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EU ACCESSION – CONSTANT OPPORTUNITY FOR NEW IPA PROJECTS

Author: Bojan Vujović, Acting Director General for EU Funds



Photo: Bojan Vujović

Even during the rather complex geopolitical circumstances that we have witnessed in the last few years, with constant economic challenges, membership in the European Union and the gradual adoption of European values and standards is a future whose alternative is hard to imagine. The process of accession to the European Union, as a systemic undertaking and a sort of big project of the entire Montenegrin society, is still supported by the majority of Montenegrin citizens, after 10 years since the formal start of the negotiation process.

Although the negotiation process within each of the negotiation chapters brings specific challenges and requires dedicated work of the administration on the preparation, adoption and implementation of regulations by which we gradually adopt the EU acquis, it is only one of steps that need to be taken before EU membership. Despite numerous debates about the specific benefits of the accession process on one side and what a part of society sees as a real or opportunity cost of this process on the other, role of EU funds is very important, as an element that contributes to the majority of society's support to membership in the European Union.

The year which is now ending is also the year in which Montenegro formally began using EU funds within the third consecutive seven-year programming period of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Support (IPA III) 2021-2027. By dedicated work of the part of administration, which is sometimes simply called IPA structure, as well as the engagement of the non-governmental sector, scientific community, local governments, agricultural producers and the private sector, since 2007 we have been gradually contributing that each new program year brings new opportunities for financing specific projects with EU financial support.

Despite the numerous challenges that are to some extent common to all IPA beneficiary countries, which relate to the complexity and specificity of the procedures, as well as the need for constant training of new and qualified staff for the preparation and implementation of EU funded projects, after 15 years of using IPA support we can say that there is a solid base of expert personnel who work on these complex jobs every day. Due to their engagement and continued good cooperation with the relevant EU institutions EU accession process can be also seen as a constant opportunity for new IPA projects.

During 2022, in the shadow of events on the global and local political scene, the preparation of new and implementation of already approved projects funded by the EU in Montenegro continued. From an economic point of view, instability on the global market with the constant growth of inflation, the energy crisis and the increasingly difficulties to find sources of funding for new investments have additionally confirmed the importance of funds granted by the EU to Montenegro and the region. Important EU initiatives that were promoted in the previous period, such as the Connectivity Agenda and Green Agenda, are currently gaining importance in light of specific project initiatives, with EU confirming its position as a leading donor. Thus, during this year, we witnessed the beginning or completion of the implementation of numerous IPA projects that were approved during previous years. We had a lot of new projects - from the most obvious examples of benefits for the entire society, such as the start of work on the construction of a new building for the clinics for infectious and skin diseases, work on the reconstruction of a part of the railway line, signed contracts for the construction of a special hospital

and additional facilities for the needs of the Administration for enforcement of criminal sanctions, reconstruction of courts, a new network of microbiological laboratories, approved additional funds for border management, to an additional 30 million euros that were recently approved to mitigate the negative effects of the energy crisis and 40 million euros for new infrastructure projects approved in the context of the Economic and Investment Plan for West Balkans.

New investments were continued in the area of agriculture and rural development through the IPARD program, but also by the implementation of many projects of cross-border and transnational cooperation within nine programs in which Montenegro participates. With the support of the European Union, it is now possible to build a new infrastructure for wastewater treatment in Kolašin, Mojkovac and Rožaje, but also to create better conditions for our elementary and high school education by building or reconstructing schools.

Each new project that we implement using financial support of the EU is an additional incentive to the economic development of Montenegro. In addition to the direct effects of increased investments, the long-term effects of projects in terms of more efficient public administration, improvement of the rule of law, simplified procedures and the creation of a more favorable business environment certainly contribute to more intensive economic growth. This is precisely why it is important that all relevant structures of society adequately participate and contribute to making the best possible use of the accession process as a constant opportunity for new IPA projects. Whether we create new ideas or devote ourselves additionally to preparing the highest quality project proposals, and later on the documentation necessary for their implementation.

I believe that we can all make an equally important contribution - from the highest political level, on whose constant support the work of the IPA structure depends, to every creative individual in the structure or ambitious beneficiary of the project at the local level. The Ministry of European Affairs will certainly continue with a proactive approach in coordinating the available EU funds in Montenegro, with an effort to bring the EU closer to each of us through new projects in the best possible way.

AMBASSADOR OF THE NEXT EU PRESIDING COUNTRY SWEDEN, ANNIKA BEN DAVID FOR EUROKAZ

POLITICAL PARTIES IN MONTENEGRO SHOULD FIND A WAY FOR OVERCOMING POLITICAL DIFFERENCES

Author: Marko Vešović, Journalist of RTCG Portal



I need to point out that recent developments in Montenegro have made the talks and EU integration process more complex, as it seems that the focus have been largely put on domestic issues, Annika Ben David said

Ambassador of Sweden (country that will hold EU Presidency in the first half of 2023) to Montenegro H.E. Annika Ben David said, in her interview for Eurokaz, that political parties in Montenegro should find a way for overcoming political differences and focus on the joint priority goal – EU membership, followed by taking concrete steps to achieve that goal. She said that Sweden is generally focused on the Russian war against Ukraine, with the view to ensuring security to EU citizens, strengthening the EU role globally, fighting organised crime, accelerating climate transition and preserving EU fundamentals.

The expansion of the EU to the countries of the Western Balkans will probably be high on the agenda of your country's presidency of the Union. In this context, how do you see the position of Montenegro?

Well, first of all I would like to highlight that in our view – we, as a country, have traditionally been very much pro-enlargement. And we see the whole Western Balkans and Montenegro as natural future members of the European union. However, I would need to point out that the recent developments in Montenegro have made it increasingly difficult to discuss and plan the EU integration process, since so much focus in the country seems to be on domestic issues. From the perspective of our EU presidency, it's quite difficult to predict what can happen in Montenegro during "our" 6 months. I'll be frank and say that we didn't quite expect this development earlier this year, and the situation seems to be getting increasingly complicated. We'll just have to wait and see how it all plays out before any meaningful steps can be taken.

