



NO 12

# EUROKAZ

MAGAZINE ON EUROPEAN  
INTEGRATION OF MONTENEGRO

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## **EUROKAZ**

MAGAZINE ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF  
MONTENEGRO

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### **GRAPHIC DESIGN:**

Denis Čupić

### **CONTACT:**

Department for Public Information on the EU and the EU  
Accession Process  
Secretariat General of the Government of Montenegro

Bulevar revolucije 15, Podgorica

E-mail:

[nada.vojvodic@gsv.gov.me](mailto:nada.vojvodic@gsv.gov.me)

Web: [www.mep.gov.me](http://www.mep.gov.me)

[www.eu.me](http://www.eu.me)

# CONTENT

## CURRENT AFFAIRS

**4-5** A view from Brussels - International support and favourable circumstances for acceleration of Montenegro's accession to the European Union

## EU IN MONTENEGRO

**5-7** Safer border and cross-border crime control is a common task for the EU and Montenegro

**7-11** Both consumers and banks to support businesses protecting environment

**12-14** A Long Journey to Europe

## NEWS FROM IPA

**14-16** Lipa Cave becomes Montenegro's must-see attraction with EU support

**16-17** First rural parliament fulfilled its goal

**18-19** Improving environmental protection through cross-border cooperation

## FOTOCOLAGE

# A VIEW FROM BRUSSELS - INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT AND FAVOURABLE CIRCUMSTANCES FOR ACCELERATION OF MONTENEGRO'S ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

*Author: PhD Petar Marković  
Ambassador – Head of the Mission of Montenegro to the EU*



The month behind us was marked by the first official international visit of the newly elected President of Montenegro, Jakov Milatović, to Brussels – as it is to be expected for a leading country in negotiations on membership in the European Union. Talks with EU and NATO officials, representatives of the media and civil society, as well as numerous meetings with leaders of the EU Member States, along with the subsequent visit to the second European Political Community Summit in Moldova, served to send a clear message from Montenegro, after

several months of lull in the highest-level relations, about the new enthusiasm and legitimacy to continue and accelerate the work on completing the reforms in the rule of law area. It will allow us to finally lift the ramp from our European path, which has been preventing the temporary closure of the remaining negotiation chapters for years.

*A new political culture.* The circumstances that made it impossible for this to happen earlier in the country were known – the level of political polarisation in our Parliament and the impossibility of reaching a qualified majority, with the perception of our political actors that any concession is a sign of weakness, have delayed the political dialogue on judicial appointments. Just like in the Game of Thrones, political outsmarting in the Balkans is too often a zero-sum game, in which someone always loses if the other wins, and they would, perhaps, have continued indefinitely if winter had not come, along with warnings from the EU and Member States that the lack of agreement regarding the election of judges of the Constitutional Court would definitely stop our movement towards the Union. From the perspective of the mature spring in which we are now, this winter of discontent seems quite distant, somewhat surreal. In the meantime, in the example of the presidential elections, the political system has proved that it continues the process of democratic consolidation and maturation which, I believe, will only be further confirmed by the upcoming parliamentary elections. This all together means that today, looking from Brussels, instead of the certainly exaggerated label “cancer of Europe”, Montenegro looks much more like a salve for the region burdened with protests, bilateral disputes, and neighbours who have not yet unreservedly come to the defence of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

*A new springboard.* The President’s visit was thus an ideal opportunity for more detailed discussions about the plan and dynamics of reforms in the coming period. More importantly, we received guarantees from the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Council, the EU High Representative for CFSP, the President of the European Parliament, as well as the Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood, that the principle of “more for more” will apply to our mutual relations – if Montenegro fulfils the interim benchmarks

in the rule of law area in the next few months, and does it quickly, efficiently, and with a clear demonstration that its political elite is ready to maturely set the priorities and reach the necessary compromises, regardless of the electoral temptations of political struggle and coalitions, we can expect that this will be clearly stated in the EC's annual report, and that we will soon be able to temporarily close the remaining chapters again. It is especially important for the élan of our small but motivated state administration that this actually happens. Numerous ministries have been, for at least five years, working in the shadow of lacking results in the fight against organised crime and corruption. At first, developments in other chapters were less visible, but, after the entry into force of the so-called new methodology and codification of the balance clause in it, the transfer of progress in those chapters into their closure was made completely impossible. The estimates of our partners in Brussels are that as many as 10 chapters could be closed provided that the reformers in those chapters do not give up and continue to keep them aligned with the ever-changing EU acquis. If the process is unblocked by the end of the year, all those civil servants who are in one way or another responsible for this valuable work will receive long-deserved satisfaction. This satisfaction will not be lacking either for the citizens who, in the vast majority, expect major steps towards membership, because closure of a large number of chapters would set a rhythm that would lead to the conclusion of the overall negotiations on membership in just a few years. In short – for the second time in the last year, and perhaps the last one, Montenegro has an opportunity to dramatically jump off in comparison to the region when it comes to the pace of its steps towards the EU.

*A new paradigm in Brussels.* If, by completing the homework in negotiating chapters 23 and 24, primarily through the judicial appointments in the Parliament, we merit the Intergovernmental Conference at the end of the year, Montenegro will regain its full right to remind the decision-makers in the EU capitals of the regatta principle and demand that the centre of gravity in their deliberations on the enlargement is moved from the back of the column to its front. In other words, instead

of predominantly dealing with potential and newly proposed candidates, full attention would be given to the frontrunner in negotiations, eager to start discussions on the somewhat forgotten Chapter 34: how big piece of the EU budget pie we can expect as the first next member of the EU. But that is, I hope, a topic that will come up very soon, for one of the next editions of Eurokaz.

