

THE SERBIAN WORLD - ORIGINALLY BORROWED CONCEPT

DFC analysis of the attempt to merge
Montenegro into *the Serbian world*



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THE SERBIAN WORLD – THE ORIGINALLY BORROWED CONCEPT

The global trends of conservative forces strengthening, which advocate for a return to traditional values and the establishment of a different pattern of social relations, have generated new energy of nationalistic structures in the Western Balkan region. They have shown vitality, adjusting their methods and tactic to the dynamics of the key decision-makers of the global political processes. In the new circumstances marked by the internal problem that hit the EU in the Brexit process and the U.S. isolationism during Trump's presidency, the right-wing forces with Serbian prefix saw a chance to fulfill the project of uniting the Serbian national body in the region, centered in Belgrade. Traditionally tilted towards the East, rather than the West, they tried to find allies in fulfilling their plans among the right-wing circles in certain EU member states. However, it is evident that it is Russia that they see as their natural ally, whose ultimate goal is to decline the support to the European integration, the Western values, and to prevent of future NATO's enlargement. The Western Balkans has become leverage in the imperial geopolitical ambitions of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Ever since 2006, Russia has endeavored to expand as far as possible its sphere of influence in the Western Balkans by combining economic, intelligence, media, and propaganda methods of operation.

To compensate for the unsuccessful attempt to establish a navy base in Montenegro (Kumbor), immediately after the fall of Milosevic's regime, Russia has directed the capital of its citizens toward the real-estate purchasing on Montenegro's coast (and throughout Montenegro as well), trying this way to secure additional mechanisms of influence.

Simultaneously, Moscow tried to prevent Montenegro's accession to NATO in every possible way. Those attempts culminated in the failed coup attempt on the Montenegrin parliamentary election night in October 2016.

On the other hand, Russia focused its attention on disciplining Serbia, which, in the days following the failed coup attempt in Montenegro, acted in the manner not complying with the expectations from the official Kremlin, but rather in favor of Montenegro and its investigation authorities.

The predominantly Slavic and Orthodox country, undergoing long democratic and economic transition, Serbia, at this moment, is a playfield where Russia's ambitions are brought into the open. Its demographic situation is unfavorable as it is in Russia. The process of facing the 1990s politics is moving slowly, as well as the transitional justice processes.

In Serbia, the terms *ethnicity* and *religious affiliation* are considered to have an identical meaning. The issues of ethnicity and religion are frequently mixed up, while the affiliation is determined by the ethnic characteristics, which, according to some theorists, include religion as the main characteristic of ethnicity. Thus, religion and ethnicity are equated, becoming the main element of identifying an individual – the Serbian ethnicity and Orthodoxy are equated. Finally, Serbia has a specific position and complex relationship with Montenegro. These specificities make not only Serbia but also the entire Western Balkans susceptible to the influence of Russia's soft power.

The term *the Serbian world* has been lately exploited, referring mainly to the insatiable Greater-Serbia ambitions for expanding its influence beyond the borders of the Republic of Serbia. This quite vaguely articulated idea could be considered as Russia's concept of soft power, with the goal of undermining the Western values and the European and Euro-Atlantic integration in the Western Balkan region.

The notion – *the Serbian world* is equivalent to the initiation of the Russian *мир* (world), and, in essence, it represents a continuity of the ancient hegemonic idea of Greater Serbia, which was one of the key causes of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and bloody ethnic conflicts fought on its territory in the 1990s.

In 2007, Russia institutionalized this initiative within the equally named foundation – *Russkiy Mir* Foundation, which is not only preserving the cultural heritage but is an integral part of the open and public politics, combining soft and hard powers. Putin himself justified the annexation of Crimea by evoking this concept and the aspiration for reviving *the united Russian civilization protected from the foreign (Western) forces*.

The concept of *the Serbian world* was built on the same principles, referring to the narrative about the vulnerability of Serbs on the territories outside of

Serbia in the function of their homogenization, historic revisionism, negating of the national identity of certain nations in the immediate neighborhood, and attempts to completely unify them with the Serbian national body, while clearly expressing ambitions that Belgrade decides on every issue of vital importance concerning Serbs, no matter where they live.

Those ambitions are also expressed in quite liberal Law on Citizenship, according to which persons of Serbian ethnicity, who do not have residence on the

territory of the Republic of Serbia, can obtain Serbian citizenship without having to renounce their foreign citizenship, under the conditions that they turned 18 years, have the business capacity, and have submitted the written statement that they consider the Republic of Serbia as their country.

Just as the idea of *the Russkiy Mir* negates the existence of the Ukrainian identity, equating it with the Russian, so does the idea of *the Serbian world* treat Montenegro's identity and historical heritage.

Legal framework

On the basis of the Federal Law *on the State Policy of the Russian Federation concerning compatriots abroad* (Федеральный закон о государственной политике Российской Федерации в отношении соотечественников за рубежом), the Strategy of the state national policy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2025 (Стратегия государственной национальной политики Российской Федерации на период до 2025 года) and other laws and bylaws, Serbia also legally founded its policy towards Serbs in the region.

