



## ARTICLE

# Ethnocultural Pluralism and Multiculturalism in Contemporary Montenegro: Lessons to Learn

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### ABSTRACT

The paper discusses successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in the context of Montenegro, viewed from the perspective of multiculturalism as a normative-legal model that this state adopted in relation to ethnic and national communities that inhabit its territory. Particular emphasis is placed on three different levels at which ethnocultural pluralism can be discussed, and the paper elaborates the issue of successful management at each of those levels. On the basis of available data, obtained by conducting relevant research and analysis of the applied model of multiculturalism, the paper delves into the key challenges of the process of transformation of Montenegrin society in the context of dominance of ethnonationalism.

### KEYWORDS

ethnocultural pluralism, multiculturalism, Montenegro, ethnic relations, identity

## Introduction

Successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in modern democratic societies is among the key challenges that these societies face. Ethnocultural pluralism varies in degrees and forms, depending on the type of ethnocultural communities that exist in particular countries. Modern migrations and globalisation processes render the issue of pluralism even more important. The United Nations estimates that the number of immigrants leaving their countries of origin for various reasons will only continue to grow (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Therefore, an increase in the degree of ethnocultural

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pluralism in modern democracies can also be expected. Simultaneously, in the sphere of developing international standards in the field of collective rights of minority national and ethnic communities, the process of globalisation seems to assert the dominance of the model of multiculturalism in modern democracies, given that these modern democracies are comprised of different ethnocultural communities. Of course, some countries are officially multicultural and the obligation to implement measures and mechanisms of this model is imposed by the constitution or laws. Other countries, although officially non-multicultural in the normative-political sense, still envisage legal and political solutions that enable ethnocultural communities to preserve their identity specifics and achieve full integration without assimilation. In that sense, they are also multicultural to a certain extent. Immigration is not the only challenge that multiculturalism has been facing; rather, there is also the issue of governing ethnocultural pluralism, which is based on existence of the so-called national minorities that are territorially concentrated and historically present on the territory of a certain country (Eriksen, 2002; Kymlicka, 2007, pp. 68–71; Mesić, 2006, p. 82).

The problem of successful management of ethnocultural pluralism from the perspective of needs of ethnocultural communities, as well as the interests of the social community as a whole, is mainly the subject of reflection and analysis at the state level. More precisely, theorists and researchers focus, to a great degree, on legal-political measures and mechanisms that the state envisages and introduces for ethnocultural communities and their members, in accordance with the unique characteristics of their position. Additionally, the Balkans and Montenegro are still dominated by the ideology of ethnonationalism (Danopoulos & Messas, 1997; Dyrstad, 2012). The reasons for the above are numerous and include a specific process of nation formation as well as the legacy of the authoritarian socialist order, which slowed down the process of individualisation and maturing of the society, while enabling the primacy of the collective principle<sup>1</sup>.

In determining the basic elements of the ideology of ethnonationalism, we start from the definition provided by Dušan Kecmanović (2014), one of the most relevant authors and researchers of ethnonationalism in the Balkans. He singles out the following most important characteristics of this ideology: simplification, dichotomisation, rigidity, demarcation, uniformity, degradation of the rational, anti-individualism (pp. 117–133). In short, according to Kecmanović, the ideology of ethnonationalism is based first on the simplification of a reality that is always complex, and then on the dichotomisation which

<sup>1</sup> On the formation of nations in the Balkans in the process of so-called *Vernacular mobilisation* or *etatization* of a nation that resulted in the creation of nations in an imperial, hostile environment without the help of the state, see (Smith, 1991). This type of national identity is historically much closer to the ethnic than the civic model of the national identity, more related to the assumed common origin, cultural elements, myths and religion than to the territory, state and legal-political components. As such, it is more introverted and emotionally rooted compared to the territorial, civic variant of national identity and it is much more susceptible to instrumentalisation and politicisation by political actors (Smith, 1991, 1995).

As a result of their different origin, i.e., their emergence in completely different and specific circumstances, these two types of national-state identities kept those differences in later periods of development. The ethnonational form of national identity remained dominant in the Balkan region, which is a very significant circumstance when it comes to attitude towards national minorities.

implies exclusive division into two sides, us and them, in which we cannot and must not be neutral, undecided. Achieving compromise, rapprochement and the search for a minimum common denominator that could connect us is considered a weakness and is contrary to the ethnonationalist view of the world. Furthermore, ethnonationalists insist on the notion of immutability of them as individuals but also of the communities to which they belong, as well as on the necessity of clear demarcation of identity, but also in every other sense. Kecmanović explains the degradation of rationality by the fact that ethnonationalist messages are intended more for the heart and emotions than the head (Connor, 1994, p. 85; Janjić, 2009, p. 21; Kecmanović, 2006, pp. 123–124, 2014, pp. 117–133).

In the context of management of ethnocultural pluralism in Montenegro and the rest of the Balkans, both in theory and the field of public policy, we note a lack of appreciation of the fact that ethnocultural pluralism can and should not just be the subject of attention at the *state level*. There were very few researchers who dealt with this topic in the Montenegrin context, and they mostly focused on the aforementioned level (see Vukićević, 2004). The fact that successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in democratic contexts depends on two additional levels, the level of *ethnocultural communities* and the level of *individual identities* of their members, is often overlooked. For the purpose of this paper, we distinguish between the three levels in a theoretical sense, fully aware of the fact that in practice they do not exist in the form of three separate strata. Thus, the distinction is made for theoretical and analytical purposes and aims to underline certain tendencies that are critical for successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in the Montenegrin context.

