



Global Center  
for Security Studies

JUNE 2018

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## RUSSIA AND MONTENEGRO: HOW AND WHY A CENTURIES OLD RELATIONSHIP RUPTURED

By the end of 2016 Montenegro (MNE) and America were experiencing similar problems. Among numerous accusations by politicians that the elections were irregular, Presidential in US and Parliamentary in Montenegro, there was one more thing that was common for Montenegro and USA last year - Russian meddling in the democratic process of both countries. Russia was involved in obstruction of the American presidential elections, according to an official assessment from American intelligence agencies. During the 16 October election night in Montenegro, a group of Russian citizens together with individuals from Serbia and Montenegro, reportedly planned to kill former Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic and overthrow his proWestern government. According to the official statement regarding this by the Montenegrin Special Prosecutor Milivoje Katnic, given at a press conference on 6 November 2016, Russian nationalists were involved in the planned action with the goal of stopping Montenegrin accession to NATO.<sup>1</sup>

On 18 November, Katnic released the names of two Russians who are accused of organizing the attack- Eduard Shirokov, currently on the Interpol's red notice and Vladimir Popov.<sup>2</sup>

In 2014, Shirokov was a deputy military attaché in the Russian embassy in Poland, but was expelled as persona non-grata, due to espionage for Russia. Both Shirokov and Popov are members of GRU, Russia's military intelligence service.<sup>3</sup>

With high-tech assistance to view encrypted calls and emails between plotters from British and American services, there was credible evidence from both countries that an attempt of terrorist attack was something real, and resulted in the arrest of 20 suspects in this case. Montenegrin's society remains divided on the veracity of this case; with many believing this was manufactured by the ruling party on the Election Day.<sup>4</sup>

These divisions, between Montenegrins and Serbs (who support stronger ties with Russia) dates from the period of separation from Serbia in 2006, which created a society in which the Serb portion of the nation wanted, and continues to want to annex Montenegro to Serbia, oppose NATO integration and wants a militarily neutral country under the protectorate of Russia.

1 "Montenegro Says Russian 'Nationalists' Were Behind Plot To Kill Djukanovic", Radio Free Europe, November 06, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-russian-nationalists-plot-assassination-djukanovic/28100046.html>

2 "Istraga o pokušaju 'državnog udara' u Crnoj Gori", Aljazeera Balkans, November 20, 2016, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/istraga-o-pokusaju-drzavnog-udara-u-crnoj-gori>

3 Farmer, Ben 2017, "Montenegro 'to indict Russian spy behind coup plot'", The Telegraph, 26 February 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/26/montenegro-indict-russian-spy-behind-coup-plot/>

4 Recknagel, Charles 2016, "Montenegrin Opposition Calls Charges Of Plot To Kill Djukanovic 'Fabricated'", Radio Free Europe, November 06, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-russia-denies-role-plot-to-killpm/28101516.html>

## Historical Relations Between Two Countries

We must look to history to explain this strong Russian influence in the Balkans. Russia had a centuries long obsession to become "the third Rome"<sup>5</sup> an idea hatched in the 15<sup>th</sup> century after the fall of Constantinople under the Ottomans. This ambition of Russia can be clearly seen from letters of Monk Filofej to the Russian emperor Peter the Great in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in which he says: "All the kingdoms of the Christian Orthodox faith are poured into your kingdom, and you are the only Christian Emperor under the heavens."<sup>6</sup>

In his book **Political Thought** Dostoevsky explains the necessity of Russia to be a world leader: "In order to exist for a long time, every great nation must believe that the salvation of the world lays in them, only them, that their only goal is to rule other nations, in order to unite them and lead them to a greater cause."<sup>7</sup>

In a political statement of Peter the Great, written in 18<sup>th</sup> century, one can find his grand plan for Russia to win world domination through the conquest of the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> This document also stated that Russia must extend her boundaries over the Balkan states and Constantinople, across the Dardanelles and so forth. Peter the Great writes: "Approach as near as possible to Constantinople and India. Whoever governs there will be the true sovereign of the world. Consequently, excite continual wars, not only in Turkey, but in Persia. Establish dockyards on the Black sea. Penetrate to the Persian Gulf..." Here are some additional points of the statement:

1. To keep the Russian nation in constant warfare, in order to always have good soldiers.
2. Interfere in the affairs of all Europe, particularly Germany which deserves your main attention.
3. Divide Poland, by raising up continual disorders and jealousies.
4. Take all you can from Sweden; isolate her from Denmark, and vice versa. Be careful to rouse their jealousy.
5. Do all in your power to approach closely Constantinople and India. Hasten the fall of Persia. Open a route towards the Persian Gulf. Re-establish, as much as possible, the ancient commerce of the Levant, and then approach India.

