



# **Population Censuses in Montenegro – A Century of National Identity “Repacking”**

Research Article

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# Population Censuses in Montenegro - A Century of National Identity “Repacking”

Ivan Vuković\*

Montenegro’s recent political history has been extremely turbulent. Within less than a century, this country lost and regained internationally recognized state independence. Moreover, it was a part of three rather different “Yugoslav” state projects. At the same time, albeit without significant demographic shifts, the declared ethnic/national composition of the Montenegrin population changed radically. The focus of this paper is on the interaction between Montenegro’s dynamic political development and the constant reconfiguration of its ethnic/national structure. It concludes that the varying outcomes of the population censuses in Montenegro have actually mirrored political changes which the country has undergone throughout the observed period. It also finds that, because of the proliferation and, in particular, participation in government of nationally-oriented party organizations, census results in recent years have become politically salient to the extent that they began to influence the very character of the political game in Montenegro.

**Keywords:** Montenegro, census, national identity

## Introduction

Among the countries of the Balkan region, Montenegro has had a very dynamic contemporary political development. For nearly four decades before World War I (WWI), the Montenegrin principality/kingdom existed as an independent, internationally recognized state. Subsequently, as part of the 1918 establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (*Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, KSHS),<sup>1</sup> Montenegro was annexed by Serbia and thus erased from the world’s political map. It reappeared as a separate political entity in 1945, as one of the six constituent republics in the newly created socialist Yugoslav federation (*Federativna narodna republika Jugoslavija*, FNRJ).<sup>2</sup> When, at the beginning of the 1990s, the era of brotherhood and unity of its peoples came to a bloody end, Montenegrins decided to continue living in a joint state with Serbia (*Savezna republika Jugoslavija*, SRJ).<sup>3</sup> However, less than a decade and a half later, they chose to leave the state union and, through the May 2006 referendum, re-established the independent state of Montenegro.

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<sup>1</sup> The KSHS was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (*Kraljevina Jugoslavija*, KJ) in 1929.

<sup>2</sup> In 1963, with the adoption of a new constitution, it was renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistička federativna republika Jugoslavija*, SFRJ).

<sup>3</sup> SRJ was reconstituted as a loose federation and renamed the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (*Državna zajednica Srbija i Crna Gora*, SCG) in February 2003.

Put differently, a few generations of Montenegrin people, without changing their place of residence, alternately lived in a sovereign country, an unnamed province of the Yugoslav kingdom, a republic with all statehood attributes in the socialist Yugoslavia, a political unit of the federal unions with Serbia, and, once again, in an independent state.

Considering its turbulent recent political history, one should not be surprised by the scope of change of the country's ethnic/national composition as defined by censuses during this period. In the first population census organized in Montenegro, in 1909, people were asked to self-identify in relation to language and religion.<sup>4</sup> In the next one, conducted by the KSHS authorities in 1921, the questions were similarly structured, only this time, the answers were used as the basis for the creation of a list of a total of fourteen "nationalities" of the newly founded state. The fact that the term "Montenegrin" was absent from this list clearly reflected the nature of the aforementioned political change that had taken place in Montenegro three years earlier.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, in all the censuses that took place in the post-World War II (WWII) period, Montenegrins constituted the largest national group in Montenegro. Still, compared to the censuses organized in the socialist Yugoslavia (1948, 1953, 1961, 1971, 1981, and 1991), the number of people self-identifying as Montenegrins dropped significantly in the last two (2003 and 2011).<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, the percentage of Serbs in the population of Montenegro also varied considerably, from over 90% in 1921, to less than 2% in 1948, to the current 28.7%. Thus, as the number of declared Serbs grew, the number of declared Montenegrins declined and vice-versa. The share of Muslims in the Montenegrin population dropped from 13.2% in 1971 – the year when they were officially recognized as one of the Yugoslav constituent nations – to the current 3.3%.<sup>7</sup> Bosniaks appeared in the 2003 census as a separate national group and eight years later amounted to 8.6% of the overall population. Finally, just like the country after which they were named, Yugoslavs in Montenegro – standing at 5.6% in 1981 – practically disappeared (0.3%) as a national group in the 2003 census.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, mirrored in the population censuses subsequent to the collapse of Yugoslavia, the course of Montenegro's political development has been greatly influenced by their results. As a consequence of the escalating political crisis in the socialist federation in the late 1980s / early 1990s, the most salient political issues in the constituent republics became those related to ethnic/national and religious identity. The first multi-party elections in Montenegro, organized in December 1990, took place at the moment when the nationalist euphoria across Yugoslavia reached its peak. Strongly influencing the political atmosphere in

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<sup>4</sup> The results showed that close to 95% of the Montenegrin population consisted of Orthodox Christians who spoke the Serbian language.

<sup>5</sup> Montenegrins, predominantly Serbian-speaking Orthodox Christians, were officially incorporated into the Serbian national corpus. The results of the census are available (in Cyrillic) [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> The overall percentage of Montenegrins in the country's population went down from 90.6 in 1948 to 43.1 in 2003, and to 44.9 in 2011. For the complete results of the three censuses, see [here](#) (1948), [here](#) (2003), and [here](#) (2011).

<sup>7</sup> Muslims first appeared as a separate ethnic/national group in Montenegro in the 1961 Yugoslav census (see the results [here](#)). The results of the 1971 census are available [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> Their number in the 2011 census was 0.2%.

