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MASTER'S THESIS

**JOINING THE COMMUNITY
MONTENEGRO'S PATH TO NATO ACCESSION**

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DECLARATION:

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, based on the sources and literature listed in the appended bibliography. The thesis as submitted is 127.389 keystrokes long (including spaces), i.e. 71 manuscript pages.

Your name

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27 July 2017

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List of acronyms

ANB	Agencija za Nacionalnu Bezbednost (National Security Agency)
ANP	Annual National Programme
ASDE	Air Situation Data Exchange
BRAAD	Balkan Regional Approach to Air Defence
CDT	Center for Democratic Transition
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CIRT	Cyber Incident Response Team
DPPI SEE	Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative
DPS	Demokratska Partija Socijalista (Democratic Party of Socialists)
EU	European Union
EUFOR	European Union Force
EUNAVFOR	European Union Naval Force
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan
IPCP	Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JNA	Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija (Yugoslav's People's Army)
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
MAP	Membership Action Plan
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MONDEM	Montenegro Demilitarization
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCIRC	NATO Computer Incident Response Capability

OCC	Operational Capabilities Concept
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PARP	Planning and Review Process
PfP	Partnership for Peace
RACVIAC	Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Centre – Centre for Security Cooperation
SEEC	Forum for Western Balkans Defence Cooperation – SEEC
SFOR	Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina
SKCG	Savez Komunista Crne Gore (League of Communists of Montenegro)
SPS	Science for Peace and Security
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force
US	United States

Introduction

On 5 June 2017, the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Duško Marković, deposited the instrument of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty of Montenegro in Washington DC, making the accession of this country to the Atlantic Alliance official. Montenegro, one of the smallest of the post-Yugoslav Western Balkans republics, was thus welcomed into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as its 29th member. This accession, which materializes the first NATO enlargement since 2009, is the result of a long process which has driven important parts of Montenegrin policy change since the independence of the country in 2006. This process has had a tremendous impact on Montenegrin politics for the past decade and has sparked one of the most important and divisive debate in the Montenegrin public opinion and political class since the one over the independence. The very fact that Montenegro managed to access NATO is a very prominent illustration of the evolutions within the country since the breakup of Yugoslavia. Moreover, it also provides a very interesting case to study with regards to the enlargement and evolutions of security-oriented international organizations. Indeed, despite the small size of Montenegro, the study of this accession process, of its particularities, and of its impacts on the many actors involved, is relevant to contemporary international security studies for multiple reasons. As an international organization which is based on mutual defense and constitutes the largest military alliance in the world, NATO remains a strongly pertinent organization to study. Its enlargement eastward has been one of the defining policies of the Alliance since the end of the Cold War and the integration of Montenegro is the most recent example of this process. This integration also bears some specificities related to the functioning of the country relative to both politics and public policies, but also other features which have impacted its accession process, such as its multiethnic character or its place within the international system. This subject is also relevant when analyzing this study with a regional scope, given that the Western Balkans remain amongst the most instable areas in Europe and that security and peace-building are very pregnant issues in the region.

The main object of this thesis is the process Montenegro has been undergoing throughout its path to NATO accession and the underlying conditions which have impacted this process. Therefore, the objective is to understand the dynamics that have existed within this process. These have been coming from the outside, at the

level of the relationship between NATO as an international organization and Montenegro as a state, but also from the inside, at the domestic level within Montenegro. A secondary objective is to identify the reforms that have been achieved in Montenegro as a result of the accession process and whether this process has had an impact on NATO, as an international organization, but also on the Western Balkans as a region. Thus, this thesis aims at answering the following question:

How did the NATO integration process impact political and social change in Montenegro?

From this question stem several additional associated questions: What were the underlying conditions which influenced this integration process? To what extent did the Montenegrin security and defense sector evolve through this process? Does the Montenegrin accession to NATO have an impact on the Western Balkans regional security?

This research is seeking to provide a general and holistic picture of the Montenegrin NATO accession process by addressing the topic through various perspectives. The enlargement of NATO has been widely studied over the years¹, including in the relatively recent cases of Croatia and Albania which both joined in 2009². However, the case of Montenegro, as the most recent case of an integration which happened in a difficult geopolitical reality punctuated by much more dramatic issues than the enlargement of NATO to a small Western Balkans state, has been less so. Indeed, even if a literature about the Montenegrin accession process to NATO exists, it does not include pieces of academic work compiling the multiple factors which impacted this process. Furthermore, given the fact that Montenegro's accession to NATO is very recent, there is a lack of very recent analyzes presenting the process in its globality and the impact it is having now that this NATO enlargement is achieved.

¹ This includes studies about enlargement during the Cold War (please refer to the book written by Mark Smith: *NATO Enlargement during the Cold War* (2000)), during the enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe of the 1990's-early 2000's (please refer to the book written by Ainius Lašas: *European Union and NATO Expansion* (2010)).

² For more information about the accession process of these two countries, please refer to the work edited by Vincent Morelli: *NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia and Possible Future Candidates* (2008); or to the article written on the issue by Nathan M. Polak, Ryan C. Hendrickson and Nathan G. D. Garrett: *NATO Membership for Albania and Croatia: Military Modernization, Geo-Strategic Opportunities and Force Projection* (2009).

The selected literature used for this thesis can be indexed into two categories: grey literature and academic articles.

The grey literature includes mostly technical documents issued by the Montenegrin Government dealing with the Montenegrin accession process. These documents are mostly dealing with the requirements and achievements of the integration process at the level of the Annual National Programme (Government of Montenegro 2010; Government of Montenegro 2014; Government of Montenegro 2015). An important issue with this part of the literature is that the same kind of technical documents on the Montenegrin accession process produced by NATO are not available to the general public, meaning that they could not be exploited in this thesis.

This selected literature coming directly from the concerned institutions also includes documents which were geared for communication purposes in order to keep the public informed of the process. These are coming from the Montenegrin Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, with a factsheet on the NATO integration process (MVPEI 2012) and from the Official Gazette of Montenegro (2012). These documents can also come from NATO itself and include the Secretary-General's 2016 annual report (Stoltenberg 2017).

The selected academic literature is much more furnished than the grey literature. This category of the selected literature can be divided into three sub-categories: NATO and its evolutions, the Montenegrin accession process, and Montenegrin politics.

There is a lot of information about NATO and its evolution. The main difficulty, given the number of available sources on this topic, with this part of the literature, is to be able to select only documents which are relevant to the specific studied topic. The selected texts provide a historical account of the evolution of NATO as an institution (Behnke 2013; Colby and Solomon 2015; Crawford 2001; Hallams and Schreer 2012; Kaufman 1998; Mattelaer 2011; Noetzel and Schreer 2012) and analyzes of NATO's historical role in the Western Balkans (Mccgwire 2000; Roberts 1999; Robinson 2001). This category of the selected literature also deals with NATO enlargement as a general policy for the Alliance (Friis 2015), focusing on the enlargement in the Western Balkans (Cascone 2010; Jordanova 2009; Zagorcheva 2012) or even criticizing this process (Kovacevic 2017). One could highlight that the specificities of the enlargement to

Montenegro from the NATO institutional perspective have not been properly addressed in the academic literature.

The literature about the Montenegrin accession process can be considered as extensive but incomplete. Indeed, this part of the literature deals with the Montenegrin integration process as such, with the security sector reform in the country and with other elements linked to the integration process. The integration process as such is studied in general (Bátor 2014; Jovetić 2009), from the Montenegrin perspective (Knežević 2015) and from the NATO perspective (U.S. Congress 2016; Orlandić 2016). The reform of the security sector is well documented with academic texts offering a global analysis of these reforms in Montenegro (Austrian National Defence Academy 2016; Radević 2009; Tahirović and Injac 2016) or in the Western Balkans region (Busterud 2015; Marley 2014; Polak, Hendrickson, and Garrett 2009), but also taking a more focused approach on specific aspects of these reforms such as civilian capabilities (Sošić 2014), cyber-defense (Šendelj et al. 2014), or the place of women in this process (Tahirović 2011). Analyzes of the general reforms which have been carried out in Montenegro since the independence (Lukšić and Katnić 2016) and of the Russian impact on the NATO accession process (Troude 2016) can also be found in this part of the literature. However, this part of the selected texts is limited by the fact that an important part of the literature on this topic is only available in Serbo-Croatian since the integration process was mostly studied inside Montenegro or in neighboring countries. This explains the lack of literature regarding the domestic non-security reforms linked to the NATO accession process. It is necessary to underline that the selected literature in this thesis is limited to texts written in languages understood by the author, meaning English and French.

Finally, the third part of the literature, which concerns Montenegrin politics in light of the NATO accession process, can be considered as relatively complete. It provides information about Montenegrin politics in general (Darmanović 2003, 2007, 2017; Dzankić 2014; Marković 2016; Morrison and Čagorović 2014; Vuković 2015), the debate over Montenegro accession and its implications (Banović 2016; Radanović Felberg 2007; Radoman 2007), and about the impact that 'Euro-Atlanticization' has been having on the political environment of the country (Massari 2005; Vujović 2008). This selected literature offers a lot information about Montenegrin politics even though

it can be argued that it lacks more thorough analyzes of the domestic institutional dynamics of these politics and of relationships structuring the opposition in the country.

The combination of these categories provides a relatively complete literature covering the topic of the Montenegrin accession to NATO and of the factors that influenced it. The only topic that is very scarcely treated in this literature is the impact that this integration has been having on the Western Balkans region and on the relationship between Montenegro and its neighbors. In fact, there is only one text directly attempting to assess these impacts (PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes 2016). In order to properly cover these issues, this thesis will therefore also rely on newspaper articles from the press specialized on international affairs (Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, 45eNord.ca) and the Western Balkans region (B92, Balkan Insight, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty).

The main thesis of this research is that the relationship between Montenegro and NATO, which started in the early 2000's and has been revolving primarily on the integration process, which started soon after the independence of the country in 2006, and which has profoundly modified the security and defense sectors in Montenegro, has impacted the politics of the country and is embedded within what has been a larger strategic approach of NATO to the Western Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe in general. These impacts on the Montenegrin security sector and its political environment are even more significant given the post-Yugoslav and post-conflict context that prevailed at the beginning of this relationship. The Montenegrin integration process is particularly interesting given the fact that it has revolved three dynamics. Firstly, there has been an endogenous dynamic linked to the political attitude of the Montenegrin Government since the 1990's which has put Euro-Atlantic integration at the forefront of its policy. This is confirmed by the extensive reforms that have been carried out within the Montenegrin public sector. These reforms, along with efforts to allow the country to reach European standards in terms of democratic practices and rule of law, have been driven by an internally and externally fueled Europeanization of the country. There has also been a Euro-Atlantic dynamic which has corresponded to the strategy of NATO which has been acting as security enforcer and provider in the Western Balkans since the 1990's and which has aimed, along with the European Union, to gradually integrate the countries of the region within its security community. Lastly, there has been an endogenous dynamic coming from the geopolitical state of

affairs in Europe which has been heavily modified by the resurgence of Russia, the annexation of Crimea, the civil war in Ukraine, the migration crisis, and more recently the announce of the Brexit. In this context, it is noteworthy to highlight that the integration of Montenegro to NATO is the first since the annexation of Crimea and the revival of the tensions between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community. This thesis has many implications at the domestic, regional, and international level. At the domestic level, it has awakened profound cultural and social fractures that are specific to Montenegro and are not solely linked to NATO, but are instead the result of a combination of conjunctural factors and historical roots. This integration also has regional implication, the Western Balkans being strategically important for NATO and the EU and Montenegro having become a key player in the region. The current context of a worsening of the political instability in the Western Balkans, particularly in Kosovo³, Bosnia-Herzegovina and FYROM makes the Montenegrin accession process even more significant for the region as it will most probably have an impact on regional stability. Despite the size of the country and its apparently limited strategic importance, the integration of Montenegro to NATO also has an international signification since it embodies a return of NATO enlargement and a Western defiance of Russia's renewed involvement in the Western Balkans. It also materializes NATO's will to keep on carrying out its open-door policy and has implications for the organization itself.

Theoretical background and methodology

This thesis is embedded within a social constructivist theoretical background. The objective is to use various lines of constructivist work in order to determine the specific theoretical context within which this thesis is set. These include sociological institutionalism as developed by Frank Schimmelfennig and Martha Finnemore and the theory of institutional influence proposed by Rachel A. Epstein.

