



No 13

# EUROKAZ

MAGAZINE ON EUROPEAN  
INTEGRATION OF MONTENEGRO

## **EUROKAZ**

Magazine on European Integration of Montenegro

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# COMPLETING THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS BY THE END OF THIS GOVERNMENT'S TERM OF OFFICE

*By: Maida Gorčević, ministarka evropskih poslova*

Eleven years after the process of negotiations on Montenegro's accession to the family of European democracies started, the relations and circumstances both within Europe and on the global level have changed. Within a bit more than a decade of negotiations, Montenegro also went through dynamic internal processes and changes in society and politics, but with one constant – strong majority of Montenegrin citizens keep supporting the aspiration of the country to become a member of the community of European democracies. In order to ensure progress of a political community that was until recently dominantly defined by identity divisions, consequences of the unfinished process of democratic and economic transition and frequently also by differing views of foreign policy priorities, it is important to detect common interests in the society. For more than four fifths of citizens, that unifying goal is the accession to the European Union. This fact means that decision-makers on all levels of authorities and political institutions have the duty to show full commitment to the obligations in our EU agenda.

Voting for the 44th Government, Montenegro started a new stage in the EU integration process, in the foreign policy circumstances that have never been more favourable for closing the accession negotiations within the forthcoming four-year term of office of the Government. For less than a month, this Government has shown the ability to bring together a qualified majority for the key issues in our society, which was frequently a mission impossible for the previous governments. It is worth recalling that this Government has the support of the largest number of

MPs since restoration of Montenegro's statehood. At the same time, it has a responsible attitude towards the topics that polarize Montenegrin society, like the census, where the law treating it was voted for by almost four fifth of MPs after an inclusive dialogue of the Government and opposition. The long-lasting issue of appointment of the seventh member of the Constitutional Court has been solved by the vote of the qualified majority comprising both position and opposition MPs. This was a significant contribution to meeting the interim benchmarks for the negotiation chapters 23 and 24. These examples of a broad consensus in the legislature show that there is a long-awaited potential of the political stakeholders to come together in making decisions the citizens expect them to make.

I am absolutely certain that the important processes ahead will be followed by a consensus related to meeting our obligations from the European agenda.



*Maida Gorčević*

I expect that very soon we will solve the issue of the unsolved appointments in judiciary – Judicial Council, Supreme State Prosecutor, and Supreme Court and thus fully emerge from the institutional crisis. It goes without saying that these are our priorities, because making progress in the two fundamental chapters and obtaining the closing benchmarks after that constitute preconditions for closing all other chapters.

Strengthening cohesion of the society is also a contribution to our European prospects, and therefore, through the commitment expressed in Prime Minister's exposé, but also through daily efforts of the Prime Minister and line ministers, this Government is creating a framework for raising the standard of living, which is a topic that successfully surpasses the issues of identity divisions. The support of the EU institutions and funds is also conducive to the achievement of this goal, as well as the Growth Plan. In that context, we therefore particularly look forward to the detailed overview of the announced possibility for the candidate countries to enter the EU Single Market before they become member states.

Montenegro has neither extra time nor spare chances to afford mistakes on its European path. That is why, as the Minister of European Affairs, together with my colleagues from other line ministries, I diligently work on creating preconditions that will ensure efficient and high-quality reforms. It goes without saying that it would not be possible without a strong determination of the 44th Government to that approach. For the common good, it is necessary that all participants in the decision-making process deliver results in the reform agenda confirming thus the status of Montenegro as the most prosperous candidate for membership in the EU.

Without any doubt the support of the EU institutions and representatives is there, willingness of the opposition and the majority to cooperate in this context is in sight, engagement of the civil sector as the correction factor is precious, and expectations of the largest number of our citizens are clear. In such favourable and optimistic circumstances, it is time that we act responsibly, speed up the negotiation process and close it before the end of the term of office of this Government.

## AMBASSADOR BUGENHAUT FOR "EUROKAZ"

# BELGIUM IS COMMITTED TO MONTENEGRO'S EUROPEAN FUTURE

*By: Marko Vešović, RTCG*

**Belgium remains committed to the European prospects for Montenegro and all Western Balkan countries, says Kati Bugenhout, Ambassador of Belgium in Montenegro. In the interview for „Eurokaz“ she speaks about priorities of the Belgian EU Presidency in the first half of 2024.**

*EU enlargement to the Western Balkan countries will probably be high on the Agenda of your country's Presidency. How do you see Montenegro's position in that context?*

I am exceptionally proud to be able to share with you that the programme of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union Council was officially published on 8th December. I invite you to read it! It is dominated by three key topics: protection of citizens, strengthening of economy and preparation for our common future.

