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## THE DIVERGENCE OF ELITE NATIONAL THOUGHT IN MONTENEGRO DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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*APSTRAKT: This article analyses elite national thought in Montenegro during the interwar period. Against the background of politic and economic instability, the elite gradually reformulated competing national ideas in Montenegro, elaborating two dominant proto-nationalist traditions. Whereas at the beginning of the interwar period differences in national thought only consisted of different grades of importance ascribed to proto-nationalist Montenegrin elements within the Serbian national idea, by the end of the interwar period the two proto-nationalist traditions were crystallized into two sharply opposing national ideas: a Serbian and a Montenegrin national idea.*

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**Key words:** *elite, national thought, Montenegro, national identity, Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia*

### 1. Introduction

The central aim of this article is to examine the development of elite national thought in Montenegro during the interwar period. I claim that by the end of that period, for the first time, the Montenegrin elite formulated clearly opposing ideas on the national identity of the Montenegrin population. Hence, in my opinion, the interwar period is of decisive importance to understand present-day discussions about Montenegrin national identity. In the literature dealing with the topic of our concern, one comes across a whole range of different viewpoints. Firstly, there is the nationalist viewpoint, both Serbian and Montenegrin, which

claims that the vast majority of the Montenegrin population ‘always’, and thus also in the interwar period, was conscious of its century-long belonging to the Montenegrin or Serbian nation. If these authors go through the trouble of explaining the presence of other national ideas in Montenegro, these are reduced to marginal phenomena and mostly linked to a perverse, external influence.<sup>1</sup> Recent political developments in Montenegro, however, have led to a growing number of publications that deal with the national question in Montenegro from a more objective approach, namely that no form of national thought in Montenegro is more ‘natural’ than another. Most of these publications, however, only vaguely describe the ‘green’ and ‘white’ national idea in Montenegro during the interwar period as a sort of forerunners to present-day opposing Montenegrin and Serbian national ideas. In doing so, these publications tend to interpret the history of national thought in Montenegro from the framework that is biased by the recent, sharp division between Montenegrin and Serbian national ideas in Montenegro, as if this division has been present ever since the first formulations of Montenegrin national thought. The point of this article is that only by studying the historical development of national thought in Montenegro, one can understand the present „huge areas of ambiguity surrounding Montenegrin identity, especially concerning the thorny question of the relationship between Montenegrin and Serb“ (Allcock 2000b: 340).

In this article, I want to come to a more attenuated view on the development of national thought in Montenegro during the interwar period. The hypothesis that will be elaborated in this article states that the Montenegrin political elite, against the background of ever-growing political and economical instability during the interwar period, gradually reformulated several competing forms of national thought. Whereas in the pre-world-war-I period differences in elite national thought in Montenegro were minimal, by the end of the interwar period the political elite for the first time formulated two clearly opposing national ideas: a Serbian and a Montenegrin national idea. As such, my article strongly opposes to what an eminent scholar as John Allcock has written on the subject. Allcock claims that „[s]o far as the development of Montenegrin national identity was concerned, the interwar years should [...] be regarded as a period of latency“ (Allcock 2000a: 181). It must be stressed in advance that I am not intending on dealing with nationalism as a mass political movement here, nor with the national consciousness of the Montenegrin people as a whole during this period, but with developments in national ideas of the small group of Montenegrin political elite. I am, thus, not claiming that the whole Montenegrin population became sharply divided on the Montenegrin national question. My claims only count for the political elite.

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<sup>1</sup> One need only browse the internet to find rigid examples of such approaches to the topic: [www.montenegro.org](http://www.montenegro.org) or [www.montenet.org](http://www.montenet.org) for a Montenegrin nationalist approach, [www.njegos.org](http://www.njegos.org) for a Serb nationalist approach.

In order to come to a comprehensive view on the development of national thought in Montenegro, we want to introduce the notion *proto-nationalism*, a term coined by Eric Hobsbawm in his classical study on nationalism. A proto-nationalist community shares a certain communal identity, mostly based on religious, cultural or political factors. In the pre-modern period these proto-national communities overlap and do not exclude one another. It is only in the modern period that political and cultural elite proclaims one proto-national community to be *the* nation, in their views clearly distinguished by a national identity, thereby reducing, reinterpreting or completely denying other proto-national traditions (Hobsbawm 1990: 46). In order to come to a fruitful observation of interwar elite national thought, I want to start this elaboration by pointing, with Ivo Banac, at two proto-nationalist traditions that were firmly established when the Montenegrin principality formally gained independence in 1878,<sup>2</sup> namely a proto-national Serbian and Montenegrin tradition (Banac 1984: 274–275). Essential in this examination is that these proto-national traditions did not exclude one another, but rather came to be stressed in different circumstances. The proto-national Serbian tradition in Montenegro, mostly based on undeniable linguistic, religious and other cultural similarities, stressed and gained strength in the mutual battle against the Ottoman enemy. The proto-national Montenegrin tradition involved a specific feeling of proto-national community based on the political and religious unity of Montenegro, which during the Ottoman period had its own political and religious leaders and structure, and as such gained official independency during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rastoder 2003: 112–123). It should be noted here that the proto-national Montenegrin tradition, since it was almost exclusively linked to the Montenegrin tradition of autonomy, only obtained in so-called Old Montenegro, the core of the Montenegrin state around Cetinje. In the territories Montenegro gained during the reign of Nikola, this tradition did not stand strong. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the de facto independent Montenegrin state very slowly entered a process of modernisation. It was, however, not until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the installation of the constitution and the parliament in 1905, and thus a first form of modern political life, that we can distinguish modern national thought in Montenegro (Rastoder 2003: 125; Pavlović 2003: 88–89; Škerović 1964: 85). It is in this period that very small political elite started to formulate a Montenegrin national idea.

