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## THE SELF-PROCLAIMED MONTENEGRIN ORTHODOX CHURCH – A PAPER TIGER OR A RESURGENT CHURCH?

**Abstract:** During the early nineties, a so-called nationalized and traditional Orthodox community has been revived in the republic of Montenegro. This community calls itself the Montenegrin Orthodox Church and claims to be the representative of a resurgent form of the traditional Orthodox Church in Montenegro, which according to themselves vanished in the formation of Yugoslavia in 1918. Since 1993 they have therefore tried to claim local traditions, customs and places as part of their revitalized “Montenegrin” version of Eastern Orthodoxy.

Up until now the research on this community has been limited and has only focused on the – often violent – struggle between this community and the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral. It is difficult to grasp the reach and extent of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church in these studies – is the community a paper tiger or an actual existing and thriving church? This study will focus on a selection of religio-sociological key findings on this community in order to provide a more nuanced description of them. The emphasis will be on this community’s existence and a discussion about the degree to which the transformation of Montenegrin society and the independence of the Montenegrin state at large have contributed to the formation of this organization.

**Key words:** Montenegro, religion in Montenegro, Orthodox Church, nationalization on religion, religion post-communism.

### Society and religion in Montenegro

During the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia and the subsequent civil wars in the late eighties and nineties, the religious and social landscape in the republic of Montenegro changed. This change was first and foremost visible in the ethnic composition of the majority of the Slavic speaking population.<sup>1</sup> Until the early nineties, the majority of the Slavic speaking popula-

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<sup>1</sup> In the following article “ethnicity” and “nationality” will be used as translations of the Serbian word “narod”. This is a simplification, because the meaning of “narod” is much wider and more fluid, see Kolstø, 2014.

tion identified themselves as being Montenegrins and only small minority saw themselves as either Serbs or Yugoslavs. This changed during the nineties as a significant proportion of Montenegrin citizens began to identify themselves as Serbs while the self-identification as Yugoslav slowly vanished. This change was not due to any major migration or other sort of external changes in the country's demographical composition, but was rather a sign of the political turmoil and change in the republic.

**Table 1: Percentage of total population of Montenegro identifying themselves as Montenegrins, Serbs and Yugoslavs**

	1981	1991	2003	2011
Montenegrins	68.50%	61.86%	43.16%	44.98%
Serbians	3.32%	9.34%	31.99%	28.73%
Yugoslavs	6.46%	4.25%	0.00%	-

Source: Montestat

The period from 1986 to 1999 when dissolution and civil wars shaped new states in the Balkans a distinct Montenegrin nationalist movement began to rise. This movement found fertile ground in the Montenegrin society in the early nineties – as other nationalistic movements did throughout the Balkans. The national movement's primary objective was a detachment of the former Socialist Republic of Montenegro from the Serbian state. The independence of the Montenegrin state was crucial, according to this movement, in order to preserve the distinct Montenegrin national identity from its Serbian counterpart. At the same time, the rise of Serbian nationalism also influenced Montenegrin society. Several Serbian nationalists argued that the Montenegrin majority population and the Orthodox population were Serbs, thereby denying that the Montenegrin identity was something more than a mere *toponym* (referring to the name of a place). A large group of Slavic-speaking Montenegrin citizens therefore began to identify themselves as Serbs rather than Montenegrins. These two-opposite movements heavily politicised the question of Slavic-speaking Montenegrin citizens' ethnic identity (Morrison 2010, Džankić 2013, 2016).

During the same period, as several social scientists remarked, religion once more became a central hallmark and sign of a national identity (Lampe 2010). The question of national identity therefore also became a question of religious belonging. This manifested itself in the intertwinement between the Serbian nationalist movements and the Serbian Orthodox Church, which Klaus Buchenau aptly describes as a "sacralisation of the nation" (2012). Montenegrin nationalists therefore identified the local branch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, known as the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral, from hereon the MML, as the main opponent of Montenegrin independence. The Montenegrin nationalists accused the MML of being

the stronghold of Serbian nationalism in Montenegro.<sup>2</sup> A key point in the Montenegrin nationalist political program therefore became to counter the influence of the MML in Montenegro. A step towards this goal was the formation (or the so-called revival) of a Montenegrin Orthodox Church (mng.: "Crnogroska Pravoslavne Crkve", from hereon CPC) in 1993. The Liberal party played a major role in the formation of this church according to themselves and most external observers (Morrison 2009). Until 2000, the CPC was registered as a non-governmental organization and simply called the "The Religious Community of Montenegrins of Eastern Orthodox Confession" (mng.: "Vjerska zajednica Crnogoraca istočnopravoslavne vjeroipovesti"). Along with the formation of this organisation, the Liberals also helped to establish a whole branch of Montenegrin political and cultural institutions, such as "The Cradle of Montenegro" (founded in 1993, mng.: "Matica Crnogorska") and the Dukljan Academy of Science and Arts (founded in 1999, mng.: "Dukljanska Akademija Nauka I Umjetnosti"). The formation of these "pro-Montenegrin" organizations coincided with a watershed in Montenegrin politics in 1996–97. The former monolithic socialist party split into two groups, one pro-Montenegrin and the other pro-Serbian. The pro-Montenegrin party was formed under leadership of then Prime Minister Milo Đukanović, and has remained in control of the government since 1996 (Morrison 2009). Đukanović and his government endorsed the pro-Montenegrin organization, including the CPC, as part of his campaign for Montenegrin independence that culminated in a referendum in 2006 after which Montenegro became an independent republic.

These political and cultural transformations in the Montenegrin republic were also noticeable in its religious demographics as table 2 shows.

**Table 2: Religious communities in Montenegro (adherents as a percentage of the total population)**

Religious community	1953	1991	2003	2011
Orthodox	45.84	69.12	74.23	72.07
Islam*	17.65	19.18	17.74	19.11
Roman Catholic	4.81	4.41	3.54	3.44
Atheist	31.46	1.6	0.96	1.24

Source: Bakrac 2012, p. 116

<sup>2</sup> The Montenegrin territory is at the present time part of two other Serbian eparchies as well, but the MML is the dominant voice for the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro – and hence the MML will be used as a label for the Serbian Orthodox Church within Montenegro.

