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RELIGIOUS, ETHNIC, AND LINGUISTIC DISTINCTIVENESS IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

Summary: *This paper aims to analyse the possible influence of politics on the ethnic, linguistic, and religious distinctiveness of Montenegrins in relation to Serbs. The influence of politics on the ethnic distinctiveness of Montenegrins has especially been active since the beginning of the 21st century; hence this period represents the main time frame of the analysis. Since the difference between Montenegrins and Serbs is very blurred in terms of ethnic, linguistic, and religious distinctiveness, one of the hypotheses we argue in this paper is about politics, which appears as the main factor that dictates the differences between these two peoples in Montenegro. Consequently, the next hypothesis we argue about is the increased political differences between Serbia and Montenegro, the widened gap between ethnic Montenegrins and Serbs, the increased number of Serbs, and the reduced number of Montenegrins. On the other hand, while harmonious relations between Serbia and Montenegro prevailed and the difference between ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins was not politically encouraged, the number of Montenegrins increased, and the number of Serbs in Montenegro decreased.*

Keywords: *religion, church, ethnic affiliation, nation, language, Serbia, Montenegro, Serbian Orthodox Church, Montenegrin Orthodox Church.*

VERSKA, ETNIČKA I JEZIČKA RAZLIČITOST U POLITIČKOM KONTEKSTU

Rezime: *Rad ima za cilj da analizira mogući uticaj politike na etničku, jezičku i vjersku posebnost Crnogoraca u odnosu na Srbe. Uticaj politike na etničku posebnost Crnogoraca posebno je aktivan od početka 21. vijeka; stoga ovaj period predstavlja glavni vremenski okvir analize. S obzirom da je razlika između Crnogoraca i Srba veoma zamagljena u pogledu etničke, jezičke i verske posebnosti, jedna od hipoteza izložena u ovom radu odnosi se na politiku, koja se pojavljuje kao glavni faktor koji diktira razlike između ova dva naroda u Crnoj Gori. Shodno tome, sledeća hipoteza o kojoj raspravljamo je povećanje političkih razlika između Srbije i Crne Gore, prošireni jaz između etničkih Crnogoraca i Srba, te povećan broj Srba i smanjen broj Crnogoraca. S druge*

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strane, dok su vladali harmonični odnosi Srbije i Crne Gore, a razlika između etničkih Srba i Crnogoraca nije politički podsticana, broj Crnogoraca se povećavao, a broj Srba u Crnoj Gori smanjivao.

Ključne reči: *vera, crkva, etnička pripadnost, nacija, jezik, Srbija, Crna Gora, Srpska pravoslavna crkva, Crnogorska pravoslavna crkva.*

Introduction

The issue of identity, at least when it comes to national identity in Montenegro, is without a doubt one of the most important and popular issues in this republic, especially at the beginning of the new millennium. Therefore this historical period is the referential historical framework of this paper. Most issues or problems can be problematized or relativized, even those related to economic and existential issues, however, national identity is a topic that deserves the most views or comments on all Montenegrin portals. The sensitivity sensors, side by side with the national, are at the highest possible level when it comes to religious identity. Therefore, national and religious identities represent the most popular topic in the contemporary Montenegrin public - a popular topic for disagreements and divisions. It is practically impossible to separate these two identities in Montenegrin society. Viewed chronologically, national and religious identities in Montenegro were more or less actual, but this actualization came to the fore especially at the beginning of the 21st century, more precisely since the referendum on 21 May 2006.

The theme of these two inherently strong issues is more complex than we are able to explain in this paper. In our opinion, the fact that these issues are regulated depending on the political situation in Montenegro is the best evidence of how thin the border between Serbian and Montenegrin ethnic groups is. The difference between these two ethnic identities is rather vague and blurred, thus it must be most often viewed through a political prism, i.e., from the current political climate in a certain historical period. According to Vladan Stanković, this is an analysis of identity from the positions of transient categories of consciousness that change in step with changes of power in society (Stanković, 2013). Following the above theory, we think that identity consciousness, at least when it comes to ethnic affiliation, changes in accordance with the political affiliation, i.e., depending on the political parties in power. That means that political parties shape national and identity consciousness in Montenegro to a large extent (Vuković-Ćalasan, Đečević, 2015: 13-14). Hall agrees that identity is understood as an influence on the collective consciousness, and believes that myths, symbols, political and geopolitical aspects, etc. join forces to homogenize the national homogenization (Hall, 2006).