However, my point in this article is that present-day sharp divisions on the national question were not present ever since those earliest formulations of national thought in Montenegro. Rather, only as a consequence of and reaction to political and economic instability in the interwar period, the political elite formulated diverging national ideas, based on the above-mentioned dominant proto-national traditions in Montenegro. Only by the end of the interwar period, for

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive Montenegrin history, see Rastoder 2003.

the first time, it came to a crystallisation of proto-nationalist traditions into two opposing elite national ideas, a Montenegrin and a Serbian national idea. From then on these opposing forms of national identity became available as practical categories to be induced by different political fields, could suddenly happen, to use Brubaker's terminology (Brubaker 1996: 13–22).

## 2. Early formulations of national thought

In this subchapter I briefly want to sketch the developments in national thought in Montenegro in the pre-World-War-I period and during the First World War, since then were formed the fundamentals on which interwar national ideas were built. Examining the discussions held by the political elite in the Montenegrin parliament from 1905 on, it is undeniable that it was the Serbian proto-national idea that was proclaimed to be the only, 'natural' national idea in Montenegro. All representatives in the Montenegrin parliament stressed that the Montenegrin people were part of the Serbian nation as a whole and demanded the unification of all Serbian lands.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that the Serbian proto-national idea was more natural, more real than the Montenegrin. It was only as a result of specific historical factors that the Serbian proto-national idea was proclaimed to be *the* national idea in Montenegro. However, two variants of Serbian national thought emerged before World War I. One variant claimed that the Serbian people in Montenegro should be united under the leading role of the Serbian Kingdom and its dynasty. The spokesmen of this variant in Montenegro claimed that Montenegrins were in no way different from other Serbs and thus had to join the core of the Serbian nation-state, which was considered to be Serbia. Here, there was no place for stressing proto-national Montenegrin elements. The formulation of this variant of national thought was stimulated by various external factors, most noticeably the prestige the Serbian Kingdom enjoyed in educated and progressive circles in Montenegro, as a state that was economically and politically relatively well developed, juxtaposed to the 'dictatorial', 'backward' and 'separatist' regime of Prince (from 1910 on King) Nikola I Petrović. The most ardent representatives of this national idea were, not surprisingly, a group of Montenegrin students who had studied in Belgrade and actively took part in discussions concerning the Montenegrin future.<sup>4</sup>

„The correct interpretation of the national interests in the new life of Montenegro, will make that all separatist strivings, antagonism and provincial interests, to the extent that they would collide with the real needs of the Serbian

<sup>3</sup> For detailed surveys on political life in Montenegro during this period, see Đonović 1939 and Škerović 1964.

<sup>4</sup> For a tendentious look on the political situation in pre-war Montenegro by one of the students in question and thus for a good account on the ideas of the students, see Đonović 1939.

people, must succumb to the idea of freedom and unification of the Serbdom“ (cited from a declaration of the students on the occasion of the installation of the constitution in 1905 in Škerović 1964: 91)!<sup>5</sup>

Other supporters of the ‘pure’ Serbian national idea in Montenegro are to be found in the ranks of the National Party (*Narodna stranka*) the only real political party in Montenegro before World War I, opposing the politics of Prince/King Nikola. Its members are commonly known as *klubasi* (Rastoder 2003: 125; Pavlović 2003: 88–89).

The political elite that stood close to Prince, later King Nikola, supported the other variant of Serbian national thought in Montenegro. This group too accepted that the Montenegrin people were part of the Serbian nation, but they claimed that the Montenegrin state, headed by the dynasty of Petrović-Njegoš, should take the lead in the Serbian unification process. By stressing the importance of the Montenegrin state-tradition and its dynasty, the most important proto-national Montenegrin aspects were integrated in this variant of Serbian national thought. Because of economical and political factors during the first decennium of the 20th century, because of which it became more and more clear that the Montenegrin state could not justify its claims as the ‘Serbian Piedmont’, the group close to King Nikola took on a more defensive stance, which was of great importance for its national thought. Defending the Montenegrin state to ‘the imperialism of the Serbian Kingdom’, King Nikola and his supporters more and more stressed the historical rights of the ‘century-old’ Montenegrin state, its people and its dynasty, thus stressing clearly proto-national Montenegrin elements.<sup>6</sup>

