

Five Decades of the University of Montenegro

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Abstract: This paper provides a concise and synthesised overview of the establishment and half-century existence of the University of Montenegro which stands as the most prominent higher education, scientific, and artistic institution in our country. It traces the origins and development path of this only state University, its changes, and achievements over the first fifty years of work, as well as its impact on the development and emancipation of Montenegrin society. Relying primarily on data from the Monograph on the University of Montenegro¹ published in 2024 on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, but also on other sources, this paper highlights the facts that we believe can present this comprehensive and the most important higher education institution in Montenegro.

Keywords: University of Montenegro, Foundation, Development, Reforms, Current issues, The role in society.

1. Introduction

Although literacy in Montenegro has a long history (dating back to as early such as the hagiography of Prince Vladimir from the 11th century, the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja from the 12th century, and the Crnojević printing press, which produced the first book in the Slavic South, the Oktoih, 530 years ago), due to historical and unfavourable economic conditions, the first secular schools and the first "rays of enlightenment" [7] were delayed until the 19th century. It was in 1834 that Njegoš established the first secular primary school in Cetinje. Subsequently, professional schools and high schools were established in the second half of the 19th century, with the foundation of the first higher and tertiary educational institutions occurring in the second half of the 20th century.

¹ The monograph of the University of Montenegro 1974–2024 is a comprehensive resource, meticulously documenting data on the origin, development, work and organization of the only state university, recording all its changes over half a century. Spanning over 300 pages, the Monograph, through numerous data and photographs, illustrate the state of the University through all development phases, but also reminds of important people, university professors, students and events that had a decisive influence on the fate of the University. The monograph represents a capital work that will be the foundation of all future research at the University of Montenegro.

During the initial period of peace following the Berlin Congress in 1878, when Montenegro gained recognition as an independent state, Prince Nikola I Petrović initiated several efforts to implement higher education. The first initiative in 1889 focused on constructing a university in Bar, with Franjo Rački preparing the project. Subsequently, in 1901, efforts were made to establish a Great School in Cetinje, a concept realized by Valtazar Bogišić. The third initiative, in 1908 and 1909, aimed to establish the Faculty of Law in Cetinje. Unfortunately, none of these endeavours was realized due to a shortage of personnel and financial resources, which necessitated seeking support from abroad, primarily from Imperial Russia [3].

During the period between the two world wars in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Montenegro was characterised by a lack of significant progress. Individuals seeking education during this period were compelled to leave Montenegro (in Yugoslavia at that time there existed three universities in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana). The only research institution that was established in that period was the first scientific research institution in Montenegro - the State Experimental Station for Southern Cultures established in 1937 in Topolica near Bar and it is recognized as the precursor to the contemporary Faculty of Biotechnology.

The first institutions for college and higher education were established post World War-II in the Socialist Republic of Montenegro, one of the six republics of the The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The development was seen as essential for the accelerated post-war progress and emancipation of the country. To address the shortage of teaching staff for the growing number of newly established schools (with compulsory primary education), the Higher Pedagogical School was founded in 1947 in Cetinje (this school, together with the Teachers' School in Nikšić later formed the Pedagogical Academy in 1963). The first faculty in Montenegro offering a four-year study program was the Faculty of Economics, founded in 1960 in Titograd. Additionally, the first scientific institution in the field of social sciences was the Institute for the Study of the History of the Montenegrin People (today known as Historical Institute), founded in 1948 in Cetinje, and later relocated to Titograd in 1959.

2. The Establishment of the University

The necessity to establish a university and unify the existing scientific institutions, colleges and higher educational institutions, became increasingly prominent in Montenegrin educational and cultural policy, and finally,

this initiative began to realize in the 1970s². By gaining financial and staffing support from experts in the joint state, the process of establishing the University began on April 2, 1974, through signing the *Self-management Agreement on associating into the University in Titograd* by representatives from three existing faculties: the Faculty of Economics (founded in 1960), the Faculty of Technical Sciences (1963), and the Faculty of Law (1972), all based in Titograd; two higher schools: the Pedagogical Academy (1963) from Nikšić and Maritime College Kotor (1959) from Kotor; and three independent scientific institutes: the Historical Institute (1948), the Agricultural Institute (1960), and the Institute for Biological and Medical Research (1972), all located in Titograd.

