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4



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## Seven years of negotiation talks

## The Time of Strengthening of Montenegro's Overall Democratic and Economic System



Author: Marko Mrdak, Deputy Chief Negotiator for the EU Acquis Chapters

Montenegro's position as frontrunner in the EU integration process is not only reflected in the number of open and closed negotiation chapters, but also in continuous strengthening of institutions that strive to ensure the living standards comparable to the EU Member States in their respective policy areas. In this regard, we have just emerged from a very intensive period essentially focused on building the system that guarantees the rule of law, and fosters overall economic development.

It is noteworthy that for Montenegro EU membership is not a goal per se to the detriment of quality; rather, greater focus is placed on the quality of reforms than on speed. The ongoing transformation of our society and strengthening of institution

that guarantee political, security and economic stability are at the heart of the process.

In an effort to build institutions that guarantee the rule of law, since the beginning of the negotiation process Montenegro adopted or amended more than 70 pertinent laws and set up key institutions to fight organised crime and high-level corruption. Tangible results achieved over the three years of their operation testify of a system that is built on strong foundations; namely, almost 30 million euros of criminal proceeds were recovered, and over 200 public officials were dismissed on the count of conflict of interests or corruption. The initial track record in criminal prosecution of money laundering offences, financial investigations and seizure of criminal assets has been established. Significant improvement in judicial clearance rates is certainly worth mentioning, best shown by the decrease in case backlog, while human rights standards are increasingly more aligned with the EU standards and the highest international targets.

Moreover, gradually strengthening their capacities, Montenegrin security services are becoming a credible partner for European law enforcement agencies, as shown by a number of high-profile international operations resulting in a number of arrests and illicit drug seizures. By way of illustration, from 237.4 kg of drugs seized in 2015, we reached the record-breaking quantity of 3300 kg in 2018, as a clear indication of the progress made in strengthening the system.

By developing a system modelled against the European ones, Montenegro ensured substantial economic growth rates; thus, over the last two years we are witnessing the growth rates (4.7% of GDP in 2017 and 4.9% GDP in 2018) which are among the highest in Europe. Furthermore, the data clearly show that such strong economic growth has had a direct impact on the labour market – over the last years we have seen an evident increase in employment and activity rates, with steady decline of unemployment.

Successful management of European funds is also worth mentioning; using such funds Montenegro has continuously strengthened the capacities of all public administration authorities for efficient delivery of services to citizens and businesses. Thus, since the beginning of the EU integration process, Montenegro has contracted over 700 mil euros of grant money, used also for funding a number of infrastructure projects. Additionally, with the support of the Office for EU Integration, these funds have been made available to interested CSOs and local governments for implementing the projects of regional interest.

Aware of the responsibility it has as a leader in the enlargement process and the main promoter of stability and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans, Montenegro, in collaboration with its European partners, will continue to work consistently on its essential goal, i.e. reaching the European quality of life, to result in Montenegro's membership to the European family of nations.



The new status of Salina and its surrounding area - a new development opportunity

## Ramsar - Salina among prestigious sites

Author: Marina Miketić Nikolić, PR of the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism

The story of the Salina is not only a story of rare birds from across Europe coming here for nesting or for a rest on their travel towards warmer climes. This is a story of a flatland of rare beauty, particularly so in mostly hilly Montenegro, of malaria, of mosquitoes, of a good idea of one prince and a canal named after his wife – Port Milena. Salina is also a symbol of collapse of a company, a story of the struggle of authorities and the civil society, each using their own methods, for this area to become a Nature Park. The new designation of the saltiest soil in Montenegro should, before long, answer the question

of how best to enjoy its uniqueness. Namely, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat sets the framework for national actions and international cooperation to preserve the wetlands and use their resources wisely. Over 2.1 million square kilometres in over 2,200 sites around the globe bear the Ramsar designation. In the prestigious company of 170 countries Montenegro participates with two sites already – the National Park Skadar Lake, inscribed in 1995, and Tivat Salina in 2013.

Photo: CZIP



Photo: CZIP

The Salina area, with its distinctive beauty, is an exceptional example of interaction of man and nature. This man-made and semi-natural wetland ecosystem, established in 1934, ultimately created sui generis biodiversity composed of some of the most beautiful and rarest specimens of flora and fauna.

Let us take a step back in time when the “Bajo Sekulić” salt company was a mainstay of Montenegrin economy. Many workers, mostly from the area of Ulcinj, spent their lives harvesting high-quality sea salt. The sun and the wind would dry out the basins, leaving crystal clear healthy salt which reached the shelves of many socialist supermarkets, spicing up the lunch at 3 p.m. sharp in many a Yugoslav home. Last decade of the previous century marked the beginning of an end to many things, Salina included. Nevertheless, there are reasons for optimism, given other, alternative ways to use this site wisely. It provides home for at least 250 out of 526 bird species that Europe has in total, for endangered species of fish, amphibians and reptiles, and is increasingly frequented by humans as well. Most come in the first week of October, called the Pink Saturday. Then nature-lovers come to enjoy watching flamingos, the pink princes among birds. This may be the very solution for tapping into what Salina has to offer. Over the last two decades, the so-called „wetland tourism” has been

gaining in popularity. The idea is to make Ramsar sites and other wetlands enticing, but in such a way for people not to disturb the laws of nature or the peace of the species living there. The humidity and wilderness of wetlands, the mystique and uncertainty of its waters certainly occupy the thoughts and engross the soul of each nature-lover and adventurer. Watching birds, large turtles and various exotic reptiles and fish has long since become an important segment of global tourism industry. The Indian Tso Moriri or the Mountain Lake at 4,600 m above the sea level, the caves of Skocjan in Slovenia, the National Park Kakadu in Australia, the Launai at the Seychelles where the backs of rare humpback whales or sea turtles glisten in the setting sun are certainly among the most enticing or best harnessed Ramsar sites. However, the view of the exceptional and breath-taking beauty comes with a price. The lovers of the miraculous world of nature are ready to bake in the scorching sun for hours, to get bitten by mosquitoes and have their feet caught in mud just to hear and see the mating of a rare species of frog. This price has its expression in dollars, euros, liras, rupees and roubles, so that this counterpoint of mass tourism is actually very viable financially.

