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## Njegoš and memory disputes in Montenegro

Njegoš i konflikty pamięci w Czarnogórze

**Abstract:** Petar II Petrović Njegoš is probably the most famous figure in Montenegro's history and a particular symbol of this place. Despite his short life, he achieved fame not only as a politician but also as an artist. The article aims to analyze how the memory of Petar II Petrović Njegoš – a symbolic figure in the history and culture of Montenegro – has been constructed. The analysis will focus on the public debate on this figure in relation to the motion to establish a new national holiday – Njegoš's day, i.e., the day of Montenegrin culture. The study uses both the discourse method and content analysis, including legislative projects, newspaper articles, television broadcasts, public speeches, and other messages from individual politicians and intellectuals. The public debate on Njegoš revealed how the inconsistency of memory, primarily the Montenegrin, Serbian and Bosnian memory, generates conflicts and at the same time deepens the prevailing social divisions.

**Keywords:** Petar II Petrović Njegoš, Njegoš, Montenegro, memory disputes, politics of memory, the Balkans

**Streszczenie:** Petar II Petrović Njegoš to prawdopodobnie najsłynniejsza postać w historii Czarnogóry oraz swoisty symbol tego państwa. Pomimo swego krótkiego życia zasłynął nie tylko na polu polityki, ale także kultury. Celem artykułu jest znalezienie odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jaki sposób kształtowana jest pamięć o Petarze II Petroviću Njegošu – postaci-symbolu Czarnogóry, historii i kultury tego państwa. Analizie zostanie poddana publiczna dyskusja, która toczyła się wokół propozycji ustanowienia nowego święta państwowego – Dnia Njegoša, czarnogórskiego święta kultury. W badaniu zostały zastosowane metoda zarówno dyskursu, jak i analizy treści. Analizie poddano treści projektów ustaw, materiały prasowe, telewizyjne, wypowiedzi, a także przemówienia poszczególnych polityków oraz intelektualistów. Dyskusja publiczna dotycząca postaci Njegoša uwiaryściła, w jaki sposób istniejąca niespójność pamięci przede wszystkim czarnogórskiej, serbskiej oraz

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bośniackiej generuje konflikty i jednocześnie pogłębia istniejące już podziały w społeczeństwie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Petar II Petrović Njegoš, Njegoš, Czarnogóra, konflikty pamięci, polityka pamięci, Bałkany

## Introduction

The past has always been a subject of a debate, not only between states but also between nations. A particular case concerns multinational states in which it is the past – or more precisely, memory about specific past events, historical figures, etc. – that generates conflicts. The way particular events or characters of the past are remembered and interpreted is extremely difficult to negotiate, particularly in a multinational state. A specific interpretation of common history, top-down shaping of history (by the governments) in multinational states can either unite or divide individual members of the society as history may often be treated selectively or manipulated<sup>1</sup>. As Radosław Zenderowski points out, collective memory forms are based on the selective reception of historical material, which undergoes ideological revision<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, what we commemorate (as well as what we forget or do not speak about) and how we do it often depends on the leaders' current needs. It is the government of a given country that most significantly shapes the discourse on memory dominant in society. Besides, acts of commemoration are always selective as the choice of what a nation wants to commemorate is one of the elements of the politics of memory or the state's policy on history and symbols. Due to this selectivity, the phenomenon of memory conflict can also emerge – a topic discussed by Clifford Geertz in his analysis of Ireland's case. He noticed that Catholics and Protestants living in Ireland do not tell the same stories. One group erects monuments, while the other destroys them,

1 J. Olędzka, *Konflikty pamięci a geopolityka przestrzeni poradzieckiej*, [in:] *Świadectwa pamięci. W kręgu źródeł i dyskursów (od XIX wieku do dzisiaj)*, eds. E. Dąbrowicz, B. Larenta, M. Domurad, Białystok 2017, p. 339.

2 R. Zenderowski, *Pamięć i tożsamość narodowa*, "Atheneum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne" 2011, vol. 28, p. 163; see also: A. Jakubowski, *Uwarunkowania konfliktów etnopolitycznych w państwach wielonarodowościowych*, "Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne", 1/2018, p. 13; Andrzej Jakubowski emphasizes in his analysis of underlying causes of ethno-political conflicts in multinational states that the more the other side is represented as an enemy in memories, symbols and myths of a given ethnic group, the higher the risk of an open conflict, A. Jakubowski, *Uwarunkowania konfliktów etnopolitycznych...*, p. 13.

following the established tradition of explosive 'de-commemoration'<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the dominant discourse is often undermined by other subjects, including the participants (or those attempting to participate) in the process of memory-shaping. For this purpose, such subjects create opposing counter-discourses to undermine the dominant discourse. Wilde describes this mechanism as "irruptions of memory," i.e., public events that:

"receive extensive coverage in the media and involve the authority of public institutions and of the elites responsible for them. They involve a period of recent national history notably framed by conflicting political memories" (Wilde, 1999: 475). During these irruptions [...] there is "an arena of deeply divided public discourse, shot through with contending and mutually exclusive collective representations of the past." Although memory is likely to be controlled by political elites in power, especially in politically unstable times or times of crises, this does not imply that no other memories exist besides the official mnemonic discourse. [...] [A]ll individual, sectional and oppositional narratives are created in relation to and communication with the official one<sup>4</sup>.

Montenegro is a multinational and multicultural state that has been a place where different influences, cultures, and traditions came into contact with each other for centuries. According to the most recent census (2011), the majority of the inhabitants are Montenegrins (44.98%), followed by Serbs (28.73%). Other inhabitants also include Bosniaks, Muslims (Yugoslav Slavic Muslims), Croats, Albanians, as well as Roma, Gorani, and Balkan Egyptians. At the same time, Montenegro is one of the youngest Balkan states as it declared independence in 2006. According to Article 1 of the Constitution of Montenegro, it is a civic state, not a national one<sup>5</sup>, so building a collective identity that will unite all the nations of multicultural Montenegro is one of the most difficult challenges faced by the government of the

3 P. Burke, *Historia kulturowa. Wprowadzenie*, Kraków 2012, p. 78.

4 T. Banjevlav, *Conflicting memories, competing narratives and contested histories in Croatia's post-war commemorative practices*, "Politička misao" 2012, 49(05), p. 8.