Constructivism revolves around the idea that, within a given social structure, the actors and their actions are "socially constituted and subject to social change" (Schimmelfennig 1998, 210). It is therefore the study of social interactions and structures and of the change that they are subjected to which can explain identities and international relations and behaviors. Sociological institutionalism, on its part,

³ This designation is without prejudice to the positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

posits that it is these social structures and interactions which generate agents whose actions and identities are shaped by this same social structure within which they are embedded. As explained by Martha Finnemore (1996, 333) “In institutionalist analysis, the social structure is ontologically primary. It is the starting point for analysis. Its rules and values create all the actors we might consider relevant in international politics, including states, firms, organizations, and even individuals”.

This theory has been primarily tailored for the study of institutions. An institution has been defined in the context of social institutionalism by March and Olsen as “a relatively stable collection of practices and rules defining appropriate behavior for specific groups of actors in specific situations” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891). In an international context, this translates in a collection of practices and rules that apply to the states which belong to a given institution. It is the norms that exist within the international institution that set standards for the behavior of the states belonging to it (893).

In this thesis, these mechanisms are of particular interest because they explain the process through which the enlargement of international institutions happens. Indeed, during an enlargement process, an international institution transfers its beliefs and practices to its aspiring member and gradually integrates the newcomer through what is labeled by Schimmelfennig (1998, 211) as “international socialization”. More specifically, the process it goes through is described by Martha Finnemore as a ‘norm cascade’, a process through which a norm is transferred through international organizations (Finnemore and Sikkink 2002, 902). It also describes how the development of shared practices triggers social learning which results in the development of mutual trust and of a collective identity. This process is also explained by the theory of institutional influence, as highlighted in the work of Epstein who breaks it down in two phases: “Initially, international institutions use their social power to persuade an elite group of domestic reformers of the desirability and credibility of particular policy measures. Subsequently, international institutions empower their domestic interlocutors to implement reform and overcome opposition through a range of mechanisms” (2005, 68).

Thus, sociological institutionalism seems to be the most appropriate theory to explain the nature of NATO as an international institution and how it has built a collective identity and common values for its members. It also explains how the NATO enlargement process has been able to influence its sphere of influence and in particular

its aspiring members by pushing for the development of shared practices which trigger social learning resulting in the development of mutual trust and of a collective identity and to the adoption of NATO beliefs and practices.

The enlargement of an international institution from the Euro-Atlantic area has been thoroughly studied in the case of the EU. When studying the EU enlargement process, Schimmelfennig (2015, 6-8) identified eight mechanisms belonging to either a 'logic of consequences', which explains a given behavior from an actor because it maximizes its utility, or to a 'logic of appropriateness' which explains a given behavior by the social norms and the social role of the concerned actor. These mechanisms break down the ways the EU impacts actors beyond its member-states. They are respectively, for the logic of consequences, Conditionality, Externalization, Transnational incentives and Transnational externalization; and for the logic of appropriateness, Socialization, Imitation, Transnational Socialization and Societal imitation. Given the fact that NATO is, like the EU, embedded within the Euro-Atlantic community, of which it constitutes the main military organization (Schimmelfennig 1999, 8), and given that NATO shares many understandings and values with the EU, in particular in terms of enlargement, one can consider that these mechanisms can without difficulty be applied to the NATO enlargement process.

In the case of Montenegro, it is by analyzing NATO's impact on Montenegro through the Schimmelfennig mechanisms, but also by studying the integration process with the help of other social constructivist arguments and explanations, that this thesis will try to demonstrate that Montenegro has joined NATO because after a learning and sharing process it has been undergoing, it now shares the collective identity and values of NATO and adheres to its constitutive norms (Schimmelfennig 1999, 8).

Finally, as explained by Schimmelfennig (1998, 229), the fact that constructivism seems to be the fittest theoretical background to understand the enlargement of NATO, and therefore its enlargement to Montenegro, does not mean that there are no valid rationalist explanations of this process. Therefore, this thesis, even though strongly based on constructivist assumptions, will sometimes rely on a more realist set of explanations for the Montenegrin NATO accession process. This possibility to build upon more realist arguments even though this thesis is resolutely social constructivist fits into the methodological approach which has been adopted for this research.

From an epistemological perspective, the mindset within which this thesis is set aims at being close to the “ecumenism of research practices” preached by the late Norwegian political scientist Stein Rokkan (Seiler 2014, 13). This means that this thesis will attempt to apply of Rokkan’s famous quotes “the individual scholar must be empirically responsible for his theories and hypotheses and willing to test them according to methods that would give others the possibility of reproducing them” (Rokkan 1980, 17-18).

This thesis should be valued for what it is, a research project from a Master’s Degree student. This means that it will lack some sources such as methodological interviews with officials from the actors involved which could have been highly valuable to build a qualitative analysis of the issue, even though interviews and qualitative research can be found in the selected literature and will be used in this work. Extensive interviews were not possible in the context of this research project because of a lack of funding and time. It will as a result differ in depth and methodology compared to what could be found in a PhD thesis or in a traditional academic paper.

This thesis will aim at applying the coherent theoretical background described earlier in a rigorous fashion. It will be built starting from the idea that Montenegro has been embedded within a process specific to NATO enlargement that has been having domestic and international preconditions and consequences and it will cover the results that stem from this. The idea is that this NATO enlargement process to Montenegro can be explained through the progressive international socialization of the country which has been undergoing sociopolitical change. The case of Montenegro also bears a set of domestic and regional factors (historical, cultural, social and political) which have shaped its identity and ultimately its public policies. This has translated, as we will explore throughout this thesis and as expected by the theoretical background, into the progressive adoption of constitutive norms and practices specific to NATO. This has also been meaning that change in politics and perceptions has been happening during this process at different levels, even though specificities can be identified because of the particular preconditions of Montenegro.

We will start by analyzing the relationship between Montenegro and NATO from a historical perspective, focusing on Montenegro’s history and on the evolution of NATO’s role in the Western Balkans. Then, we will analyze the Montenegrin NATO integration process per se, dividing our analysis between the integration process per

se, the transformation of the Montenegrin security and defense sector, and the impact it has had the position of Montenegro within the international system. We will then demonstrate that this integration process has had an important impact on Montenegrin politics, having created a major debate in the country and having led to domestic reforms and sociopolitical changes. We will next study the NATO perspective on the Montenegrin integration process by seeking to understand its willingness to welcome Montenegro, the internal institutional dynamics that have led to this choice, and the extent to which Montenegro represents a new model for NATO enlargement. Then, we will analyze the broader implications of this process by assessing the regional consequences of the Montenegrin accession to NATO and the evolution of the Euro-Atlantic community. Ultimately, we will propose a conclusion followed by a research agenda for the future study of NATO enlargement and the Western Balkans in relation to the Atlantic Alliance.

The relationship between Montenegro and NATO: a historical perspective

The relationship between Montenegro and NATO and the way it has been built has been determined by a number of preexisting factors which explain part of the behavior of these two actors and the willingness there has been to integrate the small republic into the largest military alliance in the world. This section presents the history of Montenegro as a geopolitical entity and the evolving role of NATO in the Western Balkans region.

A complex geopolitical history: The Montenegrin case

Montenegro is a small Balkan country with a population of approximately 620.000 and spans over a little less than half the size of Belgium. In order to fully understand the Montenegrin NATO integration process, it is necessary to underline that, despite its small size, the country bears several specificities which are heavily influencing its politics and the way it functions.

Montenegro, which has lost and regained its independence many times over the past millennium, is at a crossroads, like the rest of the Balkans, between the West and the East. It has successively belonged to the Serbia, the Venetian sphere of influence and

the Ottoman Empire for most of its history. However, it has also a long history as an independent entity in the region which explains that it was internationally recognized as a state in the 1878 Treaty of Berlin⁴. Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, it was a principality and then a kingdom before being absorbed into Yugoslavia in 1918. The country regained its independence in 2006 as one of the last countries to emerge from what used to be Yugoslavia.

This tumultuous history is accompanied by specificities related to the ethno-religious composition of the country. Indeed, the majority of the population is Christian Orthodox (72%) but Montenegro also hosts a sizeable Muslim minority (19.5% of the population) and a Roman Catholic minority (3.5% of the population)⁵. Montenegro also represents a rare case in Europe of a country where no single ethnicity makes up the majority of the population. Montenegrins represent only 45% of the population, with Serbs (29%), Bosniaks (9%) and Albanians (5%) being the largest other ethnic groups⁶. This specific ethno-religious composition partly explains the deep divides that exist in the country and the important role that minorities play in shaping its politics.

Montenegro, being a mostly Orthodox and Slavic country, has particularly strong historical links with two countries: Serbia and Russia. The links with Russia find their origins in the common Serbian and Montenegrin struggle to break free from the Ottoman empire between the 14th and the 19th century. Throughout this process, both countries received important support from the Russian Empire which was seen as the main guarantor of a regained independence. This might explain why Montenegro was the only European country to get involved in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War⁷. Even though this relationship between Montenegro and Russia has been heavily impacted by the NATO accession process, cultural and economic links with Russia have remained prominent for Montenegro, since “an estimated 40 percent of the Montenegrin real-estate is Russian-owned” (Gramer 2015). Even if Russia has been an important historical ally for Montenegro, the most important neighboring country in

⁴ For more information about Montenegrin history before the end of Yugoslavia, please refer to the website Montenet (<http://www.montenet.org/history/history.htm>), referred to in Marković (2016).

⁵ These statistics were taken from the 2011 Montenegrin census ([http://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/popis2011/saopstenje/saopstenje\(1\).pdf](http://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/popis2011/saopstenje/saopstenje(1).pdf)).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Montenegro was excluded from the 1905 peace treaty and ceased to be independent soon after. The war between Montenegro and Japan was technically ended in 2006, after more than a hundred years (http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2006/06/16/Montenegro_Japan_to_declare_truce/UPI-82871150474764/).

Montenegrin history remains Serbia. The two countries have shared a large part of their history and there are questions surrounding the existence of Montenegrin as an ethnic group distinct from the Serbs since the two groups share the same language and religion. This ethnic question has been at the origin of many defining events in Montenegrin history and has had an impact on the debate over the NATO accession which will be addressed later in this thesis.

The history of Montenegro is also highly relevant to the study of its NATO integration process because it reveals that Montenegro, as an independent country, has been historically active as a guarantor of peace and stability in its region. The most prominent example of this is the fact that Montenegro led one of the first modern peacekeeping missions to ever take place. In 1897, after an insurrection of the Greek population of the island of Crete against the Ottoman rule and population, eighty Montenegrin soldiers were sent by Nikola I, the Prince of Montenegro, in order to protect civilians, accompany the return to order and maintain peace on the island (Sošić 2014, 146). Montenegrin troops stayed in Crete for two years and their action was deemed a success and allowed the Montenegrin military of the time, despite its small size, to earn some degree of international recognition and respect. This event has been identified by Banović (2016, 99) as being at the center of a “narrative of cooperation” used by the proponents of the NATO accession as an argument justifying the sending of Montenegrin soldiers abroad and proving the natural tendency of the country to get involved as part of a security community.

The recent history of Montenegro has been marked by two events which paved the way for NATO accession: the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990's and the return to independence of the country in 2006. The breakup of Yugoslavia which found its origins in the death of Tito in 1980 but progressively became a reality after the 1989 anti-bureaucratic revolution which brought in power Slobodan Milošević in Serbia and overthrew the old guard of rulers in Montenegro. Throughout the Slovenian, Croatian, and Bosnian independence wars (1991-1995), Montenegro remained strongly attached to Serbia, continuing to contribute to the Yugoslav National Army (JNA). It also remained governed by the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), the direct heir of the Montenegrin faction of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKCG) which had governed the republic since 1945. As described by Darmanović (2003, 148-150), this support to the Serbian authoritarian regime collapsed after an important clash

between pro and anti-Milošević within the DPS in 1997 which resulted in the Prime-Minister-turned-President Milo Đukanović to become the sole leader of the party. Even though Đukanović was already a major political figure in Montenegro before 1997, it is from this moment that he became an absolutely central actor who defined the political course of his country. Đukanović distanced himself from Milošević and managed to keep Montenegro neutral during the 1999 Kosovo War, advancing the idea that Montenegro was suffering from the political decisions made in Belgrade and adopting a completely different stance on the NATO intervention (Radanović Felberg 2007). It is also in 1999 that Montenegro achieved one of its first steps towards independence by almost seceding from Serbia economically in unilaterally replacing the Yugoslav dinar, which had been suffering from hyperinflation for several years, by the German Mark (Hanke 2016). After the fall of Milošević in 2000, the Montenegrin political elite, still led by Đukanović, managed to impose its vision for independence and obtained the disappearance of Yugoslavia which was replaced through the 2002 Belgrade Agreement by the Union of Serbia and Montenegro (Darmanović 2007, 154).

