

# Earthquake

(written in 1979)

On the 15th April 1979, at 7.20 an earthquake of 9 degrees intensity, according to the Mercalli scale, with many epicentres (from the frontiers of Albania, along the coast, as far as Grahovo near NikSic) caused catastrophic damage. Under the ruins about 100 persons were found dead and 1,000 were injured. In an instant of fury, unleashed by the forces of nature, much of that which had been built during the course of centuries or which had hardly been completed was destroyed. With a terrifying uproar blocks of stone fell from Lovcen, from the heights of the Orjen and from the Dinaric mountains, destroying everything man had built: everything trembled as if seized by a terrible fever of the elements. The coastal district suffered most. Great damage was done to the ancient cities of Ulcinj, Budva, Kotor, Bar, Herceg Novi and Tivat and all the villages along the coast. Signs of destruction are also visible at Cetinje, NikSic, Danilovgrad and Titograd. The earthquake hit 250 villages with a total of 100,000 inhabitants. Many villages, especially Krajina, Crmnica, Pastrovici, Grbalj, were razed to the ground. Many palaces, schools, industrial plants were completely destroyed or rendered useless: serious damage was done to ports, docks and a part of the coast was literally swallowed up by the sea, together with its houses, roads, trees, and railway lines. A great social wealth, the fruit of centuries of labour, was destroyed in the most developed zone of Montenegro and at the same time the most ancient and rich in traditions and cultural inheritance.

The stone, that noble substance which our people have endowed with a soul and with which cities have been built, fortresses, palaces, portals, vaults, churches, monasteries, mosques, squares, carved and modelled with love, there near the sea soaked with sun and nourished with salt, gave up: it fell, it crumbled, and beauty and harmony fell to pieces in a shapeless mass. The walls of Kotor have crumbled away; palaces and churches, jewels of the Mediterranean, are now deserted or tottering. The baroque palaces along the Gulf of Kotor were damaged; many churches, city towers, the fortresses of Ulcinj and Herceg Novi have fallen into the sea. The roofs and the bell-towers of the churches and monasteries have fallen; the frescoes and the icons have been ruined; small country churches have been razed to the ground; minarets, mosques and other monuments of the Islamic culture have been devastated. The museums of Ulcinj, Bar, Budva, Kotor, Herceg Novi and Cetinje were destroyed. The damage was enormous and incalculable, but Budva, Kotor and the other cities will not remain mere ghosts. They will be rebuilt to bear witness anew to their beauty and their architectural grandeur. Kotor, by a decision of UNESCO, has been declared a part of the world's cultural inheritance and has good hopes therefore of rising again very soon.

Inured to all difficulties in storms and misadventures, the inhabitants of Montenegro have borne with dignity even this blow, resolving not to surrender. Suddenly an enormous amount of energy hidden away in man has been released, initiatives have multiplied everywhere, organised in the districts and co-ordinated among them. With incredible speed, if one thinks of the size of the tragedy and of the difficulties which followed (rains, wind, the floods in spring), basic living conditions have been set up again and with them the foundations for reconstruction.

The Montenegrin does not surrender, he does not despair: to recognize defeat would amount to denying his personality and identity. Therefore he will spare no toil, no self-sacrifice to tame the elements, the more so since generous help from other people will be offered to Yugoslavia.

But years will pass before we can recover everything that has been lost and before all the monuments can be restored. Montenegro will bear the scars of its wounds for a long time yet, perhaps forever. Its development will be the first to feel the consequences because the most prosperous part was destroyed. The burdens therefore are greater: Montenegro reconstruction must be well and truly planned.

Across its frontiers flow now the great rivers of help and of solidarity. Montenegro opens its heart to all men of goodwill, even if today there are less hotels than yesterday, far less houses: but tomorrow will be different. Without hiding or embellishing anything, Montenegro invites you to get to know it. This can only enrich us, both of us, naturally.