Key documents in this context are the following:

- **The Declaration of the Government of the Republic of Serbia proclaiming the relations between the home country and the Diaspora the relations of the greatest state and national interest (2006)** – affirms the issue of building closer ties between two unwillingly and spatially separated parts of the Serbian people and other peoples living in Serbia, as well as the fulfillment of numerous and diverse needs and interests both of those living in the home country, and especially those living in diaspora. That task is set as one of the greatest state and national interests;
- **The Law on the Diaspora and Serbs of the Region (2009)** – governs the way of maintaining, strengthening, and realizing the ties of diaspora and Serbs in the region with the home country by concluding bilateral and multilateral agreements, fostering Serbian language and Cyrillic script as well as the cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious identity;
- **The Strategy of preserving and strengthening relations between the mother country and Diaspora and between the mother country and Serbs of the region (2011)** – strives to provide the material, social and political assumptions for successful development and preservation of identity particularities of the Serbian people outside of the borders of the Republic of Serbia, while the continuity in preservation and strengthening of relations between the home country and diaspora and Serbs in the region is defined as its fundamental goal. *The conclusion is that after Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro should be put in the center of the foreign and regional policy of the Republic of Serbia.* Taking into consideration centuries-long historical relationship, it stresses the importance of the equality and fair representation of the Serbs in the state institutions, and state and local administration, the need to give the right to Serbian citizenship, as well as the continuous investment in the political, economic and cultural emancipation of the Serbian people in Montenegro. *It is necessary to systemically arrange and guarantee the acquired right to education in the Serbian language. The Serbian language does not refer only to the Serbs in Montenegro but also to a high number of Montenegrins that still call their language by its traditional, Serbian name;*
- **The strategy of National Security of the Republic of Serbia (2019)** – stipulates the preservation of existence and protection of the Serbian people no matter where it lives, as well as the preservation of national minorities and their cultural, religious, and historical identity as a condition for the survival of the Republic of Serbia, diaspora and the Serbs abroad, and the Republic of Srpska as an entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with the Dayton Agreement;
- **The Culture Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia from 2020 to 2029** – reads that a significantly valuable part of the Serbian cultural heritage, which represents an integral part of the Serbian cultural space, is outside of the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Those are, primarily, the cultural monuments owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church. The need for systemic aid to the institutions and organizations gathering Serbs outside of their home country and having a potential of the informal Serbian cultural centers (Matica srpska,

Vuk's Foundation (Vukova zaduzbina), Serbian Educational and Cultural society *Prosvjeta*) is emphasized.

The Russian Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) is engaged in similar activities.

The Agency, founded by a decree of Vladimir Putin in 2008 and presided by Yevgeny Primakov, has its offices in 80 countries all over the world. One of the goals of this Agency is not only to build the image of Russia abroad through soft power techniques but also to provide help for *compatriots* living outside of Russia and their cultural, linguistic, and religious centers.

Montenegro and *the Serbian world*

After the unsuccessful coup attempt in 2016, whose goal was to prevent Montenegro from joining NATO¹, Russia changed its approach and let Serbia work on destabilizing the 29th NATO member state.

The political situation in Montenegro worked in the favor of these efforts. After the period of stable democratic growth following the restoration of independence in 2006, the political situation in Montenegro entered a very turbulent phase characterized by mass protests due to the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion. It was a trigger to activate all pro-Serbian entities in the region, coordinated by the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) in Montenegro when it comes to the operative aspect – in the field. The clergymen of the SPC led the processions, who, in the period before the parliamentary elections, assumed the role of the political agitators in the field.

The accumulated dissatisfaction of the Montenegrin citizens arising from the feeling of social injustice and widespread corruption, calculated and tendentiously incited for years from the centers outside of Montenegro, in synergy with particular political, NGO and media circles from Montenegro, resulted in a defeat of the pro-Western coalition led by the Democratic Party of socialists of the current President Milo Djukanovic on the parliamentary elections held on August 30, 2020.

The victory of the pro-Serbian and pro-Russian forces, which had ideological, material, media, and infrastructural assistance of Belgrade and the Serbian Orthodox Church (the SPC), led the country to a state of continuous political uncertainty and turned the country, which used to be a leader in the European integration among the Western Balkan countries, into the new Balkan's *powder keg*.

Montenegrin elections, first the parliamentary ones (August 2020) and then the local in Niksic (March 2021),

took on a character of the internal issue of the Republic of Serbia. That was manifested by open meddling of the Serbian political structures in the Montenegrin election processes, with the participation of the activists of the President **Aleksandar Vucic**'s ruling party – Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), who offered significant support in the field to the pro-Serbian political parties in Montenegro.

The entire media infrastructure from Serbia was engaged in order to implement the key goals of *the Serbian world* architects. The goal was defined in the magazine *Pecat* whose founder is Milorad Vucelic, Director of the *Radio Television of Serbia* (RTS) in the epoch of Slobodan Milosevic, as a final defeat of Djukanovic's project *which represents the most important among the preconditions to return Montenegro where it has always been, into its Serbian world* (*Pecat*, no. 657, March 19, 2021).