Montenegro, it gave rise to the emergence of numerous national parties in the country. The pro-Serbian oriented People's Party (*Narodna stranka*, NS), and, in a coalition, the Albanian Democratic League in Montenegro (*Demokratski savez u Crnoj Gori*, DSCG) and the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije*, SDA) took part in the 1990 elections. In the years that followed, more party organizations claiming to represent the political interests of various national groups were established in Montenegro.<sup>9</sup> Their political rhetoric and ambitions have to a great extent been founded upon the results of the last two population censuses.

Throughout its recent political history, Montenegro's fluid ethnic/national composition both determined and, lately in particular, has been determined by its internal political dynamics. Departing from this general premise, the main ambition of this article is to contribute to a better understanding of the interplay between the radical political changes and the diverging census outcomes in Montenegro. Towards that goal, the following stages in the country's political development will be analyzed: the inter-war years (1918-1941) during which Montenegro and Montenegrins did not exist in political terms; the post-WWII decades of Montenegrin political and national emancipation in the socialist Yugoslavia; and the most recent (post-SFRJ) period leading to the 2006 renewal of Montenegro's state independence.

### **The post-WWI years**

After the First World War, albeit fighting along the victorious Allies, Montenegro lost its state sovereignty that had been internationally recognized at the 1878 Berlin Congress. Instead of joining the newly created Yugoslav state as one of its constitutive parts, Montenegro was first annexed by Serbia and as such incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Slovenes, and Croats. On 24. November 1918, at the moment when Montenegro's King Nikola I Petrović and his government were still in exile,<sup>10</sup> under the heavy presence of the "liberating" Serbian military in the country, a so-called Great People's Assembly (*Velika narodna skupština*) convened in Podgorica to "legitimize" the unconditional integration of Montenegro into Serbia.

Even though a vast majority of Montenegrins wanted their country to become a part of the "first Yugoslavia", a considerable number stood up against the manner in which the integration had been carried out. Any union with neighboring South Slav states, they believed, was supposed to be based on the principles of equality and respect for the Montenegrin sovereignty.<sup>11</sup> As it became obvious that such political status was unlikely to be bestowed upon the

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<sup>9</sup> Among the (former) parliamentary parties, these include: the Democratic Union of Albanians (*Demokratska unija Albanaca*, DUA), the Serbian People's Party (*Srpska narodna stranka*, SNS), the Croatian Civic Initiative (*Hrvatska građanska inicijativa* – HGI), the Democratic Serb Party (*Demokratska srpska stranka*, DSS), the Albanian New Democratic Power - FORCA (*Nova demokratska snaga*, FORCA), the Albanian Alternative (*Albanska alternativa*, AA), the Bosniak Party (*Bošnjačka stranka*, BS), the Albanian Coalition "Perspective" (*Albanska koalicija "Perspektiva"*, AKP), and the New Serb Democracy (*Nova srpska demokratija*, NOVA).

<sup>10</sup> The rulers from Petrović-Njegoš family had governed Montenegro since 1697.

<sup>11</sup> Pavlović, Srdja. 2003. *Who are Montenegrins? Statehood, Identity and Civic Society*, in *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, edited by Bieber, Florian. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 83-106, 89.

Montenegrins, their disillusionment with the state of affairs moved swiftly from vocal protest to armed uprising.<sup>12</sup> However, by the end of 1919 the military campaign against the unification was largely neutralized and the “Montenegrin Question” was brought to a political end.<sup>13</sup> The aforementioned absence of a specific “Montenegrin” denomination in the aftermath of the first Yugoslav census held two years later symbolized “an inglorious conclusion of Montenegro’s period of independence”.<sup>14</sup> In a way, this was anticipated with the following remark by Savo Fatić, vice-president of the Great People’s Assembly, made on the occasion of the November 1918 proclamation of the state unification of Serbia and Montenegro: “We are no longer Montenegrins, but Serbs.”<sup>15</sup>

Within the politically centralized Kingdom in which the territory of Montenegro comprised only 2% of the population, its political, cultural and national role remained “marginal.”<sup>16</sup> The volume of central government grants for investments in Montenegro – to mention just one of the indicators of its status in the KSHS – was smaller than the amount of war reparations which it should have received after WWI.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, as they were “forced to recognize that the regime was failing to address economic and social ills which had placed Montenegrins near the bottom of the heap in the new Yugoslav state,”<sup>18</sup> many of those who had wholeheartedly supported the decisions of the Podgorica Assembly soon became disillusioned. The scale of popular discontent in Montenegro during the 1920s and 1930s is perhaps most convincingly demonstrated by the fact that the number of people killed, arrested, detained, and tried was “several dozens of times higher in percentage” when compared to the population in any other part of the KSHS.<sup>19</sup>

The next Yugoslav census conducted in 1931 coincided with the adoption of a new constitution that was to legalize the earlier introduction of personal dictatorship by King Aleksandar. Followed by a brutal campaign against his political opponents, the Law on Royal Rule and Supreme State Administration (*Zakon o kraljevskoj vlasti i vrhovnoj državnoj upravi*) was passed in January 1929 as a response to the escalation of the prolonged political crisis in the Kingdom.<sup>20</sup> Determined to uproot popular attachment to the historical regions within the country and symbolically unite them under its new name (the

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<sup>12</sup> Morrison, Kenneth. 2009. *Montenegro: A Modern History*. London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Officially established on 1 December 1918, the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes received international recognition a month later, at the Paris Peace Conference.