Additionally, it is important to provide a couple of terminological clarifications at the very beginning. The term *multiculturalism* is rather inconsistent and is used inconsistently in various scientific disciplines and by public actors, policy makers and members of political elites. It is most often used in a demographic sense, referring to the fact that several ethnic and national communities live in the same state<sup>2</sup> (Horton, 1993, p. 2). Another possible meaning of the term is normative-political, which offers a definition of multiculturalism as a political-legal model that a certain state adopts in order to enable legal-political and institutional solutions for full integration of ethnocultural communities into social and political life, while preserving their identity specifics (Nye, 2007, p. 111; Rex, 1996, p. 16; Silj, 2020, p. 2; Young, 2001, p. 116). In a broad sense, it is a part of the so-called politics of recognition (Parekh, 2004, p. 199).

We argue that imprecise use of the term, whereby it is being used to convey both meanings, should be avoided. The ambiguity often occurs not only in literature

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<sup>2</sup> There is no uniform agreement on the denotation of terms *ethnic* and *national community*. Some authors separate the notion of ethnic group from the notion of nations, considering the latter a modern phenomenon formed by the emergence of modern states, while others define national communities as those dominated by ethnic elements that have been reworked in the new circumstances of modern society, but continue to form the very core of national communities and provide them with emotional roots, a sense of historical continuity and a common collective destiny shared by all members of the community (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 4; Jenkins 1997/2001, p. 250; Llobera, 1994, p. 214; Tadić, 1999, pp. 8–15). Without intending to go into more detail in the analysis of differences and similarities between ethnic and national, we intend to use the term *ethnocultural community* for both aforementioned types of communities, considering it broad enough to include these types of communities and what they have in common.

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but also in the aforementioned use of the concept by public officials and members of the political elite. One possible solution to this problem is the proposal that the term *multiculturalism* should be used exclusively in the normative-political sense to denote the model of management of ethnocultural pluralism, which is accepted in different national contexts to different degrees, and involves the application of a range of legal and institutional solutions, measures and mechanisms that enable integration without assimilation. To denote the demographic plurality of modern states in the ethnic and national sense, we suggest the use of terms such as *ethnocultural pluralism* or *multiethnicity*. Accordingly, in this paper, the term *ethnocultural pluralism* denotes ethnic and national pluralism in the demographic sense, the context of the state level. Simultaneously, we acknowledge the complexity of ethnic and national identities on the other two levels that will be discussed in the paper.

### **Ethno-Cultural Pluralism in Montenegro**

The Balkans is usually referred to as a region rich in ethnocultural pluralism in demographic terms, and a region that has historically been marked by a highly pronounced dynamic in terms of identity stratification and politics. Given its position at the crossroads between the East and the West, the Balkans were ruled by various invaders who stayed in this area for shorter or extended periods of time, bringing with them new identity contents that were incorporated within the Balkan peoples in different ways. Montenegro, as one of the oldest Balkans states, which gained its statehood at the Berlin Congress in 1878, had a very turbulent history. Having developed in stages ranging from a tribal organisation over a theocracy, a modern state was slowly formed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which included territories that were under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006; Dašić, 2000; Gopčević, 2008; Jovanović, 2001). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the national and ethnic structure changed and, with the restoration of statehood in 2006, Montenegro entered a new phase of consolidation of its national-state and political identity (Vuković-Čalasan, 2013, pp. 80–84). The foundations of the model of multiculturalism as a model of managing ethnocultural pluralism in Montenegro were created within the Constitution, adopted in 2007. This Constitution defines the state as civic and founded in multiculturalism (Ustav Crne Gore, 2007, § 1). The combination of the principles of citizenship and the model of multiculturalism was a significant step forward for Montenegrin society and its democratisation and emancipation. In order to emphasise the reality of ethnocultural pluralism of Montenegro and its preservation, the drafter of the Constitution dedicated a complete chapter of the Constitution to collective minority rights, although this is not a regular practice for the Constitution as the highest legal act (Ustav Crne Gore, 2007, § 79). Additionally, the Constitution places a ban on assimilation in all its forms (Ustav Crne Gore, 2007, § 80). Thereby, the importance of preserving the ethnocultural and plural character of the state was recognised, which is a solution that follows the model of multiculturalism. In the demographic sense, Montenegro belongs to the

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so-called multinational states, if we use Kymlicka's terminology, which assumes that in a multicultural (ethnoculturally plural— author's note) state, its members "either belong to different nations (multinational state) or they immigrated from different nations (polyethnic state)" (Kymlicka, 1995).