When we say that the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council is preparation for the future, that means that we will focus on the continuation of the enlargement process. At the same time, European Union must be capable of admitting new members in the future. Reflections about the future of our Union go hand in hand with the topic of enlargement. That was also the message in the informal European Council in Granada in October 2023. In other words, one of the Belgium's priorities related to enlargement is to ensure discussions about internal reforms in the EU, so that EU is capable of managing the inflow of new member states.



*Kati Bugenhaut*

Belgium remains committed to the European prospects for Montenegro and all countries of the Western Balkans. During our latest presidency in 2010 Montenegro got the status of a candidate for EU membership. It is clear that expectations from our Presidency are high. Belgium will play the role of an honest mediator, since, after all, we are one of the founders of the EU. This is our 13th Presidency, and we have a huge experience!

How do you assess Montenegro's progress on its European path, and what do you think we should focus on during the Belgian Presidency?

First of all, I have to say that we know how much people in Montenegro want to join the European Union. Do you know that people in Montenegro support European Union with the rate of 70%, which is the same as the support given by the European Union (72%)? Check Eurobarometer survey published in early December!

Montenegro has the best results among Western Balkan countries, with 33 opened negotiation chapters out of 33. It rightfully holds the title of a "forerunner". But we do agree with the analysis of the European Commission presented in the latest November enlargement report that indicates to the general lack

of progress in Montenegro in the last couple of years, primarily in terms of burning issues like reform of the justice system, fight against corruption and freedom of the media. At this moment, with the newly established government, some positive steps are being undertaken in those key areas. We encourage Montenegro to keep up the good work. The country should now focus on meeting the interim benchmarks in the chapters related to the rule of law – 23 and 24, which would ensure speeding up of the accession process and starting the process of closing the remaining chapters. There are also some good sides of Montenegro's accession process. For example, we warmly welcome your consistent and full compliance with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, including your support to the EU sanctions against Russia.

***From your perspective, what will the European path of the region, particularly of Montenegro, look like in the future, in the context of the current developments in the EU and the expectations that EU has from the countries of the region?***

Just look at the map: all Western Balkan countries are in Europe. Without any exception they all have borders with one or several EU Member States. European institutions and member states have been supporting integration of this region into the EU for years. To ensure concrete and tangible incentives to the candidate countries we could explore some forms of gradual integration in the period of our Presidency. One of the preconditions for closer connections with the Single Market is to deepen the Common Regional Market.

Belgium welcomes the proposal of the Commission for the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. For us, it is important that the investments are related to implementation of the reforms. In other words, everything must be strictly conditioned. EU membership is not a free ride. We think it is positive that the countries cannot block each other and that their efforts will be individually assessed within the Growth Plan.

***Do you expect that EU will continue strongly supporting reforms in the field of the rule of law in Montenegro?***

The rule of law is the corner stone of the European Union, and therefore every EU Member State and all

candidate countries must comply with the fundamental principles. Belgium is very much aware of the great engagement of both European Commission and Montenegro on ensuring fast progress towards meeting the interim benchmarks. If the European Commission report on Montenegro's progress in meeting the interim benchmarks is published in the near future, it can happen that we will deal with it during the Belgian Presidency and we will welcome that. I am aware of Montenegro's ambition to become an EU member state by 2028, but sustainable reforms and full preparedness for membership is more important than focusing on any deadline.

***How would you assess bilateral relations between Belgium and Montenegro?***

Our countries have excellent political bilateral relations, which was also emphasized by our Prime Minister Alexander de Croo when he met with the President Jakov Milatović in June this year. Your President and my Prime Minister recently met again on the margins of the COP28. Minister of Foreign Affairs Hadja Lahbib visited your beautiful country on 23rd November and had meetings with the President, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of European Affairs and her counterpart, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Filip Ivanović.

Belgium has a long experience in maintaining very strong relations with Montenegro. For example, Belgium recognized Montenegro's independence on 23 June 2006, 20 days after it was declared. Then, several years later, when Belgium presided the Council of the EU in 2010, Montenegro got the status of a candidate country for membership in the EU. Our two countries have regular political consultations on the highest administrative level, the latest of which took place in October this year.

With the trade balance of 14.6 million euro in 2022 our economic relations are still on a very modest level. But, as we in Belgium say, modest is beautiful! BESIX, a company with strong roots in Belgium, has been contributing to development of Luštica Bay since 2013. As you can see, there is still a lot of room to raise our trade relations and investment to a higher level, but already now our two countries have very good cooperation.