This temporary confederative state, imagined by the EU and in particular its High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs Javier Solana, was considered as unsatisfying by the Montenegrin political elites which kept pressing for the independence of the country (Massari 2005, 263). It can however be considered that this unique situation paved the way for the only case of a peaceful accession to independence in the Post-Yugoslav context. This was made possible by the support of the EU which oversaw the good conduct of the independence referendum which was held on 21 May 2006. In order to guarantee its recognition of the independence of Montenegro, the EU required a 55% threshold to be put in place⁸. With 55.5% of the voters approving the independence of the country, Montenegro secured its international recognition and officially regained its independence from Serbia on 3 June 2006, 88 years after it had lost it to what became Yugoslavia.

The independence of Montenegro further strengthened the DPS and the Đukanović regime, allowing him to put forward the next steps of his political agenda and to put in motion a redefinition of the country's objectives. This renewed political agenda has

⁸ Darmanovic (2007, 156) highlights that this decision bore significant risks since a situation where between 50% and 55% of the population would have voted in favor of the independence but would have not reached the 55% threshold, would have been very difficult to manage.

erected as one of its pillars Euro-Atlantic integration which has become one of the main strategic objectives for Montenegro, as stated in the preamble of the 2007 Montenegrin Constitution which underlines that this constitution is stemming from “The dedication to cooperation on equal footing with other nations and states and to the European and Euro-Atlantic integrations” (Official Gazette of Montenegro 2007, 1). It can thus be considered that, since its independence and the renewal of its constitution, Montenegro has had the goal of integrating the Euro-Atlantic by joining NATO.

NATO in the Western Balkans: from peace enforcer to peacebuilder

In parallel with the changes in Montenegrin socio-political change that were just described and with the progressive process towards the independence of Montenegro, NATO started to get involved in the Western Balkans. This involvement has taken various forms, from peace enforcement to peacebuilding, and is continuing to this day.

As observed previously, the breakup of Yugoslavia started in the very beginning of the 1990's, roughly at the same time as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. NATO having lost its main reason to exist and its archenemy, the Warsaw Pact, its future form, and its involvement in the coming conflicts were very uncertain. However, the successive crises which hit the Western Balkans region materialized a brutal return to the reality of a conflict happening in Europe, a first since World War II.

The conflicts which arose in what used to be Yugoslavia, and in particular the Bosnian War, did not only impact the Western Balkans, but also Europe as a whole. Indeed, the Bosnian War demonstrated the inability of the newly created European Union to act militarily and in a united fashion to prevent the escalation of a country in its own direct sphere of influence. Instead, the Bosnian created an internal turmoil within the European Union which paralyzed its ability to act from the start of the conflict⁹ (Kaufman 1998, 24). This inability of European institutions to manage the situation properly coupled with the failure of the UN peacekeeping mission, UNPROFOR, to

⁹ In 2013, in Lille, France, I had the privilege to attend a conference held by Jacques Delors, who served as President of the European Commission during most of the Bosnian War. During this conference, titled “Europe, how do we move forward together”, he declared that the moment he most believed the European Union could disappear was during the negotiations between the French, the English, and the Germans about the attitude to adopt regarding the Bosnian conflict.

prevent massacres (Robinson 2001, 118-119) resulted in NATO taking over the management and later on resolution of the conflict.

NATO got involved in Bosnia in the end of 1992 (Kaufman 1998, 24-25) and gradually stepped up its military presence and actions, driven by the will of the then President of the United States Bill Clinton. Eventually, on August 30, 1995, NATO launched Operation Deliberate Force, its first substantive crisis management operation. This operation has been labeled a strategic success (Kaufman 1998, 27) since it prevented further major civilian massacres and forced the leaders of the Bosnian Serbs to go back to the negotiation table, which allowed the resolution of the conflict through the Dayton Peace Agreements in November 1995. Bosnia was therefore NATO's first steps as a peacekeeper and its first direct involvement in the Western Balkans. This involvement was continued by the deployment in 1996 of the NATO-led Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR), the first long-term out-of-area deployment of a NATO force, which lasted until 2004 when it was replaced by the European Union's EUFOR Althea.

Only a few years after its intervention in Bosnia, NATO intervened again in the Western Balkans, this time during the Kosovo War. After the loss of most of the Yugoslav territory between 1991 and 1995, the Milošević regime began pressuring the Albanian populations of the southern Serbian province of Kosovo and threatened to challenge the relative autonomy they had acquired through the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution. This situation progressively escalated in the 1990's and resulted in the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in 1995. This tensed situation ultimately turned into an ethno-religiously based civil conflict in this small autonomous province in 1998 (Crawford 2001). As a result, and because of a number of reasons internal or external to the Atlantic Alliance, as detailed by Mccgwire (2000), NATO launched Operation Allied Force, a massive air campaign on Yugoslavia, in order to stop the cleansing of ethnic Albanians in the region. This operation forced the Milošević regime to pull its military forces out of Kosovo and resulted in Kosovo becoming an international protectorate. This new situation was followed by the sending of a major peacekeeping force in the UN-governed protectorate, the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR), which has managed to preserve a relative stability in Kosovo since 1999. This second NATO crisis management operation in the Western Balkans that is sometimes qualified as a "humanitarian war" (Roberts 1999) can be considered as strategically similar to the

Bosnian intervention since there was a need for NATO to prevent a collapse of regional security in a region within which it had already become heavily involved.

Regarding NATO's relationship with Montenegro, the Kosovo War represents an important precedent since even though Montenegro's involvement in the conflict was limited, the small republic was targeted. Indeed, Montenegro trying to remain neutral did not prevent NATO from bombing JNA installations in Montenegro, which led to the deaths of at least six civilians. This constitutes one of the events which has heavily influenced the Montenegrin debate over NATO accession.

After having acted as a peace enforcer and a peacebuilder in the Western Balkans for most of the 1990's, the Atlantic Alliance's role evolved in the early 2000's. In the mid-1990's, the promises that NATO had made to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to bring them back into the European family began to transform into an active enlargement policy (Behnke 2013, 103). This policy is well explained in the Study on NATO Enlargement (NATO 1995) which details how, in the changing post-Soviet world, an enlargement to the East was necessary to reinforce stability on the European continent and to strengthen the Alliance's ability to safeguard its security community. This process began with the integration of ten new members over two rounds of enlargement in 1999 and 2004. The 2004 enlargement included the first post-Yugoslav nation to join NATO, Slovenia. The Slovenian integration was followed in 2009 by the integration of Croatia and Albania, two countries which had links with NATO respectively since the Croatian and Bosnian Wars and Kosovo War. These integrations reflected NATO's will to accompany, along with the EU, the rebuilding of these countries which had been damaged by war (for Croatia) or by decades of a brutal dictatorship (for Albania) (Polak, Hendrickson, and Garrett 2009). It is with these integration processes, which also included FYROM¹⁰, that NATO faced the first time the specific problems of enlargement in the Western Balkans in terms of institution and security sector reforms (Cascone 2010, 179-187). The presence of NATO in the region and the conditionality it has used in order to integrate the candidate Western Balkan countries have fostered regional cooperation and helped democratization and stabilization, as argued by Zagorcheva (2012). Furthermore, the experience gained with the Albanian and Croatian integration processes has set a standard for

¹⁰ The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) had also completed its Membership Action Plan by 2009 but has been unable to join NATO because of its name dispute with Greece.

enlargement in the Western Balkans (Cascone, 188-192) and therefore impacted strongly the Montenegrin accession process.

These successive integrations and the implementation of the open doors policy in the Balkans thus represented the first steps of a process of enlargement to the Western Balkans region that is still continuing today and of which the Montenegrin integration is the latest expression.

The Montenegrin NATO integration process

In this section, we will firstly identify the various steps Montenegro had to go through in order to join NATO. We will continue by analyzing the transformations of the security and defense sectors which occurred during this process and we will finally assess the process' impact on Montenegro's role and place within the international system.

Understanding the NATO integration process in the case of Montenegro

Even though there were already contacts between the Union of Serbia and Montenegro and NATO since 2003, the relationship between Montenegro as an independent country and NATO began in November 2006, during the NATO Riga Summit (Knežević 2015, 52). During the summit, Montenegro was officially invited to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program which formalizes relations between NATO and a country considered as a partner¹¹. Similarly to other NATO partners seeking membership to the Alliance, Montenegro underwent a first PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP)¹², which took place in 2007-2008 and determined the main objectives the country had to reach in terms of military capabilities in order to successfully continue its road to NATO membership (Knežević 2015, 54). It was accompanied by the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP). This last program was replaced in June 2008 by the launch of an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP)¹³ for Montenegro which broadened the range of policies concerned

¹¹ More information about the PfP program can be found on the NATO website:

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm

¹² More information about the PARP can be found on the NATO website:

http://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_68277.htm

¹³ More information about the IPAP can be found on the NATO website:

http://www.nato.int/cps/on/natohq/topics_49290.htm

by NATO objectives. It also allowed Montenegro to get provided with a dialogue and recommendations more specific to its own problematics.

A major milestone in Montenegro's path to NATO accession was reached in December 2009 (MVPEI 2012, 2) when Montenegro started the last stage of the accession process by beginning its Membership Action Plan (MAP)¹⁴. As explained by Friis (2015, 2), the MAP is a status that allows countries having acquired it to undergo a series of reforms with the help of NATO through the Annual National Programmes (ANP). These annual programs are rather straightforward and describe the areas concerned by the program and the objectives that are set with the expected timeframe to achieve them. For instance, the first ANP put forward by Montenegro in 2010 (Government of Montenegro 2010), identified five chapters that would include reforms to adopt or practices to change in order to reach NATO standards: Political and Economic Matters, Military and Defence Matters, Resources, Security Matters, and Legal Matters. Attached to these areas were a list of reforms to adopt or to continue and a specific technical account of these objectives and the way to achieve them (Government of Montenegro 2010, 10-56). These ANPs spanned from 2010 to 2015 and included the bulk of the reforms of the security sector and of the Montenegrin policies and politics that will be discussed throughout this thesis. In 2015, the Government of Montenegro issued a 'Report on the Implementation of the Fifth Annual National Programme (ANP) of Montenegro'. This document assesses the progresses that were made and outlines the priorities for the NATO integration process in the framework of the intensified and focused talks tool. One can also highlight that between the first ANP from 2010 and the last one, from 2015 (Government of Montenegro 2014), four key areas to focus the reforms on have been identified (security sector reform, strengthening rule of law, increasing public support for accession to NATO and continuation of the defence sector reform) and the chapters included have evolved to include: Political Matters, Rule of Law, Parliamentary Reforms, Security Matters, Military and Defence Matters, Economics Matters, and Legal Matters.

The implementation of these programs is necessary for the applicant state if it wants to advance towards NATO membership or augmented cooperation. This is part of the conditionality policy carried out by NATO with its applicant states. The NATO

¹⁴ More information about the MAP can be found on the NATO website: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_37356.htm

conditionality is very similar and even intertwined with the EU one. However, and as underlined by Bátor (2014, 5), the EU membership accession process is very technical, with the chapters opening, reforms being carried out, and the chapters closing, whereas the NATO one is much more politically driven. It is important to notice that, for Montenegro, the NATO integration process and the reforms carried out in the context of the successive ANPs were very much connected with the reforms undergone in the context of the EU accession process (Friis 2015, 2).

Montenegro's accession to NATO became more plausible after the 2014 Wales Summit which introduced new tools to enhance the Montenegrin NATO accession process, namely the intensified and focused talks. Bátor (2014, 7-8) considers that this new tool has contributed to reinforce the accession process. It has supplemented the MAP/ANP process in some strategic areas and it has allowed Montenegrin and NATO officials to meet more often in order to discuss technical topics. The Wales Summit, as Bátor (2014, 8) also points out, also provided a more specific agenda for the Montenegrin accession by demanding an assessment of the Montenegrin progresses by the end of 2015. The interpretation is that this strict timeframe was an indication of the willingness of NATO allies to speed up the Montenegrin integration process.