According to the latest population census from 2011, there are 278,865 or 44.89% of Montenegrins living in Montenegro; 175,110 or 28.73% of Serbs; 53,605 or 8.65% of Bosniaks; 30,439 or 4.91% of Albanians; 20,537 or 3.31% of Muslims; 6,251 or 1.01% of Roma people; 6,021 or 0.97% of Croats. A total of 30,170 or 4.87% of the population remain undeclared (Uprava za statistiku, 2011). Having in mind the structure in the ethnocultural sense of the word, it is clear that Montenegro is a country with a pronounced degree of ethnocultural pluralism (see Raduški, 2003). Montenegro is the only country in the region and in Europe in which the majority ethnocultural community makes for less than 50% of the population (Bešić, 2019, p. 2). Therefore, the issue of successful management of this type of pluralism becomes even more pronounced, since in such circumstances it is more challenging to provide communities and their members with the necessary space for freedom to develop their identities, while strengthening the components that they have in common with others, which provides for identification with a shared political identity, and preservation of social cohesion. Consequently, and in light of increasingly complicated and complex global and regional circumstances and challenges, it is necessary to pay attention to this issue on a theoretical level as well. All the more so as research shows a growing concern about challenges related to achieving social cohesion in many countries. For example, an IPSOS survey from October 2020 shows that 41% of people perceive social cohesion in their country as weak (Social Cohesion in the Pandemic Age, 2020, p. 9).

Therefore, considering the levels of possible treatment of ethnocultural pluralism, it is necessary to briefly draw attention to the nature of ethnocultural pluralism in Montenegro or, more precisely, to the types of ethnocultural communities that inhabit its territory. In Montenegro, the dominant type of ethnocultural communities are *national minorities*, i.e., communities that have lived on the territory of Montenegro for a historically long period, and communities that perceive Montenegro as their homeland. Some of the ethnocultural communities in Montenegro are territorially concentrated in one or more self-administrations (municipalities) (see Vuković-Čalasan, 2018, pp. 155–156). In the most general sense, successful management of ethnocultural pluralism would entail the adoption and implementation of legal and political solutions, measures and mechanisms that would result in equal possibilities to reach more successful integration for all ethnocultural communities. In addition, it would mean greater equality between these communities, reduced ethnic distance, good quality of relations between communities that would be characterised by acceptance, understanding, strong social ties and developed relations of exchange and interaction, elimination of various forms of discrimination and marginalisation of communities, as well as expansion of freedoms of their individual members. Such effects would contribute to the process of democratisation of society and would have a positive impact on the social cohesion of the community.

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## National-State Level: The First Level of Managing of Ethnocultural Pluralism

It is clear that the issue of managing ethnocultural pluralism is mostly related to the most general, national-state level, primarily as a result of the nature of the model of multiculturalism, the essence of which is embodied by the legal-political and institutional solutions adopted and applied at the state level. In that sense, it can be argued that Montenegro has adopted certain legal and institutional solutions in line with the model of multiculturalism, especially with the adoption of the Constitution in 2007, which laid a solid foundation for further improvement of the solution within the framework of the aforementioned model (Vuković-Ćalasan, 2018, pp. 161–172). The 2007 Constitution finally laid the foundations for the model of multiculturalism in Montenegro, and treated this matter through an entire chapter dedicated to the protection of identity and collective rights that can be enjoyed by ethno-cultural communities (Ustav Crne Gore, 2007). Prior to the adoption of the Constitution, *Zakon o manjinskim pravima i slobodama* [Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms], adopted in 2006, was the model used to treat the above issue. This Law foresaw three key pillars of the model of multiculturalism in Montenegro: The Minority Policy Strategy, National Councils, and the Minorities Fund (*Zakon o manjinskim pravima i slobodama*, 2006). What would successful management of ethnocultural pluralism mean at this level, in the context of Montenegrin society, but also in the context of any society that is democratic, regardless of the degree of its democratisation? First of all, it would mean *the existence of normative preconditions, in the legal-institutional and political sense, which should enable all ethnocultural communities to enjoy full integration into the social and political life of the community, on equal terms*. Can we say that the aforementioned normative preconditions have been fully implemented in the context of Montenegro? Although significant improvements have, undoubtedly, been made in terms of normative and legal solutions along the lines of the model of multiculturalism, attention should be drawn to the most visible shortcomings that call into question the basic principles on which the model is based, and which pertain to the obligation of equal treatment of ethnocultural communities that share a similar position—the foundation of equality and uniformity in defining and implementing key solutions. In that sense, we note that the Roma ethnic community is exposed to what its representatives define as *systemic political discrimination* (Beriša, 2017). In line with the need to ensure participation in political decision-making of minority ethnocultural communities in a manner that will ensure their authentic representation and representation in the Parliament, measures of affirmative action in the field of electoral legislation have been envisaged (*Zakon o izmjenama*, 2014)<sup>3</sup>.

The standard electoral threshold of 3% of the total number of valid votes was reduced to 0.75% of the total number of valid votes for national parties and lists representing the interests of individual ethnocultural communities. In order not to leave the Croatian national community without authentic representation, for the electoral lists

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the actualisation of the right to political participation as a necessary precondition of the process of integration of ethno-cultural communities, see the chapter “Effective participation as the key to integration” (Đorđević, 2016, pp. 199–201).