„The royal dignity belongs to Montenegro according to its *historical right* and its own merits [...]. All great powers will greet, besides the Serbian kingdom by the Serbian Danube, this second in the Serbian coastland with blessing, as one more pledge for the cultural progress and peace on this border between East and West, the Slavs and all Serbs as one more guarantee for the survival and better future of the Serbian tribe“ (cited from the declaration of King Nikola at the proclamation of the Kingdom of Montenegro on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1910 in Škerović 1964: 555, my stress).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> „Zdravo shvaćanje nacionalnih interesa u novom životu Crne Gore, učiniće da sve separatističke težnje, antagonizam i provincijalni interesi, u koliko bi se kosili sa stvarnim potrebama Srpskoga naroda, moraju ustuknuti pred idejom slobode i ujedinjenja Srpstva.“

<sup>6</sup> See for example Tomanović 1910, a work written by the Montenegrin prime minister on the occasion of the proclamation of the Montenegrin Kingdom, glorifying Montenegrin history and especially the reign of King Nikola.

<sup>7</sup> „Kraljevsko dostojanstvo pripada Crnoj Gori po istorijskom pravu i po njenim sopstvenim zaslugama [...]. Sve velike sile sa blagoslavom će pozdraviti pored jedne kraljevine u srpskom Podunavlju ovu drugu u srpskom Primorju, kao jedna zaloga više za kulturni napredak i mir na ovoj granici između Istoka i Zapada, a Slovenstvo i svi Srbi kao još više jemstvo za opstanak i bolju budućnost srpskoga plemena.“

During World War I, the two above-sketched variants in Montenegrin national thought further diverged. Following the capitulation of the Montenegrin state on the 25th of January 1916,<sup>8</sup> two emigration centres strived to become the legitimate spokesman of the Montenegrin state and its people. Both centres legitimized their political aspirations with national ideas. Firstly, there was the ‘Montenegrin Committee for National Unification’ (*Crnogorski odbor za narodno ujedinjenje*), headed by Andrija Radović, a former *klubaš*. This Committee demanded the unconditional unification of Serbia and Montenegro under the dynasty of Karađorđević (Brković 1974: 190–197; Čulinović 1961, I: 131–133; Vujović 1962: 206–229). These demands were justified by a national reasoning, which stressed the national unity of the people in Serbia and Montenegro and the leading role of the Serbian Kingdom. The committee strongly criticized King Nikola, in their views an authoritarian despot who denied the century-old Serbian national consciousness of the Montenegrin people out of personal interests (Radovitch 1918). At the other side, there was the Montenegrin government in exile, seated in Neuilly near Paris. The Montenegrin government, headed by King Nikola, demanded that the Montenegrin state and its dynasty would be restored after the war, with a noticeable enlargement of the Montenegrin territory. These claims were justified by stressing the ‘century-old’ existence of the Montenegrin state and its dynasty, by stressing a certain Montenegrin entity within the Serbian nation (Brković 1974: 190–192; Čulinović 1961, I: 133; Vujović 1962: 157–174).

### 3. The unification of Serbia and Montenegro or the Serbian annexation of Montenegro (1918–1919)

It was obvious, however, that Montenegrin Committee, supported by the Serbian government (Banac 1984: 283–285; Živojinović 2002: 13–33) outmanoeuvred the Montenegrin government in exile. After the liberation of Montenegro by Serbian troops in October and November 1918, the Montenegrin Committee called for elections for a National Assembly, which were to decide on the future of the Montenegrin state.<sup>9</sup> Elections were held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 1918 and the National Assembly gathered in Podgorica from the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1918. The Assembly decided that Montenegro should be united with Serbia under the dynasty of Karađorđević. During the campaigns for the Assembly and in its direct aftermath, the two visions on Montenegrin future we have sketched above were propagated, each formulating a distinct, though in essence still Serbian, national idea. Firstly, the *bjelaši* (the ‘Whites’, called so because they presented their candidates on white lists) propagated the unconditional

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed overview of Montenegro during WW I see Vujović 1962.

<sup>9</sup> We have based our examination of the unification of Serbia and Montenegro on the following historical studies: Čulinović 1961, I: 134–137, Vujović 1962: 307–330).

unification of Serbia and Montenegro under the dynasty of Karadorđević. Since ‘Whites’ exclusively dominated by the National Assembly, the final decision of the Assembly is a good example of what came to be called the ‘white’ national idea in Montenegro:

„The Serbian people in Montenegro shares the same blood, the same language, the same aspirations, the same belief and habits with the people that lives in Serbia and other regions; shared is their glorious history [...] shared ideals, shared national heroes, shared suffering, shared is everything that makes a nation into a nation“ (cited in Čulinović 1961, vol. 1: 135).<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that this national idea goes back solely to the proto-national Serbian idea in Montenegro and interprets proto-national Montenegrin elements from a Serbian national viewpoint. It perceives the Montenegrin history and culture as an indivisible element of Serbian national identity.