On 2 December 2015, after the implementation of the fifth annual national plan and after a successful use of the intensified and focused talks, NATO foreign ministers officially invited Montenegro to start Accession Talks to join the Atlantic Alliance (BBC News 2015). This was followed by the aforementioned Accession Talks which took place between February 2016 (Delauney 2016) and May 2016. Their conclusions resulted on 19 May 2016 (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty 2016) in the signature by NATO foreign ministers of the Accession Protocol, the last step before full membership.

In order to finalize the accession process and for Montenegro to become a full NATO member, the Accession Protocol had to be ratified by the then 28 NATO member states. During this process, which took roughly eleven months, beginning with the ratification by Iceland on 23 June 2016 and ending with the ratification by Spain on 18 May 2017 (US Department of State 2017), Montenegro was considered as an 'Invitee', allowing its representatives to attend NATO summits and participate to the meetings without, however, having voting rights. It is in this quality that the country participated in the Warsaw Summit in July 2016 and to the Brussels Summit in May 2017. The ratification process intervened in a relatively tensed geopolitical climate which could

have jeopardized the whole process. There were firstly Montenegrin domestic tensions linked to the October 2016 parliamentary elections and to the Montenegrin debate over NATO accession (an issue which will be addressed later in this thesis). There were also interrogations about the ratification of the Accession Protocol by the United States, since the newly elected President, Donald J. Trump, had expressed a relatively hostile stance towards NATO during his campaign. However, once in office, President Trump proved to be a partisan of the Montenegrin NATO accession (Office of the White House Press Secretary 2017) and encouraged the U.S. Congress to ratify the Accession Protocol, which happened on 21 April 2017 (US Department of State 2017). Finally, there were reports (Tomovic 2017) that the Montenegrin opposition attempted to block the Dutch ratification by advocating for the organization of a referendum on the ratification. This did not materialize, the Dutch Parliament having ratified the Accession Protocol on 4 May 2017.

Montenegro officially joined NATO as the 29th member of the Atlantic Alliance on 5 June 2017. The accession, which was finalized by the deposition of the country's instrument of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington D.C by the Montenegrin Prime Minister, Duško Marković, happened in the presence of Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary-General and was followed by a meeting between Marković and the Vice-President of the United States, Mike Pence (Djurdjic 2017). After the flag-raising ceremony, which saw the Montenegrin flag join the 28 other NATO ones on 6 June 2017, Montenegro started to fully take part in NATO activities, as shown by the participation of its representative to the NATO Military Committee on 7 June 2017 (NATO 2017a).

The transformation of the Montenegrin security and defense sector

The most important reforms carried out during the NATO integration process were related to the security and defense sector. As a matter of fact, the security institutions of Montenegro, which were inherited from the Yugoslav era (Bátor 2014, 9), were completely transformed over the decade of NATO integration process. This whole process, which can be identified as a Security Sector Reform (SSR) encompasses many different aspects of the security sector, be it in organizational, managerial, or financial terms (Marley 2014, 33-34). This phenomenon has happened within most post-Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, and, as explained by Marley

(2014), has been happening in the post-Yugoslav space alongside democratization and European integration.

In the case of Montenegro, the reforms carried out through the various stages of the integration process allowed the country to reach the NATO standards required for its accession to the Alliance. This concerned the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces of Montenegro, the intelligence community, but also other institutions or policies related to the security sector. In order to provide a clear definition of this process and to outline the reforms needed and their achievement, the Montenegrin government produced several strategic documents during the lapse of time between the independence of the country and its accession to NATO. These documents, which represent the implementation of the provisions planned within the ANPs, have profoundly transformed the Montenegrin defense and security sector.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) of Montenegro has been the first institution impacted by the reforms undertaken in the NATO integration context and has centralized the formulation of the reforms and their implementation (Tahirović and Injac 2016, 40). This focus on the MoD appears very clearly when looking at the partnership objectives set in the first Montenegrin PARP of 2008, since in this document “26 out of 32 partnership objectives are related to the Ministry of Defense and the Army of Montenegro” (Knežević 2015, 54). Even if the bulk of the reforms concerned the Armed Forces and their functioning, the MoD itself was also transformed during the integration process. These changes were firstly organizational, as described in the 2013 Strategic Defence Review of Montenegro (Ministry of Defence of Montenegro 2013, 16-17). The MoD has become increasingly decentralized and has been reorganized around three directorates: The Directorate for Defence Policy, the Directorate for Human Resources and the Directorate for Material Resources. The link between the MoD and the Armed Forces is the General Staff of the Armed Forces which has been subject to an increased civilian control, as showed by the adoption in 2009 of the Law on Army (Knežević 2015, 56). This civilian control exercised by the MoD has been coupled with measures adopted to fight and prevent corruption, a rampant issue in Montenegro. In order to comply with NATO requirements in terms of transparency and integrity, the MoD adopted in 2014 the ‘MoD Integrity Plan’ (Tahirović and Injac 2016, 43). The transformation of the MoD has also been accompanied by a feminization of the sector which has traditionally been dominated by men in Montenegro (Tahirović 2011, 133).

This feminization can be considered as an example of change that has been triggered by the social learning that has been acquired through NATO integration.

The MoD, and in particular its Directorate for Material Resources, has also been in charge of the management of the equipment available to the Armed Forces and of its modernization. For a Post-Yugoslav state, the management of the equipment remaining from the JNA and its replacement with modernized equipment is a major issue. In the case of Montenegro, one of the main issues which was dealt with in the process of NATO integration was the management of the important surplus it had inherited from the common army with Serbia. This has been a priority of the MoD since 2007 (Tomovic 2016) and the reduction of the surplus has been mainly achieved through its progressive destruction. This objective has been pursued with the support of the international community, as shown by the MONDEM project launched in 2007 by the UNDP and the OSCE¹⁵ and by programs launched with NATO support (Tomovic 2016; Government of Montenegro 2015, 36). These reforms in the management of the equipment have also resulted in a redefinition of the scope of capabilities of the Montenegrin Armed Forces. This is best exemplified by the reform of the Montenegrin Air Force. The choice has been made, because of the small size and capabilities of Montenegro, to focus on helicopters (which are to be modernized) and on the ability to cover the airspace with a renewed modern radar system (Ministry of Defence of Montenegro 2013, 30). This has effectively meant that Montenegro has abandoned the idea to maintain its combat aircrafts operational¹⁶. This strategic choice was only made possible by the assurance that Montenegro could pool from NATO resources if needed and could rely on the Atlantic Alliance for the defense of its airspace.

Another major issue for the Montenegrin MoD, as underlined by Radević (2009, 95), has been the financial management of the defense sector. Given the size of the country's population and economy, Montenegro has limited military expenditures, which amounted to 60.7 million euros in 2016¹⁷. This small budget represented 1.61% of the country's GDP¹⁸, which is lower than the 2% demanded by NATO, even though

¹⁵ For more information about the project, please refer to the dedicated webpage:

http://www.me.undp.org/content/montenegro/en/home/operations/projects/democratic_governance/MONDEM.html

¹⁶ Montenegro had inherited 17 G-4 Super-Galeb combat aircrafts from the Yugoslav Army.

¹⁷ According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

¹⁸ According to the World Bank:

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=ME>

there are plans to reach the NATO threshold by 2024 (U.S. Congress 2016, 3). According to the MoD (2013, 36), 15% of these expenditures are linked to modernization and have therefore directly been allocated to allow the Montenegrin defense sector to reach NATO standards. Apart from the raise in military expenditures themselves, Montenegro's accession to NATO also raised the question of the country's direct contribution to the NATO common budget. During the integration process, it had been estimated that this direct cost linked to NATO accession could exceed one million euros per year (Jovetić 2009, 118). The real Montenegrin contribution is however set to be much more limited at an annual 450.000€ (RTCG 2017).

All of these reforms have been provided in the ANPs and have been achieved with the support of NATO experts and funds, as explained by Tahirović and Injac (2016). Within this context, one can highlight the particular role played by Norway in the reform of the Montenegrin MoD. Busterud (2015) details how the Norwegian MoD assisted Montenegro both financially and with its expertise to help with the reforms the country's defense sector had to undergo. This cooperation also proves that these reforms were not only achieved through NATO conditionality, but also through cooperation, which in this case resulted in transnational socialization and the adoption of practices and understandings corresponding to those of NATO. Within just over a decade, the Montenegrin MoD managed to completely reform itself in order to reach NATO standards and determine its new functioning and strategies in the Euro-Atlantic context. This transformation of the Ministry of Defence goes however way beyond the reforms that impact the ministry as a government institution. It also primarily impacted the Armed Forces of Montenegro.

The transformation of the Armed Forces of Montenegro has been directly linked to the reforms carried out by the MoD. These reforms have been implemented with the will for the Montenegrin military to reach NATO standards, which would allow the country to access the Alliance and to be fully able to cooperate militarily with its allies. This transformation began right after the independence of Montenegro when conscription was abolished and the country switched to a professional army (Tahirović and Injac 2016, 46). This professionalization, which happened in most European countries since the end of the Cold War, resulted in the Montenegrin active military personnel having downsized from 6,000 after the independence to 1,950 in 2016 (Austrian National Defence Academy 2016, 2). This phenomenon was accompanied by a reform in the

organization of the armed forces, and in particular of the land forces. The Montenegrin land forces were organized into brigades, which involved a heavy hierarchy and did not match NATO standards in organizational terms. This outdated structured was simplified by the adoption of a new structuration in battalions for the armed forces. According to the 2013 Strategic Defense Review (Ministry of Defense of Montenegro 2013, 26-29) this reorganization was one of the key priorities for the enhancement of the Montenegrin defense system. In parallel with this reorganization, the Montenegrin military sought to improve the overall education level of its personnel. This materialized into several programs with international partners and public and private education infrastructures (Tahirović and Injac 2016, 47). Montenegro also benefited from the possibility to send its cadets to military academies abroad and from trainings available to its personnel through PfP, bilateral or multilateral frameworks (48-49). This amelioration of the global education level within the Montenegrin Armed Forces has contributed to the success Montenegro has experienced in becoming NATO-ready and reaching the Alliance standards in terms of military practices and readiness.

The Montenegrin military received operational training with NATO standards under the Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC) provided with the PfP. The OCC, according to Tahirović and Injac (2016, 46) “represents the process of reaching capabilities according to NATO standards in order to participate in NATO-led international operations”. In 2014, a first Montenegrin company completed the OCC process and was therefore ready “for equal participation in international missions and operations led by NATO” (45-46). The main objective of the OCC was to ensure that the Montenegrin Armed Forces could become interoperable with other NATO forces, as this stands as a requirement for NATO integration (Jovetić 2009, 114). Throughout the various reforms it has undergone since its creation, the Montenegrin military has managed to attain the maturity of a NATO standardized military capable of being deployed in a multinational context and to operate with its allies in an optimized way. This interoperability has been tested in various ways before the Montenegrin accession to NATO. It has firstly been proven through NATO-led projects, such as the BRAAD project or the ASDE project taking place primarily at the regional level (Government of Montenegro 2014, 17-18). It has also been tested through the Montenegrin participation to many joint military exercises under NATO auspices. Tahirović and Injac (2016, 51-52), have identified 23 international exercises in which the Montenegrin

Armed Forces took part in nine NATO countries up to 2016. It has also recently participated in several NATO exercises in 2017, including 'Platinum Eagle 17.1' in Romania (Romanian Ministry of National Defence 2017) and its first exercise as a full NATO member¹⁹, 'Adriatic Strike 2017', which took place in Slovenia (Allied Air Command Public Affairs Office 2017).