\* Originally the category of Islam and Muslims were separated in the official census, but the Islamic Community strongly rejected this division and their reaction resulted in the merging of the categories and an official apology from the Statistics Agency.

Montenegro's religious demographics changed remarkably from the eighties until the last census in 2011. The major change was that the largely secular and non-religious majority population became mostly religious within a few years, which was a trend throughout the Yugoslav republics. According to a study, only 45% of the total population in all Yugoslav republics in 1984 declared that they were religious believers (Perica 2002). Seven years later in 1991 this number had risen to 91.6% in Montenegro (Montestat). The change is mainly due to the close connection between religion and national identity which is characteristic of the post-Yugoslav period in the Balkans (Bakrač 2012). The revival of religion in Montenegro was similar to the changes seen in Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia (Bakrač & Blagojević 2013, Morrison 2009, Buchenau 2012). The CPC was born out of this religious revival process and it is regarded to have been at an early stage in the nineties as a manifestation of growing national self-awareness amongst Montenegrins (see Bieber 2003, Šistek 2010, Kube 2012, Jelena Džankić 2014 & 2016).

### Studies of the CPC

The CPC has been studied in a few social scientific articles (Morrison 2009, Šistek 2010, Kube 2012, Jelena Džankić 2013 & 2014a & 2014b & 2016 and Troch 2014). The main findings throughout these studies are that the CPC is – in various wording – a Montenegrin nationalist organization that promotes the idea that Montenegro has a separate culture, language, ethnicity and religion. Most of the studies are based on newspapers and online articles and a few site visits. All of the mentioned studies do not deal with the concrete social-religious formation of the organization in detail. This is mostly because it is not the subject of their studies, but it nevertheless leaves a blind spot. A second noticeable thing in these studies is that they deal with the CPC as a homogenous organization that has remained unchanged throughout the post-Yugoslav period. Finally the focus of most of the studies is on the time before and during the crucial stages of the Montenegrin way to independence. The has left the period after 2006 unexamined. In the following, the CPC will be described differently and hopefully this will provide a more nuanced picture of it. The first and foremost aspect that needs to be dealt with in order to determine the CPC's social-religious role in Montenegrin society is the determination of a few basic structures of the organization. These structures are basic things such as the location of the churches, the demographics of the community, the major events and conflicts the CPC has been involved in and what the community thinks of itself. This will provide a point of departure into a discussion of the CPC's place in Montenegrin society.

This study is mainly based on my own field-work, interviews and site visits in 2011, 2013 and 2014, combined with the CPC's own publications,

such as its constitution and its ecclesial magazine *Lučindan*. To some extent, other materials such as articles from the Magazine *Matica Crnogorska* and data from local NGOs and scientific papers will also be used to support the observations.

### The foundation of the CPC

The CPC was founded in Cetinje in 1993 in the days around St. Luke's day (18. October) and St Petar's death day (31 October). The foundation of the CPC took place in Cetinje and not in the capital of Podgorica, because Cetinje is the cultural capital of "Old" Montenegro and was, until the fall of the Montenegrin Kingdom in 1918, the city where its royal family resided. The city was originally founded by the noblemen Ivan Crnojević around a monastery where the Orthodox Metropolitan of Zeta (later Montenegro) took residence after the Ottoman invasion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The region around Cetinje (called Katunska nahija) is, according to the 2011 census, inhabited to a large extent by people who identify themselves as belonging to the Montenegrin ethnicity and who vote for the parties that support Montenegrin independence. The CPC is claimed to be a revival of the Orthodox Church organization that existed in the historical Kingdom/Principality of Montenegro until it was absorbed into the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1920 after Montenegro became a part of the new Kingdom for Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in 1918. The dismantling of the Montenegrin Kingdom and church is a highly controversial subject in Montenegro, where pro-Montenegrins claim that both things were done illegally by the Belgrade government and its army (see Sekulović 2010). During the period of the Socialist Republic of Montenegro (from 1945 to roughly 1989), there were a few instances where the Orthodox clergy in Montenegro expressed the wish to form a local Montenegrin Orthodox Church as the case was in Macedonia. The Serbian Orthodox Church continually denounced these claims and argued that the wish had been nurtured by anti-Orthodox attitudes from the communist regime (Alexander p. 169, 180). The wish to form an independent (called autocephaly) Montenegrin Orthodox church is therefore not a new invention.

### *The CPC's churches and religious sites*

According to various sources, the CPC has an estimated 10–15 churches and at least one monastery in Old Montenegro. The sources range from the CPC's Wikipedia page, their magazine *Lučindan*, my own fieldwork and Jelna Džankić's studies (2016). It is estimated that there are between 571 and 650 Orthodox churches in Montenegro and the MML owns the rest as well as at least 60 monasteries in the Montenegrin territory (Džankić 2015, p.

123, Buchenau 2003, p. 110). Most of the CPC's churches are found around the village of Njeguši near Cetinje. Njeguši is the birthplace for the clan of Petrović-Njegoš, who ruled Montenegro from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until 1918. The precise number of churches and monasteries is uncertain because the CPC frequently use ordinary houses (and refers to them as churches) or open fields as places for religious services (Buchenau 2003). A few of the churches are old religious buildings, said to belong to the clans of Njeguši or Cetinje, while others are converted or restored buildings.