### **NEW AGREEMENT ON FRONTEX INVOLVEMENT INTO OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES ON THE MONTENEGRIN BORDERS TO ENTER INTO FORCE ON 1 JULY**

## **SAFER BORDER AND CROSS-BORDER CRIME CONTROL IS A COMMON TASK FOR THE EU AND MONTENEGRO GORU**

*Author: Jovana ĐURIŠIĆ, journalist of daily newspapers "Pobjeda"*

*The goal of these activities is to combat illegal migration and cross-border crime through screening, registration and verification of the identity of people crossing the border and border control tasks. Working hand in hand with the authorities, as well as helping in gathering and exchange of information is essential for the achievement of this goal – EU representatives pointed out and stated that their support might include provision of enhanced technical and operational assistance at the border.*

Podgorica – In 2022, officers of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) reported 144,118 irregular crossings at the EU's external borders on the Western Balkans route, which is more than twice when compared with 2021. These figures could improve from 1 July, when the implementation of a new agreement, which was signed by the Montenegrin government and FRONTEX in June, will start.

According to this agreement, FRONTEX teams will be deployed at all Montenegrin borders with neighbouring countries, not only on the border with Croatia, which is the EU Member State, as it was the case before.

Under the 2020 Agreement, FRONTEX assisted Montenegro in controlling borders with EU Member States, Croatia and Italy, particularly in situations of increased influx of migrants from the Middle East and conflict-affected areas. The goal of the amended agreement, which will enter into force on 1 July, is to help solve illegal migration, which was very burdensome during the last year, both for the Balkan countries and Europe itself.

According to European Commission document on visa-free regime monitoring, which was published last week, the number of irregular crossings increased partly due to the fact that third-country nationals arrived to the Western Balkans without visas, and travel further to the EU.

Entry without visas into the Western Balkans of citizens from countries requiring the visa to enter the EU contributed to an increase in the number of irregular arrivals to the EU in 2022. The fact that this increased the burden for individual Member States was mentioned in the document.

EU representatives stated that the EU wanted to help countries to better respond to challenges posed by changes in migrant routes, and thus reduce the number of illegal entries into the EU.

When asked what prompted the EU to change the previous agreement and engage FRONTEX staff along the entire Montenegrin border, the EU representatives recalled that FRONTEX had a new mandate since 2019,



and that it was therefore important to negotiate new, improved status agreements with those countries.

- This ongoing process follows the Council's authorisation of 18 November 2022 to start negotiations with four countries on FRONTEX status agreements, following Commission's recommendation on that issue, which was adopted on 25 October 2022 – representatives of the EU Council said.

In February 2023, the Commission and Montenegro negotiated a new status agreement (based on the current FRONTEX Regulation); the agreement was signed on 16 May.

- The agreement will enter into force provisionally on 1 July 2023. From this date, FRONTEX will be allowed to deploy additional personnel on the Montenegrin territory, in accordance with the operational plan agreed between FRONTEX and the Montenegrin border police - according to EU responses.

When asked how much the new, improved agreement would be important for European security itself, bearing in mind that FRONTEX would also protect the borders with non-EU countries, the Council representatives recalled that the first of those status agreements was signed with Moldova in March 2022, while the second one was signed with North Macedonia in October 2022.

- The Commission is committed to supporting our partners in the Western Balkans and strengthening our cooperation in the field of migration management. That is why we suggest negotiating the improved status agreements within the framework of FRONTEX reinforced mandate. This enables deployment of FRONTEX officers, in principle, to the entire territory of the Western Balkan partner countries with the full strength of its mandate, including borders between the two third countries, in order to better address the challenge of changing migration routes. Its goal is to ensure that their borders are still managed in line with best European practices and fundamental rights – EU representatives said.

When asked what was the danger of migrants on these routes, which would be covered by the agreement, the EU Council representatives told our newspaper that close

cooperation with partners from the Western Balkans was essential if we wanted to address the common migration challenges we were facing.

- These status agreements on border management cooperation are an important part of our overall border management strategy. The goal of these activities is to combat illegal migration and cross-border crime through screening, registration and verification of the identity of people crossing the border and border control tasks. Working hand in hand with the authorities, as well as helping in gathering and exchange of information is essential for the achievement of this goal – EU representatives pointed out and stated that their support might include provision of enhanced technical and operational assistance at the border.

They also indicated that strengthening border management along the routes was a key pillar of the EU Action Plan for the Western Balkans – which was presented by the Commission in December 2022.

- In order to achieve further results, it is necessary to support partners from the Western Balkans by strengthening joint operations and through deployment of FRONTEX officers along the EU's external borders with partners from the Western Balkans, based on the existing agreements on the status of FRONTEX – Brussels representatives stated.

When asked if they believed the borders would then be safer, EU representatives reiterated that the Status Agreement enabled deployment of FRONTEX permanent corps capable of carrying out the tasks necessary to control the border under the command and control of the relevant authorities of a third country.



- These new status agreements will provide better coverage with permanent corps support in the Western Balkans by deploying them to any part of the countries where they may be needed and where support is sought – EU representatives concluded.

Balkanu raspoređivanjem u bilo koji dio zemalja gde bi oni mogli biti potrebni i gdje se traži podrška – zaključili su u EU.