Furthermore, the proficiency of the Montenegrin military and its ability to operate in a multinational environment have not only been demonstrated by participating in military exercises. Indeed, the Armed Forces of Montenegro have actually deployed some of their troops in a NATO-led out-of-area operation, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, between 2010 and 2014. This deployment, which has been achieved under the command of the German Military and the Hungarian Military²⁰, reached 39 troops in 2012 (Ministry of Defence of Montenegro 2012). It has been underlined by the NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg (NATO 2017b), as a proof that Montenegro has been contributing to the NATO shared security. As of 2016, 18 Montenegrin troops (Stoltenberg 2017, 100) remain deployed in Afghanistan under the Resolute Support Mission, which started in 2015. In addition to this deployment, the Montenegrin military has also contributed to peacekeeping or peacebuilding operations in other frameworks, be it with the UN, by participating in UNMIL²¹, or with the EU, by participating in EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta²² (Sošić 2014, 151-154).

These transformations have also concerned the civilian capabilities of Montenegro. It has been argued by Sošić (2014), that Montenegro has lacked civilian capabilities for international interventions. This is most visible in the case of the Civil Protection units which are supposed to exist but de facto do not. In this area, NATO integration has been very valuable since the enhancement of the Montenegrin civilian capabilities has been identified as an objective in the fifth ANP (Government of Montenegro 2014, 61). In the NATO context, the experience of similar-sized countries which are active in the

¹⁹ Montenegro became a full NATO member during the exercise, which took place between 4 June and 10 June 2017.

²⁰ The Montenegrin military was mostly stationed at Camp Marmal (commanded by Germany) and at Camp Pannonia (commanded by Hungary).

²¹ For more information about the United Nations Mission in Liberia, please refer to the dedicated website: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/>

²² For more information about the EUNAVFOR Atalanta, please refer to the dedicated website: <http://eunavfor.eu/>

deployment of civilian capabilities in peace support missions, such as Iceland, is an additional asset for Montenegro. On this matter, Montenegro has displayed important advancement and has been trying to present itself as a regional leader (Sošić 2014, 161). A demonstration of this has been the hosting, in Montenegro, of a major NATO consequence management field exercise, titled 'CRNA GORA – 2016'. This exercise mobilized 680 participants from 31 NATO and partner countries and demonstrated the interoperability of the mobilized, among others, civilian capabilities (NATO 2016).

This exercise has been organized with the help of the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme, a program in which Montenegro has been actively taking part since its creation in 2006 (Ivanovic 2010). Science has represented an important part of Montenegro's efforts to integrate into NATO, being mentioned as one of the first priorities in the report on the fifth ANP (Government of Montenegro 2015, 10). The country has therefore been willing to get increasingly involved in the project (NATO 2014).

NATO integration has also impacted other parts of the Montenegrin security sector which includes the Montenegrin intelligence community and the country's cyber-defense infrastructures. One of the main issues which delayed the Montenegrin integration into NATO was the fragility of its main intelligence, the National Security Agency (ANB), which was inherited from the Yugoslav era and was suspected to be penetrated by the Russian intelligence, as explained by Jankovic (2014). This issue was tackled in 2014, with the adoption of a new legal framework for the activities of the ANB (Bátor 2014, 9) and additional reforms in order to meet NATO standards (Government of Montenegro 2015, 28-30). These reforms have also meant a change in human resources by sending into early retirement a number of experienced agents who might have been compromised (Tomovic 2015). Cyber-security has been a widely different issue, since most of the policies and infrastructures had to be built after the independence. Indeed, cyber-security was firstly addressed in Montenegro just a little before the independence, in 2005 (Šendelj et al. 2014, 3). Moreover, as proven by the fact that it is not mentioned in the first ANP (Government of Montenegro 2010), cyber-security did not become a matter of interest for the Montenegrin Government before 2013, when a 'National Cyber-Security Strategy for Montenegro 2013-2017' was adopted (Šendelj et al. 2014, 3). Since then, this strategy has started to be implemented, as provided by the report on the fifth ANP (Government of Montenegro

2015, 30-33) with a focus on the strengthening and developing of the existing CIRT across the country. NATO accession also represents an important opportunity for the Montenegrin cyber-security sector since it is allowing the country to draw from the NCIRC cyber-defense support, a structure thanks to which NATO has been deemed “the only organization which is dealing with this kind of threat in a systematic and professional way” (Tahirović and Injac 2016, 59).

Montenegro within the international system

The Montenegrin integration into NATO and its subsequent accession to the Organization as a full member has been having an important impact on the country’s role as a state within the international system. Because of the evolution of the geopolitical climate in Europe for the past decade, the Western Balkans, which had been gradually forgotten from the Western political agenda, have become a priority again (Bechev 2017). For a small country such as Montenegro, this has represented a great opportunity to prove to the world that it is a “serious state committed to the rule of law and security” (Jovetić 2009, 113). It can be argued that NATO integration has greatly increased Montenegro’s reputation on the international stage and has allowed it to join a community that is considered very advanced and valuable.

This integration strengthens the Montenegrin presence on the European and international stage especially in areas of security and international cooperation. Before its accession to NATO, the only major international security institution Montenegro was a member of was the OSCE. However, the NATO membership is much more powerful in the way that it materializes the fact that Montenegro now belongs to the Euro-Atlantic security community. This means that the country can now count on collective security for its defense and is part of a community of shared practices and understandings. This will most likely improve Montenegro’s relations with many of its new Atlantic Allies and will allow it to promote its vision of international politics with the support of a large and powerful institutional platform.

Lukšić (who served as Montenegrin Prime Minister between 2010 and 2012) and Katnić (2016, 692) have identified EU and NATO memberships as the two pillars which have driven political reform. In this context, and as in the case of other Central and Eastern European countries, Montenegro has been building upon its NATO integration to reinforce its efforts to join the EU. This is particularly valid when considering that

Montenegro has only been able to pursue this dual strategic objective of Euro-Atlantic integration after its independence. Under what remained of Yugoslavia and the Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the perspectives to get integrated by the EU was limited (Massari 2005). However, the fact that Montenegro has put as one of its core priorities EU and NATO integrations has expressed a strong stance on the position it aspires to get on the international stage. From a theoretical standpoint, it could be considered that the international socialization and institutional learning acquired in the NATO integration process are directly spilling over to the EU integration process. In this regard, Montenegro has been attempted to learn from the paths of other CEE countries, such as Poland or Estonia (Lukšić and Katnić 2016, 692). The Montenegrin case is also very similar to the one of its neighbor, Croatia, which has managed to join the EU in 2013, four years after its entry into NATO. In both cases, NATO integration, beyond the advantages it has immediately brought, has allowed to push for reforms actively contributing to the EU membership bid. Even if the incorporation into NATO prior to the EU membership is not an obligation, it has been underlined that, due to the overlap of requirements between the two organizations, NATO membership can be used as a tool and as a platform towards the EU one (Jovetić 2009, 112). One can notice in this regard that the 'external relations' chapter of the *Acquis Communautaire* for Montenegro's EU accession process was closed on 20 June 2017 (Council of the European Union 2017), a few weeks after the country's full accession to NATO.

For all these reasons, the Montenegrin accession to NATO represents an important accomplishment for the country's geostrategic policy. It confirms the reorientation of the country's geopolitical place as an independent state which wishes to belong to a new community, the Euro-Atlantic one. Indeed, Yugoslavia was one of the founder states of the non-aligned movement and Serbia, with which Montenegro was united, is openly reluctant to pursue NATO accession and shares strong diplomatic and military links with Russia. This accession also provides guarantees at the regional and international level by countering in itself the instability brought by the global geopolitical environment. It also provides guarantees against the threats emitted from Russia (Luhn 2017) which sought to inflex the country's path towards the Atlantic Alliance and attempted to achieve so in getting involved in Montenegro's domestic debate over NATO accession.

The impact of the NATO accession process on Montenegrin politics

Security and defense have been the most impacted sectors during the Montenegrin accession process. However, this does not mean that this process did not have a domestic impact beyond the changes and reforms that were described. This section analyzes two very different impacts that the NATO accession process has had on Montenegrin politics. The first is the Montenegrin debate over NATO accession which has mobilized a large part of the Montenegrin political space for the past decade. The second is the changes that have occurred in Montenegrin policies and sociopolitical practices as a result of the integration process.

Explaining the Montenegrin debate over NATO accession

The debate over NATO accession has been the most divisive issue in Montenegrin politics since the debate over the independence of the country which took place in the 1990's and early 2000's. It is important to notice that the country's public opinion has been alternating between leaning slightly in favor or against the integration since the beginning of the debate²³. In this way, NATO membership is much more controversial than the EU one²⁴.

This debate is specific in the sense that it has revolved around three different issues: the political and economic interests of joining NATO, the Montenegrin identity and its alignment on the international stage, and the Montenegrin political system. In addition to these issues, the involvement of external actors in the debate, and in particular of Russian and Serbian ones, has directly impacted Montenegrin politics in this specific context.

There has been an intensive debate over the opportunity of joining NATO and about the potential consequences for Montenegro. A similar set of arguments has been used to justify both positions. Radoman (2007, 15-18), identified firstly the proponents of NATO accession, who argued that it would result in an enhanced global position and security for the country, push forward EU membership, and bring new economic

²³ According to polls carried out by the NGO CEDEM (<http://www.cedem.me/en/>) and the public opinion research agencies Ipsos (<http://www.ipsosadria.com/>) and Damar.

²⁴ In 2016, the support for EU membership was evaluated at 74% by the EU: <http://www.delme.ec.europa.eu/code/navigate.php?Id=3455>

opportunities. She also identified the opponents of NATO accession (2007, 18-20), who argued that, on the contrary, NATO, as an outdated institution, would not increase Montenegro's security and that it would not bring consequent economic improvements. The economic aspect of the debate, which has been summed up by Jovetić (2009), has mostly revolved round the cost that would be needed to cover the new security obligations linked to NATO membership and to the potential impact on Russian investments in Montenegro. There has also been fears, including in the academic community (Kovacevic 2017), that the integration of Montenegro would be part of a neocolonial project designed by NATO to threaten Russia. This might be explained by the fact that, among the opponents to NATO accession, the memory of the 1999 NATO bombings is indeed still vivid (Kovacevic 2017, 43) and that it thus seemed unthinkable that Montenegro would join that very organization which bombed the country in the close past.

However, beyond these rather 'usual' elements of the debate, this societal question over the opportunity to join NATO has resulted in the emergence of much deeper lines of division within the Montenegrin socio-political sphere. This division goes back to a very basic question: Do the Montenegrins exist as a people distinguished from the Serbs? This question has been at the center of the building of the Montenegrin identity since it has emerged as an independent entity in the 18th century. It is argued by some Montenegrin Serbs that there is no difference between Serbs and Montenegrins and that they should therefore behave like one unified people (Banović 2016, 109-113). This issue has been revolving around two aspects of the constitution of identities: language and religion. Since the independence of the country, the Government has managed to impose Montenegrin as the only official language in the country, even though the language is very similar to Serbian and that there was no distinction between the two languages during the Yugoslav times (Boskovic 2010). The religious question has also gained importance in recent years. Most Montenegrins are Christian Orthodox and were linked to the Serbian Orthodox Church since the disappearance of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church in 1918. The latter has been reinstated after the fall of Yugoslavia and has been promoted by the Montenegrin Government. Since the existence of an autonomous Orthodox Church is a symbol of a specific and distinct identity, the dynamics of opposition between the two factions has become a

sociopolitical issue shaping the modern Montenegrin identity (Morrison and Čagorović 2014).

This question of the Montenegrin identity is at the center of a book written by Branko Banović and published in 2016 titled 'The Montenegrin Warrior Tradition: Questions and Controversies over NATO Membership'. In this book, Banović explains that the modern Montenegrin identity has been structured around six defining historical moments²⁵ (2016, 86-90). Among those, the 1918 Podgorica Assembly and the ensuing Christmas Uprising have been critical in shaping the current discourse on Montenegrin identity. In 1918, after the end of World War I, the Podgorica Assembly voted in favor of the unconditional unification with what was the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, making Montenegro effectively disappear as a distinct political entity. This decision was far from unanimous and led to a civil conflict between the advocates of this new situation, the 'Whites', and those who opposed it, the 'Greens'. This was mostly based on ethnic identities, the 'Whites' identifying themselves as Serbs and the 'Greens' as Montenegrins. This division, which had become invisible in the public space under communism, resurfaced at the fall of Yugoslavia and took a central place during the debate over independence. It has continued to exist to this day and has taken the form of opponents and proponents of NATO integration. As a result, these defining moments are still invoked by the different parties in order to support their narratives (2016, 100-104). Banović has observed as a consequence that those who self-identify as Montenegrins are more inclined to support NATO integration and the independence of Montenegro (2016, 105-109) whereas those who self-identify as Serbs are more inclined to oppose the NATO membership and to consider that the Montenegrin identity is inextricably linked to Serbia (2016, 109-117).