The Genesis of “Ethnic Montenegrins”

Science distinguishes between ethnic and national identity. The term ethnic refers to an ethnic group³ or community and identity, and national refers to the national community and national identity. Ethnic communities and identities are permanently linked to human history. Ethnic diversity exists in both the past and the modern world. Thus, ethnic groups and ethnic identities are older than the national ones. Nation, national phenomenon, and national identities are a product of modern society (European model of modernity) from the 18th century, through the 19th and 20th centuries, until today (Korunić, 2005). The ethnic distinctiveness of Montenegrins in relation to Serbs was problematized in Montenegrin society, especially at the beginning of the 21st century. Here, we emphasize ethnic instead of national, consistent with the introductory paradigm that the nation is a product of modernity, while the genesis of ethnic Montenegrins, according to historians who advocate ethnic distinctiveness, extends deep into the past.

Historians, who advocate the authenticity and ethnic distinctiveness of the Montenegrin nation, doubt the Slavic origin of Montenegrins. The assumption is that the inhabitants of Montenegro are mostly natives who adopted the Slavic language and influence (Vlahović, 2008:13). Based on B. P. Aleksejev's data, Stevo Vučinić believes that Montenegrins are an autochthonous Balkan variant of continental European population, older than the Mediterranean, originating from the Upper Paleolithic Europeans, while they are two-thirds of Illyrian-Vlach origin in genetic terms (Vučinić, 2017:62-63). Relying on various sources, Stanković states that the latest genetic research of haplogroups detects that Montenegrins have the genetic potential of people called Illyrians in ancient times, Vlachs and the Arbanasi people throughout the Middle Ages. Stanković is determined that such research aims to point out the difference between Serbs and Montenegrins, and the similarity between Montenegrins and the Arbanasi people, “karst Croats”. Accordingly, Montenegro is perceived as an “extended Dalmatia” or a “red Croatia” whose borders extend beyond Durres in Albania. Relying on the writings of Relja Novaković, Stanković also states that the ethnic distinctiveness of Montenegrins should be sought in historical sources, citing the writings of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who “does not classify Dukljani (Docleans) as Serbs but does not state the origin of Dukljani (Docleans)” (Stanković, 2020: 52-53).

3 “Ethnic group: a common term in the social sciences (English and American), denotes a group of people who share a common identity based on the same culture, tradition, religion, history, same language, ethnic origin, and other characteristics. Ethnic group (French *ethnie*, Italian *etnia*): a complete ethnic/human community, based on the union of *etnos*, special values, and historical continuity; ethnic groups have a special ethnic consciousness (identity) and the name under which they are recognized (*ethnonym*); the majority ethnic group may include sub-ethnic groups that share the fundamental values and characteristics of the ethnic group within which it is located” (Korunić, 2005).

Therefore, the main goal of such historical statements is that Montenegrins are autochthonous people rooted in the medieval history of Duklja (Doclea) and Zeta and that they have no indications to identify with Serbs. The thousand-year statehood of Montenegro is added to the confirmation of Montenegrin distinctiveness, and Duklja (Doclea) is described as a multi-confessional country (of Romans, Vlachs, some Slavs, and the Arbanasi tribes) (Stanković, 2018, 2020: 55). Then, according to Andrijašević, Stefan Nemanja occupied Duklja (Doclea) in 1185 (Andrijašević, 2015: 18). As the advocates of ethnic distinctiveness of Montenegrins claim, Raška (Rascia) is only Serbia, and the Nemanjići are the rulers of Raška (Rascia). According to them, “the spirit of Saint Savaism” that occupied much more advanced Duklja (Doclea) was conceived in Raška (Rascia). With the disintegration of Dušan’s empire around 1360, Zeta was ruled by the Balšići from 1360 to 1421, and then by the Crnojevići (1451-1496). (Stanković, 2020: 56-57).

The struggle against the occupiers led by the Montenegrin metropolitans followed the occupation of Zeta by the Ottoman Empire. The role of the Montenegrin metropolitans is interpreted ambivalently: on the one hand, the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral is perceived as the bearer of Montenegrin statehood, and on the other hand, advocates of Montenegrin ethnic distinctiveness claim that the metropolitanate undermines the foundations of Montenegrin statehood by insisting on Serbian identity, thus hindering the completion of the Montenegrin national identity. During the Austro-Hungarian occupation from 1916 to 1918, and later, during the attempt to create the fascist Independent State of Montenegro from 1941 to 1945, any effort to eliminate the Serbian ethnic entity of Montenegrins ended in failure (Stanković, 2020: 57).