Every serious analysis of Russian foreign policy recognizes the Balkans as an important area where imperial and later Soviet Russia had strong ambitions and constant geostrategic interest. Thanks to the cultural, religious and political relations, the Balkans was an area where the Orthodox religion created a special tie, together with the historic fight against the Ottomans. During the long history of their relations, Montenegro and Russia had a love-hate relationship. A significant number of those who are not familiar with Montenegrin history, of which, unfortunately, there are many, believe that Russia and Montenegro had a centuries long partnership, brotherhood, friendship and mutual respect. Russian diplomacy towards Montenegro, before and after gaining independence at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, was more of a diktat, a continuous attempt to keep a small country such as Montenegro under control.

<sup>5</sup> Radonjic, R, "U predjelima duha", Podgorica, 2015, page 80

<sup>6</sup> Nersesjanc, V. S., "История политических и правовых учений", Moscow, 1988, page 157

<sup>7</sup> Dostojevski, F. M., "Political thought", Belgrade, 1934, page 243.

<sup>8</sup> Dimitry V. Lehovitch, "The Testament of Peter the Great", American Slavic and East European Review Vol. 7, No. 2(Apr., 1948), pp.111-124



There were periods during which Montenegro saw Russia as Patroness figure, to whom we owed loyalty. But a long-term patronage that Russia was achieving in MNE by sending money to the Montenegrin rulers, was in fact the way to keep this small country on a leash, and a short one at that, to ensure this small but militarily competent nation could join their wars when it suited their interest. Each time Montenegrin rulers tried to turn to other countries in order to establish or strengthen an alliance, Russia reacted aggressively by cutting financial help significantly. As many historians claim, Russia was even behind the murder of the Montenegrin ruler Prince Danilo in 1860.

According to the historical theory that was never proved, the motive was the Montenegrin desire to create closer ties to France during Danilo's governance, which was perceived by Russia as a betrayal. Perhaps the most vivid impression of how Russia viewed a small country such as Montenegro is detailed in the document "Montenegro from 1860-1900"-published in the magazine of the Russian Academy of Science "Славяноведение" by historian Dr. Varvara Borisovna Hlebnikova, in which the Russian ambassador in Montenegro, Konstantin Arkadijevic Gubastov states: "Montenegro cannot have any kind of citizen mission that other communities might have; no independent form of state cannot exist within that territory. As a country, Montenegro is too small, too poor and deprived of the ability to have peaceful civil existence."<sup>9</sup>

The idea of Russia as a superpower continued during the long history of its leaders. It is worth mentioning Stalin and his definition of internationalism that says: - "The touchstone and infallible criteria of internationalism is the attitude towards the Soviet Union - the socialist motherland to all working people, bastion of peace and security of the nation. Internationalist is the one who is without question, without hesitation, without any conditions willing to protect the SSR because the SSR is the base of the world revolutionary movement."<sup>10</sup> Modern history of international relations shows how the Russian special vision of the world continuously evolved and grew. Another example is President Dmitry Medvedev's call for a new European security architecture, the most active initiative undertaken by Russian diplomacy in recent years.<sup>11</sup> The Medvedev project was launched in 2009 with an attempt to introduce Russia's own vision of European and Euro-Atlantic security. The Kremlin seeks to exploit divisions within the Western alliance, between the US and Europe, and amongst the Europeans themselves. In a very real sense, it reflects Russia's desire to play, and have the leading role as a 'responsible stakeholder' in regional and global affairs.