This division over the Montenegrin identity exists also when it comes to the position of the country on the international stage. The Montenegrin Government and other NATO accession advocates have argued that joining NATO represents an accomplishment for Montenegro as an independent country and constitutes a logical continuation "in the reproduction of the contemporary Montenegrin identity" (Banović 2016, 102). Integration to NATO as a military alliance has also been justified by what Banović

²⁵ The identified defining historical moments are: The Battle of Martinići (1796), the Battle of Grahovac (1858), the Congress of Berlin (1878), the Podgorica Assembly (1918), the Christmas Uprising (1918), and the Uprising in Montenegro (1941).

(2016, 99) describes as a “narrative of cooperation”. This narrative relies on the idea that cooperation with NATO allies and participation in international operations are in the continuity of a tradition built from the 1897 Montenegrin intervention in Crete. This narrative has been rejected by the NATO accession opponents who have built their own narrative of the Montenegrin position on the international stage. It is based on the idea that Montenegro should either pursue neutrality or cultivate its ties with Russia, a country which has long been Montenegro’s most precious ally and has largely helped Montenegro acquire its independence and get internationally recognized during the 19th century (2016, 81-82).

The Montenegrin political system has also been at the center of the debate over NATO accession. Montenegro is a unique case in the post-Yugoslav space: one political party, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) has been ruling the country for more than 26 years. This party is also the only heir of the old Yugoslav League of Communists that has remained to retain power continuously after the breakup of Yugoslavia (Darmanović 2017, 123). This is explained by the fact that the party, in addition to benefiting from the charisma of its leader, Milo Đukanović, has managed to adapt its positions and policies in order to stay in power (Vuković 2015). However, the DPS regime has been regularly accused of being corrupt²⁶ and of exercising and retaining power through the control of state institutions and resources. The oversight on state infrastructure and control over public spending, party funding and state administration have also been complemented by modifications in citizenship policies by the DPS governments to influence electoral dynamics in its own favor (Dzankić 2014). The power exercised by the DPS in Montenegro can be described as ‘state-seizure’ since the policies that are put in place are aimed at the survival of the regime. Given that accession to NATO has become one of the main objectives of the DPS regime since the independence of Montenegro, it has become a heavily manipulated political topic. The DPS has presented the NATO accession as a way to bring stability and democratization, and to ensure the independence of the country. It has also been promoting itself as the guarantor of NATO accession and thus has also increasingly presented those who opposed the accession (and therefore the DPS) as forces seeking the destabilization of the nation (Banović 2016, 107-109). On the contrary, the

²⁶ Milo Đukanović has been identified as the ‘2015 Man of the Year in Organized Crime’ by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project: <https://www.occrp.org/personoftheyear/2015/>

opposition has seized the platform represented by the NATO accession debate to contest the power of the regime and call for reforms. This opposition has taken the form of sometimes violent demonstrations in Podgorica calling for the resignation of Milo Đukanović and the discontinuation of the NATO integration process.

This opposition has been mainly driven by a political platform named the Democratic Front, which emerged in 2012 as a coalition of mostly Serb political parties. This coalition has aimed at overthrowing the longstanding DPS regime and at advancing the political objectives of the Serb minority in Montenegro. Given the historical relationship between Serbs and NATO, it does not come as a surprise that this community would oppose NATO accession since they consider the Atlantic Alliance as an aggressor and as the main opponent to Russia, the historical ally of both Montenegro and Serbia. In addition, Serbs consider themselves second-class citizens in Montenegro and envision NATO accession as the pinnacle of a decade of political orientations that have been decided against their will (Banović 2016, 109-117).

Similarly to other cases in the recent European political history, this platform, which has stood as the main opponent to NATO accession within the debate, has been heavily influenced and funded by Russian interests (Darmanović 2017, 124). This Russian meddling within the debate is logical, given the strategic importance of Montenegro as a country having access to the Adriatic coast and the historical links between Montenegro and Russia.

The Russian implication in the Montenegrin debate over NATO accession appeared very clearly during the October 2016 Parliamentary elections. Montenegro is a unicameral parliamentary republic with a closed list proportional representation electoral system. This system has meant that the DPS regime has often relied on political allies in order to form coalitions and remain in power. In this context, the October 2016 Parliamentary elections have appeared as a crucial point during the debate over NATO accession. The Democratic Front and its allies had been calling for a referendum over the NATO accession for some time (Kovacevic 2017, 50), an option which was refused by the DPS government. Instead, and since Montenegro had already been invited to join NATO in 2015, the 2016 elections acted as a *de facto* referendum on the issue (Darmanović 2017, 126). It can thus be considered that this election and the associated campaign have represented the peak of the debate over NATO accession. These elections were rhythmized by various significant events, the

most pregnant having happened on election day, 16 October 2016. On that day, the Montenegrin prosecutor for organized crime announced the arrest of twenty ultranationalist Serbians who were said to aim at disrupting the elections and even assassinate the Prime Minister (Serwer and Vuković 2016). This coup attempt has been proven to have been led by pro-Moscow forces and by Russian operatives, which demonstrates the degree of involvement of Russian and pro-forces in these elections and thus in the NATO accession debate (Joseph and Vuković 2016).

The Russian involvement did not, however, reach its goal, since the 2016 Parliamentary elections resulted in a win from the DPS which has been continuing to exercise power in Montenegro. The DPS has managed to gather the support of the political parties representing the ethnic minorities of the country²⁷, which are largely in favor of the NATO accession, to build an absolute majority in the National Assembly (42 seats out of 81) and remain in power. These elections have had significant consequences, since they have resulted in Milo Đukanović stepping down as Prime Minister to be replaced by its close ally Duško Marković (Euractiv 2016). More importantly, since these elections acted as a referendum on the issue, they have validated the NATO accession and represented a conclusion to the Montenegrin debate over NATO accession.

Domestic reforms and sociopolitical change in relation to NATO integration

Beyond the debate which has shaken Montenegrin politics for the past decade, the NATO integration process has had an important impact on many policies and sociopolitical practices that have been carried out in the country. Even if security and defense have been the most concerned policy areas, these reforms do not only deal with this sector. Instead, the NATO integration process has reached and impacted many issues, as it would be expected in a case of international socialization occurring by integrating into an international organization. These include the organization of the Montenegrin political life, the democratization of the country, and the development of its organized civil society.

²⁷ The DPS is currently in a coalition with the Bosniak Party, the New Democratic Power (FORCA, representing the Montenegrin Albanian minority) and the Croatian Civic Initiative, all representing minorities. This coalition also includes two other political parties: the Social Democrats, and the Liberal Party of Montenegro.

Given that the Montenegrin NATO integration process has been very divisive and has sparked the largest debate in the country since it returned to independence, it has had an important impact on the organization of the political life of the country. The position of a given political party and its behavior during the debate has become one of the main lines of demarcation in terms of party affiliation. As explained by Vujović and Komar (2008), Europeanization, as a global process, has transformed Montenegrin politics. However, and even if the EU integration fosters political change and party reform, it has been a much more consensual process than NATO integration (2008, 240). This means that in addition to the various reforms it has instigated directly, NATO has also restructured Montenegrin politics into a new matrix.

The NATO integration process has also allowed Montenegro to improve its legal framework and practices related to democratization and the rule of law. As it has been highlighted during the debate on NATO accession, Montenegro has been affected by high levels of corruption²⁸ and a dysfunctional judicial system inherited from the Yugoslav era. The ANPs have included measures regarding the political and judicial practices of the country and have enhanced the general rule of law standards in Montenegro. The fifth ANP included the Rule of Law as its second chapter of priorities and reforms to carry out (Government of Montenegro 2015, 20-28) which focused on reforming the judicial system and fighting organized crime and corruption. Even if Montenegro is far from having reached levels of rule of law comparable to Western countries, as illustrated by its limited freedom of press (Abrahams 2016), some reforms have been achieved and are starting to bear results. One can highlight for instance the creation in 2015 of the Special State Prosecutor's Office which has been in charge of the indictment of those who participated in the 2016 election day foiled attack on the elections and the Prime Minister. The arrest and prosecution of the ex-Mayor of Budva (ninth largest city in the country), who was condemned in 2016 for "abusing public administration position and obtaining personal gain via corruption" (Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative 2016) is also a sign that the judicial system is globally improving. These reforms have also been boosted by the fact that they also correspond to the implementation of requirements of the EU integration Acquis, and in particular those of Chapters 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and

²⁸ In 2016, Montenegro ranked 64th out of 176 countries (31st out of 50 countries in the Europe and Central Asia Region) in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index with a score of 45 out of 100: <https://www.transparency.org/country/MNE>

Security), which has resulted in the adoption of the 2014-2018 Judicial Strategy (Bátor 2014, 12).

During its integration into NATO, Montenegro has also been developing a social environment favorable to a renewed organized civil society which has managed to reinforce democratization by asking for more accountability from the government and other institutions. These most notably include the Center for Democracy and Human Rights²⁹, which was created in 1997, and the Center for Democratic Transition³⁰, which was created in 2000. The Montenegrin organized civil society has also actively taken part in the NATO integration process and the associated debate. The CDT has for instance opened in 2012 a Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration which has been identified as a tool contributing to the improvement of the public support for NATO accession (Bátor 2014, 10). Counterparts from the organized civil society advocating against the NATO accession also exist, such as the Movement for Neutrality of Montenegro³¹ (Kovacevic 2017, 50-55).

These reforms and social changes have to be understood within a more global transition that Montenegro is undergoing as a post-Yugoslav country. This transition is linked to both NATO and EU integration, as well as other endogenously-generated reforms and political change (Lukšić and Katnić 2016). In this context, the NATO integration, even if it has not directly impacted the policy-making in areas outside security and defense and despite the fact that the NATO accession process concerns a narrower spectrum than the EU one, has been providing a clear path and examples to imitate. It has also given the Montenegrin Government and the civil society new interlocutors to interact with. This means that the NATO accession process has fostered socio-political change and has been bringing the Montenegrin society and practices of governance closer to the standards of the rest of the NATO members. It can thus be considered that the norm cascade that has resulted from the NATO integration process has had implications beyond the core activities of NATO and into the society as a whole. During the integration process, Montenegro has benefited from social learning transferred by NATO as an organization and from the shared practices

²⁹ For more information about the CEDEM, please refer to their dedicated website:

<http://www.cedem.me/en/>

³⁰ For more information about the CDT, please refer to their dedicated website:

<http://www.en.cdtmn.org/>

³¹ For more information about the MNMNE, please refer to their dedicated website: <http://mnmne.org/>

that have been developed with NATO members and the representatives of their societies.

Integrating Montenegro: the NATO perspective

The Montenegrin accession process did not impact only Montenegro. Since it has chosen to integrate Montenegro, NATO has also adopted a specific set of behaviors and practices that have allowed it to welcome Montenegro as its new member. There has been a will from NATO to integrate Montenegro which can be explained by several factors along with internal institutional dynamics that have appeared to support this process.

Explaining NATO's will to integrate Montenegro

NATO has been created in 1949 for one overwhelmingly central purpose: to deter and contain the Soviet Union militarily, and by reaching this goal, to protect the West in general and Western Europe in particular against the Warsaw pact. However, the end of the Cold War in the 1990's completely modified the environment within which NATO existed and evolved. With its central objective achieved and the threat it had been built to prevent gone, NATO's strategy in the 1990's and after had to evolve drastically in order for the Alliance to stay relevant and address newly emerging threats. One of these threats was the security void left in Central and Eastern Europe by the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact (Orlandić 2016, 95-96). The answer from NATO was to proceed to progressively adopt an expansionist policy in Europe which was aimed at securing the east of the continent. It also allowed NATO to expand its political influence beyond its traditional borders and increasingly play the role of a 'security fosterer'. The accession to NATO of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary in 1999, formalized the redefinition of the Alliance's borders and of the spatial area understood as 'the West' that has been having important strategic implications. The two recent waves of enlargement (2004 and 2009) have expanded NATO's borders with Russia³² and have confirmed NATO's role as a stabilizer and as a security community builder in Europe (Behnke 2013, 92-107). During the 1990's and the early 2000's, NATO began to act as a crisis manager, even expanding outside its traditional sphere of influence for a large 'out-of-area' operation in Afghanistan. This focus on crisis

³² The NATO members Estonia and Latvia border Russia.

management has been at the center of NATO strategy, the 2010 Strategic Concept even putting the primary focus of the organization on the “management of the periphery” (Behnke 2013, 162). However, the last noticeable event in NATO history before the Montenegrin accession was the 2011 intervention in Libya. This operation and the tensions it has sparked within the Alliance have seriously challenged the centrality of crisis management within the NATO strategy (Noetzel and Schreer 2012). In this context, the integration of Montenegro is not only the logical continuation of the enlargement policy that has been developed and carried out by NATO since the 1990’s. It is also a sign that the Atlantic Alliance is continuing to refocus its strategy on European affairs and territorial defense.