5 "Ustav Crne Gore", 2007, [http://www.skupstina.me/cms/site\\_data/ustav/Ustav%20Crne%20Gore.pdf](http://www.skupstina.me/cms/site_data/ustav/Ustav%20Crne%20Gore.pdf) [18.03.2020].

new state<sup>6</sup>. In his analysis of nation-building and state-making processes in Central and Eastern Europe, Rogers Brubaker emphasizes that neither civic, nor binational, nor multinational state model has many chances of being successfully implemented in this region as almost all of the new states will become nationally oriented – fully or to some degree. A variety of nationally oriented policies, practices and approaches have already been adopted in such areas as language policy, education, mass media supervision, state symbols, national iconography, migration policy, employment in the public sector, and legislation regarding citizenship. Thus, a question is not whether the new states adopt national orientation but how they will implement it and to what degree<sup>7</sup>.

The article aims to analyze how the memory of Petar II Petrović Njegoš – a symbolic figure in the history and culture of Montenegro – has been constructed<sup>8</sup>. The analysis will focus on the public debate on this figure in relation to the motion to establish a new national holiday – Njegoš's day, i.e., the day of Montenegrin culture. The new holiday was supposed to commemorate one of the most famous characters in Montenegrin history. Nationwide public discussions have, so far, taken place four times in 2013, 2016, 2018, and 2019. It is thus crucial to study how particular nationalities within Montenegro attempted to shape the memory of Njegoš, and whether their assessments and interpretations of Njegoš himself and his literary works have been divergent. Answering these questions will provide a detailed explanation as to the nature of the memory conflict over Njegoš in today's independent Montenegro. This is an important issue in at least two aspects: 1) building a civic society (according to the provisions of the Constitution of Montenegro), and 2) the process of making the Mon-

6 More on the process of building the Montenegrin nation in 1991-2018 see: A. Domachowska, *Proces budowania narodu czarnogórskiego w latach 1991-2018. Geneza i uwarunkowania*, Toruń 2019.

7 R. Brubaker, *Nacjonalizm inaczej: struktura narodowa i kwestie narodowe w nowej Europie*, Warszawa – Kraków 1998, p. 133-135.

8 One of the components of national identity, particularly highlighted by Radosław Zenderowski, is *gnos*, or the notion of having common ancestors, often considered as the nation's founding fathers and great heroes. The ancestors can be historical figures or purely fictional ones. Such pantheon of national heroes, fixed in collective memory, acts as a mediator between the past and the present, R. Zenderowski, *Religia a tożsamość narodowa i nacjonalizm w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej: między etnicyzacją religii a sakralizacją etnosu (narodu)*, Wrocław 2011, p. 30.

tenegrin nation – one of the largest ethnic groups living in Montenegro (however, not a majority).

The politics of memory is crucial in building national identity by shaping the memory of eminent figures and past events, and reinforcing this memory with specific holidays, celebrations, and monuments, among others. It is reflected in the entire symbolic sphere of a state, yet such symbols may often be dividing instead of uniting<sup>9</sup>. In Montenegro, symbols have been a critical matter. Since the state declared its independence in 2006 and the work on a new constitution started, there have been continuous debates on state symbols<sup>10</sup>, i.e., the flag, emblem, and hymn. For such a multinational country as today's Montenegro is, it is imperative to build supranational places of memory as a way of dealing with the fact that memory carries the potential for conflicts<sup>11</sup> – especially considering that disputes concerning memory – are often more challenging<sup>12</sup>.

The study uses both the discourse method and content analysis, with the material including legislative projects, newspaper articles, television broadcasts, public speeches, and other messages from individual politicians and intellectuals. The methods have already been used in studies on the ways of memory-shaping. Discourse analysis is particularly useful in research on symbolic practices. As Bohdan SzklarSKI emphasizes, the prime activity area for new actors in the political arena is the sphere of public discourse. Today, nobody is surprised by the language being treated as equal to action. *Homo politicus* found its alter ego in *homo symbolicus*. The change in the character of politics

9 See more: P. Kolstø, *National symbols as signs of unity and division*, "Ethnic and racial studies", 29(4), s. 676-701.

10 See more: K. Melnytska, *Między podziałami a wspólnotą: symbole narodowe Czarnogóry*, "Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2018, 53(2); L. Moroz-Grzelak, *Emblematyczne formy manifestowania wartości w świecie postjugosłowiańskim. Patriotyzm*, [in:] *Konstrukcje i destrukcje tożsamości. Wartości w świecie słowiańskim*, eds. E. Golachowska, D. Pazio-Wlazłowska, Warszawa 2015, p. 361.

11 See more: B. Korzeniewski, *Przeszłość jako podłoże konfliktów czy most ku pojednaniu?*, "Kultura Współczesna" 2008, 2(56).

12 T. Sindbæk Andersen, B. Törnquist-Plewa, *Introduction: Disputed Memories in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*, [in:] *Disputed Memory: Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe* (vol. 24), eds. T. S. Andersen, B. Törnquist-Plewa, Berlin – Boston 2016, p. 11.

made people realize the importance of culture as a subject of political conflict and as a factor lending strength to the actors in politics<sup>13</sup>.

## 1. Njegoš as a symbol of Montenegrin culture

1. Petar II Petrović Njegoš (born Radivoj Tomov Petrović)<sup>14</sup> is probably the most famous figure in the history of Montenegro and a particular symbol of this place<sup>15</sup>. He was the fifth ruler from the fourth dynasty – and longest-ruling one (from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. to 1918) – of Montenegrin leaders. The Njegoš family name derives from the Njeguši village, located near the city of Cetinje, where their ancestors settled after (probably) moving from the lands of Bosnia. The subsequent leaders from this dynasty, called *vladikas* (or Prince-Bishops), until 1852 held both lay and religious power as the metropolitans of the Orthodox Church. The power was passed from paternal uncles to nephews, which allowed the clergymen to observe celibacy.

Petar II Petrović Njegoš ruled in 1830-1851. He continued the policy of his predecessor, Petar I Petrović, who attempted to make Montenegro a centralized state by uniting the Montenegrin clans. Petar II Petrović Njegoš is considered as the ruler who laid the foundations of the modern state of Montenegro as he established new state institutions and reformed the administration, police, and military forces<sup>16</sup>. During his rule, he had to struggle not only with the Ottoman Empire but also with internal conflicts as part of Montenegrin clans opposed his reforms. Njegoš was provided with substantial financial support by Russia.

Njegoš's views were, to a significant degree, shaped by his teacher, a well-known Serbian poet Sima Milutinović-Sarajlija. The *Vladika* also knew personally Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, whom he met in Vi-

13 B. Szklarski, *W poszukiwaniu współczesnych powinowactw antropologii i polityki*, [in:] *Mity, symbole i rytuały we współczesnej polityce: szkice z antropologii polityki*, ed. B. Szklarski, Warszawa 2008, p. 7-8.

