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## MONTENEGRIN VOLUNTEERS IN THE GREEK WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

**ABSTRACT:** *On the occasion of the bicentennial anniversary of the Greek War of Independence, the present paper aims to briefly present the participation of Montenegrin volunteers in the revolutionary activities. Montenegrin volunteers' participation is an interesting case study, as it is linked to the Balkan dimension of the Greek revolution and it offers insights on the impact of the French revolution in the region.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Montenegrin volunteers, Greek war of Independence, Balkan dimension*

### **Introduction**

On the occasion of the celebration of the 200 years since the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence, several initiatives run in Greece and global-wide offering new insights of the past events. The participation of Balkan volunteers in the Greek War of Independence is a quite interesting topic, as the rebels shared the common desire to end the Ottoman rule in the region. During the outbreak of the Greek revolution in the Danubian principalities, Serbian, Montenegrin, Bulgarian and Moldavian volunteers rushed to support the revolutionary activities.<sup>1</sup> Similar solidarity actions among Balkan warriors took place in the First Serbian Uprising (1804-1815), when Greek, Bulgarian and Wallachian volunteers joined the Serbian revolutionaries.<sup>2</sup> Inter alia, Balkan volunteers' participation is interconnected to the impact of the

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<sup>1</sup> D. Dakin, *The Greek Struggle for Independence, 1821-1833*, University of California Press 1973, 57.

<sup>2</sup> D. T. Bataković, A Balkan-Style French Revolution? The 1804 Serbian Uprising in European Perspective, *Balkanica XXXVI*, (2006), 126-127.

French revolution in the region and the political and economic decline of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup> Revolutionary nationalism was apparent<sup>4</sup> and as Kolokotronis Theodoros (1770-1843), who was one of the eminent leaders of the Greek revolution, said:

*“According to my judgement the French Revolution and the doings of Napoleon opened the eyes of the world. The nations knew nothing before, and the people thought that kings were gods upon the earth and that they were bound to say that whatever they did was well done. Through this present change it is more difficult to rule the people”.*<sup>5</sup>

French revolution ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity were referred on the proclamation of revolt in the Danubian Principalities that was issued by Alexander Ipsilantis (1792-1828), who was the leader of “Filiki Eteria” (“Society of Friends”),<sup>6</sup> on February 24, 1821. The proclamation was addressed to both Greeks and Cristian Balkan populations:

*“Fight for Faith and Motherland! The time has come, O Hellenes. Long ago the people of Europe fighting for their own rights and liberties, invited us to imitation. These although partially free tried with all their strength to increase their freedom and through this all their prosperity.*

*Our brethren and friends are everywhere ready. The Serbs, the Souliots and the whole of Epirus, bearing arms, await us. Let us then unite with enthusiasm. The Motherland is calling us!*

*Europe, fixing its eyes upon us, wonders at our inertia. Let all the mountains of Greece resound, therefore, with the echo of our battle trumpet, and the valleys with the fearful clash of our arms. Europe will admire our valour. Our tyrants, trembling and pale, will flee before us.*

*The enlightened peoples of Europe are occupied in restoring the same well-being, and full of gratitude for the benefactions of our forefathers towards them, desire the liberation of Greece. We, seemingly*

<sup>3</sup> Μ. Θ. Λάσκαρις, *Το Ανατολικόν Ζήτημα 1800-1923, Τόμος Α (1800-1828)*, Θεσσαλονίκη: εκδόσεις Επίκεντρο, 2006, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Παπαδριανός, Γρчки Устанак 1821. Године и Црногорци, *Историјски записи* 3/1996, 61-62, E. Goldstein, *Wars and Peace Treaties, 1816-1991*, UK: Routledge 1996, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in L. Stavrianos, Antecedents to the Balkan revolutions of the nineteenth century, *Journal of Modern History* 4, XXIX, 1957, 344.