## BOTH CONSUMERS AND BANKS TO SUPPORT BUSINESSES PROTECTING ENVIRONMENT

*Children are getting acquainted with the impacts on the climate and the environment in schools, and this issue is no longer only discussed from the perspective of an individual, but is also a part of regulations, through which businesses are also directed towards this important matter. At the end of April, the European Parliament adopted a new instrument for taxing the carbon footprint, which may cause an increase in the price of the final product or a decrease in competitiveness. One of the key trends is the ESG standard - measuring a company's impact on society, environment and governance.*

*AUTHOR: Damira KALAČ, journalist, daily newspaper Vijesti*

The carbon footprint of wine in just one glass is equivalent to 700 meters of driving by car. This information can be found on the website [co2everything.com](https://co2everything.com), where you can find how much carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is emitted during the manufacturing of a product. The data only illustrate the impacts of individual industries, noting that the value of the carbon footprint depends on a number of factors. Specifically, in wine production, the carbon footprint refers to the total greenhouse gas emissions generated over the entire life cycle of the wine. The following is taken

into account: whether pesticides or artificial fertilizers were used, the energy used is calculated, whether the energy sources are renewable or not, transport costs, type of packaging... and finally, the price is formed. A lower value of the carbon footprint will make the product more competitive on the market, and this is something that producers and companies from Montenegro must consider if they want to make a breakthrough on other markets.

Wine producers may not face such an obligation so soon, but as of 2026, importers of fertilizers and electricity, for example, will be obliged to submit a certificate at the border containing the amount of emissions generated during the manufacturing of a product.

The “story” of low-carbon tourism in Montenegro began ten years ago. In 2015, the lowcarbonmne.me website was also launched, which is still active today, but the news on the site are outdated - the last one was published four years ago. With the support of UNDP, the website calculateco2.me was created in 2016, where you can still calculate your personal carbon footprint.

“We all have to make an impact on climate change. Our actions - how we move, how we use the energy, eating habits and lifestyle affect the climate”, the authors said.

Children are getting acquainted with the impacts on the climate and the environment in schools, and this issue is no longer only discussed from the perspective of an individual, but is also a part of regulations, through which businesses are also directed towards this important matter.



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## In addition to financial impact, impact on environment also to be measured

In corporate business, globally, and especially in the European Union (EU), one of the key trends is to incorporate something called the ESG standard into the scope of business operations and into investment-related decision-making process, where ESG stands for: Environmental (environment), Social (social aspect) and Governance (management).

ESG specialist, Katarina Milačić, explained that the aforementioned was a term used to indicate the measuring of a company’s impact on society, environment and governance.

“In the next few years, our goal is to make the ESG report equivalent to the final account and we want it to become it’s integral part under the non-financial reporting, meaning that we want to measure and monitor not only the financial, but also the ESG impact of a company,” she said.

She added that it was expected for the aforementioned to be a key element that goes beyond the interests of shareholders, based on of which companies would differentiate themselves from each other, both among consumers and among interested parties and future investors.

Milačić also said that that meant that it was no longer enough to observe how economic, social and other factors affect a company, but also to observe a company’s impact on the environment and the society in which it operates.

“Through ESG, companies would be enabled to identify the impact of their operations on the environment and to assess their exposure to climate and environmental risks, while the reports of banks and other financial institutions will clearly show how much they encourage sustainable



business practices with their credit policies,” Ivana Vojinović explained.

The director of the Centre for Climate Change said that the ESG principles in Montenegro would change the way business success is perceived and measured.

“Our economy and financial sector must be prepared for such thing in time. The recently adopted Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive means that, upon joining the EU, Montenegrin companies and financial institutions will have to submit climate information, decarbonization goals and activities they implement to reduce their carbon footprint in accordance with the goals of the Paris Agreement”, she said.

She added that the changing of business philosophy would also imply additional investments, but she also said that the application of ESG standards could create opportunities and competitive advantages for companies that seriously understand the issue of climate change.

“Only those companies from Montenegro that apply ESG standards will meet future legal obligations and, on top of that, they will have access to funding sources and international capital markets. Companies in Montenegro must already understand that they will not be supported by financial institutions for those activities that are ecologically unsustainable. Key EU financiers, such as the European Investment Bank, which has been transformed into the European climate bank and the EBRD, are already demanding, even from clients who are not members of the EU, to comply with standards from the framework of corporate climate governance”, Vojinović explained and added that the aforementioned meant that companies would have to assess their direct and indirect GHG emissions, i.e. their carbon footprint, that part of their activity portfolio should be climate-friendly, as well as that the financed activities should be in accordance with the taxonomy of environmentally friendly activities adopted by the EU in 2020.

“In Montenegro, however, there is still no legal obligation or other obligation of running a business in line with to ESG principles and standards, particularly bearing in mind the fact that our Law on Accounting does not recognize the

obligation of non-financial reporting for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up 99 percent of our market”, Katarina Milačić explained.

She added that a bigger problem than an insufficiently good legislative framework were poor infrastructure conditions, which was something making ESG business difficult, or even impossible, to conduct voluntarily.

“But there is also a lack of knowledge and familiarity with this area at all levels, which is a prerequisite for the creation of a legislative framework and the very implementation of the concept”, Milačić said and added that the ESG movement and change was also happening in other parts of the world - in Asia, Africa, America.

In order to inform and educate the real and financial sector in Montenegro about trends and obligations, the Chamber of Commerce, Centre for Climate Change UDG, AvantGarde Group from Slovakia and E3 Consulting organised a seminar in April on the topic of ESG principles in corporate business and decarbonization.



## Carbon Footprint Tax

In addition to ESG standards, the story of environmentally responsible business also includes taxation, such as the one adopted by the EP two months ago.