In an interview for the daily newspaper “Borba” on 1 May 1945, Milovan Đilas emphasized the national distinctiveness of Montenegrins, but he did not deny belonging to the Serbian ethnic group, retaining the ethnic differences between these two peoples.

“Montenegrins, undoubtedly, belong to the Serbian branch of South Slavic tribes and peoples. In the past, in the eighteenth, and even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Serbs in Serbia were the rayah under the Turks, the Montenegrins - partly the rayah and partly the free peasants in the constant struggle against the Turks. The unique religion was the ideological form in which the struggle of both people against Turkish feudalism (the cross against the crescent) took place. It is quite understandable that there were the same aspirations for liberation and unity in the struggle of the Orthodox rayah, which was the same in historical traditions, and related in language and customs. However, the paths of development towards the nation were different in one (Serbia) and the other (Montenegro)”⁴.

4 <http://www.srpsko-nasledje.rs/sr-l/1998/11/article-12.html> (1 August 2021)

According to Stanković, the difference in the ethnic distinctiveness of Montenegrins did not exist or was not problematized during the entire communist period, and perhaps until the beginning of the 21st century, so Serbs voluntarily declared themselves as Montenegrins. This is also evident in the mentioned interview of Đilas, where the Montenegrins are mentioned as a branch of the Serbian South Slavic tribes. With the disintegration of socialism and the SFRY, the separatist forces, which deny the Serbian ethnic origin of Montenegrins and promote the idea of Montenegro's independence from Serbia, emerge in Montenegro (Liberal Party LPCG). We agree with what Stanković observes. Namely, while the borders between Montenegro and Serbia, i.e., Montenegrins and Serbs, were only geographical, not ethnic, and when no great difference was made between Montenegrins and Serbs, the citizens of Montenegro mostly declared themselves as Montenegrins. That is evidenced by the Census 1948-2003 (Stanković, 2020: 59-62). Realizing that a distinction is made not only on the geographical but also on the ethnic level, both Serbian and Montenegrin populations begin to stratify, homogenizing on the ethnic level. The political scene in Montenegro starts to function on that principle, homogenizing its electorate exactly on that ethnic principle. Such policy is present not only internally but also in terms of relations with official Serbia even today, at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century. Political parties make good use of divisions on ethnic grounds because more or less they homogenize their own electorate on this principle in the absence of economic and all those factors related to the standard of living. All this, of course, describes the immature political consciousness among the citizens of Montenegro. Thus, ethnic and religious affiliation proves to be a very good initiator, since ethnicity and ethnic affiliation in Montenegro have an extremely strong influence.

The Period in Post-Referendum Montenegro Monitored Through the Political Relations Between Serbia and Montenegro

The pre-referendum year of 2003 was the prelude to the referendum campaign in 2006. Before that, it is necessary to recall the political facts during the 1990s. Namely, we should emphasize that the official political establishment in Montenegro was extremely pro-Serbian during the 1990s. The speech of Milo Đukanović, the current president of DPS (the Democratic Party of Socialists) and the then prime minister, that it is shameless and fruitless to frighten the Montenegrin people with Greater Serbian hegemony, calling it a sick hallucination, is well known.⁵ In line with such political circumstances, the percentage of ethnic Montenegrins was more than half. According to the 1991 Census, there were 61.9% of Montenegrins and about 9% of Serbs. That was a period when the political estab-

5 <https://srbin.info/politika/tako-je-govorilo-milo-bestidno-je-plasiti-crnu-goru-srpstvom/> (10 September 2021)

lishment was ethnically pro-Serbian, ethnic diversities were not problematized, and the community of Montenegro and Serbia was advocated.⁶

However, the political discourse slowly began to change in 1997, when, the then two fraternal peoples slowly began to diverge. The then “two eyes in one head”⁷ began to separate truly both on the ethnic and political level thanks to political circumstances. According to many political analysts, the key sentence that Milo Đukanović uttered for the weekly newspaper “Vreme” concerning the policy of Slobodan Milošević is taken as the beginning of distancing between Serbia and Montenegro both on the political and ethnic level. “Today, Mr (Slobodan) Milošević, a man of outdated political thought, is deprived of the ability to strategically respond to the challenges facing our state.”⁸

The divisions that started were not as strong as in the years to come. That is evident in the 2003 and 2011 Censuses, which detect a decline in ethnic Montenegrins and an increase in ethnic Serbs. The influence of politics is also visible in terms of language. The mentioned Censuses detect a decline in those who speak Serbian and an increase in those who speak Montenegrin. After the referendum in 2006, the distance between ethnic Montenegrins and Serbs, in political jargon, began to increase slightly, and relations between the then two fraternal republics reached the lowest point in “fraternal harmony”.