Plenty are the ideas and suggestions how to revive the Salina and its immediate vicinity, but mostly cut short for the lack of money. When it comes to salt



production, the Conservation Study developed by the Ministry with the assistance of the EU experts, show that Salina is not financially sustainable. The initial investment in the salt production needed for the ecosystem preservation is in the range of 4 to 10.5 million euros, plus the annual operational costs between 0.5 and 1.4 million euros. The maintenance of this 85-year-old system so far also came with a cost, since the water infrastructure was in need of repair. When the danger of losing biodiversity in the Salina due to stoppage of pumping became apparent in 2013, the state of Montenegro invested close to 1.2 million euros in infrastructure renovation between May 2015 and the end of 2018. In addition, in order to physically protect the Salina, maintain the pumping system, repair embankments, and carry out regular flora and fauna monitoring this site was put under the management of the Public Company for National Parks in August 2015.

According to some estimates underpinning the UNWTO reports, by 2020 the tourism based on what protected and conserved sites stand to offer should generate enormous revenues. Combining the revenues generated by visitors to wetland and protected areas with domestic travellers, recreationists and day visitors, the figure reaches 950 billion dollars annually. Globally, more than 35%

of Ramsar sites report some level of tourist activity, although such figures include all interesting wetlands, not necessarily the ones under protection-only.

What is certainly encouraging is the incredible growth of eco-tourism, with "wetland tourism" as one of its niches. This branch of tourism is gaining in popularity and recording a tremendous growth both in terms of the number of visitors and the revenues generated. These holiday-makers are among the most environmentally conscious and educated people. This concept can only favour Montenegro which currently has 13% of its territory under protection (with the Salina, this share would increase further) and which abounds in rare natural beauties. Our relation to nature will speak of us today and through future generations. I believe that our descendants will cherish the ideas of developing tourism on sustainable grounds, where nature is used in a way which makes no harm, and which is conducive to the development of local or rural communities. It remains to be seen in near future how creative and able we are to find the money and proper solutions to capitalise on the healing mud of Ulcinj, its crystal clear salt and the most beautiful highlights of this southernmost point of our coast.

Photo: CZIP



## The features of eco-tourism:

- all forms of nature-based tourism in which the main motivator of travellers is observation and respect for the nature and the traditional cultures in natural areas,
- the partners of service-providers in the destinations are usually small-scale tour operators, while local population and companies are very much involved in the process,
- minimising the adverse impacts on the natural, social and cultural environment,
- support to the maintenance of natural areas used as eco-tourism highlights,
- have economic benefits for communities and hosts, organisations and authorities managing the natural sites with a view to their preservation,
- ensure alternate employment and income-generation opportunities for local communities,
- raise awareness of the preservation of natural and cultural properties, both among the local population and visitors.

## The Story of Port Milena

The wetland area of today's Salina troubled the local population at the time of Prince Nikola. Namely, the marshy area of Zoganj Lake (Birds' Lake), the area where the salt pans were subsequently developed, abounded in insects, so malaria and various other diseases took the lives of many a child. The local residents asked Prince Nikola for help in addressing this major problem. What seemed to be the best solution at the time was to build a canal to dry out the marshy land and drain the water towards the sea. The construction began, and once finished an unforeseen thing happened - instead of running towards the sea, the sea water started entering the marshy land. The surrounding area was below the sea level, and the sea water filled the swamp. Obviously, the swamp did not dry out, but the unexpected penetration of sea water nevertheless reduced the outbreak of diseases and eradicated malaria. As a token of their appreciation, the local residents named the canal Port Milena, after the Montenegrin Princess.



A thorny, but profitable path to product designation

## “Crnogorski pršut” at the European market shortly

Author: Bojana Milićević, RTCG

It has certainly happened to you to buy Pljevlja cheese which is not from Pljevlja region at all, the olives from Bar that never grew in Bar or pršut (prosciutto) from Njeguši which has been nowhere near Njeguši. The reason is, among other things, that until recently most domestic products did not have any protected geographic indication or designation of origin.

Two and a half years ago, however, the first designated product reached the shelves and our tables – “Njeguški pršut”. It got the geographic indication. Such produce is of specific quality, reputation or other features which are associated with a certain region. As explained by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, at least one production stage is to take place in that region, while the raw material may originate from a different region. Since 2016, additional six products have joined “Njeguški pršut”. „Pljevljski sir” (cheese from the region of Pljevlja), „Crnogorskigovedipršut” (beef prosciutto), „Crnogorskastelja” (deboned smoked mutton), „Durmitorski skorup” (dairy produce of the Durmitor area) and „Kolašinskilisnati sir” (cheese from the area of Kolašin) got the designation of origin, while „Crnogorskipršut” got the geographical indication. According to the regulations, farming and food produce may receive protected geographical indication, protected designation of origin, and guaranteed traditional specialties guaranteed marks. In such cases, the designation procedure is launched by a group of producers.



“The products with the designation of origin have the quality or the properties exclusively or mainly the result of the geographical area where they are produced and the skill of the producers from the given area. All stages of production, i.e. production, processing and preparation take place in a given geographic area” the Ministry of Agriculture explained for Eurokaz.



To be registered as a traditional specialty guaranteed, an agricultural product or a foodstuff must have specific properties clearly distinguishing it from similar products of the same category and has to be traditional. “Specific properties refer to physical, chemical, microbiological or organoleptic characteristics of a product or a production method that the producer uses or the specific conditions of production. Traditional here means proven usage of the product on the market over a period which suggests transition between generations, lasting at least 25 years. The requirement is that it is produced using traditional raw materials or is characterised by a traditional composition or a method of production”, the Ministry explained. The procedure for registering protected geographical indication or designation of origin starts with an application for registration lodged with this department. “The registration application is submitted by a group of producers or processors of an agricultural product or a foodstuff. The registration application may refer to one geographical indication or designation of origin only. The Ministry sets up a Commission for the registration of protected geographical indication or designation of origin of an agricultural product or foodstuff”, they explained. The process was completed last year by the “Crnogorskipršut” association. United by a wish to make a product that would stand out by its specific features and quality, eight Cetinje-based companies completed the certification process in one year.



“Given the vast competition, we wished to make a product whose specific features would be expressed through defined geographic boundaries within which it is produced and the specific conditions in which it is made. This required large investments. All facilities had to be brought to the first category standards, and all products had to be sound and safe, labelled and properly packaged. We have enjoyed substantial support from the Ministry of Agriculture, and part of the funding has been provided through the IPARD programme”, said the “Montstate” CEO, Predrag Bracanović.