In the presence of the republic's political leaders, the rectors and vice rectors of Yugoslav universities, the Constituent Assembly of the University was held on April 29, 1974, and this day is celebrated as University Day. The Assembly, which then served as the highest governing body, elected the president (Prof. Dr. Radule Sekulić), the vice president (Mira Nikčević, a student of the Faculty of Law), and the members of the Assembly, the Executive Board of the Assembly (President Prof. Dr. Srđan Hajduković), the rector (Prof. Dr. Mirčeta Đurović), and two vice rectors (Prof. Mojsije Lazarević and Prof. Dr. Branislav Ivanović), by which the establishment process was completed.

The newly founded University was launched with the mission to unify scientific and cultural potential of the country as well as to educate academic staff that would be able to respond to dynamic socio-economic and cultural development in Montenegro. As envisioned by its founders, it will become "a powerful scientific and educational center, capable of integrating into the mainstream of economic progress and social transformations, and a strong driver for overall socio-economic renewal of Montenegro" [1].

The University Law (1992) clearly defined the position, mission, tasks, and role of the University in Montenegrin society and beyond: "The University is an autonomous institution in scientific, legal, and economic terms, which, in a critical and integrative manner, acquires, preserves, transmits, and develops culture and established scientific and artistic knowledge and values through unified research, artistic, and educational activities. The Uni-

² Among the former Yugoslav republics, prior to Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina also established their first universities. The universities in Skopje and Sarajevo commenced operating shortly after the war, specifically in 1949. Even the universities in the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija were founded before those in Montenegro – in Novi Sad in 1960 and in Priština in 1969. Consequently, Montenegro was the final Yugoslav republic to establish a university as its primary academic and educational institution.

versity preserves and develops humanistic tradition of Montenegro, Yugoslavia, Europe, and the world, guided by the principles of freedom, research, respect for human values, the natural environment, commitment to continuous a dialogue beyond political and geographical borders, and the opening of communications and interaction among world cultures."³

Up to date, the University has changed its name three times: upon its foundation, it was named the University of Titograd. In the following year, in May 1975, it was renamed into "Veljko Vlahović," and since May 1992, it has borne its current name, the University of Montenegro.

During its half-century existence, the University has undergone several phases of development, which, depending on the criteria chosen, could be conceptualized differently. For the purpose of this paper, we will briefly present and analyse its changes in the previous and present century. Regardless of the choice of periodization, the University can be seen as a dynamic entity – continuously striving to meet the real demands of the society and the times. It functions as a community of interconnected units that has steadily grown, adapted and evolved into a more complex and comprehensive institution of higher education.

3. The University in the 20th Century

The conditions under which the University was formed were quite adverse: space was unlimited; construction of the building designated for technical faculties, which also accommodated the Rectorate, commenced in 1975 coinciding with the first anniversary of the University and was not completed and occupied until 1978. Furthermore, there was a significant lack of proper equipment, and a notable shortage of qualified teaching staff, as over 75% of lecturers were sourced from universities outside Montenegro [7]. Additionally, the financial circumstances of university lecturers and teaching assistants were insufficient to enable their full engagement in both teaching and research activities [8].

In 1975, the University had 248 lecturers, including 169 with permanent contracts and 79 part-time 28 doctors of science and 34 holding master degree. By the 1976/77 academic year, the three faculties had a total of 10,542 students, with 4,359 regular and 6,183 part-time students. Several years later, in the academic year 1979/80, the number of students grew to 15,618, of which 9,294 were part-time. Teaching was provided by 250 lecturers, including 89 adjunct professors and 114 teaching assistants [4].

³ Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro, year XLVIII, no. 37, University Law, Article 2, Podgorica, August 3rd 1992 [6].

The increase in the number of students, alongside the need for training national personnel, the development of new sciences and scientific disciplines, as well as the growing and changing needs of the economy, necessitated a reorganization of existing university units and the creation of new ones. The aim was to align the University with contemporary trends in higher education policies. We will specify individually all the transformations of both existing and newly established organizational units at the University over the initial 25 years.

