



No 18

EUROKAZ

MAGAZINE ON MONTENEGRO'S
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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EUROKAZ
Magazine on Montenegro's European Integration

No 18

PUBLISHED BY:
Ministry of European Affairs

EDITORIAL BOARD:
Directorate for Informing the Public about the EU
and the EU Accession Process

Ministry of European Affairs

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DOES JOINING THE EUROPEAN UNION MEAN LOSING ONE'S OWN IDENTITY AND CULTURE?

Filip Ivanović, PhD, Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

Whenever a nation faces a great historical decision, it also faces an inevitable question of whether opening the door to the future means losing a part of its own being. That question is also raised in relation to Montenegro's European path.

Discussions about membership in the European Union often do not tackle only economy, laws and institutions, but something much deeper – identity, culture and historical memory of a country. Almost every country that was in the process of accession to the EU faced similar challenges underpinned by a natural level of caution against the possibility that joining a broader political or social community might diminish the particularities that had been created for centuries. However, history has shown that identity rarely vanishes due to encounters with the other. Much more often it weakens when it stops developing, when it closes into its own boundaries losing the ability to speak the language of the time it lives in.

That is precisely why it should be underlined that Montenegro's identity has not been shaped in isolation. On the contrary, it has been shaped at the crossroads of cultures and ideas, through permanent encounters with different civilisations and historic circumstances. Since the Middle Ages, through almost half of a millennium fight for preservation of freedom and reinforcement of statehood, all the way to international recognition of Montenegro in the Berlin Congress in 1878, a strong feeling of self-awareness and belonging was being developed. Montenegrin tradition was not being built on the foundations of political institutions only, but also on the basis of culture, customs, language, spirituality and the values transferred from one generation to the other. It is precisely these historical roots which show that, in these territories, identity has never been a transient

category whose core was changing in line with the current political processes, but that identity has been continuously upgraded as a result of a long term historical existence.

Montenegro is entering the European space with its rich heritage that was being built for centuries. Its territory has always been the point of encounter of the Mediterranean and the Balkans, the East and the West, sea and mountains. Merchant routes included its ports connecting the Adriatic with European centres, while the statesmen and diplomats from Cetinje built connections with the most important European capitals. Openness to Europe is therefore not a novelty in Montenegrin history. It is its natural continuity.

As for the relations between national identity and European integration, let us just remember the birth of the European Union. Its foundations were laid after the most difficult wars that the European continent went through, with a view to replacing conflicts with cooperation and divisions with joint institutions and dialogue. European Union was not born as a project of creating one nation, one language or one culture. On the contrary, its essence lies in respecting diversity. That is why its motto „United in diversity“ is not only a political



dr Filip Ivanović, potpredsjednik Vlade

phrase, but a recognition that European unity exists precisely because of the abundance of different traditions, languages and historic experiences. European space is not devised as a place where particularities are erased, but as a community where they can be preserved and presented, enriching each other.

This is confirmed by experience of the countries that have already gone through the path of integration into the EU. Malta has not lost its Mediterranean character after joining the European Union in 2004. Its language – Maltese, one of the smallest official languages of Europe, has become an official language of the European Union, getting thus an additional institutional protection.

Slovenia constitutes a similar example. After joining the European Union in 2004, it continued cherishing and promoting its national identity, while European programmes ensured additional affirmation for Slovenian cultural heritage and tradition and cities like Ljubljana became recognizable centres of cultural events and international cooperation.

Their languages remained official languages, their national symbols remained unchanged, while their cultural specific features became a part of a broader European scene, without any loss of their own authenticity. What is even more, they got a new kind of visibility and a broader stage where they can be presented to hundreds of millions of people. European space has not replaced their identities. It ensured that they are better recognized.

Through the programmes for culture and protection of heritage, European Union allocates significant funds every year for preserving cultural heritage of Member States and candidate countries. For Montenegro, this may mean additional support for preservation and promotion of cultural goods that constitute the foundations of its historical identity – the cultural-historic heritage of Cetinje as once a historic capital of Montenegro, for example, or Kotor as one of the most significant Mediterranean centre of cultural heritage on the Eastern coast of the Adriatic, as well as numerous sacral cultural goods in the North of the country. At the same time, European programmes can contribute to the protection of archival material, museum activities and non-material heritage that constitute the evidence of the Montenegro's several centuries long state, cultural and spiritual continuity.

In this respect, it is sufficient to recall some of the provisions of the Treaty on the European Union, like Article 3 which reads

that „the Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples“, as well as that „it shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced“. Similar to this, Article 4 reads that „the Union shall respect the equality of Member States before the Treaties as well as their national identities, inherent in their fundamental structures, political and constitutional“. That is why the most important question is maybe not if we will lose our identity. Much more important question is how we shall present our identity to Europe.

It is also important to understand that one cannot preserve identity by political declarations. It is to be preserved by schools, libraries, theatres, museums, artists, scientists and families that convey our values to the new generations. No international organization can jeopardize culture that creates, explores and remembers. The most serious threat to identity is not being open to the world but being indifferent to one's own identity.

Culture and the way of life are today much more strongly affected by digital platforms, media and global trends than by state borders. In such an atmosphere, the challenge to preserve identity exists equally for the countries in the European Union and for those outside of it. That is why modern Europe increasingly invests into protection of languages, cultural heritage and local traditions, recognizing them as values that enrich the entire continent.

Integration into the EU therefore does not constitute a change of identity, but a change of position. Instead of observing the processes shaping the future of the continent from the side, Montenegro is getting an opportunity to participate. Its voice would no longer be that of an observer, but of a collocator. That is not renouncement of national interests, but an opportunity to represent them there where decisions that influence our joint European future are made.

European integration does not mean renouncing particularities but creating an additional space to affirm them. For Montenegro, the European path is neither a choice between tradition and modernity, nor between past and future. That is not a crossroad where we must renounce one to get the other. On the contrary, it is an opportunity to connect historic heritage with modern development and to preserve cultural values through new forms of their presentation.

That is why the answer to the question of whether by joining the European Union we will lose identity is not hidden in any political programme or international treaty. It is in the self-confidence of a society. Nation that knows its history, respects its cultural heritage and believes in the value of its particularities has no reason to hesitate to cooperate with others. Such a nation cannot lose itself in the encounters with the world. On the contrary, it is precisely in such encounters that it shows its identity in the clearest possible way.

Through its history, Montenegro was always the strongest when it managed to connect openness and self-awareness. Its greatest achievements were made when it was connected to the broader European flows and remained faithful to itself at the same time. European Union is therefore not a renouncement of identity, but a new opportunity to present it with more self-confidence, dignity and visibility. Identity is not a shadow that disappears when we get closer to the others; it is the light that becomes brighter when we present it to the world.

AMBASSADOR KEVIN COLGAN FOR EUROKAZ: MONTENEGRO IS ENTERING THE FINAL STAGE OF ITS EUROPEAN PATH

By Marko Vešović, RTCG

Ambassador of Ireland in Montenegro, Kevin Colgan, says that Ireland strongly supports Montenegro's European path and thinks that our country is the frontrunner in the process of accession to the European Union. In the interview for the magazine Eurokaz, Ambassador Colgan spoke about priorities of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the prospects of enlargement to the Western Balkans, Montenegro's progress in the accession negotiations, development of the Accession Treaty, as well as about bilateral relations of the two countries and opportunities to enhance them further.

EU enlargement to the Western Balkans will certainly be high on the agenda during Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In this context, how do you assess Montenegro's current position?

Ireland is honoured to hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the eighth time. We take on this responsibility at a particularly important moment for Europe, as we navigate growing geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty and an evolving security landscape.