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and parties of this national community, the electoral threshold was further reduced to 0.35% of the total number of valid votes (Zakon o izmjenama i dopunama zakona o izboru odbornika i poslanika, 2014, §62). What is problematic, however, and is in the zone of normative discrimination, is the fact that a similar solution has not been provided for the Roma ethnic community, which is represented to approximately the same extent as the Croatian national community in the total population, but suffers a worse social position in all dimensions of integration. The above results in members of the Roma community being unable to have their own authentic representatives in the Parliament of Montenegro. In addition, lack of affirmative action that would enable their political representation is reflected in the degree of their political participation in general. Without the possibility to cross the electoral threshold, the Roma did not have a motive for political engagement or party formation, so Montenegro remains the last former Yugoslav state in which the Roma formed a political party, the Democratic Party of Roma, in December 2019. Representatives of the Roma population in Montenegro, as well as relevant institutions, such as the Ombudsman, consider this circumstance as unacceptable discrimination and hope to see changes in the legislation that would create normative prerequisites for the realisation of equality of this community in Montenegrin society, without which successful management of ethno-cultural pluralism is impossible (for more details see Damjanović, 2022; MINA, 2022; Vlahović, 2022; Zaštitnik ljudskih prava i sloboda, 2022).

Such discrimination becomes even more pronounced if we bear in mind that the Roma are in the most difficult position in terms of integration into Montenegrin society, in almost all areas of socio-economic and political life (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Their position and the obstacles they face in the process of integration into Montenegrin society are incomparable with any ethnocultural community living in Montenegro. Trapped in a vicious circle of poverty, ethnic distance, and the refusal of the rest of the population to accept them as equal citizens, unemployment, and often unresolved basic legal status are all circumstances that prevent members of this ethnic group from finally having a better quality of life in Montenegrin society. Roma are the most exposed to hate speech in Montenegro and this is clearly perceived by 55.2% of Montenegrin citizens in the latest study on the patterns and degree of discrimination in Montenegro, from December 2022 (see CEDEM, 2022a, p. 54). Although this treatment of Roma in the field of electoral legislation has been criticised by relevant European institutions monitoring the process of Montenegro's accession to the European Union, there has been no indication of a change in the direction of political will to eliminate this normative shortcoming. The 2022 European Commission Progress Report on Montenegro, clearly states that "Roma and Egyptians are still the most vulnerable and discriminated minority group" adding that "in January 2022, the Roma Council submitted an initiative to Parliament to reduce the threshold for political representation of Roma in the Law on the Election of Councillors and MPs. This issue falls under the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Committee on Comprehensive Electoral Legislation. There were no developments in this regard" (European Neighbourhood Policy, 2022, p. 43). Thus, successful management of ethnocultural pluralism at the level of institutional and legal-political solutions should include elimination of this and

similar shortcomings that have deep and far-reaching consequences not only for the position of the discriminated community, but also in the context of interethnic relations, thereby creating a sense of injustice and exclusion.

Even though national communities in Montenegro do not have territorial autonomy, even when they are territorially concentrated to a certain extent, the model of multiculturalism implies the so-called non-territorial minority autonomy embodied in the existence of the so-called national councils. Territorial autonomy, as a form of governing minority nationalisms, has never taken root in the Balkans and has always been viewed through the prism of security and lack of trust in minority communities in terms of their attitude towards potential secession (for more details see Harris, 1993, pp. 307–308; Kymlicka, 2004, pp. 148–150).

It has been mentioned that Article 79 of the 2007 Constitution of Montenegro specifies, inter alia, that members of minority peoples and other minority national communities have the right to establish a Council for the Protection and Promotion of Special Rights. Article 33 of the 2006 *Zakon o manjinskim pravima i slobodama* [Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms] provides that members of minority peoples in order to preserve their identity and promote their rights and freedoms, may establish a Council representing the given minority people. In October 2019, the author of the paper conducted research on the functioning of national councils, as a form of non-territorial minority self-government in Montenegro. The research showed that the councils of different ethno-cultural minority communities face different challenges, but that the Roma National Council is definitely in the most complex position, which reflects the complexity of the situation in which the Roma community finds itself.<sup>4</sup> For example, Representatives of the Roma Council point out the problematic composition of the council. According to the legal framework, the Council consists of members appointed by function, or more precisely automatic members, in addition to those who are elected by delegates at the electoral assembly (*Zakon o manjinskim pravima i slobodama*, 2006). The Roma National Council has no members appointed by function due to the lack of authentic representatives in Parliament, the lack of representation of members of this community in state institutions, public administration bodies, courts, the prosecution and other

<sup>4</sup> The research included in-depth interviews with representatives of national councils who were asked to answer the following questions: 1. How do you evaluate the regulated position of national councils in terms of the election of members, their composition and prescribed competences? 2. What problems do you see in the functioning of your council in the current legal and political context? 3. How do you rate the quality of communication with institutions that decide on matters of relevance for minority peoples and other minority national communities? 4. What would you change, and how would you make the change to improve the work of your council and the institution of national councils in general? Of the six national councils that exist in Montenegro, representatives of four national councils provided answers—the respective presidents of the national councils of Roma, Serbs, and Croats, while representatives of the national councils of Bosniaks and Albanians were not available for an interview.

The research was conducted for the purpose of participating in two international conferences held in 2019 and 2021. The former was held in October 2019, under the name “Cultural Autonomy and Minority Self-Government”, Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade; Academic Network for Cooperation in Southeast Europe. (Conference paper: “Minority Self-Government in Montenegro—Possibilities and Challenges”). The latter was held in 2021, under the name “Monitoring and Evaluation of Performance of National Minority Councils”, The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), Flensburg, Germany (Presentation: “National Minority Councils in Montenegro”).