This refocus of NATO on territorial defense and European affairs is linked to an arising, or rather returning, threat to NATO’s security, materialized by the aggressive geostrategic policy adopted by Russia over the recent years. It can be considered that this shift in the Russian foreign policy started with the 2008 War in Georgia. The resurgence of Russia has become the main concern for NATO after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its subsequent intervention in Eastern Ukraine. The Russian disruption in Ukraine started after the Euromaidan movement gained momentum and resulted in the 2014 Ukrainian revolution which ousted the then pro-Russian government and set Ukraine on a more Western-leaning course. Ukraine thus currently represents the pinnacle of the rising tensions between NATO and Russia. In this context, as underlined by Orlandić, “Montenegro’s Euro-Atlantic integration process must be observed and understood through the geopolitical lenses of the current Ukrainian crisis” (2016, 102). From a global perspective, the integration of Montenegro to NATO represent a strategic victory for NATO which proves that it remains attractive as an organization (Picard 2017) and that Russia cannot prevent or control its enlargement policy. This integration also has to be understood in the regional context of the Western Balkans. This region, from which NATO had been relatively disengaged for the past decade, is coming back to the agenda alongside the return of Russia in the area. In addition to the Russian meddling in the Montenegrin NATO accession debate, it has been underlined that Russia has been increasing its political and military involvement in other parts of the region, such as Serbia and Republika

Srpska³³ (Bechev 2017; Gramer 2015). This return of Russia to the Western Balkans is happening in a difficult context for the region which has been hit by the 2015 migration crisis. Therefore, the integration of Montenegro into NATO has occurred in a critical moment for the Atlantic Alliance which has been seeking to address Russian interferences in Europe and needs to prevent the destabilization of the Western Balkans which could become again a major threat for the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Overall, one can highlight that this integration, which happened despite Moscow's protestations, is effectively resulting in NATO countering Russia in the Western Balkans and reinforcing its role as a stabilizer in the region.

Beyond the immediate countering of Russia in the Western Balkans, the integration of Montenegro also represents an opportunity for NATO to improve its relationship with the remaining non-NATO countries of the region. Indeed, the integration of Montenegro proves that NATO as a security community is continuing to expand and to transfer its norms and practices to aspirant countries. It also proves that countries which achieve enough reforms can integrate this community, and this even in a tensed international geopolitical context. From a more institutional perspective, and given that the last NATO enlargement happened more than eight years ago, the Atlantic Alliance needed to show that its accession conditionality was not endless and that reforms and continuous support to NATO integration were rewarded (Bátor 2014, 14). This could encourage other aspiring countries, in particular in the Western Balkans, to strengthen their efforts to undergo through the necessary reforms to reach NATO standards and join Montenegro within the Euro-Atlantic community. The Montenegrin case also demonstrates the soft power that can be exercised by NATO as an international organization on its periphery and its capacity to continue to carry out its enlargement policy.

It has also been underlined that NATO, through the political and economic benefits it is bringing Montenegro with its integration, might improve its relationship with Serbia (B92 2017). This integration might challenge the mainstream perspective on NATO in a country which has been getting closer to Russia and views NATO with extreme skepticism. Furthermore, Montenegro being one of Serbia's closest neighbors and allies, NATO has gained a regionally important new member which will allow it to

³³ Republika Srpska is one of the two main entities composing Bosnia and Herzegovina and is inhabited in majority by ethnic Serbs.

engage with the largest country in the Western Balkans more easily. Given the importance of the links between Serbia and Russia, an improvement of the Serbian relations with NATO thanks to Montenegrin integration could even result in the development of shared understandings between NATO and Russia regarding the Western Balkans and enhance the stability of Europe as a whole.

Internal institutional dynamics surrounding the integration of Montenegro

As it has been underlined in this thesis, NATO integration is not only a technical process based on reforms and the transformation of the security and defense sector. Given the very political nature of the decisions taken by the North Atlantic Council, the integration of a new member is also dictated by internal political dynamics taking place within NATO. Therefore, one of the key elements that has helped Montenegro to integrate NATO is that a consensus on this accession has been built from within the Alliance.

One of the main issues for Montenegro to guarantee its accession to NATO was to get enough support from member states and to ensure that its integration would not be blocked from the inside since the decision to accept a new member into NATO must be unanimous. The states that have been supporting Montenegro's integration to NATO have managed to push the accession on the NATO political agenda and have fostered the building of the consensus that this integration would be beneficial for the Atlantic Alliance. This support has been expressed by various actors and in different ways. A first internal dynamic was the support of NATO itself as an institution for which the integration of Montenegro has been a strategic victory and a reassurance of its relevance. This support has been expressed multiple times by Secretary-General Stoltenberg (NATO 2017b; Stoltenberg 2017, 63) and has translated in a speedier integration process than the rest of the remaining applicants in the Western Balkans. Montenegro has also received internal support from two Nordic countries which are heavily involved in the Western Balkans: Iceland and Norway. Iceland, which was the first country to recognize the independence of Montenegro in 2006, was also the first country to ratify the Montenegrin accession protocol on 23 June 2016 (Office of the Prime Minister of Montenegro 2016). Norway has also supported Montenegro's integration, albeit in a more direct way through its cooperation programs to support the reforms of the Montenegrin MoD. Montenegro has also benefitted from the support of

its neighbors and allies from the Western Balkans Region. Slovenia and Croatia, which used to belong to Yugoslavia alongside Montenegro have also been strong supporters of the Montenegrin integration and were openly pushing for its rapid accession (Sta 2014). Hungary was also a prominent fosterer of the Montenegrin accession process, as proven by the fact that it was the Hungarian embassy in Montenegro that became the official NATO Contact Point in Montenegro in 2015 (Knežević 2015, 61).

Another determining institutional element was the position of the United States. As the largest country and main contributor in NATO, the US is the most influential member within the organization. The support of the Trump administration to the integration of Montenegro, which was evoked earlier in this thesis and was pushed by senior US officials such as White House national security adviser Michael Flynn (Hanna 2017a), has had a tremendous importance on the finalization of the accession. Montenegro has also greatly benefitted from the fact that the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly voted in favor of its accession to NATO³⁴ (U.S. Congress 2017). This was made possible by the strong support of some senior US Congressmen such as John McCain (Office of John McCain 2017) and Lindsey Graham (Hanna 2017b).

The Montenegrin case: a new model for NATO enlargement?

The Montenegrin accession to NATO represents the first case in the 2010's and has happened in a geopolitical context which is much more tensed than for the three previous (1999, 2004, and 2009) accession rounds. This integration process was characterized by two trends which might seem contradictory. On the one hand, the integration of Montenegro had become an imperative for NATO for the endogenous and exogenous reasons that were detailed earlier in this thesis. On the other hand, the Montenegrin accession process was relatively long, having lasted more than ten years, and it can be argued that a high level of implementations of the demanded reforms was expected of Montenegro to be welcomed into the Atlantic Alliance. The Montenegrin case could therefore be perceived as a new model for the NATO enlargement policy. This renewed policy corresponds to a continuation of the open-door policy which is dictated by political and strategic imperatives for NATO to strengthen its ability to ensure peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. Parallely, it also corresponds to a reinforced set of conditionality principles becoming more

³⁴ Th record shows 97 votes in favor, two against, and one not voting.

demanding and thus to a higher standard of practices expected from the applicant countries. This means that this integration process could be a useful example to follow for the remaining applicant states, and in particular the ones in the Western Balkans (Orlandić 2014, 104), namely Bosnia and Herzegovina and FYROM. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the Montenegrin case is very specific, given the country's history, its relationship with NATO, its domestic political environment, and the international context its integration has been embedded in. Moreover, NATO being a constantly-evolving and highly politicized institution, what could be described as the 'Montenegrin model' could rapidly become obsolete, depending on the internal political evolutions within the Alliance and the emerging global geopolitical trends.

From a more theoretical perspective, the Montenegrin integration case is also a model of the evolution of NATO as an organization. As explained in the introduction of this thesis, the enlargement of NATO is based on institutional influence as described in the work of Epstein (2005, 68): "Initially, international institutions use their social power to persuade an elite group of domestic reformers of the desirability and credibility of particular policy measures. Subsequently, international institutions empower their domestic interlocutors to implement reform and overcome opposition through a range of mechanisms". This process is exactly what Montenegro underwent during its integration process since it was mostly the elites in power (the DPS regime) that were persuaded to carry out the reforms required by NATO. The Atlantic Alliance, in turn, has supported Montenegro both financially and politically and has helped the country cope with the Russian-fueled opposition to the integration. These practices illustrate the fact that NATO has been becoming more than a simple military organization. Instead, it has transformed into a real intergovernmental institution which bears its own shared meanings, practices and understandings that get passed down through social learning to the states that wish to join its community. The Montenegrin case also proves that NATO has been evolving towards being more similar to the EU, since both the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness exist within the NATO integration process. Indeed, social issues, such as the role of women or the development of the organized civil society, have appeared through transnational socialization alongside the traditional conditionality and policy incentives. This is a clear sign of the institutionalization of the NATO enlargement policy and of its rapprochement with the EU one.

The broader implications of the Montenegrin accession process

Beyond the direct impact and implications this integration has been having on Montenegro and NATO, the accession of Montenegro to the Alliance has broader implications. Montenegro being a small country, the consequences of its integration are mostly limited to the Western Balkans. However, it is also a confirmation of the evolving face of the Euro-Atlantic community.

What regional consequences for the Western Balkans?

The Montenegrin accession to NATO has important implications for the Western Balkans region. Firstly, from a geostrategic perspective, it means that NATO now controls all of the Adriatic coast³⁵ and effectively all of the Northern Mediterranean coast, allowing it to properly secure its maritime borders (Picard 2017). This is important because it prevents Russia from opening a naval base in the region and further threaten NATO interests in Europe. It also means that NATO's grip on the Western Balkans is tightened since it effectively surrounds the remaining four non-member states of the region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM, Kosovo, and Serbia). With the accession of Montenegro, NATO sends a powerful message in the region which could appeal to these remaining states. A Western Balkan country joining NATO provides a strong incentive for the two countries of the region aspiring to join the Atlantic Alliance, Bosnia and Herzegovina and FYROM, to continue to carry out reforms and thrive towards NATO membership (Orlandić 2016, 104). With Montenegro in, NATO is thus reinforced in the Western Balkans both strategically and politically, since it has restored its role as the main security guarantor in the region and has managed to counter the Russian attempts to prevent the continuation of its enlargement to the area. Consequently, this accession represents a setback for Russia which loses a historical ally and a safe haven for its investors. It has been highlighted that this setback for Russia is having economic consequences for Montenegro and the region with some Russian investments leaving Montenegro for countries more favorable to the Russian regime (Troude 2016).

³⁵ With the exception of the Bosnia and Herzegovina coast (town of Neum) which spans 20 kilometers and could not welcome a military harbor.

The accession of Montenegro to NATO also has an impact on the security balance within the region and on the regional security. Indeed, by entering NATO, Montenegro confirms the shift in its foreign policy it has started since its independence. Before its independence, Montenegro was considered a historical Russian ally and the most loyal Serbian ally in the region, having been the only republic not to leave Yugoslavia during the 1990's. The NATO accession is the final confirmation that this has radically changed. Montenegro can now be considered to be aligned with its new NATO allies in the region, Croatia and Albania. These two countries, which integrated NATO together in 2009, now benefit from a new ally in the region which strengthens what could be described as the 'NATO group' of the Western Balkans. This group has therefore enhanced its strategic importance and its influence in the region (PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes 2016).