Many DFC pieces of research showed to what extent the media from Serbia went and how the Belgrade-based media reported when it comes to the events in Montenegro. Following the Russian soft power model, Serbia employed the foreign policy tactic of open meddling in the internal affairs of Montenegro, based on impudent propaganda, disinformation, and fake news launching in order to help their favorites in the Montenegrin election race. There were no any significant reactions from the EU to the comprehensive operation that Serbia conducted towards Montenegro.

The President of Serbia stated many times what a final goal is in this phase of *the Serbian world* completion, emphasizing that he finds the census in Montenegro crucial. That way, Vucic gave a hint that Serbia will still be working devotedly to try to change the demographic structure in Montenegro. Numerous statements and

¹ The epilogue of the attempted terrorism, or coup attempt, after the Appellate Court annulled the verdict of the First Instance Court, is expected to happen in the increasingly complicated atmosphere in Montenegro, characterized by the unprecedented efforts of the 2016 conspiracy actors to reach the dismissal of the Special Prosecutor who built the case against them by amending prosecutorial laws.

publicly communicated attitudes of many Serbian politicians, intellectuals, and prominent individuals in different fields, lead to a conclusion that this engineering is supposed to have a dominant influence on the Serbian national body in Montenegro as a favorable result. Belgrade would certainly be a center where the issues significant for all Serbs from the region would be decided upon.

Even though Aleksandar Vucic never publicly used the phrase *the Serbian world*, he keeps insisting on the unity of the Serbian body upon the regional principle, which was particularly noticeable before the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion or Belief, on December 26, 2019, and numerous protests (processions) that followed in Montenegro, organized by the SPC.



Actually, Vucic was the one who announced the beginning of the Serbian campaign towards Montenegro in July 2018, when he accused the former Serbian government, in one of its media tirades, of *letting Montenegro go* in 2006. He explained that the *people in Serbia, who let themselves lose the campaign before the independence referendum in the country with 30% of Serbs and 60% of the citizens speaking Serbian language, can only be labeled as irresponsible*, with a conclusion that *no one uttered a word when Montenegro had been lost after that*.

This statement of Vucic is the one that marks the beginning of the mass campaign towards Montenegro, which is continuously conducted by Serbia using all the instruments being at its disposal.

Nikola Selakovic, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia and former advisor to the President of Serbia, is known

for many controversial statements when it comes to the Serbian issue in Montenegro. Out of these, the most distinctive is probably the one that Montenegro is a typical Serbian state, which has been proud of its Serbian identity since forever. Along with being untrue, Selakovic's statement can also be interpreted as the expression of the open territorial claims against an independent, sovereign country and a NATO member state.

Selaković: Crna Gora je klasična srpska država



Selaković: 'Naše rešenje je da se borimo da pregovaramo što možemo više i da čuvamo mir' (Arhiva)

The former Minister of Foreign Affairs and current President of the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia **Ivica Dacic** did not hesitate to give similar statements either. Dacic is very prone to sharp, inappropriate, and undiplomatic comments on the situation in Montenegro. He will be remembered as the author of one of the numerous fake news pieces on Montenegro, which he launched on the infamous *Happy TV* with the national frequency. Dacic stated that a man was allegedly fired in Bijelo Polje for claiming to be of Serbian nationality. Dacic's statement was supposed to confirm the narrative on the Serbs being endangered in Montenegro, but it turned out that his statement was a pure fabrication.

Minister of Interior **Aleksandar Vulin** is one of the political hawks always ready to publicly comment on the situation in Montenegro with very sharp evaluations and criticism, which he directed to the former but also the current Montenegrin government. Vulin is a passionate supporter of *the Serbian world* concept, and his statements lead to a conclusion that he perceives that phenomenon as a natural thing and undisputable question. In this context, his statement that the President of Serbia *is, should be, and must be the President of all Serbs no matter where they live*, had the greatest impact. He also concluded that Aleksandar Vucic should be creating *the Serbian world*. According to his

Vulin: Vučić predsednik svih Srba, treba da stvara "srpski svet"

VESTI | Autor: Beta | 27. sep. 2020. 10:32 > 10:34

Podeli:    



publicly communicated perception, peaceful unification of all the territories where Serbs live is the ultimate goal that should be achieved over a period of time. *We started considering together the key issues of the Serbian people's survival and, of course, these issues must be formulated in Belgrade. Belgrade is the place where the decisions on Serbia and Serbs must be made; Belgrade gathers and unites us*, he emphasized while appearing on *TV Happy*, one of the Serbian world forums and apologetics of the Serbian President. The Minister of Health **Zlatibor Loncar** also could not resist commenting on the Montenegro-Serbia issue,

expressing his discontent with some decisions of the Montenegrin government in an unforgettable statement that he would advocate that there should be no Montenegrins in the health care system in Serbia.

Similar comments were made by other Serbia's officials who are very prompt in commenting on Serbian people being allegedly endangered and the need for it to act uniformly, such as the leader of the Democratic Party of Serbia **Milos Jovanovic** who uses his frequent public appearances to reiterate his opinion that Montenegro is a part of *the Serbian world*.