Our Presidency will focus on three closely connected priorities: competitiveness, values, and security. Together, these pillars reflect our ambition to build a stronger, more resilient Europe—one that is economically competitive, steadfast in defending democracy and the rule of law, and capable of responding effectively to contemporary security challenges. Our Presidency motto, Ní neart go cur le chéile, meaning "Strength with unity" captures this approach. It reflects a simple but enduring belief that Europe is at its strongest when we work together, especially at a time when unity has never mattered more.

Within this framework, enlargement remains central to that vision. Ireland has long been a strong supporter of



Foto: Ambasador Irske Kevin Colgan

EU enlargement. We had the privilege of holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the historic 2004 enlargement, when ten new Member States joined the Union. We see the enlargement process as a key expression of our values and as an investment in peace, security, stability and shared prosperity across Europe.

In this context, Ireland supports the significant work that Montenegro has accomplished to-date in its accession journey. The hard-work done and buy-in by stakeholders across Montenegrin society have truly earned your frontrunner status. Of course there is still crucial work to do, and progress will depend on maintaining a steady pace of reforms and delivering tangible results in key areas.

How do you evaluate Montenegro's progress on its European path, and what should be the key priorities during Ireland's Presidency?

Montenegro has done significant work throughout the accession process. Montenegro is the clear accession frontrunner for EU membership. The progress achieved so far reflects a strong commitment to the European path and demonstrates what can be accomplished through sustained political will and reform.

At the same time, EU accession is an ongoing reform process, and important work still lies ahead. Continued progress will depend on maintaining the pace of reforms and delivering tangible results, particularly in strengthening the rule of law, the independence and efficiency of the judiciary, public administration, and fight against corruption and organised crime.

During Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we will continue to support a credible, predictable and merit-based accession process. We believe that where reforms are delivered, progress should be recognised.

Montenegro has an important opportunity to complete its accession process, and Ireland's Presidency will work to support the country's progress towards membership of the European Union.

From Ireland's perspective, how do you see the future of the European integration of the Western Balkans, particularly Montenegro, in light of current developments within the European Union and the expectations the EU has for the region?

The Western Balkans is clearly a hugely important region for the European Union, and Ireland by extension.

We believe that the future of the region lies within the European Union. A stable and prosperous Western Balkans is in the interests of all of us.

This commitment is reflected in Ireland's growing engagement across the region. The opening of Embassies in Sarajevo and Belgrade marked significant deepening of engagement in the Balkans and Ireland's long-term commitment to supporting the region's European perspective.

The EU-Western Balkans Summit that you recently hosted made clear that enlargement is a priority for the European Union. The message from Tivat was clear: enlargement is at the centre of the European agenda, and both the European Union and candidate countries have a shared interest in making this process a success.

The challenge now is to translate that political momentum into tangible progress. This requires continued commitment from both sides. Candidate countries need to maintain the pace of reforms, while the European Union must ensure that genuine progress is recognised and rewarded. The credibility of the enlargement process depends on maintaining this balance.

During Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we will work closely with all candidate countries while continuing to uphold the principle that progress is determined by merit. In Montenegro's case, our Presidency will prioritise supporting the completion of accession negotiations and advancing the preparation of Montenegro's Accession Treaty, in line with the progress achieved in the negotiations.

Montenegro has made significant progress and is now entering the final phase of its accession journey. If further advances can be achieved during our Presidency, this would be important not only for Montenegro, but for the entire Western Balkans. 13 years on from the last entry, it would demonstrate that European Union membership remains an achievable objective.

At the same time, we also recognise the importance of maintaining public confidence in enlargement. During our Presidency, Ireland will continue to promote a better understanding of the benefits of enlargement, both within the European Union and across the candidate countries, because a successful enlargement process ultimately depends on the support and engagement of citizens on all sides.

Do you believe that the drafting of Montenegro's Accession Treaty could be completed in the near future?

Ireland welcomed the decision to start drafting Montenegro's Accession Treaty, which is indicative at just how far Montenegro has come. This is the first time the EU has sat down to work on an accession treaty since the accession of Croatia in 2013.

Reaching this stage should make clear to all just how far we have come and also the confidence of Member States in Montenegro's progress to-date. At the time, we were clear with our fellow Member States that we wanted the relevant Working Group tasked with drafting the Treaty to begin work as soon as possible.

As Presidency, Ireland's role is to build consensus among Member States, facilitate negotiations where countries are ready, and ensure that enlargement remains high on the European agenda. It is evident Montenegro has made substantial progress and is now entering a particularly important phase of negotiations. If Montenegro continues to deliver on the necessary reforms and maintains the current momentum, there is every reason to be optimistic about the next stages of the accession process, including progress towards the preparation of an Accession Treaty. Ultimately, however, the pace of the process will continue to be determined by the fulfilment of the agreed accession criteria and the consensus of all Member States.

How would you assess the bilateral relations between Ireland and Montenegro, and where do you see the greatest potential for further strengthening cooperation?

2026 marked twenty years of bilateral relations between Ireland and Montenegro. 20 years on, I am pleased to see bilateral relations continue to go from strength to strength. This year, President Connolly welcomed President Milatovic to Dublin for the first state visit by a President of Montenegro to Ireland. In June, we were pleased to welcome Minister Gorčević to meet with her counterpart Minister Byrne. Our Taoiseach attended the recent EU-WB Summit in Tivat. Across these meetings, Ireland has reaffirmed its strong support for Montenegro's EU accession and encouraged the continuation of the reforms that will bring the country closer to membership.

Expanding our presence in the Western Balkans reflects the importance we attach to relations with Montenegro and our long-term commitment to further strengthening our engagement.

Ireland seeks to contribute to Montenegro's democratic, economic and broader societal development by supporting its European integration process. Our own experience demonstrates the transformative benefits of EU membership, and we are ready to share the lessons we have learned, as well as examples of public policies that have contributed to Ireland's development and prosperity.

Beyond the European agenda, I see significant opportunities to strengthen economic ties, promote tourism, and foster innovation and educational cooperation. By bringing our businesses, institutions and people closer together, we can build on the strong foundation that already exists and develop an even more dynamic and mutually beneficial partnership in the years ahead. I was delighted to see that Ireland was already investing in Montenegro with the partnership between the Irish Duty Free company Aer Rianta and Montenegro Duty Free.

I am optimistic about the future of Irish-Montenegrin relations. We share many experiences and values and I believe there is enormous potential to deepen our partnership in the years ahead.

GROWTH PLAN PRODUCES RESULTS: MONTENEGRO SUCCESSFULLY CONTINUES IMPLEMENTATION OF REFORMS

By Marko Dragaš, Ministry of European Affairs

Reforms are not an end in themselves. Their value is measured by the moment in which citizens start feeling that the state is working faster, more transparently and more efficiently, while European standards become a part of their daily lives.

Since its implementation started in the fourth quarter of 2024, Montenegro's Reform Agenda 2024-2027 has been

one of the most important instruments for accelerating European integration and modernization of the state. Thanks to the Growth Plan of the European Union for the Western Balkans, the reforms ceased being a part of the negotiations only. They are now directly connected to the financial support of the European Union intended to improve citizens' quality of life, strengthen competitiveness of economy and efficiency of public administration.

Although the Reform Agenda frequently speaks of the laws, reform steps and reports, its end goal is not to develop new legislation, but to improve citizens' daily lives. This means that citizens should have opportunities to use an increasing number of services of the state by electronic means, instead of waiting in lines and collecting numerous documents. For economy, this means starting a business in a simpler way, fewer administrative barriers and conditions more conducive to investment. For young people, the reforms bring

higher quality education, better aligned with labour market needs and more opportunities for employment. In the energy sector, the goal is more secure energy supply, better use of renewable resources and lower costs through higher energy efficiency. Strengthening of the rule of law and fight against corruption contribute to better legal certainty, more efficient work of institutions and stronger citizens' trust into the state.