For Serbia, on the contrary, the Montenegrin accession represents a serious blow since it materializes its isolation in the region. This is a serious issue for a country that has lost a quarter of its territory and its access to the sea with the successive independences of Montenegro (2006) and Kosovo (2008), that lags behind most of its neighbors economically and has arguably lost its position as the main regional leader in the Western Balkans. In a less significant way, Bosnia and Herzegovina and FYROM, two countries which could benefit from the momentum in favor of NATO enlargement at the regional level, are also further isolated in the region as they are not NATO member yet and have not reached the same level of preparedness as Montenegro. Finally, Kosovo, the youngest of the Western Balkans republic which is not yet fully internationally recognized, can be considered that its security is reinforced by having gained a new NATO member on its borders, even if the country's overall situation remains the worst in the region, both politically and economically.

The position of Montenegro in the Western Balkans and its regional aspirations have also been impacted by its accession to NATO. The small republic, which integration into the Atlantic Alliance has been called a "remarkable success story" (Gramer 2015) now benefits from an improved political status in the region since it is now part of the Euro-Atlantic community. This enhanced legitimacy supplements the already favorable position Montenegro has in the region economically, having managed to evolve from one of the poorest parts of what used to be Yugoslavia into one of the richest country of the Western Balkans (Lukšić and Katnić 2016, 707). Thanks to this new status,

Montenegro could even be in the process of leaving the negatively connoted 'Western Balkans' since it has been argued that this region has been artificially created to identify the countries that were originally excluded from the Euro-Atlantic integration process (Jordanova 2009, 53; 73).

Overall, this renewed status as a member of the Euro-Atlantic community is reinforcing Montenegro's capacity to influence regional politics. Beyond the direct legitimacy and support coming from NATO and its new condition as a Euro-Atlantic country, Montenegro has managed to maintain good relationships with all its neighbors. This means that it is well-placed to improve its position within regional cooperation organizations and networks. This is especially valid for the defense and security regional cooperation institutions and initiatives that Montenegro participates in, such as the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative (DPPI SEE)³⁶, the Forum for Western Balkans defence Cooperation (SEEC)³⁷, or the Centre for Security Cooperation (RACVIAC)³⁸.

Finally, Montenegro's accession to NATO could also bear unexpected domestic consequences which would improve Montenegro's security and social cohesion. In particular, Montenegro is now part of the same major international organization as Albania and Croatia. This is important because there has been fears surrounding the potential demands of the Montenegrin Albanian and Croatian minorities which could want to secede from the country in relation to the concepts of 'Greater Albania' and 'Bay of Croatian Saints' (Banović 2016, 106). Montenegro now being part of NATO, it will be better able to accommodate these minorities through a reinforced dialogue and partnership with its new allies fostered by their common belonging to the NATO security community. On the contrary, the risk remains that the NATO accession and the relative regional isolation of Serbia could further alienate the large Montenegrin Serb minority and destabilize the fragile ethno-religious stability of the country. This is why it has become critical for Montenegro to influence Serbia into following its steps towards NATO integration.

³⁶ For more information about DPPI SEE, please refer to their dedicated website: <http://www.dppi.info/>

³⁷ For more information about SEEC, please refer to the dedicated Regional Cooperation Council webpage: <http://www.rcc.int/pages/35/rcc-and-regional-initiatives-and-task-forces-in-south-east-europe>

³⁸ For more information about RACVIAC, please refer to their dedicated website: <https://www.racviac.org/>

The evolving face of the Euro-Atlantic community

The Montenegrin accession to NATO is the most recent proof that the Euro-Atlantic community has dramatically changed over the past two decades. What started as an Alliance between most Western European countries, the United States, and Canada, has progressively expanded to new territories fitting its core values. After the end of the Cold War, the understanding of what the Euro-Atlantic community should encompass has changed to include Central and Eastern countries. For these countries, which used to belong to a common European space in the 19th century, integrating NATO and the EU has materialized their return to an area of shared understanding that they had forcibly left during the 20th century. The Western Balkans are currently following the same dynamic and represent the latest example of the 'New Europe' which is rejoining the 'Old Europe'. Montenegro, a country with a long history of involvement in the concert of European nations³⁹ which was in a way 'reborn' in the 21st century and has since pursued NATO and EU integrations as its primary foreign policy goals, exemplifies this new face of the Euro-Atlantic community.

The accession of Montenegro is the sign that the Alliance has taken a social constructivist approach in its functioning by spreading its values to its neighbors and gradually helping them to reach its standards in multiple areas. This is achieved through an institutionalized cooperation which rewards NATO's neighbors if they are willing and able to adopt the Euro-Atlantic shared norms, practices and understandings as their own. Therefore, it is now necessary to understand NATO and its enlargement policy within a more global context of redefinition of the international geopolitical paradigm. In a fast-changing external environment with new threats arising on its periphery and old ones coming back, NATO is becoming increasingly considered as the military component of a community that is primarily based on a set of core values, such as democracy, the respect of human rights and Western cooperation. However, the understanding of NATO as a community should not be limited to that of a military organization. Instead, NATO is one of the components of a complex network of intergovernmental organizations that are fostering cooperation and reinforcing the Euro-Atlantic as a deeply integrated security community.

³⁹ Nikola I, King of Montenegro, who ruled over the country between 1860 and 1918, is sometimes referred to as the 'Father-in-law of Europe' since he married seven of his twelve children to members of the European nobility, two of which became kings (Sementéry 1985, 31-34).

This evolution of the role of NATO has also been expressed in the extension of its prerogatives, the Atlantic Alliance having moved forward from its primary purpose as an organization purely focused on territorial defense. Even though NATO's role as a global player intervening everywhere around the globe has been seriously hampered since 2011 and even though NATO is in the process of stepping up its efforts of territorial defense again (Colby and Solomon 2015), it is also acting in a wider than ever range of areas. Its relationship with the EU and its multitude of programs in favor of science, human rights, or gender equality are the signs that NATO has truly become a multifaceted international organization capable of both flexibility and adaptability to the challenges that are bestowed upon it.

These evolutions are interesting in a context where the United States, under the Obama administration, has started to reorient the focus of its foreign policy towards Asia (Hallams and Schreer 2012). The ambiguous behavior of the Trump administration regarding NATO and the role the United States should play in it seems to confirm that US leadership in NATO is declining. On the opposite, the European members of NATO, some of which have been directly threatened by the Russian foreign policy (including Montenegro), have been stepping up their defense spending and are increasingly relying on NATO to ensure their security and counter Russia. In this context, and as more European countries are joining NATO, it could be possible to witness a process of Europeanization of NATO that would be in line with the idea of a "European military awakening" put forward by Mattelaer (2011, 134-135).

Conclusion

As it has been argued throughout this thesis, Montenegro has been greatly impacted by its NATO integration process. It has first and foremost radically transformed the country's security and defense sector, bringing it to NATO standards and enhancing Montenegro's capabilities and ability to cooperate with its new allies. The Montenegrin military, as small as it may be, is now interoperable with the best militaries in the world and has already proven that it is capable to be deployed alongside other NATO troops, as in Afghanistan. Montenegro has also proven that it is seeking to take an active part in the Atlantic Alliance, as it has shown with the organization of NATO exercises on its territory. This process has impacted greatly Montenegrin politics by insuflating reforms aiming at a better governance of the country. The Montenegrin society has also been transformed during NATO integration, the debate over NATO accession having revealed new lines of societal divisions in the country. At the national level, it has represented an achievement for the DPS regime, which has been in place since the 1990's, a unique case in the region. This regime has managed to capitalize on NATO integration in order to remain in power and improve its legitimacy domestically and internationally.

This integration is a new step for NATO itself as it is a proof that it remains attractive and can continue to have a positive role in inciting democratic reforms in its neighborhood and in fostering cooperation. At the international level, the integration of Montenegro is a victory for NATO which has managed to carry out its enlargement policy and has successfully countered the Russian attempts to influence the process. It has thus constituted a new episode in the renewed geopolitical confrontation taking place between Russia and NATO in Central and Eastern Europe. The integration of Montenegro, a country which will be able to contribute to the Alliance in a very limited way and which strategic importance is relative, is the proof that NATO still counts as a priority the expansion of its security community and the building of stability in the euro-Atlantic area. It is also the proof that NATO remains profoundly rooted in social constructivism as it has been since the end of the Cold War and continues to see itself as a diffusor of peace and stability in Europe and as a positive actor of political and social change. Internally, the accession of Montenegro reflects the current institutional dynamics within NATO, and this particularly when it comes to enlargement. In institutional terms, this accession materializes the fact that the factions within NATO in

favor of enlargement in the Western Balkans have managed to keep this item as a relative priority on the NATO political and institutional agenda.

Finally, the Western Balkans, as a region, have also been changed by this integration process which has modified the balance of power in the region. Montenegro now benefits from an enhanced position in the region together with the other NATO members of the area. The expansion of NATO in the region is a significant event for a region which is slowly catching up with the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. However, and even if Montenegro has been a stabilizing element in the Western Balkans and will probably see its role as a security fosterer improved, the region still faces many obstacles. Among those, the difficult relationship between Serbia and Kosovo, the tensed situation in Macedonia, both domestically and with regards to its relationship with Greece and Albania, and the inherent instability of Bosnia and Herzegovina remain very serious issues that should continue to be addressed by the countries of the region and the Euro-Atlantic community.

What future for NATO enlargement? Setting a research agenda

NATO is a large and rapidly-evolving international and intergovernmental institution that is characterized by the fact that it is highly politicized. However, during the past two decades, and as NATO's security doctrine has evolved depending on circumstances, enlargement has steadily remained high on the agenda and new members have continued to join the Alliance. In order to properly understand the internal dynamics that have been allowing enlargement to remain a priority for NATO, further research is needed on the functioning of the contemporary international organizations. The research should in particular seek to identify the actors and factors that are influencing policy planning and its positioning on the political agenda of the organization.

The NATO enlargement process itself evolving with the institution, the concerned countries, and the experience acquired throughout the various accession rounds, further research on the integration process will be needed as long as the Atlantic Alliance continues its expansion. As of today, the research should focus on analyzing the impact of the NATO enlargement policy on NATO as an organization, but also on its relationship with Russia and on the security of the concerned region. Future research could also aim at deepening our understanding of the NATO enlargement as

a process of transmission of norms, values and practices from an international institution to the various components of the targeted country. Such research could focus on change at the institutional level, but also at the societal level, given the growing involvement of the civil societies in the integration processes.

Finally, future research will also need to analyze the relationship between NATO and the remaining countries that gravitate around it, such as FYROM, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine, in order to assess their position within the NATO integration process.

Abstract

On 5 June 2017, the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Duško Marković, deposited the instrument of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty of Montenegro in Washington DC, making the accession of this country to the Atlantic Alliance official. Montenegro, one of the smallest of the post-Yugoslav Western Balkans republics, was thus welcomed into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as its 29th member.

This thesis analyzes the process Montenegro has been undergoing throughout its path to NATO accession and the underlying conditions which have impacted this process. It argues that the relationship between Montenegro and NATO, which started in the early 2000's and has been revolving primarily on the integration process, which started soon after the independence of the country in 2006. This integration process has profoundly modified the security and defense sectors in Montenegro, has impacted the politics of the country and is embedded within what has been a larger strategic approach of NATO to the Western Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe in general.

The Montenegrin integration process, as analyzed in this thesis, is considered to have revolved around three dynamics. The first has been an endogenous dynamic linked to the political attitude of the Montenegrin Government since the 1990's which has put Euro-Atlantic integration at the forefront of its policy. This is confirmed by the extensive reforms that have been carried out within the Montenegrin public sector, and in particular in the security and defense sector. These reforms, along with efforts to allow the country to reach European standards in terms of democratic practices and rule of law, have been driven by an internally and externally fueled Euro-Atlanticization of the country. There has also been a Euro-Atlantic dynamic which has corresponded to the strategy of NATO which has aimed to gradually integrate the countries of the region within its security community. Lastly, there has been an endogenous dynamic coming from the geopolitical state of affairs in Europe which has been heavily modified by the resurgence of Russia, the annexation of Crimea, and the civil war in Ukraine.

The various implications and impacts that this integration process has had on Montenegrin politics, on NATO as an international organization, and on the Western Balkans region are also assessed throughout this thesis.

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