14 D. Gil, *Prawosławie, historia, naród: miejsce kultury duchowej w serbskiej tradycji i współczesności*, Kraków 2005, p. 265.

15 More on Petar II Petrović Njegoš see also: A. Domachowska, *Proces budowania narodu czarnogórskiego...*, p. 112-115.

16 See: D. Kubik, *Nowoczesność. Serbia i Czarnogóra*, [in:] *Leksykon idei wędrownych na słowiańskich Bałkanach XVIII-XXI wiek. Nowoczesność, sekularyzacja, postęp*, vol. 4, eds. G. Szwat-Gyłybowa, D. Gil, L. Miodyński, Warszawa 2019, p. 43.

enna in 1833 and whose language reform he supported<sup>17</sup>. During his numerous travels, including Russia and Western Europe, Njegoš continued collecting literary works, expanding his personal library, and the Cetinje monastery's collection<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, he contributed to the development of the educational system – the first school in Montenegro was opened during his rule – and founded a state printing press in Cetinje. As Katarzyna Sudnik emphasizes, his dream was to show the world that the Montenegrins are more than a “tribe of wild men and slaughterers” (*pleme divljaka i glavosječa*), and that despite constant fighting, they have enough strength and talent for systematic learning<sup>19</sup>.

Njegoš became famous not only as an outstanding ruler but also as a writer. He wrote in a pure folk language, despite his Orthodox Church education<sup>20</sup>. As Katarzyna Sudnik notes, the literary output of Petar II Petrović Njegoš, a foundation of Montenegrin culture and national heritage, is a source of knowledge about history, traditions, and culture as well as moral and ethical values, and it, therefore, has educational and formational functions<sup>21</sup>. The most important works of Njegoš include *The Ray of the Microcosm* (*Luča mikrokozma*), *The False Tsar Stephen the Little* (*Lažni car Šćepan mali*), and *The Serbian Mirror* (*Ogledalo srpsko*).

However, unquestionably, his greatest work is considered to be *The Mountain Wreath* (*Gorski vijenac*)<sup>22</sup>. In *The Mountain Wreath* Njegoš presents a poetic history of the Serbian nation from the Battle of Kosovo to the events occurring in Montenegro in 1703-1735<sup>23</sup>, when the Montenegrins, led by *Vladika* Danilo, began to fight the Turkicized

17 Petar II Petrović Njegoš: *the Mountain Wreath*, [in:] *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770-1945*, vol. 2, *National Romanticism: The Formation of National Movements*, eds. B. Trencsényi, M. Kopeček, Budapest – New York 2007, p. 428.

18 K. Sudnik, *Oświata. Czarnogóra*, [in:] *Leksykon idei wędrownych na słowiańskich Bałkanach XVIII-XXI wiek. Oświata, tradycja, uniwersalizm*, vol. 6, eds. G. Szwat-Gyłybowa, D. Gil, L. Miodyński, Warszawa 2019, p. 38.

19 Ibidem, p. 37.

20 B. Popiołek, *Język czarnogórski*, [in:] *Słowiańskie języki literackie. Rys historyczny*, eds. B. Oczkowska, E. Szczepańska, Kraków 2011, p. 274.

21 K. Sudnik, *Oświata. Czarnogóra...*, p. 38.

22 S. Slapšak, *Petar II Petrović Njegoš: The Icon of the Poet with the Icon*, [in:] *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries. Volume IV: Types and stereotypes*, eds. M. Cornis-Pope, J. Neubauer, Amsterdam – Philadelphia 2004, p. 112.

23 H. Pisarek, *Niebył, nicość i nic w ujęciu Piotra Njegoša*, “Sofia” 2006, no. 6, p. 217.



inhabitants of Montenegro (i.e., those who converted to Islam). At that time, when the Ottoman Empire dominated the Balkans, it was Islam that was considered a threat to the unity and independence of the state<sup>24</sup>. It should be added that in Serbia and Montenegro today, this text is still read uncritically, which gives rise to controversies among the Muslim minority still inhabiting both states<sup>25</sup>.

*The Mountain Wreath* is often called a Serbian *Iliad*, or a Serbian national poem<sup>26</sup> – fittingly, as it was dedicated to the “ashes of Karađorđe,” the leader of the First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813). Serbians and Montenegrins still debate this work’s position in the history of Serbian and Montenegrin literature<sup>27</sup>. Njegoš is considered a founding father of Serbia and Montenegro’s historiosophy and the interpreter and codifier of the Kosovo myth, which is the central theme of the poem<sup>28</sup>. As Dorota Gil emphasizes in her analysis of that text, this Serbian national poem is on the one hand, a canon icon of *Vidovdan* ideology, with the accompanying motif of *holy revenge* and sanctified crime committed *in the name of the Holy Cross and golden freedom*. On the other hand, the poet evokes tragic guilt by emphasizing the fratricidal aspect of fighting the same blood’s renegades. However, this fight is ultimately justified and sanctified by God’s orders and the overarching interest of the nation, whose depositaries are the ancestors fallen at the holy Battle of Kosovo, which ended with the already mentioned *blessed defeat*<sup>29</sup>.

There have been ongoing debates as to the “Serbian-ness of Njegoš”<sup>30</sup>. The Serbs are convinced that he is a Serbian writer, while the Montenegrins consider him to be a Montenegrin one, pointing out that in e.g. documents and letters of the rulers from the Petrović dynasty the adject-

24 *Petar II Petrović Njegoš: the Mountain Wreath...*, p. 429.

25 *Ibidem*, p. 432.

26 M. Dąbrowska-Partyka, *Literatura pogranicza, pogranicze literatury*, Kraków 2004, p. 115.

27 More on using the figure of Njegoš and his work *The Mountain Wreath* in the nation-making process by Yugoslavs, Serbians and Montenegrins, see: A. B. Wachtel, *How to use a classic: Petar Petrović Njegoš in the Twentieth century*, [in:] *Ideologies and national identities. The case of twentieth-century southeastern Europe*, eds. J. Lampe, M. Mazower, Budapest – New York 2006.

28 D. Gil, *Prawosławie, historia, naród...*, p. 265.

29 M. Dąbrowska-Partyka, *Literatura pogranicza...*, p. 115.

30 On identity dilemmas in the Serbo-Montenegrin culture see more: D. Gil, *Dylematy identyfikacyjne w obrębie serbsko-czarnogórskiej kulturosfery. Dawne i współczesne modele (auto)refleksji*, Kraków 2019.



tive “Montenegrin” appears several times more often than “Slavic-Serbian” and is even used in opposition to the latter<sup>31</sup>. The passports issued during Njegoš’s time described the nationality of bearers as Montenegrin. Besides, in his numerous travels, Njegoš never reached the territory of Serbia proper, and met with Serbs mostly in Vienna or Trieste<sup>32</sup>.