9 Khlebnikova, V.B. (Varvara Borisovna), "Rossiia i Chernogoriia v kontse XIX-nachale XX vv." Vladivostok: Izdvo Dal'nevostochnogo universiteta, 1992 page 40-51, <https://www.antenam.net/index.php/istorija/item/13205-strogo-povjerljivo-ruski-car-pocetkom-1914-odlucio-drzavu-crnu-goru-unistiti-pripojiti-je-srbiji-1>

10 "Большая советская энциклопедия", Второе издание, Moscow, 1953, том 18, page 300

11 Lo, Bobo 2009, "Medvedev and the new European security architecture", Open democracy, August 3, 2009, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/email/medvedev-and-the-new-european-security-architecture>

## Russian Economic Penetration After Independency in 2006

After gaining its independence based on a peaceful referendum in 2006, Montenegro set a priority for Euro Atlantic integrations as a constitutional cornerstone. Membership in NATO became one of Montenegro's primarily goals, after establishing a stable economy. That was the moment when the Montenegrin economy went through a period of so-called investment boom, and was one of the leading countries in terms of Direct Foreign Investments per capita. The investments wave lasted until 2008, when the global economic crisis bared the severe structural problems of the Montenegrin economy. By 2007 some thirty thousand Russians had bought land and real property, and invested nearly 2 billion dollars in Montenegro. In the briefing paper requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, author Matija Rojec explains how from all CEE and SEE countries, Russian Foreign Direct Investments in 2006 were highest in Montenegro (8.1% of total 2006 inward FDI stock), while the importance of Russian investors in other CEE and SEE countries was more or less negligible.<sup>12</sup> These direct investments in the economy were seen as creating a solid Russian basis in the Balkans, while many characterized it as an expected result of the attractiveness of the Montenegrin market, combined with the closeness and traditional friendship between two countries. Some projects have been implemented while others were suspended due to the economic crisis or illegal building. Russian "Lukoil" participated in the privatization of the Montenegrin company "Montenegro bonus", a petrol stations network, with a plan to open additional 15 gas stations.

However, it is important to mention one case of privatization that left serious consequences on Russia-Montenegro relations. In 2005 a majority package of shares of the KAP (Aluminum factory and bauxite mine) was sold to the Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska. The deal was endorsed by the Kremlin and Russian officials - speaker of Duma Boris Gryzlov and then Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu visited the factory.<sup>13</sup> After the collapse in global aluminum prices in 2009, the government was forced to buy back nearly 30 percent. Nonetheless, Central European Aluminum Company CEAC still controlled the company's management and had led KAP into debts. In addition to buying back half of Deripaska's KAP stake after the price collapse in 2009, the Government also provided guarantees for a 132 million Euro loan that Deripaska took from Hungary's OTP bank and Russia's state-controlled VTB bank.<sup>14</sup> The whole case ended up at arbitration tribunal of the Vienna-based UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) with Deripaska filing a suit against Montenegro in front of the arbitration court for 93 million euros.<sup>15</sup> Deripaska's law suit was eventually rejected by the court but the company, which once employed 5,000 workers ended up in bankruptcy in 2013, with 180 million Euros of debts.<sup>16</sup> The ultimate goal of Russian economic presence in MNE was to establish firm ground for future political acting. As a group of authors recently claimed in the publication *The Kremlin Playbook*, Russia has cultivated an opaque web of economic and political patronage across the region in order to advance its interests by influencing policy making.<sup>17</sup>

12 "The Russian Economic Penetration in Montenegro", European Parliament, Briefing Paper, Brisel, Dec. 2007.

13 "Montenegrin Aluminum Plant's Woes Cast Geopolitical Shadow", Radio Free Europe, July 15, 2013,

<https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-russia-aluminum-plant/25046657.html>

14 John Helmer, "Oleg Deripaska's Newest Disappearing Trick - En+ Share Price Dives After Prospectus Draws No Commercial Demand; Vtb Required To Finance Chinese Share Buyer", November 12, 2017, <http://johnhelmer.net/oleg-deripaskas-newest-disappearing-trick-en-share-price-dives-after-prospectus-draws-nocommercial-demand-vtb-required-to-finance-chinese-share-buyer/>

15 Arbitration in Vienna dismissed the claim of the company Mr. Deripaska to Montenegro, Russia News Today, January 16, 2017, <https://chelorg.com/2017/01/16/arbitration-in-vienna-dismissed-the-claim-of-the-company-mrderipaska-to-montenegro/>

