

The Status of Montenegro's **EU INTEGRATION**

LEGAL, ECONOMIC AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORMS
DOMINATE THE COUNTRY'S ACCESSION PROCESS

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It has been more than two years since Montenegro opened accession negotiations with the European Union, thus entering a dynamic and challenging period. In its first year of negotiations, Montenegro established a negotiation structure that engaged more than 1,300 people from public administration and civil society in preparations for explanatory and bilateral screening meetings with the European Commission. These meetings were held between March 2012 and June 2013 and were aimed at establishing the state of play in each of the areas as well as identifying major institutional, legal and investment challenges for Montenegro.

Montenegro underwent comprehensive social reforms in the second year of negotiations. Changes to major strategy documents, laws, secondary legislation and action plans were adopted or are underway. Administrative capacity for fulfilling the commitments has been enhanced through strengthening existing structures, establishing new institutions and training of employees. These reforms aim for political and democratic stability, the creation of an environment primed for economic growth and improving living standards for citizens.

Our goal, defined in the 2014-2018 Programme of Accession to the EU, is to implement all necessary reforms and make all internal preparations for membership. This document contains an overview of the measures that we need to complete with clearly defined responsibilities, timelines and necessary financial resources.

We are proud to say that, after two years, we have initiated negotiations in 12 chapters, two of which, science and research, and education and culture, are provisionally closed. Apart from the key chapters, judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security, which represent the cornerstone of the rule of law, we also started negotiations on the following chapters: free movement of capital; public procurement; company law; intellectual property law;

information society and media; enterprise and industrial policy; foreign, security and defense policy; and financial control.

Although all chapters are equally important, we have focused on reforms in the rule of law area, which represent the cornerstone of every society's development. Apart from this, Montenegro is negotiating with the EU under a new approach that places the judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security chapters at the heart of the entire process. These discussions started early and are close to the final stage of negotiations. To fulfil the commitments of these chapters successfully, Montenegro adopted comprehensive and elaborate action plans to create frameworks for further work regarding the rule of law.

Furthermore, these two chapters concentrate on judicial reform, the basis of the rule of law and a precondition for exercising fundamental human rights, as well as for overall political and economic progress. We have prepared amendments to the key laws in these chapters that will contribute to the creation of an impartial judiciary, improved transparency in judicial elections, and strengthened professionalism through the gathering of statistics. We have also established judicial and prosecutorial councils and elected all judges in the constitutional court.

An important segment of the rule of law relates to the fight against corruption and organized crime. These are areas to which Montenegro has devoted much attention. The country has improved its legislative and administrative framework, introduced best practices and measured the results. Anticorruption laws have been drafted, and the country plans to establish the Agency for Anticorruption and Special Prosecution Office for the Fight against Organized Crime, Corruption, Terrorism and War Crimes to implement the EU *acquis* efficiently. Additionally, Montenegro actively participates in and contributes to international police actions against organized crime.



Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic, left, meets German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Balkan conference in Berlin in August 2014. Montenegro is among the countries seeking admission to the EU.

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The country has placed special focus on activities and measures arising from visa-free regime commitments. Considering that external border control is of utmost concern to the internal safety of the EU, we are dedicated to implementing all legislation in the areas of border control, migration, visa and asylum, and police and judicial cooperation.

Aside from political reforms, we are working on fulfilling the economic criteria for membership. A new approach, which places structural reforms and economic governance at the core of the economic criteria, is compatible with the goals of the 2020 Strategy. Government activities are aimed at creating a stable macroeconomy and financial development, a competitive market economy, and strong industrial, agricultural and energy sectors. Their aim is to create conditions for higher employment, but also to develop a more flexible labor force.

When it comes to security and defense policy, Montenegro has enhanced its foreign policy, actively contributes to the international community and regularly participates,

through the use of soldiers and civilians, in international peacekeeping missions. Moreover, through participation in mechanisms for regional security cooperation, such as the U.S.-Adriatic Charter, Montenegro continues to initiate and implement projects with other members of the A5, which represents a significant and positive experience of joint involvement in peacekeeping missions.

Montenegro is satisfied with the fulfilment of the obligations of our Euro-Atlantic agenda. The fourth Annual National Programme has recently been completed, and preparation for the fifth ANP is already underway. Our main focus is to continue reforms in defense, security and intelligence; strengthen the rule of law; and increase public support for NATO membership. We are committed to continuing intelligence and security sector reforms to meet the standards of NATO and to strengthen trust. Reforms in the defense sector have been focused on strengthening the budget and modernizing equipment. In June 2014, then NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh

Rasmussen announced that the Alliance will open an intensified and focused dialogue with Montenegro that, by the end of 2015, would result in assessing whether to invite Montenegro to join NATO.

Montenegro actively participates in the International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan and recently sent the 10th (X) contingent of the Army of Montenegro, which will, as part of a multinational unit with Croatia and Germany, secure the Marmal base in Mazar-e Sharif. Montenegro is committed to contributing to Afghanistan after 2014. We have expressed our willingness to participate in the mission Resolute Support.

It is important to note that in the field of European integration, particularly through the negotiation process in the areas of foreign security and defense policy that opened in June 2014, and through fulfilment of our obligations and constant strengthening of our presence and contributions to the EU's Common, Security and Defence Policy, Montenegro continues to prove that it is a reliable partner of the EU, and that its role and contribution to global security is internationally recognized.

Montenegro will continue to participate in activities in the field of European security and defense policy, initiate projects and cooperate with neighboring countries, confirming its active role in the region and commitment to regional and global security. By identifying forces that are readily available to the EU for military and civil crisis management operations, Montenegro has confirmed its strategic commitment to international peace and security.

Accession negotiations are challenging but remain the best preparation for EU membership. More importantly, negotiations are an opportunity to build a better and more developed society. The development and improvements that we undergo today are investments in a better future and a better quality of life for Montenegro's citizens. We are aware of this fact and accept this opportunity. □