Ilija Despotović holds the opinion that Serbian-ness, as understood by Njegoš, may have meant a framework of a program for freeing the Orthodox Christians from under the Ottoman yoke – a part of the ideological platform of a joint freedom movement in the Balkans. Thus considering Njegoš’s Serbian-ness as a negation of his Montenegrin-ness, and as a denouncement of Montenegro, is erroneous – as Despotović states, this Montenegrin ruler never denounced Montenegro, the Montenegrin nation or his Montenegrin name<sup>33</sup>. Despotović emphasizes that Njegoš’s identity cannot be determined with today’s categories, as this would only depreciate his personality and works<sup>34</sup>.

According to his last will, Njegoš was buried at the top of Mount Lovćen in an Orthodox church he had built in 1845 and dedicated to his uncle, Petar I Njegoš<sup>35</sup>. However, Lovćen is not the only place in Montenegro commemorating Njegoš. There are numerous monuments<sup>36</sup>, institutions (such as museums, archives, and libraries) as well as streets and squares named after him. Njegoš remains a popular topic in books, theatrical performances, and paintings. The mentioned Bilijarda palace houses a museum with his memorabilia, including several editions of *The Mountain Wreath*<sup>37</sup>. Further, the largest Montenegrin winemaker “13. jul Plantaže” also created commemorative wines named “Luča” (*Ray*, a direct reference to the work *The Ray of the Microcosm*) and “Vladika”<sup>38</sup>. Additionally, one of the state awards

31 L. Miodyński, *Naród. Czarnogóra*, [in:] *Leksykon idei wędrównych na słowiańskich Bałkanach XVIII–XXI wiek. Konserwatyzm, liberalizm, naród*, vol. 3, eds. G. Szwat-Gylybowa, D. Gil, L. Miodyński, Warszawa 2019, p. 157.

32 Ibidem, p. 158.

33 I. Despotović, *Jedan pogled na Njegoševo srpstvo*, “Matica Crnogorska”, autumn/winter 2012, p. 204.

34 Ibidem, p. 199.

35 A. B. Wachtel, *How to use a classic: Petar Petrović Njegos in the Twentieth century...*, p. 136.

36 In Montenegro as well as other post-Yugoslav countries and all over the world.

37 Narodni muzej Crne Gore, [http://www.mnmuseum.org/bld\\_e.htm](http://www.mnmuseum.org/bld_e.htm) [09.03.2020].

38 Promocija vina Luča i Vladika nakon “Gorskog vijenca” u CNP-u, Vijesti.me, 27.11.2014, <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/promocija-vina-luca-i-vladika-nakon-gorskog-vijenca-u-cnp-u> [08.03.2020].



In the Glory of Njegoš's Thought. Photo: Agata Domachowska

also bears Njegoš's name (*Njegoševa nagrada*). It is bi-annually awarded by the President of Montenegro on Njegoš's birthday (November 13<sup>th</sup>) for literary works in South Slavic languages all of which are a significant contribution to the development of South Slavic literature<sup>39</sup>.

Among the many monuments representing Njegoš himself, a work worth noting is that of Dimitrije Popović, a sculptor from Cetinje who now lives and works in Zagreb. The monument, titled *In the Glory of Njegoš's Thought* (*U čast Njegoševe misli*), was unveiled in Cetinje<sup>40</sup> (see the photograph above) to celebrate the bicentennial anniversary of the Montenegrin *Vladika's* birth. It is a gift from the artist and the National Community of Montenegrins in Croatia (*Nacionalne zajednice Crnogoraca Hrvatske*). According to its creator, the sculpture's form refers to Njegoš's poem *The Ray of the Microcosm*<sup>41</sup>.

39 Zakon o državnim nagradama, "Službeni list Republike Crne Gore", br. 38 od 22. Juna 2007.

40 B. Baskar, *The third Canonization of Njegoš, the national poet of Montenegro*, [in:] *Great Immortality: Studies on European Cultural Sainthood*, eds. J. K. Helgason, M. Dović, Leiden – Boston 2019, p. 288.

41 J. Peršić, *Dimitrije Popović izradio spomenik Petru Petroviću II. Njegošu*, *mojvecrnji.hr*, 14.03.2013, <https://www.vecernji.hr/kultura/dimitrije-popovic-izradio-spomenik-petru-petrovicu-ii-njego-su-524457> [18.03.2020].

## 2. Contemporary discussion around Njegoš in Montenegro

The year 2013 marked the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Njegoš's birth. This event proved to be a good opportunity to restart the debate on the significance of this historical figure for the Montenegrin state and the different nationalities living in Montenegro. In celebrating this round anniversary, a multitude of ceremonies, conferences, symposia, and other events related to Njegoš, were organized nationally and locally<sup>42</sup>. In May 2012, the state's authorities had already established a special Coordinating Committee for the Celebrations marking the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Petar II Petrović Njegoš (*Koordinacioni odbor za proslavu 200 godina od rođenja Petra II Petrovića Njegoša*), headed by the Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Đukanović.

It was also in 2013 when the Montenegrin Parliament opened up a discussion on Njegoš concerning the amendment to the law on state and other holidays (*Prijedlog, Zakon o izmjeni i dopuni zakona o državnim i drugim praznicima*), presented by the Montenegrin Government. The bill was about introducing a new state holiday – November 13<sup>th</sup> (Njegoš's birthday) – which was to become the Montenegrin festival of culture, with many accompanying events. The bill presented several reasons for introducing changes to the law. First of all, the Government referred to the custom of other countries and nations that honor the memory of some figures and events significant for state-building, history, culture, and tradition. Besides, several such dates already exist in the Montenegrin law. Secondly, many countries organize celebrations to commemorate key literature figures, e.g., William Shakespeare or Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra – April 23<sup>rd</sup> is World Book Day and the death anniversary of these two prominent authors. Another example which was used to support the bill is the Slovenian national holiday – a festival of Slovenian culture (February 8<sup>th</sup>; *Prešernov Dan slovenski kulturni Praznik*) – celebrated on the date of the death of poet France Prešeren. On this day, the Prešeren Award (*Prešernova nagrada*) – the highest decoration in the artistic field in Slovenia – is also awarded. Finally, referring directly to Njegoš, the drafters of the bill listed his advantages as a ruler and reformer, who

42 See more: A. Domachowska, *Proces budowania narodu czarnogórskiego...*, p. 238-239, 244.

brought the nation out of the darkness of the Middle Ages and laid the foundations of a modern Montenegrin state.

