

The background of the cover features a light yellow-to-white gradient with several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across it. These motifs are simple, elongated shapes with a small stem and two leaves, appearing to float or drift across the page.

# **CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO**

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**Christopher Deliso**

The logo for Greenwood Publishing Group, featuring a stylized green leaf motif to the left of the company name.

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***Culture and Customs  
of Serbia and Montenegro***



Serbia and Montenegro. Cartography by Bookcomp, Inc.

# ***Culture and Customs of Serbia and Montenegro***

**CHRISTOPHER DELISO**

Culture and Customs of Europe



GREENWOOD PRESS  
Westport, Connecticut • London

## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Deliso, Christopher M., 1974–

Culture and customs of Serbia and Montenegro / Christopher Deliso.

p. cm. — (Culture and customs of Europe)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978–0–313–34436–7 (alk. paper)

1. Serbia—Civilization. 2. Montenegro—Civilization. 3. Serbia—Social life and customs.  
4. Montenegro—Social life and customs. I. Title.

DR1952.D45 2009

949.7103—dc22 2008032966

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2008032966

ISBN: 978–0–313–34436–7

First published in 2009

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

[www.greenwood.com](http://www.greenwood.com)

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48–1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## Series Foreword

THE OLD WORLD and the New World have maintained a fluid exchange of people, ideas, innovations, and styles. Even though the United States became the de facto world leader and economic superpower in the wake of a devastated Europe in World War II, Europe has remained for many the standard bearer of Western culture.

Millions of Americans can trace their ancestors to Europe. The United States as we know it was built on waves of European immigration, starting with the English who braved the seas to found the Jamestown Colony in 1607. Bosnian and Albanian immigrants are some of the latest new Americans.

In the Gilded Age of one of our great expatriates, the novelist Henry James, the Grand Tour of Europe was de rigueur for young American men of means, to prepare them for a life of refinement and taste. In a more recent democratic age, scores of American college students have Eurailed their way across Great Britain and the Continent, sampling the fabled capitals and bergs in a mad, great adventure, or have benefited from a semester abroad. For other American vacationers and culture vultures, Europe is the prime destination.

What is the New Europe post-Cold War, post Berlin Wall in a new millennium? Even with the different languages, rhythms, and rituals, Europeans have much in common: they are largely well educated, prosperous, and worldly. They also have similar goals and face common threats and form alliances. With the advent of the European Union, the open borders, and the Euro and considering globalization and the prospect of a homogenized Europe, an updated survey of the region is warranted.



Culture and Customs of Europe features individual volumes on the countries most studied and for which fresh information is in demand from students and other readers. The Series casts a wide net, inclusive of not only the expected countries, such as Spain, France, England, and Germany, but also countries such as Poland and Greece that lie outside Western Europe proper. Each volume is written by a country specialist, with intimate knowledge of the contemporary dynamics of a people and culture. Sustained narrative chapters cover the land, people, and brief history; religion; social customs; gender roles, family, and marriage; literature and media; performing arts and cinema; and art and architecture. The national character and ongoing popular traditions of each country are framed in an historical context and celebrated along with the latest trends and major cultural figures. A country map, chronology, glossary, and evocative photos enhance the text.

The historied and enlightened Europeans will continue to fascinate Americans. Our futures are strongly linked politically, economically, and culturally.

## Preface

THERE IS NO country in Europe today that has been more misunderstood and misrepresented than Serbia. This is largely the result of how international media and certain governments, including that of the United States, have tended to depict the country since the violent disintegration of the federation of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, a process that spawned three wars and culminated with a NATO bombing campaign against Serbia for control of its southwestern province, Kosovo, in 1999. According to all too many news reports, government communiqués, and sensationalizing exposés to have come out in recent years, the Serbs are to blame for all of those events: they are at best irrational nationalists and genocidal monsters at worst. By 2008, this line of thinking has become such an ingrained part of Western conventional wisdom that journalists and public officials rarely have to support any comment denouncing Serbia and its people with facts.

