**REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER DUŠKO MARKOVIĆ AT THE CEREMONY OF DEPOSITING INSTRUMENTS OF RATIFICATION OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY**

**State Department, June 5, 2017**

Dear Deputy Secretary of State,

Dear Secretary General,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends and allies,

Today is a big day for Montenegro – a day when my country is becoming a NATTO ally.

That is a historic event for a country and a nation which endured enormous sacrifices in the 19th and 20th centuries in order to defend their right to a free life; the right to decide on our own future; the right to be recognized by the world under our own name and with our national symbols.

History has shown us that when we say Montenegro, these phrases cross our mind:The smallest country and an enormous sacrifice!

Nearly a hundred years after it was deleted from the political map of Europe at the end of the World War I, and eleven years since restoration of its independence, Montenegro is again a part of global politics.

 We are celebrating today the fact that it will never happen again that someone else decides for us and our state, behind our back, as it was the case in the past.

Today we are also formally becoming a part of the most powerful and most successful alliance in history, which decides on the most important issues of today’s world. Membership in NATO means permanent stability for us, with Euro-Atlantic democratic valuesembedded in the society and economy geared towards further prosperity.

Allow me to extend my gratitude to our host country, the United States of America;

to President Trump,

to the Senate, for the staunch and continuous support for our membership in NATO,

to Vice President Pence, Secretary Tillerson and the entire State Department who have been very helpful throughout this entire process, in enabling us to be at this place today.

I am also grateful to all of you who are here today to share our satisfaction.

From the moment of reinstatement of our relations back in 2006, the United States has been a staunch, reliable and precious partner of Montenegro in achieving the vision of a Euroatlantic andEuropean country. That is also a confirmation of something that has never been questioned – that Americans remain committed to the stability and security of the Western Balkans and Europe.

We are very grateful to the NATO and esteemed Secretary-General who is with us today. Dear Mr. Stoltenberg (dear Jens), you have been actively supporting us all this time, with a vision and friendly advice. Montenegro will know how to prove that it is a trustworthypartner.

As an ally, Montenegro will continue working reinvigorated towards that goal. So as to reach the standard allocation of 2 per cent of the GDP for the defense budget by 2024 and to develop a national plan by the end of this year, because we believe that equitable burden sharing is important for the functioning of the Alliance. We will be contributing to the NATO deterrence and defense policy, counter-terrorism, projecting stability as well as to overseas operations and missions.

We will be a strong advocate and partner in Alliance’s refocusing on the Western Balkans and further integration of the countries of the region into NATO.

I firmly believe that this is a historic day for NATO, too.

Facing the new and grave challenges, the Alliance is admitting the 29th member, showing crystal clear that the open door policy is alive – and that it works well – as a beacon of hope to all of those who want to share its values and standards.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since this day, June 5th, 2017, we are an ally that will enjoy the benefits provided by the collective system of security, with major responsibility to continue, together with you, unwaveringly and committedly, to walk towards durable peace, stability and security of Europe and the world. That is a task that will be passed on to the next generations.

Allow me to send a message to the citizens of my country from this place:

 let us unite and let us seize the opportunity to make Montenegro a better country where people will live better lives; with even higher level of democracy, rule of law and equal opportunities for all.

We primarily owe it to ourselves.

But we also owe it to our allies who understood and supported, acknowledged and accepted a small Balkan country as an equal partner.

Let us be wise, for the sake of our future, as much as we were brave in our heroic past!

May Montenegro be eternal!

Thank you.