The Faculty for Teachers Education was founded in 1977 from the Pedagogical Academy established in 1963, in Nikšić, which in 1988 was transformed into the Faculty of Philosophy. In 1978, through the reorganization of the Technical Faculty, three faculties were formed from the existing departments: the Electrical Engineering Faculty, the Mechanical Engineering Faculty, and the Faculty of Metallurgy in Titograd. Also in 1978, two institutes were founded in Titograd: the Institute of Mathematics and Physics and the Institute of Foreign Languages. In the same year, the University Library started with work.

The Higher School of Physiotherapy in Igalo first operated as a branch of the Higher School of Nursing and Health Technicians from Zagreb since 1976, and became an independent organizational unit in 1980. Since 2015, it has been functioning as part of the Faculty of Medicine. The Faculty of Civil Engineering in Titograd was established in 1980 in order to meet Montenegro's most urgent needs for higher education personnel in civil engineering, particularly following the devastating earthquake that hit Montenegro in 1979.

The Music Academy was founded in Cetinje in 1980. One year later, the Faculty of Cultural Studies was established in 1981, also in Cetinje, primarily focused on the education of experts in the conservation and restoration of movable cultural monuments. This faculty ceased working in 1988, after which the Faculty of Fine Arts was established on its foundations in the same year. The Maritime Faculty in Kotor was established in 1981, following the transformation of the former Maritime College Kotor, which was established in 1959. In 2016, it was renamed into the Faculty of Maritime Studies Kotor.

The Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Titograd was established in 1988, emerging from the Institute of Mathematics and Physics founded a decade earlier. The Faculty of Metallurgy and Technology in Titograd was established in 1995 by the introduction of new study programs and the development of the existing ones, and by renaming the Faculty of Metallurgy established in 1978. The Biotechnical Institute was constituted in 1997, while the Institute of Marine Biology in Kotor was formed in 1984

through the transformation of the Institute of Biological and Medical Research and the Institute of Marine Biology.

The Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Cetinje was established in the academic year 1994/95 as a department of the Faculty of Fine Arts before becoming an independent university unit in 1997. The Medical Faculty in Podgorica was established in 1997, by which Medical Institute stopped existing as a medical institution (established in 1985) and was integrated into the structure of the Medical Faculty. The Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality was founded in 1999, expanding upon the foundations of the former Department of Tourism, which had been part of the Maritime College Kotor since 1965. Additionally, the Center of Information System of the University of Montenegro (CIS) was founded in 1998.

The data indicates that over the first 25 years of its establishment and growth, the University underwent significant organizational and location changes. Initially, the University consisted of 8 units including three faculties, two colleges, and three institutes. By 1999, it expanded to 19 units comprising 11 faculties, three arts faculties, four independent scientific institutes, and one college. In 1974, six out of eight (75%) organizational units were located in Titograd, whereas by 1999, eleven out of nineteen (57.8%) were situated there. This structural evolution involved the establishment of units across various towns in Montenegro, accompanied by the development of campus infrastructure and reputable academic staff. The development and transformation of these units, including the establishment of new ones in Montenegro, aimed to respect tradition and local resources while promoting balanced regional development and decentralization [3].

Over this 25-year period, the University awarded 23,832 degrees, including 12,399 bachelor's degrees, 11,237 university college diplomas, 116 master's degrees, and 80 doctoral degrees. This period is also known for the creation of significant scientific results (textbooks, studies, monographs, journals, etc.) and the emergence of numerous experts in industry, culture, education, and politics [2, 5].

The University governance structure was initially established in compliance with legislative acts governing this area. Initially, the Assembly served as the primary governing body at the University, consisting of 51 members with the authority to: establish statutes and other general regulations, define development policies, make decisions regarding the establishment of organizational units, review enrolment policies, appoint and dismiss the rector and vice-rectors, among other responsibilities. The Executive Board was responsible for program implementation, annual and financial planning; preparing drafts of statutes and other general regulations for approval by the Assembly. The University Law of 1992 mandated that the highest governing

body would become the University Senate, assuming all functions of the former Assembly and current Board of Directors. The rector held managerial authority, while the University Council functioned as the professional body, corresponding to the present day role of the Senate.