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institutions working on creation and implementation of public policies, and protection of freedoms and rights. Representatives of Roma Council consider the fact that they do not have members appointed by function a great shortcoming, because their existence would strengthen the position of the Council itself and its influence in the efforts for integration and equality of the members of this community. The Roma Council considers the fact that they do not have a backing through political party particularly problematic. Without a political party supporting them, they assess the work of the Council as very difficult, in terms of exerting any real influence. In their opinion, political support is necessary in order to achieve the desired goals. The quality of cooperation and communication with institutions dealing with this issue is another shortcoming in the process of integration of this community. Institutions either do not consult the Council at all, or fail to consult it sufficiently in decision-making processes of importance and relevance to the Roma people. For example, in the case of the appointment of mediators intended for school-age children of the Roma community—the Roma Council was not consulted at all by the Ministry of Education in the appointment process. In the end, mediators who did not speak the Romani language were appointed. The Council also pointed out the problem of irrational spending of funding, for example for teaching Roma children the Romani language, sending Roma children on separate school trips and the like.

Another significant element of successful management of ethnocultural pluralism at this first level concerns *the way in which a common political, national-state identity is constituted*. Although all states are, to a greater or lesser degree, involved in the process of nation-building the challenges they face in this regard are specific in each individual context. The type of political culture, historical background, degree of ethnocultural pluralism, legal-political solutions and the like, differ from country to country, from region to region. We previously underlined that a particular challenge is faced by countries that have a high degree of demographic ethnocultural pluralism in the sense that there is no single ethnocultural community that makes for the majority of the total population. In terms of the established common political identity, Montenegro is defined as a civic state (Constitution of Montenegro, 2007, §1). From the aspect of successful management of ethnocultural pluralism, we consider the above a good solution. Certainly, a civic state does not function as a post-national one in practice. It retains the ethnocultural component of national identity but seeks to make it as inclusive as possible for different ethnocultural communities. Therefore, we believe that it is unrealistic to expect that the civic state can be completely devoid of the ethnocultural component and rely exclusively on the political and legal components. Nor does it need to be such. The constitution of a political identity in the framework of civic nationalism implies an important element on which successful management of ethnocultural pluralism largely depends. The element can be outlined as *reducing the degree of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national affiliations and their politicisation in a negative sense*. In fact, pacifying ethnic and national divisions and their politicisation for daily political purposes would be very useful in the context of the process of building a common political identity, since the ethnocultural component would not be in the forefront, which happens when the degree of politicisation is high.

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Building a civic society based on developing a culture of dialogue, reducing the use of hate speech motivated by ethnic and national differences, building capacity for compromise on identity policies and ways to build a common identity are essential for successful management of ethnocultural pluralism. Successful application of the model of multiculturalism and further democratisation of society depends, inter alia, on the development of a society based on public, inclusive dialogue and the reduction of the instrumentalisation of ethnic and national differences. The previously mentioned research on patterns and degree of discrimination in Montenegro, from December 2022, confirms our thesis: political parties and politicians, as the most significant political actors in Montenegro, are perceived as actors who make the least contribution to the fight against discrimination and actors who mostly use hate speech that is directed towards communities that differ by the colour of their skin and national or ethnic affiliation (Bešić, 2022, pp. 43, 50, 52). In our view, further investment in building a civic state, and development of a civic society in all the elements that strengthen the process of individualisation, expand the space of individual freedom and pacify ethnocultural divisions, which can only strengthen social cohesion and facilitate successful management of ethnocultural differences. A common political identity must remain as open and inclusive as possible. The degree of identification of the Muslim national community with the state of Montenegro shows that the construction of a common political identity on civic grounds is one of the critical components of successful management of ethno-cultural pluralism. This form of identification is much more pronounced in Montenegro compared to the rest of the region, which is why the degree of acceptance of the national designation “Bošnjak” (which binds Muslims to Bosnia as their motherland) is lower (see Đečević et al., 2017).

### **The Level of Ethnocultural Communities: The Illusion of Homogeneity**

The model of multiculturalism has a twofold relationship with the category of ethnocultural communities. On the one hand, the measures and mechanisms of this model are aimed at improving the position of communities and preserving their identity specifics. Thereby, their identities continue to be profiled and the politicisation of ethnocultural identities of communities in this sense has a positive impact on their survival. On the other hand, the elite of ethnocultural communities, which consists primarily of political subjects and intellectuals, i.e. the scientific elite, interprets and profiles the identity of the community in a certain way and strives to make it accepted to the highest possible degree by the members of the community. In this sense, each community, i.e., its elite, is interested in increasing the degree of homogeneity within the community, which can be quite a challenge for its individual members. In contexts dominated by ethnonationalism, the pressure from the community elite on its members to accept the “dominant” view of its identity can be very pronounced. The political elite of the community seeks to present the community as a single, homogeneous entity. However, it should be noted that ethnocultural communities are never really homogeneous. These are heterogeneous entities within which individual members have different views on identity, its position in a particular context as well as

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different views of the best direction of the development of the community in the future (Baumann, 1999, p. 140). Certainly, in regions where ethnonationalism is traditionally dominant, such as the Balkan region, this homogeneity is further insisted upon. Thus, successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in a democratic context and in line with a democratic political culture, must include taking into account that these are heterogeneous entities that are themselves plural and complex (Žagar, 2010, p. 387)