The ruling political establishment created the policy at an increasing distance from Serbia and the Serbian ethnic affiliation. The establishment first introduced the Montenegrin language as the official language. Closer cooperation with the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, as the guardian of the ethnic distinctiveness of Montenegrins, was not hidden. The revision of historical facts was in the service of official policy. It all culminated in a confrontation with the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Law on Freedom of Religion, as the last bastion of Serbianhood in Montenegro. That law limits the Serbian Orthodox Church and puts the church under the auspices and control of the state. Metropolitan Amfilohije considered: “Đukanović splits the Serbian nation in Montenegro, at the same time he builds a Montenegrin identity with elements of Croatianhood, and in parallel works against every Serbian national issue to such an extent he already endangers himself in the leadership position, he even endangers the real interest of his

6 “The Democratic Party of Socialists, aware of the importance of the historical moment and fateful decision to be made, invites its members, sympathizers, and all citizens of Montenegro to express patriotic and civic duty by going to the referendum and voting for the continuation of life in the common state-Yugoslavia. <https://www.vijesti.me/kolumne/25909/ideolosko-kameleonstvo-mila-jukanovica>

7 In accordance with the political circumstances at that time, Slađana Košutić wrote the song “Montenegro and Serbia, two Eyes in one Head”. <https://tekstpesme.com/tekstovi/sladjana-kosutic/crna-gora-i-srbija-dva-oka-u-glavi/>

8 <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/balkan-54538629> (10 September 2021)

Montenegrin state.”⁹

On 9 October 2008, eight months after Priština’s decision on declaration of independence, the government of Montenegro recognized Kosovo, and the then ambassador of Montenegro in Serbia was declared “*persona non grata*”. The issue of Serbs, as an ethnic group in Montenegro, becomes an essential topic in the political field between the two countries. “The issue of the practical position of Serbs in Montenegro, defining their status, and the role of the Serbian language was raised. When Montenegrin President Filip Vujanović visited Serbia in May 2009, Serbian president Boris Tadić declared that it was necessary to define the status of Serbs in Montenegro as autochthonous people. That was very negatively received in Podgorica, and the meeting has been considered as the lowest point of relations between the two sides since 2006.”¹⁰ The political crisis culminated in 2010, when the then Prime Minister of Montenegro, Milo Đukanović, accused the Prime Minister of Serbia of financing the opposition in Montenegro. These accusations continue even today.