The member of the Main Board of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) **Vladimir Djukanovic**, who continues to insist on denying Montenegro's nation, uses his frequent appearances in Serbian media to claim that Montenegrins and Serbs are the same nation. While appearing on the *Srpski sv(ij)et* (Serbian world) TV show on the pro-Russian *National IN4S TV*, Djukanovic commented on the life of the late Metropolitan Amfilohije saying that he had brought vitality into Montenegrins' organism, highlighting that by Montenegrins he was primarily referring to Serbs. To back up his argument, he quoted Archpriest-Staurophore Lazar Milin who said, in the manner customary to the Serbian Orthodox Church which harbors the attitude denying Montenegro's identity, that *a Montenegrin who is not a Serb is not a Montenegrin either*.

The activists

The phrase *Serbian world* blossomed in the (pro) Serbian media outlets in both Montenegro and Serbia in the middle of 2020 when the editorial office of the pro-Russian news portal *IN4S* launched the project the *National TV* whose central show *Srpski sv(ij)et* is broadcasted from Belgrade. The idea behind this project of the online TV is to further develop the single Serbian information space. As the director and the editor-in-chief of the outlet *IN4S* **Gojko Raicevic** said, the project owns its name to **Dragoslav Bokan**, a film director and the former leader of the paramilitary unit *White Eagles* active in the wartime events in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, who is now a regular guest in all shows in Serbia concerning Montenegro. Since then, the phrase has been used in the daily political language, while the tabloids in both Serbia and Montenegro, Serbia's and pro-Serbian politicians in Montenegro and activists, journalists, and historians affiliated with them are pushing this construct, creating the nationalistic narrative about the necessity of a revival of Serbia as the guardian of the Serbian diaspora.

Together with the Serbian officials and media committed to the *Serbian world*, a great number of activists are promoting on a day-to-day basis the narrative about the project of the unification of all Serbs in the region, while at the same time denying the Montenegrin identity and the fundamental values of Montenegrin antifascism.

The loudest proponent for the unification of Montenegro, Serbia, and the Republic of Srpska into a single state is **Aleksandar Rakovic**, a Serbian historian and ideologist of the Greater Serbia project, and a regular guest on the *TV Happy* as well. His ideas culminated in the plan of the engineering for the nation, according to which, in the next population census in Montenegro the number of Serbs (28.73% in the last census) should be increased, while the numbers of Montenegrins should fall to only 25% (from the current 44, 98%), in order to create circumstances which would facilitate the entry of Montenegro into the *Serbian world*. Rakovic rounded out his campaign of insulting Montenegrins and negating their existence with the latest statement that

Montenegrins have an error in their mentality and that they should be reprogrammed by Serbs, and that the citizens of Montenegro change their identity like socks. Another proponent of the idea of the Serbian world is the president of the political association *Progressive Club* historian **Cedomir Antic** who is known for his calls on the TV *Happy* to lynch Montenegro's Ambassador in Belgrade. In the next census in Montenegro, according to Antic's estimations, Serbs will make up 50% of the population, while Montenegrins, like in Rakovic's projections, make up only 25%. Montenegro would thus become a Serbian state which would make possible the creation of a *strategic triangle* among Belgrade, Podgorica, and Banjaluka. Antic rounded out the narrative which negates the Montenegrin nation with the statement that Montenegro is a *fascist country that persecutes Serbs*.



The member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the former member of the Senate of Republic of Srpska **Kosta Cavoski** voices his hope that the number of Serbs in Montenegro would increase in the

next census, and that people would be encouraged to declare themselves as Serbs. He advised that, after the census, the new elections should be held in which the new majority would be *significantly greater and more powerful*, which would gradually bring back Montenegro into the *Serbian world*.

Svesti Crnogorce na 25 odsto: Politika objavila plan nacionalnog inžinjerina za Crnu Goru

On the *Sputnik TV*, a Professor at the Faculty of the Political Sciences at the University of Belgrade **Caslav Koprivica** made similar observations. According to him, the Montenegrin nation does not exist, and Montenegrins, during their long history, have been Serbs. He added that those who claim that they are not Serbs are neither Montenegrins, but they are rather a novel nation – montenegrini (derived from the English term for *Crnogorci*) or Diocleans, on whose creation had worked the Vatican, while the major role had the Comintern.

These explicit public attitudes are backed up by an extremely serious political media propaganda infrastructure that in parallel operates in Serbia, the Republic of Srpska, and Montenegro. Following Russia's model, the right-wing parties, organizations, and associations, many groups on social media, are promoting the conservative, far-right, and antiglobalist ideas, in a hypocritical, ideologically superficial, and conflicted manner, never hesitating to insult and intimidate their opponents, and spread lies about them. Every attempt to confront these beliefs is insulted in public outlets and social media, along with threats and new insults to Montenegro and Montenegrins, and met with either the passive attitude of the state institutions or their inconsistent (re)actions.

The Serbian Orthodox Church

Identifying religion with a nation, namely equalizing Orthodoxy with Serbhood is not only an effective instrument for the action of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC), which is based on ethnophyletism but also a highly favorable circumstance for Russia to exercise its soft power in the Western Balkan region. Especially if we take into consideration that the relationship between the church and the state in Serbia is regulated in such a manner that the state has a greater influence upon the Church, rather than vice versa. In Russia, the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the state is similar.