When discussing the development of the University in the 20th century, it is important to acknowledge the challenging period during the 1990s, marked by wars in the former Yugoslavia and sanctions imposed by decisions of the UN Security Council due to the involvement in conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia (1992-1996). Soon after the lifting and subsequent re-imposition of sanctions in 1998 due to the war in Kosovo and Metohija, Montenegro was eventually exempted from these restrictions. Consequently, the final decade of the 20th century was characterized by the looming threat of conflict, bombings, blockades, isolation, and significant setbacks. This tumultuous period resulted in a halt in institutional development activities, cooperation, and connections with international partners for the University [3].

At the end of the 20th century, in 1999, the University celebrated its 25th anniversary, and a monograph was published to celebrate its jubilee [2], presenting an overview of the University's development from its foundation to its anniversary. Prior to this publication, three books had been published about the University [1, 8, 9], with only one additional book published this year to mark the 50th anniversary of the University [3].

4. The University of Montenegro in the 21st Century

The beginning of the 21st century in Europe was characterised by significant higher education reforms, driven by the adoption of the Bologna Declaration, and the subsequent Bologna Process. The aim was to establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 and the European Research Area (ERA). The University of Montenegro was well positioned to embrace the Bologna Declaration, leading to Montenegro's accession to the Bologna Process at the Ministerial Conference in Berlin in 2003. That same year, in October, the Law on Higher Education was enacted, providing the legislative framework for reform aligned with the principles of the Declaration. This legislation enabled Montenegro's higher education system to align with European standards, ensuring that the achievements of the University would be measurable according to accepted general principles, standards, guidelines, and indicators.

The University Statute, adopted in early 2004, precisely defined the mission, responsibilities⁴, autonomy⁵, and the new organizational scheme connecting all University units (faculties, academies, institutes, colleges, libraries, maintenance services and Center of Information System). It established the Administrative Board (as the governing body), the Rector (as the University's executive body), and Deans/Directors (as the managing bodies of organizational units). The Statute also established the Senate (as the highest academic body), three professional councils of the Senate (for social sciences, natural and technical sciences, and arts), councils of organizational units, and student bodies (student commissioner, Student Parliament, students' representatives, and student councils of organizational units). The new organization anticipated that the University of Montenegro should be a unified legal entity, while maintaining certain autonomy for its organizational units in relation to the completely integrated university.

The University's study programmes were organized as undergraduate, specialist, master, and doctoral programs following the 3+1+1+3 model, or 4+1+3 year model. The first generation of students studying according to the new study rules, based on the principles of the Bologna Declaration, was enrolled in the academic year 2004/2005. According to the new *Law on Higher Education*, the University was granted a valid license and accreditation for existing programmes, with the reaccreditation expected by September 1, 2007.

⁴ Among its responsibilities were the expansion and promotion of the knowledge, learning and skills, openness to collaboration with similar and other institutions and entities from the neighbouring and broader environment; orientation towards priority social needs; openness to all students and staff solely based on their merits and abilities; dedication to preserving and developing multicultural and multiethnic society in Montenegro; offering a wide range of study programs in social, natural, and technical sciences and arts, supported by effective teaching methods and transfer of the professional knowledge and skills; developing continuous and lifelong education; fostering and promoting research achievements in scientific fields, as well as achievements and creativity in arts; being proactive in encouraging social and economic applications of top achievements in its field of activity; creating an environment encouraging the development of the University staff competencies, recognizing this as a fundamental precondition for successful fulfilment of its mission (*Statute of the University of Montenegro, 2004*).

⁵ The University is autonomous in performing its activities. Autonomy entails the right to establish study programs, their development and implementation, determination of study rules, internal organization, selection of management bodies and leadership, appointment of academic and other staff, establishment of collaboration with national and foreign institutions, publication and public presentation of scientific results, issuance of public documents, management of financial resources, use of property, awarding honorary titles and other honorary distinctions, and other rights arising from good academic practices (*Statute of the University of Montenegro, 2004*).