Another important issue that is often in the background, but concerns this level of our discussion, relates to the quality of links and relations between ethnocultural communities in a particular context. Policies of multiculturalism focus mainly on the rights of communities and their position, but very often neglect the relationships between communities, i.e., what happens between them. If policies of multiculturalism were implemented in an uneven and one-sided way, it could lead to negative consequences. For example, in Montenegro, there is a constitutionally guaranteed right to proportional representation of members of minority peoples and other minority national communities in public administration, state administration bodies, courts, prosecutor's offices, etc. in accordance with their share in the total population (Constitution of Montenegro, 2007, § 79). If this right were implemented in such a way that the bodies in charge of its implementation employed members of one or more ethnocultural communities at a pace that was not aligned with employment of members of other ethnocultural communities, despite the fact that it would not be against the law, it would ultimately lead to negative consequences. It is very easy to trigger a feeling of injustice and exclusion among those who are not part of this process, which directly affects the quality of relations between ethnocultural communities. Therefore, implementation of these measures must be carried out in a way that will not jeopardise the purpose of the envisaged legal and other solutions, if successful management of ethnocultural pluralism is desired.

Additionally, at this level, it is important to monitor trends in inter-community relations. Is there an increase in the level of interest of members of a community in the culture and identity specifics of others with whom the same political space is shared, as well as interest in understanding the position of other communities and specific challenges they face in the integration process? Or, do we have a pronounced ethnic distance at work, with self-closure and a certain degree of self-isolationism of ethnocultural communities, as well as a focus exclusively on their own ethno-national interests? This is a significant issue that is very topical in the Montenegrin context. Research on ethnic distance in Montenegro shows that it is increasing rather than decreasing, and that it is quite pronounced. In the period from 2013 to 2018, the level of interethnic distancing increased in almost all aspects, as well as the level of overall ethnic distancing in Montenegro. Simultaneously, the total ethnic distance in this five-year period increased by four percent (Bešić, 2019, pp. 2, 6). This further indicates that there are problems with the effects of the model of multiculturalism on ethnic relations and the quality of relations between different ethnic and national communities in Montenegro. The high degree of politicisation and instrumentalisation of ethnic and national identities by political actors certainly contributes to this. The abuse of these affiliations for political purposes and for the interests of political parties is reflected in interethnic and inter-

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national relations. This is amplified by one of the characteristics of the authoritarian political culture that prevails in Montenegro, “the confinement of individuals to the group and the confinement of the group to externalities” (Čupić, 2020, p. 80). Due to the fact that it is a very powerful mobilising resource in the political sense, and one that mostly produces an emotional reaction, political parties are most inclined to use it as a means of achieving political objectives. In that sense, it is very interesting to analyse the degree and forms of political participation of citizens in Montenegrin society.

Montenegro traditionally has a high degree of political participation in parliamentary elections, with generally high turnout. However, other forms of political participation, such as participation in public debates, civic activism in various areas, and the like, are scarce in the period between elections. One of the explanations for this tendency lies in the high degree of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national elements by political actors, primarily political parties. By generating internal enemies embodied in members of certain ethnic and national communities who are allegedly a threat to the survival of their own community, and making extensive use of recent and not so recent history, political parties contribute to the horizontal level of trust declining and individuals becoming very prone to perceiving members of other ethnic and national communities through the prism of fear and mistrust. According to the European Social Survey conducted in Montenegro in 2019, approximately half of respondents do not trust people of another religion or nationality (European Social Survey, 2021). Only 11.4% of respondents have complete trust in people of another nationality, while only 9.5% have complete trust in people of other religious affiliations (European Social Survey, 2021). We consider this to be a direct consequence of the politicisation of ethnic and national affiliations by political parties. Ethnicisation of politics and the politicisation of ethnicity (in the sense of its instrumentalisation) occur, which makes it difficult to successfully manage ethnocultural pluralism. Bearing the above in mind, and considering the process of ethnicisation of politics in the post-socialist context of Balkan societies, Vučina Vasović (2013) states the following:

Part of the reason for the strong tendencies of ethnicisation of politics should be sought in the authoritarian inclinations among a significant part of the political elite, regardless of whether it is the ruling majority or the opposition. Rather than democratisation, the elite chose hyper-ethnification or nationalisation of politics. That process ran parallel to the process of politicisation of ethnicity. (p. 163)

In addition to the above, Vasović refers to inadequate political representation of ethno-cultural communities as one of the most significant reasons for the emergence of a negative tendency of ethnicisation of politics, which was discussed in the previous chapter (Vasović, 2013, p. 163). This represents a challenge and danger for social cohesion of Montenegrin society. The country’s social cohesion is based on the need to strengthen trust not only in the vertical but also in the horizontal dimension, as well as the need to strengthen social ties and activate the so-called linking social capital (Szreter, 2002). Successful management of ethnocultural pluralism at this level implies raising awareness of political actors in the direction of their greater understanding of

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the consequences of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national elements, especially from the perspective of achieving and strengthening social cohesion. Individual party interest must not endanger social cohesion, and yet we believe that Montenegro is exposed to that risk. In a sense, citizens recognise the often-irresponsible actions of political parties, which are reflected in both interethnic and inter-national relations. This is further illustrated by the fact that in public opinion polls that are conducted continuously, trust in political parties is traditionally at the very bottom of the scale of trust that citizens have in institutions and social organisations (CEDEM, 2022b, p. 11; for 2021, 2020, 2019, see CEDEM, n.d.). Political actors must be aware that their actions primarily determine whether the level of exchange, interaction and understanding between different ethnic and national communities will increase, or whether their inaction or misconduct will erode trust between community members and reduce the model of multiculturalism to creating an environment in which members of different ethnic and national communities do not *live with each other* in a common social space but *next to each other*.