<sup>6</sup> “Filiki Eteria” was a secret organization that was established in September 14, 1814 by Nikolaos Skoufas (1779-1818), Emmanuil Xanthos (1772-1852) and Athanasios Tsakalov (1790-1851) in Odessa. Aim of the organization was to raise Greek populations in rebellion in order to achieve independent statehood.

*worthy of ancestral virtue and of the present century, are hopeful that we will achieve heir defence and help. Many of these freedom-lovers want to come and fight alongside us. Move, O friends, and you will see a Mighty Empire defend our rights! You will see even many of our enemies, moved by our just cause, turn [...]”.*<sup>7</sup>

While the motives of the Balkan volunteers varied,<sup>8</sup> the majority hoped that through their participation in the Greek uprising, they would be able to promote their national cause. This also applied for the Montenegrin volunteers,<sup>9</sup> who were further encouraged by the proclamation issued in support to the Greek uprising by the Metropolitan Petar I Petrović-Njegoš (1748-1830) on June 26, 1821.<sup>10</sup> While Montenegrin volunteers’ case study has been already discussed,<sup>11</sup> aim of the present paper is to offer fresh insights, contributing thus in the scholarly discussions initiated by the bicentennial anniversary that promote historical dialogue and enrich our understanding of the past events and their complexity.

### Montenegrin volunteers in the Greek War of Independence

Montenegrin volunteers in the Greek War of Independence participated and sometimes leded revolutionary operations with some of them obtaining senior or supreme military positions.<sup>12</sup> Vaso Brajević or Vasos Mavrovouniotis (1797-1847) is a notable example, as he was assigned the rank of Army General, ruling hundreds of men and leading operations mainly on the island of Evia. Vaso, like several Montenegrin volunteers, bore the nickname “*Mavrovouniotis (i.e. the Montenegrin)*”, in order to protect his fam-

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in R. Clogg, *The Movement for Greek Independence 1770-1821, A collection of documents, Edited and translated and with an introduction by Richard Clogg*, UK: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1976, 201.

<sup>8</sup> Ν. Τοντόρωφ, *Η βαλκανική διάσταση της επανάστασης του 1821. Η περίπτωση των Βουλγάρων*, Αθήνα: εκδόσεις Gutenberg 1982, 67.

<sup>9</sup> Ι. Α. Παπαδριανός, Μαυροβούνιοι εθελοντές στον εθνικοαπελευθερωτικό αγώνα των Ελλήνων στα 1821, *Βαλκανικά Σύμμεικτα, τόμος ΙΙ, (1999-2000)*, 164-165.

<sup>10</sup> Σ. Λουκάτος, *Σχέσεις Ελλήνων μετά Σέρβων και Μαυροβουνίων κατά την Ελληνικήν Επανάστασιν 1823-1826*, Εταιρία Μακεδονικών Σπουδών – Ίδρυμα Μελετών Χερσονήσου του Αίμου, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1970, 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> J. Παπαδριανός, Грчки Устанак 1821. Године и Црногорци, *Историјски записи 3/1996*, 61-73.

<sup>12</sup> Δ. Σ. Σούτζος, *Οι Φιλέλληνες των Βαλκανίων στην Επανάσταση του 21, Με πρόλογο του Σπύρου Π. Ζερβού Καθηγητού Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών*, Αθήνα 1976, 45; Ε. Πρωτοψάλτης, Σέρβοι και Μαυροβούνιοι Φιλέλληνες κατά την Επανάσταση του 1821, *Πρώτο Ελληνοσερβικό Συμπόσιο, Συνεργασία Ελλήνων και Σέρβων κατά τους απελευθερωτικούς αγώνες 1804-1830*, Θεσσαλονίκη: Ίδρυμα Μελετών Χερσονήσου του Αίμου, 1979, 77.