As it was applied for the first time, the initial reaccreditation of the University was particularly demanding and was carried out in 2007. It was preceded by a Self-Evaluation Report⁶ in which the state of the University was presented through numerous parameters and indicators. Some of these data included: the University consisted of 17 faculties, two independent study programs, and four institutes located in five cities (Podgorica, Nikšić, Cetinje, Kotor, and Igalo); Teaching in the first year was organized according to the new rules in 55 academic and 18 applied study programs across eight cities in Montenegro; The University had a total of 1,188 employees, including 367 with academic and scientific titles, 346 associates (27 of whom held PhD), 77 professional staff, and 398 technical and administrative staff [3].

What followed was the evaluation of the compliance with standards at the University presented in the *External Evaluation Report*, which was presented to the University and prepared for the Council for Higher Education by the External Evaluation Commission. The conclusion was that the University demonstrated readiness and commitment to promptly engage in international higher education and align with the best universities in Europe. This was achieved through the improved quality of education delivered to students, development of its vision, mission, and strategic objectives (related to education acquisition and research conducted according to international academic standards of quality), enhancement of international cooperation, improvement of research capacities, and creation of conditions to increase interest among high school graduates for enrolment. This commitment was further demonstrated by dedicating more attention to the production and dissemination of information, actively determining and managing the work of academic staff, modernizing curricula and programs, promoting independent learning, prioritizing student needs, rationalizing information and communication technologies, investing significantly in new equipment, resources, and facilities, encouraging collaboration among employees, establishing a clear research strategy, and implementing procedures for regular monitoring of its quality and standards. Through the reaccreditation process, responses were provided to 16 adopted standards⁷, providing a comprehensive overview of study programs at all levels across the entire University. This marked the transparent beginning of implementing standards

⁶ Since we do not have any scientific papers or books available on the work and the development of the University in the 21st century, all essential information can be accessed through reports, including self-evaluatory reports and those produced by accreditation or external evaluation committees.

⁷ The adopted standards are as follows: 1. Policy and procedures for ensuring quality; 2. Institutional mission and objectives; 3. Organization and management; 4 and 5. Degrees, qualifications, and structure of study programs; 6. Students; 7. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and examinations; 8. Student assessment; 9. Academic, professional, and administrative staff; 10. Scientific, research, artistic, and professional work; 11. Publishing activities; 12. Physical and material resources; 13. Information system; 14. Public information about activities; 15. Cooperation and mobility; 16. Financing.

and guidelines for monitoring higher education as a means of control and quality assurance.

The second reaccreditation of the University of Montenegro was completed in 2012, following changes in European Union legislation aimed at aligning with development trends in the field. Some of these changes included the establishment of EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) and the formation of working groups to amend the ESG (European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance). The Commission for External Evaluation and Accreditation noted that demands for improving the quality of higher education had increased, necessitating the implementation of various activities to respond effectively. Based on specific conclusions and feedback, the Commission proposed to the Council for Higher Education to issue an Accreditation Certificate to the University.

According to data from the central CIS database, in the academic year 2012/13, the University had a total of 20,898 students, including 17,474 in undergraduate programs, 2,700 in specialist programs, 682 in master programs, and 42 in doctoral programs. Among these students, 5,304 were funded by the state budget (4,655 in undergraduate and 649 in specialist programs), while tuition fees were paid by 15,594 students. The University also enrolled 448 international students. The total staff numbered 1,176, including 732 in teaching roles, 147 in clinics, and 420 in non-teaching positions.

In 2013/14, the University underwent external evaluation by IEP, an independent agency from the EQAR Register of European Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR). This evaluation was followed by a subsequent *Follow-up* evaluation in 2017/18, providing valuable insights and guidance for the University's future activities and the enhancement of its work.

Major changes were made with the decision to transition to a new reformed study model with a duration of 3+2+3 years. Regulated professions such as medicine, dentistry and architecture are excluded from this model. Legislative amendments supporting these changes also included the abolition of the category of self-financing students in the Higher Education Law. The accreditation of the innovative study programs under the new study model was completed in 2017.