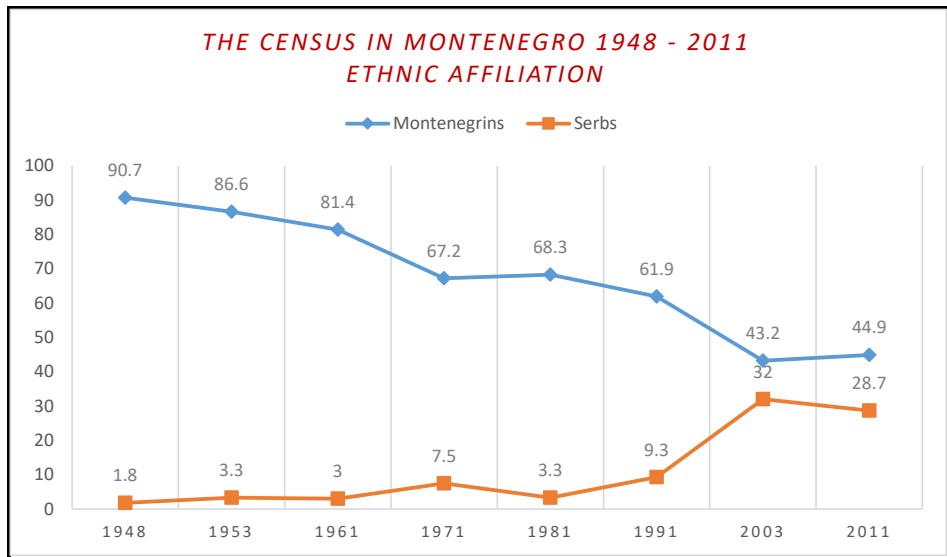
When it comes to the 2011 Census, its results follow the influence of political circumstances and the political climate in Montenegro. As the political conflicts between Montenegro and Serbia increased, the distance in ethnic affiliation also increased. While being a Montenegrin was almost the same as being a Serb, the number of Montenegrins increased, and the number of Serbs decreased, however as the ethnic distance between Serbs and Montenegrins increased under the influence of political circumstances, the number of Serbs increased, and proportionally the number of Montenegrins decreased. The difference between ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins culminated at the beginning of the new millennium. Namely, the number of Serbs in Montenegro was 1.8%, and Montenegrins 90.7% in 1948, that score was 3.3% - 86.6% in 1953, 9.3% - 61.9% in 1991. According to the Census of Montenegro, most people identified themselves as Montenegrins and then as Serbs. According to the results of the Census, there are about 620,029 thousand inhabitants in Montenegro, and no nation has more than half. According to these data, the majority are Montenegrins - 44.98%, Serbs - 28.73%, and Serbs-Montenegrins - 0.34%. Compared to the 2003 Census, about 2% more citizens now declare themselves as Montenegrins, while about 3% fewer people declare themselves Serbs. However, it is interesting that 42.88% of the citizens speak Serbian, and 36.97% speak Montenegrin. Compared to 2003 and the then Census, the percentage of Serbian-speaking citizens decreased by about 20%, while the percentage of Montenegrin-speaking citizens increased by about 20%, however about 6% of Montenegrin citizens speak Serbian more than Montene-

9 <https://www.in4s.net/kakoo-stvoriti-srpski-svijet-kako-napraviti-strateski-trougao-beograd-banjaluka-podgorica/> (11 August 2021)

10 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/kratka-hroniologija-politi%C4%8Dkih-odnosa-srbije-i-crne-gore-2006-2020-30976423.html> (11 August 2021)

grin¹¹. All this indicates that political circumstances dictate not only ethnic genesis but also language. The citizens learned the Serbo-Croatian language until the beginning of the 1990s, and the language in schools in Montenegro was called Serbian until the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. The 2011 Census recorded that although it was not an official language in schools, the number of those who spoke Montenegrin increased sharply, which directly indicates that political circumstances dictate not only ethnic but also linguistic distinctiveness.

When it comes to confessional self-identification, 72.07% declared themselves as Orthodox¹². Analysing the data on national and religious identity in Montenegro and the comparison from the 2003 Census, we can see that national identity largely follows the political events and the political climate in this republic. The political climate in Montenegro was not the same during 2003 and 2011.



Source: www.monstat.org

<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/kratka-hroniologija-politi%C4%8Dkih-odnosa-srbije-i-crne-gore-2006-2020-/30976423.html>

11 “Montenegro’s Constitution of 2007 defines a country as civil (Article 79). The official language is Montenegrin. However, the constitutional provisions also speak of the use of Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Albanian in official use, as well as the equality of the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets (Article 13). The Latin alphabet became the alphabet of official communication and official texts of the state administration during the previous two decades. Montenegro - Serbian or Montenegrin language It was agreed in Montenegro in September 2011 that the name of the subject of the mother tongue in schools would be “Montenegrin - Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian.” <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/kratka-hroniologija-politi%C4%8Dkih-odnosa-srbije-i-crne-gore-2006-2020-/30976423.html>

12 [https://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/popis2011/saopstenje/saopstenje\(1\).pdf](https://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/popis2011/saopstenje/saopstenje(1).pdf)