ily members in the homeland from possible retaliation by Ottoman Turks.<sup>13</sup> Vaso Brajević was also involved in revolutionary activities on the islands of Thassos and Hydra, as well as, in Peloponnese.<sup>14</sup> He also participated in the failed “Lebanese campaign” in 1826 with Greek comrades, which aimed at the liberation of Cyprus.<sup>15</sup>

Official Greek documents certify Vaso Brajević’s contribution in the Greek War of Independence. Inter alia, the Greek Supreme Court issued a certification for Vaso Brajević, enabling him to request for reward for his services once Greece achieved independent statehood:

#### “SUPREME COURT

*The brave and great friend of the nation captain Vasos, who comes from a Slavic land, was on the island of Evripos [i. e. Evia] with many of his soldiers since the beginning of the revolution and for two years he performed with loyalty and honesty his duties. Without obtaining any salary, he sacrificed many of his relatives and of his soldiers, liberating several Christians from the enemies’ rule. Vasos preferred to serve for the liberation of these people, than taking the significant money offered to him by the enemies. For this reason, we provide him this certification, in order to enable him, after the liberation of the country, to claim reward for his services in the montherland.*

*Ksirochori, 5 February 1823*

*The General Secretary  
Dimitrios Nikolaidis”*<sup>16</sup>

In general, Vaso Brajević’s contribution in the Greek War of Independence is widely acknowledged. Recently, the Greek embassy in Monte-

<sup>13</sup> Σ. Λουκάτος, Σέρβοι, Μαυροβούνιοι και Βόσνιοι μαχητές της ελληνικής ανεξαρτησίας (1821-1829), *Πρώτο Ελληνο-σερβικό Συμπόσιο, Συνεργασία Ελλήνων και Σέρβων κατά τους απελευθερωτικούς αγώνες 1804-1830*, Θεσσαλονίκη: Ίδρυμα Μελετών Χερσονήσου του Αίμου, 1979, 101-120.

<sup>14</sup> J. Παπαδριανός, Γрчки Устанак 1821. Године и Црногорци, *Исторјски записи* 3/1996, 71; Σ. Παπαγεωργίου, Βάσος Μαυροβουνιώτης. Ένας σλάβος οπλαρχηγός στο κατώφλι της νεωτερικότητας: Από την υπηρεσία της Υψηλής Πύλης στην υπηρεσία της Ελληνικής Επανάστασης και του Βασιλείου της Ελλάδας, in: Κ. Τσίγλη-Αρώνη, Π. Σ. Παπαγεωργίου, Α. Πατρικίου (ed.), *Η Ελλάδα της νεωτερικότητας. Κοινωνικές κρίσεις και ιδεολογικά διλήμματα (19ος-20ός αιώνες)*, Κείμενα για τη Ρένα Σταυρίδη-Πατρικίου, εκδόσεις Παπαζήση, Αθήνα 2014, 33-42.

<sup>15</sup> Ε. Πρωτοψάλτης, Αυθαίρετος επιδρομή Ελλήνων κατά του Λιβάνου (1826), *Αθηνά, τόμ. 58* (1954), 243-277; Α. Βακαλόπουλος, Τυχοδιωκτική επιχείρηση Ελλήνων στο Λίβανο, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους, ΙΒ*, Αθήνα: Εκδοτική Αθηνών 1975, 417-418.

<sup>16</sup> Note: Translated from Greek by the author. Quoted in I. Α. Παπαδριανός, Μαυροβούνιοι εθελοντές στον εθνικοαπελευθερωτικό αγώνα των Ελλήνων στα 1821, *Βαλκανικά Σύμμεικτα, τόμος 11*, (1999-2000), 173.

negro made a special reference to him on the occasion of the bicentennial anniversary.<sup>17</sup> Regarding Vaso Brajević's activities in the post-revolution era, it should be noted that he continued to be active in the political life of the newly established Greek state, serving as a Senior General in the Greek army.<sup>18</sup>