Until now the CPC has only built one new church, which is found in Cetinje and named after Ivan Crnojević. The CPC does, however, lay claim to a number of buildings currently owned by the MML, and have tried on several occasions to forcefully take possession of them. Most of these disputed buildings are in Old Montenegro and especially in the city of Cetinje. The CPC has also, without any confrontation so far, laid at least a cultural claim to an Islamic and a Roman Catholic site. The Catholic site in question is the man-made island and the church on it devoted to the Lady of the Lake (mng.: "Gospa od Skrpjela") in the bay of Kotor. This site is devoted to a local holy woman and she is venerated in a ritual performed by the local inhabitants of the bay. The Islamic site in question is the shrine on the mountain Rumija devoted to a saint venerated by several Orthodox churches as well as the local Catholics and Muslims. Each year a local ritual is performed by all communities in order to venerate the saint. The CPC sees these two sites, along with the historical persons and the ritual connected with them, as genuinely Montenegrin and therefore a part of the CPC.

### *The CPC's clergy and ecclesial organization*

According to the CPC itself, its clergy consists of three *vladikas*, ten priests and one deacon (mng.: "trojicu vladika, deset svještenika i jednog đakona", Lucindan 2009, p. 77). Compared to this the MML had at least an estimated 60 priests and 160 other forms of ecclesial personnel in 2003 (Buchenau 2003) and the numbers have probably risen since then. However, it should be remarked that Alexander Stella (1979) reports that in 1979 the total numbers of MML priest (18) was equal to the number of CPC clergy today.

Noticeably, the CPC calls its bishops *vladikas* and not *episkop* or *metropolitans* in its more informal texts. The title of *vladika* means ruler and is often translated to bishop-prince. The Metropolitan of Cetinje from around the 16<sup>th</sup> century used the title to designate the double nature of his office as both a secular and religious leader. The title of *vladika* is only used loosely and in the official "constitution" of the CPC (Ustav Crnogorske Pravoslavne Crkve, 2009) the religious "leader" of the CPC is referred to as the Archbishop of Cetinje and the Metropolitan of Montenegro (mng.: "Arhiepiskop Cetinjski i Mitropolit Crnogorski", Paragraph 9, 2009). This title is very similar to the head of the MML. The CPC's hierarchical order begins

with the Metropolitan and has six additional levels ranging from the bishop's council to parish councils. Beside the hierarchy of the clergy, the line of management from the council of the Metropolitan down to each parish church is also established (Paragraph 7, 2009). The constitution of the CPC explains in details the scope of the church's works. It ranges from what could be characterized as traditional Christian work, such as formal procedures of election of bishops (Paragraph 16.17–18, 2009) and more general Christian work, such as "*keep and defend the purity of Christian Orthodox teachings on faith and morals*" (mng.: "Čuva i brani čistotu hrišćanskoga pravoslavnoga učenja o vjeri i moralu", Paragraph 16.6, 2009) and maintaining internal unity (Paragraph 16.3). In addition to this traditional Christian service, the CPC also defines its work as preserving, protecting and devoting attention to the Montenegrin ecclesial and historical materials, saints, texts etc. (Paragraphs 16.8, 17.23–24, 18.2–5, 2009). The CPC is divided up into the following dioceses/episcopates (mng.: "episkopije", Paragraph 23):

- The Archbishopric of Cetinje, consisting of the Katunska nahija.
- The Episcopate of Duklja, consisting of the capital of Podgorica, the city of Danilograd and the ruins of the city of Duklja.
- The Coastal episcopate, centered in the city of Kotor and entailing all of Montenegro's coastland (the Littoral).
- The Episcopate of Ostroški – Niksic, centered in the city of Niksic and its upland. The episcopate lays claim to the monastery of Ostrog, which is currently owned by the MML.
- The Episcopate of Bjelopljaska, centered in Bijelo Polje and including the northern Montenegrin municipalities.
- The Diaspora Episcopate.

One can see that the CPC's internal division follow the borderline of the republic of Montenegro and most of the episcopates are built around the division of municipalities of Montenegro. This is in grave contrast with the MML, which only covers Old Montenegro and the coastland (the Littoral). The northern and western parts of Montenegro are included into other Serbian eparchies (episcopates) – namely the "Mileševska" and the "Budmilje and Niksic" eparchies, which also include territories in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. The Budmilje and Niksic eparchy was restored in 2001 and the Mileševska eparchy in 1999 (Džankić 2016, p. 143).

Furthermore, the constitution of the CPC also contains a section on the criteria one has to fulfill in order to become a bishop. This indicates the ideal form a senior member of the CPC clergy should be like. The constitution states that a bishop in the CPC needs to be at least 30, have a higher theological education and be devoted to the church and the people/nation (mng.: "crkve I naroda", Paragraph 24.5). He needs to be born in Montenegro and be a citizen (this does not apply to a bishop of the diaspora). The



episcopal office is thus reserved for Montenegrin citizens who are devoted to serving the people/nation.

### Who are the members?

There are no official records nor a standardized national census providing a precise estimate of the number of members or Orthodox believers that adhere to the CPC. One could assume that there is a close correlation between being a member of the CPC and identifying oneself as a Montenegrin (Džankić 2014). The members of the CPC could therefore be limited to the group of people in Montenegro that identify themselves as Montenegrins. This is 45% of the total population, which is roughly 300,000 persons according to the 2011 census (Montestat 2011). This is the absolute maximum number of persons that the CPC could appeal to within Montenegro.

A qualified estimate of the total number of members could be found in the empirical research on the political landscape of Montenegro conducted by the Montenegrin Center for Democracy and Human Rights (Centar za demokratiju i ljudska prava, shortened to CEDEM). Over the past decade, CEDEM has continuously conducted two to three minor polls each year. These polls include from time to time questions regarding the religiosity of Montenegrin citizens. Two of their polls, from 2009 and 2015, show the percentage of Montenegrin citizens that identify themselves as members of the either the CPC or the MML (see table 3, CEDEM).