During the ongoing discussion on the Government's proposal, a group of 72 Montenegrin intellectuals appealed to the Parliament to approach the Government's motion with due seriousness. The intellectuals also emphasized that Njegoš was the first South Slavic writer who noticed the continuity and the wholeness of European literature, beginning with Homer's works. In turn, Njegoš's works connect Montenegrin culture with the spirit and history of European and world civilization. The intellectuals, therefore, explicitly stated that Njegoš should be protected from everyday politics, and his works ought to be treated as the greatest spiritual asset<sup>43</sup>.

The Bosniak Party (*Bošnjačka stranka*, BS), then forming a government coalition with the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (*Demokratska partija socijalista Crne Gore*, DPS), immediately opposed by saying that in civic Montenegro it is unacceptable to make the date of Njegoš's birthday a public holiday since, when read literally, the ideas in *The Mountain Wreath*, justify crimes against, and genocide of, the Muslim community in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Montenegro and in the region<sup>44</sup>. What is more, the party pointed out that the content which offends Muslims and carries a dangerous message on interreligious and interethnic conflicts should be removed from textbooks<sup>45</sup>. They postulated that Njegoš's works should be finally analyzed with critical objectivity, without "mythomania".

Rifat Fejzić, the Reis (leader) of the Islamic Community in Montenegro, also expressed his disagreement with the Government's proposal. During the ongoing debate, he proposed to make April 26<sup>th</sup>, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, a public holiday for followers of Islam, since Njegoš was to have his public holiday. He also reminded

43 *Intelektualci pisali Skupštini: Zaštitite Njegoša*, Vijesti.me, 19.12.2013, <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/intelektualci-pisali-skupstini-zastitite-njegosa> [12.03.2020].

44 S. Janković, O. Nikolić, *Njegoš utro evropski put*, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 13.11.2013, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-slavi-parlamentarizam-i-njegosa/25167110.html> [16.03.2020]; A. Nikolaidis, *Njegoševa Crna Gora: Jedan narod, jedna vjera, jedna istraga*, Sandzakpress.net, 10.12.2013, <https://sandzakpress.net/njegoseva-crna-gora-je-danasnja-republika-srpska-jedan-narod-jedna-vjera-jedna-istraga/> [21.03.2020].

45 *Nikolaidis: I ja sam pogresno shvatio Njegosa!?*, ul-info.com, 08.12.2013, <http://mne.ul-info.com/nikolaidis-i-ja-sam-pogresno-shvatio-njegosa/> [15.03.2020].

that stories about the life of Muhammad were sung in hymns written by outstanding Muslims from Montenegro, such as Bosniak Hafiz Salih Gašević and Albanian Ali Riza Ulcinjaku<sup>46</sup>.

Similar arguments were made by Šerbo Rastoder, a historian of Bosniak origin. He stated that Njegoš was a great writer and occupied an important place in history. The anti-Islamic theses present in his works can be justified in the context of the period when Islam was a real threat to the Balkan nations seeking to free themselves from the rule of the Ottoman Empire. However, Rastoder claimed that it is wrong to use these views in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, as it was under Njegoš when the greatest crimes against the Muslim population in the Balkans had taken place. Therefore, Njegoš cannot be considered a model of morality and ethics<sup>47</sup>. Rastoder also said that this way of using Njegoš actually does a disservice to the *Vladika*, who should be defended against the Church and the authorities who currently use him for political gain<sup>48</sup>.

The debate was also joined by Andrej Nikolaidis, a Montenegrin novelist and columnist. He agreed that *The Mountain Wreath* describes the fight for freedom from the Turks, but at the same time, he stressed that this text also speaks about “cleansing” the community of members of a different faith – and that this is a myth of creating a homogeneous, national and denominational community that has been purged with fire. In turn, the Montenegro that Njegoš described – i.e., the state of one nation and one religion – is not contemporary Montenegro but, instead, such a state is Republika Srpska<sup>49</sup>.

In response to the allegations made by the Bosniaks, a Montenegrin publicist Rajko Cerović said that Njegoš's works should always be read in the context of the period in which they were created, that is, when Islam posed the greatest danger to the Montenegrin people.

<sup>46</sup> *Reis Fejzić: Kad može Njegoš, onda može i Muhamed*, PCNEN, 12.11.2013, <https://www.pcnen.com/portal/2013/11/12/reis-fejzic-kad-moze-njegosa-onda-moze-i-muhamed/> [12.03.2020].

<sup>47</sup> D. Jovičević, *Za i protiv Njegoševog rođendana kao praznika kulture*, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 30.10.2013, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/za-i-protiv-priglasenja-njegosevog-rodjendana-kao-praznika-kulture/25152838.html> [18.03.2020].

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> A. Nikolaidis, *Njegoševa Crna Gora: Jedan narod, jedna vjera, jedna istraga*, Sandzakpress.net, 10.12.2013, <https://sandzakpress.net/njegoseva-crna-gora-je-danasnja-republika-srpska-jedan-narod-jedna-vjera-jedna-istraga/> [18.03.2020]; Republika Srpska is one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Those who in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries misread Njegoš's works attempt to disqualify Njegoš as a model of morality<sup>50</sup>.

Members of the Democratic Front (*Demokratski front*, DF)<sup>51</sup> – the largest opposition party in Montenegro – also opposed, though for different reasons, the idea of making Njegoš's birthday a national holiday. They stressed the fact that the authorities were trying to change Njegoš's identity – from Serb to Montenegrin. They opposed the attempt to make a Njegoš-Montenegrin out of the Njegoš-Serb. Therefore, they proposed a compromise (in their opinion) to announce Njegoš's birthday a national holiday called "Njegoš Day – Montenegrin Culture Day" (*Njegošev dan kulture Crne Gore*). The ruling Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro did not intend to agree with such an assessment of this Montenegrin ruler and accused DF of spreading delusions and wrong claims that Njegoš was more a Serb than a Montenegrin.

As can be observed, this discussion was a clash of mainly Montenegrin (in the national sense – represented by DPS), Bosniak (BS), and pro-Serb (DF) ideas. Naturally, there were also voices that did not intend to focus on Njegoš's Serb or Montenegrin identity, or on how to read his works. Such a voice was expressed, for example, by Draginja Vuksanović (Social Democratic Party of Montenegro, *Socijaldemokratska partija Crne Gore*, SDP<sup>52</sup>), who only said that to honor Njegoš, several days of celebrations, not just one, should be assigned<sup>53</sup>. In turn, Azra Jasavić, a member of the Positive Montenegro (*Pozitivna Crna Gora*), announced that her party would vote in favor of the amendment to the Act on condition that it introduced amendments establishing subsequent holidays. For example, an Artist's Day, thanks

50 D. Jovičević, *Za i protiv Njegoševog rođendana kao praznika kulture*, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 30.10.2013, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/za-i-protiv-prglaneja-njegosevog-rodjendana-kao-praznika-kulture/25152838.html> [18.03.2020].