He noted that strong benefits are yet expected, and that they have the ambition of placing „Crnogorskipršut” on the European market. “Such a product is a guarantee of success, both in the local and regional markets, but also in the EU. That is why last year we applied in Brussels for the protection of our product at the European level. Some companies in the cluster already have European registration number. We expect the procedure to be completed by the end of next year. We see our opportunity primarily in Croatia, which consumes around one million pieces of prosciutto a year, while our total production is around 400,000 pieces a year”, said Bracanović.

Before hitting the European market, the “Association of Olive Growers” from Bar would like to reach domestic and the consumers in neighbouring countries with their designation of origin. They



have only commenced the registration process. "The largest challenge is the categorisation of the olive variety Žutica and the oil made from it, with both the scientific literature and accredited laboratories being scarce in Montenegro. Nevertheless, we hope to complete the whole process in the coming six months", Ćazim Alković, the president of the "Association of Olive Growers" from Bar told us.

The number of designated products in Montenegro is bound to increase, as indicated by the possibility introduced last year for individual producers to seek the designations of "Superior Quality", "Mountain Product" and "From my Farm". "Superior Quality" designation requires an agricultural product or foodstuff to stand out by its specific properties in terms of quality, as defined by its composition, organoleptic, physical and chemical properties, and production or processing methodology.

The "Mountain Product" label may be affixed to products using in its production the raw materials and feedstuff primarily from the mountainous regions. This designation may be used for processed products, if the processing itself takes place in the mountainous region. The products wishing to be designated as "From My Farm" have to be produced on the same farm, using the raw materials found there, and if the producer is both the farm owner and the vendor.

"In case of animal products, they have to spend at least two thirds of their lives on the same farm, and in case of seasonal migrations, this period is taken into account. The raw materials which have not been produced on the farm may be used as amendments to production if not exceeding 15% of the total ingredients by weight, apart from sugar, which may be used in the quantities required", the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development pointed out. Eligible for such designation are in-

dividuals, companies or entrepreneurs duly registered for agricultural production. A company may apply for the "From My Farm" designation provided that they have less than 3 workers and that their annual turnover does not exceed €200.000.

Although the process is neither short nor straightforward, and the requirements are not easily met, it comes with many benefits. The Ministry notes that the quality designations enable food producers greater market value for their products. In addition, it brings recognition to their area of origin, has a positive impact on farm revenues, and enables improvement of product quality and protect against abuse. These are the benefits experienced by those whose products have already been designated, and hoped for by those commencing the process.

"I expect to see increased awareness among the producers regarding the significance of respecting the quality standards, and hope that the designation would help in the recognition of our product, better price and increased sales", the olive-grower Ćazim Alković says.



## 4th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR)

# Budva as the Agora of the Adriatic-Ionian Region

*Author: Ana Savjak, head of the Group for Programmes with the EU Member States*

Montenegro's chairmanship over the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR), as the first non-EU member state that has been entrusted with this important role, ended on 10 June 2019. Montenegrin chairmanship programme traditionally closed by holding the 4th Annual EUSAIR Forum under the slogan of "Integration for the People, Development for the Region" between 6 and 8 May in Budva, as the host of the Union institutions, national and local authorities, businesses, the academia and the civil society from eight countries from the Adriatic-Ionian basin. The Forum was organised by Montenegro's Office for European Integration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with the European Commission.

With a view of better connection of the stakeholders from the Adriatic-Ionian region, the Forum was held together with the Second Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities. The side events included, among other things, the Annual Event of the Adriatic-Ionian Transnational Programme (ADRION), a workshop on culture routes, an exhibition of the works of nine artists from the Adriatic-Ionian region, and the international workshop with the students of journalism held by the EUSAIR Support Unit, Montenegro's Office for European Integra-

tion and the European Commission to exchange ideas on youth involvement in the EUSAIR activities.

The very practice of holding annual EUSAIR fora shows the multi-layered management of macro-regional strategies, focused on challenges and opportunities of specific geographic regions

### WHAT IS EUSAIR?

- European Union macro-regional strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian region, adopted by the Commission and confirmed by the Council in 2014
- The Strategy development is linked with many years of successful cooperation under the auspices of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative
- It includes 4 EU Member States (IT, GR, SL, HR) and 4 candidate or prospective candidate countries for EU membership (CG, AL, SR, BiH);
- It supports the economic growth and prosperity of the region by increasing its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity through 4 thematic pillars: Blue Growth, Connecting the Region, Environmental Quality and Sustainable Tourism;
- It has the added political value, since it brings the countries aspiring to membership closer to the EU.



which are too local to be of immediate concern for the whole EU, and widespread enough to go beyond what the national level can do alone.

Given that macro-regional strategies do not envisage any new EU funds, no new formal structures or legislation (the “3 NO” principle), the annual fora offer an opportunity for decision-makers to set joint priorities and give guidance from the political level for future strategic actions, usually in the form of ministerial declarations. Thus, at the meeting of the All Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the EUSAIR held on May 8th within the Forum framework, Budva Declaration was adopted, supporting the involvement of the Republic of North Macedonia into EUSAIR and of the Republic of San Marino into All. The Declaration welcomes the inclusion of macro-regional cooperation as a horizontal priority into the new legal framework

In case of Montenegro, small-scale coastal fishing accounts for 80% of the fisheries sector. Given that it cannot compete in output, Montenegro needs to focus on the quality and production of new organic products in demand on the market, connecting fishing industry with hotel businesses to upgrade its tourism product.

for European territorial cooperation over the period 2021-2027, and invites the Commission to consider other sources – primarily the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund – for funding EUSAIR priorities, primarily in the area of Blue Growth.

Macro-regional strategies, including the EUSAIR, are underpinned by the “3 YES” principle – yes to complementary sources of funding, yes to better institutional coordination, and yes to new joint projects. While the first two core principles are primarily handled at the political level, the third requires a strategy to be as visible as possible and as relevant to the academic community as possible, as well as to the civil society and the private sector, given that they implement the projects that may be most conducive to development at the local and transnational levels, and the sustainable development of the Adriatic-Ionian region.