Also, at this point I need to highlight the fact that we since recently have a new government in Sweden. We expect to receive the EU presidency priorities later this month. The general direction though is a strong focus on Russia's war against Ukraine, providing security for EU citizens and strengthening the EU's role in the world, stopping organised crime, speeding up the climate transition and safeguarding the EU's fundamental values.

How do you assess Montenegro's progress on its European path and what must we focus on during the Swedish presidency?

I think it is fair to say that Montenegro has had a great head start in the process compared to its neighbours, but that it has slowed down considerably in the last years. In essence, the political parties in Montenegro need to find a way to overcome political divisions and focus on the common overriding goal – and then take concrete steps to get there.

Right now, the country finds itself in a stalemate. The EU has expressed our deep concern over the new Law of the President. All legislative acts should be in line with the constitution. All political stakeholders should refrain from any action that could further deepen the institutional crisis and undermine the Montenegro's democratic institutions.

What is urgently needed now, is the election of judges for the constitutional court, increased focus on reforms, and building a genuine political dialogue in parliament.

The political crisis that we are witnessing is to a large degree self-inflicted and we hope that Montenegro manages to get out of it sooner rather than later. We, the member states and the EU will be there to help of course, but it is up to the Montenegrin politicians to lead the country out of the crisis in a responsible manner. The accession of Montenegro to the European Union is the strategic choice of an overwhelming majority of Montenegrin citizens and the publicly stated goal of a vast majority of Montenegrin political stakeholders. Montenegro has been a frontrunner among the EU candidate countries. Continued progress on EU accession requires all political actors to support the functionality of the country's democratic institutions and strengthen the rule of law.

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

As a consequence of the brutal and unprovoked Russian full-scale war on Ukraine I believe we are witnessing a watershed moment in the world. The course of this war is perhaps the factor that will shape our priorities, actions and our common goals more than anything other crisis in recent history.

The level of solidarity and unity within Europe as a whole is unprecedented, with rare exceptions. Montenegro has aligned itself with the EU on CFSP positions and introduced sanctions towards Russia. This is much appreciated, but also normal, having in mind what is happening.

I would say that the war has created an increased sense of urgency of bringing the Western Balkans into the EU, confirmed in Tirana – but at the same time it seems like developments within the different countries of the region is going in an unwanted direction. More than anything else it will take dedication by the Western Balkans countries to make a case for themselves that they are ready to join the EU.

Do you expect that the EU will continue to strongly support reforms in the area of the rule of law in Montenegro?

I absolutely do.

Your assessment of bilateral relations between Sweden and Montenegro?

We have excellent bilateral relations, and I believe that they will be even better in the future. Montenegro is an increasingly popular destination for Swedish tourists and we already have a well-integrated Montenegrin diaspora in Sweden. There is a gradually increasing amount of bilateral visits and I believe our trade numbers are showing positive signs as well. Montenegro was swift to welcome and endorse our bid for membership in Nato. Hopefully, soon we will both be member of Nato, and I am eagerly waiting for the day that Montenegro becomes an EU member.



ADINA VĂLEAN, EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR TRANSPORT, SPEAKS FOR EUROKAZ:

MONTENEGRO HAS PLAYED A SUCCESSFUL ROLE IN IMPROVING REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Author: Jovana Đurišić, journalist of Pobjeda

PODGORICA – As the country currently chairing the Transport Community bodies until mid-2023, Montenegro has been playing an active and successful role in improving regional connectivity. This was pointed out by Adina Vălean, European Commissioner for Transport, in her interview for EUROKAZ.



Foto: Aldina Vălean

Vălean emphasises that Montenegro is obliged to implement relevant EU acquis in the transport area, but so far it has scored a low implementation rate. Therefore, she expects that our country will be focused in the future on harmonisation and implementation of pertaining obligations.

Montenegro currently chairs the transport community of Southeast Europe. This is an important initiative for our country, bearing in mind that we strive for better transport connections. To what extent is Brussels ready to help Montenegro in connectivity with the rest of Europe?

The primary goal of the Transport Community is to support the Western Balkan Partners in the transposition and implementation of the EU transport Acquis, as listed in Annex I of the Transport Community Treaty. In parallel, the Transport Community also plays an active role in the extension of the indicative TEN-T network to the region. In its role as current Chair of the Transport Community official bodies until mid-2023, Montenegro has played an active and successful role driving forward improved connectivity in the region. The European Commission has worked closely together with Montenegro to address challenges in the transport sector and support the country and the region on its path to EU accession.

The Commission is already very much involved in enhancing Montenegro's transport connectivity. Firstly, our Economic and Investment Plan in the Western Balkans is listing several key transport projects that will increase links within the country and its neighbours. For instance, the Commission is working with Montenegro on a plan to speed up the realisation of the rail links that will connect Belgrade to the port of Bar, enhancing trade for this strategic Adriatic port. Montenegro as part of the extended Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) of the EU is eligible for EU financial support. Within this framework, the TEN-T addresses the implementation and the development of a Europe-wide network of railway lines, roads, inland waterways, maritime shipping routes, ports, airports, and railroad terminals. Furthermore, the recent Blue Lanes initiative linking Albania, Montenegro and Italy, will create conditions for seamless transport in the wider Adriatic area. All these instruments, linking policy and financial assistance are greatly contributing to integrate Montenegro further within the European connectivity network.

One section of the highway was recently built, and another section is on the way. Is EC interested in helping in the construction of this project and under what conditions?

The Commission supports Montenegro in having a comprehensive transport strategy, which looks at developing road and rail in a way that is both financially and environmentally sustainable. The Commission supports Montenegro in that work through a number of projects and programmes, through bilateral technical and multi-country assistance, including through the Western Balkans Investment Framework Long term planning - with the focus on developing mature and strategic investments - is key and in particular, the development of the Bar- Boljare highway as part of the EU's Trans-European Transport Network is closely monitored by the Commission. Our interest, and surely Montenegro's, is also to ensure that this investment can be developed taking into account the cost-benefits of different solutions, the respect of environmental requirements, as well as other EU standards regarding sound financial management and the impact on the budget.

At a recent meeting in Brussels, you mentioned the Montenegro-Serbia highway. Do you expect that this project could be realized in the near future?