Zatim, nekoliko godina kasnije, pod belgijskim predsjedavanjem Savjetom Evropske unije 2010. godine, Crna Gora je dobila status države kandidata za članstvo u EU. Naše dvije zemlje redovno održavaju političke konsultacije i na najvišem administrativnom nivou, a poslednji put u oktobru ove godine.

Sa trgovinskim bilansom od 14.6 miliona evra 2022. godine, naši ekonomski odnosi su i dalje veoma skromni. Ali, što bismo mi u Belgiji rekli, skromno je i lijepo! BESIX, kompanija sa jakim korenima u Belgiji, doprinosi razvoju Luštica Bay-a od 2013. godine. Kao što vidite, ima još prostora za podizanje trgovinskih odnosa i investicija na viši nivo, ali čak i sada, naše dvije zemlje veoma lijepo saraduju.

## **WHAT CAN OUR COUNTRY EXPECT FROM THE GROWTH PLAN FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS PROPOSED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION?**

## **REFORMS UNLOCK THE TREASURY WITH 413 MILLION EUROS**

*By: Jovana Đurišić, Pobjeda*

**PODGORICA** – If it implements the required reforms and achieves necessary progress in the field of democracy, rule of law and human rights, Montenegro could have access to 413 million euros from the European treasury through the new and ambitious Growth Plan for Western Balkans, designed by the European Commission to support economies of the countries from the region.

Financial support will be subject to a number of prerequisites in the field of democracy, rule of law and human rights, that will be defined individually for each of the countries, as well as to general conditions in the field of macro-financial stability, good public finance management, transparency and supervision of the budget.

To have the money disbursed, countries must have these conditions met at any time during the programme of the European Commission.

Representatives of the Government - Ministers of European Integration, Finance and Energy - recently went to Brussels to present the Draft Reforms Plan for the Growth Plan to the representatives of the European Commission.

### *What is written in the Draft Reform Agenda*

The document that was presented in Brussels by the ministers inter alia contains the message that the Government is determined to continue reforms in the public sector, to make it more responsible, transparent, inclusive, efficient, and effective service for citizens and society.

- Digitalization should lead to improvement of the capacities and capabilities for Montenegro's digital transformation, as well as to raising digital awareness of the society and digital competitiveness of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector in Montenegro. With that goal in mind, as the document emphasizes, the Government pays particular attention to creating a digital society, digitalizing processes in the public domain, introducing eGovernment, further improving the central and local eGovernment and provision of eServices to citizens.

To implement the reforms, the Government also plans to introduce a catalogue of online and offline services, with a view to obtaining feedback from the users and undertaking measures to improve provision of the services and user satisfaction.

- The system of quality assurance will be established to optimize the processes within the authorities and to improve quality of services that are provided to the end users. As for the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, the main goal is to ensure access to the fixed broadband Internet at the speed of 100Mbps to as large percentage of households as possible.

As for cyber security, the Government plans to establish a Cyber Laboratory for learning and practicing cyber security skills on the national level, as well as to develop a new Cyber Security Strategy.



*Bojan Vujović*

The idea of the executive branch of power is to establish a fully functional Cyber Security Agency, as well as an operational Government Security Operational Centre.

### *Four Pillars of the Reforms*

European Commission says that they have received all drafts of the reform agendas that the countries prepared and that it is a clear indicator of how much the Balkan countries care to meet the requirements for this programme.

Bojan Vujović, General Director of the Directorate for European Funds in the Ministry of European Affairs, explains that European Commission had announced development of the new Growth Plan for Western Balkans, after which it proposed the key elements of this instrument in early November 2023 when it was officially forwarded to the European Council and European Parliament for adoption.

- New Growth Plan relies on the previously adopted Economic and Investment Plan for Western Balkan from 2020, particularly when it comes to incentives for long-term recovery and sustainable economic growth in the region, supported by green and digital transition, implementation of the reforms required for membership in the EU and approximation of the Western Balkan Countries to the EU Single Market.



Among other things, one of the goals of the new plan is to use the economic potential of the region in the short- and mid-term period and to provide a significant room for the increased inter-regional economic cooperation and trade. All in all, the goal of the new plan is to speed up the economic convergence of the Western Balkan region with the EU average, with the projection that implementation of reforms and financial support of the EU will have a positive effect on economic growth and other key macro-economic indicators – says Vujović.