Assessing correctly that the very SPC could be one of the most effective instruments for spreading its interests in the Western Balkan region, Russia has given special attention to its relationship with this religious organization, which resulted in, apart from other things, the SPC strongly supporting Serbian organizations which promote the strengthening of the relations with Russia, including Russia's organizations in Serbia and the region.

Bearing all of this in mind, the *Serbian world* cannot be discussed without considering the supporting pillar of this project, the Serbian Orthodox Church, which,

in Montenegro, comprises of the following eparchies: the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral, the Eparchy of Budimlja-Nikšić and some parts of the Eparchy of Mileseva, and the Eparchy of Zahumlje, Hercegovina and the Littoral.

The dignitaries of the SPC have been supporting the thesis that the Serbian people is in a position worse than the one under the Ustasha regime in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH, 1941-1945) and constantly negating Montenegro, its statehood, independence, and the very existence of the Montenegrin people.

At the same time, the SPC has been providing guidance and logistics to pro-Serbian political parties and coalitions. The extent to which the SPC has been involved in the political processes in Montenegro is reflected in the fact that the current Prime Minister of Montenegro Zdravko Krivokapić (who, as the president of the NGO *Ne damo Crnu Goru* (*We don't give you Montenegro*), was a holder of the Democratic Front's electoral list), was chosen at the urging of the SPC, and that the discussions among the political leaders of the winning coalitions, with the active participation of the high ranking members of the Church, about the formation of the Government following the elections in August 2020 were held at the Ostrog Monastery.

The influence of the SPC upon the Government of Montenegro is obvious in the current situation regarding the *Fundamental Agreement* whose content would remain unknown to the public and most members of the Government until the date of signing, as announced by the head of the Eparchy of Budimlja-Nikšić and Administrator of the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral Joanikije.

Joanikije: Sadržaj ugovora neće biti poznat javnosti sve dok ne bude potpisan

REGION | Autor: Vjesti | 24. apr 2021 20:08 | 15 komentara

Podijeli:    



Neither the spiritual authorities, the former and current Serbian patriarchs, **Irinej** and **Porfirije** respectively, did refrain from commenting on the topics of Montenegrin nation, and the upcoming census in Montenegro. The

late Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church Irinej said: *Montenegrins are nothing other than Serbs from Montenegro* and that *those who refuse to be Serbs should become something else*, adding that *relations are difficult since Montenegro is giving up on Serbia*.

The newly-elected Patriarch of the SPC Porfirije agreed with the leaders of the pro-Serbian and pro-Russian Democratic Front that the processions and amendments to the Law on Freedom of Religion are a battle not only for the shrines but for the Orthodox and Serbian identity.

Just as the idea of the *Serbian world*, the *modus operandi* of the SPC in Montenegro has also been borrowed and adjusted. Moscow has used the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in Moscow, to interfere in the internal affairs in Ukraine.

The high-ranking members of the ROC and UOC-MP did not confine themselves to public support of the pro-Russian opposition in Ukraine at the elections in October 2020, they directly participated in the election campaign in which a UOC-MP priest, a proponent of the idea of separatism in Ukraine, appeared in the electoral list of the Pro-Russian opposition.

Kozačka vojska u Kotoru: Poruke zamaskirane pravoslavljem



Kozački pukovnik Slobodan Pejović osudio je stav zvanične crnogorske politike za uclanjenje Crne Gore u NATO, nazvavši ovu organizaciju kavezom (Screenshot)

An event in Montenegro that slipped under the radar but is very important in this context is the founding of the Balkan Cossack Army in September 2016 in Kotor. The uniformed Cossacks and bikers that came from Russia, the pro-Russian areas of Ukraine, Serbia, and Montenegro stayed before the Church of St. Nicholas in Kotor where the liturgy was held by the Kotor-based priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church **Momcilo Krivokapić**. Following the service, the anti-Western messages were conveyed under the pretense of Orthodoxy and Pan-Slavism.

Among those present were also the supreme ataman of

the Balkan Cossack Army general **Viktor Vladimirovich Zaplatin**, who worked for more than 16 years as a representative of the Russian Federation in Serbia, the lieutenant-colonel (ataman for Montenegro) **Slobodan Pejovic**, the priest and the former member of the 63rd Parachute Brigade formed in Nis **Mijajlo Backovic** who is known for actively participating in the actions and operations of the SPC in Montenegro, **Sergej Stepin** from the Union of Volunteers of Donbas, the vice-president of the Veterans' Organisation of the Republic of Srpska **Vojo Gusic** and the war veteran from the Republic of Srpska **Miroslav Topalovic**.

The Balkan Cossack Army responds to the Russia-based Central Cossack Army, which, under the direction of the ROC, played a major role in the negotiations during the *annexation of Crimea in 2014*.



Today, under the guidance of the ROC, the Cossack paramilitary groups patrol the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic fighting against *the Ukrainian enemies*.

To accomplish its interests in Montenegro, Belgrade, like Kremlin, is using the SPC, which, as the center of the influence, gathering, and homogenization, has been demonstrating its power through active participation in political processes for the last two years.