At the same time, successful implementation of reforms entitles Montenegro to significant grants and favourable funds from the European Union. Such funds are not intended only for the state institutions – they ensure investment into schools, kindergartens, hospitals, roads, railways, digital infrastructure, environment protection and other projects that directly improve citizens' quality of life. In other words, each successfully implemented reform is a step towards a more efficient country and concrete benefits that citizens can feel in their daily lives – through faster services, better public

REFORMSKA AGENDA ZA BOLJI ŽIVOT SVIH NAS

Plan rasta Evropske unije za Zapadni Balkan pomaže Crnoj Gori da sprovodi reforme koje nisu samo dio evropskog puta, već donose konkretne promjene u svakodnevnom životu građana.

*Reforme danas,
bolji život sutra!*

REZULTATI KOJI DONOSE NOVE MOGUĆNOSTI

41 reformski korak obuhvata sve četiri oblasti reformi	34 koraka u potpunosti ispunjena (prema samoprocjeni institucija)	~97,3 miliona eura predviđena podrška EU za potpuno ostvarene korake	€ 117+ miliona eura ukupna vrijednost EU podrške za sve reformne korake
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Reforme nisu cilj same po sebi. Njihova vrijednost mjeri se trenutkom kada građani osjete da država radi **brže, transparentnije i efikasnije**, a evropski standardi postanu dio njihove svakodnevice.

KAKO REFORME UTIČU NA VAŠ ŽIVOT?

- DIGITALIZACIJA**
Manje čekanja na šalterima, više usluga online – brzo, lako i dostupno svima.
- POSLOVNO OKRUŽENJE**
Lakše otvaranje firmi, manje administrativnih prepreka i više prilika za nove poslove.
- OBRAZOVANJE**
Modernije škole i programi usklađeni s potrebama tržišta rada – bolje prilike za mlade.
- ENERGETIKA**
Veća energetska sigurnost, obnovljivi izvori energije i niži troškovi kroz efikasnost.
- VLADAVINA PRAVA**
Efikasnije institucije, borba protiv korupcije i veća pravna sigurnost za sve građane.
- EU PODRŠKA**
Više investicija u puteve, škole, bolnice, željeznicu, digitalnu infrastrukturu i zaštitu prirode.
- Zajedno gradimo modernu, digitalnu i održivu Crnu Goru – zemlju jednakih mogućnosti za sve generacije.

services, more secure institutions, new jobs and higher quality infrastructure. Reform agenda is therefore not only the obligation on the path towards membership in the European Union. It is a plan for modernization of Montenegro, the end goal of which is to ensure that citizens live in the state that functions in line with European standards and provides equal opportunities for development, work and higher-quality life.

The key coordinator of this process is the Ministry of European Affairs. Through the Reform and Growth Facility, it coordinates planning, monitoring and reporting about the implementation of reform obligations, connects institutions involved in their implementation and constitutes the main link with the European Commission. Key pillar of this system is the Secretariat for the Reform Agenda. By doing daily coordination of institutions and their work, preparing reports, organizing Coordination Body and Monitoring Committee meetings, as well as by continuously communicating with all participants in the process, it ensures that the reform steps are monitored in a systemic and transparent manner. It is precisely thanks to this model of coordination that the Fourth semi-annual report that was submitted to the European Commission on 15 July 2026. This confirms that Montenegro is making a continuous progress in meeting the obligations it undertook.

The report includes the total number of 41 reform steps in four reform areas and refers to all the periods

since the beginning of implementation of the Reform Agenda. Based on the self-assessment of the relevant institutions, 34 steps have been fully, while seven have been partially implemented. Particularly encouraging is the fact that for the first time the steps that are due at the end of 2026 and mid 2027 have been reported as finalized. This shows that the reform activities in certain areas are being implemented even before the plan. Thirteen ministries and several state bodies participated in their implementation, confirming thus that the success of the reforms depends on the joint work of the entire public administration. This makes the adopted report the most successful out of the four that have been adopted so far, with 83% of the reform steps due for reporting in this period being implemented.

The fully implemented reform steps are envisaged to receive European Union financial support of approximately 97.3 million euros, while the total value of the funds approved so far, if all the steps are approved through the Fourth Semi-Annual Report, would amount to 186.6 million euros. Final judgment regarding the compliance and the decision on payment will be made by the European Commission after the evaluation process. On the basis of the excellent results from this reporting period, but also from the previous ones, we expect the European Commission to decide to approve additional funds from the Growth Plan to Montenegro. It will be the best confirmation of credibility of planning and implementation of the key reforms expected by the end of 2027.

However, the most important result of this process is not to be measured only by the number of implemented reforms or the amount of the approved funds. Its real goal is to have the citizens feel concrete changes through faster and more accessible public services, more favourable business environment, more secure digital systems, higher quality education and stronger institutions functioning in line with European standards. One does not assess the success in building a house on the basis of the number

of bricks that have been laid, but on the basis of how secure and functional the house is to live in. Just like that, the success of the Reform Agenda is not measured only by the number of the implemented reform steps, but by the changes that citizens feel on a daily basis. That is precisely why the Growth Plan is much more than a financial instrument – it is an investment into European future of Montenegro and in the quality of life of each of its citizens.

EC ABOUT THE ACCESSION TREATY: THIS IS THE MOMENT WHERE MONTENEGRO'S POSITION IN THE EU STARTS ASSUMING ITS FINAL SHAPE

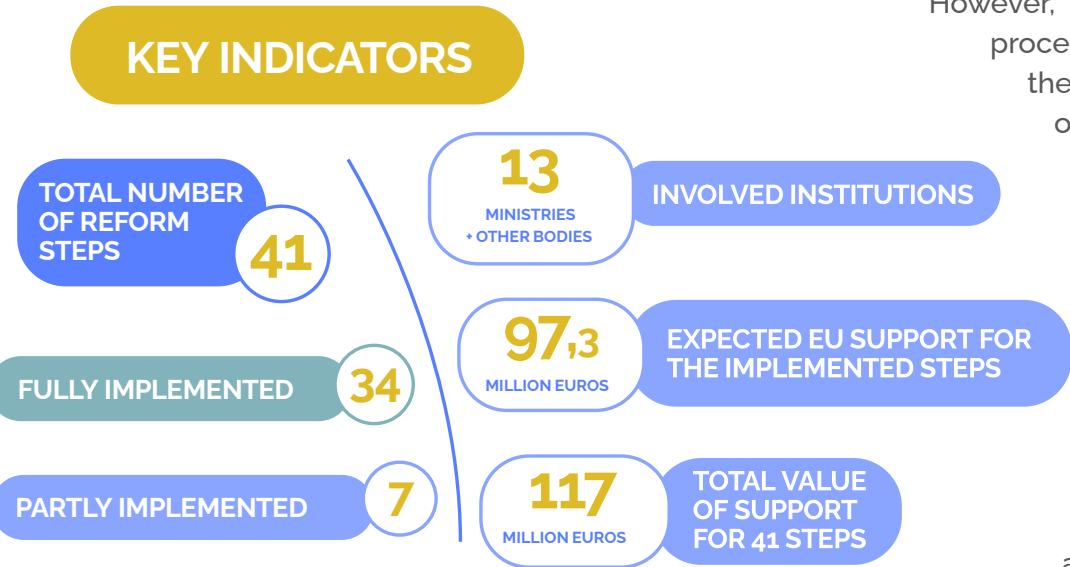
By Jovana Đurišić

Decision of Member States to start drafting the Treaty on Accession with Montenegro constitutes a great step on Montenegro's path to membership in the European Union. This is the moment at which Montenegro's place in the European Union starts assuming its final shape, says European Commission when speaking about the recent decision of the EU Member States to have the newly formed Work Group started drafting the Treaty on Accession for our country. Although there are still no clear indications of what the Treaty is to contain, or how it will differ from the others, the signals that Montenegro is getting from Brussels indicate that the work is going on according to the plan.