At the other side, the *zelenashi* (‘Greens’, who presented their candidates on green lists) demanded that the Montenegrin Kingdom entered Yugoslavia as an equal partner, and not just as a Serbian province. The ‘Greens’ did not state that the Montenegrins formed a distinct nation, they accepted that Montenegrins were part of the Serbian nation, but they claimed that the Montenegrin Serbs had a distinct political and historical tradition which should be preserved. Thus, the ‘green’ national idea was, from a nationalistic point of view, a bizarre mixture of a Serbian national idea, in which some proto-national Montenegrin elements – mainly based on the Montenegrin state tradition – were preserved. After the decisions of the National Assembly and the proclamation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918, the Greens revolted against the way Serbia and Montenegro were unified. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1919 – in the so-called Christmas insurrection (*božićna pobuna*) – a few cities in Old Montenegro (Virpazar, Rijeka Crnojevića, Nikšić and most notably Cetinje) came momentarily under control of green rebels (Banac 1984: 286; Rastoder 2003: 130–131; Vujović 1962: 331–370). A proclamation of the leader of the Greens in Cetinje, Krsto Popović, forms a good example of such ‘green’ national thought. Popović states that „the Assembly, gathered in Podgorica on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November [according to the old calendar], is held against the regulations of the constitution of our country, and most of all against the will of the absolute majority of the Montenegrin people“ (cited in Zeković 1990: 187).<sup>11</sup> The Greens demanded that „Montenegro entered one big Yugoslav state, equal to the other regions“ (cited in Zeković 1990: 187).<sup>12</sup> After the 7<sup>th</sup> of January the Serbian army,

<sup>10</sup> „Srpski narod u Crnoj Gori jedne je krvi, jednoga jezika i jednih težnji, jedne vjere i običaja s narodom koji živi u Srbiji i drugim krajevima; zajednička im je slavna prošlost, [...] zajednički ideali, zajednički narodni junaci, zajednička patnja, zajedničko sve što jedan narod čini narodom.“

<sup>11</sup> „Skupština sazvana u Podgorici 11. novembra 1918. godine sazvana je protivno odredbama ustava naše zemlje a najviše protiv volje apsolutne većine crnogorskog naroda.“

<sup>12</sup> „Crna Gora uđe punopravno sa ostalim pokrajinama u jednu veliku Jugoslovensku državu.“

with the help of the Whites, managed to regain control over Old Montenegro, although green armed resistance did not completely end until 1924 (Rastoder 2003: 131; Vujović 1962: 469–520). This, however, does not mean that the green national thought vanished in Montenegro. To the contrary, the national question became an important issue in the political life of the interwar years.

The Montenegrin government in exile did not stop its activities after the decision of the National Assembly and the proclamation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Under the impulse of Jovan Plamenac, one of the leaders of the Christmas insurrection, who was nominated as prime minister on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 1919, the Montenegrin government remained very active until the death of King Nikola on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1921 (Rastoder 2003: 132–133; Vujović 1962: 406–438; Živojinović 2002). In an attempt to restore the Montenegrin Kingdom and its dynasty, the Montenegrin government formulated a national idea, in which, for this period, we find the most attention paid to Montenegrin proto-national elements. Several studies on the Montenegrin question, presented by the Montenegrin government, claimed the existence of a clearly confined Montenegrin people within the Serbian nation as a whole. A good example of such – from a nationalist viewpoint – ambiguous ideas can be found in a study written by Jovo Popović in 1919:

„The Montenegrin people have a history that is four centuries older than the Serbian [Serbian addresses to the Serbian Kingdom]; those four centuries, full of self-sacrifices and tortures for the general national case, covered the Montenegrin name with a legendary glory and decorated it with the wreath of a national martyr, not only for the whole nation, but also for the whole, big Slavonic race“ (Popović 1990 [1919]: 266).<sup>13</sup>

In the end, Popović claimed that the Montenegrin people wanted to enter a Yugoslav state where „everyone could maintain his customs and *historical individuality*“ (Popović 1990 [1919]: 266, my stress).<sup>14</sup> Popović did not deny the existence of a Serbian nation in Montenegro, he revised its inner structure. The Serbian (*srpski*) nation as a whole consisted of a Montenegrin and a Serbian (*srbijanski*) part, each with its own historical state tradition and consequently a specific identity. The Montenegrin people had always suffered for the case of the whole nation, whilst the Serbian part only wanted to impose its will on the nation, as became obvious from the way Montenegro had been ‘annexed’ by the Serbian Kingdom. The political solution for the Montenegrin people lay in a federalist structure of Yugoslavia, wherein the Montenegrins could preserve their historical individuality. Thus, the political elite, gathered around the Montenegrin

<sup>13</sup> „Crnogorski narod ima istorijsku prošlost stariju za četiri veka od srbijanske; a ta četiri stoljeća, puna samopožrtvovanja i muka za opštu nacionalnu stvar, pokriše legendarnom slavom ime crnogorsko i ukrasiše ga ne samo u čitavoj naciji, nego i u vaskolikoj velikoj slovenskoj rasi, vijencem nacionalnog mučenika.“

<sup>14</sup> „svaki bi u njoj zadržao svoje običaje i svoju istorijsku individualnost“.



government in exile, formulated a national thought where the Montenegrin people formed a distinct, historical and political unity within the Serbian nation, an idea that was very similar to the ideas later formulated by the federalists, as we shall see further on. With the death of King Nikola the Montenegrin government in exile gradually fell apart, but this was not the end of national ideas where proto-national Montenegrin elements gained more and more importance.