At the beginning of 2020, the Serbian Orthodox Church organized mass protests in all cities of Montenegro due to the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs in the Parliament of Montenegro. From the very beginning, the religious character of protests was combined with the political one. Besides many citizens, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the adopted Law combined with difficult social situation and corruption pressing all social structures, the protests were also attended by opposition political parties, which saw a political potential of the processions. Due to the existence of an obvious similarity in the interests of the SPC and the pro-Serbian political parties, the processions were transformed into a continuous campaign for the parliamentary elections, with the final goal of changing the government in Montenegro.

Under the guise of Orthodoxy and Serbhood in Montenegro, the processions promoted the *Serbian world* ideas. In that context, the statement of Bishop of Bac **Irinej Bulovic** can be analyzed, who said after the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs (previously harmonized with the stances of the Venice Commission) *that the main threat to the SPC in Montenegro is not Miras Dedeic's sect* (chairman of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Mihailo) *but Milo Djukanovic's threat, a threat of an unbaptized and unbelieving man, that he will create a new Montenegrin church*.

The protests organized by the SPC became a platform for the officials from the Republic of Serbia to present freely and in a rather undiplomatic manner, their stances and messages of support to *a fair fight of the Serbian people in Montenegro to protect the shrines*, while openly meddling in the internal affairs of Montenegro. In May 2020, when the protests reached their peak, Prime Minister of Serbia **Ana Brnabic** expresses her opinion that *our (of the Republic of Serbia) constitutional obligation and moral duty, as well as a wish, is to give our support to the Serbian people in that country (Montenegro)*.

Neither did **Nenad Popovic**, the Minister without Portfolio in Brnabic's Government, an open exponent of the Russian interests, refrain from comments that the Serbian people and their shrines in Montenegro were deeply endangered due to the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion. He expressed such opinions during the meeting with the President of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan **Hilarion** of Volokolamsk.

The SPC in Montenegro and the UOC-MP in Ukraine have a similar position in a specific information environment in Montenegro and Ukraine respectively. The SPC's operations aim at undermining pro-NATO and pro-Western initiatives, while the UOC-MP in Ukraine has similar activities.

Both the SPC and the UOC-MP negate the existence of the Montenegrin, i.e. Ukrainian identity and they both try to undermine the sovereignty of Montenegro and Ukraine.

Helped by the ROC, the SPC tries to undermine the Montenegrin Orthodox Church by negating its right to existence, just as the Russian Orthodox Church using the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) tries to undermine the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Domestic constructors

The promotion of the idea of the *Serbian world* would not be possible without key support of the pro-Serbian and pro-Russian political structures in Montenegro, which, after the last parliamentary elections, succeeded in leveraging over pro-Western powers that have been favoring the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. A heterogenic post-election coalition gathers all right-wing structures that have been acting from the platform of traditionalism and conservatism in their own interpretation for a longer period, whereas in real political life, it acts through either hiddenly or openly advocating for the separation of Montenegro from the West and directing it toward the centers in Belgrade and Moscow. Insincerely and by means of much conditioning supported by a razor-thin parliamentary majority (41 out of 81 MPs), Zdravko Krivokapic's Government, the exponent of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, has shown during its almost six-month-long mandate many weaknesses and quite incompetence in performing state affairs. The biggest omissions were made in the security and intelligence sector. Rather shady moves and solutions of the newly-appointed creators of the security policy, which have been performed under the guise of the reforms and depoliticization, might be understood as deliberately provoking suspicion of the Western partners and NATO allies.

This is corroborated by a fact that the principles and priorities proclaimed in the Agreement signed soon after the elections by the three coalitions' leaders constituting the Government have not been truly accepted by all political entities of the parliamentary majority supporting the current Government.

Among them, there are the leaders of the Democratic Front – **Andrija Mandic** and **Milan Knezevic**, who hide neither their pro-Serbian and pro-Russian views nor the fact that their policy has been harmonized with Belgrade and the President of all Serbs – Aleksandar Vucic. As self-proclaimed sole and true representatives and protectors of the Serbs in Montenegro, Mandic, and Knezevic have been regularly visiting Belgrade for consultation; it is not even rare that the President of Serbia sends an airplane of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for them. Their political activism may be summarized within the narratives on the alleged endangerment of the Serbhood and Serbs in Montenegro, the necessity to firmly tie Montenegro with Serbia, and the restoring of strong partnership with Russia.

Moreover, Milan Knezevic, who was sentenced together with Andrija Mandic to five years in prison because of participating in the coup attempt financed by Russia in 2016, but was not rendered a final judgment, has

"Popis u CG od najvitalnijeg značaja za SPC"

Slobodno izjašnjavanje na predstojećem popisu stanovnika u Crnoj Gori od najvitalnijeg je značaja i za Srpsku Pravoslavnu Crkvu i za državu, saopšteno je nakon sastanka lidera Demokratskog fronta sa patrijarhom SPC Porfirijem.



been appointed President of the Defense and Security Council of the Parliament of Montenegro after the shift of the political structures in Montenegro.

Newly elected Vice President of the Parliament of Montenegro and member of the Democratic Front **Strahinja Bulajic** advocates for the establishment of close ties between Montenegro and Russia, which is corroborated by his many statements for Russian media and meetings with Russian activists and Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Podgorica. Bulajic sees recognition of Kosovo's independence and sanctions to Russia as the biggest disgrace and humiliation of Montenegro in its history. Bulajic also advocates for the final resolving of the Serbs' issue in Montenegro; therefore, he thinks that the issue of Serbian language (Cyrillic latter) and the Church are crucially important and these issues are closely related to the national being of one in three citizens of Montenegro at least.