As mentioned above, the ongoing work on the Bar-Boljare highway as part of the EU's Trans-European Transport Network is carefully assessed. It is now incumbent on everyone that this should be developed in a financially and environmentally sustainable way, and it is necessary now to agree carefully on the next steps. Moreover, any cost benefit analysis will also be updated dealing with the context of the rising costs and the current changes in the economic climate. It should be restated that this road investment, while being critical, is a complex investment for the future of Montenegro and the region for the longer term. Further development on multimodality is also encouraged and necessary. Further efforts to develop the parallel railway connections, in order to have a comprehensive logistics corridor, is essential.

What are the biggest challenges in the Balkans when it comes to the transport community? What defects must be corrected?

The Transport Community Treaty establishes a list of EU transport legal obligations that should be implemented by all its signatories, including Montenegro.

Accordingly, the country also has the obligation to implement related EU acquis in the area of transport. However, we have seen a low implementation rate so far. We are expecting that the alignment to and implementation of these obligations will be addressed in the future.

Acquis implementation can indeed be a challenging process, as the EU acquis is a moving target, with constant changes and adaptations that necessitate continuous work and effort on the side of EU candidates and potential candidates. However, aligning to the EU legal framework provides the essential prerequisite for transport integration within the region and with the EU.

In the framework of the Transport Community, Montenegro and the other Western Balkan Partners receive a considerable level of support in meeting the challenges related to acquis implementation. To this end,



Foto Sa sastana Transportne zajednice kojom predsjedava Crna Gora

the Secretariat of the Transport Community provides technical assistance, ensures an overview of progress via regular Reports on Acquis Implementation and the follow-up of commitments of the Regional Partners on the Action Plans in the different transport modes.

Beyond the Transport Community framework, the European Commission also supports Montenegro bilaterally in its path to EU accession. The EU's relations with the Western Balkan countries take place within a special framework known as the stabilisation and association process. It has 3 aims: stabilising the countries politically and encouraging their swift transition to a market economy, promoting regional cooperation, and eventual membership of the EU. The process is based on an even-closer partnership and helps the countries concerned build their capacity to adopt and implement

EU laws, as well as European and international standards. This support was recently reiterated in the Commission communication on EU Enlargement policy and the accompanying Montenegro report 2022, which called on Montenegro to focus efforts in the coming year to:

- achieve full membership in the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on port state control;
- adopt a new railway law and ensure the functional, decision-making and operational independence and appropriate staffing of the railway regulatory body and the railway safety authority; and
- start implementing intelligent transport systems (ITS) on its core road network and lay down the strategic ITS framework for the rail and maritime networks.

BY BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE EMN, MONTENEGRO IS GETTING CLOSER TO EUROPEAN BODIES

MONTENEGRO IS AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EU MIGRATION POLICY

Author: Bojana Milićević: RTCG journalist

By obtaining observer status in the European Network for Migration, Montenegro is gradually getting closer to European bodies, which is against the background of the gradual acceleration of accession negotiations and early integration measures, assessed the Head of the Working Group for Chapter 24, Miloš Radonjić. Montenegro thus

became an active participant in the implementation of the EU's migration policy, emphasized the Ministry of Interior. The importance of cooperation with the European Migration Network confirms the increased influx of migrants during this year.



Foto: Miloš Radonjić

In the first 10 months of this year, a total of 6,937 migrants were registered on the territory of Montenegro, while in the same period 586 persons were prosecuted for illegal crossing of the border, according to data from the Ministry of Interior. The Montenegrin Office of the International Organization for Migration told Eurokaz that this is an increased influx of migrants compared to the previous two years.

"The total number of new arrivals in 2021 was 3,336, and 2,856 in 2020, and a significant increase is being recorded in the current year," the International Organization for Migration announced. They also stated that most of them came from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. "They stay on average from two to five days, and that depends a lot on the weather. It happens that they continue their journey immediately after the registration process or stay for one

day, and sometimes longer than five", the International Organization for Migration points out, noting that there are a total of 164 places in the Departments for the Reception of Foreigners Seeking International Protection - Spuž and Božaj.

These data, the growing pressure on the Western Balkan migratory route and the significant increase in the number of illegal migrants caused by the current geopolitical situation and Russia's aggression against Ukraine, emphasize the importance of Montenegro's observer status in the European Migration Network (EMN). In September of this year, an administrative arrangement was signed on the establishment of cooperation between the European Commission and the Ministry of Internal Affairs within the EMN, which gave Montenegro the status of an observer state in that network.

"In this way, Montenegro got the opportunity to get acquainted with the best practice in the field of asylum and migration, as well as to use the expertise of the network in the development of its own migration management systems. "Montenegro has become an equal partner to the member states within the EMN, as well as an active participant in the implementation of the EU's migration policy," said Acting Director General of the Directorate for European Affairs, International Cooperation and Support Programs in the MoI Sergej Mučalica.

The Head of the Working Group for the preparation and conducting of negotiations on Montenegro's accession to the European Union for Chapter 24 - Justice, Freedom and Security, Miloš Radonjić, said that migration management is one of the most important issues within that negotiation chapter, as evidenced by the fact that eight out of a total of 38 temporary benchmarks in this chapter dedicated specifically to migration and asylum.

"In light of that fact, the signing of the Administrative Arrangement on the establishment of cooperation between the European Commission and the Ministry of Interior within the framework of the EMN is extremely important, both because of the strengthening of the overall impression of Montenegro's commitment to European values and accession negotiations, and because of the openness to cooperation on migration management plan,



Foto: Sergej Mučalica

which ultimately confirms us as a constructive partner on the European level," said Radonjić. He underlined that EMN, as an important platform and a useful mechanism for reviewing relevant data, research studies and reports, and exchanging good practices, will serve our country to strengthen resilience, create a sustainable migration policy, as well as improve overall capacities in the field of migration management.

"Additionally, with the awareness that numerous security challenges require joint action, in which closer cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans is necessary, Montenegro is gradually moving closer to European bodies through its membership in the EMN, which is against the background of the gradual acceleration of the process of accession negotiations and early measures integration foreseen by the new enlargement strategy", said Radonjić.