51 The Democratic Front – is the major opposition party in Montenegro. It is currently composed of the New Serb Democracy (NSD), Democratic Serb Party (DSS), Movement for Changes (PzP) and Democratic People's Party (DNP).

52 SDP – a party which until 2016 was in coalition with DPS. It stood for the parliamentary elections in 2016 separately – for the first time since 1996. Draginja Vuksanović has been SDP's leader since 2019, when Ranko Krivokapić resigned.

53 N. Đurić, *Da li je Njegoš veći Srbin ili Crnogorac*, "Politika", 06.12.2013, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/277776/Region/Da-li-je-Njegos-veci-Srbin-ili-Crnogorac> [15.03.2020].



to which different events would be organized, such as a commemoration of Iso Kalač in Rožaje and Avdo Mededović in Bijelo Polje<sup>54</sup>.

Prime Minister Djukanović also spoke on this issue. He defended Njegoš and his role in the state's history as the figure that made Montenegro famous and described his works as an expression of a brilliant mind. The Prime Minister explained that the idea behind the bill was in no way to provoke or offend anyone but to start the third century of the immortality of Njegoš<sup>55</sup>. Djukanović said that the opponents of introducing changes to the bill were opponents of Njegoš's greatest achievement, which is independent Montenegro. He also added that residents of Montenegro can now have different identities, but Montenegro as a state stands above all these individual identities<sup>56</sup>.

During a solemn session of the Montenegrin Parliament convened on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Njegoš's birth and 107 years of Montenegrin parliamentary traditions, the Chairman of the Parliament, Ranko Krivokapić, said that Njegoš belongs to all nations in the region and mentioned the recent improprieties in referring to Njegoš. Notably, from all the opposition groups, only the Positive Montenegro took part in the celebration. The Bosniak Party, which was part of the government coalition at the time, did not participate in this event, claiming that they did not intend to support the initiative of making Njegoš's birthday a national holiday, but respected the solemn celebration of the Parliament Day<sup>57</sup>.

In turn, DF, which since the presidential election in April attended parliamentary sessions selectively, did not intend to participate in this jubilee, explaining that the ceremony was only a political propaganda trick just before the local elections that were to be held in Cetinje. At that time, Miodrag Lekić, one of DF leaders, said explicitly that the authorities used the idea of the holiday and Njegoš himself for political purposes<sup>58</sup>.

54 Ibidem.

55 Đukanović: *Njegoš učinio Crnu Goru slavnom*, RTS.rs, 06.11.2013, <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/1438265/djukanovic-njegos-ucinio-crnu-goru-slavnom.html> [16.03.2020].

56 Ibidem.

57 S. Janković, O. Nikolić, *Njegoš utro evropski put*, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 13.11.2013, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-slavi-parlamentarizam-i-njegosa/25167110.html> [16.03.2020].

58 Ibidem.



Eventually, members of the Committee on the Political System, Judiciary and Administration did not support the adoption of the proposal to amend the National Holidays Act to establish 13 November, Petar II Petrović Njegoš's day of birth, a public holiday. Members of DPS and the Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (*Socijalistička narodna partija Crne Gore*, SNP)<sup>59</sup> voted in favor and DF against the amendments. Representatives of the Positive Montenegro and the Social Democratic Party of Montenegro abstained<sup>60</sup>. This voting turned out to be extremely interesting as it highlighted the fact that, regarding this particular issue, the political dispute does not follow a simple division: the government coalition vs. the opposition or the pro-Montenegrin vs. the pro-Serb groups. Therefore, the attitude towards Njegoš, more specifically the memory of him, could not be explained directly by using the simplest division patterns present, not only in the political elite in Montenegro but also in society itself.

After three years, the discussion on the issue returned to the Montenegrin Parliament. However, this time, members of the Committee on the Political System, Judiciary and Administration supported the Government's bill to amend the law (*Izveštaj o razmatranju predloga zakon o izmjeni i dopuni zakona državnim i drugim praznicima*, 23 December 2016)<sup>61</sup>.

The content of this bill was the same as the one in 2013. However, the Government, led by Prime Minister Duško Marković (DPS), decided to withdraw the bill (28 December 2016). The Prime Minister's decision came after BS, once again, categorically stated that it would not support the proposal to amend the law<sup>62</sup>. Marković understood that in such a situation, the Government did not have a majority in

59 SNP – an opposition party formed as a result of the 1997 split in DPS in 1997. In 2016 the party established an electoral coalition (the Key Coalition) with DEMOS and the Civic Movement United Reform Action (URA).

60 N. Đurić, *Da li je Njegoš veći Srbin ili Crnogorac*, "Politika", 06.12.2013, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/277776/Region/Da-li-je-Njegos-veci-Srbin-ili-Crnogorac> [15.03.2020]; *Bez podrške prijedlogu da dan Njegoševog rođenja bude praznik*, Portalanalitika.me, 5.12.2013, <https://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/125799--bez-podrske-prijedlogu-da-dan-njegosevog-rodenja-bude-praznik> [15.03.2020].

61 *Njegošev rođendan državni praznik*, Danas.rs, 23.12.2016, <https://www.danas.rs/svet/njegosev-rodjendan-drzavni-praznik/> [25.03.2020].

62 *Njegošev rođendan neće biti državni praznik*, Beta.rs, 28.12.2016, <https://beta.rs/vesti/vesti-region/50026-njegosev-rodjendan-nece-biti-drzavni-praznik> [25.03.2020].

the Parliament to pass the bill; however, he said that he did not discuss that issue with BS representatives or its leaders<sup>63</sup>. Marković again emphasized that Njegoš's works cannot be read without knowing the historical and social context in which they were written: 150 years ago, when the most famous ruler of Montenegro wrote *The Mountain Wreath*, the situation in Europe, including Central Europe, was totally different. However, if there had been no Njegoš, today's Montenegro would not exist<sup>64</sup>.

With the Government's vague explanation as to why the bill had been withdrawn, Zuvdija Hodžić, a member of the Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts, said that if the Government's proposal had been serious and the authorities really wished to establish a national holiday on Njegoš's birthday, BS members could have been persuaded to support the bill, and thus it would have been passed. Hodžić explicitly said that Njegoš was a brilliant writer and in no case should he be credited with praising genocide. *The Mountain Wreath* needs to be treated as a literary piece and therefore read in this way. There are no "less offensive" words directed at, for example, the Venetians or Montenegrins (e.g., the character of Pop Mićo). Hodžić also asked a public question: since when have the then Turks been identified as today's Bosniaks?<sup>65</sup>.