On 13 May this year, Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union held the inaugural meeting of the Ad Hoc Work Group for drafting the Treaty on Accession of Montenegro to the European Union. This was an important step in the final stage of the accession process.

As it was stated by the Cyprus Presidency at that time, it was an important turning point confirming that enlargement remains a credible and strategic priority of the European Union and that the process of European integration of the Western Balkan countries continues making progress.

The establishment of the Work Group was approved by the ambassadors of the European Union Member States on 22 April. The task of the Work Group is to draft the Treaty



Prime Minister of Montenegro Milojko Spajić and European Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos



Delegation of Montenegro in the Inter-Governmental Conference in Brussels

on Accession of Montenegro that will be finished after the finalization of the accession negotiations and alignment of all the required legal and technical provisions.

Such ad hoc work groups are not a part of the regular negotiation structure. They are formed in the final stages of the accession process to prepare the final text of the Accession Treaty. Similar work group was established also in the final stage of negotiations with Croatia in 2011, after all negotiation chapters were closed. Together with representatives of Croatia, it worked on the technical level to fine tune the draft of the Accession Treaty before it was signed in December that year.

European Commission has confirmed today that this is the moment in which Montenegro's place in the European Union starts assuming its final form.

„Decision of the Member States to start drafting the Accession Treaty with Montenegro constitutes a great step on Montenegro's path to the membership in the EU. It recognizes the progress Montenegro has made and encourages acceleration of reforms. Of course, we welcome this new stage of the accession negotiations with Montenegro. This is the moment at which Montenegro's place in the

European Union starts assuming its clear contours“, state the representatives of the European Union in Brussels for Eurokaz.

It is already certain that the treaty that will be prepared for Montenegro will differ in some segments from the accession treaties signed earlier by new member states. In Brussels they are already discussing whether the new enlargement wave should contain new safeguards that would ensure European Union a more efficient response if the state deviates from the undertaken commitments after the accession.

According to the recent „non-paper“ signed by five Member States of the European Union, the future treaties will contain a new template that will be signed in the end of the negotiation process by the candidate country, to secure that the future enlargements will strengthen the EU.

The document proposes additional strengthening of the existing safeguards and transitional measures that were applied in previous enlargement rounds, as well as introduction of new safeguards, particularly in the field of the rule of law. There are also proposals for temporary and transitional restrictions of the voting rights.

According to Reuters, the document was signed by Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

The document that the relevant media had an insight in underlines that „simple copying of previous accession treaties will not do“ for new enlargements and that EU should use this opportunity to introduce necessary improvements.

„That will be of key importance for preserving and increasing political and public support to enlargement, which is in its turn of essential importance, given the need for ratification of the accession treaties in all member states“, reads the document.

The proposal is that European Union upgrades the existing sectorial safeguards and transitional measures from the earlier enlargements.

„These safeguards (in the field of judiciary and the interior, internal market or economic situation) should again be included into the future accession treaties, but we have to assess if they are still sufficiently broad to respond to current challenges“, underlines the document.

According to this proposal, the new safeguards could be needed in the fields like economic security and resilience to foreign interference.

To our question of whether they have already considered which safeguards will be included into the treaty, the EC says that they are still considering how they could be regulated.

„As for the safeguards, we are considering how they could be regulated in all future accession treaties. The goal is simple: to ensure that the obligations undertaken during the negotiation process, particularly those that refer to „fundamentals“ are respected after the accession. This is about credibility, trust and proper functioning of the Union“, says European Commission.

The Minister of European Affairs, Maida Gorčević, recently also noted that the work group worked according to the time framework set in advance.

“Writing a treaty of a new generation requires time and discussion about all the issues. It will all go in parallel with the process of closing the chapters. After the inaugural session, the work group had a few more meetings. They have their clear discussion calendar, and everything is in order there. These are now still technical meetings, and they are dealing with the paperwork. Currently they have a scheduled session about chapter 13 that refers to fisheries,” says Gorčević for the Daily paper Dan.

In the meantime, on 14 July, Montenegro closed two more negotiation chapters.

Having closed the chapter 8 – Competition Policy and the chapter 29 – Customs Union, Montenegro's total score in the „European race“ is 18 chapters, out of the total 33 that have been opened.

Ambassadors of EU Member States gave a green light for closing of two additional chapters in the negotiations with Montenegro – chapter 8 (Competition Policy) and chapter 29 (Customs Union). After closing of these two chapters, Montenegro will have 18 out of 33 chapters in the negotiations with the EU closed. Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU says that the enlargement momentum is being built, which shows the importance that Ireland attaches to the enlargement during its presidency.

CHAPTERS 1 AND 2 BRING SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS FOR CITIZENS AND ECONOMY

By Milan Žugić, MINA Agency



In the Intergovernmental Conference in June Montenegro temporarily closed Chapter 2

Chapters 1 and 2 that refer to the freedom of movement of goods and workers, open the huge European market for Montenegro, where domestic products will be more competitive, while Montenegrin citizens will be able to exercise all labour rights without any possibility to be discriminated against based on their citizenship.

Head of the negotiation work group for Chapter 1 Dragan Vukčević explains that this chapter includes all goods – industrial and agricultural, while a simple interpretation



Dragan Vukčević, YouTube/printscreens

of the Freedom of movement of goods is access to the common market of the European Union (EU).

„In other words, whatever we produce here, if it meets the requirements defined in Chapter 1, can be put into the common market of the EU without additional customs or any other obstacles“, says Vukčević.

500 miliona ljudi odraziti na cijene i izbor proizvoda, rekao da Crna Gora još nije razvila sopstvenu proizvodnju, zbog čega je uvozničko tržište, te da naša ponuda prema Evropi nije dovoljna i da bi je trebalo povećati, a da će, što se tiče ponude za potrošače, uvoz proizvoda ostati isti, kao i cijene proizvoda.

He emphasizes that Montenegro, that has about 620 thousand citizens, is to be present in the market of 500 million people.

„Our general economic policy is that we must diversify our economy, join other members states and have one share of economic growth in industrial production. Therefore, this chapter is of key importance,“ says Vukčević, emphasizing that Chapter 1 does not give any gifts, but gives us an opportunity to apply structured development using domestic and foreign investment, to develop the industrial part of Montenegro that is currently clearly insufficient.

Head of the Negotiation Work Group for Chapter 2, Ivana Šućur, says that the freedom of movement of workers is one of the four fundamental freedoms within the EU and that it makes this chapter exceptionally important. In its essence, it represents the idea behind creation of the EU which was based on exercising the four freedoms.

Freedom of movement of workers is one of the fundamental principles of the EU which constitutes the key component of the four freedoms of the Union's internal market. It additionally emphasizes how important it is to have connections between labour market and strengthening of economic integration. This right includes the freedom of movement and residence during employment in another Member State; rights from all branches of social insurance, like pension and health insurance and insurance in case of unemployment and rights to family income.

Talking about the benefits of this chapter, Šućur underlined that the citizens of Montenegro would be able to exercise the same rights to employment and all the rights based on labour within every Member State, without possibility to be discriminated against based on their citizenship. She explained that, in practice, that meant exercising rights to pension and disability insurance, health insurance and coordination of social benefits.



Ivana Šućur, Instagram nalog Ministarstva rada, zapošljavanja i socijalnog dijaloga

She says that Montenegro met all the formal criteria defined in the 2017 Common Negotiation Position already in February, but that, due to complexity of this chapter, the negotiation position was considered for two months in the Council of the EU.

According to her, in addition to Montenegrin citizens living and working in Montenegro, exceptional benefits of this chapter and implementation of the policies will be strongly felt by Montenegrin citizen who already work and have residence in some other Member States.