“This is a so-called Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) that was announced a long time ago. The purpose of this instrument is to put a tax on the import of products

at the EU border corresponding to the amount of GHG emitted during their manufacturing, in order to avoid the so-called CO<sub>2</sub> leakage at the border. The goal is to prevent unfair competition for European companies, and to ensure that emissions from countries that inherit lower environmental standards, such as the entire Western Balkan region, are not moved without sanction to the EU or other geographical locations with high environmental standards", Ivana Vojinović explained.

"This means that, as of 2026, importers from the sectors covered by CBAM (cement, aluminium, fertilizers, electricity, hydrogen, iron and steel, together with some precursors and indirect emissions from electricity production) will be obliged to deliver a CBAM certificate at the border that will state the amount of emissions generated during the manufacturing of their product", she added.

"The first stage of CBAM application, before its extension to all sectors and sources of emissions, includes sectors that account for 94 percent of industrial CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the EU. This means that the electric power company of Montenegro Elektroprivreda Crne Gore, thermal power plant Termoelektrana Pljevlja, Uniprom, as well as other industrial activities that can be developed in the future, such as the cement industry, and others must seriously prepare themselves for this new levy," she said.

According to the Director of the Centre for Climate Change UDG, the banking sector of Montenegro particularly needs to be trained for directing its credit portfolio towards green businesses and stop financing outdated and environmentally harmful technologies, as well as for creating green banking products (loans, bonds...).

She added that products from Montenegro were not yet aligned with the ESG principles, nor with the measuring of the carbon footprint and its taxation.

"Since Montenegrin companies will be subject to CBAM, what must be well understood is that only the improvement of the technological process, i.e. the reduction of the carbon footprint, in carbon-intensive companies will ensure avoidance of payment of high CBAM. In other words, products that will be manufactured with higher

GHG emissions, due to higher taxation, will have higher prices for final customers, and will be less desirable and acceptable in terms of demand, that is, less competitive," she explained.

When observing the response given by the representatives of the most relevant ministry - Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism - to the question regarding whether and what a certain carbon footprint value means for a product, whether, how, how much it affects its price and whether products from Montenegro are ready for other markets in this regard, they do not seem confident when it comes to knowledge of this subject matter:

"The accredited carbon footprint companies can certainly have certain benefits when placing their product to other markets. It is more a matter of a company's responsibility towards the environment and society. As far as we know, the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro has initiated certain ESG activities".

## And what can I do?

During the process of preparation and adaptation of businesses to operate in a manner that includes a responsible attitude towards the environment, an individual can do a lot - by using environment-friendly grocery bags, by selecting waste at the point of origin, by responsibly using water, electricity.



"Turn a faucet off, repair installations consuming resources, unplug the charger, turn off devices when you are not using them, turn off the lights in areas where they are not needed, donate excess wardrobe, unnecessary devices and toys, recycle organic waste and produce humus for plants, or simply take sorted waste to recycling yards". This is a message from the representatives of Cellula, the association of biologists who teach the school population about responsible behaviour.

"Nature can be preserved if part of free textbooks used by primary school pupils is reused", they added.

"If you do a simple calculation of how many pupils attend primary schools Montenegro, with an average of 20 textbooks per pupil, you will come to a staggering number of how many textbooks end up in municipal waste. Most of those textbooks have been completely preserved and could be used at least for one more school year, while those that are not usable can be recycled. By doing so, you could give children an example of recycling and its importance", they said.

Representatives of this association believe that the number of biology and ecology classes should be increased in schools and they have already contacted the Ministry of Education and the Education Office when it comes to this subject matter.

They added that environmental activism should also be introduced as mandatory school subject: "This is similar to the community services that were organised in the past at the municipal or state level. This is how love for the homeland and the obligation to take care of it becomes stronger".

## Green award, loans, incentives for employees and partners

In order to promote a responsible attitude towards the challenges of climate change and stimulate scientific thought in this area, the Central Bank has introduced the "Green Award" for the best academic work in the area of the impact of climate change on the financial system and announced a competition with 18 August set as a deadline for submitting works.

Katarina Milačić cited Glovo, which has been operating in Montenegro since 2021, and NLB Bank as examples of companies that have introduced an ESG strategy into their business model.

"The carbon footprint of Glovo, as a company, is not large, especially in Montenegro, but Glovo recognises its responsibility and has identified the type of transport used by the fleet of couriers who work for Glovo through courier agencies as one of the key problems in this area", Milačić explained.

During the year, among other things, Glovo' plan is to provide certain benefits to partner agencies that invest in e-bikes/e-motorcycles/e-scooters and that make them available to couriers, as well as to allocate funds for co-financing the purchase of these means of transport for couriers and the agencies that hire them.

NLB Bank is part of the NLB Group with headquarters in Slovenia. When it comes to the bank's main office building in Montenegro, the plan is in place to increase its energy efficiency through reconstruction and renovation.

"This bank takes into account the consumption of paper. Consequently, last year, it contributed to the preservation of 866 trees at the group level. Employees have the opportunity to work from home and are encouraged not to use cars to get to work, but other less polluting means of transport", she added.

In the field of environmental protection, the mission of NLB Bank in Montenegro is the greening of all schoolyards in the next five-year period.

NLB and UNDP have provided an eco-loan for the municipality of Pljevlja to subsidise measures to increase energy efficiency in residential buildings in the area of the most polluted municipality in the country.

NLB Group has committed itself that by 2030, 75 percent of the electricity used by its banks will come from zero CO2 sources.

"At the end of 2022, NLB Group already reached 70 percent of this goal", Milačić said.

