. This can also be seen in the policy towards Bosniaks. On the Croatian side there was no significant threat because there was no real potential for the Croatian population to engage, taking into account their constant but relatively small share of the total population.

All of this paved the way for a referendum which peacefully restored Montenegro's independence in 2006. Although supporters of continued union with Serbia did not succeed in their aims in the referendum, the Montenegrin political elite on all sides of the spectrum showed enough wisdom not to start a conflict, as they were wise enough not to spark one after the presidential elections in 1997 or during the Nato bombing in 1999. Supporters

of independence were especially numerous in members of national minorities which we can, following Collins, explain through their fear of assimilation within the state union with Serbia due to Serbia's own geopolitical goals. They avoided the Kosovo scenario, which we discussed earlier.

Time has shown that tensions still persist today between various post-Yugoslav states, peoples, and religious groups. In Montenegro itself, there is still potential for conflict and divisions in society along religious and national fault lines. However, previous experience, when peace in the country was preserved during the much more complex context of a war raging in the neighbourhood, during the process of economic collapse, under international sanctions, as well as when suffering the dominance of autocratic regimes in the region, all teaches us that future political conflicts will remain part of the field of politics without necessarily escalating into inter-ethnic and/or inter-religious armed conflict.

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