«Последствие абсолютно пагубной политики»: вице-спикер парламента Черногории — о преодолении кризиса в отношениях с РФ

6 апреля 2021. 11:11 Сергей Белоус

[Короткая ссылка](#)



Черногорский парламент (Скупщина) намерен налаживать сотрудничество с российской Государственной думой. Об этом в интервью RT заявил вице-спикер законодательного органа Страхинья Булайич. По его словам, черногорские парламентарии планируют в ближайшее время сформировать группу дружбы со своими коллегами из РФ. По словам зампреда парламента Черногории, сегодня отношения Подгорицы и Москвы находятся на недопустимо низком уровне из-за действий предыдущего черногорского правительства. Политик также назвал втягивание Подгорицы в НАТО без референдума ошибкой и отметил, что антироссийские санкции противоречат национальным интересам Черногории.



Even though they are openly dissatisfied with the composition and work of Zdravko Krivokapic's Government, representatives of the Democratic Front have succeeded in *planting* many of their own personnel in the state administration. This is also their key interest in this stage of implementing the *Serbian world* project, with the attempts of election engineering by amending the decisions on temporary and permanent residence and modeling voter lists, which could give them the advantage in the next electoral processes. It is evident that the next stage will include their attempts to assume key positions in the executive power, which they have not succeeded to secure after the government change on August 30, 2020.

In the context of the increasingly visible activities regarding the creation of the *Serbian world*, the activity of the new Minister encompassing four departments – education, science, culture, and sport – is highly characteristic. Minister **Vesna Bratic**, a successor of Zdravko Krivokapic in the place of the President of the NGO *We don't give you Montenegro (Ne damo Crnu Goru)*, defends the interests of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Her attitudes and commitments shed a brighter light on the ideological profile of the so-called technocratic government of Zdravko Krivokapic, who referred to his Ministers as apostles after having assumed their positions.

Minister Bratic shows the same pattern of negating the Montenegrin nation as was seen in the views of the officials and activists from Serbia. She calls Montenegrins the new Montenegrins, *montenegrini* (deriving from the English term for *Crnogorci*), Diocleans, and Milo's people – the same terms that her spiritual father, late Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral Amfilohije,

would use to refer to Montenegrins. Coming from B&H (she obtained Montenegrin citizenship a few years ago), Bratic states that the Serbs are autochthonous inhabitants of Montenegro, that they did not come from Serbia but were born here as well as their ancestors. Such stances may be connected to her former public statements when she described herself as a *Serbian nationalist* and a *Chetnik woman*. Such negating of the existence of Montenegrin nation, particularly taking into account that she heads the department of education and culture, may strongly influence the value system, particularly the one of the younger population in Montenegro who are yet to vote.

Among the representatives of the current political majority in Montenegro, **Marko Milacic** stands aside as a classic example of the Russian methodology of selecting, profiling, promoting, and *planting* a politician who is openly speaking in favor of Russia and advocating for anti-NATO stances, while supporting the establishment of the *Serbian world*.

Similar views are shared by **Vladislav Dajkovic**, a former Secretary-General of the True Montenegro Party, who has been increasingly present in the media and who has been possibly dedicated a bigger role in the implementation of the project of joining and strongly connecting Serbian national body in the region. So far, Dajkovic is acting outside of any institution.

Given the methodology, as well as the successful *planting* of their exponents in important places in the country, additional attempts of infiltrating of Russian and Serbian exponents might be expected in all structures of the government, with the final goal of integrating Montenegro in the *Serbian world* and changing its foreign and political course.

Financing

The Government of Serbia allocated 3.4 million euros from the budget in order to build the Serbian Home (Srpska kuća) in Podgorica, which encompasses all the Serbian organizations in Montenegro. It was open in February 2019 and registered as an LLC in the Central Register of the Commercial Entities of Montenegro. Among 29 founders are numerous officials and activists of the pro-Serbian political parties in Montenegro, passionate advocates of the Serbian world idea in Montenegro, and deniers of the Montenegrin national identity such as the CEO **Emilo Labudovic**, current rector of the University of Montenegro **Vladimir Bozovic**, member of the New Serbian Democracy (NSD) **Budimir Aleksic**, Vice-President of the Parliament **Strahinja Bulajic**, Editor-in-Chief of the *IN4S* **Gojko Raicevic**.

The Serbian Home encompasses Matica srpska, the Institute for Serbian Culture, the Serbian National Coun-

cil, the Association of Writers of the Serbian People, the Serbian television, the Serbian radio, newspapers, news portals, and the Serbian Cultural Center.

The Government of Serbia allocated the one-time assistance amounting to 1.64 million euros to societies and associations of the Serbs in Montenegro, for project implementation and work support. The Government of Serbia made that decision on May 21, 2020, when it was published in the Official Gazette of RS. Interestingly, this aid was allocated a couple of months before the parliamentary elections in Montenegro. The secret remained which Serbian associations received money from the budget of Serbia. *IN4S*, the main media pillar of the Serbian world, is also financed directly and indirectly by Serbia. The greatest income from the ads comes from M: tel operator (owned by Telekom Srbija), the Government of Serbia, and related legal persons.