**Table 3: Percentage of respondents that belong to the MML or the CPC**

	MML	CPC
2009	52.20%	21.70%
2015	52.30%	15.60%

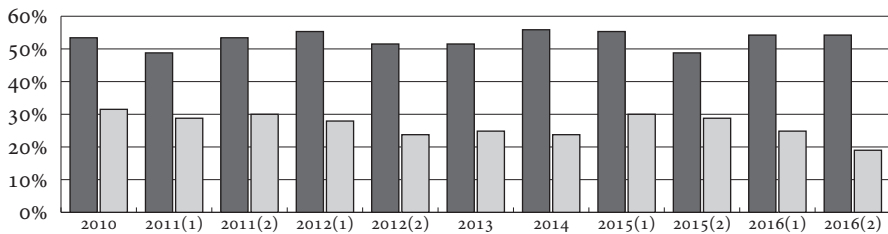
*Source: Centar za demokratiju i ljudska prava, Montenegro*

These two polls indicate that the Orthodox Christians in Montenegro, which make up 72% of the total population according to the 2011 census, are divided between the MML and the CPC. The majority of the population (52–53%) which is roughly two thirds of all Orthodox believers, attest that they belong to the MML, while the remaining minority, which is between 16–22% of the total population and approximately a third of Orthodox believers in Montenegro, belongs to the CPC. If these polls are crossed with the 2011 census, they thereby indicate that almost 50% of those Montenegrin citizens that identify themselves as ethnic Montenegrins, do not support the CPC but the MML. This information suggests that half of Montenegrins connect their national identity with their religious affiliation, while the other half doesn't. The two polls indicate therefore that approximately 150,000 Montenegrins in Montenegro are members of the CPC. This number

seems, however, to be an overestimation considering the size of the clergy and the number of churches belonging to the CPC. This overestimation could be based on the fact that the respondents had to choose between the CPC and the MML, which forced them to take a stand that they might not have taken otherwise. The polls were also conducted with a minor group of respondents (aprox. 1,000 persons) and might therefore not precisely reflect the scale of the CPC. Furthermore, the polls might not show the actual number of members but rather the size of the population that passively supports the CPC without actively engaging in CPC activity.

This estimation flickers a bit further when one takes another line of observation from CEDEM into account. CEDEM has also asked on a regular basis if Montenegrin citizens "trust" in specific institutions, such as the parliament, the military, the MML and the CPC. This provides a long series of observation displayed in figure 1.

**Figure 1: Percentage of respondents that "trust" in the MML and the CPC from 2010 to 2016**



*Source: Centar za demokratiju i ljudska prava, Montenegro*

The median is 52.7% for the MML and 27.6% for the CPC for all observations from 2010 to 2016. The median reveals that, statistically speaking, 27.6% of the total population "trust" the CPC as an institution. This could be interpreted as support. This percentage of supporters is not far from the estimation of the number of members in CEDEM's other polls. This underlines perhaps that table 3 shows the percentage of passive supporters of the CPC rather than its actual members.

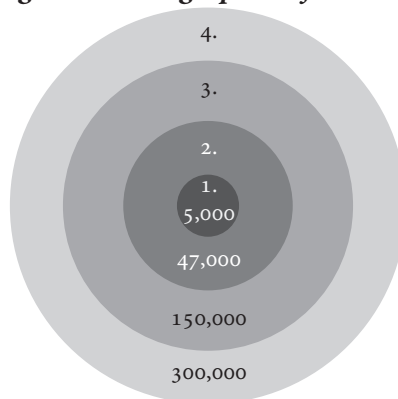
A correlation to CEDEM's polls is another poll from 2011 which was designed by a research group (Kolstø 2016). This 2011 poll indicates a somewhat different picture. In this poll, less than ca. 16% of the ethnic Montenegrin population identify themselves with the CPC. This is far less than the estimation from CEDEM. In contrast to this small group, the majority of ethnic Montenegrins, which is 58%, would rather describe themselves with the rather bland label of "Eastern Orthodox". The 58% thereby signal that they belong to neither the MML nor the CPC. This 2011 poll therefore estimates the total number of CPC members around ca. 47,000, if it is crossed with the 2011 census. A conservative estimate may therefore be that ca. 47,000

persons are firm and loyal members of the CPC, while at least 150,000 people in Montenegro sympathize with the CPC on some level.

A further correlation to these numbers is found in the budget of the CPC from 2009. Here, the CPC's treasury informs that 4,265 payments have been made to the CPC. (Lucindan 2009, p. 69): 2,800 from legal entities and 1,465 from physical persons (mng.: "2.800 pravna lica i 1.465 fizička lica"). It is not made explicit what those two labels cover, but a qualified guess is that *fizička lica* is literally a single person donating and that *pravna lica* covers families, clans, villages or organizations of some sort. This provides enough information to assume that at least 4,265 persons have made the choice to donate money to the CPC. This group – combined with the clergy and other officials – could be considered as the core base of believers for the CPC.

In total, the sources mentioned above could be used to estimate the total size of the CPC. First and foremost there seems to be a base of firm and active believers comprising approximately 5,000 individuals. Secondly, there is a group of ca. 47,000 persons that belong to the CPC, which is 16% of all ethnic Montenegrins. Thirdly, around ca. 150,000 persons in Montenegro somewhat sympathize with the CPC. The size of this last group is perhaps the most difficult one to determine. The polls from CEDEM suggest that the group is between 16 and 30% of the total population. Finally, there are ca. 300,000 persons in Montenegro to whom the CPC could appeal to. The numbers mentioned above are estimations based on the demographics of Montenegro. It should be noted that the number of firm believers might have been higher during the formation of the CPC. Morrison reports that 15,000 people showed up to the foundational celebration of the CPC in Cetinje in 1993 (2009, p. 131). These 15,000 must have been strong supporters of the CPC and could be characterized as the core members of the early CPC.

**Figure 2: Demographics of the CPC**



Key: 1: The firm believers; 2: Those that identify themselves with the CPC; 3: Those that sympathize with the CPC; 4: Those that the CPC can appeal to

## The recent history of the CPC

The CPC was formally founded in 1993, but has existed roughly since the All-Montenegrin National Synod in 1991 and functioned as an NGO until its official recognition in 2000. Below is a list of the most significant events in the recent history of the CPC.