Talking about the benefits for citizens, companies and the state coming from Chapter 1, Vukčević says that, at that moment, there are 15 products from Montenegro that have been exported already for many years to the common market of the EU and that comply with all the Directives and Regulations. Adoption, i.e. transposition of those Directive and Regulations into our law will make their work and access much easier.

„We are also creating motives for opening of new production capacities that will rely on the important requirements that have been aligned so far and have products acceptable in the common EU market. This brings us a level of competitiveness that the countries that are not members of the EU do not have,“ says Vukčević underlining that there is another important benefit – all the products offered in our market are safe.

Vukčević thinks that a system should be created and focus put on trainings and contacts with the real market, citizens and economy, because that is an imperative in this short period of time before accession.

As for the benefits to be achieved through Chapter 2, Šućur says that citizens will have access to all vacant positions within the EU and that they are preparing the Employment Office to assume the role of EURES. It will be the contact point for exchanging of data with other Member States. She adds that, at any moment, Montenegrin citizens will have an overview of all vacancies in the EU that are at their disposal.

Šućur emphasizes that at this moment we have a significant Montenegrin diaspora, but that the question is what percentage of our people who work in the EU exercise the rights based on labour that they will be able to exercise when Montenegro becomes a member.

„We amended our legislation which has a reciprocity effect. Every Montenegrin citizen who finds a job in another Member State will have the same treatment as the citizens

of those EU Member States. This means that there will be no discrimination based on citizenship“, says Šućur adding that mobility will be prominent and that there will be possibilities of promotion, exchange of experience and similar activities.

She emphasized that economy would feel benefits too, because foreign investment in Montenegro would increase since the environment would be in line with European standards.

„I think that Montenegro will be exceptionally competitive and that it will be precisely the European experts who will choose Montenegro to live in. However, Montenegro has to reach the level of European standards in terms of salaries and ensuring working conditions and protection of the rights of workers“, said Šućur and added that the state was making an environment where workers are protected, particularly through the recent reforms of labour legislation which resulted in higher transparency of salaries and improvements in the protection of workers' rights and balance between private and business life.

She also underlined the importance of European funds, inviting the citizens to use them to improve their business, capacities and skills of workers.

Talking about how joining the market of 500 million people will affect the prices and selection of products, Vukčević says that Montenegro has still not developed its own production, which makes it an import market, and that our offer to Europe is not good enough and should be increased. He adds that, when it comes to offer to the consumers, import of products will remain the same, as well as the prices.

WE PLAN TODAY, WE USE TOMORROW

By Irena Bošković, Ministry of European Affairs
Cohesion policy does not start with membership in the European Union – it starts with a serious preparation for responsible development management.

Preparation of Montenegro for European Union Cohesion Policy does not start on the day of accession to the European Union. On the contrary, it starts much earlier – through strategic planning, preparation of National and Regional Partnership Plan (NRPP) and building of institutions that European funds can turn into concrete development projects and measurable results for citizens.

European integration process is entering a new stage. In addition to alignment of legislation with the *acquis communautaire*, an increasing importance is attached to the ability of the state to plan its development, manage investment and use European funds in the manner in which it is done by the Member States.

It is precisely why the Chapter 22 – Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments is one of the most demanding, and at the same time one of the most important negotiation chapters. It is not only a set of rules that are to be transposed into the national legislation, but a test of institutional maturity and preparedness of the state to manage the generous funds intended for development.

Experience of IPA funds – the best preparation for the future

Multiannual management of IPA programmes ensured establishment of a functional system for programming, financial management, contracting, control and auditing of European funds.

The results have confirmed that administration is ready for the increasingly complex challenges. Within IPA II programme, 97.4% of available funds have been contracted, while more than 92% of the contracted funds have been paid. At the same time, management and control systems

have been developed, as well as the systems for protection of financial interests of the European Union and for audit, while more than 300 civil servants acquired precious experience in managing European funds.

European funds are not about availability of money, but about ability to manage it in a responsible and efficient manner.

Strategic Planning – Foundation of the Future Cohesion Policy

One of the most important steps in preparation for membership is the development of the Strategic Planning Document, which constitutes the basis for the future National and Regional Partnership Plan.

This document was not developed behind a closed door. It was being prepared through a broad partnership process that brought together public administration institutions, local self-governments, social and economic partners, academic community and other relevant stakeholders.

The scope of this process is best illustrated by figures:

- 6 work groups have been established
- 15 public policy areas have been analysed
- 92 institutions have been included
- 692 participations of representatives of various institutions and organizations have been recorded
- 105 development challenges have been identified.



The Government adopted the Strategic Planning Document (SPD) on 26 June 2026, and only a couple of days later, on 30 June, the document was submitted to the European Commission.

SPD is much more than a planning document. It constitutes a joint development vision that connects reform processes, investment and long-term development priorities of Montenegro with the goals of the European Union.

NRPP – New Logic of European Planning

After 2027, European Union will introduce a new model for programming of funds through National and Regional Partnership Plan, that will replace the operational programmes that existed before.

For Montenegro, this means much more than developing a new document. NRPP will become the key framework for using future Cohesion Policy funds.

New approach of the European Union ensures a stronger link between financing and reforms, as well as between the results and clearly defined success indicators. This is why the future plan must be based on the high-quality strategic planning, clearly identified development priorities and strong administrative capacities.

Particularly important is to align the future NRPP with the new instrument Global Europe, so that the reform priorities are connected with the accession process and socio-economic convergence with the European Union. Such an approach ensures continuity in programming and avoiding loss of precious time after membership

Preparations also have a very concrete financial dimension.

According to the assessment of the European Commission, the total budget effect of Montenegro's accession to the European Union in the period 2028-2034 might amount to about **3.189 billion euros**.

Out of this amount, roughly **1.991 billion** would be the funds that will be programmed through the National and Regional Partnership Plan.

This constitutes the biggest development opportunity in the modern history of Montenegro, but also a great responsibility. Success will not depend only on the amount of available funds, but also on the quality of projects,

efficiency of institutions and our ability to guide the investment in such a way as to ensure their strongest impact on development of economy and quality of life of citizens.

From Pre-Accession Assistance to Equal Partnership

The progress made within chapter 22 confirms that Montenegro is gradually building the system that will ensure it to transit from the stage of using pre-accession assistance to the stage of full-fledged participation in European development policies.

European Union cohesion policy is not only a financial instrument. It is a mechanism that Member States use to reduce regional differences, develop infrastructure, encourage innovation and create better living conditions for their citizens.

That is why preparation for Cohesion Policy is not an administrative obligation, but investment into the future of the state. It is the process of building institutions, developing strategic planning and creating the system that will turn European investment into sustainable development.

Membership in the European Union will not be measured only by the date of accession, but by the ability to turn European opportunities into visible results for every citizen of Montenegro.

“EQUAL IN THE PROCESS – EQUAL IN THE FUTURE”

By Project Team of the Union of the Blind

The Union of the Blind of Montenegro, with the financial support of the Ministry of European Affairs, implemented the project “Equal in the Process, Equal in the Future”, with a view to explaining the process of Montenegro's accession to the European Union to persons with disabilities, particularly persons with sight impairment, and to clarify their rights within the European inclusion and equality policies.

Through the network of eight local organizations and more than 1,000 members around Montenegro, the Union of



The Union of the Blind of Montenegro

the Blind has been working for almost eight decades on improving the position of persons with siht impairment. This project additionally strengthens the capacities of the Union and its local organizations for more active inclusion of persons with disabilities in the European integration process.