The EU has been a key partner of Montenegro in migration management for more than a decade. The Ministry of Interior emphasizes that the EU has provided an immeasurable contribution to strengthening the administrative and technical capacities of Montenegro in that area, as well as improving the infrastructure at certain border crossings. The Head of the Directorate for European Affairs in the MUP, Sergej Mučalica, said that through the IPA 2015, sectoral budget support worth around 20 million was implemented, through which border infrastructure was improved and border security was strengthened. Mučalica announced that starting next year, with the support of the EU, two important projects for this area will be implemented.



Foto: ZGP izmedju CG i R. Albanije Zatrijebacka cijevna Grabon

"Through IPA 2022, sectoral budget support for integrated border management, worth 15 million euros, will be implemented. Furthermore, there is also a regional project to support migration management in the Western Balkans, through which investments in the amount of 15 million are also foreseen. It is planned that these projects will contribute to the strengthening of technical, personnel and infrastructural capacities for border surveillance," Mučalica explained.

With the financial support of the EU and the then Ministry of Public Administration, Digital Society and Media, the NGO "Pravni centar/Law Center" realized, in partnership with the organization "Caritas", the project "My lawyer - free and professional legal assistance in effective access to rights for migrants", in period from 15 January 2020 to 15 July 2021. From the Law Center, they announced that within the project, 677 persons received free legal support, 34 persons received financial support in paying administrative fees, while 38 foreigners were represented in the process of approving international protection before administrative bodies and courts. In that NGO, they also said that, among other things, 146 field visits were carried out, and 350 packages of humanitarian aid were distributed to vulnerable target groups in 13 Montenegrin municipalities.

Benefits of cooperation with Frontex

Cooperation with Frontex also brought numerous benefits to Montenegro in migration management. The Ministry of Interior points out that on 18 November this year, the Council of the EU adopted the Decision approving the opening of negotiations on a new status agreement between the European Union and Montenegro, Albania, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina on operational activities carried out by Frontex in these countries, which represents an additional step towards strengthening our country's cooperation with this agency.

Acting Director General of the Directorate for European Affairs, International Cooperation and Support Programs in the Ministry of Interior, Sergej Mučalica, specified that at the request of Montenegro, an evaluation of the border security system of Montenegro was carried out by Frontex this year. "The evaluation is focused on the system of

electronic surveillance of the state border, border checks, normative framework, material and human resources, infrastructure, standard operating procedures and the system of officials training. The evaluation resulted in recommendations that will form the basis of further reform and improvement of the work of the border police," said Mučalica.

Brussels recognized the results in the management of the refugee crisis

In the annual report, the European Commission recognized Montenegro's efforts in the field of refugee crisis management, stating that Montenegro received the proportionally largest number of refugees of all Western Balkan countries, notes the Ministry of the Interior. This, they say, recognized the results and confirmed Montenegro's readiness for migration management. The Ministry of Interior reminds that in March of this year, after the war in Ukraine began, the Government made a decision to grant temporary protection to persons from Ukraine and, in order to supervise the implementation of that decision, formed a Coordination Body, which consists of representatives of competent state administration bodies. Shortly after the establishment of the Coordination Body, the Government set aside 2,000,000 euros for the implementation of the Decision on the Approval of Temporary Protection for Persons from Ukraine, so the Ministry of Interior conducted a tender in August for the provision of hotel accommodation on a full board basis and thus provided accommodation for Ukrainian citizens in hotels in Nikšić and Sutomore. "From the beginning of the application of the Decision on temporary protection until 28 November 2022, Ukrainian citizens submitted 7,276 requests for temporary protection, of which 4,841 were women and 2,435 were men. A total of 6,533 requests for temporary protection were approved," said the Acting Director General of the Directorate for European Affairs, International Cooperation and Support Programs in the Mol, Sergej Mučalica.

REGIONAL CYBER CAPACITY CENTRE TO BE BASED IN PODGORICA

KNOWLEDGE TO BE TRANSFERRED BY EUROPEAN EXPERTS

Author: Miloš Rudović: ND Vijesti journalist

Due to increasing exposure to threats and attacks, the countries of the region will have the opportunity to strengthen their security by learning from domestic and European experts at the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre (WB3C) in Podgorica.

Despite the fact that all the countries of the region expressed their interest in being a host country, Montenegro proved to be the most suitable candidate for placing the WB3C seat. The idea of a regional training centre draws on the French experience of setting up similar centres in Africa.

"The fact that, of all the countries in the region, Montenegro has been in the process of accession to the European Union for the longest time, which is 100 percent aligned with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and which, except the seat of the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), does not have a seat of any major regional or international organisation, helped us in reaching such a decision", Slovenian ambassador Gregor Presker explained to "Eurokaz".



*Presker, Abazović and Thimonier after signing the letter of intent on the occasion of the setting up of WB3C
Photo: Government of Montenegro*

A letter of intent concerning the setting up of the Centre was signed in mid-November by Prime Minister Dritan Abazović and Ambassadors of Slovenia and France, Gregor Presker and Christian Thimonier respectively.

The Government's information on the setting up of the Regional Centre states, inter alia, that the Centre will have a legal status of an international organisation, with a view to gradually opening it up to other countries in the region that want to join it. In the long term, the financing will be based on annual contributions of the member countries, considering the fact that the WB3C is conceived as a centre that will grow into a self-sustaining and successful project.

The WB3C is expected to become operational in the first half of 2023 with specific programmes to be implemented, starting with the spreading of cyber culture and raising awareness and strengthening of operational capabilities of practitioners, as well as with promotion of regional and international cooperation in the field of cyber security, cybercrime and cyber diplomacy.

"WB3C will primarily focus on the training of regional experts and will work in accordance with the principle of training, as well as on the basis of the so-called the 'Train-the-Trainer' model of education, all with the aim of transferring relevant skills and knowledge", Presker said. He explained that this included not only civil servants but also experts from the private sector who work in the field of information and communication technology, critical infrastructure, etc.

The ambassador pointed out that one of the goals of WB3C would be to establish academic cooperation between universities in the region in the form of studies in the field of cyber security.



*Photo: Dušan Polović
Vlada Crne Gore*

By deciding the Science and Technology Park (STP) to be the place where the Regional Centre is to be located, the University of Montenegro has also gained a strategic partner in the development of a set of new multidisciplinary study programmes in the field of cybersecurity and cybercrime, information and communication technology, digital information security, software and hardware protection, as well as in terms of modern Internet space management policies, Andrea Mihailović, coordinator of the project team for the development of the application for the WB3C location, told "Eurokaz".