The leader of DEMOS (*Demokratski savez*)<sup>66</sup>, Miodrag Lekić, described the whole political scandal related to the withdrawal of the bill as an example of political trade. In his opinion, the very text of the proposed change in the law says nothing about Njegoš. In turn, it says a lot about irresponsible dilettantes and "political merchants." According to Lekić, by withdrawing the bill, the ruling DPS showed its readiness for any immoral deeds only to stay in power as long as possible<sup>67</sup>.

63 *Da nije bilo Njegoša, ne bi bilo današnje Crne Gore*, Mondo.me, 30.12.2016, <https://mondo.me/info/Crna-gora/amp/a576456/Da-nije-bilo-Njegosa-ne-bi-bilo-danasnje-Crne-Gore.html> [25.03.2020].

64 Ibidem.

65 Zuvdija Hodžić: *Njegoš nije ideolog genocida*, Cdm.me, 15.01.2017, <https://www.cdm.me/politika/zuvdija-hodzic-njegosa-nije-ideolog-genocida/> [28.03.2020].

66 DEMOS – Democratic Alliance; political party set up by Miodrag Lekić in 2015, opposition of the ruling DPS.

67 Marković: *Da nije bilo Njegoša ne bi bilo današnje Crne Gore*, Vijesti.me, 30.12.2016, <https://www.vijesti.me/eu-vijesti/markovic-da-nije-bilo-njegosa-ne-bi-bilo-danasnje-crne-gore> [27.03.2020].

Professor Božena Jelušić, a literary scholar, tried to defend the Prime Minister's decision by saying that the head of the Government compromised. In her opinion, Bosniak intellectuals have never been able to adopt a different way of reading Njegoš's works and thus evaluate them in a different way than Montenegrins do<sup>68</sup>. She also said that Njegoš is not discussed by institutions or scientists, but by those who use this Montenegrin ruler for their particular interests. This silence of institutions facilitates the situation in which, contrary to what the Constitution stipulates, Montenegro is increasingly moving away from what it postulates – being a civil state and civil society. She also stated that in other countries, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Pushkin are considered as great writers, although their works could also arouse much controversy if they were read literally<sup>69</sup>. Đuro Radosavović, a young generation writer in Montenegro, was of a similar opinion. He also reminded that Njegoš has long been misinterpreted. This is evidenced by the history of the Njegoš Award, the greatest appreciation of literary activity in the times of Yugoslavia and often instrumentalized, depending on a given situation and the needs of the then Montenegrin elite. Therefore, Njegoš's works should still be explained, not only from the conservative perspective and always in the context of the times and circumstances in which they were written<sup>70</sup>. In turn, historian Šerbo Rastoder believes that the problem with *The Mountain Wreath* is not in the text itself, but in how it is read and for what purpose someone refers to it. Another problem is that Njegoš is still treated in Montenegro as a kind of totem, and any attempt to desacralize him would be negatively received by the Montenegrin society, i.e., as a non-scientific criticism<sup>71</sup>.

During the ongoing discussion, the opinion about Njegoš expressed by Adnan Muhović, a member of BS and the then chairman of the assembly of the municipality of Petnjica, caused indignation in Montenegro. He said that Njegoš was a writer calling for genocide and

68 Ibidem.

69 S. Janković, *Njegoševo ime, alibi za mržnju i političku trgovinu*, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 02.02.2017, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/njegoss-crna-gora/28275344.html> [28.03.2020].

70 D. Jovičević, *Čiji je 'naš' Njegoš?*, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 06.01.2017, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ciji-je-njegoss-crna-gora/28217345.html> [28.03.2020].

71 Ibidem.

characterized him as the greatest “torturer” of Bosniaks and Islam. What is more, he stated that *The Mountain Wreath* openly and directly calls for conflict, war, hatred and offending religion<sup>72</sup>. After these words, parts of the opposition wanted DPS to remove BS from the government coalition, which would mean that DPS would no longer have a majority in the parliament. Husović, the leader of BS, immediately apologized to the citizens of Montenegro for Muhović’s statement. In addition, he appealed directly to other party members to refrain from expressing opinions that would violate the state’s civic character and devalue its multinational and multid denominational character<sup>73</sup>.

After two years (in 2018), the debate on establishing a new national holiday in Montenegro to honor Njegoš started again. This time, however, the proposal to change the law was presented by the opposition DF (*Predlog zakona o izmjeni i dopuni zakona o državnim i drugim praznicima*). Representatives of the government coalition rejected this motion. Milan Knežević, a representative from DF, reminded that earlier, the Montenegrin Government presented a similar proposal, but because of BS, the motion was withdrawn. DF directly stated that if the Government did not see the significance of this date for the state-forming process, then there really was not a single point that would bind the Montenegrin society – an element around which all residents of Montenegro could unite<sup>74</sup>. In their motion to amend the law, DF members underlined the significant, universal, and timeless nature of Njegoš’s works. According to DF, his literary works promote such values as heroism, fight for freedom and courage, as well as present freedom as a condition of equality. Moreover, Njegoš was a reformer and creator of the modern concept of the state, which made him a recognizable symbol of Montenegro<sup>75</sup>.

At the same time, the Bosniak diaspora appealed to the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education of Montenegro to remove the

72 V. Žugić, *DPS Njegoša stavio na čekanje*, Vijesti.me, 14.11.2017, <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/politika/dps-njegosa-stavio-na-cekanje> [28.03.2020].

73 Rafet Husović *se izvinio*, Danas.rs, 03.02.2017, <https://www.danas.rs/svet/rafet-husovic-se-izvinio/> [28.03.2020].

74 Skupština Crne Gore odbila da razmatra predlog da Njegošev rođendan bude praznik kulture, Blic.rs, 30.10.2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/skupstina-crne-gore-odbila-da-razmatra-predlog-da-njegosev-rodjendan-bude-praznik/g1wskv7> [29.03.2020].

75 *Predlog zakona o izmjeni i dopuni zakona o državnim i drugim praznicima*, 23.10.2018, p. 3.

works of Njegoš and Danilo Kiš from the school curriculum as their content provokes hatred against Islam, Muslims, Bosniaks, and Albanians. The signatories of the appeal stated that those books somehow provoked Serbs and Montenegrins to start wars and commit genocide in the Balkans<sup>76</sup>. Moreover, the diaspora demanded the abolition of the Njegoš Prize. This appeal was supported by, i.e., the Bosniak Academy of Sciences and Art, and the Bosniak National Council in Montenegro<sup>77</sup>.