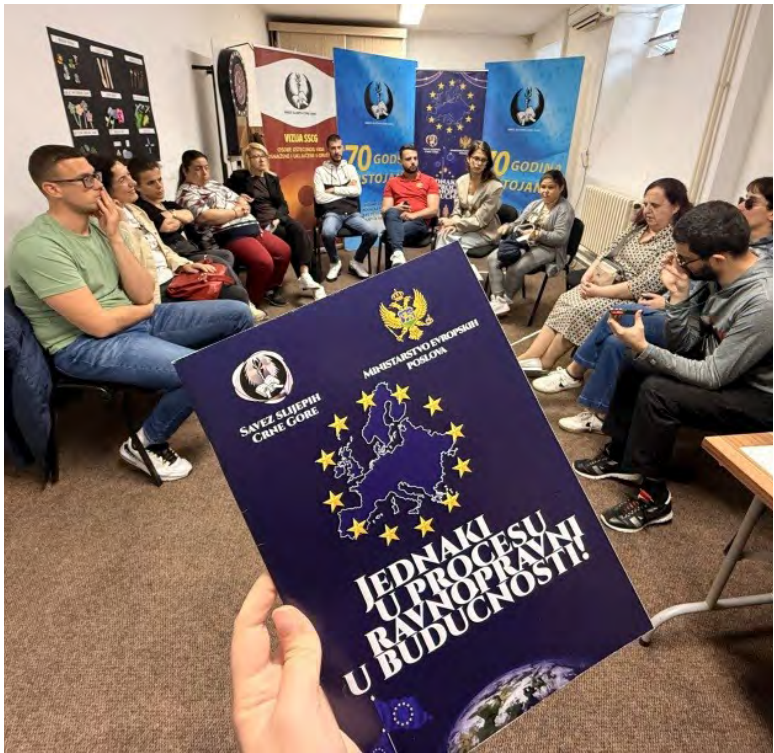
Although Montenegro is making a significant progress on its European path, persons with disabilities are still facing numerous obstacles when it comes to access to information and participation in the processes in the society. Information about European integration tend not to be available in accessible formats, which is why persons with sight impairment remain insufficiently informed about the rights and possibilities that the membership in the European Union can bring.

The Project has therefore put a particular focus on availability of information and active inclusion of persons with disabilities. During the implementation, five interactive forums were organized, giving an opportunity to the participants to learn about the process of accession to the EU, rights of persons with disabilities in the European Union and possibilities that European integration brings for higher quality and more equal life.

The project also produced a brochure with information in several accessible formats – enlarged print, Braille alphabet and audio format – so that the information are accessible to all persons with sight impairment. This publication contains the key information about European integration and rights of persons with disabilities. It is distributed to the forum and quiz participants and available in the official channels of the Union of the Blind of Montenegro. The publication can be

downloaded from the following link:
<https://ss-cg.org/?p=5494>

A special segment of the project referred to information and raising of awareness through media and promotion activities. A new column “EU and Disability Policy” in the Audio Review, the audio magazine followed by more than 400 persons with sight impairment in Montenegro, region and diaspora, presents European practices and experience in the field of the rights of persons with disabilities. The following is the link to the YouTube channel of the Audio Review <https://www.youtube.com/@radiofeniks-ssc5888/videos>.



The Union of the Blind of Montenegro

The Project also included production of a video and organization of an interactive quiz about European Union with prizes. The goal was to additionally inform and include persons with disabilities and broader public.

Link for the video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgukALmegHc>

The interactive quiz about European Union with prizes constituted one of the most interesting and most creative segments of the project, designed with the view to explaining the process of European integration to persons with disabilities and broader public in an attractive and interesting way. Through the questions about European Union, rights of persons with disabilities, European values and process of accession of Montenegro to the EU, the participants had an opportunity to extend their knowledge, but also to discuss actively the topics important for the society.

In addition to the educating role, the quiz also had a strong motivation role, because the most successful participants won valuable prizes, which additionally encouraged interest and engagement of the community. Six teams participated in the quiz, comprising 14 persons of various interests, level of education and age. The first prize was won by the team “KAPSIN”, the second by the team “International Department” (“Međunarodna katedra”), while the prize also went to the team “Masterovci I” (“Master class I”). The teams “School of Economics” (“Ekonomska škola”), “Master II” and “Smart money” also participated in the quiz.

In this way, the project promoted learning through interaction and showed that information about European integration can be accessible, inclusive and interesting. At the same time, the quiz contributed to raising awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities and strengthened their visibility and participation in the process of Montenegro's integration into Europe. All the activities were actively shared in social media, and the prizes to the best teams were awarded during the last forum with persons with disabilities. This additionally contributed to the creation of a positive atmosphere, higher interest of participants and promotion of inclusive participation of persons with disabilities in the process of European integration.

All project activities promoted European values of equality, non-discrimination and accessibility, with the message that persons with disabilities must be active participants in the

European integration process, and not only the observers of changes that impact their daily lives.

Thanks to the change of perception, raising awareness and knowledge, the project “Equal in the Process, Equal in the Future” contributed to the creation of a more inclusive society, better availability of information and higher participation of persons with disabilities in Montenegro's European integration process. This contribution will remain even after the implementation of the project finishes.

GOVERNMENT ADOPTED THE PROPOSAL OF THE ECOLOGICAL NETWORK THAT INCLUDES MORE THAN 44% OF THE STATE TERRITORY

NATURA 2000: EUROPEAN SHIELD FOR MONTENEGRO'S MOST VALUABLE NATURAL WEALTH

By Bojana Milićević, journalist, Radio of Montenegro



Proposal of the ecological network Natura 2000, adopted by the Government of Montenegro, constitutes one of the key obligations in the negotiations with the European Union within the chapter 27. If this proposal is confirmed by the European Commission, more than 44% of the state territory will become a part of the largest European nature protection network that protects biodiversity and at the same time ensures sustainable development of local communities.



Bear, Dalmatian pelican, sea meadows of Neptune grass and hundreds of other plant and animal species could soon get their places in the largest European nature protection network. Their habitats are in the proposal of the ecological network Natura 2000, recently adopted by the Government of Montenegro, which is one of the most important steps in the negotiations with the European Union within Chapter 27 – Environment and Climate Change. The final word about this proposal of the government will come from the European Commission.

The title, which to the citizens often sounds complicated and too administrative, hides the system which simultaneously protects Europe's most valuable nature areas and ensures their sustainable development. That is why experts say that Natura 2000 is not a network of restrictions, but a network of opportunities – to preserve biodiversity, develop local communities and use European funds.

Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development says that the proposal of the area of ecological network, i.e. the network Natura 2000, includes 58 Sites of Community Importance and 32 Special Protection Areas for birds on the land. As for the sea, the proposal includes seven Sites of Community Importance. This ministry explains that these areas include 50.9% of the land and 7.06% of the sea, i.e. 44.15% of the total territory of Montenegro. Some are already under national protection, like all national parks, Park of Nature "Piva" and Monument of Nature "Canyon of Cijevna", but there are those that have not been under national protection so far, like Nikšić Field, Čemovsko Field and Rumija.

"Establishment of ecological network, i.e. network Natura 2000, is Montenegro's key obligation in the process of accession to the EU, defined in the closing benchmark 5 within the Chapter 27 – Environment and Climate Change", says the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development.

They underline that the network Natura 2000 is to be established upon joining the European Union and that this step is of great importance for an adequate protection of habitats and species that are recognized as important on the European level. With this, Montenegro gets another system of additional preservation of natural values.

Delegation of the European Union in Podgorica also confirms that establishing the network Natura 2000 is one of the most important obligations within chapter 27 and the key indicator of Montenegro's preparedness to apply the EU acquis in the field of nature protection.

"It is not just a technical requirement; it is also a proof of the capacity of the state to protect biodiversity in line with European standards. Natura 2000 is the corner stone of the EU policy in the field of nature protection, and it has the key role in preserving the most valuable habitats and species in Europe. After the Government adopted the Information about the proposal of the environmental network Natura 2000 in Montenegro, the state reached the key turning point in the accession process and thus entered into the next stage of the procedure to establish the Natura 200 network," says the Delegation of the European Union in Montenegro.