NTP has been founded in partnership between the Government (57 percent) and the University of Montenegro (43 percent) with a focus on creating a technological development centre of Montenegro, which, with its various programmes and activities, will provide appropriate support in terms of improvement of the innovation-entrepreneurial ecosystem in Montenegro, thus contributing to a faster economic development of our country.

"Bearing in mind the fact that digital transformation and strengthening of national capacities for combating cybercrime through education and research is one of the most important strategic interests of Montenegro, the University of Montenegro will, in the coming period, develop a series of new lifelong learning programmes in accordance with the Development Strategy (2019-2024). Accordingly, by means of the signed memoranda of cooperation with the NGO Cortex and the Human Resources Administration, the University of Montenegro strives to adequately respond to all the demands of digital transformation and the needs of the ICT industry as a national development priority," Mihailović explained.

She also pointed out that educational programmes would be implemented with French, Slovenian, European and regional experts, with the support of two universities from France, including Nice Cote d'Azur and its Balkan Institute for Science and Innovation.

The focus will, among other things, be on the development of a group of trainers, on raising general awareness with an emphasis on decision-makers, on solving and overcoming the lack of skills for cyber security in public administration, on improving regional cooperation and networking in the area of information exchange in cases of cybercrime and the development of general cyber culture in accordance with the latest EU standards.



Photo: Andrea Mihailović (University of Montenegro)

The Government's information on the setting up of WB3C states that intense cyber-attacks on its IT infrastructure and the information and communication network of the authorities, which occurred in the previous months, have revealed vulnerabilities in the segment of information security and the fact that very little attention was paid to the development of capacities for quality cyber defence in the previous period.

Dušan Polović, director of the Directorate for Infrastructure, Information Security, Digitalization and e-Services in the Ministry of Public Administration, said that the setting up of WB3C had been of great importance since "we have recognised the lack of human resources in the area of cyber security, as well as in the area of fight against cybercrime in our country". Polović pointed out that Montenegro had a deficit of personnel who could provide training in this area.

"As for the Ministry of Public Administration, as a state administration body responsible for information security-related affairs, it is extremely important to strengthen the capacities of its staff in the directorates for infrastructure and information security, to strengthen the future G-Soc team in the ministry, as well as the staff of the future Agency for Cyber Security, which will be formed in accordance with the best practices and the competencies defined under the new Law on Information Security, which we are actively working on," Polović said.

He expects that education of personnel will increase cyber resilience, not only in government institutions, but also, and equally, in the critical infrastructure sectors. "In

order to make Montenegro a destination for investments, it is extremely important to raise the level of cyber security to the highest one", Polović pointed out.

The first planned activity of the Regional Centre is to organise an expert conference, which would be held at the end of April 2023.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS A STRONG PARTNER IN THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Author: Aldina Žuđelović, programme assistant at the Centre for Civic Education (CGO)

A strong civil sector is one of the key actors in the process of democratisation of Montenegrin society. The large-scale reform processes that a country goes through on the path of integration into the European Union require a stimulating environment for action and full involvement of civil society in public policy-making.

The goal of the CSO project in Montenegro - from basic services to M'BASE policy-making is to contribute to building the capacity of civil society organizations to credibly participate in the democratic development of the country, promotion and application of European standards.

In addition to financial support to project ideas, a capacity building program and continuous mentoring support are provided. The organization that receives the project goes through a training program for managing project funded by EU. This includes training in administrative management and financial management in accordance with national legislation and PRAG. In order to better communicate their projects to target groups and stakeholders, organizations have the opportunity to get acquainted with the rules of visibility of EU support, as well as to acquire basic skills in writing press releases, publishing and managing the presentation of projects through social networks. A special segment of the training is dedicated to getting acquainted with the methods of monitoring the work of public institutions in the creation and implementation of public policies. The project envisages financial support in several

categories to include organizations of different levels of development, primarily smaller organizations operating outside the Capital City or concentrating their activities in less developed regions of the country.

In the three calls for support to civil society organizations announced so far, 271 project proposals have been submitted, of which 63 have been supported in the total amount of over 1 900 000 EUR. By the end of 2023 and the completion of the project, two more calls will be announced.

Supported projects address a wide variety of topics such as initiatives that contribute to the improvement of the rule of law, fight against corruption, promotion of human rights and gender equality, empowerment of youth activism, environmental protection and promotion of sustainable development. One of the successful initiatives is the EU Corner in Bijelo Polje established as an informative and educational centre for citizens where through various events, such as projection of the achievements of European cinema, panels, seminars, conferences, exhibitions - citizens are informed about various aspects of the integration process, European values and culture. With M'BASE support, numerous services are provided for citizens in all regions of the country, SOS lines for women and children victims of violence, legal support for LGBTIQ people, legal aid for migrants, consumer counsellors, etc. Within the supported projects, numerous activities were organized for young people in youth centres throughout Montenegro, peer education in schools, and strengthened the capacities of teaching staff and other professionals in schools and non-governmental sector who work with young people. In addition, initiatives and recommendations for improving youth policies are formulated and advocated. Platforms for communication of citizens with local self-government have been launched, including an



application for reporting cases of corruption in health care, informal groups of citizens have been organised in order to monitor and participate in the work of local institutions. The promotion of human rights and gender equality takes place within the framework of information campaigns aimed at the development of human rights culture, the production of publications, documentaries, exhibitions and other cultural and artistic events.

Discussion forums and round tables, which take place within the project, represent a space for direct dialogue between civil society and the Government, and exchange of ideas in order to improve cooperation and build a more favourable framework for a more effective impact of the non-governmental sector on the work of institutions and public policy. In addition to the direct dialogue of key actors, research, public opinion polls and analyses are also conducted, the findings of which serve to create recommendations for decision-makers in the field of civil sector development policies.

One of the activities is the annual conference dedicated to the negotiation process that brings together representatives of institutions, civil society, representatives of international organizations and the donor community in order to identify common solutions, possibilities of cooperation in order to accelerate and achieve better effects of the European integration process through discussion on challenges.