Concluding our examination of the national thought in the period of the unification, we agree with Rastoder: „In general, nobody challenged the ethnical kinship of the people in Montenegro and Serbia, or the limited economic possibilities of the independent Montenegrin state in the period before the unification“ (Rastoder 1996: 109).<sup>15</sup> The way the unification was conducted, however, resulted in a further divergence of national thought in Montenegro. One part of the Montenegrin political elite supported the unification and legitimized it by formulating a Serbian national idea with no place for specific Montenegrin elements. The white, ‘pure’ Serbian national idea in Montenegro thus did not significantly change compared to pre-war formulations of this idea in Montenegro. Another part of the Montenegrin elite did not support the way the unification brushed away all Montenegrin historical traditions and consecutively formulated a national idea of a distinct Montenegro historical and political unity within the Serbian nation, with its own political rights. Proto-Montenegrin elements became thus more and more stressed within their interpretation of the Serbian national idea.

#### **4. Montenegro in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1929)**

Political and economic circumstances during the first decennium of the existence of the Yugoslav state did not stabilize this divergence of national thought in Montenegro. On the contrary, political life in Montenegro became, to a certain extent, structured on different conceptions of the national identity in Montenegro. At the elections for a constitutional assembly, held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1920, we can for the first time observe the development of a network of political parties in Montenegro. Six different parties took part in the elections, none of which was Montenegrin by origin (Banac 1984: 387–392; Rastoder 1996: 30–40; Vujović 1969). All of these parties favoured a centralist structure of the new state and formulated a national idea that viewed the Montenegrin people as an integral part of the Serbian nation, although it is noted by Vujović that the Radical Party appealed to a certain form of ‘green’ patriotism during its election campaign in Old Montenegro (Vujović 1969: 201). Banac too has noticed that the impressive success of the Communists and the Republicans, although they too

<sup>15</sup> „Etničku srodnost naroda u Crnoj Gori i Srbiji i ograničenu ekonomsku sposobnost samostalne crnogorske države u periodu pred ujedinjenje, uglavnom nije niko osporavao“.

supported a centralist state structure and the Serbian national idea in Montenegro, must partly be explained by the fact that these revolutionary parties were the only possible outlet against Serbian hegemonism (Banac 1984: 330).

After the elections of 1920 two parties gradually adopted a national idea that didn't see the Montenegrin people as an integral part of the Serbian nation. In doing so, they firmly opposed to other political parties in Montenegro. The first such party was the Montenegrin Party (CS, *Crnogorska Stranka*). Sekula Drljević and Mihailo Ivanović, two leaders of the later CS, had tried to found a Montenegrin federalist party before the elections of 1920, but due to a lack of time and resistance from the authorities, they did not succeed in doing so until the elections of 1923 (Rastoder 1996: 39–40; Vujović 1981: 63–70). In the years before those elections, the party's main ideologist, Sekula Drljević, had already expressed his national thought in a few journals. He claimed that Serbians and Montenegrins belonged to the same nation, but that both had developed a different identity, due to separate historical evolutions (Vujović 1981: 76–81). At the elections of the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1923 the CS gained the impressive result of 24.3% of the votes and became the second largest party in Montenegro, just behind the Radicals, who gained 25% of the votes (Rastoder 1996: 57; Vujović 1981: 108–109). The party program stressed that only a federal structure of the state could improve the economic and political situation in Montenegro. Montenegro, with its long historical tradition, should be a federal unit in Yugoslavia (Rastoder 1996: 53–54; Vujović 1981: 99–100). In 1924 the party founded its own journal, *The Montenegrin (Crnogorac)*, in December of the same year the party adopted its official name and in October 1925 the party was officially founded with its first congress (Rastoder 1996: 80–81; Vujović 1981: 150–152, 167–173). At the elections of the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1925, the party obtained an even better result, becoming the biggest party in Montenegro with 25.7% of the votes (Rastoder 1996: 74; Vujović 1981: 162–163). It was during this period that party deputies clearly formulated their national idea in parliament:

„We, Montenegrins, are a *political people* that have formed its state by its own force and have preserved it in the most painful moments in the history of our race. We do not have the ambition of becoming a Serbian district, or whoever's province. Montenegro was Serbian and must always stay Serbian but with all rights [...] it demands only equality and that in the interest of the unity with Serbia and other provinces of the former Austrian-Hungarian monarchy“ (Mihailo Ivanović in the parliament on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1924, cited in Jovanović 1986: 309, our stress).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> „Mi smo Crnogorci politički narod koji je svoju državu stvorio sopstvenom snagom i očuvao je u najmučnije doba istorije naše rase. Nemamo ambicije da budemo srbijanski okrug, ili ma čija provincija. Crna Gora je bila vazda srpska i mora ostati srpska, ali sa najviše prava [...] traži samo ravnopravnost i to u interesu jedinstva sa Srbijom i ostalim provincijama bivše Austrougarske monarhije.“