<sup>14</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Popović, Milorad. 2011. *Njegoš i crnogorska nacija*. Cetinje: Otvoreni kulturni forum, 145.

<sup>16</sup> Rastoder, Šerbo. 2003. A Short Review of the History of Montenegro, in *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, edited by Bieber, Florian. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 107-38, 133.

<sup>17</sup> Roberts, Elizabeth. 2007. *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro*. London: Hurst & Co, 184.

<sup>18</sup> Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, 337.

<sup>19</sup> Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, 207.

<sup>20</sup> Basically, the crisis was a result of the dissatisfaction of other Yugoslav peoples – first and foremost Croats – with the Serb domination in the political affairs of the joint state. As noted by Ramet, Serbian officials “aspired to nothing else than political, economic, and cultural hegemony within the new state and saw strict centralism as a ‘logical’ solution.” See Ramet, P. Sabrina. 2006. *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 37.

Kingdom of Yugoslavia), the King strictly prohibited the public display of tribal, i.e. national, symbols.<sup>21</sup> In view of that, one should not be surprised by the lack of questions about ethnicity/nationality in the 1931 census.

### **Montenegrin rebirth in the Yugoslav federation**

Subsequent to the end of the Second World War, in which it once again ended on the winning side, Montenegro was reestablished as a political entity. Denouncing the greater Serbian hegemony, which they regarded as the key factor in the failure of the first Yugoslavia, Yugoslav Communists – the leading force in the popular armed resistance against the Axis powers – endorsed the post-war creation of a federation of six republics “based on the principle of nationality under centralized party control.”<sup>22</sup> On equal terms with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia, Montenegro thus entered the new Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia. In addition, the 1946 federal constitution listed Montenegrins as one of its constituent nations.

Furthermore, reflecting its political status, the first census organized in the socialist Yugoslavia in 1948 demonstrated a radical change in the national structure of Montenegro’s population. Montenegrins – unrecognized in the Yugoslav kingdom – comprised the vast majority of people living in the smallest FNRJ republic with no less than 90.7%.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the percentage of people self-identifying as Serbs in the population of Montenegro went down to 1.7%.<sup>24</sup> The next Yugoslav census conducted five years later had a similar outcome in this regard. There were officially 86.6% of Montenegrins and 3.3% of Serbs in Montenegro.<sup>25</sup> Just like in 1921, the results of the 1948 and 1953 censuses mirrored the political reality, rather than any demographic change taking place in this country.

Namely, the Communist-led resistance movement in Montenegro during the Second World War, which was adjacent to class, aimed at the national liberation of its people. On 13 July 1941, Montenegrins organized hitherto the largest popular uprising in Axis-occupied Europe.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, both during and after WWII, a higher percentage of population belonged to the Yugoslav communist party in Montenegro than in any other republic.<sup>27</sup> At the end of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 81.

<sup>22</sup> Morrison, *Montenegro*, 66.

<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the number of Albanians – standing in 1948 at 5.4% of the population – remained stable to date. See footnote 6.

<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, this was less than the percentage of Croats (1.8) living in Montenegro at that time.

<sup>25</sup> In addition, Yugoslavs (1.5%) appeared for the first time as a separate national group in Montenegro. For the complete results of the 1953 census, see [here](#).

<sup>26</sup> During the next four years, Montenegro suffered massive human losses. The official death toll at the end of the war stood at 40.446 (more than 10 per cent of the country’s pre-war population – I.V.). See Marović, Branislav. 1987. *Društveno-ekonomski razvoj Crne Gore, 1945-1953*. Titograd: Istorijski institut SR Crne Gore, 28-30. It is important to mention that a considerable number of these casualties resulted from an internal conflict between the Montenegrin Partisans and the Serbian loyalists (*Četnici*) whose extremely nationalist program, contrary to the Communists’ idea of “a society of equal peoples and a state that would be restructured on a federal basis” (See Rastoder, *A Short Review*, 135), envisaged the creation of ethnically homogenous nation-state under the Serbian crown.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson, Mark. 1992. *A Paper House: The Ending of Yugoslavia*. New York: Pantheon Books, 162.

war, 17% of the officers and as many as 36% of the Communist-led Partisan army generals were Montenegrin.<sup>28</sup> Containing merely 2% of its population, Montenegro therefore joined the federal Yugoslavia with huge moral capital.<sup>29</sup> Given their prestige in the newly established Yugoslav state, one should not be surprised by the extremely high percentage of Montenegrins (in Montenegro) in the censuses conducted in the aftermath of its creation.

On account of the role they played in the National Liberation War (*Narodnooslobodilački rat*), Montenegrins subsequently managed to “colonize the federal bureaucracy” and – due to strong clientelistic networks – remained heavily overrepresented for decades in the institutions of socialist Yugoslavia.<sup>30</sup> The power of the Montenegrin political elite was most clearly reflected in the generous allocations to the Republic from the federal budget as a result of which, during the times of socialist Yugoslavia, “Montenegro experienced the greatest economic regeneration in its entire history.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time, its dynamic development was followed by the strengthening of the feeling of Montenegrin national separateness in the federation. In line with the idea of Yugoslavia as – in the words of Veljko Milatović (then president of the Montenegrin Presidency) – “an alliance of free states which Montenegro joined voluntarily,”<sup>32</sup> the Republic’s highest officials had throughout this period been very critical of any initiative that could bring into question the national rights of Montenegrins.