Given that Montenegro, together with Greece, is coordinating the activities under the thematic pillar 1 Blue Growth, the focus of its activities as the chair and of the Forum programme was on development and promotion of sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and integrated coastal zone management. Given that tourism is one of the main factors for economic prosperity in the Adriatic-Ionian

region, the session devoted to blue growth also touched upon the development of sustainable tourism practices in support of traditional fishing practices and aquaculture in the region, as well as the tools for integrated management of the sea and the coastal area mitigating adverse anthropogenic factors, putting an end to coast degradation and reducing the loss of biodiversity in the coastal areas of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas.

The panel session devoted to EUSAIR Pillar 3 Environmental Quality was on maritime spatial planning, which is in the Adriatic-Ionian region developing in parallel with ecosystem services, green infrastructure and integrated coastal zone management. Montenegrin Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism presented the project implemented in the Boka Bay area which included the development and testing of marine ecosystem research methodology and identification of critical zones, in line with the rules of the Barcelona Convention. The European Maritime Spatial Planning Platform was presented, as well as the SMART Plant: Scale-up of low-carbon footprint material recovery techniques in existing wastewater treatment plants, supported through the EU Horizon 2020.

The ways in which the Strategy contributed to integration of plans in the area of energy and climate change was in the focus of the session devoted to

The NTG (Next Tourism Generation) Skills Alliance is implemented within the framework of the EU ERASMUS+ programme and currently encompasses the experiences of 6 EU countries with the tendency to expand to non-EU member states. The NTG aims to establish the first European alliance for improving collaboration between education and industry. It develops strategies and action plans aimed to respond to shortcomings in tourism and hospitality, including the need for new digital.

EUSAIR Pillar 2 Connecting the Region, Energy Networks. Given that the use of some energy sources, coal in particular, poses serious impediments for further energy transformation of the region, in the upcoming period the focus of the countries has to shift from energy supply to more energy efficient services. In addition, the importance of having national energy and climate plans was stressed in order to ensure alignment with long-term targets of the EU, the UN Framework Climate Change Convention and the Energy Community.

The discussions during the session on tourism focused on the need for the Adriatic-Ionian region to have a strategic response to its pronounced seasonality to be better positioned on the global tourism map. The participants to the plenary session – ministers and representatives of relevant institutions from Montenegro, Albania, and Slovenia, and the Commission representatives – stressed in particular the potential for tourism development in the Adriatic-Ionian hinterlands and its connection with the coastal tourism, fostering agritourism, promotion of rich gastronomic offer and “silent exports” i.e. placing domestic products through tourism services.

The panel on sustainable tourism stressed the need to develop human resources in tourism and hospitality. Montenegro has an opportunity to innovate its tourism sector relying on the experiences and examples from other countries, such as dual education that proved successful in countries like Greece and Switzerland, for aligning the education system and the market needs in tourism. For instance, the employment rate for Swiss students with a degree in tourism is 97% within one year after graduation. As pointed out, having human-centred service in tourism is essential, since this is an industry focused on satisfying the needs of people. The transport systems in the Adriatic-Ionian region,



## WELCOME PROJECT SITE VISIT (Interreg IT-AL-CG)

As an example of positive outcomes of regional cooperation within the EUSAIR, the hosts offered an opportunity to participants to see first-hand what a trilateral waste collection initiative looks like in practice. Implemented through a trilateral cross-border cooperation programme among Italy, Albania and Montenegro, the WELCOME project aims to reuse litter collected from the beaches to build anti-erosion shore structures. The WELCOME project takes into account all four EUSAIR pillars, given that it protects biodiversity (blue growth), reinforces regional cooperation through marine litter management (connecting the region and environmental quality), and helps raise awareness of this issue (sustainable tourism).

current challenges and future steps when it comes to expanding the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to Southeast Europe were the topics discussed during the session on transport. Fast technological development, social and environmental challenges demand continuous efforts and building upon the existing projects and policies,

i.e. developing new solutions in transport. The TEN-T revision scheduled for 2023 envisages its extension to Southeast Europe, and strengthening of the Eastern and Mediterranean partnership; hence, this session stressed the need to build the network across the Western Balkan region, combining railway, internal waterways, transport nodes and hubs, and its preparation for integration in the TEN-T.

Smart specialisation strategy (S3) and its relevance in practice were presented in some detail by the experts from Montenegro and the European Commission, showing how S3 may ensure further “integration for the people and development for the regions”, to use the Forum motto. In other words, based on strong shared historic, economic and cultural features of the Adriatic-Ionian region, S3 should “open up a path for transition to a knowledge-based economy”, as pointed out by Montenegrin Minister of Science, Sanja Damjanović.

She also presented the project concerning the South East European International Institute for Sustainable Technologies (SEIIIST), envisaging the treatment of oncological patients by hadron cancer therapy with protons and heavy ions, state-of-the-art and most effective method for treating

various types of cancer. The project is also conducive to research capabilities, it helps prevent brain drain, fosters links between science and industry, and boosts the economic development of the region. The initiative has also been supported by the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), but active involvement of all partners and strong political commitment of all Western Balkan countries is needed for its full implementation. The 4th Annual EUSAIR Forum was closed with the panel of ministers responsible for EUSAIR coordination, following which Montenegrin Foreign Minister Srđan Darmanović officially handed over the EUSAIR and All chairmanship to Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić.

With successful EUSAIR chairmanship and Forum organisation, Montenegro reaffirmed its commitment to regional cooperation, while Budva Declaration sends a strong message concerning the

significance of the EU enlargement policy and gives an additional impetus to aspirant countries to speed up the integration processes. The Adriatic-Ionian region is a home for over 70 million people sharing the same challenges, as well as exceptional development potentials. Although the countries of this region have different macroeconomic indicators, it should be borne in mind that the EUSAIR promotes an evenly developed and competitive region characterised by economic and social growth. Therefore, accelerated economic development and job generation, as well as creating business opportunities through specific activities in the areas of blue growth, transport and energy networks, sustainable tourism and environment have to be the linchpin of all the actions in the macro-region, with the 4th EUSAIR Annual Forum contributing to those goals through specific projects and recommendations for future joint activities.





