## ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF MONTENEGRO DUŠKO MARKOVIĆ

## AT THE SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENT OF MONTENEGRO

## ON RATIFICATION OF

## THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY

## AND

## PROTOCOL TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ON THE ACCESSION OF GREECE AND TURKEY

## CETINJE, 28 APRIL 2017

Esteemed Speaker Brajović,

Distinguished Members of the Parliament,

Distinguished representatives of the diplomatic corps,

Members of the Government of Montenegro,

Fellow Citizens, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Parliament of Montenegro, these MPs elected by citizens in October last year – have a historic privilege to make a decision today that will be remembered for as long as Montenegro and Montenegrins shall live; for as long as Montenegro and all other nations inhabiting it shall live.

I am exceptionally humbled and honoured today, in the Old Royal Capital of Cetinje that has been the symbol of Montenegrin freedom, honour and values cherished in our country for centuries, to put forward to the Parliament of Montenegro the Law on the Ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty and the Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the Accession of Greece and Turkey. Our entire history, tradition and spiritual being of our country tell us that such a decision could not be made anywhere else other than in Cetinje.

I will remind you that up to now, the Parliament of Montenegro has already made a significant contribution to our rapid and efficient progress in the process of NATO integration by adopting on two occasions the resolutions supporting the membership of our country in the Alliance.

This day today is written on the brightest page in the history of Montenegro;

alongside 1 July 1878 when the Berlin Congress discussed the international acknowledgement of the independence of Montenegro as 27th state of that time;

alongside 13 July 1941 when Montenegro became a part of the great antifascist coalition that defended global civilization;

alongside 21 May 2006 when the people of Montenegro decided to restore the statehood of their fatherland, taken away by grave injustice and fraud almost an entire century ago...

Today all these, and many other bright dates in our history, are united in the decision on the accession of Montenegro to the North Atlantic Alliance – the club of 28 states representing leading power and value of the modern world.

It was just yesterday when all of this seemed unattainable!

The smallest and most backward republic of the former Yugoslavia; devastated by echoes of the bloody Balkan wars of the nineties of the last century; unwillingly drawn into a mindless war of Serbia with NATO forces on Kosovo – all the odds were against Montenegro, falling behind throughout the past on the Balkan side tracks.

What happened was precisely the opposite!

When we restored our full state autonomy in 2006, we clearly said we did so, among other things, in order to be able to realize two foreign policy priorities, whereby we would most conveniently protect our key national, economic and security interests: membership in NATO and the European Union.

Distinguished Members of the Parliament,

Let me remind that the official relations between Montenegro and NATO were established on 29 November 2006, only six months after the referendum on independence. On that day, Montenegro received an invitation for membership in the Partnership for Peace. Let me remind you that this first big step was made by the Government headed by late Željko Šturanović. After the visible progress achieved, three years later, in December 2009 we received an invitation to join the Membership Action Plan (MAP), whereby we entered a new stage of relations with the Alliance. In the years that followed, we boosted the pace of reforms in the sector of defence and security, rule of law and strengthening of public support, which resulted in a positive outcome of the NATO Ministerial Meeting on 2 December 2015, when Montenegro was invited to join the Alliance. This historic step, let me remind you, was made by the Government headed by the leader of restoration of our independence Milo Đukanović.

In the previous 16 months, all the complex procedures in 27 member states of NATO have been finished; it only remains that the Spanish Senate ratifies the Protocol, which will take place over the next ten days.

The aim of passing this Law in our Parliament is to provide the final conditions for full membership of Montenegro. After the entry into force of this Law, and after Secretary General Stoltenberg's call, we shall deliver our instrument of ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty to the Government of the United States of America, which is the depositary of the Treaty.

This will be also official date of Montenegrin NATO membership.

With gratitude to all the countries of the Alliance, as well as the Secretary General and his team for the support we have had, on the swift and efficient ratification of the Protocol, I want to clearly communicate the following:

By joining the club of 28 leading countries of the world, Montenegro will not get something that is not deserved; something that does not belong to it.

In this respect – hard, committed and determined work of this generation of politicians, especially over the last ten years, has been of paramount importance. But, in a larger context, historically speaking, all those previous generations of our people made our positioning among the most developed are responsible possible: fighters and warriors, statesmen and authors from all walks of life. All those generations, at least over the last two centuries – not to go further in history, which were always on the right side of history; which endured terrible sacrifices in defending the achievements of civilization in two world wars in the course of the last century; and whom great powers deprived of a fair acknowledgement of these sacrifices...

It is today that by entry into the privileged club, we get the right to a fair settlement.

Therefore, this is an opportunity to pay tribute to the Montenegrin heroes who perished and whose names and deeds remain embedded in the foundations of our state, its survival and prosperity!

Distinguished Members of the Parliament,

Montenegro's NATO membership is a long-term guarantee of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, the security of citizens and a prerequisite for stable economic development which is opening the door to EU membership. We believe that this is a national interest and response to the question what strategic direction the country should take so that the generations to come would live a better life.

It is not about TO BE or NOT TO BE for our country.

It is about: what kind of future we choose for us and generations to come?

Therefore, we believe that **THIS IS PRECISELY** the best path for Montenegro and for all its citizens.