During the Bologna period, as in the previous era, the University underwent significant transformations of existing organizational units and the establishment of new ones. The first new organizational unit was the Independent Study Program for Teacher Education in the Albanian language, which started in the academic year 2004/2005 in Podgorica and was later integrated into the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić in 2015. The Faculty of Applied Physiotherapy was founded in 2005 in Igalo, evolving from the

Higher School of Physiotherapy. Since 2015, Applied Physiotherapy has been part of the Faculty of Medicine.

In 2006, the Faculty of Architecture was established by separating the Architecture study program (founded in 2002) from the Faculty of Civil Engineering. Also, the study program of Geodesy was detached from the Faculty of Civil Engineering as an independent entity. In the same year, the Faculty of Political Science was founded in Podgorica, building upon the Department of Political Science that had existed within the Faculty of Law since 2003.

The Biotechnical Faculty in Podgorica originated from the Biotechnical Institute (established in 1997) by launching agricultural studies (academic year 2005/2006) and acquiring the status of a higher education institution, leading to its transformation into a faculty in 2008. Also in 2008, the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education was established in Nikšić by transforming three study programs: Physical Education, Sports Journalism, and Sports Coaching, previously integrated under the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić.

The Faculty of Philology in Nikšić was constituted in 2015 by separating philological study programs (for Montenegrin, Serbian, English, Russian, Italian, French, and German language and literature) from the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić and merging with the Institute of Foreign Languages from Podgorica. The Center of Excellence for Research and Innovation was founded in 2018 to enhance networking and coordination of research and innovation resources at the University. This Center will later transform into the Institute for Advanced Studies in 2021.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the University pursued an intensive development and investment policy, constructing new buildings and renovating existing ones to improve university infrastructure and study conditions. The first phase of the Faculty of Architecture building was completed, and a new modern Rectorate building was constructed and occupied in 2009. The old gymnasium building in Nikšić was renovated in 2008 to house the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education. Following the completion of the Unistan I building, funds were allocated to cultivate the area between it, the Rectorate building, the technical faculties building, and the monument dedicated to Petar I Petrović Njegoš, resulting in one of the most beautiful green areas in Podgorica. Also, the construction of a building for three faculties was initiated, now housing the Science and Technology Park Montenegro. This was followed by the construction of the new residential-commercial complex Unistan II. Later, two more buildings were added to the university campus: the Sports and Cultural Center hall (2015) and the New Student Dormitory (2013).

Significant efforts were made to provide housing and loans under favourable conditions for most university employees. The construction of residential-commercial complexes Unistan I (2006, George Washington Street building) and Unistan II (2011, two buildings on Studentska Street) resolved housing issues for over 500 university employees. Many employees received loans to improve their housing conditions.

During its 50-year history, the University of Montenegro has had 11 male rectors and one female rector, each leaving a distinctive mark on the development of University and Montenegrin society. These rectors are : 1. Prof. Dr. Mirčeta Đurović (1974–1978); 2. Prof. Dr. Miljan Radović (1978–1982); 3. Prof. Dr. Milinko Šaranović (1982–1986); 4. Prof. Dr. Miloš Radulović (1986–1990); 5. Prof. Dr. Božidar Nikolić (1990–1995); 6. Prof. Dr. Ratko Đukanović (1995–1999); 7. Prof. Dr. Predrag Obradović (1999–2003); 8. Prof. Dr. Ljubiša Stanković (2003–2008); 9. Prof. Dr. Predrag Miranović (2008–2014); 10. Prof. Radmila Vojvodić (2014–2017); 11. Prof. Dr. Danilo Nikolić (2017–2021); and 12. Prof. Dr. Vladimir Božović (2021–).

5. University of Montenegro today

The University of Montenegro today represents the intellectual nucleus of Montenegro's development, serving as a hub of scientific research, cultural and artistic creativity and innovation. As the oldest and only state university, it is the most comprehensive higher education institution in Montenegro, standing alongside three private universities: Mediterranean University (founded in 2006), University of Donja Gorica (founded in 2007), and Adriatic University (founded in 2017). The University of Montenegro holds a crucial social role and responsibility to generate and disseminate knowledge through excellence in education, science, and artistic creation. Its goals include enhancing international cooperation, creating successful and socially responsible academic citizens, and promoting the democratic and sustainable development of Montenegrin society and country.