### Level of Personal Identity: The Right to a Plural Identity?

It is also possible to discuss ethnocultural pluralism at the level of personal identities of individuals. This level is mostly neglected and ignored. Societies dominated by the ideology of ethnonationalism do not sustain an environment that affirms and respects the fact that the ethnocultural identities of individuals are often complex and plural. In the conditions of dominance of ethno-nationalism, it is easy to activate the authoritarian-collectivist type of ethno-cultural (national) identity within the two previously mentioned levels, which is inevitably reflected on the level of personal identity. In the context of Montenegro and the Balkans in general, this translates to hate speech towards members of other ethno-cultural communities, non-affirmation of plural identities of individuals, as well as primacy of the collective over the individual (Golubović, 2007, p. 344; Marković, 2010, p. 18; Vuković-Čalasan, 2014, pp. 126–128). Montenegro is among the 25 percent of the most authoritarian countries, according to the European Values Survey, and is characterised by a subservient-participative political culture that is authoritarian by nature (Knežević, 2012, p. 398; Komar, 2013, pp. 112, 173). It is clear from the above that the environment for expanding the space of personal freedom in terms of identity in Montenegro is not particularly affirmative. One of the basic characteristics of authoritarian political culture concerns the primacy of collective identity in the sense that “in a culture of a community dominated by authoritarianism, *we* is more important than *I*” (Čupić, 2020, p. 79). An important factor to consider is the often-neglected circumstance of identity duality in Montenegro in the historical sense. There is a so-called Montenegrin *homo duplex* in terms of simultaneous existence of categories of *Serb* and *Montenegrin* that are not mutually exclusive in ethnocultural sense (Darmanović, 1992, as cited in Džankić, 2015, p. 137). Furthermore, to the extent that the state succeeds in building a civic political identity that is inclusive in character, it can be expected that members of minority ethnocultural communities will also adopt the identity determinant Montenegrin, and thus build a

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complex identity in the national sense. The fact that the identities of individuals are often complex is recognised in the *Ljubljana Guidelines for the Integration of Diverse Societies*, which clearly underlines that

individual identities can be and in fact increasingly are multiple (a sense of having several horizontal identities; for instance, belonging to more than one ethnicity), multi-layered (various identities coexist and overlap in the same person, such as ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender, professional and the like), contextual (the context might determine which identity is more prominent at a given moment) and dynamic (the content of each identity and the attachment of individuals to it is changing over time). (The Ljubljana Guidelines, 2012, p. 14)

However, if there is a visible presence of a high degree of politicisation and the instrumentalisation of ethnic and national elements, political elites seek to deepen ethnic and national divisions, insisting on clear boundaries and pure identity positions. This situation is a precondition for political profit, which is much easier to build if individuals who inherit plural and complex identities in the ethnocultural sense are discouraged from nurturing and strengthening that pluralism. Pluralism is viewed with suspicion and distrust as it disrupts the black and white image of the world that the ideology of ethnonationalism is founded upon. If the environment is favourable and plural identities are affirmed by those who possess them, and individuals are encouraged to not give up on their different affiliations in ethnocultural terms, as a result we could see strengthened social networks, interaction and understanding between ethnic and national communities, which runs against the intentions of ethnonationalists. Ethnonationalism as an ideology is based on simplification of reality, clear identity boundaries and profiling of differences, very often to the point of exclusivity. Therefore, we believe that successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in modern circumstances must take into account the level of the individual and personal identity. The space of personal identity is a space of individual freedom and, in that sense, it is inseparable from democracy (Davis & Marin, 2009). Dominance of ethno-nationalism and the reduction of multiculturalism primarily to particular identities of ethno-cultural communities are fertile ground for the emergence of the so-called essentialisation of identity (Parekh, 2008, p. 34). It leads to development of authoritarianism at the level of ethnocultural communities towards individual members who are under pressure from the community to preserve its homogeneity and dominant view of identity (Crespi, 2006, p. 162).

Having in mind the above, one of the challenges faced by Montenegrin society is to recognise the importance of individualisation in the sphere of identity in the process of further maturation and democratisation. This would translate into resistance to the enslavement of this area by political actors in the first place. Each individual must be free to build their ethnocultural identity in a way they think they should by nurturing their ethnic and national affiliations, if there are more than one, without facing pressure, rejection, suspicion, and mistrust. Although the model of multiculturalism is more focused on ethnocultural communities and less

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on their individual members and the space of their freedom, we are of the view that certain negative tendencies resulting from the dominance of ethnonationalism must be recognised at the level of individual identity. Any insistence on differences, the point of exclusivity, even where there is much in common between communities and their identities, potentially erodes the social networks that are prerequisite for preserving social cohesion. However, the step that precedes this moment occurs at the level of personal identities of individuals who, under the pressure of the ideology of ethnonationalism, must set clear boundaries even with those with whom they share much in common in terms of identity.