Interview with the Ambassador of Finland to Montenegro, Kimmo Lähdevirta

## Enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans is a strategic priority

Author: Marko Vešović, daily Dan

Bringing stability, prosperity and improving the functioning of democratic institutions and rule of law in the region is not only important for the citizens and companies operating in the Western Balkan countries, but it is also in the best interest of the EU and the member states, said Kimmo Lähdevirta, the Ambassador of Finland – EU member state which currently holds the presidency of the Council of the European Union. In an interview with Eurokaz, the Ambassador Lähdevirta noted that the enlargement of the EU is based on commonly agreed criteria, and it is important that these criteria are met.

“We know that it requires hard work, especially when it comes to Rule of Law, which is the foundation for everything else. However, we are convinced that Montenegro has the capacity to deliver and push things forward in the sectors where progress has been less satisfactory”, he said.

**• EU enlargement to the countries of the Western Balkans will certainly be high on the agenda of Finland’s EU presidency over the second half of the year. What will Finland insist on during the EU presidency when it comes to Montenegro and its obligations under the European agenda?**

Traditionally, Finland has been an enlargement-friendly country. We are committed to

enlargement, and it will indeed be high on the agenda during our Presidency. The benefits of the enlargement policy are clear: in a nutshell, it plays a significant role in advancing peace, prosperity and security in our continent. The Western Balkans is of high strategic value for the EU, and Finland is committed to taking forward work on a credible enlargement perspective for the region. The enlargement of the EU is based on commonly agreed criteria, and it is important that these criteria are met. We know that it requires hard work, especially when it comes to Rule of Law, which is the foundation for everything else. However, we are convinced that Montenegro has the capacity to deliver and push things forward in the sectors where progress has been less satisfactory.



Kimmo Lähdevirta

Therefore, we encourage Montenegro to demonstrate in a concrete way what it means to be a frontrunner in the EU accession process.

**• Do you share the view that for the EU itself, it is important that the Western Balkans be an integral part of it? And if so, why is it important?**

For the EU, enlargement of the Union is a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability in Europe. Even though the EU has recently faced many challenges, it is in its core a peace project that has brought prosperity and democracy along with it, and therefore, we see no better option for the Western Balkans. Bringing stability, prosperity and improving the functioning of democratic institutions and rule of law in the region is not only important for the citizens and companies operating in the Western Balkan countries, but it is also in the best interest of the EU and the member states. Recently, our Minister for Foreign Affairs Pekka Haavisto wrote an op-ed article in the leading newspaper in Finland, stating that the Western Balkans is not in the neighbourhood of Europe but is in its heart. Geographically, Finland may be far from the region but we understand its significance for our common continent.

**• How do you assess the progress of Montenegro on its European path and what is it that we need to focus on during Finland’s presidency?**

The European Commission report on Montenegro 2019 gives a realistic and comprehensive estimation of Montenegro’s progress, and it also outlines very well what the priorities are in the coming period, such as stepping up efforts in media freedom and fight against corruption. There is enough time to carry out the reforms that are still required, to implement them, and to establish a

credible track record, for Montenegro to achieve EU membership within the perspective of 2025. However, there is no time to waste. From the EU’s side, Montenegro has, and it will get, the support needed in this process. Finland is always willing to offer its expertise, and currently, I am happy to tell that there is a Twinning project going on between Finland and Montenegro, with Croatia as a Junior Partner, on Human Resources Management. We encourage Montenegro to utilize the opportunities provided by European assistance and funding, to the maximum. As Montenegro progresses on its EU path, opportunities will increase even further, also as regards bilateral cooperation.

### The EU can deepen its own development

**• From your perspective, what will be the further European path of the region, especially Montenegro, in the light of all the current developments in EU and expectations that the EU has from countries of the region?**

The pace of the EU accession process is primarily set by the determination and perseverance of the candidate countries to carry out the reforms. As reiterated by the Council of the EU in its meeting in June, we continue to “expect partners to take ownership and fully commit to European values and the vigorous pursuit of necessary reforms in the interest of their people”. Of course, from the EU’s side, we also need to ensure that the Union can maintain and deepen its own development, including the capacity to accept and integrate new members. As for Finland, one of our main tasks as the Presidency is to foster unity of the Member States in order to strengthen the EU’s ability to make decisions and to speak with one voice, even in complex situations.



## The stand of future EP groups on enlargement to the Western Balkans

# The Greens and the Liberals want to see the region in the EU

Author: Jovana Đurišić, *Pobjeda daily*

The new composition of the European Parliament (EP), more fragmented, but with the pro-European block still holding the majority notwithstanding the strengthening of the extreme right, populist and anti-EU powers, will continue to strongly advocate for the enlargement to the Western Balkans, Eurokaz interlocutors report.

The recent elections for the European Parliament showed that the two most powerful groups – the European People’s Party (EPP) and Socialists and Democrats (S&D), although they have lost a number of seats, are still the strongest groups in the EP, with the historic high results for the Greens and the Liberals, with whom they will have to form a broad coalition.

Eurokaz interlocutors from among the ranks of these parties agree that the European project can never be complete without the Western Balkans, and that from their positions they will continue to strongly support the region in its efforts to become a member of the European community.

A Dutch MEP from the Greens, European Free Alliance, Bas Eickhout, said his party would continue to strongly advocate the enlargement process, wishing it to be a success.

“For us, the European project is not complete until the Western Balkan countries are part of the Union. We believe that, when the accession criteria are met, the Western Balkan countries (Al-



Bas Eickhout

bania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia) should join the EU. The decision to move on to the next stages in the accession of those countries needs to be made based on the existing criteria and on merits” Eickhout said for Eurokaz.

Eickhout noted the EU should assist the candidate countries in completing the necessary reforms to be ready for accession.

Asked whether the Greens, as a minority party in the EP, and potentially a member of a bigger coalition, would be able to impose its views on enlargement, Eickhout noted that the Greens are now stronger than ever before and that their opinion will have to be taken into account.

“This is the first time that the two large groups, the EPP and the S&D, do not hold the majority. The Greens are stronger than ever before. If other pro-European forces wish to have a stable majority, they will have to look at the Greens as well. We will play a constructive role, but have to see a real change in order to support the enlargement policy”, Eickhout concluded.



Tanja Fajon

The governing Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) advocated the enlargement even in the previous Parliament. An MEP from this party, Tanja Fajon, said for Eurokaz that her party had always insisted that the enlargement was very much needed, firmly believing in the advantages the enlargement is to bring both to the EU proper, and the candidate countries.