The message of the non-governmental sector is that the adoption of the proposal for the area of ecological network Natura 2000 is not only an important step on the path towards the membership in the European Union, but a decision that defines how we want to develop Montenegro in the decades ahead. Centre for Protection and Research of Birds (CZIP) emphasizes that Natura 2000 is not a network of restrictions, but a framework that ensures that nature is protected, while tourism, agriculture and forestry are developed in a sustainable way.

"It is particularly important for inhabitants of rural areas, since it creates new opportunities for them to work on development based on preserved nature, sustainable practices and use of European funds. That is why Natura 2000 is a development opportunity for Montenegro – a model where nature is not an obstacle to development, but its most valuable resource. Therefore, the inhabitants of rural areas should be among the first to get clear, accurate and timely information about what Natura 2000 brings, which opportunities it creates and how it will be implemented," underlines CZIP.

The line ministry also emphasizes that Natura 2000 areas especially focuses on human aspect.

"Without certain human activities, like maintaining agricultural land or cattle breeding, the presence of species and representativeness of habitats can change. So, if an agricultural land is within the Natura 2000 area, that may mean that certain subsidies will be paid. Decision on whether a certain activity can be done in the Natura 2000 area will be a product of an acceptability assessment – the procedure which ultimately defines what is the impact on the protected habitat or species in a particular location. If the impact is negligible, the activity can be approved. So, these assessments are individual", explains the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Development of the North.

Executive Director of the NGO Green Home, Azra Vuković, thinks that the very fact that it has been proposed for the network Natura 2000 to cover 44% of the territory of the country shows that, from the aspect of biodiversity, Montenegro is exceptionally valuable. Although happy about the achieved results, Vuković warns that the manner of managing the protected habitats has to be defined in an adequate, clear and precise way.

"Some habitats are in the territory of local self-governments only, and in some local self-governments there are no managers of protected areas at all. So, there is a whole range of open issues that are to be defined and worked on in the period ahead", says Vuković.

The Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development says that they work on the preparation of the framework to manage Natura 2000 network.

"Work on this activity is made easier because we know the territorial coverage of the proposed Natura 2000 network, which is possible to be modified after the comments of the European Commission. This is a complex and very important process since the protection of these valuable areas depends on the establishment of the adequate framework, i.e. management system," says the Ministry.

European Union also expects continuous efforts on the strengthening of institutions to ensure efficient management and protection of these areas.

"Equally important is to maintain an inclusive dialogue with local communities, civil society, users of the land and other stakeholders, since a broad understanding and support of the public will be of key importance for a long-term success of the network", says the Delegation of the EU.

They emphasize that European Union has been a partner to Montenegro for many years providing support in preparations for Natura 2000 through IPA projects focused on mapping biodiversity, research, strengthening of institutions and alignment with the EU acquis in the field of environment.

"As the process now transits from the stage of identification to the stage of assessment of the proposed network and its future implementation, the EU remains committed to supporting Montenegro within Chapter 27. Continuation of cooperation will be focused on strengthening institutional capacities, development of efficient management systems and ensuring long-term protection of the Nature 2000 area. Future support will continue in line with Montenegro's accession priorities and available EU financing instruments," concludes the Delegation of the European Union in Podgorica.

28BY28: MONTENEGRO'S EUROPEAN HORIZON

By Draženka Laketić, Ministry of European Affairs

Montenegro is a country of sharp contrasts, best illustrated by the mountains that plummet towards the sea and their snow-covered tops that can be seen almost entire summer from the long sandy beaches. Completely different landscapes replace each other at small distances, while the paths through canyons and ravines suggest cruelty but lead to the places that are tame and mild.

These contrasts also reflect the character of people who live here, shaped by the landscapes they grew up in. That is how one can meet the composed people from Boka, but also the proud people from the North whose wrinkled faces look as if they are a part of the Durmitor slopes. Both dignified, open and always willing to help.

We cherish a modestly hedonistic way of life. We take our coffees as a part of a recognizable social ritual, almost at any opportunity, as if we particularly accepted the message

„Make haste slowly“. If anyone could translate the Latin *festina lente* into daily life, it is us. We often hurry just to find time for something slower.

Maybe throughout history we were not in the centre of Europe, but we always belonged to its cultural and identity area.

Printing of the first book in the territory of Montenegro only two years after America was discovered, political continuity that we have, early inclusion into European streams and our institutional development are not in proportion with the size of the country and they show that openness to broader social frameworks is not a recent idea, but a historical fact that permeates this country for centuries.

Our state, although a small country at the Adriatic coast, has always striven to European framework, putting efforts into confirming its authenticity and strength on a broader stage. We believe that our rich tradition can additionally enrich European Union and harmoniously fit into its mosaic of diversity.

That is why it is not strange that Montenegro has become the central topic of numerous conversations: as a frontrunner in the process of European integration and the country where



Brendirani avion Air Montenegro



Promocija brendinga 28by28

numerous political and social stakeholders work on the goal of becoming a new star on the European Union flag.

The fact that we are becoming the epicentre of European optimism is also confirmed by the events organized this year, special in many aspects – it is the year in which Montenegro chairs the Berlin process and in which we welcomed leaders from the entire Europe in the EU Western Balkans summit. As the host of the key events on the European and regional agenda, Montenegro found itself in the focus of attention that is given to numerous dynamic processes happening in the country.

Maybe it is precisely this blend of contrasts and openness that attracts attention – making Montenegro not only a country that one should learn about through conversation, but also as a place that should be experienced through its natural beauties, cultural peculiarities and the daily rhythm that can be felt the best among the young.

It is in that space between experience and value that Montenegro is getting closer to the European horizon, with a clear ambition to use the strong institutional transformation to take the place that in terms of values it already deserves for a long time – the place of the 28th Member State of the European Union by 2028.



Foto: Ženski rukometni klub Budućnost

SKADAR LAKE IN THE UNESCO NETWORK OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES: RESULTS OF SUCCESSFUL CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN MONTENEGRO AND ALBANIA

By **Nada Pejović**, *Ministry of European Affairs*

Skadar Lake Watershed, shared by Montenegro and Albania, has become a part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves within the Man and the Biosphere Programme. This is one of the most significant international recognitions for protection of nature and sustainable development in the region.

This success resulted from the project „Skadar Lake Watershed – a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve“ financed through IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Montenegro – Albania. The project was implemented in the period from February 2023 to July 2025 in the total value of 453,096 euros, out of which the European Union secured 385,131 euros of grants.

The project was implemented by EDEN Centre from Albania as the leading partner, in cooperation with the organization EnvPro from Montenegro, National Agency for Protected Areas from Albania, and Public Company National Parks of Montenegro. The key goal of the project was to create conditions for nominating together the Skadar Lake Watershed for UNESCO cross-border biosphere reserve, improving protection of biodiversity, ecological monitoring and institutional cooperation between THE two states.



Minister of European Affairs Maida Gorčević

The project prepared expert documentation that was necessary for nomination. Public opinion survey was conducted, as well as numerous consultations with institutions, experts, civil society organizations and local communities. Thematic work groups were established in both countries, and national and cross-border workshops were held. The plans of monitoring, education and public relations were developed.

Special contribution of the project is the strengthening of capacities to protect nature through purchase of equipment for monitoring and upgrade of the system for monitoring the condition of the ecosystem. Through an inclusive process that involved more than 200 representatives of institutions and stakeholders, three nomination files were prepared and submitted to UNESCO – two national ones and one joint cross-border file.

Designation of the Skadar Lake Watershed for a UNESCO biosphere reserve confirms the importance of European territorial cooperation and shows how European Union support contributes to achieving concrete results in the field of environment protection, sustainable development and strengthening of good neighbourly relations. At the same time, this recognition additionally affirms European values of cooperation, joint management of natural resources and inclusion of local communities in the development process.



