

We'll Fulfil PROMISES TO CITIZENS

Public Administration Reform is one of the most important priorities of the Government of Montenegro. I believe that we've created the institutional and normative prerequisites required to provide professional, expert and efficient public administration

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For this special edition we discussed public administration reforms and the results that this comprehensive process of change should bring to the economy and citizens with Suzana Pribilović, Minister of Public Administration of Montenegro.

■ How should the public administration look following the culmination of the reforms in 2020?

- I believe that in the previous period, with our dedication to the obligations undertaken, we've justified the existence of the ministry of public administration and established public administration reform as one of the most important priorities of the Government of Montenegro. We've also created the institutional and normative prerequisites, through the adoption of several pieces of legislation, primarily the Law on State Administration, the Law on Civil Servants and State Employees and the Law on Local Self-Government, which should ensure a professional, expert and efficient public administration. We started the process of optimising the number

of employees, and in parallel proposed new solutions regarding the reorganisation of public administration through the new Law on State Administration. In the previous period, the number of electronic services has increased, so today we have 564 services under the jurisdiction of 50 institutions. Reform simultaneously implies a change of awareness to change our old habits, to act in accordance with modern standards, in order to provide citizens with the best service.

■ You announced at the beginning of the year that around three per cent of public sector employees at the central level and five per cent at the local level would lose their jobs by the end of 2018. How realistic is it that this measure will be implemented within the deadline set?

- The government recently adopted the Report on the Implementation of the Optimisation Plan Until 2020 for the first two months of implementation. Considering that this is a short implementation period, the Report on the Implementation

of the Optimisation Plan aims to indicate movement trends in the implementation of the plan for the first two-month period, as well as the challenges that accompanied the launch of implementation of the Optimisation Plan. The high-quality way in which the process of coordination was established resulted in us having a trend of reductions in the number of employees as soon as the first reporting period, in a total amount of 339 employees: 96 employees at the central level and 243 employees at the local level. In order to monitor the optimisation process in the best possible way, the Ministry of Public Administration has conducted a series of activities aimed at strengthening coordination of the implementation of measures from the Plan, and we have significant political support for its implementation, which is crucial to the success of this process. I believe that we're on the right path to achieving the indicators set by the end of 2020.

■ Alongside staff streamlining, how else can you ensure the quality of the work of the public administration?

OPTIMISATION

I believe that the series of activities we are undertaking will lead to us having a better administration in 2020 that will be more in the service of citizens, with lower operating costs

DIGITALISATION

The goal of the Government of Montenegro is to enable citizens and businesses to service the greatest possible number of their needs via electronic means alone

RESPONSIBILITY

The public administration is ready to be evaluated by citizens, and is also ready to adapt to their demands

What measures are available to you?

- First of all, I would like to emphasise that this is about the optimisation of public administration, and not about rationalisation, as it is often presented in public. This means that we want to create a better quality public administration with lower costs. High-quality personnel are a prerequisite for high-quality management, so we strive to retain the best staff, but also to create an environment to which the best will come. Evidence for that is to be found in the activities undertaken by the Ministry in the previous period, and here I'm primarily referring to the new Law on Civil Servants and State Employees.

■ Will these personnel changes have negative ramifications for the European integration process, which requires a large number of professional people? How capable is the public administration of attracting high-quality experts in this field?

- Absolutely not; we've established the system so that no single section can threaten the EU membership negotiation process. We were particularly careful about this when defining optimisation measures. That's why the Optimisation Plan itself, through the description of measures for limiting employment, details situations when it is possible and cases in which someone can be hired. In accordance with his, deviation from the plan is envisaged, inter alia, for working engagements on the basis of projects funded via EU funds or donations.

■ How much will the digital transformation process help in the optimising of your work?

- Montenegro's transformation into a modern state must be accompanied by the digital transformation process, as one of the key preconditions for the country's economic development. Trends indicate that activities focused on the integra-

tion of people, processes and technology will bring the highest value and greatest benefits to each business organisation. Accelerated technological changes and the overall growth of information continually raises the importance and responsibility of ICT in the era of the new technological



negro, at the proposal of the Ministry of Public Administration, as the competent ministry, proposes activities that will help in processes aimed at optimising public administration in Montenegro. The goal of the Government of Montenegro is to enable citizens and businesses to service the greatest possible number of their needs via electronic means alone, starting from a unique system of identification and access to all electronic services, to the possibility of electronic signatures and exchanges of documents, as well as realising these services without the need to submit any accompanying documentation.