“I am deeply convinced that the Western Balkans will be more prosperous and more stable as a part of the European family. In order to achieve that goal, we have to work together. On one hand, the candidate countries must continue their reform agendas, while, on the other, the EU must acknowledge the achievements made and live up to its promises”, Fajon noted.

Fajon asserts that, despite each Western Balkan country having its own challenges, it is fair to say that North Macedonia and Albania have made considerable progress.

“That is why I strongly called upon the EU Council to open the accession talks without any further delay and to show to the Western Balkans people that they have our full support”, Fajon noted.

Asked whether strengthened nationalistic parties could affect the views of the majority parties in the EP, Fajon emphasised that, despite the strengthening of the extreme rightists, the two most powerful parties remain committed to enlargement.

“It is true that the recent European elections changed the EP composition, particularly with the strengthening of some extreme right and nationalistic parties that will certainly bring new challenges. Nevertheless, Socialists and Democrats remain the second largest group in the EP, and committed to EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. We need each other more than ever. We are facing the same 21st century challenges and we can only

address them together. Only united we can make our EU stronger (and safer). I will remain a strong advocate for the European path of the Western Balkan nations and I look forward to future cooperation among our parliaments, all responsible people in the country and the citizens", concluded Fajon.

The Western Balkans aspirations to become a part of the EU have been relentlessly advocated by the Liberals. An MEP of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats of Europe (ALDE) Party, Roman Jakič, is convinced that such a policy of the third largest political group in the EP would continue with this parliament in office.

"The Liberals in the EP have long since advocated the EU enlargement with all those countries that meet the obligations stemming from the EU integration process. We add that such integration should also be seen from the geopolitical perspective, not only as a technical issue of whether the *acquis communautaire* requirements were met. I think that such an approach of the third largest political group in the EP will continue in this five-year term", Jakič stated for Eurokaz.

The Slovenian diplomat added that the governing parties in the EP will not be able to ignore the opinion of the Liberals, since, as he noted, in future they would be participating in the ruling powers in the EP together.

"Liberals can no longer be ignored by the EPP and PES since they need us for the majority in the EP and for the election of the highest EU officials, that will certainly include liberals among their ranks. This time we will take part in the government. And taking part in the government means listening to each other and seeking compromises to the benefit of us all. Us who are already EU member states and all those who wish to become so", Jakič concluded.



Roman Jakič

## Europe without hurdles for all its citizens

# Equal Opportunities for All

*Author: Irena Bošković, head of the Group for programmes with the non-EU countries*

Cross-border cooperation is one of the priorities of the European Union, while the EU integration process itself is its single most important driving force. The aim of cross-border programmes is the promotion of good-neighbourly relations, stability and prosperity of the regions, and connectivity among people in border regions. The projects implemented within the framework of this programme aim to diminish the existing differences between neighbouring countries and foster overall economic, cultural, social and scientific cooperation between local and regional communities.

Montenegro takes part in nine cross-border and trans-national cooperation programmes, and one of them is implemented together with the partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, where three projects are currently being implemented, worth more

than a million euros in total. For this Eurokaz issue we present the POWER project, which aims to create an environment more suited to persons with disabilities, particularly in the areas of education, employment and awareness-raising.

"Full economic and social participation of persons with disabilities is essential for achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", reads the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020. To that effect, the EU is firmly committed to improving the social and economic position of persons with disabilities so that they can fully enjoy their rights and have full benefits from their participation in the society and economy. Montenegro invested substantial efforts into aligning its legal system with the pertinent international standards. However, although progress has been made, additional efforts are needed to translate the policy and legal framework into practice.





The P.O.W.E.R. project, done in collaboration with the partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, is one of the ways for raising awareness on these issues and implementing specific actions aimed at improving the positions of persons with disabilities. Caritas coordinator for Bar Archdiocese, Marko Đelović tells something more about the project, planned actions, achievements and long-term effects.

### **The POWER project at a glance?**

The POWER project –Creating new opportunities for work, employment and professional rehabilitation of persons with disabilities – was launched on February 1st, 2018, and is intended to last for 24 months. The overall goal is to increase employability of disabled persons in the border region. The objectives include increasing employability through competency and professional skills development, increasing the number of job offers, putting in place a functional institutional framework through strengthening the dialogue and developing an environment conducive to employment, reducing stigma and raising awareness. The partners on the project are the Caritas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vedri Osmjeh from Mostar, the Youth Centre John Paul II from Sarajevo, Caritas of the Bar Archdiocese, and the Association of Paraplegics from Bar and the Business Start-up Centre Bar. The project is worth €459.776 in total, where the EU contribution is €390.800.

### **How does the project help improve the position of persons with disabilities in Montenegro and in Bosnia and Herzegovina?**

The project envisages several sets of actions which are conducive to improving the position of persons with disabilities in Montenegro and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The training programme envisages empowerment of the target group to be more visible in the labour market. The campaigns planned

within the framework of this project intend to inform and educate about the rights and abilities of persons with disabilities. We held job fairs in Berane and Mostar, attended by some 70 exhibitors from various sectors with over 350 participants. The internship and mentorship programme is ongoing, with 20 persons with disabilities on internship with 20 employers from different industries. In parallel, the mentorship programme implies that one person has been trained to act as a mentor in each company receiving interns. The training needs analysis and target group employment opportunities survey were also done within the framework of the project. Additionally, in collaboration with the VET Centre, 4 occupations or 4 training programmes for persons with disabilities are currently being developed: administrator/organiser and/or big data analysts (IT), online brand manager (Digital Marketing), upcycling operator (Environment) and assistant permaculture gardener (Agriculture). We believe that all of these activities implemented under the POWER project contribute to better position of persons with disabilities in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **Given the theme of the project, how do you see the added value of collaborating with the partners from BiH, as opposed to pursuing it independently?**

The project activities are implemented in Sarajevo and Mostar in BiH, and in Berane and Kotor in



Montenegro. The cross-border aspect is particularly significant in sharing good practices regarding the employment of disabled persons. Given that the employment and professional rehabilitation frameworks for persons with disabilities are currently being analysed in both countries as a part of this project, these will be translated into recommendations for its improvement. Some good practices are already recognised in BiH which will be recommended for implementation in Montenegro, such as the possibility of registering a company for employment of disabled persons. Similarly, the recommendation will be to apply in BiH the provision which exists in Montenegro, envisaging that an employer who hires a disabled person is entitled to permanent reimbursement of up to 75% of the salary, depending on the degree of disability.