Conclusion

An amplified activity of Russia has been visible in the entire Western Balkan region, and particularly in Serbia, the Republic of Srpska in B&H, the north of Kosovo, and Montenegro. Russia uses Serbia as a base for its activities in the region, focusing on the areas mostly resided by the Orthodox population, with an accent on those parts of the Orthodox population whose frustration, caused by political, social, economic, or other issues, is being articulated through an animosity toward Western civilization values.

Its activities in recent years have been favored by the situation on the global level, which caused the attention of the key Western partners to be diverted away from the Western Balkan region, leaving the room for the activities on its destabilization, interruption of democratic processes, undermining of European Union values and European integration processes, and the undertaking of propagandistic activities against cooperation with NATO or its membership.

Montenegro, a new NATO member state, which has become the member despite strong Russian opposition, and a country that has been a leader in the European integration process, was the first to *bear the brunt*. Russia tries to send a message to the Alliance that they made a serious mistake by Montenegro's membership, using all of the soft power instruments to increase its effects, with the final goal of preventing further NATO enlargement in the Western Balkans.

Among its arsenal of tools, which is on disposal for the *dynamization* of the processes in the Western Balkans, the most effective one is, for sure, the one related to *the unsolved Serbian issue*, i.e. a whole range of issues which may be linked to the idea of uniting the Western Balkan territories largely populated by Serbs.

Guided by Russia and led by an autocratic rule of Aleksandar Vucic, Serbia saw a chance in the current international events to fulfill the project under its working title *all Serbs in one state*, which was believed to be long forgotten but obviously has never been sidelined.

An assessment that a constitution of a country encompassing all *Serbian territories* in one state would be difficult to accomplish in the current circumstances has directed the architects of the Greater-Serbia project towards the idea of the creation of the *Serbian*

world, as a phase in the fulfillment of the final goal. The authors of this construct see Montenegro as a key element, which should sacrifice its thousand-year-long history and identity build through a centuries-long battle for freedom on the altar of *the Serbian world*. A pretext for its meddling in the internal affairs of Montenegro, Serbia found in its concerns for Serbs' interests in Montenegro. Serbia uses the existence of pro-Serbian networks in Montenegro, which are inclined to the concept of the *Serbian world*, as a political lever for the promotion of its politics.

A comprehensive Serbia-led campaign toward Montenegro, showing the elements of carefully planned operation that is not only backed by the Serbian state, has a firm foothold in Montenegro after the government change. New parliamentary majority and the Government, mostly consisting of the pro-Serbian (Greater Serbia-oriented) figures, have focused on the change of the structure of the state administration that has been quickly infiltrated by their personnel, the change of the legislation that will enable a large number of their potential supporters to acquire citizenship and on the population census in Montenegro. That way, they try to make preconditions for the implementation of their pro-Serbian policies in the long run.

The officials from Belgrade and the Serbian Orthodox Church have expressed equal interest in the population census in Montenegro. The President of Serbia stated many times that *the population census in Montenegro is critically important for him*, and other Serbian officials, intellectuals, and prominent figures are of the same opinion. The SPC Patriarch Porfirije adopts the same attitude as President Vucic. Serbia has also previously interfered in the population census process in Montenegro. Through his advisor Mladjan Djordjevic, former Serbian President Boris Tadic led a campaign in Montenegro prior to the 2011 population census. Then, the goal was the same – to influence the census results in order to show that the Serbian national body was a backbone of the demographic structure in Montenegro. This is the result that Belgrade and their exponents in Montenegro want to achieve in the next population census, and such results would officially confirm that Montenegro is an integral part of *the Serbian world*.

After its stable development of democratic institutions following the 2006 independence referendum

and its decisive stepping on the path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, crowned by its 2017 NATO membership, Montenegro has again been faced with an imposed dilemma whether to continue its civic and democratic development based on the principles and values of the Western civilization or to turn toward blurry projections and nationalistic constructs under the patronage of Belgrade and Moscow.

The consciousness that the operation headquarters in Belgrade, with political infrastructure in Montenegro, might influence the change of the value system that the Montenegrin state is founded on and threaten its multinational and multiconfessional character has resulted in some forms of the Montenegrin national body gatherings. They express their dissatisfaction with the moves of the new government in Montenegro by organizing street protests. Security implications of these processes have already become visible through individual incidents, and, as the discontentment grows, some serious upsetting of the security atmosphere could occur in the next period. This is particularly true if we take into account the fact that the security sector has been made partially dysfunctional by the moves of the new government (or has gotten into *the state of hysteria*, as the President of the Parliamentary Board for Defense and Security Milan Knezevic has recently assessed).

This is the reason why stronger attention of the Western partners and allies of Montenegro is necessary. New energy and sentiment are needed in order for the current Russian success in destabilizing the internal affairs in Montenegro and in positioning a large number of its loyalists in its institutions and state bodies, to be regarded in the long haul as an episode, i.e. a delicate phase of the democratic development of the Montenegrin society enriched by differences.