The most complete formulation of the national idea of the Montenegrin federalists is to be found in the works of Sekula Drljević, most notably in his 'Centralism or federalism' (*Centralizam ili federalizam*), a collection of his parliament speeches. Drljević stated that the unification of Yugoslavia was economically and nationally desirable, but that there was no such thing as a Yugoslav nation. Yugoslavia consisted of three equal and related nations, the Serbian, the Croatian and the Slovenian nation. Within the Serbian nation, he distinguished several political-historical entities, among which the Montenegrins. Because of its specific historical and political evolution, the Montenegrin community formed a specific entity within the Serbian nation and on those grounds, it could state its federalist claims (Drljević 1926). Thus, the Montenegrin federalists still accepted a Serbian national idea, but proto-national Montenegrin elements gained more and more importance and justified the existence of a specific Montenegrin *historical-political* entity within the Serbian nation. At the elections on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 1927, the Montenegrin Party gained only 14.9% of the votes, largely due to internal disagreements, a less clearly formulated federalist program and a close cooperation with the Croatian Agrarian Party, which apparently could not appeal to Montenegrins (Rastoder 1996: 81, 91, 97; Vujović 1981: 283–300, 334–342, 354–355). After the elections the party entered the Agrarian Democratic Coalition of Radić and Pribičević and became notably less active (Vujović 1981: 360–373). When the party was banned with the proclamation of the royal dictatorship on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1929, it was clearly no longer the properly organized party of 1923–1926.

The second party that proclaimed a separate Montenegrin entity was the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*). In the first years of the unified Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Montenegrin communists were ardent favourites of a centralised Yugoslavia. In Montenegro, they seated in the National Assembly and actively fought the greens (Banac 1984: 332–339; Brković 1974: 217–220; Rastoder 1996: 36). After the ban on the Communist Party in 1921, the party gradually adopted a different viewpoint on the national question in Yugoslavia. In Montenegro too, the communists started striving for „a free (federative) union of all nations on the Balkans, Montenegro included, as historically separately developed units, in a political, economical and cultural sense“ (cited from the communist journal *The Battle (Borba)* of the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 1926 in Vujović 1962: 537).<sup>17</sup> Thus, the Montenegrin communists were the first who clearly proclaim the existence of a separate Montenegrin *nation* with a specific national identity and political rights. However, they did not go through great trouble to define the Montenegrin national identity in order to legitimize the existence of the proclaimed Montenegrin nation, nor its relation to the Serbian nation.

So far I have only focussed on political elites that proclaimed a specific Montenegrin entity within the Serbian nation. One must, however, not forget

<sup>17</sup> „slobod[ni] (federativ[ni]) [savez] svih nacija na Balkanu pa i Crne Gore kao istorijski zasebno postale jedinice u političkom, ekonomskom i kulturnom smislu“.

that the majority of Montenegrin political parties were very clear supporters of the Serbian national idea in Montenegro. Whatever differences separated these parties, they all attacked the Montenegrin federalists as separatists that longed for the old authoritarian regime of King Nikola, who were agents for the Italian government et cetera (Vujović 1981: 102–107). These parties, most notably the National Radical Party (*Narodna radikalna stranka*), the Democratic Party (*Demokratska stranka*), the Union of Agrarians (*Savez zemljoradnika*) and the Yugoslav Republican Party (*Jugoslovenska republikanska stranka*) – all accepted the ‘white’ national idea, of which the content remained fixed compared to previously sketched periods. Concluding, we must remark that the political life in Montenegro in this period was not solely divided on the national question. It certainly was not so that voters voted for or against a Montenegrin nation. The national question formed a growing point of discussion and divergence among parties, but it was not the dominant issue in Montenegrin politics.

### 5. National thought in Montenegro during the royal dictatorship and the royal regency (1929–1941)

With the proclamation of the royal dictatorship, King Aleksandar I Karađorđević forbade all political parties. After the resurrection of the parliamentary system and the new constitution in 1931, only parties that were firmly organized on the whole territory of Yugoslavia and that accepted the state ideology of integral Yugoslavism, were allowed to take part in the political life (Čulinović, II: 5–37). As a result, it is very hard to examine various forms of national thought of the Montenegrin political elite during this period. The few dissident national ideas that the Montenegrin political elite formulated in this period, show that the divergence of the national thought further developed, with at the one side of the continuum of Montenegrin national ideas a Montenegrin ethnic-nationalism, as formulated by Savić Marković Štedimlija, and at the other hand persistent ‘white’ national ideas. It is in this period thus, that the green national thought evolved to a ‘pure’ Montenegrin national idea. After 1929, Sekula Drljević further developed his national ideas to a point where he rejected earlier theses that the Montenegrin people formed a historical and political unit within the Serbian nation. He now stated that the Montenegrins formed a separate nation, descendant of the Illyrians that only had its language in common with other South Slav nations (Banać 1984: 290). Similar ideas were formulated by Štedimlija, in a few works dating from the second half of the decennium.<sup>18</sup> I do not intend to give a detailed