# A LONG JOURNEY TO EUROPE

*Author: Jovana Janjušević, Centre for the Study and Protection of Birds*

Just like a theatrical play, Ulcinj Salina is a story whose scenes were bravely presented by many on their long journey full of plots, intrigues, "aha moments", documentary content, drama, criminology and light at the end of the tunnel. This "salted" theatrical play can make you laugh, bring you to tears the very next moment, mercilessly bring you to your knees, make heart beat faster again, discourage, embrace, battered by rain and winds. And all this in one day!

Such powerful Ulcinj Salina is. At the same time, it is a fragile, worn out old lady, tired and barren, once a beauty of the Mediterranean, today robbed and underprivileged homeless lady from whose wrinkled neck, by public auction, the last string of pearls in the form of small wagons and rails, which once transported salt, was sold.

Ulcinj Salina is a story about museum values that were melted into scrap iron, about excavators swallowed by darkness, about tons of salt that were "gone with the wind", about packing houses that were bought for a million and sold at 150 times lower price. It is a spectacle for the public, manifestation of a society, but also the strength of a long process painted with a blue flag and yellow stars.

It is the strangest man-made embankment, carrying life in its backwaters, dragging the sea from the shore to the inside of its limbs, to embrace hundreds of thousands of birds as they bring the sand of Africa on their weary wings. There they will feed, invigorate, and many of them will nest and overwinter, while others will continue their long journey to Europe.

Today's nature park survived a great transformation by travelling a long way from the former Zoganj mud (zog, Alb. – bird), only to become a salina during the reign of King Nikola. And yet, essentially, then and today, it serves its primary and divine purpose — birds.

The history of the saltpan sounds almost like a fairy tale. Although formed during the reign of one kingdom, it reached its glory during the former Yugoslavia, when Ulcinj salt was branded as love child of sea and sun, was a synonym for quality, and at the same time was a home for incredibly rich biodiversity. How advanced we were in those ancient times, is best illustrated by the fact that the Salina was protected by the factory management as the first nature park in 1989, precisely because of the birds. We were visionaries, some would say maybe even clairvoyant.

With the disintegration of Yugoslavia, we are entering the phase of privatization, and with it the collapse of the economic giant, such as the Salina "Bajo Sekulić", a factory that employed more than 400 workers and was a synonym for the prosperity of the Municipality of Ulcinj. With the last harvest, in 2013, life on the Salina was extinguished and struggle for its survival began.

Ulcinj Salina experienced "clinical death" when its major lifelines and pumps stopped working. It was clear to a small group of people, who feared until that moment that this scenario would come true, what it means when seawater stops pumping into salt basins. If we were to compare this with human body, it would mean that heart beating and transfer of oxygen through the bloodstream stopped.

However, as fortune favours the bold, during one of many excursions organized by the Centre for the Protection and Study of Birds, three ladies joined them and changed the course of the years-long decay of the former pearl of the Adriatic, i.e. stories started with dubious privatization, even more obscure loans, mortgages and attempts to change land for the purpose of building a marina, hotel complex and golf court.

The ambassadors of Germany, France and Poland entered the scene – women who changed the course of diplomacy as we know it, and who incorporated Ulcinj Salina into the agenda of European integration. Primarily thanks to the former Ambassador of Germany, Mrs. Gudrun Steinecker, the Ulcinj Salina became the first item on the agenda of all-important state-level discussions, and has remained so to this day. It has paved the way for us to continue, with



scientific backing, regular monitoring and well-supported data to defend the survival of the Salina and, finally, with the help of the EU Delegation, we succeeded in making a bankrupt factory final benchmark in the accession negotiations. In a nutshell, without the protected and ecologically functional Ulcinj Salina, Montenegro will not be able to join the European Union.

It might seem harsh, but this play with elements of a crime novel, as it has its heroines, also has anti-heroes who have been hatching a plot for years to surgically precisely remove the vital organs of the salina and put concrete in their place instead of algae, shrimp and long-legged flamingos. They also devised the plan how to erase from cadastral records, away from public eye, that the Salina belongs to all of us citizens, and that it is the heritage not only of Montenegro, but of the entire Europe.

It was amazing and miraculous when more than 117,000 Europeans signed a petition to preserve the Salina, urging our Prime Minister to protect what has become a former factory both at the national and international level. Thanks to the signatures that were gathered even at the moment of petition handover, during the meeting with the Prime Minister, when, in addition to 90 000 signatures, additional 27,000 signatures came in during a single hour of the meeting, and the message was received.

Europe has spoken from all addresses. This time it wasn't just embassies that were loud, the lesson was given by common people that never set foot on worn grounds of

the Salina. The factory "Bajo Sekulić" attained the status of nature park in 2019, and after a few months of protection at the state level, it was added to the list of wetlands of international importance.