16 "Russian Billionaire Sues Montenegro Over Lost Investment", Balkan Insight, December 7, 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/russian-tycoon-deripaska-sues-montenegro-over-investment-loses-12-07-2016>

17 Conley, H, Mina J, Stefanov R, Vladimirov M, "The Kremlin Playbook", Center for strategic International Studies, October 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/kremlin-playbook>

## Russian Close Ties with Serbian Church in Montenegro

Russian attempts to establish Montenegro as a zone of their economic interest and influence were not the only ways of trying to gain influence. During the last 8 years, numerous associations of Russian-Montenegrin friendship were established; the powerful Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro intensified cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church: resulting in three Russian Orthodox churches being built, and an anti – NATO movement was established.<sup>18</sup> Wisely using the momentum in which Montenegrin society is divided between national Montenegrins that voted for the referendum, and those who consider themselves Serbs, Serbian Church and its leading man in Montenegro, Serbian Orthodox Church bishop Amfilohije Radovic used close ties to Russian representatives in Montenegro and in Serbia to obstruct Montenegro's path to NATO.

Radovic was an honorable guest in numerous events dedicated to the concept of military neutrality of Montenegro and organizing referendum about entering NATO. He even gave a blessing in May 2016, when one of the leaders of the opposition Democratic front, Milan Knezevic, signed a Declaration about cooperation with Putin's Unified Russian Party. According to the Declaration, they will work together on creating an alliance of neutral sovereign states of Southeast Europe, and suspension of the sanctions to Russia.<sup>19</sup> Serbian Church even gave an Order of the Holy Emperor Constantine to the director of the Russian Institute for Strategic Research Leonid Rešetnikov, for **"nurturing and spreading of Orthodoxy"**.<sup>20</sup> Rešetnikov was one of the loudest critics of Montenegrin accession to NATO. During Rešetnikov's book promotion in 2014, bishop Radovic cursed all of those "who are not loyal to Russia" with short message that "living flesh will come of their skin" if they don't obey this.<sup>21</sup>

18 Đuranović, Draško, 2014, "Kad Moskva pozove"; April 16, 2014, Portal Analitika,

<http://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/142605/kad-moskva-pozove>

19 "DNP sarađuje sa Putinovom partijom: Deklaracija potpisana uz blagoslov Amfilohija", Portal Vijesti, May 7, 2016,

<http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/dnp-saraduje-sa-putinovom-partijom-deklaracija-potpisana-uz-blagoslovamfilohija-886998>

20 "BRAĆA PO SPC ORDENJU": Vujanović, Rešetnikov, Velja Ilić", Portal Analitika, June 4, 2014,

<http://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/148996/arhiv>

21 Amfilohije osudio politiku Crne Gore prema Rusiji, Blic, April 29, 2014,

<https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/amfilohije-osudio-politiku-crne-gore-prema-rusiji/j2n5hnm>



## Harsh Reactions of The Russian Diplomacy in The Last Phase of Montenegrin Membership to NATO

Perhaps the most significant defeat for Russia was the decision Montenegro made when it gained independence - to pursue membership in NATO. One of the first reactions to Montenegrin ambition to join NATO was in November 2013, when the Russian ambassador in Serbia, Alexandar Chepurin, during a lecture to students in Belgrade, described the Montenegrin ambition to become a member of the Alliance as **"monkey business"**.<sup>22</sup> Due to Montenegrin aspirations, Russia continued to increase political pressure in 2014. The voice of their diplomacy became openly aggressive after Montenegro joined the sanctions that the EU imposed on the Russian Federation as a response to the illegal annexation of Crimea. As a reaction, the Russian ambassador gave a statement in which he said that "The Montenegrin choice "will have an appropriate place in the common history of the two countries", and that "Montenegro, regardless of what is the policy of the European Union, should avoid offending Russia."<sup>23</sup> That was just the beginning of Russia's harsh reactions to many decisions taken by Montenegrin government, which Russia claimed were directed against it. Anger and offensive statements were a sign that Moscow was not planning to give up so easily on their efforts to influence Montenegro. Several days after Prime Minister Đukanović met with the US Vice President Biden in Washington in April 2014, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted: "In his speech Milo Djukanovic allowed himself hostile statements against Russia, which in combination with joining EU sanctions create great disappointment."<sup>24</sup> Reacting to the Russian statement, a Montenegrin opposition delegation offered an apology to Moscow during their official visit, as well as an explanation that "The irresponsible statements of Djukanovic don't represent the majority will among Montenegrin citizens."<sup>25</sup> "The expansion of NATO to the former Yugoslav republics is an irresponsible policy and we in Moscow see it as a provocation"- warned the Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergei Lavrov, in September 2014.<sup>26</sup> The Montenegrin Ministry of foreign affairs reacted immediately with a statement that the country has a clear foreign policy commitment, which is in line with national interests and which is repeatedly stated in communication with Russian officials and other countries. During 2014 harsh, rude and inappropriate statements by the Russian officials were part of the everyday political life in Montenegro. From Sergei Lavrov, who stated in December 2016 for the Russian news agency Sputnik, that Montenegro "betrayed Russia,"<sup>27</sup> to Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Dmitry Rogozin, who said that, "Montenegro will regret its decision to join NATO."<sup>28</sup> These and other statements from Russia, a significant world player towards a small Balkan country, created a kind of political hysteria which became a yet another example of how Russia conducts high pressure of international relations.