Rado Brajević or Rado Mavrovouniotis, Vaso Brajević's brother, was also a distinguished Montenegrin volunteer in the Greek War of Independence. Rado Brajević participated in the revolutionary operations on the island of Evia for three years (1821-1823) and then he went to the island of Psara, where he co-leaded revolutionary activities with Lambros Kassandrinos. Rado died heroically during one of the battles that led to the "Destruction of Psara".<sup>19</sup> Below you may find a description of these events published by an eyewitness in a Greek newspaper on January 23, 1825:

*"If it is fair and proper to beatify those who fought and died for our beloved motherland, it is fair and proper to praise and beatify the glorious and brave Rado, who came from a Slavic land; in fact, Rado shall be remembered forever as he sets the example to those who will sacrifice their sweet lives for the motherland. Rado was among the army generals who were present during the dramatic events that led in captivity the residents of the island of Psara.*

*This army general [i.e. Rado], when he saw Christians' and humanity's ungodly enemies debarking on the island and starting brutally massacring the Christians, he decided to die with his soldiers, because he could not bear the horrific acts of the infidel barbarians. He said to his soldiers, like a modern Leonidas, "Brothers! We were born once! We will die once!" and then he went at a fortress, which had cannons, at the island's cape, where women and children had found refuge.*

*When the enemies, who were countless, surrounded the fortress and tried to conquer it, the brave Rado, like a modern Achilleas, with his comrade Lambros Kassandrinos, who shared the same soul and the same heart with Rado, went out from the fortress, holding a sword and fought until the sword broke in two[pieces] and could not be used*

<sup>17</sup> Πρεσβεία της Ελλάδας στο Μαυροβούνιο, 200 χρόνια από την Ελληνική Επανάσταση (1821-2021) - Επιλογές οπτικοακουστικών πρωτοβουλιών, <https://www.mfa.gr/missionsabroad/montenegro/news/200-khronia-apo-ten-ellenike-epanastase-1821-2021-epiloges-optikoakoustikon-protoboulion.html> (March 2021).

<sup>18</sup> Ι. Α. Παπαδριανός, Μαυροβούνιοι εθελοντές στον εθνικοαπελευθερωτικό αγώνα των Ελλήνων στα 1821, *Βαλκανικά Σύμμεικτα*, τόμος 11, (1999-2000), 170.

<sup>19</sup> Ι. Α. Παπαδριανός, Μαυροβούνιοι εθελοντές στον εθνικοαπελευθερωτικό αγώνα των Ελλήνων στα 1821, *Βαλκανικά Σύμμεικτα*, τόμος 11, (1999-2000), 171.

*anymore. But [Rado's] brave soul could endure more suffering; when the countless enemies continued to attempt conquering the fortress, he decided on Sunday, June 23, following a 24 hours heroic resistance to set the fortress on fire and die for the beloved motherland, rather than to surrender to the barbarians because of hunger. Then he asked an old man to stay next to the gunpower warehouse, in order to set it on fire, upon his signal. Then he opened fortress' gates and let huge crowds of Turks to enter. [Rado] rushed to fight against [the Turks] with a few remaining soldiers. Once exhausted, he gave his signal and the old man set the gunpower warehouse on fire and everyone in the fortress, Christians and Turks, died.*

*This glorious hero is equal to Markos Botsaris, Ilias Mavromichalis and other immortal men, who set examples of patriotism and will be remembered forever! May his memory live forever!"*<sup>20</sup>

Apart from Brajević brothers, Djoan (or Joannos) of Montenegro and Grigor Djurovic (or Jurovic) were among the notable Montenegrin volunteers in the Greek War of Independence. The latter, served as a chieftain supporting revolutionary operations. He also contributed in the development of the Greek-Montenegrin relations, visiting Montenegro in 1824, upon Greek Provisional Administration request, in order to discuss with Petar I Petrović-Njegoš possible ways of collaboration against the Ottoman Turks. Also, on November 1828 he officially requested from the first Greek Governor, Ioannis Kapodistrias (1776-1831) for an assignment as a reward for his services during the Greek revolution. In support to his request, he submitted a certification issued by Alexandros Mavrokordatos (1791-1865), the secretary of the Provisional Administration of Greece, which certified that Grigor Djurovic served with sense of duty during the revolution.