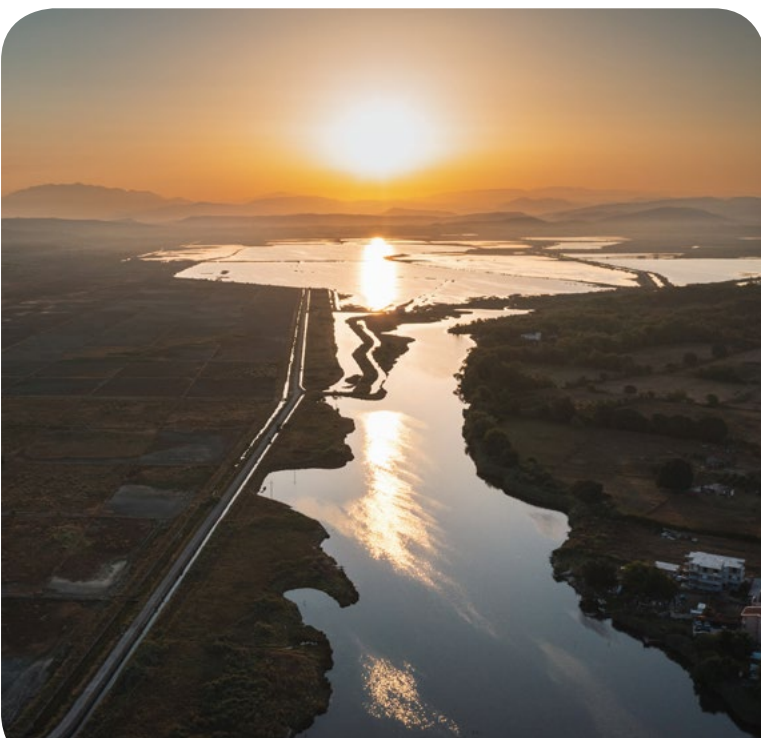
But what does protection essentially mean if there is a protected area only on paper, if a ship is sailing without a captain? Even today, four years after the proclamation, Salina has no manager, no host, although it is taken care of by national parks, although CZIP has worked tirelessly on reconstruction and procurement of new pumps, the supply of specialized excavator for the repair of embankments, monitoring of ornithofauna, adaptation of museums and gatehouse, as well as education and promotion. Again, we are hearing empty promises.

From the moment of bankruptcy, when heavy doors of the Salina closed, it took thousands of mellow words and strength to remove the padlock. Finally, the Salina is open to all visitors, freed from fears that photos of its destruction will cause shock and disbelief on social networks. Such effect cannot be achieved in our country. All factories are of the same appearance. On the other hand, there is no such factory that holds to its bosom fiery pink birds - flamingos, whose pink color you will notice only when they flap their wings or fly over you with great commotion and noise. And right here, in the middle of this great desert entwined with salt, you can feel the connection between Ulcinj and Serengeti through sound and sight. Nature is indeed a miracle because it is carried by wings.

Such a peculiar combination of industry and nature found its corner as a part of the Venice Biennale exhibition with a very appropriate topic "Reporting from the front". It truly reflects the stroll along the first part of the park. You have a feeling that you have walked through a war-torn scene, and then you enter a large oasis, which was called "the place of peace" in the TV show "Top lista nadrealista".

This place of peace is at the heart of Ulcinj Salina. Flamingos and stilts move gracefully here, somewhat clumsy pelicans show off, colourful common shelducks and pied avocets fly over, while oystercatchers nest in the remaining embankments. Everything is teeming with life, playing, bouncing, feeding, giving birth, all of it arriving just to return and die. In that scene worthy of every BBC documentary, you are trembling with the same fear as the engineers did one hundred years before under the order of a king – them wanting to overcome the ruthless and decaying base of the Zogaj mud where the Ulcinj Salina was to emerge, us wanting to repair the embankments and bring water and life back into it.

A challenge of a lifetime: how they used to divide the Zogaj mud with embankments using their strength and shovels, and how we have to engage excavators today. Will it sink, are the calculations correct, will the rain destroy all our plans. Is it possible for a small group of people to create a whole mimicry of natural processes, i.e. to mimic a perfect system.



Hold on a little longer, little girl. Your lifeline will be patched up too. For all those wings and beaks, for desert powder and a string of pearls that one day will sweep through carrying wagons full of white gold. And you're young and enthusiastic again! Such is the vision of a long journey to Europe.

## LIPA CAVE BECOMES MONTENEGRO'S MUST-SEE ATTRACTION WITH EU SUPPORT

*Author: Stefan Bulatović, Ministry of European Affairs*

In Dobrsko Selo just outside the Old Royal Capital of Cetinje lies one of the most famous speleological attractions in Montenegro – the Lipa Cave. Ever since it was discovered in the mid-19th century, this unique natural wonder has gained the attention of many, ranging from the Petrović dynasty, through explorers and speleologists, to adventurers.

It gained widespread recognition in 2015, when it was adapted and opened to visitors through a public-private partnership, offering exciting tours across a vast expanse of rock formations – stalagmites and stalactites. Since then, the Lipa Cave has been attracting thousands of visitors every year, while continuously improving its

offering. In doing so, the cave has benefited considerably from EU pre-accession funds.

In an effort to make the Lipa Cave part of the cave tourism brand within the Adriatic-Ionian region, the tourism company managing this site has partnered with stakeholders from this region to enhance existing and develop new products based on the natural and architectural heritage found in caves. The project, entitled Adriaticaves, was co-funded supported by the Interreg ADRION transnational programme.

In addition to the Lipa Cave, the Adriaticaves project aimed to improve the tourist offerings in other well-known speleological areas within the Adriatic-Ionian region. These include Majella National Park in the Central Apennines and the Romagna Caves in Italy, the protected landscape of Bijambare on the slopes of the Sarajevo Canton in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Velebit Nature Park – the largest and most complex protected area in Croatia, as well as the Kađenica and Turčinovac Caves located between the steep slopes of Ovčar and Kablar in the City of Čačak in Serbia. Additionally, it also covers the Dhenve, Moho, Perkali, and Arapi Caves in the Albanian part of the Dinaric Alps.



“Although the Lipa Cave company was very young when it became part of the Adriaticaves project, we are proud that we managed to improve our tourism offering in a short period of time. By sharing knowledge with our partners, we realized the importance of standardizing the services we provide,” says Milena Raičević, director of Lipa Cave, speaking for Eurokaz.