22 "Čepurin: CG u NATO-majmunska posla", Portal Vijesti, November 23, 2013,

<http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/33180/cepurin-cg-u-nato-majmunska-posla-.html>

23 "Nesterenko:Sankcije Crne Gore biće dio zajedničke istorije", Radio Televizija Republike Srpske, May 13, 2014,

<http://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=112063>

24 Redžić, Nebojša, "Podgorica odgovara na kritiku Moskve", April 15, 2014,

[http://www.glasamerike.net/a/podgorica\\_moskva/1893750.html](http://www.glasamerike.net/a/podgorica_moskva/1893750.html)

25 "Rukovodstvo SNP-a putuje u Moskvu da se ogradi od Đukanovića, Danilović tvrdi da se premijer preigrao", April 15, 2014, Portal Analitika, <http://portalanalitika.me/clanak/142538/rukovodstvo-snp-a-putuje-u-moskvu-da-seogradi-od-jukanovica-danilovic-tvrdi-da-se-premijer-preigrao>

26 "NATO's planned Balkan expansion a 'provocation': Russia's Lavrov", Reuters, September 29, 2014,

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-balkans-russia-idUSKCN0HO11W20140929>

27 "Are we supposed to betray ourselves in order to avoid betraying Russia?", Portal CDM, December 15, 2016,

<https://www.cdm.me/english/trebali-da-izdamo-sebe-da-ne-bi-izdali-rusiju-2/>

28 "Statement by Montenegro's Foreign Ministry regarding DPM of Russia Dmitry Rogozin's claims", Government of Montenegro, January 13, 2016, <http://www.gov.me/en/News/156731/Statement.html>

Some of those statements came from the Director of the Russian Institute of Strategic Research and ex KGB agent in Serbia, Leonid Resetnjikov, who was fired by Putin less than a month after the failed attempts on life of Djukanovic in Montenegro. While he was commenting an attempt of a terrorist attack on a Russian television station TV (24. November 2016), in a political talk show "Russian response" Resetnjikov said that he believes there can be bloodbath in Montenegro. " <sup>29</sup> This individual also invited Russian tourists to boycott Montenegro during the summer season and **"not to leave money to Djukanovic"**. The same TV show hosted an opposition leader from Montenegro, Milan Knezevic. During the live appearance, right before Knezevic started to explain the decision of the opposition parties to boycott the Parliament in the upcoming period, the host of the show asked him, **"How are you dealing with the difficult situation, our brothers? Are you being tortured? Our hearts suffers because of what you are going through."** The main title on the screen was, **"War in Montenegro"**. Knezevic used the opportunity to call for help from the Russian state to save them from Djukanovic and NATO. It is worth mentioning that this TV station is owned by the Russian tycoon of Constantine Malofeyev, who is also a great admirer and friend of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Malofejev, who got a blessings of the bishop Amfilohije Radovic, is on the list of Russian citizens to whom the European Union frozen property and banned travel to EU countries. Malofeyev was also one of the main financiers of anti-Western and anti-NATO movement in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. <sup>30</sup>