*Table 5: List of events relating to the CPC 1991–2013*

Year	Event
2013	October: Celebration of Njegoš
2010	20 January: Clash at Church of St. John the Baptist in Bajice
2008	October: Meeting with the Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Moldavian non-recognized churches
2007	18 April: Clash between CPC and MML supporters at Cetinje monastery
2005	May: The MML build the controversial Rumija church
	Easter: The CPC receives greetings from the Prime Minister of Montenegro.
2000	January: Official recognition by the Montenegrin state
	17 January: Clash between CPC and MML supporters at Donji Kraj church
1997/98	The election and elevation of vladika Dedic/Mihailo
1996	The death of the first vladika, Abramovich
1993	31 October: The founding of the CPC on St. Petar's death day
	12 July: Clash between CPC supporters and a Serbian armed militia on St. Petar's day in Cetinje
1991	6 January: The All-Montenegrin National Synod
	January: The first badjnak

The recent history of the CPC is centered around two crucial periods. The first one is the early nineties (1991–1993) where the CPC became established as a spearhead for the Liberals and Montenegrin nationalists in their reaction towards the MML. A central event was the bloody St Petar's day, where a Serbian armed militia started shooting at a Montenegrin demonstration in Cetinje. This event convinced many locals in Cetinje that the MML stood in the way of the Montenegrin nationalist movement and that consequently the CPC needed to be founded in order to counter the MML (Morrison 2009). Following its foundation in 1993, the CPC struggled to become an established community and put its organization into place. A significant amount of energy was expended to secure the transferal of the office of Metropolitan from the first vladika Abramovich to the second vladika Mihailo.

The second crucial period for the CPC began in 2000 when the confrontation between the MML and CPC was put to the test. The recognition of the CPC in that year became a point of departure for a CPC-lead

campaign which sought to take back all Montenegrin shrines built before 1920. This period culminated in 2007 shortly after the referendum without the CPC being able to overtake any shrines owned by the MML. The CPC leadership seemed to have hoped that Montenegrin independence would pave the way for their control over the central churches and monasteries in Montenegro. Instead of being welcomed by the Montenegrin authorities, they were, in stark contrast to their expectations, confronted by a Montenegrin police force protecting the MML on 18 April 2007. Following 2007, the CPC has been stabilized and institutionalized with a new constitution, the rebuilding of churches and a continual presence at official state events, such as the celebration of Njegoš in 2013.

This timeline is to a large extent reflected in the writings of the church and their supporters. The majority of texts defending the church in pro-Montenegrin magazines, such as the *Matica crnogorska* or the CPC's own publication *Lučindan*, are dated from around 2000 and up until a few years after the 2006 referendum.

### The cultic and ritual praxis of the CPC

In general, the CPC invokes Christian language, holidays and rituals as part of the clergy's praxis which is described in details in the magazine *Lučindan*, such as Metropolitan Mihailo's greeting to the CPC at Easter (Lučindan 2013). To the extent that is visible in its outlet, the CPC should be characterized as a Christian community. There is, however, often a paucity when it comes to biblical references, which is perhaps more due the lack of deep theological training than an expression of a theological stand. It is hard to determine if this form of Christianity is a deep commitment to the Christian faith or simply a structural and cultural garment for the community.

Beside the traditional Christian structures, rituals and holidays, the CPC's praxis is based on a revivalist interpretation of what Montenegrin Christendom should be like. An example of this is the use of the title *vladika* rather than the title of bishop or metropolitan. *Vladika* invokes a local tradition of Christian rule, rather than the long episcopal succession expressed in the title of bishop.

The CPC's main national characteristic is also found in the so-called "sainted Montenegrin cult" (mng.: култу Црногорославља), which consist of a list of saints that the CPC venerates in particular. These saints are especially bond to the history of the Montenegrin lands and the former medieval states of Duklja and Zeta. However, two of the saints are also venerated by the MML and other Orthodox churches. The CPC describes the essences of these saints as the fight for (Montenegrin) freedom and they are used as ideal-figures exemplifying the Montenegrin's right to an independent state (Lučindan 2009, p. 37). The five most central are as follows:

**Table 6: List of national saints**

Name of cult	Historical person	Historical period	Known for
Vladimiroslavlja	Jovan or Ivan Vladimir, unknown family – perhaps Vojislavljević	Early medieval 990–1016	First ruler of the Montenegrin area. First locally known saint.
Vasilioslavlja	Vojislavljević – A line of rulers, the best known of which are Stefan, Mihailo I and Constantine Bodin	Early medieval 1034–1186	The ruling dynasty of independent Duklja. First local Slavic independent royal house – ousted by the Serbian house of Nemanjić.
Stefanoslavlja	Probably Stefan Piperski	Ottoman period Unknown birth – 20/21 May 1697	Local Montenegrin saint – founded the Čelija piperska monastery in Brda outside Podgorica.
Ivanoslavlja	Ivan Crnojević	Late medieval 1465–1490	Lord of the Zeta – Montenegrin state, founder of Cetinje and the Cetinje monastery.
Petroslavlja	Petar I Petrović-Njegoš	1748–1830	Sainted vladika of the Petrović-Njegoš dynasty of Montenegro. Modernized Montenegro and known as Petar of Cetinje.