<sup>18</sup> Today, Štedimlija is a very controversial figure. Opponents of the existence of a Montenegrin nation see him as the fascist and racist inventor of Montenegrin separatism (see for example Glomazić 1988; Terzić 2003). Proponents of Montenegrin independence and the existence of a

description of Štedimlija's ideas here. I will suffice by mentioning that he defined the Montenegrin nation as an ethnic entity that was formed as a mixture of a separate Slav tribe, very close to the Croat tribes, and the autochthonous Illyrian and Vlach population. The Montenegrin nation that emerged out of this mixture saved all characteristics of the autochthonous population, except for the language and the name of the Slav immigrants (Glomazić 1988: 89–90; Štedimlija 1936: 128; Terzić 2003). The Montenegrin nation further developed independently and was „with its united and separated community of destiny and its specific community of character the best example of an already formed nation“ (Štedimlija 1936: 128).<sup>19</sup> Thus, Štedimlija stressed proto-national Montenegrin elements of a long independent Montenegrin state tradition and reinterpreted Montenegrin history and culture from this viewpoint in order to legitimize the existence of a Montenegrin nation that had very little in common with the Serbian nation.

Another group that proclaimed the existence of a Montenegrin nation, though not in an ethnic nationalist way like Štedimlija, were the communists. The communists very clearly stated that the Montenegrin people formed a nation with a specific national identity, that rightfully claimed the restoration of the national freedom it had lost in 1918: „the *Montenegrin people* [...] is conscious of the its *Montenegritude* and the battle it must do, together with all democratic elements, to regain its lost freedom“ (cited from a communist manifest from 1939 in Vujović 1962: 547, my stress).<sup>20</sup> The communists, however, remained favourites of a form of Yugoslav solidarity and cooperation in a Yugoslav federation and thus, unlike Štedimlija, did not stress differences between the Serb and the Montenegrin nation:

„Only in the mutual battle of the Montenegrin people and the other peoples of Yugoslavia is it possible to achieve that Montenegro, as our other regions, becomes a free and equal unit and that it lives a free and national life in the frame of the state community of Yugoslavia“ (excerpt from a party manifest of 1939, cited in Vujović 1962: 547).<sup>21</sup>

It was only during and after World War II that the Montenegrin communists would come to a detailed formulation of the Montenegrin national identity and popularised this national idea.<sup>22</sup>

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Montenegrin nation rather don't mention him. By mentioning Štedimlija we do not intend to discredit every national idea that proclaims a certain Montenegrin nation, we rather want to point at the most extreme formulation of an ethnically Montenegrin national idea in the interwar period, clearly influenced by the racial theories of that period.

<sup>19</sup> „sa svojom jedinstvenom i izdvojenom zajednicom sudbine i sa svojom specijalnom zajednicom karaktera, najbolji primjer jedne već formirane nacije“.

<sup>20</sup> „*crnogorski narod* [...] je svijestan svog *crnogorstva* i borbe koju mora da vodi zajedno sa svim demokratskim elementima, da bi došao do svoje izgubljene slobode“.

<sup>21</sup> „Samo u zajedničkoj borbi crnogorskog naroda i ostalih naroda Jugoslavije jedino je moguće izvojevati da Crna Gora, kao i ostale naše pokrajine, bude slobodna i ravnopravna jedinica i da živi slobodnim, nacionalnim životom u okviru državne zajednice Jugoslavije.“

<sup>22</sup> For an early theoretical presentation of the communist view on Montenegrin national identity, see Đilas 1945. Another classical example is Brković 1974.

Advocates of white national thought remained very active, especially in the second half of the thirties, when debates on the national question in Yugoslavia became increasingly heavy and more intense. As a reaction to the elaboration of green national ideas, several advocates of the Serbian national idea in Montenegro had to 'prove' that, their national idea was the only correct one, which meant that, for the first time, they formulated their national idea in detail. Through several journals and publications, they attacked Montenegrin separatists and proclaimed the 'right' national Montenegrin identity. The following quote clearly shows that the essence of their national idea did not go through great differences in the interwar period:

„They [the Montenegrins] have always lived and died for the Serbian name, for the Serbian faith and freedom, to fulfil the Serbian oath and thought that consists of the liberation and unification of the whole Serbian nation. That was the cult and the device of the Montenegrins, their national gospel from Kosovo until today. That all that is the truth, the Montenegrins proved with their Serbian blood and strengthened it through five painful centuries. They confirmed it with their historical Decision in Podgorica [...], with the unification of Montenegro with Serbia“ (excerpt from the journal *The Free Thought (Slobodna misao)* of 8 November 1936, cited in Jovanović 1986: 289).<sup>23</sup>

The Whites continued to interpret the Montenegrin history and culture as a Serbian national history, stressing proto-national Serbian elements and denying specific proto-national Montenegrin elements.

Thus, in the period under the royal dictatorship and the royal regency, the range of national ideas formulated by the Montenegrin political elite clearly diverged. At one side, we sketched the white national thought that persistently proclaimed the Serbian national idea in Montenegro, stressing proto-national Serbian traditions and interpreting Montenegrin history and culture – in the broadest meaning of the word – from a Serbian national viewpoint. At the other side, we noticed the development of national ideas that proclaimed the existence of a Montenegrin nation, based exclusively on proto-national Montenegrin traditions, and interpreting Montenegrin culture from this viewpoint. Thus, by the end of the interwar period the Montenegrin elite proclaimed two competing national ideas, based on the aforementioned two dominant proto-national traditions in Montenegro.