The CSO program in Montenegro - from basic services to M'BASE policy-making is implemented by the Centre for Civic Education (CCE) in partnership with the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), NGO Centre for Protection and Study of Birds of Montenegro (CZIP) and NGO Politikon network, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of European Affairs of the Government of Montenegro. The project is funded by the European Union and co-financed by the Ministry of Public Administration.

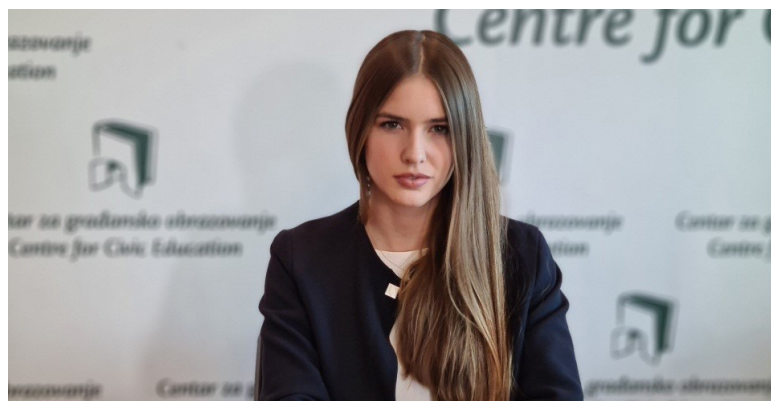


Photo: Aldina Žudelović

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE: COUNTERING MALIGNANT DISEASES WITH EU SUPPORT

By Stefan Bulatović, Visibility Officer at the Ministry of European Affairs

Prevention is the core principle that underpins modern medicine. Whether it is a routine check-up, adoption of a healthy lifestyle or simply education, preventing disease is much more effective than treating it. Preventive healthcare is particularly important when it comes to non-communicable diseases such as cancer, which is why systematic investment in methods like early detection plays a key role in protecting public health.

The importance of prevention is recognized by institutions and organizations from Montenegro, who strive to improve the quality of preventive healthcare throughout the country with the help of cross-border cooperation projects. These projects are funded by the European Union, which sees the improvement and protection of public health as a top priority.

Blažo Orlandić General Hospital in Bar has carried out a number of successful cross-border cooperation projects with the aim of improving the prevention and detection of malignant diseases, while collaborating closely with partner institutions across the border. One such project is MELAdetect, which was funded through the Interreg IPA CBC Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro 2014-2020



Photo: Meladetect

programme and implemented by this hospital in partnership with the Institute of Public Health Zadar, University of Zadar, ZADRA NOVA Agency in Croatia and Faculty of Medicine at the University of Mostar and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The inspiration for the MELAdetect project came from the fact that Mediterranean countries are more exposed to intense sunlight compared to the rest of the continent. As a result, there is an increased need to raise awareness in this region about tumours, especially about the melanoma of the skin, mucous membranes and eyes.

Melanoma is the most dangerous form of cancer, leaving little hope of survival if detected at a later stage. That is why early detection of this malignant disease increases the chance of successful treatment.

Thanks to this project, Bar General Hospital received a valuable donation in the form of medical equipment for melanoma detection worth around €60,000. Among other things, the hospital acquired a digital dermatoscope for whole body mapping, UVB lamp and an indirect ophthalmoscope.

"Patients from all over Montenegro visit our hospital for dermatoscopic check-ups after having learned from the media that this kind of examination that involves the mapping of the whole body can only be performed in our hospital. Furthermore, tourists visiting our country also come for check-ups. The same goes for ophthalmological examinations," says Ninela Plamenac, project manager at Bar General Hospital, speaking to Eurokaz.

According to her, the equipment is used to diagnose any suspicious changes on the patient's skin or eye. Such data is then recorded, stored in the computer system, and compared and monitored as appropriate.

"Within the project we also organized workshops for healthcare and non-healthcare workers, who were trained to recognize and promptly refer patients for examination of changes on the skin. We also managed to raise awareness of the importance of preventive skin check-ups so that people could dedicate due attention to any change and start treatment on time," explains Plamenac.

She points out with pride that Bar General Hospital, together with its partners, significantly exceeded the initial targets. During the course of the project in Montenegro, the hospital carried out 399 check-ups, or almost three times the planned number. They also held five cycles of educational workshops for health workers from all over Montenegro, with a total of 142 participants attending. Impressive results were also achieved in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which led this project to be showcased to the European Commission as a success story.

Building on the results of this successful cooperation, Bar General Hospital joined forces again with partners from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to implement the ON TIME project, which focused on the prevention and early diagnosis of colon and breast cancer. This project was also funded within the Interreg IPA CBC Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro 2014-2020 programme, with partners including Zadar General Hospital, Institute of Public Health Zadar, Institute of Public Health of Montenegro and the Institute of Public Health of West Herzegovina.

Despite the fact that the project kicked-off during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the General Hospital managed to successfully implement it thanks to a great amount of dedication and good cooperation with its partners. The project helped purchase the newest model of an endoscope, which features accessories for colonoscopy and polypectomy.

According to Plamenac, the newly purchased instrument also has an add-on device for performing gastroscopy, which serves for the prevention and early detection of oesophageal, stomach and small intestine cancers.

“Within 18 months of using the endoscope, a total of 335 invasive procedures were performed in our endoscopy unit. During the project, we organized training sessions for our health workers on how to use this probe, so the entire surgical team of the hospital is now trained to successfully perform invasive endoscopic procedures,” she says.

The acquisition of this valuable medical device allowed Bar General Hospital to become part of the National Colon Cancer Screening Programme.

In parallel with ON TIME, Bar General Hospital also implemented the LAB-OP project, again in cross-border partnership with institutions from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This project allowed the hospital to install



Photo: Fors MNE

a pneumatic cassette transport system, which is used to transport blood and urine samples within the hospital area. This system, which operates on the principle of air mail, enables faster and more efficient delivery of biological samples for analysis.

“Bar General Hospital significantly improved the quality of healthcare thanks to these projects. In addition, we have ensured better working conditions and modern equipment for our employees, so the institution has an extra incentive to develop new projects,” Plamenac adds.