Source: "Uloga Svjēštenstva", *Lučindan* 33, 2010, p. 83

This national characteristic of the CPC is also found in their calendar of religious celebrations. According to the CPC, their church celebrates most of the Christian and Eastern Orthodox holidays, such as Christmas, the Epiphany (19 January), the prayer to the Theokotos (14 October) and so on. The special CPC holidays are the following:

**Table 6: List of specific national holidays**

Name	Date (Julian/ Gregorian)	Refers to	Celebrated at
St. Basil of Ostrog	12 May / 29 April	The venerated founder of the monastery of Ostrog (near Danilograd)	Ostrog monastery
Holy Stefan Piperski	2 June / 20 May	The venerated founder of the monastery of Piperski (near Podgorica)	Piperski monastery

Holy martyr Vladimir of Duklja	4 June / 22 May	Jovan or Ivan Vladimir	Mount Rumija and city of Bar
Holy and just Ivana Crnojevića	4 July / 21 June	Ivan Crnojević	Cetinje monastery and churches
St. Peter from Cetinje, the Wonderworker	31 October (calender unknown)	Petar I Petrović-Njegoš	Cetinje monastery
Lučindan	18 October (calender unknown)	Luke's day	
Badjnak	Christmas (Julian calendar)		Cetinje main square
Petrovodan	29 June (calender unknown)	St. Petar I Petrović-Njegoš' birthday	Cetinje monastery

Source: "Praznici", *Lucindan* 37, 2010, p. 50

Noticeably, four of the local Montenegrin cults are turned into holidays and another one is added. One central feature of all the celebrated holidays is that the person venerated is bound to a very specific geographical and often physical space (e.g. a monastery). Most of these places are today controlled by the MML. The CPC underline, through their veneration, their claim on Montenegro's physical heritage through a spiritual argument (Saggau 2017a). One of the most central holidays and rituals is the badjnak. The badjnak is a local ritual – used throughout Eastern Europe. It is centered on the burning of a large Yule log (or sometimes just a bonfire) at Christmas Eve. Every year the MML and the CPC each hold a badjnak only a few hundred meters apart. The MML burns its logs in front of the monastery in Cetinje, while the CPC burns its logs in front of the last Petrovich-Njegoš palace in a central square in Cetinje. During the badjnak, nationalist songs are sung by both crowds and they wave Serbian or Montenegrin national flags. The reason the CPC continues to hold on to the date of the Badjnak is not only just a yearly provocation towards the MML. Christmas has a cultural history of its own in Montenegro. Three key historical events occurred at Christmas in Montenegro that made the holiday into a national and cultural event that transgresses the limited symbolism of Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The holiday is the center of Petar II Petrovich-Njegoš' (1813–1851) epic about his forefather vladika Danilo Petrovich-Njegoš. In the epic, Danilo leads Montenegrin Orthodox believers as they slaughter the Montenegrin Muslims that refuse to convert on Christmas. The so-called "cleansing" of Montenegro is a mythological (or some argue real) tale of Montenegrin freedom from the Muslim. In addition to this tale, the Montenegrins have on two other occasions risen to arms during Christmas. First and foremost in a Montenegrin national uprising during the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 in a so-called civil war. The second occasion was during Montenegro's occupation by Italian forces during the Second World War.

## A religio-social mapping of the CPC

So far this article has dealt with the basic structure of the CPC which provides some insights into the organization. In the following paragraph, these findings will be supplemented with a religio-social mapping of the CPC within Montenegrin society. Such mapping is based on a country's legal norms and its political discourse, which constructs structures through which the religious organizations can act. Such structures could be described as belonging to specific models describing the relationship between church and state. Silvio Ferrari, a professor of law and religion, maps such structures into three governing models. The first model is that of a *separation system*, where the state and religious communities are separated from each other – such as in the French laicity system. The second is called a *concordat system*, which is built on explicit agreements between state and church, such as in Spain. And the third system is called a *national church system* with established national churches, such as in Denmark or England (Ferrari 2002).

In the Montenegrin context, the relationship between the state and religious communities is not well described and there isn't a comprehensive legal framework in place. Various parties and religious communities strongly disagree on the matter and thus no new laws pertaining to religion have been passed since independence in 2006 despite a few failed attempts. The relationship between the state and the religious communities is therefore rather loose and only vaguely prescribed in the constitution and some minor by-laws on religious education, culture etc.

Montenegro's constitution (Ustav Crne Gore 2007) from 2007 is based on a Western model. Article 46 states that there is freedom of religion in Montenegro and that all "religious communities shall be separated from the state" (article 14). Article 14 explicitly declares the state to be secular. This is to some extent softened in other paragraphs where the constitution allows religious communities and individuals to exercise and express their religion as well as establish religious organizations with the support of the state. Religious organizations are also allowed to maintain contact with other religious organizations outside of Montenegro, such as the papal church. The by-laws on religion require that the religious communities register at a local police office, which will inform the Ministry of Interior about the registration. Being registered entitles organizations to own property, hold bank accounts and receive a tax exemption. There are twenty registered religious communities at the present time (International Religious Freedom Report 2015).

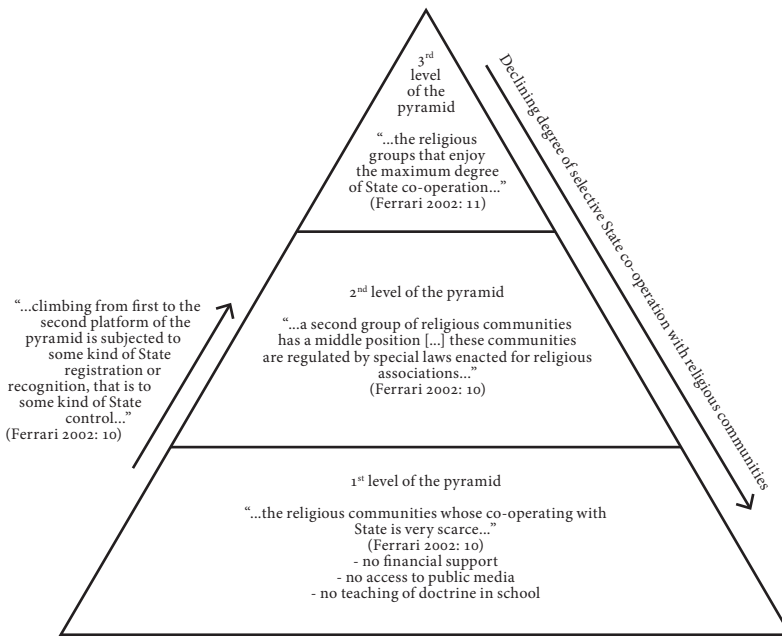
The Montenegrin state could, according to Ferrari's models, best be characterized as a separation system on a general level, where church and state have nothing to do with each other. However, the content of the some of the constitution's articles, some of the Montenegrin by-laws and the agreements between the state and some of the religious communities, points to the fact



that in practice the Montenegrin state formulates explicit agreements with religious communities.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that on a practical level, the Montenegrin church-state relationship is rather a concordat system according to Ferrari's models. This mixture of models seems partly to be the unintended side-effect caused by the lack of a comprehensive legal system for religion.