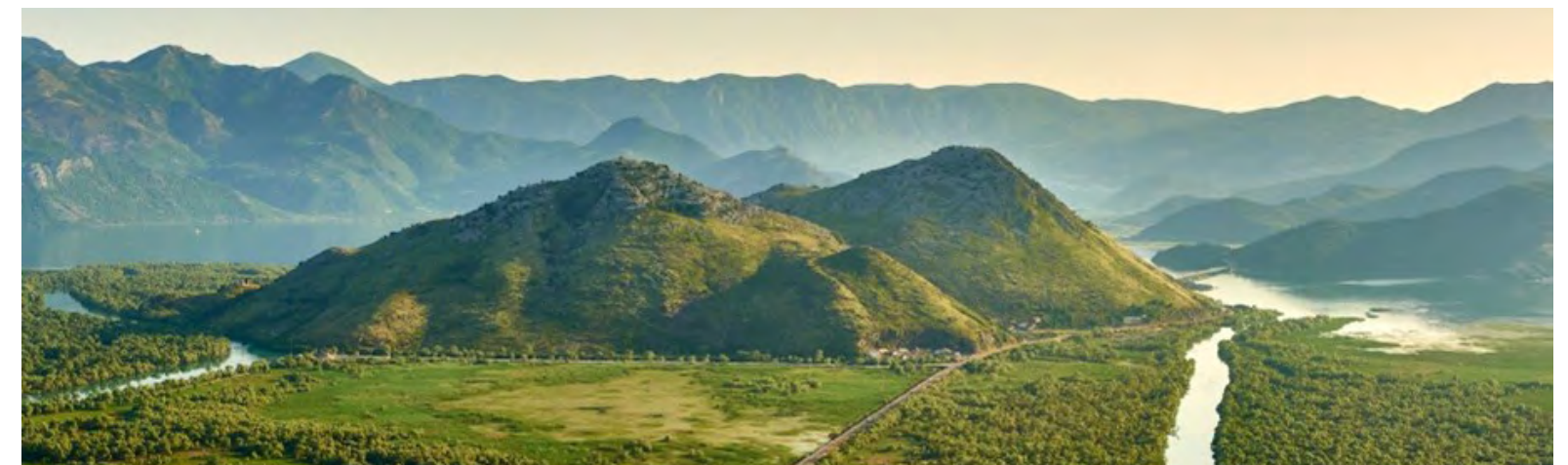
Skadar Lake Watershed, Duško Miljanić

Making the Skadar Lake Watershed a part of the UNESCO network is an important step towards international affirmation of one of the most valuable natural areas of South-Eastern Europe. At the same time, these results confirm the success of the IPA programmes for cross-border cooperation as an instrument of European territorial cooperation and contribute to achieving the goals of European integration through strengthening of good neighbourly relations, sustainable development and joint management of natural resources.

“The fact that the Skadar Lake Watershed has become a part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves is an exceptional international recognition for Montenegro and Albania, but also a strong confirmation that European cooperation changes our communities for the better. This success shows that, through

partnerships, responsible management of natural resources and a shared vision, we can make results that will have a permanent value. That is the legacy we will leave to the future generations and the confirmation that, by acting together, we can achieve the goals that are of particular importance for nature, our citizens and the entire region,” said the Minister of European Affairs Maida Gorčević.

Through its Direction for Bilateral Cross-Border Programmes, the Ministry of European Affairs will continue providing support to the initiatives that connect communities on both sides of the border and contribute to sustainable development, environment protection and strengthening of European values with cooperation in the region.



Skadar Lake Watershed, Duško Miljanić

MONTH OF EUROPE: SEVEN CITIES, ONE EUROPEAN STORY

By Ana Palibrk, EU4ME Project

For many years now, the Europe Day in Montenegro exceeds the framework of one date and one central celebration. For the entire month of May it is celebrated in all municipalities, through programmes that bring together local communities, schools, establishments of culture and various creators. Every community tells the story about Europe in its own way, but with the same idea – that union, dialogue and mutual understanding are built in the best way through culture, education and joint creation.

Within the celebration „Montenegro Celebrates the Europe Day“, Ministry of European Affairs, with the support of the Delegation of European Union in Montenegro through the EU4ME project, together with municipalities, schools and establishments of culture, organized programmes in seven cities. The concept was shared, but none of the celebrations looked like any other. Herceg Novi spoke the language of art, Andrijevica the one of children play and music, Cetinje used history and culture, Kotor used language of literature, Tuzi of dialogue, while Gusinje and Plav spoke the language of

belonging to the local community. The common thing was that the key role was given to the young, who gave European values their own voice and local expression.

In Herceg Novi, the story started with art. Pupils of the Secondary Mixed School „Ivan Goran Kovačić“ in the programme „I can do it alone, but I do not have to“ showed how music, drama and arts can speak about solidarity in a much more convincing manner than big words. The segment inspired by the musical Hair brought energy of freedom and union, while the exhibition „Hands“ used a quieter language to speak about friendship, support and intimacy among people. All together it was a reminder that art means the most when it becomes a space where people recognize each other.

From Herceg Novi the European story went to the North and continued in Andrijevica, where it got the joy of the children's view of the world. The programme „Europe in My Backyard“ showed that European values do not start in the institutions but in the community. Through music, recitations, acting and dance, primary school pupils talked about friendship, freedom and understanding without any need to provide explanation for these concepts. The song „I love you“ performed in several European languages was particularly symbolic – sending a simple message that showed that different languages can convey the same feelings, while the fragment from Mountain Wreath naturally connected European framework with the national cultural heritage.



Dan Evrope, Cetinje



Dan Evrope u Andrijevici

In Cetinje, the celebration got a slightly more ceremonial tone, which is not surprising for the city where European diplomacy had a special role through the history of Montenegro. The programme was prepared by the pupils of grammar school, secondary arts school and Music School „Savo Popović“ who connected music, recitation and stage performance into a story about freedom, equality and tolerance. Performing of the „Ode to Joy“, in which the young symbolically presented EU Member States and Montenegro's European path, constituted a natural climax of the evening – not as a formal goal, but as a joint performance of the generation that perceives the European space as their own.

While Cetinje spoke through history and symbolism, Kotor found European values in literature. Through the performance „Reading of the Little Prince – Now and Here“, the pupils of the grammar school showed to what extent a literary work written more than eight decades ago still speaks to modern generations. Their reading was not only a theatre interpretation, but a conversation about responsibility, friendship and empathy – the values that remain equally important regardless of the time or borders.

In Tuzi, the shared concept assumed a completely different form. The programme „Bridges, and not Walls“ focused on mutual understanding and wealth of diversity. Through art performances and conversations, the young showed that community is not created in spite of differences, but actually thanks to them. Instead

of great messages, they left the audience with a simple picture of people who talk, cooperate and build trust.

European story finished in Gusinje and Plav, under a symbolic title „From Gusinje and Plav to Brussels – our European Story“. It is precisely this title that summarized in the best way the entire concept of the celebration. Instead of perceiving the process of European integration as something distant, the programme showed that integration starts in the local community – through education, culture and opportunities that ensure that young people can remain connected with their homeland and be a part of a broader European community at the same time.

Taken together, these programmes did not constitute a number of separated celebrations, but one story told in different local languages. Behind every performance, show, exhibition or a song there was cooperation of the Ministry of European Affairs, EU4ME Projects, local self-governments, schools and cultural establishments, but above all of pupils and their teachers that together designed the way to translate European values into their own experience.

Maybe that is the greatest value of this year's Europe Month. It did not attempt to define what Europe is but showed how young people perceive and experience Europe through music, theatre, literature and arts. It is where European values stop being a topic and start being a part of daily life – which is the way it should be.



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Dodjela nagrada novinarima



Forum Pitaj ministra





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