On the other hand, Montenegro’s communist leadership constantly avoided tackling the problem of defining the *meaning* of Montenegrin nationhood. Instead, its representatives purposefully chose to cover it with “the blanket of ideological uniformity.”<sup>33</sup> Through strict adherence to the Yugoslav communist dogmas, the local party leaders effectively sought to neutralize the national identity issue. In practice, as Andrijašević and Rastoder argue, they represented “an ideal surrogate of the Yugoslav nationality“:

*“Throughout the post-war period, [they were] less nationally-oriented than any other (‘Our nationality is communist – internationalist’), being the last to found a national party (1948); they were the most ardent protagonists of the class struggle (‘class above nation’); they lagged behind the others in the setting up of national institutions [;] they cherished the policy of inferiority and the extended hand [;] they operated by clichés and used a political vocabulary replete with phrases and slogans“.*<sup>34</sup>

Such a “neutral” stance on the national identity issue was primarily aimed at bridging the deeply rooted Green-White political division in Montenegro.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric. 1995. *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*. London: Abacus, 170.

<sup>29</sup> Andrijašević and Rastoder, *The History of Montenegro*, 227.

<sup>30</sup> Lampe, R. John. 2006. *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 303.

<sup>31</sup> Rastoder, *A Short Review*, 137.

<sup>32</sup> Milatović, Veljko. 1975. *Tokovi revolucije*. Zagreb: Centar za aktualni politički studij, 262.

<sup>33</sup> Pavlović, *Who are Montenegrins?*, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Andrijašević and Rastoder, *The History of Montenegro*, 259.

<sup>35</sup> The Green-White divide refers to the aforementioned Podgorica Assembly that voted in 1918 to abolish Montenegro as an independent state. Namely, a vast majority of delegates supporting its decisions printed their agendas on white paper while a few of those who opposed them printed

With strong memories of its bloody revival in the Second World War, the Republic’s leadership was determined to maintain an internal political balance between the diametrically opposed positions. The socialist federation seemed to “engulf this demarcation by absorbing Montenegro’s two tones into a larger palette”.<sup>36</sup> In essence, however, it implied an “undefined dual politics without a national program”.<sup>37</sup>

Its impact on the process of Montenegrin national identity building was evident from the results of the population censuses conducted in Yugoslavia during this period. As demonstrated in Table 1 (see below), the share of people self-identifying as Montenegrins in the Republic’s population dropped from 81.3% in 1961 to 68.5 two decades later.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, when judged against the first one, the last census organized in the federation in 1991 showed a decrease in the number of Montenegrins by almost one third (61.8 vs. 90.6%).<sup>39</sup> For the reasons mentioned above, the socialist Yugoslav years were, for many in Montenegro, the best in its entire history.<sup>40</sup> Yet, because of the ambivalent attitude of its political elites, the issues of Montenegrin national identity and – in the context of the late 1980s Yugoslav political crisis – the related Montenegrin national interest remained essentially unresolved.<sup>41</sup> Determined principally by Montenegro’s political status within the SFRJ, they were bound to be re-problematized as the foundations of the socialist federation started to shake.

### **Post-Yugoslav ethnic/national realignment in Montenegro**

Compared to the period between the two world wars, the ethnic/national structure of Montenegro changed substantially during the period of socialist Yugoslavia (see below). Montenegrins – officially unrecognized as a separate nation in the Yugoslav kingdom – became far and away the most populous declared national group in the smallest FNRJ/SFRJ republic. In contrast, the share in its population of the once-predominant Serbs plummeted to the single digits. In addition, Muslims and Yugoslavs emerged in 1961 as newly

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theirs on green paper. Seemingly irrelevant, this detail would symbolically mark the onset of the great political schism between pro-unionist and pro-independence oriented Montenegrins (Vuković, 2014: 68).

<sup>36</sup> Thompson, *A Paper House*, 160.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Morrison, *Montenegro*, 82.

<sup>38</sup> In 1971, Montenegrins made up 67.1% of the population of Montenegro. At the same time, the percentage of Serbs increased from less than three in 1961 to 7.4 ten years later. Similarly, the number of Muslims in Montenegro (see: footnote 7) doubled during this period (from 6.5 to 13.2%). The share of Yugoslavs in the Montenegrin population also rose progressively (0.3% in 1961; 2% in 1971; 5.6% in 1981).

<sup>39</sup> The percentage of Serbs in Montenegro’s population almost tripled between 1981 and 1991 (3.3 to 9.3). The results of the 1981 Yugoslav census are available [here](#). For the 1991 census, see Grupković, Dragutin. 1994. *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava, stanova i poljoprivrednih gazdinstava u 1991. godini*. Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku.