■ What are Montenegro's plans regarding the Digital Agenda, which was adopted this June and is under the jurisdiction of your ministry?

- The Ministry of Public Administration participates actively in the work of the Working Team for the coordination of activities within the framework of the Berlin Process. Montenegro recognised digital development as one of its priorities way back in 2003, with that year's

The Ministry is working on the development of the ICT sector in order to improve anti-corruption mechanisms in public procurement processes, by providing electronic services and developing a concept of open data

revolution. While working on the plan for optimising the work of the public administration in Montenegro, we considered the experiences of EU countries as being very useful in considering all measures that can impact on the efficiency and efficacy of the work of the public administration.

In that sense, the digitalisation of public administration processes implies an entire set of measures that transform public administration into an administration orientated towards citizens and services. This is precisely why the strategic and planning documents of the Government of Monte-

adoption of the first Strategy for the Development of the Information Society, after which strategic planning in this segment continued. Moreover, with the aim of furthering digital development and increasing trust in electronic transactions, through the legal framework responsible for regulating secure and reliable electronic transactions, we adopted legislation in the field of electronic identification and electronic signatures. With the aim of utilising software solutions developed in the EU and fulfilling the obligations of the Digital Agenda related to inter-

operability, the Ministry of Public Administration signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the European Union and Montenegro in Brussels that relates to Montenegro's participation in the ISA² programme.

Improving digital competences, as one of the obligations envisaged by the Digital Agenda, is also in the focus of current activities. The implementation of analytical activities regarding the state of digital skills in the countries of the Western Balkan six, WB6, is underway, and its improvement is included on the Agenda of the Multi-Annual Regional Economic Area Action Plan for the WB6.

cess contribute to reducing this phenomenon?

- Digitalisation transforms public administration in countless ways, impacting on the speed of information exchanges with the aim of achieving faster communication and data analysis, which can contribute significantly to the fight against corruption, where information and communication technologies have opened up new doors for the prevention, detection and prosecution of perpetrators of corruption. Digitalisation, as a way of providing services using ICT technologies, means by definition the use of services at a distance, via the internet. It is precisely this kind of

Why did you choose to regulate the work of independent bodies in a new way?

- The aim of the new legislation is to improve the organisational structure and harmonise the organisation of the state administration with European standards in a way that establishes a clear typology of state administration bodies and a clear line of accountability in the system. In the state administration system, alongside ministries and administrative bodies, for the first time, state agencies and funds, which perform state administration tasks, are being introduced, and in this way the organisational structure is harmonised with EU standards. In this way, a legal framework will be established for the clear organisation and typology of the authorities and will contribute to the coherence of the system, which is one of the strategic goals of public administration reform established in the Strategy of Public Administration Reform until 2020.



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As part of these activities, the project “Regional Approach for Improving Digital Ability in WB6 Countries” was launched, supported and funded by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), which aims to provide a framework that supports regional activities related to digital skills in the Western Balkans.

■ **The Head of the Cooperation Section at the European Union Delegation to Montenegro, Hermann Spitz, recently assessed that Montenegro has made some progress in the fight against corruption. To what extent can the digital transformation pro-**

interaction of citizens and the economy, with the state or local administration, that is considered one of the important anti-corruption mechanisms, as confirmed by numerous studies and research. Participation in the Open Government Partnership, as a call for the development of e-Democracy, impacts on the awareness of citizens and increases their interaction with public administration, while on the other hand we see public administration reform through the process of digitising and automating work flows.

■ **The draft law on state administration was met with various comments.**

■ **One of the measures you've also announced is the gauging of citizens' satisfaction with the services provided. How will you measure citizens' attitudes and when will we be able to receive the first results of this measurement?**

- Specifically, according to the Action Plan, by year's end we should prepare a methodology for gauging satisfaction among citizens, and then identify the state administration and local self-government bodies that provide public services, which will form the basis upon which we will annually publish the results of these measurements in the period ahead.

■ **How ready is the administration to be evaluated by citizens and to adapt to their demands?**

- I think the public administration is ready to be evaluated by citizens, and is also ready to adapt to their demands. This is supported by the fact that some state and local government bodies carried out some measure to gauge citizen satisfaction in previous years. Our aim is to create a unique methodology and take on the role of coordinator, and to establish a mechanism for the systematic monitoring of the quality of services provided. ■