The truth, of course, is less black and white. Owing to limitations of space, however, this book cannot possibly get into all the details of Serbia's recent (and less recent) history, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and Western diplomatic and military interventions in the region. In any case, some books taking a more critical view of these complex events have started to appear.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, few Americans are aware of the interesting facts that indicate the historical affinity between their country and Serbia, such as that the largest airlift of downed American pilots in history occurred when Serbian rebels and civilians, at great danger to themselves, sheltered and helped evacuate some 500 American airmen shot down over Nazi-occupied Serbia during World War II.<sup>2</sup>

The scope and size of this book, however, preclude any sustained discussion of complex historical episodes. Instead, it seeks simply to give some introduction to the unique aspects of daily life, history, art, and culture that make Serbia one of Europe's most distinctive and significant places. Serbs are warm-hearted, hospitable people who keep their traditions close to their hearts and delight in festivals, celebrations, and generally doing things "big." Most foreign tourists who visit leave quite pleasantly surprised with their experience.

The same goes for Montenegro, which has been spared many of Serbia's recent troubles, using historically tried and tested diplomatic skills and a unique geographical positioning to its advantage. Although Serbia's smaller neighbor has throughout history always been living in Serbia's shadow—literally, under some of Europe's most sweeping mountain peaks—Montenegro is now coming into its own. Even before it and Serbia decided to peacefully part ways in May 2006, tourism had started to take off. In the past few years, foreign investors have been snapping up property on Montenegro's gorgeous Adriatic coast, and the new influx of tourists is only increasing. Outsiders are always eager to discover Europe's "next big thing," and Montenegro, with its beaches, medieval castles, and mountain sports, is right up there. And Serbia too is receiving more and more visitors, with the capital, Belgrade, now recognized as one of Europe's most dynamic and fun cities, and music gatherings like the Guča Trumpet Festival and EXIT Festival in Novi Sad attracting massive audiences and increasing their international presence.

Of course, Serbia and Montenegro both have their flaws and problems, just like anywhere in the world. However, day to day, outsiders will find that they are among the safest places in Europe to travel. All things considered, now seems to be the perfect time for the outside world to embrace these countries, which, despite their very close historical and cultural ties, offer much variety and much to see and do. Hopefully, in some small way this book offers an introduction to some of the facets of life, culture, and history that will inspire readers to visit or at least learn more about two of the most unique and unknown countries in Europe.

## NOTES

1. A few examples of such works include veteran journalist Peter Brock's *Media Cleansing, Dirty Reporting: Journalism and Tragedy in Yugoslavia* (Los Angeles: GM Books, 2005), an expert analysis of biased and fraudulent media coverage of the recent wars in Yugoslavia; Canadian war reporter Scott Taylor's on-the-ground testimony from Serbia during the Kosovo bombardment, *Inat: Images of Serbia and the Kosovo Conflict* (Ottawa: Esprit de Corps Books, 2000), British author John

Laughland's *Travesty: The Trial of Slobodan Milošević and the Corruption of International Justice* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), on the politically motivated indiscretions of The Hague tribunal for war crimes; former National Security Agency Balkans analyst John Schindler's *Unholy Terror: Bosnia, Al-Qa'ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2007), on the close connections of the Bosnian Muslim wartime government and Islamic terrorism; and Noam Chomsky's *The New Military Humanism* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

2. Veteran American airmen thus saved went to their graves in recent years still pleading with the U.S. government to recognize and commemorate the bravery of these Serbs. For political reasons, they were unsuccessful. For the whole story, see *The Forgotten 500: The Untold Story of the Men Who Risked All for the Greatest Rescue Mission of World War II* (New York: NAL/Penguin Group, 2007).