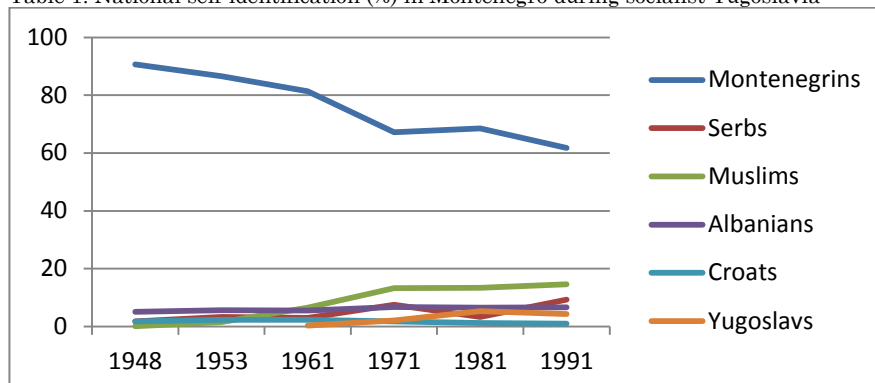
<sup>40</sup> Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, 393.

<sup>41</sup> For an interesting analysis of the failure of the nation-building project in communist Montenegro, see: Jenne K. Erin and Florian Bieber. 2014. Situational Nationalism: Nation-building in the Balkans, Subversive Institutions and the Montenegrin Paradox. *Ethnopolitics* 13(5), 431-60.



recognized nationalities in Montenegro. As noted by Džankić, national identity during the socialist period in this country was indeed “far from consolidated.”<sup>42</sup>

Table 1. National self-identification (%) in Montenegro during socialist Yugoslavia



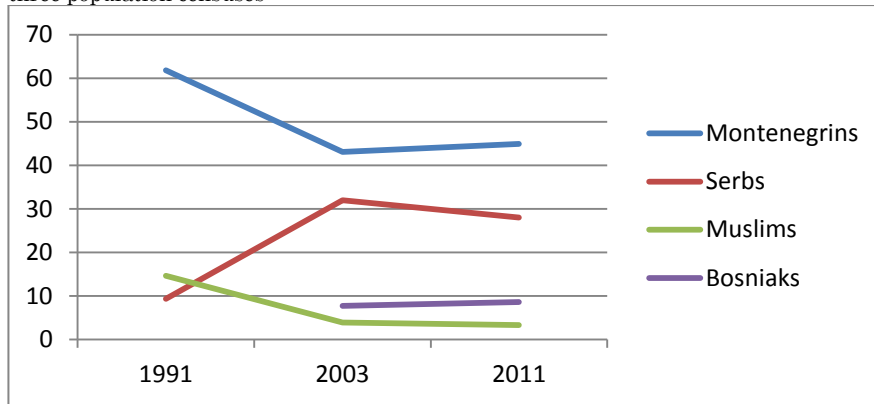
Source: Statistical Office of Montenegro (data available at: <http://www.monstat.org/eng/>)

Furthermore, the radical changes in Montenegro’s ethnic/national set-up during the period of socialist Yugoslavia continued even more radically in the years that followed its 1992 dissolution (see *Table 2*). Namely, along with the disappearance of Yugoslavs as a distinct national identity, the population censuses conducted in 2003 and 2011 indicated a substantial reconfiguration of the ethnic/national structure within the country’s two biggest religious groups – Orthodox Christians and Muslims.<sup>43</sup> For the first time since WWII, it was possible to clearly identify differentiation within those declaring as Orthodox Christian, to understand who identified as Montenegrin or Serb. Moreover, even though the share of Montenegrins in the general population dropped sharply between 1991 and 2003, they remained the most populous national group in Montenegro. On the other hand, due to the political reasons explained in the second part of this paper, the number of Serbs tripled during the observed period. At the same time, within the Muslim religious corpus, the emergence of national polarization between Bosniaks and Muslims became evident. The former group first appeared in the 2003 census (7.7%) and increased in number to the current 8.6% of the total population of Montenegro. In contrast, the number of people declaring themselves as Muslims went down to slightly less than 4% in 2003 and further to 3.3% in the last Montenegrin census. Interestingly, the ratio between the sizes of the two main religious denominations in the country remained largely stable between 1991 and 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Džankić, Jelena. 2013. Cutting the Mists of the Black Mountain: Cleavages in Montenegro’s Divide over Statehood and Identity.” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 41(3), 415.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 6.

Table 2. Montenegro’s national “restructuring” – the largest national groups (%) in the last three population censuses



Source: Statistical Office of Montenegro (data available at: <http://www.monstat.org/eng/>)

Taking into account its crucial importance for the overall political development of Montenegro, the remainder of this paper focuses on the recent ethnic/national restructuring within the Christian Orthodox segment of the country’s population. It argues that the aforementioned diverging census results reflect the character of the political evolution which Montenegro as well as the rest of former Yugoslavia underwent in the course of the last quarter of a century. At the same time, in view of the establishment of a significant number of national parties during this period (see footnote 8) and the ensuing issues of the politicization of identity in Montenegro – especially after the 2006 renewal of its independence – the article also hypothesizes a growing impact of the population censuses on the country’s political dynamics.