She emphasizes that the greatest value of this project was the opportunity to train their guides and speleo-guides.

“We succeeded in enhancing our tourism product by training the staff who directly communicate with visitors. Thanks to networking with partners, many of our employees have improved their knowledge of Italian during the project. Additionally, together with our partners, we have developed a training manual for guides,” says Raičević.

In addition to staff education, the project involved a series of activities aimed at improving the Lipa Cave's offering. Among other things, the company carried out an intensive marketing campaign, which contributed to the Lipa Cave becoming a bucket list destination for those visiting the Old Royal Capital and Montenegro. In addition to the campaign, the promotion was enhanced by the brochure entitled “From Cave to Cave,” which features all the cave attractions targeted by this project.

An important part of the Adriaticaves project was the monitoring of cave formations and sediments. In this respect, speleological research was conducted on stalactites, stalagmites, cave columns, and other



By participating in this project, the Lipa Cave team had the opportunity to exchange good practices with partners by creating a common network of caves in the Adriatic-Ionian region, having received over 172,000 euros in non-refundable EU funds.



elements formed by the deposition of crystalline calcium carbonate. Moreover, the project also helped measure humidity, temperature, air and radon concentration inside the cave.

Raičević notes that year after year, they have recorded a constant increase in the number of visitors, especially during and after the implementation of project activities.

“We keep getting positive reviews on international websites such as TripAdvisor. Visitor satisfaction has placed our attraction on the list of must-see places in Montenegro. A great deal of credit goes to the successful implementation of the Adriaticaves project,” she adds.

During the implementation, the partners also signed the Charter of Caves to ensure sustainable management of caves, preservation of their natural and historical heritage, as well as to encourage educational and cultural visits.

Thanks to the success of Adriaticaves, the partners received additional funding from Interreg ADRIION to capitalize on the project results through a spin-off project called Adriaticaves Plus. The new project helped make a 3D reconstruction of the Lipa Cave website in a bid to overcome travel and movement restrictions, building on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the Lipa Cave team, the Adriaticaves project brought an extraordinary opportunity to exchange experiences with cave and speleological heritage operators from other countries of the Adriatic-Ionian region.

“Our company, by the nature of this activity, needs to operate in the international market. This brings many challenges, some of which were also felt during the

pandemic. However, through collaboration with our project partners, we realized that boundaries in fact do not exist, even in years when this seemed impossible. Besides sharing knowledge and experience, we learned that the challenges we face are present everywhere,” says Raičević.

She notes that the difficulties faced by cave operators in the Adriatic-Ionian region are universal, while solutions are often similar.

“Our impression is that the project gave us a boost for what may have seemed impossible both in our small market and on the global market. It is only an incentive for us to come up with ideas for further development of speleological tourism, which is a completely new branch in Montenegro,” concludes Raičević.

## DISCUSSION ON ISSUES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT SIGNIFICANT FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF MONTENEGRO

# FIRST RURAL PARLIAMENT FULFILLED ITS GOAL

*Author: Bojana Miličević, journalist for Radio and Portal RTCG*

First Rural Parliament in Montenegro gathered more than 300 people in mid-May in Nikšić. It is a platform which has existed for a long time in the EU member states, as well as in the countries in the region, whose goal is to improve the communication of rural and agricultural communities



from one and competent institutions on the other side, and the promotion of agriculture and rural development. The organizer of the two-day event was an NGO Network for rural development of Montenegro, and it was financed by the EU through the M'BASE project and GIZ through the SEDRA II project.

President of the Network for Rural Development of Montenegro Ratko Bataković told for Eurokaz that the first Rural Parliament in Montenegro achieved its goal – it established the platform for an open dialogue between the rural population and decision-makers at all levels, enabling, in this way, that the voice of that population is heard stronger.

“We have defined the Declaration which was adopted at the end of the event and disseminated to all relevant addresses. Topics which were selected for discussions were illustrating fields in which urgent action must be taken: the role, the importance and position of women in rural Montenegro, defined as “Invisible heroines of rural areas”; “Youth as leaders of change in rural areas”; current and long deferred topic - the LEADER approach, which we expect as measure through the IPARD III program “LEADER, perspective or forgotten topic?”; and finally, perhaps the most important topic which concerns communication and the flow of information vertically between decision-makers and the rural population, which is defined as “Greetings from the institution, can we have your attention?!”, said Bataković.

He stated that Montenegro needed such a platform, and that it should be further developed and include as many stakeholders as possible.

“This, long-awaited, first Rural Parliament in Montenegro, succeeded and its results will come to the fore in the future, and it will make the impact in many fields, that, right now, we can't predict precisely” said Bataković.

He explained that the benefits are numerous. Rural Parliament in one place gathered farmers, owners of rural businesses, representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism, EU Delegation, Chamber of Commerce, Union of Municipalities, Investment and Development Fund, Chamber of Skilled Crafts and Entrepreneurship, and the NGO sector. Bataković stressed that the event also included study visits to businesses

which are an example of good practice in the field of agriculture, agro-industry, agro-tourism, old crafts and local customs and traditions. Bataković added that the project also contributed to promotion of rural tourism in the Nikšić region, because all the guests at the event stayed in rural households during the Rural Parliament.

In the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management they said that the first Rural Parliament opened the new way to maintaining a continuous dialogue on rural issues.

“We believe that every additional communication tool, which will enable the voice of agricultural producers to be heard, represents the basis for further development of rural areas, and especially agricultural production”, stated from Ministry of Agriculture.

In that department, they emphasized that the organization of such and similar events where information sharing, continuous dialogue and constructive discussions is advocated, can introduce agricultural producers to certain policies that bring them closer to EU standards.