### Concluding Remarks

Since 2007, Montenegro has adopted legal-institutional solutions based on the model of multiculturalism. Despite significant improvements in terms of equality of ethnocultural communities, a factor that significantly reduces the rates of success in managing ethnocultural pluralism at this first, state level is the normative discrimination of the Roma ethnic community members and uneven application of measures and mechanisms of this model to all ethnic and national communities in Montenegro. At the second level, which refers to the ethnocultural communities themselves, i.e., the quality of interethnic relations, rates of success of implementation of multicultural policies show significant shortcomings, especially in the context of ethnic distance, which has been growing since Montenegro regained independence

The above shows that at the level of communities and relations between them, we have a case of more self-closure, distancing and self-isolationism than interaction. At the third level, the level of individual identities, creation of a legal and political environment that will deter the detected negative tendencies is very important. They are reflected in the high degree of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national identities, which results in a tighter space for expressing and nurturing plural identities among the citizens who possess them.

In the context of Montenegro, insufficient attention is paid to the different levels of ethnocultural pluralism, i.e., the tendencies that can be observed at these levels, and which have a negative impact on the process of democratisation. The issue of successful management of ethnocultural pluralism is indeed one of the most significant for modern societies. Tendencies to pluralise contemporary national-state contexts, at different levels, complicate old challenges and give rise to new ones that states must face. States with varying degrees of democratic consolidation in the management of ethnocultural diversity accept, officially or unofficially, the measures and mechanisms of model of multiculturalism to varying degrees. They do this by guaranteeing different collective rights, envisaging measures of affirmative action in different areas of integration—from education to electoral legislation, and ensuring political participation of members of all ethnic and national communities.

In the post-communist countries of the Balkans, as well as in Montenegro, elements of the model of multiculturalism slowly began to be introduced and implemented at the very end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A decade

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and a half into implementation, we can acknowledge a partial success of legal-institutional solutions that have provided a greater degree of equality for minority national communities. The acquired rights as well as the possibility of political participation enabled minority ethnocultural communities to better integrate into the wider social community. However, attention must be drawn to several tendencies that exist in Montenegro, which we perceive as negative, and which cannot be associated with successful management of ethnocultural pluralism. Firstly, at the first level that we referred to, there should be no formal-legal discrimination against any ethno-cultural community, as is currently the case with the Roma community. Any such unequal treatment ultimately produces a feeling of injustice, exclusion, and affects both the position of the ethno-cultural community and the quality of inter-ethnic relations and social cohesion. At this first level, it is also important to continue the process of building a common political identity in civic terms, making it as inclusive as possible in relation to different ethno-cultural communities. Montenegrin society, as distinctly plural in the ethno-cultural sense, and a society characterised by the absence of single community that constitutes a dominant majority, requires additional attention in this sense. On the second level that was discussed, constant evaluation and monitoring of the impact of the measures and mechanisms of the model of multiculturalism are required, on the social community and especially on relations between ethnocultural communities. Apart from sporadic research on ethnic distance, very little has been done in this area. Insufficient attention is paid to raising the level of community interest in each other, overcoming self-closure and ethnic distance, connecting communities that would help strengthen social cohesion and reduce the experience of others through the prism of fear and mistrust. If we want to successfully manage ethno-cultural pluralism at this level, political and social actors must find a way to encourage building relationships between communities. The latter is particularly important for the Balkan region, which is characterised by traumatic events and conflicts in the not-so-distant past that have severely damaged relations between communities and triggered a new vicious cycle of mistrust that was already strong following World War II. This is an additional reason to focus theory and research on the level of ethnocultural communities and the effects that solutions in the framework of models of multiculturalism produce in relations between communities. Successful management of ethnoculturalism at this level would include a mandatory reduction of ethnic distance, which is currently very pronounced in Montenegro, especially towards the Roma population. If the level of exchange and understanding between communities is not improved, and if the level of politicisation and abuse of ethnic and national differences for political purposes by political parties is not reduced, further closure of these communities and increase in level of distrust can be expected. In the long run, this can jeopardise social cohesion.

Successful management of ethnocultural pluralism in a democratic context is not possible without a careful analysis of tendencies that emerge at the level of personal identities of individuals who, very often, belong to two or more ethnocultural communities and inherit complex identities. The dominance of the ideology of ethnonationalism in Montenegro is still present today and, in the Balkans, overall.

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Low levels of individualisation, authoritarian political culture and a high degree of instrumentalisation of ethnic and national identities by political actors are a suitable environment for embracing the ideology of ethnonationalism. This results in a type of pressure on individual members of society to fit, in terms of their identity, into pre-defined identity matrices that are promoted as the only authentic forms of identity by political and social actors. Individuals who see their national or ethnic identity differently in terms of the content and status they hold in an individual's personal identity are marginalised and labelled as less authentic members of the community. An environment that is not affirmative of plural and complex identities and where individuals who inherit them face pressure from the community or political actors to accept the dominant version of identity is not favourable from the perspective of increasing the level of democratisation and building a society of free citizens. If the space for freedom is narrowing for individuals and if they suffer negative consequences due to the fact that they inherit a plural identity, there is little room left for discussion about successful management of ethnocultural pluralism or further democratisation of society.

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