In the SFR Yugoslavia, as previously elaborated, the question of Montenegrin national identity had seemed to have been given an appropriate, that is historically justified, political answer. Nevertheless, the outbreak of political crisis in the federation and, in particular, the growing political pressure from the Serbian intellectual elite and the new leadership under Slobodan Milošević soon demonstrated the weaknesses of this approach.<sup>44</sup> The new political developments in Serbia caught the Montenegrin authorities completely unprepared. Still firmly clinging to the idea of brotherhood and the unity of the Yugoslav peoples, they used the 1986 SKCG Congress to call for a “continuous strengthening of socialist self-management and [...] the development of the Yugoslav federation based on the constitutional principles of the national equality and workers-class interest”.<sup>45</sup> In this spirit, at the moment when “the political rhetoric of national interest and nationalism increasingly framed public debate and participation”,<sup>46</sup> the Montenegrin leadership also pledged, “an uncompromising battle against the causes and manifestations of Montenegrin, Greater Serbian, Muslim, Albanian, and Croatian nationalism”.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> On the wave of Serbian nationalism built up subsequent to the 1980 death of Josip Broz Tito – the founder and the life-long President of socialist Yugoslavia – Milošević took control over the Serbian League of Communists (*Savez komunista Srbije*, SKS) in September 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Radonjić, *Politička misao*, 531.

<sup>46</sup> Woodward, L. Susan. 1995. *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 89.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Radonjić, *Politička misao*, 531.

With political circumstances in Yugoslavia changing in exactly the opposite direction, the communist leaders of Montenegro soon found themselves on a dead-end political course. To make their position even more difficult, the socio-economic situation in the Republic was nearing catastrophe during this period.<sup>48</sup> As a consequence, more and more Montenegrins were openly demonstrating anger toward their political representatives.<sup>49</sup> Many in Montenegro came to believe that their insistence on the political status quo of Yugoslavia was actually motivated by their personal political interests, i.e. the desire to preserve privileged positions within the country's political system. At that point, the smallest Yugoslav republic was politically and economically "ripe for a major outburst of popular discontent".<sup>50</sup> Milošević's populist, anti-bureaucratic movement which by mid-1988 began to "flow out" of Serbia served merely as the trigger.

In January 1989, following a series of massive popular protests, the communist leadership of Montenegro was forced to resign. Embraced by the Montenegrin people and politically and logistically endorsed from Belgrade, a new generation of the SKCG officials organized the overthrow of their allegedly self-interested and detached-from-the-popular-base comrades. Interestingly, and contrary to common knowledge of these events, which focus entirely on the role of Milošević's political and security apparatus – the turnover in Montenegro's political summit did not mark a simple victory of Serbian nationalism in the republic. The future Serbian president did, as a result of the shake-up, secure political support in Montenegro for his plans to reorganize the Yugoslav federation so as to "protect Serbian national interests". Moreover, and arguably due to Belgrade's considerable political influence, a significantly higher percentage of people in Montenegro declared themselves Serbs in the following population census. Identity-wise, however, the new SKCG leadership continued along the path paved by the old party elite, adamantly protecting Montenegro's status within the socialist federation.

This was unreservedly stated in the official opening address at the Tenth Congress of the Communist Alliance of Montenegro, summoned in April 1989 to formalize the political change that had taken place a few months earlier: "Montenegro is a state within the Yugoslav federation [...] Should there be no federation, Montenegro, as a sovereign state, will independently decide on the form of relations with other states".<sup>51</sup> Veselin Vukotić, the coordinator of the party interim presidency similarly pointed out: "Neither from abroad nor

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<sup>48</sup> Montenegrin heavy industry-based economy, largely dependent on the federal subsidies, was hit hard by the 1982 introduction of severe austerity measures by the Yugoslav government aimed at tackling the country's fast growing international debt, inflation rate and the living costs. As a consequence, massive numbers of workers in Montenegro's largely unproductive enterprises were laid off. Already in 1984, one in four Montenegrins was unemployed. Three years later, the Republic officially declared bankruptcy. For more on the topic, see Andrijašević and Rastoder, *The History of Montenegro*.

<sup>49</sup> The number of strikes in the Republic that, according to the official figures, saw none in 1980 thus amounted to 50 in 1987. See Fočo, Salih. 1989. *Strajk između iluzije i zbilje*, Beograd: Radnička štampa, 127.

<sup>50</sup> Vladisavljević, Nebojša. 2008. *Serbia's Antibureaucratic Revolution: Milošević, the Fall of Communism, and Nationalist Mobilization*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 161.

<sup>51</sup> *Krug*, 22. September 1990.

domestically were people manipulated. These events do not signify any Serbization of Montenegro but [an expression of] the will to restore the dignity of the Montenegrin nation“.<sup>52</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting held in October 1989, the SKCG Central Committee concluded that the “Montenegrin nation and Montenegrin state are definitely a reality“.<sup>53</sup>

Two weeks earlier, in Montenegro’s old royal capital of Cetinje, the government had organized a massively-attended re-burial of the remains of King Nikola and the members of his family. Given the above-mentioned political circumstances under which they died in exile, the symbolic connotation of this event was particularly strong. Furthermore, in an opinion poll published in November 1990, a month before the first multi-party parliamentary elections in Montenegro convincingly won by the SKCG, as many as 81.3% of the respondents expressed a very positive or positive attitude toward the Montenegrin nation.<sup>54</sup> That a relatively high percentage (61.8) of people in Montenegro declared themselves Montenegrins – particularly when judged against the percentage of Serbs (9.3) – in the 1991 census should therefore not be considered surprising.