### **How has the project moved the wider community into action and inspired other initiatives?**

Through its various actions, the POWER project engaged a number of participants from different sectors. A large number of disabled persons attended the trainings, while the round table discussions and job fairs gathered persons with disabilities, their associations, representatives of the private and the public sectors. Additionally, the campaign helped promote the rights and opportunities for work and social integration of disabled persons, the internship and mentorship model which led to the employment of 20 disabled persons got a significant number of employers interested in recruiting this target group. Similarly, the support provided for self-employment of disabled persons puts in place the assumptions for further expanding this employment model. All the tools for increasing the employability of disabled persons used within the framework of this project may undoubtedly be replicated elsewhere. This helps create an enabling environment for other actors to launch new initiative to increase the employability of the disabled.

### **What are the long-term impacts of the project?**

The project particularly promotes the development of a framework for long-term employment of disabled persons in sustainable jobs. Particularly conducive to that is the methodology for analysing the local context and local labour market needs on one hand, and which of the jobs may be performed by registered unemployed disabled persons, on the other. We believe that we give particular contribution to the creation of sustainable jobs through the mentorship programme for disabled persons. Thus, by nominating a mentor from among their staff, each employer involved improved own capacities for employment of disabled persons and facilitated their integration. The long-term effects are also seen in the development of targeted education programmes for new occupations for disabled persons. Likewise, the online platform created as a tool for employment of disabled persons also has a long-term effect.

Representatives of Pan-European Union of Serbia and BiH on pending challenges

## Regional cooperation significant for the EU Path

Author: Aneta Durović, News Agency MINA

Regional cooperation among the Western Balkan countries on their path to the European Union (EU) does exist and is extremely significant and productive, the representatives of the Pan-European Union of Serbia, Vojislav Mitić, and of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Osman Topčagić noted.

They spoke for Eurokaz about regional cooperation and regional challenges on the EU path.

Mitić believes that regional cooperation on the EU path is extremely important, since it enables the EU bodies to standardise and connect better groups of countries using the neighbourhood principle, in a way acceptable for the EU. "The EU takes care of this mutual penetration of countries which are already members or which are candidate in reference to those that should be so", noted Mitić.

As he said, it is questionable whether this is a good EU principle or not, but the fact is that it actually works. "Thus, it is very important for us within the countries that remained in this area and outside of the EU to maintain exceptional mutual regional and good-neighbourly cooperation", Mitić added.

He added that, in his opinion, the notion of the Western Balkans in the geopolitical terminology is wrong, since, he believes, it produces harmful consequences.

"It turns out we are the Western Balkans in order not to affect the interests of Slovenia and Croatia, which are already in the EU, and on the other hand we are becoming the remainder of the remainder of something. The integration of the countries of that area functionally supports the stability of the European continent, since it suitably closes some hotspots, i.e. with mutual relations established certain tensions are assuaged", Mitić said.

He believes that Montenegrin negotiation structures include competent teams, as a small-scale model how things should be done, and such a model may serve as a good example to others. "Cooperation between Montenegro and Serbia is mutually beneficial. It gives an opportunity to share experiences, to shorten the path to the responses to questions posed by the EU", Mitić stated, noting that Eurosceptic forces thrive on the sluggish approach to integration taken by the European bodies.

"If they are not in favour of something, they buy time by saying that the EU has done nothing to improve the position, and this is used as an excuse. I am in favour of European patriotism and European nationalism", Mitić noted.

In his opinion, certain areas and countries may be encouraged to approach those who have waited for too long for being accepted into the EU. Hence, he added, the EU must take that into account.

He noted that the problems like Brexit, migrants and the like affect the loss of energy on the EU path, "and that our peoples lose the enthusiasm and start asking "when will the EU come?"

"We have nothing to measure against, a set of criteria, where we would be told to do "this and that" and then "this and that" would happen; rather, things keep being added as we move along. It now takes years, and as I see it, another round of elections may well take place before we have entered the final stages of the process. I don't see we will have it with these elections", Mitić noted.



Vojislav Mitić

The European parliamentary elections, he believes, do not affect us much, "except that it will prolong things".

"I don't expect the bodies will be fully established or start operating smoothly before the end of this year or even the beginning of the next. I don't see any serious traces or legacies left by the current EU leadership or that that they have said "do this and that", and I don't see the promise. I simply think this will lead to new routes and new excuses why this has to wait a bit", Mitić concluded.

The president of the Pan-European Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Osman Topčagić, noted that the issue of regional cooperation has been set as a requirement from Brussels since the beginning.

"But as the years went by, it has been recognised by all the countries in the region as their own interest. Thus, today we may say that there is regional cooperation among all the countries in many areas and which produces certain results", Topčagić said.

As he put it, here he means the benefits of cooperation in the area of economy, transport, security, education and all other areas conducive to the development of each individual country, and the region at large.

He stressed the good cooperation between counterpart institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, lasting for years and seen in mutual sharing of experiences. "At this point Montenegro is the most advanced country in the region as regards negotiation talks, and such experiences are very interesting and valuable for all the countries, BiH included", Topčagić said.



He noted that, although the membership criteria remain the same, the method for monitoring meeting of the criteria, and by extension of the negotiation process, changed over time. Here, Montenegro's experiences are the most recent, and thus the most interesting for all in the region.

Asked whether he believes individual merits or the "regatta" principle should be followed on the EU path, Topčagić noted that the EU requires the countries to meet the membership requirements, and this affects the progress in the process for each country.

"Although for a number of reasons it is practical and reasonable for groups of countries to accede, it is also clear that the countries which have advanced more in the process should not be made to wait for the ones who lag behind. We'll see how the next stages of the process will develop, but that has been the practice so far", Topčagić noted.

Asked about the expectations after the elections for the European Parliament, Topčagić notes that the enlargement policy is one of the fundamental policies, accepted by all, and that it continues to hold true and be implemented. "Given the situation within the EU, we see the preoccupation with the functioning of the EU and some issues the EU is facing at the moment. This primarily refers to the appointment of the Commission, the election of the EU leaders, but also the method of functioning in the sense of decision-making", Topčagić stated.

