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## IMPACTS OF THE 1974 CONSTITUTION ON MONTENEGRIN STATEHOOD

**ABSTRACT:** *The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution played a pivotal role in shaping Montenegro's path towards statehood by granting significant autonomy to the republics within the Yugoslav federation. This constitutional change had far-reaching implications for Montenegro's political, economic, and cultural development. The article examines how increased self-governance reinforced Montenegro's political identity and administrative capabilities, allowing for greater control over internal affairs, economic policies, and cultural institutions. Despite being one of the least developed republics, Montenegro experienced rapid industrialization and the establishment of key educational and scientific bodies during this period. The constitutional framework also contributed to a slight increase in Montenegrin national identification. While independence was not an immediate goal, the experience of autonomy under the 1974 Constitution laid the groundwork for Montenegro's eventual push for sovereignty. The article argues that this period of increased autonomy was crucial in nurturing the institutional and political structures necessary for Montenegro's later Independence Referendum of 2006.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Montenegro, Yugoslavia, Statehood, Ideology, Transition*

The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution played a crucial role in shaping the development of Montenegrin statehood by granting the republics—including Montenegro—greater autonomy within the Yugoslav federation. This shift laid the groundwork for Montenegro's eventual push for independence by reinforcing its political and legal identity. The legal changes were crucial in

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creating an institutional environment for the idea of Montenegrin independence to flourish and develop further as the time passed.

During the communist era, Montenegro was among the most underdeveloped republics in Yugoslavia, alongside Macedonia and Bosnia, due to its small size and marginal position within the federation. Like the other Yugoslav republics, Montenegro sought its own path to economic growth while existing as a smaller entity within a larger state (Malecevic & Uzelac, 2007).

Unlike many Central and Eastern European countries, Montenegro's transition from communism was not driven by grassroots social movements demanding radical political change. Instead, the shift occurred within the ruling party itself, as a nationalist faction within the League of Montenegrin Communists—backed by street protests in Podgorica—ousted the previous leadership. This internal power shift, combined with Milosevic's populist movement, laid the groundwork for continued political collaboration between Montenegro and Serbia. Despite changes in leadership, the political structure in Montenegro remained largely unchanged. While a multi-party system was formally introduced, the so-called revolution ultimately preserved the communist regime, as the leadership change was, in essence, a Serbian-orchestrated coup with strong nationalist undertones rather than a genuine democratic transition (Darmanovic, 2003, p. 147). However, this trajectory of Montenegro transition path was strongly predetermined by the outcome of long-standing reforms that culminated with adoption of the new Yugoslav Constitution.

The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution was a key moment in Montenegro's path toward statehood. By granting significant autonomy, it reinforced the republic's identity within Yugoslavia and provided a foundation for later independence efforts. Although Montenegro remained closely linked to Serbia for decades, the constitutional changes of 1974 helped nurture the institutional and political structures necessary for its eventual separation.

The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution significantly increased the autonomy of Montenegro, allowing it to exercise greater control over its internal affairs. This decentralization of power was crucial in shaping Montenegrin statehood, as it reinforced its political identity and administrative capabilities within the Yugoslav federation.

The 1974 Constitution granted each republic, including Montenegro, the right to adopt its own constitution, establish its own legal framework, and govern internal affairs independently from the federal government (Burg, 1983). This shift meant that Montenegro, despite being one of the smallest and least economically developed republics, had its own decision-making institutions and mechanisms, reinforcing the idea of separate Montenegrin governance.

Montenegro's government could now enact laws on economic policy, education, and cultural identity without direct interference from Belgrade (Woodward, 1995). This legal and administrative autonomy was particularly significant because it allowed Montenegro to develop a governance structure that persisted even after Yugoslavia's collapse.

Under the new constitutional framework, Montenegro gained the ability to manage its own economic policies, including state-owned enterprises, taxation, and resource allocation. Although it remained reliant on federal financial support, especially due to its small size and limited industrial base, this increased control over economic affairs allowed Montenegrin leaders to shape policies that suited local needs (Dyker, 1990).

Furthermore, the constitution's decentralization model encouraged a shift away from centralized socialist planning, giving Montenegro some flexibility in regional economic development. While this autonomy did not necessarily lead to prosperity, it contributed to the idea that Montenegro could function independently as a state.

One of the most significant outcomes of increased autonomy was the weakening of federal authority, which ultimately made it easier for republics to assert independence when Yugoslavia began to dissolve in the early 1990s. Montenegro, like the other republics, was no longer fully subordinate to federal institutions, allowing it to maintain a degree of self-rule.

During this period, Montenegro saw the formation of significant educational and scientific bodies, such as the University of Titograd and the Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts (CANU). Additionally, media and cultural institutions expanded, with *Pobjeda* becoming a daily newspaper and RTV Titograd enhancing its programming. These developments reflected the broader decentralization policies of the new constitutional framework, which provided Montenegro with greater control over its internal affairs and reinforced its institutional identity within Yugoslavia (Papović, 2013, p. 144).

The constitutional reforms also supported Montenegro's transformation into an industrial society, marking the fastest period of growth in its history. While the republic still lagged behind the Yugoslav average in terms of development, the establishment of educational and cultural institutions strengthened its ability to manage its own policies in science, media, and education. This period also saw a reinforcement of the dominant Yugoslav socialist ideology, which maintained political stability and limited the influence of both Montenegrin and Serbian nationalism. As a result, the constitutional framework of 1974 contributed to the further integration of Montenegro into the Yugoslav federation while simultaneously fostering the republic's distinct political and cultural identity (Papović, 2013, p. 144).

Demographic trends during this time suggest a gradual consolidation of Montenegrin identity within the republic. The proportion of Montenegrins in the population increased slightly from the early 1970s to the early 1980s, indicating a continued identification with the Montenegrin national framework. While nationalism remained on the margins of political life, the institutional and administrative autonomy granted by the 1974 Constitution laid the foundation for Montenegro's eventual statehood aspirations. Although independence was not an immediate objective, the experience of self-governance during this period would later prove instrumental in Montenegro's path to sovereignty (Papović, 2013, p. 144).

Historians argue that this constitutional change played a long-term role in strengthening the political identity of Montenegro. While Montenegrin elites remained largely aligned with Serbia for much of the 1990s, the administrative experience gained from governing independently under the 1974 framework later facilitated the republic's push for full sovereignty (Roberts, 2007).

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