However, within the next decade, the political situation in Montenegro and – as it became evident in 2003 – its ethnic/national composition, changed drastically. Following the collapse of Yugoslavia, at the referendum organized in March 1992, Montenegrins decided by a large majority to continue living with Serbia in a state federation.<sup>55</sup> After coming first in the 1990 elections, the SKCG – renamed in 1991 the Democratic Party of Socialists (*Demokratska partija socijalista*, DPS) – won again in 1992 and 1996.<sup>56</sup> Yet, at the beginning of 1997, merely a few months after the landslide electoral victory, the ruling party split up as a result of conflict between its two most important figures – president Bulatović and vice-president Đukanović – over the issue of political partnership with Milošević. While the DPS head remained loyal to its old political friend – despite terrible economic and political consequences of his belligerent politics – Đukanović gradually moved away from him and toward new, Western political partners. The resultant division of the predominant

<sup>52</sup> *RTCG*, 1 February 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Burzan, Danilo. 2009. *1989*. Cetinje: Crnogorski kulturni krug, 114.

<sup>54</sup> Pavičević, Veselin. 1997. *Izborni sistem i izbori u Crnoj Gori, 1990-1996*. Podgorica: CID, 84. Running under the original name, the party won an impressive 52.6% of the vote. In addition, the SKCG head, Momir Bulatović, won the second round of the concomitantly organized presidential election. For more on the post-communist political development of Montenegro, see: Vuković, Ivan. 2010. The Post-Communist Political Transition of Montenegro: Democratization prior to Europeanization. *Contemporary European Studies* 2(1), 59-77; Vuković, Ivan. 2011. Diverging Party Outcomes in Hybrid Regimes: The Cases of Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. *Romanian Journal of Political Science* 11(2), 81-104; Vuković, Ivan. 2015. Political Dynamics of the Post-Communist Montenegro: One-Party Show. *Democratization* 22(1), 73-91.

<sup>55</sup> Out of 2/3 of Montenegrins who took part in the referendum, almost 96% voted to stay with Serbia. On 27 April 1992, the two-member Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Savezna republika Jugoslavija*, SRJ) was officially proclaimed.

<sup>56</sup> In the general elections held on 20 December 1992, the Democratic Party of Socialists triumphed with 42.6% of the vote (46/85 parliamentary seats), and Bulatović was re-elected President, garnering 63.4% of the vote in the second round. Four years later, the ruling Montenegrin party even managed to win an absolute majority of the vote - 51.2%. It is important to mention that the DPS’s electoral successes, in large part, stem from the semi-authoritarian character of its rule during this period. For a detailed analysis of the reasons behind the early 1990s political domination in Montenegro by the Democratic Party of Socialists, see Vuković, *Political Dynamics*.

ruling party and, in particular, Đukanović's narrow triumph in the October 1997 presidential election marked the beginning of Montenegro's genuine democratic transition and – as it soon turned out – the decisive step towards the renewal of its independence.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, the 1997 conflict in the DPS resulted in the creation of (or, perhaps, just made obvious) a clear line of separation within the country's Orthodox Christian population between Montenegrin and Serb national identities.<sup>58</sup> In the years that followed, the DPS became the leading advocate of Montenegrin independence and a separate Montenegrin ethnic identity, while Bulatović's newly-established SNP promoted the common state with Serbia and a Montenegrin ethnic identity indistinguishable from the Serb one.<sup>59</sup> After a long period during which it was common for people in Montenegro – regardless of how they would officially declare themselves – to feel both “Montenegrin” and “Serb” at the same time, the growing division over its potential independence led to the “reconstruction of these identities and their association to pro-independence and unionist camps, respectively”.<sup>60</sup> The political debate in Montenegro during this period “greatly resembled that of 1918, when the issue of the unification of Montenegro with Serbia was a hot political topic.”<sup>61</sup> This time, however, the constellation of political forces was very different. As noted by Gallagher, “those who insist that Serbs were coethnics of Montenegrins or else closely related to them in terms of kinship and that Montenegrin government policy ought to reflect such ethnic consistency, found themselves on the defensive before forces asserting a primary Montenegrin identity”.<sup>62</sup>

The primacy of the Montenegrin national identity among the Christian Orthodox population of Montenegro was confirmed by the results of the 2003 census.<sup>63</sup> Its political verification came three years later, with the success of the referendum on independence.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, judged by the results of the latest population census conducted in Montenegro, the renewal of its statehood seems to have strengthened the sense of Montenegrin national distinctiveness as the percentage of people who declared themselves Montenegrins increased for the first time since 1981. As expected, this was followed by a drop in the number of Serbs in Montenegro.<sup>65</sup> Above all, the two groups now seem permanently divided not only along the lines of national, but also linguistic (Serbian vs.

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<sup>57</sup> After Bulatović won by a small margin in the first round (47.44 against 46.71% of the vote), Đukanović prevailed in the second by less than 5.500 votes (out of 344.000 cast). Subsequently, the Bulatović-led faction left the DPS and in February 1998 organized a new party organization – the Socialist People's Party (*Socijalistička narodna partija*, SNP).

<sup>58</sup> For a detailed account of this process, see: Džankić, Jelena. 2014. Reconstructing the Meaning of Being “Montenegrin”. *Slavic Review* 73(2), 347-71.