To further qualify the characterization of the relationship between church and state, Ferrari also introduces a "pyramid of priority" (see fig 3). The pyramid depicts the degrees of relations to and cooperation with the state. It reveals a compartmentalisation of religious communities in a religious landscape. The basic logic of the pyramid is that religious communities can increase their cooperation with the state, which in turn will increase their influence and positional power while at the same time subdue them to greater state control (Vinding 2013).

**Figur 3: The Silvio Ferrari pyramid of priority of selective state co-operation**



Source: Vinding, 2013, p. 44

The pyramid could be applied to the Montenegrin context to shed some light on the positions of the various religious communities in relation to the state. Close to the state are in fact the Muslim, Roman Catholic and Jewish

<sup>4</sup> See for example *The General Law on Education (Opšti zakon o obrazovanju i vaspitanju 2013)* and the formal agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Montenegrin state (*Catholics Temeljni ugovor Crne Gore i Svete Stolice 2011*). See Saggau, Pacariz & Bakrač, 2017.

communities in Montenegro. They inhabit the third level of the pyramid. These three communities have been able to form a direct agreement with the state about their rights, responsibilities and the resources that are available to them. Each of them is a minority religion and this status has perhaps provided them with the close link to the state. The Montenegrin government has been keen on preserving and protecting minorities in order to qualify for inclusion in the EU, and also as the government has heavily relied on the (non-Serbian) minority parties in parliament for support. The relation to the (non-Serbian) minorities has not been a major or controversial issue in Montenegro. The state's relationship to these minority religions must be understood to have undergone a process of general formalization after independence.

Most of Montenegro's other religious organizations including the CPC are to be classified in the second level of the pyramid. These organizations are registered and are allowed to own land and practise their religion, but none of them have a formal agreement with the state. Finally, the MML could be described as being between the second and the first level of the pyramid: on the one hand the MML are registered and exist under the same laws as the CPC, but on the other hand there are several unclear relations, especially when it comes to for example the right to property, religious education and the movements of clergy members between the former republics of Yugoslavia. Several high profiled cases, a series of lawsuits and accusations have, since the early 2000s, tainted the relationship between the current government and the MML (Morrison 2009, Radio Slobodan Evropa 2016). The degree of cooperation between the state and the MML could at best be described as minor and, likewise, the MML is only to a minor degree governed by the Montenegrin state. The MML is, however, subordinate to the Serbian Orthodox Church and therefore partly governed by the Serbian state in matters such as the education of priests etc. (Metropolitane 2013). Montenegro is still a young state and its legal framework is therefore still dynamic. The current government under the leadership of the Democratic Party of Socialists (mng.: Demokratska partija socijalista – hereon DPS) and the Montenegrin state are very much overlapping. Many state officials are party members. The individual relationship between various religious communities and high-ranking members of the DPS therefore forms the pyramid. This is unlike other states where these relations are much more formalized. The relations between the state and the communities – especially when it comes to the MML and the CPC – would very much change, if the opposition came into power.

In order to understand the CPC's place in Montenegrin society, one has to recall the two major religio-social characteristic of the CPC. They have first of all since their foundation been narrowly identified with the Montenegrin nationalist movement in all its aspects. The base of members is in Old Montenegro and this base only covers those that identify themselves

as “ethnic Montenegrins”, that is to say between 16 and 50% of all Montenegrins. Secondly, the CPC is therefore connected to pro-Montenegrin nationalist parties, such as the Liberals or the Social Democratic Party (mng.: *Socijaldemokratska partija*), and not directly to the DPS. This position partly explains why they inhabit the second level rather than the third in the pyramid of priorities. The CPC is not close enough to the DPS in order to obtain a status as a national church, and the DPS are very well aware that a substantial part of the electoral base (mainly moderate Montenegrins) are not members of the CPC. On the other hand, the DPS needs to recognize the CPC on some level because the DPS has historically relied on the Liberals and the Social Democratic Party to remain in power (Morrison 2009, p. 141). In contrast, the MML is identified as a branch of a Serbian cultural organization, which according to the DPS is alien to the Montenegrin state. This links the MML to the various Serbian-based opposition parties, which the DPS regards as its opponents. The MML and the DPS thus don't fully cooperate, which was put to the point in the discussion over the Lovćen site during the Njegoš jubilee in 2013 (Saggau 2017b).

This pyramid and state-models could be used to illustrate the dynamics in concrete situations like. The controversial Easter greetings to both the MML and the CPC by the DPS prime minister Đukanović in 2000. Traditionally, the head of the state would only greet the MML on Easter in the same manner as greetings are sent to the Muslim or Roman Catholic communities during their religious festivities. The seasonal greeting in 2000 was in contrast sent to both communities and was the first official greeting from a head of state to the CPC (Buchennau 2003). Shortly afterwards, it was followed by the official recognition of the CPC. The MML reacted harshly over this positive treatment of the CPC (Šistek 2010, p. 127). This event illustrates how the CPC moved up in the pyramid from the first to the second level expressed in the greeting and the recognition. They moved from being an unrecognized NGO into being a regulated religious community. The CPC became – on a social-religious and juridical-state level – an equal to the MML. The MML's harsh reaction was against the state's endorsing of the CPC rather than the greeting itself. It was against the juridical and societal equalization. The MML was not removed from the list of greetings, but kept their position in the pyramid. However, they were forced to share this position with the CPC and their positional power in the Montenegrin society became threatened.