He said that although the enlargement policy in some period may not be among the top priorities, this should not be an excuse for the countries in

the region not to meet the set requirements and conduct the required reforms. "These reforms are primarily needed for their own sake, and then to enable progress in the EU accession process", Topčagić concluded.



Osman Topčagić

## Awards for journalists and gifted students

Six journalists from different Montenegrin media outlets received awards for best articles on Montenegro's accession to the European Union that shed light on topics impacting each Montenegrin citizen. The winners of this year's competition for best articles are journalists from the daily Pobjeda, the public broadcaster RTXG, TV Prva and Radio Jadran., Jovana Đurišić, Maja Lalić Burzanović, Vuk Ilić, Borislav Višnjić, Tatjana Debeljević and Jelena Gardović.

They wrote about the Erasmus programme and the opportunities it offers to young people; women start-ups with the support of EU funds; the significance of having the IPA-funded waste water treatment plant. They also wrote about the Mrdak family which, thanks to the EU grants, expanded their family dairy making the cheese originating from the Pljevlja region, and the revitalisation of the house of the Nobel laureate, Ivo Andrić in Herceg Novi, to be renovated within the framework of an EU-supported project. Apart from journalists, within the framework of the EU4ME project, funded by the EU and implemented by UNDP, six primary and secondary school students also received awards. The "Europe, Can You Hear Us" call launched to celebrate the Europe Day, received 900 works in which students, using different artistic formats, showed what their peers in Europe should know about Montenegro.

The authors of the three best works among primary school students are Veljko Crvenica, Nikolina Krsić and Andrea Vukčević, from Podgorica-based schools „Milorad Musa Burzan“, „Pavle Rovinski“ and „Vuk Karadžić“. Among secondary school students, the winners are Evgenija Kesse from the "Ivan Goran Kovačić", Herceg Novi, as well as Polina Lazarenko and Borko Popović from the Art School "Petar Lubarda", Cetinje.







## Local officials trained in communicating the EU accession

Three workshops for local officials regarding public information on EU integration in local communities were held in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje in April, delivered by the Department for Public Information on the EU and EU Accession of the Government Secretariat General and the Union of Municipalities.

The new Public Information Strategy on Montenegro's Accession to the European Union 2019-2022 focuses primarily on communication with the members of the public, particularly young people, and the document itself gives clear guidance to local governments on how to communicate the accession process.

Given that the bulk of the EU Acquis is to be applied at the local level of government, information on European standards and rules, but also benefits for the people should be at the heart of the local government activities during the Strategy implementation.

During the training sessions, local officials had the opportunity to discuss with the representatives of the Public Information Department and the Union of Municipalities the significance of communicating the accession process, the topics particularly relevant for local governments and communities, the importance of good interactions with the media, the impact of social media, as well as some good practices in the field.

It has been agreed to step up cooperation by holding joint events in different municipalities in line with the local action plans for promoting EU integration that each municipality is to develop in the upcoming period.

The training was delivered by the Public Information Department staff: Nada Vojvodić, Gordana Despotović Đekić, Bojana Mučalica and Svetlana Pešić, together with Vanja Starovlah and Darko Mrvaljević from the Union of Municipalities.











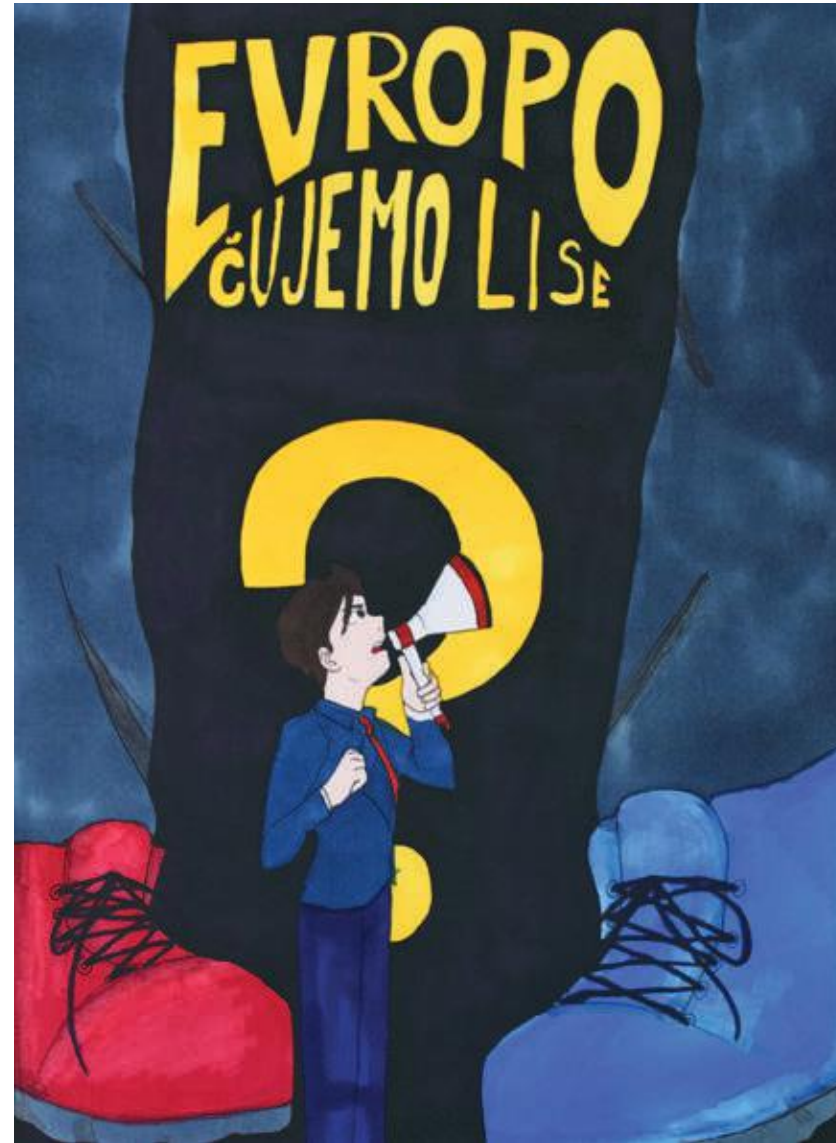
















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EU4ME - Project is financed by the EU and implemented by UNDP