The Social, Historical, and Political Context of the Relations between NATO and Montenegro

From an Institution of Collective Defense to an Institution of Collective Security: The Relations between NATO and Montenegro

In the past several years, the Montenegrin elites as well as the public at large have been preoccupied with the question of Montenegrin statehood, with the populace of the country deeply divided on the question of the country’s independence. For years, there had been debates about this on political forums and among everybody involved in the political life of Montenegro (politicians, institutions, NGOs, individuals, and so on). The “culture war,” featuring both experts and ordinary citizens, “raged” even in places that traditionally have no connection with politics. Put simply, the question had an all-consuming nature of a “total social fact.” Finally, at the referendum held on May 21, 2006, the question, “do you wish for Montenegro to become an independent, internationally recognized state?” was answered by a majority of citizens in the affirmative, fulfilling the condition for Montenegro to formally declare its independence and seek international recognition. In June 2006, Montenegro declared independence and was accepted into the United Nations. Thus the Montenegrin public was released from deliberating on a topic it had been engrossed in for years. With resolving the question of Montenegrin statehood, the stage was set for the beginning of new debates regarding other important questions of statehood. One of the first big questions before Montenegro was the question of its membership in NATO.

The anthropological study of cultural and civilizational potentials of international integration has thus far been focused on the European Union...
(EU) (Gačanović 2009)—giving the impression that the “Atlantic” part of such “Euro-Atlantic” potentials has been neglected by anthropology. On the other hand, experiences from recent enlargements of EU and NATO have clearly shown that a state’s membership in NATO has preceded its membership in the EU by a few years.1 Conceptualizing the transformation of NATO as a never-finished process and a never-achieved state, I think it is imperative to first debate the complex historical circumstances that created the conditions for Montenegro’s membership in NATO.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is an intergovernmental military alliance that at present comprises 28 members dedicated to fulfilling the goals of the North Atlantic Treaty signed on April 4, 1949 in Washington.2 In accordance with the treaty, the main role of NATO is the protection of freedom and security of all its members through political or military means. The alliance came into being as a result of the determination of its founding member states to protect “freedom, common heritage and the civilization of its peoples, based on democratic principles, individual freedom and the rule of law” while still retaining each state’s full sovereignty (NATO Handbook 2005: 18; Gligorijević and Petrović 2007: 7). The North Atlantic Treaty recognizes the individual rights of signatory states, as well as their international obligations, in accordance with the UN charter. Each member state agrees to share the risks and obligations, as well as avail its rights, of collective security. They also give assurance that they will not accept other interstate obligations that are in conflict with this treaty. The key portion of the North Atlantic Treaty is article five, which establishes that in the case of an armed attack on one or more of the signatory states, all other members will support the state or the states under attack, asserting the right to individual and collective defense. This support would involve any emergency action considered necessary, including the use of armed force. Other articles of the treaty establish the obligations of signatory states to maintain and develop individual and collective defense capabilities. The treaty also allows for the signatories to “unanimously invite to the Alliance, any European state capable of advancing the principles of the Treaty and contribute to the security in the region of the Atlantic as a whole” (Gligorijević and Petrović: 2007, 13).

NATO is also a forum in which member states debate security problems of collective interest and undertake collective action in facing them.3 A flexible organizational structure (established by article nine) has allowed the alliance to develop and adapt to new conditions, such that throughout its history, NATO has undergone a series of reforms and restructurings (NATO Handbook 2005: 9). During the Cold War, NATO was conceived in such a way to give its members very specific advantages regarding military strategy directed at a potentially terrifying war against the USSR. With the