The main opposition party in Montenegro, Democratic front, and their Russian partners, have collaborated for many years. During the massive opposition protests against Djukanovic and NATO, in October 2015, opposition leaders were publicly accused of receiving millions of dollars from Russia to organize protests, and later in 2016, for parliamentary elections campaign. <sup>31</sup> Two of them, Milan Knezevic and Andrija Mandic, travelled to Moscow in February 2016, with an aim to get instructions from their Russian financiers and mentors, such as the senior official of Unified Russian Party Sergey Zelezniak and the Vice president of the Russian parliament Pyotr Tolstoj, with whom they discussed in several occasions about organizing referendum about NATO, suspension of the sanctions to Russia and the withdrawal of the decision on recognition of Kosovo. <sup>32</sup> Knezevic even signed saw called Lovcen Declaration on mutual cooperation between Party of Unified Russia and the Democratic front of Montenegro, in which they clearly specified the necessity of improving the relations between Montenegro and Russia, creating an alliance of military-neutral states, and holding a referendum on the membership to NATO. <sup>33</sup>

29 "REŠETNJKOV: U Crnoj Gori može biti krvoprolića", Portal Analitika, November 27, 2016,

<http://portalanalitika.me/clanak/251798/resetnjikov-u-crnoj-gori-moze-biti-krvoprolica>

30 Frisches Geld aus Moskau, ZDF, 23.maj 2017, <https://www.zdf.de/politik/frontal-21/frisches-geld-aus-moskau100.html>

31 "Montenegro PM accuses Russia of financing anti-NATO campaign", Reuters, October 13, 2016,

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-montenegro-election-idUSKCN12D2QV>

32 "Mandić: Iscenirani, skandalozni državni udar u organizaciji Đukanovića produbio krizu u CG", Portal Vijesti, December 2, 2016, <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/mandic-iscenirani-skandalozni-drzavni-udar-u-organizacijidukanovica-produbio-krizu-u-cg-914484>

33 Uz blagoslov Mitropolita Amfilohija potpisana Lovčenska deklaracija, May 6. 2016, Demokratska narodna partija, <http://www.dnpcg.me/uz-blagoslov-mitropolita-amfilohija-potpisana-lovcenska-deklaracija/>

It came as no surprise when Russia expressed a great amount of interest during the 2015 opposition protests in Montenegro, organized by these two opposition leaders. Russian Ministry of foreign affairs gave an official statement during the protests in which they pointed out, **"a significant concern because of the excessive use of force over protesters in Podgorica."**<sup>34</sup> Only a month after signing Lovcen Declaration, same day when the process of ratification of the Protocol on Montenegrin accession to NATO, three opposition parties from Montenegro- New Serbian Democracy, People's Party, as well as the Socialist People's Party, signed the Unified Russia Declaration. The concept of the Declaration was establishing military alliance in the Balkan.<sup>35</sup> Opposition leaders haven't slowed down in order to stop Montenegro on its way to NATO even when membership in the Alliance has become certain. After the parliaments of Iceland and Slovenia ratified the Protocol on Montenegro's accession on June 8 2016, members of Democratic Front sent a public request to the parliaments of NATO countries not to approve Montenegro's access to the Alliance because, as they warned, "Montenegrin membership will cause an escalation of the political crisis in the country."<sup>36</sup> However, numerous Russian attempts to interfere into Montenegrin internal affairs culminated on the election night in Montenegro, on October 16, 2016. Two Russian citizens, members of the GRU service, planned to kill Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic and violently overtake Montenegrin Assembly together with a group of Serbian and Montenegrin citizens. This criminal organization was formed on the territory of Montenegro, Russia and Serbia with an aim of committing acts of terrorism, said the special prosecutor Milivoje Katnić during the press conference on November 6, 2016.<sup>37</sup> According to the special procecutor Katnić, the plan of this group who was led by Russian nationalists Vladimir Popov and Eduard Shishmakov (Russia' deputy military attaché in Poland who was expelled for spying in Russia), was to stop Montenegrin accession to NATO.<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact its citizens being prosecuted in Montenegro, Russia denied the allegations of involvement in events in Montenegro on October 16, 2016. Russia officially refused to offer any kind of assistance in this case, and to extradite Popov and Shishmakov, together with their accomplice, translator Ananije Nikic, who got an asylum in Russia.<sup>39</sup> Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov rejected accusations that Moscow was behind an unsuccessful attempt coup, saying that there was "no evidence", while spokesman for Russian President Dmitry Peskov reacted by calling the media reports **"irresponsible"**, saying that they were not supported by "concrete facts."<sup>40</sup> Special Prosecutor's Office indicted 25 people in this case, among them are leaders of the Democratic Front who lost their parliamentary immunity because of their involvement in this case- Andrija Mandic and Milan Knezevic. The trial is still on.