Preparing for the 2021 Census, it seems that the Montenegrin government wants to complete the national issue of Montenegrins and strengthen the Montenegrin National Corpus once and for all, or to neutralize the national symbol of the church in this country. It is very difficult to prove whether and to what extent politics dictates religious affiliation in Montenegro, there are no relevant statistical data on how many believers from the Orthodox corpus belong to the Montenegrin Orthodox Church and how many to The Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral - the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, politics certainly dictates religious affiliation, in addition to ethnic and linguistic affiliation. Bearing in mind historical memories, during the rule of communism and politically directed atheism, Montenegro was an extremely atheized environment (Vrcan, 1990; Bakrač, 2011, 2013; Saggau, Pačarić, Bakrač, 2020), which directly shows the influence of the political regime on religious affiliation. Hence, president Đukanović was clear: “We have offered a solution that there is an Orthodox church that will gather all Orthodox believers. If the Serbian Orthodox Church rejects that, then it is the church of national Serbs in Montenegro. Then we will create a church of national Montenegrins, although I do not think that is the best solution. We will do our best to make such a church autocephalous and recognized.”¹³ The Montenegrin Orthodox Church does not have a majority among the people (Saggau, 2017), but it is quite expected that such messages from the leader of one of the political parties can directly reflect on the number of believers of the Montenegrin Orthodox church. Also, part of the electorate of DPS (which lost power in August 2020) consisted of believers of the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, some of these believers may blame the Serbian Orthodox Church (due to organizing the procession) for the loss of power and position in society, which may shake their religious distinctiveness. We should not forget the fact that the head of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church is Miraš Dedeić, who does not enjoy special authority among the people due to his unresolved past and excommunication from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It will be very interesting to follow whether there will be an increase in believers of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church if someone who has greater authority and influence comes in his place. Therefore, all this could serve as an argument that politics influences and dictates religious affiliation in Montenegro, perhaps to a lesser extent in relation to ethnic and linguistic affiliation.

After the 2011 Census, relations between Serbia and Montenegro are somewhat calmer and more harmonious. Ten years later, president Milo Đukanović paid an official visit to Serbia. However, harmonious relations did not last long because Montenegro received a direct invitation for NATO membership, and be-

13 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/djukanovic-crna-gora-spc-pravoslavna-crkva-kri-za/30619177.html>

came a member of the Alliance in 2017, which was interpreted in Serbia as a direct opposition to its interests. That was followed by “a coup d’état” on the day of parliamentary elections in Montenegro on 16 October 2016, in which, according to a police report, a former official of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia also participated. Official Serbia distanced itself from that event.

As the Census (planned for 2021) approached, the need to increase the number of Montenegrins (at least more than half) grew. In accordance with the political climate (official Serbia - Montenegro), the ethnic distance between Montenegrins and Serbs reached its maximum. It all culminated with a proposal and then the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion on 27 December 2019. Namely, the Serbian Orthodox Church was especially indignant because of the article of the Law according to which religious communities must prove ownership over church property that was built or was in state ownership until 1918. If they fail to prove it, the property will be registered as state property. Also, the centuries-long existence of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro is disputed.¹⁴ All this additionally brought divisions between Serbs and Montenegrins; processions followed as a protest against that law. The processions were a democratic act of expressing the protest, when, at least twice a week, a large number of citizens gathered in a peaceful march, without a single incident, to express the protest. For some analysts, the processions meant the awakening of national consciousness, which has brought national cohesion of those who glorify Serbian national identity¹⁵, and for other analysts, the processions were aimed at changing the government on the street, returning Montenegro to a pre-referendum state in order to reunite Montenegro with Serbia.¹⁶ It is important to emphasize that the concessions, in addition to ethnic homogenization, homogenized and united the then opposition parties in Montenegro in a certain way. It all resulted in the change of government in the parliamentary elections on 30 August 2020. Although, in essence, the protest of the citizens occurred because of the Law on

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- 14 Historian Adžić believes: “The Serbian Orthodox Church is not a historical, traditional church in Montenegro, and it does not have centuries-old continuity in our country, as it has been invented. It was forcibly founded in 1920, after the occupation and annexation of the Kingdom of Montenegro in 1918. The Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral as part of the Serbian Orthodox Church has legally existed since 1929, i.e., 1931. That is important to know. In my opinion, Metropolitan Joanikije is the usurper of the throne of the Metropolitan of the autocephalous Montenegrin Church of Saint Peter of Cetinje, whose seat was in the Cetinje Monastery, and other Montenegrin autocephalous Metropolitans, before and after him.” <https://www.cdm.me/politika/ustolicenje-micovica-na-cetinju-je-simbolicno-repriza-podgoricke-skupstine/> (21 August 2021)
- 15 <https://www.in4s.net/kakoo-stvoriti-srpski-svijet-kako-napraviti-strateski-trougao-beograd-banjaluka-podgorica/>
- 16 Novak Adžić – The concessions are political, and the aim is to change the government on the street. <https://www.cdm.me/politika/adzic-litije-su-politicke-cilj-je-smjena-vlasti-na-ulici/> (10 August 2021)

Freedom of Religion, we should not neglect the economic motive. Namely, due to the growing distance between a small group of oligarchs and a large group of people living on or below the poverty line, the growing public debt, the long rule of one political party, the inability to consolidate democracy, repressive measures (especially during the COVID 19 pandemic), nepotism, corruption, crime, etc. the dissatisfaction among the people grew, and the then opposition forces won the Parliamentary elections.