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<sup>23</sup> „Oni su svagda živjeli i umirali za srpsko ime, za srpsku vjeru i slobodu, i za ispunjenje srpskog zavjeta i misli koja se sastoji u oslobođenju i ujedinjenju svega srpskoga naroda. To je bio kult i deviza Crnogoraca, i njihovo nacionalno evanđelje od Kosova do današnjih dana. Da je sve ovo istina Crnogorci su to svojom srpskom krvlju dokazivali i utvrđivali za pet mučeničkih vjekova. Oni su to potvrdili i svojom istorijskom Odlukom, u Podgorici [...], ujedinjenjem Crne Gore sa Srbijom.“

## 6. Conclusions

In this article, I have examined the divergence of elite national thought in Montenegro during the interwar period. I have pointed out that during that period, a wide range of political views on the Montenegrin future was formulated and reformulated as solutions for the dissatisfying political and economical situation in Montenegro. These political views were legitimated by national ideas that were based on one of the two dominant proto-national traditions in pre-modern Montenegro, or on a mixture of both. At the beginning of the interwar period, differences in national thought only consisted of different grades of importance ascribed to proto-national Montenegrin elements within the Serbian national identity. The Whites rejected any proto-national Montenegrin elements in their national idea, whereas the Greens pointed at proto-national Montenegrin elements – mainly the Montenegrin state tradition – to claim the existence of a separate Montenegrin *historical entity* within the Serbian nation, with specific political rights. In the course of the interwar period, because of growing dissatisfaction with the political and economical situation of Montenegro in Yugoslavia, the Greens more and more stressed proto-national Montenegrin elements in their national thought to legitimize their political demands. By the end of the interwar period, some groups of political elite proclaimed the existence of a Montenegrin nation, with an identity solely based on proto-national Montenegrin elements. From that viewpoint, they reinterpreted Serbian proto-national elements in Montenegrin history and culture. As a reaction to this proclamation of a strictly Montenegrin national idea, the Whites were forced to formulate their Serbian national idea more in detail and to interpret proto-national Montenegrin elements from their national point of view.

Thus, during the interwar period the political elite formulated the whole range of national identities that could potentially be proclaimed, given the existence of the two dominant proto-national traditions in pre-modern Montenegro. I want to stress that I have only examined the divergent national ideas of the political elite in Montenegro. By no means, I have included the whole Montenegrin population in my examination. Thus, I have not claimed that the whole Montenegrin population became fractured along the national question in this period. Rather, given the very slow, even negligible, popularisation of the modernisation process in Montenegro during the interwar period (Dimić 1996–1997, I: 23–79), the mainly agrarian population of Montenegro remained faithful to both proto-national Serbian and Montenegrin collective ideas. It was only after World War II that different conceptions of the national identity in Montenegro, and thus the discussion about Montenegrin national identity, were popularised. Only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the broad Montenegrin society became part of „a world in which nation is widely, if unevenly, available and resonant as a category of social vision and division [...], a world in which nation ness may

suddenly, and powerfully, 'happen' (Brubaker 1996: 21). It was in the interwar period, however, that the Montenegrin elite lay the foundations on which later crystallisations of Montenegrin nation-ness and the discussions it involved, were built. During the interwar period, the political elite in Montenegro for the first time formulated the different opposing national ideas, which from that time on are 'available', although their content naturally was adapted to ever-changing backgrounds. From then on, different competing nations, and thus the discussion on the national identity in Montenegro, could, and did, suddenly 'happen'.

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## Резиме

### Различита схватања нације код црногорске елите у међуратном периоду

**Кључне речи:** *елита, национална мисао, Црна Гора, национални идентитет, Краљевина СХС/Југославија*

Разлике у схватању црногорске нације код политичке елите у Црној Гори у периоду пре Првог светског рата састојале су се у приписивању различитих ступњева важности прото-националним црногорским елементима у српском националном идентитету. Као последица растућег незадовољства политичком и економском ситуацијом у Црној Гори, елитне националне мисли су се разишле у међуратном периоду. У том периоду, *бјелашки* су се истрајно заузимали за „чисту“ српску националну мисао, тврдећи да су Црногорци интегрални део српства, да су њихова историја и култура нераздвојни делови српског националног наслеђа. Према томе, Црногорци треба да се уједине са свим Србима у једној држави. *Зеленаши* су постепено адаптирали своје националне мисли. У двадесетим годинама црногорски федералисти су тврдили да Црногорци припадају српској нацији, али по својој дугој државној традицији чине посебну историјску јединицу унутар српске нације. У тридесетим годинама Дрљевић, главни идеолог федералиста, и његов присталица Штедимлија су држали да су Црногорци једна етничка нација са сопственим националним идентитетом. У међуратном периоду и комунисти су постепено прихватили националну идеју која проглашава постојање црногорске нације, свесни њиховог црногорства. Стога су пре Првог светског рата разлике у схватању црногорске нације код политичке елите у Црној Гори биле минималне, а на крају међуратног периода она први пут формулише две супротстављене идеје: српско и црногорско национално схватање. Од тада разне политичке струје та схватања користе као практичне категорије.