The University is competitive on an international level, particularly within the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. It collaborates with numerous global universities through 69 bilateral agreements. It is a member of the European University Association (EUA) and the ULYSSEUS network of European universities, which includes countries such as Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, and Finland. Additionally, the University is also the part of the European College for Security and Defense (ESDC) and the Regional Cyber Security Capacity Building Center for the Western Balkans. The European Commission has awarded

the University of Montenegro the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, facilitating its participation in a multitude of international projects that support teaching and research.

Initially counting eight organizational units, today, the University of Montenegro has now grown to nineteen faculties and three research institutes with plans for further expansion through the introduction of the new study programs and research centers. New study programmes have recently been launched: Mechatronics at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Conservation and Restoration at the Faculty of Fine Arts, doctoral studies in Sustainable Development, a study program in English language titled Business and Economics at the Faculty of Economics, and a master program in Maritime Environmental Protection and Management at the Faculty of Maritime Studies Kotor. Study programs such as Chemistry and master academic programme in Gender Studies are currently undergoing accreditation. Furthermore, numerous valuable programmes have been initiated within lifelong learning concept.

In 2021, the Advanced Studies Institute was founded, with three research centers: Social and Humanities Sciences, Information and Communication Technologies, and Biomedical Research. In 2022, the Center for Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies was established to coordinate and implement studies with other University units at all study levels. In order to strengthen professional and administrative capacities, several offices were established: the Project Office, Francophone Employment Office, Office for Digital Innovations, and UNISPEKTRUM economic society, aiming to provide infrastructural support for innovative development and commercialization of the results and products of university units.

Considering the number of students, organizational units, study programs and employees, the University of Montenegro is classified as a medium-sized university. In the academic year 2023/24, the University has 15,466 enrolled students (11,614 in undergraduate programs, 3,650 in master programs, and 202 in doctoral programs). The University comprises 453 professors with academic titles and 166 teaching assistants. The total number of employees is 1,155, with 470 non-teaching staff. The University offers 168 accredited study programs, including 65 undergraduate, 76 master, and 27 doctoral programs.

The University of Montenegro is a leading scientific and research institution that continually improves its international visibility within the global academic community, particularly through the publication of scientific papers in renowned journals indexed in SCI, SCIE, SSCI, A&H. The number of published papers on these lists is 4,328 with additional 1,013 papers pub-

lished in SCOPUS. Notably, five of our professors have been included in Stanford's prestigious ranking of the world's top two percent most respected and influential scientists in their fields: Dr. Ljubiša Stanković, Dr. Igor Đurović, Dr. Srđan Stanković, Dr. Gojko Joksimović and Dr. Vladimir Pešić.

The University also hosts numerous successful international scientific events, symposiums, conferences, and congresses, with 19 of them becoming traditional (some having been held more than 20 times). Among these is the *International Slavistic conference Njegoš Days*, hosted for ten times since its establishment in 2008 by the study programme for Montenegrin Language and South Slavic Literature of the Faculty of Philology, which has become a scientific and cultural brand of Montenegro.

International scientific research activities, international project activities, and the mobility of researchers, teachers and students have intensified, forming the foundation of the University's international visibility. There has been a significant growth in the number of incoming and outgoing mobilities of teachers, students and non-teaching personnel. Over the past three years 1,751 mobilities have been realized (551 student and 1,200 staff mobilities). With the support of the Project Office, international project activities have been substantially supported, which resulted in the implementation of 112 projects in 2023, totalling over 8.5 million euros.

Publication activity is a crucial aspect of the University, aiming to contribute to the development of teaching, scientific, and artistic content and to promote educational and emancipatory role of the University in society, and foster scientific and cultural creativity in the public interest. In addition to numerous published books, textbooks, studies and other publications, a significant component of the publishing activity includes scientific journals, some of which have a long-standing tradition. Notable examples include *Istorijski zapisi* (1948); *Studia Marina* (1965); *The Proceedings of the Maritime College Kotor* (1972), which was later transformed into *Časopis Pomorskog fakulteta Kotor - Journal of Maritime Studies Kotor* (JMS) in 2022; *The proceedings of the Faculty of Law* (1976); *Luča: Journal for Philosophy, Sociology and Social Life* (1984); and *Riječ*, the first journal for the science of language and literature (1995). In total, the University continually publishes 18 journals of international and national significance.