<sup>59</sup> Džankić, *Cutting the Mists*, 413.

<sup>60</sup> Džankić, *Cutting the Mists*.

<sup>61</sup> Pavlović, *Who are Montenegrins?*, 94.

<sup>62</sup> Gallagher, Tom. 2003. Identity in Flux, Destination Uncertain: Montenegro During and After the Yugoslav Wars. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17(1), 54-5.

<sup>63</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>64</sup> On 21 May 2006, with the turnout of over 86%, 55.5% of Montenegrins voted in favor of independence (see the OSCE official report on the referendum [here](#) (accessed: 1. November 2015)).

<sup>65</sup> See footnote 6.

Montenegrin language) and to a smaller extent religious identity (Serbian vs. Montenegrin Orthodox Church).<sup>66</sup>

Finally, its turbulent post-communist transition, dominated by various forms of ethno-politics resulted in the establishment of a considerable number of national parties in Montenegro.<sup>67</sup> Prior to the beginning of its democratization in 1997, the opposition parties in this country – including those with a national prefix – were all politically subjugated under the semi-authoritarian rule of the hegemonic Democratic Party of Socialists. What is more, throughout the years that followed, everything in Montenegrin politics happened in anticipation of the referendum on independence. Hence, only after the statehood issue was taken off the table in 2006 could the national parties actually embark on the realization of their political programs, most of which prioritizing the preservation of cultural autonomy and proportional representation in political institutions.

At the same time, their political demands within the latter principle are, for obvious reasons, principally founded on the results of population censuses. Given its heterogeneity, the ethnic/national structure of Montenegro has thus become an important factor in the country’s overall political life. Moreover, on account of the active role they played in the pro-independence referendum campaign, Albanian, Croat, and Muslim/Bosniak political organizations “earned” a considerable amount of political credit for the future period. Their position is further strengthened by the existence of the previously elaborated deep political cleavage between the two biggest national groups in Montenegro. The fact that a certain number of minority national parties participated in all Montenegrin governments in the post-referendum period allows them to put forward their political agendas. Thus, for instance, the political platform based on which the Bosniak Party, Croatian Democratic Initiative, and the (Albanian) Forca agreed to enter the incumbent government lists “higher level of the minority peoples’ integration into the democratic processes in the society” as one of the founding principles.<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, the Constitution adopted on 19. October 2007 – with the support of the above-mentioned parties’ MPs – established Montenegro as a civic state. As stated in Article 2, the “bearer of sovereignty is the citizen with Montenegrin citizenship”.<sup>69</sup> It is therefore hard not to notice the collision between the basic legal norm and the increasingly applied practice, defining the character of the political system. It is even harder to presume how the two will be reconciled in the future, particularly in view of the complicated process of constitutional revision in Montenegro, on the one hand, and the growing demands for minority rights protection in the process of its European integration, on the other.

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<sup>66</sup> As a part of the “unification” of Serbia and Montenegro in 1918, the autocephalous Orthodox Church in Montenegro was abolished and integrated into the Serbian Orthodox Church. In 1993, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church was officially restored. However, the Serbian Orthodox Church is still in the possession of nearly all monasteries and churches in Montenegro. See more in Džankić, *Cutting the Mists*.

<sup>67</sup> See footnote 9.

<sup>68</sup> The original document is available [here](#). (accessed: 1. November 2015).

<sup>69</sup> The full text of the Constitution is available [here](#) (accessed: 1. November 2015).

### **Concluding remarks**

Within the last one hundred years, Montenegro has experienced an unusually turbulent political development. In between the loss of state independence in 1918 and its renewal in 2006, the country had, under very distinct circumstances, entered the three politically very different Yugoslav states. As a consequence, even without significant demographic changes, Montenegro's declared ethnic/national composition has been altered substantially throughout this time. Montenegrins, politically unrecognized after WWI, became the largest national group in Montenegro after WWII. This, again, was causally linked with the variation in number of Serbs in this country. In addition, Yugoslavs, Muslims, and somewhat later Bosniaks emerged as its distinct nationalities.

This paper sought to explain the interplay between the aforementioned dynamic political processes and Montenegro's constant ethnic/national reconfiguration. It found the diverging results of the population censuses to reflect the character of political changes which the country had undergone throughout the observed period. Certainly the most interesting finding in this regard concerns the negative causal relationship between the percentages of Montenegrins and Serbs in the population of Montenegro. Contingent upon a political context in which the censuses took place, Montenegrins would increase in number while Serbs would proportionally drop, and vice-versa. Similar tendencies could lately be observed within the Bosniak-Muslim group in Montenegro.

The paper also demonstrated that in recent years, as a result of the political activity of nationally-oriented party organizations, census results became highly politically salient and, even began to affect the very nature of the political game in Montenegro. A number of Albanian, Bosniak, and Croatian parties took part in every Montenegrin government formed subsequent to the 2006 referendum in which they played an active role in the pro-independence movement. This fact gives them considerable political leverage and, notwithstanding the constitutional definition of Montenegro as a civic state, allows them to demand proportional political representation of their peoples. Census-determined percentages of their participation in the country's total population are at the core of such political aspirations; how such ethnic/national and civic aspirations will be reconciled remains to be seen.

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