A year later, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church is used as a factor of homogenization of both ethnic distinctiveness and the political parties that glorify the national distinctiveness of Montenegrins and that have become the opposition in the 2020 elections. The reason is the enthronement of Joanikije Mićović as the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral. Historians, the advocates of Montenegrin ethnic distinctiveness, and the supporters of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church believe that such an enthronement would mean the conquest of Montenegro.¹⁷ We think all of this has a more political than religious background. The circumstances concerning religion and church in Montenegro are used for the political homogenization of those who lost power in August 2020, in order to keep their electorate in “condition” further encouraging the difference at the national and religious level, and all, we think, for political purposes - to hold early parliamentary elections and return to power, by which they would, of course, restore the lost power and influence at state institutions and all the privileges that go with it. Also, we should not ignore the fact that all disharmony on ethnic and religious grounds, serves only as a cover for a dead economy and economic stability in the country. It is also very indicative that the same or similar methods, used by the participants of processions a year earlier, for example, walking for several tens of kilometres to get to the gathering, are used now.¹⁸

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to apodictically present the official political circumstances in Montenegro and their reflection on the 2003 and 2011 Censuses, which unequivocally show the impact of the political situation on ethnic, linguistic, and possibly religious distinctiveness in Montenegro. Analysing the mentioned censuses, it seems that we have confirmed our hypothesis that emphasizing the ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness of Montenegrins in relation to Serbs reduces the number of Montenegrins, and increases the number of Serbs in Montenegro. While these differences were not emphasized, as during the communist regime, there were no significant oscillations at that level, and the num-

17 <https://www.cdm.me/politika/ustolicenje-micovica-na-cetinju-je-simbolicno-repriza-podgoricke-skupstine/>

18 <https://m.cdm.me/drustvo/barani-krenuli-pjeske-ka-cetinju/>

ber of Montenegrins was significantly higher. With the new millennium, these differences began to increase by the political establishment, which had a direct reflection on the population as well.

If the census is held in 2021, it will be interesting to see how the political changes will affect it. In line with our initial hypothesis, we can expect that the number of those declaring themselves as Serbs will partially increase, and the number of ethnic Montenegrins will decrease since the victory in the parliamentary elections is won by political forces that emphasize Serbian ethnic affiliation in a coalition with civil movements. A campaign under the slogan “It is not Montenegrin if it is not Serbian”¹⁹ was launched in anticipation of the planned census. That would further support or reject the hypothesis of this paper concerning the fact that political circumstances dictate ethnic affiliation and national declaration in Montenegro. The issue of “the Serbian world”, which was initiated in 2020, is certainly interesting. It aims to awaken the identity, cultural, and spiritual paradigm of the Serbian people. According to the column of Darko Tanasković, published in the daily “Politika” on 9 August 2021, “the Serbian world” means that Serbs should be Serbs integrally and unencumbered in “their” countries, within the cultural identity boundaries, and not the theoretical space in which Serbs live, in accordance with the message of Patriarch Porfirije “Do not be afraid to be what you are!”²⁰ Analysts, advocates of Montenegrin ethnic distinctiveness, perceive this as a continuation of Serbian hegemony over Montenegro²¹, which further complicates and increases the distance at the ethnic level when it comes to ethnic affiliation. Bearing in mind what has been said so far, it remains for the scientific and critical public to monitor how the overall situation in Montenegro will reflect on the upcoming Census.

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19 <https://www.in4s.net/pocela-popisna-kampanja-in4s-nije-crnogorski-ako-nije-srpski/>

20 Darko Tanasković, May Serbs be Serbs? <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/485164/Smeju-li-Srbi-da-budu-Srbi> 10.08.2021.

21 Živko Andrijašević, The Serbian world is an eternal threat to Montenegro. <https://www.antennam.net/politika/202333-srpski-svet-je-vjecna-prijetnja-crnoj-gori>

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