She also highlights the very successful cooperation with partners from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“All the partners gave their best, while encouraging and inspiring each other along the way. We all strived for the same goal and that's to improve healthcare services in the cross-border area and enable state-of-the-art diagnostic procedures that are practised in developed European countries,” Plamenac concludes.

Prevention is also at the heart of healthcare in the north of Montenegro, where cross-border cooperation projects aimed at improving public health are also gaining currency. The Foundation for the Development of Northern Montenegro (FORS Montenegro) has been using EU grants successful for years with a view to improving the quality of life in the northern municipalities.

As part of the IPA CBC Montenegro - Kosovo 2014-2020 programme, this non-governmental organization carried out the CARES project with the aim of making a valuable contribution to better reproductive health in the cross-border area.



Photo: On time

In addition to raising the quality of healthcare services, the CARES project sought to raise awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles in order to prevent and detect breast and cervical cancer at an early stage.

As FORS Montenegro's Tamara Todorović told Eurokaz, the project activities consisted of training for medical staff, procurement of equipment and exchange of experiences and good practice models through cross-border cooperation.

"In addition to improving the quality of services, an important segment of the project involved the education of citizens in the subjects of healthy lifestyles and regular preventive check-ups to maintain good health and combat breast and cervical cancer. In addition, we also organized preventive examinations for women so that they could adopt this as a regular habit", says Todorović.

The project covers the municipalities of Andrijevica, Berane, Bijelo Polje, Gusinje, Petnjica, Plav, Kolašin, Mojkovac and Rožaje in Montenegro, as well as the municipalities of Peć/Peja, Istok/Istog, Klina/Klinë, Dečani/Deçan and Đakovica/Gjakova in Kosovo. The cross-border partner is ECMI Kosovo.

Thanks to the project, €87,000 worth equipment consisting of ultrasound machines, probes, colposcopes and medical instruments was delivered to health centres in the north of Montenegro.

Building on the results of this project, the organization is

currently implementing the CARES 2 project within the same cross-border cooperation programme with Kosovo. CARES 2 builds on the previous project and also envisages the purchase of valuable equipment.

"What sets these projects apart from other actions is that awareness raising and facilitation of preventive check-ups help detect changes and health conditions early, when the disease has not yet taken hold, which enables more successful treatment, while saving human lives in certain situations. Also, the equipment significantly contributes to the improvement of diagnostic procedures and treatment of patients, making the work of medical staff easier. This gives us great satisfaction, as well as the desire to continue developing such projects," adds Todorović.

Speaking about the importance of cross-border cooperation, Todorović points out that all of us in the region face the same or very similar challenges in areas such as healthcare, environmental protection or agriculture. In this respect, cross-border projects are a way to contribute to solving such challenges using joint efforts.

"Joint work enables the exchange of experiences, knowledge and lessons learned, but also the pooling of resources, skills and expertise in order to achieve the best possible results and improve efficiency. Enhanced cooperation between institutions and between people is the cornerstone of future joint activities and different types of support," emphasizes Todorović.

FORS Montenegro invites Eurokaz readers to find the time for preventive examinations and thus protect their health, and perhaps save their own lives. It also encourages readers to influence all women in their environment to do the same.

"Find the time. Prevent. Live." is their message.

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Photo: Fors MNE

IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROTECTION AND RESCUE SYSTEMS THROUGH CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROJECTS

Author: Tamara Todorović, NGO FORS Montenegro



A very important field of operation of FORS Montenegro is the area of protection and rescue, primarily due to the increase in the number, frequency and intensity of natural and other disasters, as well as their consequences, and thus the challenges faced by representatives of relevant authorities and institutions in their daily work. The implementation of projects in this area, which are based on the needs of the main users and the population as a whole, which are sustainable and aligned with strategic and planning documents, can significantly contribute to disaster prevention and strengthening of the protection and rescue system. Through the projects that we develop and implement, we contribute to the acquisition of necessary equipment, the organization of trainings, field exercises, the improvement of international cooperation, informing the population about the risks that threaten us and similar activities. These projects are the result

of common aspirations to contribute to more effective protection against disasters that cause significant material damage and threaten the safety and health of people and the environment.

For us at FORS, this opportunity to contribute to the strengthening of the protection and rescue system through projects means a lot, because we are aware of the seriousness and difficulty of this work, as well as the dangers it entails. We hope that through the implementation of projects, we manage to help these brave and dedicated people, at least to some extent, in situations where they risk their lives during firefighting operations, rescue in cases of floods, and similar search and rescue activities, as well as remediation of the consequences of disasters. As most of our projects in this area are cross-border, through them we also contribute to strengthening regional and international cooperation in this field, which is of particular importance for protection and rescue, since "disasters know no borders", as the name of two of our initiatives reads. These projects are financed by the European Union within the IPA cross-border cooperation programs, and co-financing for the Montenegrin side was provided by the Ministry of Public Administration. The main target groups of the projects in Montenegro are protection and rescue services at the municipalities, the Directorate for Protection and Rescue of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Institute for Hydrometeorology and Seismology.

The projects include strengthening the capacity of institutions and services dealing with protection and rescue to reduce the risk of disasters, with an emphasis on fire and flood protection, as well as raising the level of the





population's awareness of risks, appropriate preventive measures, and the activities that should be undertaken in the event of a certain disaster, with special attention to children and youth. Strengthening cross-border and international cooperation is an indispensable segment that enables the exchange of experiences, knowledge, expertise and models of good practice, but also connecting people from different sides of the border and strengthening solidarity. The joint implementation of the projects and participation in cross-border activities lead to the establishment of connections between people and institutions and easier and more successful cooperation with colleagues from neighboring countries, as well as the provision of various types of support.

As part of these cross-border projects, FORS Montenegro provided or planned through the ongoing projects, the equipment with an approximate value of about 680,000 euro without VAT for Montenegrin institutions and protection and rescue services. Through the projects, significant funds were also allocated for trainings, field exercises, information campaigns and numerous other activities that were identified as necessary in the project planning phase.

Currently, FORS is implementing two projects in the field of protection and rescue, which include such activities,

Disasters do not know borders, which we implement as part of the Cross-Border Cooperation Program Montenegro - Albania 2014-2020, and Joint Response, which is implemented as part of the Cross-Border Cooperation Program Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro 2014-2020. We hope that these two projects will fulfill their goals and contribute to the improvement of the situation in this field in the target municipalities, through activities of capacity building, education and strengthening of cooperation between Montenegrin protection and rescue services and services from neighboring countries.