37 Katnić: Politička struktura iz CG uključena u pokušaj rušenja vlasti, November 6, 2016,

<http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/katnic-politicka-struktura-iz-cg-ukljucena-u-pokusaj-rusenja-vlasti-910641>,

38 John Schindler, "Putin's Balkan Terror Plot Exposed", Observer, February 27, 2017,

<http://observer.com/2017/02/vladimir-putin-kremlin-montenegro-nato-eduard-shirokov/>

39 Russia Says It Won't Extradite Suspect In Montenegro Alleged Coup Attempt, Radio Free Europe, November 1, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-extradite-montenegro-coup-suspect/28829550.html>

40 Montenegro accuses Russia of masterminding coup attempt, Fox News, February 20, 2017,

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/02/20/montenegro-accuses-russia-masterminding-coup-attempt.html>



The case of the state coup in Montenegro was an example of Russian hybrid warfare techniques in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Despite the fact international community accused Russia for a terrorist attack attempt in Montenegro, official Moscow continued to interfere in the internal affairs of Montenegro. Opposition leaders Mandić and Knežević travelled to Moscow in February 2017 where they met with Sergey Zeleznak, who supported the idea of organizing a referendum on Montenegro's accession to NATO.<sup>41</sup> But all attempts of stopping Montenegro on its way to NATO have failed and country became 29th member on June 5, 2017. However, Russian resentment for losing a strategically important coastal area has not stopped. Right after Montenegrin accession to NATO Sergei Lavrov said that "Montenegro's accession to NATO was a purely geopolitical project imposed on that country in exchange for Russo phobia."<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia stated that official policy of Podgorica due to the membership is **"hostile"** and that Russia will take **"reciprocal measures"** because of Montenegrin accession to NATO.<sup>43</sup> Those reciprocal measures took place soon in: blocking the import of Montenegrin wine "Plantaže" by Russian Federal Service for the oversight of consumer protection Rospotrebnadzor, allegedly because they found pesticides in Montenegrin wine<sup>44</sup>; declaring Montenegrin politician Miodrag Vuković for persona non grata after detaining him for over ten hours on Russian airport Domodedovo and putting him on a black list of Montenegrin citizens who's entrance in Russia is blocked due to the Montenegrin participation in posing sanctions to Russia in 2014<sup>45</sup>; in Russian propaganda and fake media reporting on how there is a "civil war going on in Montenegro" because of its membership to NATO, and how Russian citizens should avoid travelling there.<sup>46</sup>

The latest case of Russian meddling in Montenegro was during the 2018 presidential elections in Montenegro when it was discovered that the honorary consul of the Russian Federation in Podgorica, Boro Djukić, was one of the founder and financier of the party **"Prava Crna Gora"**<sup>47</sup>, whose president was one of the opposition candidates at the April's presidential elections. Djukić's work in Montenegro was suspended and he was expelled as a response of NATO allies to Russian poisoning of an ex spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia on British soil.<sup>48</sup>

41 Železnjak i crnogorska opozicija podržali referendum o NATO, February 2, 2017,

<http://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/zeleznjak-i-crnogorska-opozicija-podrzali-referendum-o-nato/pe0dlsm>

42 Moskva prijeti najmlađoj NATO članici, Radio Slobodna Evropa, June 6, 2017,

<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/rusija-prijeti-crnog-gori/28531462.html>

43 Moskva: Imamo pravo da odgovorimo na neprijateljsku politiku Podgorice, Portal Vijesti, June 5 2017,

<http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/moskva-imamo-pravo-da-odgovorimo-na-neprijateljsku-politiku-podgorice-941037>