Regarding, Djoan of Montenegro, there are not much information available. Djoan participated in several sieges, with the siege of Tripolitsa (June-September 1821) being the most known one. His contribution to the Greek cause, was praised by Demetrios Ypsilantis (1793-1832), an eminent Greek leader.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Note: Translated from Greek by the author. Quoted in I. Α. Παπαδριανός, Μαυροβούνιοι εθελοντές στον εθνικοαπελευθερωτικό αγώνα των Ελλήνων στα 1821, *Βαλκανικά Σύμμεικτα, τόμος 11*, (1999-2000), 177-178.

<sup>21</sup> Σ. Λουκάτος, *Σχέσεις Ελλήνων μετά Σέρβων και Μαυροβουνίων κατά την Ελληνικήν Επανάστασιν 1823-1826*, Εταιρία Μακεδονικών Σπουδών – Ίδρυμα Μελετών Χερσονήσου του Αίμου, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1970, 119; Σ. Λουκάτος, Σέρβοι, Μαυροβούνιοι και Βόσνιοι μαχητές της ελληνικής ανεξαρτησίας (1821-1829), *Πρώτο Ελληνο-σερβικό Συμπόσιο, Συνεργασία Ελλήνων και Σέρβων κατά τους απελευθερωτικούς αγώνες 1804-1830*, Θεσσαλονίκη: Ίδρυμα Μελετών Χερσονήσου του Αίμου, 1979, 101-120; I. Α.

Last but not least, special reference will be made to De Wintz, a Montenegrin army general, who had also participated in the Napoleonic wars. De Wintz was in London during the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence and he collaborated with several British and Cypriots in order to create a military corps, consisting of 2,000 volunteers and mercenaries, to battle against the Ottoman Turks. For this purpose, he attempted to obtain a loan, to fund the operation, but he did not succeed due to the opposition of the Greek revolutionary committee in London, which was also trying to arrange a loan for the Greek revolutionaries. Nevertheless, De Wintz continued his efforts and on September 12, 1823, tried to obtain the support of the Greek Provisional Administration, by presenting his war plan through the English Colonel Delaways. Despite the fact that De Wintz did not achieve his aim, he is considered among the notable Montenegrin volunteers of the Greek War of Independence.<sup>22</sup>

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### *Summary*

The exact number of Montenegrin volunteers in the Greek War of Independence is not known and further research is needed, also in Montenegrin archives, to fill research gaps and more sufficiently address this case study. Nevertheless, Montenegrin volunteers' contribution is widely recognized and is often referred in the relevant Greek bibliography, as it is linked to the Balkan dimension of the Greek War of Independence. Inter-Balkan collaboration and solidarity continued in the following years, until conflicting interests and Great Powers' antagonisms change the spatial and political landscape.

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Παπαδριανός, Μαυροβούνιοι εθελοντές στον εθνικοαπελευθερωτικό αγώνα των Ελλήνων στα 1821, *Βαλκανικά Σύμμεικτα, τόμος 11, (1999-2000)*, 171-172.

<sup>22</sup> Ι. Α. Παπαδριανός, Μαυροβούνιοι εθελοντές στον εθνικοαπελευθερωτικό αγώνα των Ελλήνων στα 1821, *Βαλκανικά Σύμμεικτα, τόμος 11, (1999-2000)*, 171-172.

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και Σέρβων κατά τους απελευθερωτικούς αγώνες 1804-1830, Θεσσαλονίκη: Ίδρυμα Μελετών Χερσονήσου του Αίμου, 1979, 65-88.

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