Through the implementation of all these projects, we as an organization and the individuals who are the part of it, have learned a lot about the protection and rescue system itself, as well as the responsibilities of all of us as individuals in that system. All of us must help the competent services as much as it is our ability and obligation, and we cannot do that if we are not adequately informed and educated about the risks and dangers threatening, as well as about the appropriate measures and activities that we should undertake in case of certain disasters.

FORTITUDE: BORDERS ARE NOT A BARRIER, BUT AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCCESSFUL COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

By Ana Živanović, Head of the Project Management Office of the Municipality of Bar

Fortified structures are a unique testimony of history, culture and heritage. They give us an opportunity to delve into the past and learn about traditions, lifestyles and developments throughout the centuries.

Southeastern Europe boasts a large number of fortifications from different periods of history, starting from the Roman Empire, through the Middle Ages, to the Austro-Hungarian

rule. These fortified buildings once served as defence strongholds against enemies, but today they represent cultural landmarks that attract tourists, researchers and artists.

They also represent bridges between nations, which is confirmed by the implementation of the Fortitude project, which was funded within the Interreg IPA cross-border cooperation programme Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro between March 2020 and August 2022. In Montenegro, the project was carried out by the Municipality of Bar, which teamed up with partners from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – the Fortress of Culture Šibenik, the City of Karlovac and the City of Banja Luka.

The Fortitude project covered four fortified structures in the region – St. Michael's Fortress in Šibenik, Dubovac Castle in Karlovac, Kastel Fortress in Banja Luka and the fortress in the Old Town of Bar. It was implemented with a view to strengthening cultural and tourism offerings in the cross-border area and developing capacities for better and more sustainable management of cultural assets. The total value of the project was €1.6 million, with the Municipality of Bar having €430,000 at its disposal.

As part of the project, three buildings were renovated in Bar. In particular, the Customs House, formerly a museum, has been transformed into the Visitor Centre, which now features an augmented reality system for 6 buildings – an app that allows you to see what the buildings looked like before demolition.

In addition, the Summer Stage has been equipped with a new auditorium area with 240 seats and a mini-stage, as well as lighting and sound production equipment. Also, the building and the area next to the stage were refurbished and adapted for performers. In addition to the purchase of furniture, equipment and interior decoration work, the refurbishment also involved the reconstruction of the old Venetian gate behind the stage and the replacement of complete woodwork on both floors of the building.

The 22 most important buildings in the Old Town have been marked with new attractive information boards with basic interpretation points and QR codes.

The project also funded a bronze tactile model of the Old Town made by Zlatko Glamočak, a new map of the Old Town printed in 10,000 copies, a digital kiosk, live stream equipment, as well as numerous training sessions, workshops and study tours for employees. Additionally, the entire region got a new flagship event – Night of Fortresses. In the

coming years, the Municipality of Bar plans to organize the event at the European level, after signing a memorandum of understanding with European organizations: Efforts and Forte Cultura.

NIGHT OF FORTRESSES

During the project, the regional Night of Fortresses event was held at the same time in 44 locations in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro on 29-30 April 2022. In Montenegro, the event was organized in the Old Town of Bar, Besac Fort in Virpazar, Venezia Palace in Ulcinj, Depedogen Fortress in Podgorica and the Danilovgrad Cultural Centre.

The event in the Old Town of Bar was visited by 2,500 people, with over 100 participants taking part in the programme and more than 50 people being involved in the organization and technical support of the show.



Foto: Noć tvrđava

On day one, creative workshops and a traditional products fair were held in Bar, followed by an entertainment programme: the Games of Knights, Children, Nations and Youth. Day two included the presentation of the new augmented reality system in the Old Town of Bar, a story telling reading workshop, the launch of an archaeological exhibition at Archbishop's Palace and a concert by a guitar duo.

The Besac Fort hosted a wine tasting evening entitled Vranac, whereas the Venezia Palace held an exhibition by Rudi Gog and Mersiha Resulbegović Mavrić featuring expert guidance. In addition, a jazz concert by Mimika Orchestra was organized at the Depedogen Fortress, while an art exhibition about the Spuž Fortress was installed at the Danilovgrad Cultural Centre.



Foto: Noć tvrđava

"Our vision is to put one building in the Old Town of Bar into operation each year in order to bring a new life into the walls of the ancient city. Within the Fortitude project, we managed to complete the renovation of the Customs House, the Summer Stage and buildings 180 and 185 next to the Summer Stage. We also completed one of the phases of the illumination of the buildings in the Old Town, which has now acquired new splendour and value. For this reason, one of the priorities of the future development of our municipality is investment in cultural and historical heritage. We will continue with investments in our greatest piece of cultural heritage – the Old Town of Bar – in order to finally secure a UNESCO World Heritage Site status for it, which is what this pearl of the Montenegrin coast truly deserves," says Dušan Raičević, the mayor of Bar.



The project team that worked on the implementation of the project for more than two years met in person for the first time only at the Final Conference held in June this year in Banja Luka. At that point, we became aware of at least two facts: we achieved much more with this project than any of us expected and we made cross-border friendships that should not be broken. For this reason, we will continue our successful partnership in the new financial perspective, so we have already agreed to apply for the new Fortitude 2 project.

On 13 December, the Fortitude project was showcased at the launch of the new Interreg HR-BA-ME 2021-2027 programme in Zagreb as one of the most successful projects from the IPA II period (2014-2020). Finally, I always like to point out that the Fortitude project brought light to the Old Town of Bar – both figuratively and literally, as its results are visible at every turn.





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1

Mina Vrbica

O.Š. "Štampar Makarije", Podgorica



2

Luka Dubanek

O.Š. "Milan Vuković", Herceg Novi



3

Dimitrije Boljević

O.Š. "Sutjeska", Podgorica



Photo: European Day, Ulcinj



Photo: European Cooperation Day, Nikšić



Photo: European Cooperation Day, Berane



Photo: The winners of the quiz "How much do you know about the EU" visited the Government