I am aware that there are numerous benefits that Montenegro will have from membership in NATO, many times mentioned and explained. However, we can never highlight enough the essence of those benefits. Euro-Atlantic and European integration are the pillars on which the present-day Europe rests. NATO and the European Union have been the guarantors of stability, security and cooperation among European nations, as well as the main basis for peace, economic and social prosperity that Europe has achieved since the World War II until today. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty clearly stipulates that whatever threatens security of a member state threatens the security of all. NATO is therefore a system of collective security which, through a consensus in decision-making, allows all member states to maintain national specificities and nurture diversity while protecting common values. It is an organization in which both big and small members feel that their strategic national interests are protected.

Montenegro's membership in NATO will be a long-term guarantee of our sovereignty and territorial integrity, security of our state and its citizens. Membership represents a huge incentive for the further development of the country, the wind in our sails in the implementation of reforms on the path towards the EU and the starting point for strengthening durable and sustainable stability of our country, economy and society. Stable political and social system provides a favourable environment for business and stepping up of economic development and guarantees the attraction of foreign investments.

Membership in NATO has influence on the international political position of Montenegro – our country becomes an ally of the most developed states in the world and an equal partner in making important decisions related not only to its security but also to regional and global security. For a small state such as Montenegro, being a member of the club of the world's largest democracies and most developed economies is the best way to promote its own interests in regional and global matters.

Participation in NATO structures will significantly strengthen the capacities of our defence and security system. Members of the Montenegrin Military have already, through participation in NATO, EU and UN missions, gained a reputation of reliable, professional and ready forces, standing shoulder to shoulder with the NATO members and partners. Montenegro will continue to reinforce its defence and security capacities, guided by the standards of NATO.

NATO is not only a security community, but also a community of values. Of those values that Montenegro has been continuously cherishing and protecting – peace, stability, democracy, human rights, rule of law and economic development and prosperity. These values ​​are codified – in the initial articles of the North Atlantic Treaty on which the Montenegrin Parliament is voting today. Therefore, joining the Alliance is a natural sequence of events for our country, a civilizational and genuine commitment that has no alternative.

Together with the integration in the EU, it represents the final leg on our way to the family of modern democratic Europe. I firmly believe that these two processes are inseparable. History and experience of our neighbours near and far have taught us that – all countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe which are now a part of Europe have first become members of the Euro-Atlantic family. Membership in NATO also means long term fulfilment of the criteria that are key to the dynamics of European integration – especially in the context of strengthening the rule of law and fight against organized crime and corruption. Montenegro in NATO represents the momentum in the process of joining of our country in the EU.

Dear Members of the Parliament,

We are deeply aware that joining NATO means a great responsibility. We do not become a member of the Alliance just to be a beneficiary of collective security, but also its creator. I am confident that our membership in NATO will have a strong positive effect on the Western Balkans, favourably influencing the stabilization of the situation in the region. Montenegro is recognized as a country that promotes regional networking, cooperation and good neighbourly relations – which is best illustrated by the fact that the membership of Montenegro in NATO is widely supported in the neighbouring countries. It is a strong encouragement to all regional aspirants that reforms do pay off, that the “open door“ policy of NATO, enshrined in Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, remains valid and strongly present, and that the states that fulfil the necessary criteria can count on membership.

Euro-Atlantic and European integration processes are the key to a lasting transformation of the region from the “Balkan powder keg“ into a part of democratic Europe and an oasis of peace, stability and economic prosperity. Therefore, as a new member of the Alliance, Montenegro will strongly support the integration efforts of Western Balkan countries – precisely bearing in mind the fact that NATO is a community of consensus where the voice of all is equally heard, regardless of the size and position in international relations. As a country that has gone through the open door of NATO, we will keep the door open for those who meet the conditions and wish to become members.

At the very end, I want to send the message also to those citizens of Montenegro who genuinely believe that the other options, instead of membership in NATO, would be better for our state. Hence, not to political manipulators who very consciously misuse such stance of a number of our fellow citizens, friends, neighbours for the sake of their selfish political profits or other people's interests.

Dear fellow citizens of Montenegro,

Opponents of our membership in NATO,

I have no illusion that with these few sentences I would be able to change your attitude. It is not my intention.

I feel however that obligation, as Prime Minister who puts forward the law, the effects of which apply equally to all citizens of Montenegro, to communicate the following:

Through membership in NATO, Montenegro provides **for every citizen** a new, great and equal chance to make your life safer and better. These benefits will be felt by **ALL** of us – very quickly and very visibly, regardless of our political or any other opinion.

On behalf of the more prosperous Montenegro, I invite you to most rationally, without superfluous emotions, turn towards the future, being responsible to yourself and primarily to your children – and observe the arguments for today's decision of the Parliament.

Distinguished Members of the Parliament,

This is the moment in which, with a feeling of deep sadness and regret, we recall the tragic event of 18 years ago, when six of our people were killed in Murino during the NATO bombing. It is with reverence that I utter their names on this day: Miroslav Knežević, Olivera Maksimović, Julija Brudar, Vukić Vuletić, Manojlo Komatina, Milka Kočanović.

We shall not forget those innocent victims!

We shall also not forget that Montenegro was then, against its own will, drawn into a tragic conflict of Serbia with NATO forces, nor that it is only owing to the extraordinary diplomatic efforts of the then leadership that our country avoided the unforeseeable consequences.

In order that this would never happen again; in order that we would be able to decide the fate of our country and people – we restored its independence and joined the most powerful forces of our time!

I invite the present Members of Parliament to make a historic decision and support the Bill on the Ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty and the Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the accession of Greece and Turkey.

May Montenegro be eternal!