44 Kremlin's Diplomatic Sour Grapes Leave Bad Taste For Montenegrin Winemaker, Radio Free Europe, June 4, 2017,

<https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-plantaze-winery-russia-ban-nato/28527931.html>

45 Montenegro's Accession to NATO is 'One of the Biggest Betrayals in History', Sputnik News, June 6, 2017,

<https://sputniknews.com/politics/201706061054357050-montenegro-nato-membership-consequences/>

46 Moscow Bad-Mouths Montenegro, But Russians Still Flocking To Its Beaches, Radio Free Europe, April 15, 2017,

<https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-russian-tourists-accusation-crime/28450918.html>

47 Đukić potpisao osnivanje Prave Crne Gore, Pobjeda, March 30, 2018, page 3

48 Crna Gora protjeruje ruskog diplomatu, Radio Slobodna Evropa, March 2018,

<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-protjeruje-ruskog-diplomatu/29130249.html>

## Conclusion

Today's Russia controlled, in an authoritarian manner, by Putin, has no desire to adjust to the changes in the world. In fact, a non-democratic society such as Russian seems to have no capacity for that. It is no secret in the modern world that some state actors are trying to influence others. It is, however, amazing, how Russia used its different capacities to make an impact on small country such as Montenegro. From the economic penetration in the moment when freshly independent country such as MNE needed investments, to building close ties with Orthodox Church and Montenegrin opposition, to the last phase of anger expressed by harsh diplomacy, propaganda and spreading false news, all that in order to prevent expansion of NATO. While commenting Russian meddling in US and MNE 2016 election in the article **"Russia threat is dead serious. Montenegro coup and murder plot proves it"**, US Congressman John McCain claims that plot in MNE organized by Russia should be a warning to every American that Russia's interference in US 2016 election shouldn't be treated as an isolated incident. "We have to stop looking at this through the warped lens of politics and see this attack on our democracy for what it is: just one phase of Putin's long-term campaign to weaken the United States, to destabilize Europe, to break the NATO alliance, to undermine confidence in Western values, and to erode any and all resistance to his dangerous view of the world", McCain says.<sup>49</sup>

It is expected that Russia will continue its attempts to reinforce its influence on the Balkans through economic measures. The Russian giant will turn to Montenegro's neighbor Serbia in the future, and will invest whatever it takes to keep them on a militarily neutral track. Their influence will remain strong in Serbia because of the strong influence of the Orthodox Church on politicians and decision process in that country. As long as Serbia remains trapped in the Kosovo myth and under strong guidance of the Church that cultivates centuries long brotherhood with mother Russia, neighbors will remain far away from the Western values. Those Balkan countries that still have leaders with war burden, who still feed their nations with false post-war facts and who are winning elections based on nationalism and separation won't have a chance to make a progress in the future as long as they stay on this path, and will always be target of the regime such as Russian one. What they seek is a combination of political instability, socio-economic crisis and nationalism. Only those countries with strong leadership focused on the Euro Atlantic vision and reforms within their society won't be potential partners to Russia. One thing is pretty clear: The Russian influence in Montenegro will be limited in future, as much as the Montenegrin opposition is. For what Moscow would like to achieve in MNE, and that is to overthrow proWestern government and bring pro-Russian opposition to power, they need strong opposition leaders in MNE. Luckily, the power of opposition in Montenegro is and it will remain negligible for quite time. As Mark Galeotti claims in his publication: **"Controlling Chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe"**, in countries where institutional safeguards are weak, Moscow will target the state, not in the expectation of being able to capture it, but to seek to influence it on specific issues – such as sanctions – and to work on nudging it into a more favorable position.<sup>50</sup> Despite of the fact that Montenegro still copes with the weakness of the institutions, and high Russian support within society, which was highly explored by the Russia in the last ten years, Montenegro remains the first country that openly opposed to the Russian hybrid warfare by starting the trial against those who organized a coup in 2016.

49 John McCain: Russia threat is dead serious. Montenegro coup and murder plot proves it., USA Today, June 29, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/06/29/russian-hacks-john-mccain-column/436354001/>

50 Galeotti M, Controlling Chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe, September 1, 2017, [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR228\\_-\\_CONTROLLING\\_CHAOS1.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR228_-_CONTROLLING_CHAOS1.pdf)





<http://www.gc4ss.org/>