### **The institutional form of the CPC**

The CPC's place and role in Montenegrin society is partly determined by how its members, its supporters and its opponents view the organization. In the following paragraph, these perspectives on the CPC will be treated.

The core believers and most ardent supporters view the CPC as an ecclesial organization characterized by Christian liturgy, priests, worships and canon laws. Several writings, such as in Goran Sekulović article "*Crnogorska identitetska prava i slobode*" (2010), argue that the CPC is an Eastern Orthodox Church and that it is a natural prolongation of the "Mother" church of Montenegro from before 1920. Their main arguments and their implications in a theological sense are treated elsewhere (Saggau 2014), but they leave very little doubt about their view on the CPC. Likewise the views of the MML and other pro-Serbian organizations, newspapers etc. on the CPC are quite clear. In short the MML views the CPC as a tool for the Montenegrin nationalist movement used in order to challenge the MML's status in Montenegro. The metropolitan of the MML, Amfilohije Radović, has written a short text called "*The Church as the Pillar and Stronghold of the Truth – The Question of Autocephaly and the Church*", which expounded this position on a theological level. Remarkably, most studies of the CPC reach the same conclusion as the MML (see Morrison 2009, Šistek 2010, Kube 2012, Jelena Džankić 2013 & 2014a & 2014b & 2016, and Troch 2014).

Booth perspectives on the CPC reveal elements of its form. Its members and close supporters treat the organization as a church in a religio-sociological sense. On the other hand, as the mapping showed, the CPC plays a cultural-political role for the Montenegrin nationalist movement that the MML criticizes the CPC for. However, these two views on the CPC do not reveal all of its features because they are crafted either in positive support or a negative response.

In contrast it might be more fruitful to understand the CPC organization religio-sociologically as a "new" revivalist religion. This does not mean that their content is new, but rather that they are a new religious organization and therefore act as such. Eileen Barker, a religio-sociologist, points out that adolescent religious organizations act almost in similar patterns, because they are both religious and new (2013). The most noticeable characteristics are that they are small in numbers, that their interactions are on a face-to-face level and that they are centered around one leader (often charismatic). They are highly unpredictable and their core members are (as many first-generation religious) very enthusiastic (Barker 2013, p. 14). The CPC holds all these traits, positions and attitudes that are characteristic for new religious movements. The CPC is small, centered around one leader and its members are very enthusiastic. Its members often argue in a traditionalist, a nationalist or a revivalist pattern, which are often bound together and inseparable.

With Barker's point in mind, it makes therefore perhaps much better sense to describe the CPC as a religious organization characterized as both new and revivalist. On one hand, its "newness" defines its size, its form of organization and its core members. On the other hand, its "revivalism"

defines the reuse of Montenegrin cultural and religious heritage, which appeals to Montenegrin citizens characterized as nationalist or traditionalist.

### **A paper tiger or a resurgent church?**

As the above socio-religious description and discussions point out, the CPC exists and enjoys to some extent the backing of the parts of the Montenegrin population. The CPC is still a minor community with only few churches, a minimum of ecclesial organization and clergy as well as a few faithful believers. It is hard to determine the extent of the impact of the community on the life of everyday Montenegrins, but it's safe to say that the CPC is very much embedded into the social life of Old Montenegro, the heartland of Montenegrin nationalism. Alice Forbess (2013) and Aleksander Zdravkovski and Kenneth Morrison (2014) note that especially in the period after the referendum in 2006 there has been a blooming of Montenegrin cultural awareness in Old Montenegro. The use of Montenegrin symbols, flags and songs has been predominant at social events. In that sense the CPC is part of a resurgent cultural and religious praxis for this group and in that area – which partly explains why its churches and claims to churches are limited to this area. Its place in this resurgent cultural movement is the background for its revivalist form of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

The CPC has to some degree been successful in claiming a religious role in the new state. This role is secured through a status as a religious community in Montenegro, but this position does at the same time not really challenge the MML. Therefore the CPC's threat to the MML is still just a paper tiger, because physically, demographically and financially the MML overshadows the CPC. It is only on paper that the CPC can challenge the MML without the full backing from the DPS and subsequently the state. Such backing would require overwhelming support from the Montenegrin majority to the CPC, and that seems highly unlikely according to the polls. The DPS is therefore not interested in challenging the MML seriously on behalf of the CPC, because it is too risky both financially, politically and could endanger the peaceful coexistence between Serbs and Montenegrins in the state. The DPS favors to maintain the status-quo. Most analysts have labeled the CPC as a nationalist agent rather than a church (Šistek 2010) and have called the community "ein Elitenprojekt" (Kube 2012, p. 130). This is true in that sense that the CPC only appeals to an elite group of Montenegrin nationalists, but, as the demographics show, a larger group of Montenegrins do sympathize with the project. The CPC's religious praxis appeal to a small but key group of Montenegrins that shape the large frame through which Montenegrins interpret their culture, history, language, religion and ethnicity. This does not mean that the large group of Montenegrins would in the long run becomes members of the CPC, but rather that they live and understand themselves in relation to the supporters of the CPC. It is one-sided

to only portray the CPC as nationalistic, because it also contains traits of being a revivalist, new and even traditional form of religion. The CPC contains all of these features due to the cultural and religious context it draws on. The CPC is a nationalist organization, which its cultic praxis points towards, but this is not the whole picture. The veneration of national saints and holidays reveals both the nationalism, the revivalism and the traditionalism at play when Montenegrin culture, places and historical persons take prominence in the CPC.

Interestingly, the recent history of the CPC mirrors the social and political changes Montenegro has been through since the collapse of Yugoslavia. The birth of the CPC out of the turmoil of the civil war in 1991–1995 foreshadowed the watershed in Montenegrin politics in 1996, where the DPS elite set out on the road towards independence. The point of no return politically and religiously came in 2000, when the DPS leader both renounced the union with Serbia and greeted the CPC as an equal to the MML. The road towards independence was paved. And finally, the period since the declaration of independence has been used on stabilization of the Montenegrin state and the CPC.

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