In response to this appeal, the Ministry of Education informed that it did not intend to introduce any changes to the curriculum. Moreover, it emphasized that Montenegro is a multicultural and multiethnic state that is proud of its differences, and its current curriculum and development program was by no means an obstacle<sup>78</sup>. The appeal made by the Bosniak diaspora was also met with criticism by historian Šerbo Rastoder, who assessed this initiative as one that only irritates Montenegrin society, is ill-considered and groundless without being at all beneficial, since a critical reading of Njegoš's works is one thing but banning them is another<sup>79</sup>.

A year later (2019), DF once again submitted to the Parliament an amendment to the law on national holidays, the same as before, to establish Njegoš's day, i.e., the day of Montenegrin culture (*13 novembar Dan Petra II Petrovića Njegoša, Crnogorski praznik kulture*). During the meeting of the Parliament, deputies from this party organized a kind of performance – putting paintings with the image of Njegoš on the seats of the deputies<sup>80</sup>. Finally, the assembly again rejected DF's motion.

<sup>76</sup> Kongres Bošnjaka Sjeverne Amerike, *Apel vladama i ministarstvima kulture, obrazovanja i prosvjete država na prostoru bivše SFRJ*, 16.10.2018, Bosniak.org, <https://bosniak.org/2018/10/16/apel-vladama-i-ministarstvima-kulture-obrazovanja-i-prosvjete-drzava-na-prostoru-bivse-sfrj/> [04.04.2020].

<sup>77</sup> *Bosniaks want Njegoš and Kiš out of schools*, Cdm.me, 18.10.2018, <https://m.cdm.me/english/bosniaks-want-njegos-and-kis-out-of-schools/> [04.04.2020].

<sup>78</sup> *Zbog mržnje prema islamu i muslimanima: Bošnjaci žele da se zabrane Njegoš i Kiš*, Kolektiv.me, 18.10.2018, <https://www.kolektiv.me/122902/zbog-mrznje-prema-islam-u-i-muslimanima-bosnjaci-zele-da-se-zabrane-njegosa-i-kisa> [05.04.2020].

<sup>79</sup> A. Mudreša, *BS će predložiti da se na crnogorskoj zastavi pored krsta nađe i polumjesec*, Vijesti.me, 18.10.2018, <https://www.vijesti.me/eu-vijesti/bs-ce-predloziti-da-se-na-crnogorskoj-zastavi-pored-krsta-nade-i-polumjesec> [03.04.2020].

<sup>80</sup> Mandić: *Kad padne prva kap krvi, zakucaće se na vrata odgovornih*, analitika.me, 20.12.2019, <https://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/354374--mandic-kad-padne-prva-kap-krvi-zakucace-se-na-vrata-odgovornih> [04.04.2020].

## Conclusions

The public debate on Njegoš revealed how the inconsistency of memory, primarily the Montenegrin, Serbian, and Bosniak memory, generates conflicts and, at the same time, deepens the prevailing social divisions. The strategy of conflict neutralization, adopted and maintained by the Montenegrin Government since 2013, seems to bring only short-term results, while in the long run, the conflict over memory remains unresolved, which negatively affects the internal stability of the state.

The Montenegrin Government attempted to introduce a new national holiday twice. Eventually, this idea was not proceeded by the assembly due to the opposition voiced by the Bosniak Party – or at least some of its members. As the latter formed the coalition government with DPS, the main ruling party assumed that introducing a new holiday could lead to the government's collapse. Naturally, DPS did not support the proposal to amend the law on public holidays presented twice (in 2018 and 2019) by the largest opposition group – DF.

In this context, the amendments to the law proposed by DPS in 2013 and 2016, and by DF in subsequent years, are worth investigating. The first one assumes establishing Njegoš's day as a holiday, i.e., the day of Montenegrin culture (*Njegošev dan, crnogorski praznik kulture*). The adjective "Montenegrin" (*crnogorski*) carries ambiguous interpretation as it may refer to 1) the state (deriving from the state's name) or 2) ethnicity – one of the nationalities living in Montenegro (i.e., Montenegrins), which automatically provokes a conflict between the Serbs and the Montenegrins identifying with Njegoš as to whether he was a Montenegrin or a Serb. In turn, DF's proposal ("Njegoš's day – the day of culture of Montenegro" – *Njegošev dan kulture Crne Gore*) brought forward during the ongoing discussion in 2013 (the drafts of changes to the bill advanced by DF and previously by DPS used an identical name) seemed not to carry the conflicting element for the Serb-Montenegrin dynamics. Thus, the latter was more appropriate to the circumstances of a country valuing the ideas of a civic state as it points to the very concept of Montenegro's culture – alluding to the state, not the nation. Naturally, this does not change the fact that DF's year-by-year proposals of establishing this holiday (convergent with DPS's proposals) with the perspective of failure due to the lack of parliamentary majority was aimed solely at fueling the conflict. The figure

of Njegoš was again used to provoke tensions between the opposition and the Government as well as between the Serbs and the Montenegrins. This was symbolically evidenced by placing Njegoš's image on the seats of the delegates to the Montenegrin Assembly in 2019.

Therefore, it appears that this kind of political actions, undertaken by particular political parties reflect the social moods, and more precisely – the opinions on Njegoš held in the collective memory of individual nations living in Montenegro. The results of the analysis of the research material indicate that even within each nation there are different opinions about Njegoš. It should be admitted that some BS politicians pointed out that Njegoš has been recently used to justify the crime of genocide against the Muslim community in the Balkans, and that his greatest work (*The Mountain Wreath*) includes content that is offensive to Muslims. At the same time, during the public discussion on the role of Njegoš both in the culture and history of Montenegro, there were also voices of Bosniaks who opposed this interpretation. Significant differences regarding the memory of Njegoš were also seen in the (pro)Serbian and (ethnically) Montenegrin part of the society.

The conflict of memory about Njegoš is only one of the still active disputes in Montenegro. During the ongoing discussions, certain disagreements re-emerged regarding state symbols (first of all, the flag and emblems), the evaluation of specific historical figures and events, and even the official curricula in Montenegro. Therefore, conducting further research on how memory is shaped by various entities in the Montenegrin state seems necessary to accurately capture the differences between individual nations and identify which issues they specifically concern. Only a thorough understanding of this particular problem can contribute to finding a way to resolve disputes in the multicultural society of Montenegro or even to minimize the negative effects of the reoccurrence of memory conflict.

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