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# Chronology

6th–1st centuries B.C.	Turks, then Celts, and finally Romans settle today's Serbia; Illyrian tribes rule coastal Montenegro.
A.D. 6th–7th centuries	Serb tribes are among the Slavic Great Migration to the Balkans.
825–1120	Vlastimirović and Vojislavljević dynasties create first Serb states of Raška and Zeta/Duklja in present-day Montenegro
9th century	Serbs converted to Orthodox Christianity following mission of Byzantine monks Cyril and Methodius to Morava in 863.
1166	Stefan Nemanja founds Nemanjić dynasty and endows churches.
1219	Serbian Orthodox Church becomes autocephalous from Byzantium; Nemanja's son, the monk Sava, becomes patriarch.
1331–1355	Reign of Stefan Dušan, creator of advanced legal code and endower of churches; Serbia becomes an empire, controlling much of the western Balkans.
1371	Prince Vukašin Mrnjavčević's forces defeated by Turks at Battle of Maritsa in Bulgaria; Ottomans expand in Balkans.
1389	Battle of Kosovo between Serbs and Turks. Heavy casualties on both sides; Prince Lazar and Sultan Murad I die in battle,

- and most Serbian nobles killed. Ottoman conquest accelerates.
- 1429 The despot Đurađ Branković moves Serbian capital north to the fortified city of Smederevo.
- 1459 Ottomans capture Smederevo and conquer all of Serbia soon after.
- 1517 *Vladika* system (rule of bishop-prince) begins in semi-independent Montenegro.
- 1679 Beginning of Montenegrin Petrović Njegos dynasty; will rule until 1918.
- 1690 Mass migration northward of the Serbs during the Austro-Turkish war; Turks spread Islam in Kosovo and Raška/Sandžak.
- 1699 Treaty of Karlovci between Christian powers and Turkey ends long war; Vojvodina incorporated into Austria; Sremski Karlovci becomes revived Serbian center under Austrian rule.
- 1737–1739 Ottomans raze Belgrade after third Austro-Turkish war; second Great Migration of Serbs into Austrian territories.
- 1766 Under Greek influence, Ottoman sultan abolishes Serbian patriarchate; Serbian church subjugated to Constantinople.
- 1804 The first Serbian uprising, led by Karađorđe Petrović, breaks out after Turkish atrocities against Serbs.
- 1815 The second Serbian uprising, led by Miloš Obrenović, drives out Turkish forces; Serbia becomes autonomous principality.
- 1847 *The Mountain Wreath*, Montenegro's greatest epic poem, written by enlightened *Vladika* Petar II Petrović Njegos.
- 1852 *Vladika* system abolished in Montenegro in favor of secular principality.
- 1868 Serbian government finalizes adoption of linguist Vuk Stefanović Karadžić's innovative language reforms.
- 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War liberates Bulgaria; independent principality of Serbia formed with Treaty of Berlin.
- 1882 Kingdom of Serbia declared by Miloš Obrenović.
- 1885 After a border provocation, Bulgaria defeats Serbia in short war; Great Powers forced to accept unification of Bulgaria.

- 1903 Serbian King Petar Karadorđević takes power in a coup d'état.
- 1908 Austro-Hungarian Empire formerly annexes Bosnia-Herzegovina, while Young Turk revolution forces Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid to reinstate Constitution of 1876; Europe-wide diplomatic crisis.
- 1910 Montenegrin Prince Nikola I proclaims himself king.
- 1912 First Balkan war. Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, and Bulgaria ally against Turkey; Serbia sweeps south to occupy half of Macedonia.
- 1913 Second Balkan war; Bulgaria attacks Greece and Serbia, but loses much of its recent gains.
- 1914 Austro-Hungarian successor to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, assassinated by Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip in Sarajevo on June 28.  
  
Austro-Hungary declares war on Serbia on July 28, setting off a chain reaction of war declarations; Serbia defeats first two Austrian invasions.
- 1914–1915 Third Austro-Hungarian invasion overwhelms Serbia. Led by the king, Serbian army marches through Albanian mountains, in winter, to the sea, and rehabilitates on the Greek island of Corfu.
- 1918 Allied breakthrough on Macedonian front in September; Serbian and French armies sweep northward, liberating Serbia.  
  
Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians proclaimed in Belgrade on December 1.
- 1928–1929 Montenegrin member of Parliament assassinates Croat politician Stjepan Radić; King Aleksandar I bans ethnic parties, renaming the country Yugoslavia.
- 1934 King Aleksandar I assassinated in Marseilles by a Bulgarian-Macedonian revolutionary group.
- 1941 Bombing of Belgrade by the Nazis on April 6 causes widespread damage and kills up to seventeen thousand people; Yugoslavia capitulates eleven days later; resistance groups emerge.
- 1945 Yugoslavia fully liberated by Tito's Partisan fighters; Communist Yugoslavia replaces royalist predecessor.



- 1948 Tito breaks with Stalin, navigating a diplomatic course between Communism and the West.
- 1961 Tito hosts the first summit of Non-Aligned Countries in Belgrade; gains prominence as international statesman.
- 1974 New constitution allows more decentralization of powers; ethnic separatism slowly begins.
- 1980 Josip Broz Tito dies on May 4; Communist system continues.
- 1991–1995 Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina claim independence; savage fighting in Croatia and Bosnia.
- 1995 Dayton Agreement signed on December 14 by international leaders and Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević, Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, and Bosnian president Alija Izetbegović, formally ending Bosnian War.
- 1999 Albanian separatist fighting in Kosovo leads NATO to begin seventy-eight-day air campaign on March 24; many civilian killed and refugee crisis develops.
- Yugoslav troops evacuate Kosovo after NATO bombing; Albanian ethnic cleansing of two hundred thousand Kosovo Serbs begins.
- 2000 Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević toppled after mass street demonstrations on October 5.
- 2003 Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić assassinated by Belgrade gangsters on March 12.
- 2004 Anti-Serb pogrom by 50,000 Kosovo Albanians destroys churches and homes, displacing 3,500 Kosovo Serbs.
- 2006 Slobodan Milošević dies during proceedings at The Hague Tribunal on March 11.
- Montenegro holds successful independence referendum on June 6, becoming an independent state.
- 2008 Kosovo Albanians declare independence from Serbia on February 17.
- Serbia signs Stabilization and Association Agreement with European Union on April 29, an important step towards E.U. membership.

## Land, People, and History

THERE IS NO race which has shown a more heroic desire for freedom than the Serbs or achieved it with less aid from others or at more sacrifice to itself.

—Lord Temperley, British historian

### SERBS AND MONTENEGRINS

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, THE Serbs and Montenegrins, neighbors, allies, and close ethnic kin, have undergone cyclical processes of self-estrangement and unity. With the 2006 referendum by which Montenegro's people voted to dissolve the short-lived Serbia and Montenegro state union—itsself the last iteration of the former Yugoslavia—Montenegrins recovered the independent statelet they had last enjoyed almost a century before. However, the tightness of the result (just more than 55 percent voted in favor, and claims of fraud and illegal voting dogged the proceedings), and the fact that many Montenegrins consider themselves Serbs, indicates that there is no great cultural schism in the offing. A large majority in both countries consists of Orthodox Christians, and they speak essentially the same language. And here, as elsewhere in Europe, religion and language are crucial in determining national identity.

Serbs and Montenegrins are closely related Balkan peoples, ultimately descendents of Slavic, Celtic, and other tribes who settled the region starting in the sixth century. Their heritage, national narrative, customs, and social rituals derive largely from the heritage of the Serbian kingdoms of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, which expanded not only territory but also Slavic

literacy and learning, as well as art and architecture, in the cultural milieu of Byzantium. From that empire, based in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey) the Serbs in the late ninth century also began to adopt the Orthodox Christian religion, a decision that would have momentous consequences for the future of the nation.

In the Serbian popular imagination, cultural production, and prevailing national narrative, the story of the Serbian nation is that of a bitter, four-hundred-year struggle to preserve Serbian Christian (and so Western) culture against the attacks and abuses of the Muslim Ottoman Empire. While there are no doubt many Serbs and Montenegrins who do not view their history in such simplistic terms, it is certainly true that this national narrative has had, and continues to have, a significant influence on everything from political life to popular culture. For Westerners, the long and often bitter memories of Serbs and Montenegrins may indeed seem baffling. However, appreciating the past and present of these nations is enhanced by also considering their historical legacy.