The university has launched various infrastructural improvement projects, successfully transforming it into a large construction site. Significant renovations include the reconstruction of the largest amphitheatre (106) and the entrance hall in the building of the technical faculties, as well as the amphitheatres and classrooms at the Faculty of Science, Electrical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Medicine and the Faculty of Maritime Studies Kotor.

Additionally, the facade and waterproofing of the Rectorate's roof were renovated, the roof of the Faculty of Philosophy building was replaced, and the facade and window frames were repaired. Ongoing projects include the construction of the Faculty of Architecture building, the reconstruction of the heating plant, and the replacement of the complete electrical insulation system at the Faculty of Philosophy/Philology. Plans are also underway for the construction of the building of the Faculty of Philology and a sports hall for the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education in Nikšić.

The university continued to green and beautify the campus; including the development of a large park next to the technical faculty building, spanning 25,000 square meters, along with another smaller park behind the Professor's building. Combined with the park that was established in 2007, the University campus is becoming a favourite green space for walking and resting, benefiting not just students and professors, but also the residents of Podgorica.

The importance and impact of the University on Montenegro's educational, cultural, scientific, and economic development for Montenegro is huge which is justified by the fact that the number of graduate students over fifty years from the foundation of the University counts 81,018, including 838 magister, 3,055 master, and 425 doctoral degrees. To what extent the University has changed the educational structure of our country and what Montenegro would be like without those 80 thousand people with higher education degree, are rhetorical questions providing an answer or more just than an answer.

After 50 years since its foundation, the situation at the University has considerably improved compared to its initial period. All organizational units now enjoy satisfactory spatial conditions and are well-equipped for scientific and teaching activities, with ongoing efforts to construct new spaces and enhance existing capacities. To a considerable extent, a highly competent teaching and scientific staff has been established, with local experts comprising over 70 percent of the employees, many of whom completed undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral studies at the University of Montenegro. Living and working conditions, as well as the salaries of teaching and research staff, have greatly improved, making the University of Montenegro a highly attractive and competitive place for employment.

6. Final remarks

On the path of development and prosperity of Montenegro, the only state University has played a significant role for half a century. Its fate is uniquely intertwined with that of the country and its people from whom it

emerged. The establishment of the University offered Montenegro the opportunity to cultivate its intellectual elite and to steer its development accordingly. The University has become a bastion of Montenegro's scientific, educational, emancipatory, libertarian, progressive, and democratic aspirations.

The constitution and development of the University have been pivotal for our country's overall cultural, scientific, and economic advancement, and it significantly redirected migrations of population from the former republics of the joint state, as well as neighbouring countries towards university centers in Montenegro. It can be rightfully said that the year 1974, the year when the first university was born in Montenegro, stands as a significant milestone in the nation's modern history. "Rarely has any of its newborns been surrounded by such attention. And rarely has it invested so much hope as in this – from its University, it was expected to breathe a new life and vitality, to renew it from its roots" [2]. Despite numerous challenges, it can be said that within its capabilities, the University has fulfilled the expectations of Montenegrin society, substantially contributing to its scientific, cultural, and economic growth and development.

Lastly, it is noteworthy to recognize that at the core of the university reside the principles of freedom and autonomy. Freedom of expression, the dissemination of knowledge, and independent critical thinking, free from any non-academic state, political, economic, or religious influence, form the foundation of an autonomous university and a prosperous society. Members of the academic community are entrusted with the responsibility of contributing to societal development and disseminating scientific knowledge relevant to contemporary social issues. The University bears the responsibility to address all questions that are fundamental to community life. A free university is the cornerstone of any democratic society, and university autonomy is a fundamental European value. Looking ahead, the University of Montenegro must enhance its critical and emancipatory role to facilitate the development of a prosperous, democratic, and recognizable Montenegrin society.

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