It is clear, however, they note, that in order to resolve such issues there must be a long-term vision, and specific measures that should be taken to solve the problems.

“Namely, support to rural areas is already being implemented through the IPARD program, which is a very useful tool for us in the implementation of EU standards. Implementing IPARD projects, agricultural holdings, state administration and everyone involved in that process, go through an extremely important school for the future, preparing them for financially much more valuable funds that are the carriers of development of agriculture in EU member states, a which will be available to us after the pre-accession period”, it was announced from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management.

Emphasizing that the Rural Parliament is project financed within the framework program for civil society organizations in Montenegro - M'BASE, which is funded by the EU, from the Delegation of European Union to Montenegro said for Eurokaz that they are planning to support more similar programs and projects in the future. EU strongly supports civil society and provides significant funds for NGO work, from the EU Delegation announced that between 2014 and 2023, the EU directed almost 550 million euro to civil society and media in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Asked if events like the Rural Parliament can help Montenegrin farmers to improve communication with European partners, get ready for the single European market and get closer to the European standards, the EU Delegation said that gatherings like this are always useful for improving communication between different actors in the field of rural development.

“While the process of harmonization of legislation, including harmonization of standards with the requirements of the EU are led by state institutions, farmers should be also included, because they are mostly affected by the implementation of standards in practise. With that in relationship, every discussion and exchange of opinions not only within the country, but also within the region and EU member states is needed and useful for the entire process of integration and for the time when Montenegro will become part of the EU”, the EU Delegation emphasized.

## 63 million euro available to Montenegrin farmers through IPARD III

The EU Delegation noted that the EU supports agriculture and rural development of Montenegro through a series of programs and projects, among which the most important is the IPARD program.

“Within the IPARD II program, Montenegro had access funds of 39 million euro from the EU, and within the framework of IPARD III, 63 million euro. Montenegrin farmers can apply for three measures: Investment in physical assets in agricultural holdings; Investing in physical assets for processing and marketing and Diversification of agricultural activities. It is expected that additional measures will be entrusted to Montenegro in the coming years, including the measure LEADER, which supports the establishment of local action groups and implementation of their strategies for rural development areas”, stated the EU Delegation.



## IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION THROUGH CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

*Author: Adela Bahović, Acting Secretary of the Secretariat for development and projects, Municipality of Tuzi*

The municipality of Tuzi is working on capacity building with great commitment, in order to absorb resources from EU funds. It was never an easy path, but the results never fail, and are visible on all fields. One of the first projects that Municipality Tuzi successfully implemented in 2011 – 2012 was from the thematic priority Tourism at the Cross-border Cooperation Programme with Albania. The second was implemented in 2014 -2015 as a thematic priority environment protection at the same programme. The first project from cross-border cooperation programme Italy - Albania - Montenegro was implemented in period 2018 – 2020: PAST4Future – Promoting Accessible and Sustainable Tourism for the Future.

The municipality implemented two projects funded through Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme. Pilot projects within the thematic priority energetic efficiency were implemented in schools in the territory of the municipality of Tuzi.

This year will also be about environmental protection, through implementation of the New Environment Revitalization project Approach - NERA from the Cross-border Cooperation Program Montenegro - Kosovo, with partners from the Municipality of Peć.

Project New approach to environmental revitalization - NERA aims to contribute to environmental protection through a strategically oriented approach in local communities in Montenegro and Kosovo, and to strengthen local capacities for establishing an efficient solid waste management model in municipalities included in project. It will also include the opinion of citizens, because the project is based on a participatory approach.

Solid waste management plans will be developed through participatory approach with citizens of Tuzi and Peć. Municipalities will form teams for drafting the plans and they will exchange knowledge and experience. Expected results of the project refer to several results. The first will be capacity building of public waste management companies from Tuzi and Peć, through the organization of trainings about the concept of zero waste management, establishment of efficient communication e-tools and systems in solid waste management, adequate collection/recycling equipment for solid waste. Then, procurement and installation of equipment, cleaning and greening of wild landfills, as well as establishment of the cross-border e-market of solid waste.

Finally, part of the project is awareness raising about the "zero waste" concept and promoting project results through organizing educational sessions in primary and secondary schools about importance of waste separation and environmental protection. Also, we are organizing educational sessions for agricultural manufacturers and the implementation of an effective campaign related to waste disposal as well as environmental protection in Tuzi and Peć.

The total value of the project is about 479 thousand euro, which is a significant budget that will be allocated for

environment protection in two municipalities.

It is important to note that this project is promoting an active approach to the problem of environmental protection, because it will, apart from the first SWM (Solid Waste Management) Plan of solid waste management for the municipality of Tuzi, foresee locations for the installation of semi-underground containers in the central part of the municipality. In that way the problem will be solved systematically, both locally, as well as at the national level. The project also envisages creating an application through which citizens will be informed on the method and place of leaving waste, separating waste, as well as all information relevant to the project, but also the possibility of reporting illegal landfills. On this way the first cross-border solid waste e-market will be established, and all interested subjects will be able to apply for the waste market with just one click.

The municipality of Tuzi, with the dedication of its projects team, which is now operating within the Secretariat for Development and Projects, attracts significant funds and resolves important and current issues, all in the desire to answer the role that the municipalities represent, which is to provide quality service to citizens.



# FOTOCOLAGE







# THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ENERGY SUPPORT PACKAGE FOR MONTENEGRO WORTH €30 MILLION

NA  
**PRAVOM**  
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Support to Montenegro for transition to green energy



Support to citizens with living standards



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