## LANGUAGE

Although regional politics have made linguistic designations controversial, it is safe to say that Serbs and Montenegrins speak essentially the same language with regional variations. In Yugoslav times, the national language was known as Serbo-Croatian, but with Croatia's independence in the early 1990s, a process of linguistic revision occurred by which Zagreb created or changed numerous words to form a tongue of its own. The same process was repeated, to a lesser extent, in Bosnia, though both Croatian and Bosnian remain very similar to Serbian. Now that Montenegrin is an independent state, there are attempts being made to create a national language (e.g., the constitution states that Montenegrin is the official language of the land). However, standard Serbian, Serbian regional dialects, and the language of the Montenegrins all remain variations on the same theme.

All of these languages (along with Slovenian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian) belong to the South Slavic linguistic group. A major difference occurs with orthography: Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia (i.e., Bosnian Muslims) use the Latin script exclusively, whereas the other nations all use Cyrillic as well.

Matters are still more complicated, however: not only are slight differences between the Cyrillic alphabet used in each country, even in Latin transliteration, but also special diacritical marks are used that one needs to know to understand pronunciation. In the absence of such marks, one must be aware already of where they should go to know how to pronounce a word correctly—something that, for foreigners at least, only comes with time and experience.

The Serbian Cyrillic alphabet originally derives, as do other Cyrillic alphabets, from the ninth-century Byzantine monks Cyril and Methodius. Their labors saw the creation of a script, Glagolitic, that was later adapted by their follower Saint Kliment of Ohrid, in Macedonia, who created the Cyrillic alphabet. The alphabet was based on Greek, adding extra letters to represent sounds that do not exist in the Greek language, such as “ch,” “sh,” “dj,” and so on. The Serbian Cyrillic alphabet contains thirty letters in all.

When written in the Latin alphabet, Serbian employs a few diacritical marks, the correct understanding of which will greatly assist the reader in pronouncing names mentioned throughout this book. Serbian Latin script is read almost completely exactly as it appears to English speakers, save for the letters *c*, pronounced like the “ts” in *cats*, and *j*, which is pronounced as a *y*. The letter *h* when encountered in Latin script should be pronounced more roughly, identical to the “ch” in the Scottish word *loch*.

Diacritical marks appear in seven cases, and always above, never below the letters. The letter *č* is pronounced “ch” as in *cheese*. The letter *š* is pronounced “sh” like *sheep*. The letter *đ* (upper case *D*) has a “dy” sound, akin to the English word *verdure*. The letter *ž* is pronounced like the *s* in the English word *pleasure*—however, the compound letter *dž* is pronounced as the *j* in *just*. Finally, the letter *ć* is pronounced as the “tch” sound in the word *future*.

Most of the regions of Serbia and Montenegro have their own local dialects, such as Vranski (the dialect of south Serbia, named after the town of Vranje). There are relatively minor differences between standard Serbian and Crnogorski (Montenegrin, or the adjective derived from the proper name *Crna Gora*, or Montenegro), though it even seems to be essentially one of pronunciation. This occurs according to a system. The Serbian word for *where*, *gde*, becomes *de* when spoken by a Montenegrin. And a Serbian *e* as in the word *reka* (river) becomes elongated by Montenegrin speakers, similar to the case of Croatian/Bosnian, becoming *rijeka*, though this does not affect all words equally (e.g., the word *selo*, or “village,” is pronounced identically by Serbs and Montenegrins). However, the Montenegrin government since 2007 has been pushing for ways to make the language still more distinct—with the discussion of adding three new letters to the Cyrillic alphabet being one of the proposals. The idea was spearheaded by the late Professor Vojislav Nikčević, a Montenegrin linguist who died in 2007 at the age of eighty-two. However, the controversy will continue long after his passing, it seems.

## THE LAND

Everyone agrees that Serbia borders on Macedonia to the south, Bulgaria and Romania to the east, Hungary to the north, and Bosnia, Croatia, and Montenegro to the west. Everyone also agrees that Montenegro borders on