As Mr. Vujović explains, the Growth Plan includes four main pillars: strengthening of economic integration into the EU Single Market; strengthening of economic integration of Western Balkans through the common regional market; speeding up fundamental reforms in order to speed up the accession process, improving the economic growth and strengthening of regional stability; as well as increasing financial support with the condition that reforms are implemented through the new financial instrument of the EU for the reform and growth for Western Balkan.

As defined in the EC proposal, EU will open certain segments of its single market for Western Balkans, which will bring measurable benefits to the citizens even before the official accession, explains Vujović.

Vujović also thinks that establishment of the instrument for reform and growth for Western Balkans would imply an increase in the financial support from the EU that would be provided through a combination of grants and loans with a view to achieving a positive effect on the economic growth in the WB region.

- European Commission proposes six billion euros to be secured for the EU instrument for reform and growth for Western Balkans, with a view to providing financial support for implementation of social and economic reforms required for better use of the economic growth potentials. It is announced that the package of financial support will include combination of 2 billion euros in grants from the EU and 4 billion euros in credit funds from international financial institutions awarded under favourable conditions. As for modalities for implementation, EC intends to allocate half of the funds to the Western Balkan countries in form of budget support, while half of the funds would be allocated

for investment into infrastructure in the fields that are connected to the key reforms through the Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF). According to the indicative announced allocations of funds by states (based on the formula applied by the EC that includes several variables, including the size of population and the amount of the gross domestic product), Montenegro might have indicative 413 million euro available for the described modalities of support. These funds are to come on top of the regular allocations from European funds available in Montenegro, says our collocutor.

In the EU – Western Balkan Summit that took place on 13 December in Brussels, the heads of states from the region were presented the Growth Plan, with the expressed opinion that Western Balkans has quite some untapped potential in the field of economy.

- Economy of the Western Balkans is on the level of 35% of the European average, which means that there is quite a lot of untapped potential. That is targeted by our Growth Plan. We are opening our market to the countries of the region in seven important sectors. We requested the countries of the Western Balkans to open their markets for the neighbours and finish in that way the establishment of the common regional market. That might increase Western Balkan GDP by 10% - underlined the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen.

She says that entering into the Single Market is the third element for the Western Balkan countries,



while the fourth element comprises EU investment in Western Balkans that might double Western Balkan economies in a decade.

### *Different from IPA*

Unlike the IPA funds, where the money was allocated in advance and EU waited for the countries to deliver, this fund is set in a different way – every Government is to make its reform agenda for the four-year period of the plan.

When the reform is implemented, the money is paid to the national budget in six-month tranches.

The plan of the Commission is to start the first payments this time next year, but after the Council of the European Union and European Parliament agree with this proposal of the European Commission.

## **MORE THAN 10 YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH THE REGIONAL HOUSING PROGRAMME TO THE ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS**

*By: Bojana Milićević, Radio of Montenegro*

After the war in Croatia, Senka and Mirko Maglov moved to Bar with their two children in 1996. They went through years of hard and expensive life as tenants who had to move very often. But this is now over, thanks to the Regional Housing Programme.

“The procedure was not simple, we had to collect many documents, it all lasted for six years and this year we moved into our house. After the ordeal we went through, we are overwhelmed! This house is our empire! Montenegro is our home, and we are grateful to everyone, the donors and local and national authorities that helped us immensely in this process,” says Senka Maglov.



The Maglov family is one of 1,177 households that got roof over their heads through the Regional Housing Programme. It is the project completed successfully after more than 10 years of its implementation. In the decade behind, the programme helped more than 30,000 refugees and displaced persons in the entire region to get a home. In Montenegro, 6,063 persons got the roof over their heads thanks to the RHP.

As a consequence of the armed conflicts in the territory of former Yugoslavia, more than three million people were displaced within and outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia – partner countries whose first joint post-conflict initiative was precisely the RHP. The Programme was started with a view to ensuring sustainable housing for the most vulnerable refugees and displaced persons after the conflicts in 1990s. It was presented in the international donor conference in April 2012 in Sarajevo. On that occasion, and through other donations, international community supported the RHP with 294 million euros. Out of this amount, 238 million euros, or 81% were provided by the European Union, while 56 million euros were provided by bilateral donors like USA, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Italy, and others. In addition to the donors, the programme was supported by the Council of Europe Development Bank, UNHCR and OSCE.

„The Programme was implemented in almost all

municipalities in Montenegro, with a particular emphasis on the most vulnerable categories and closing of the collective centres in line with the obligations undertaken through the negotiation chapters 23 and 24, that are related to fundamental human rights and freedoms", says the national RHP coordinator in Montenegro, Budimirka Đukanović. She explains that RHP ensured construction of 62 housing units in Nikšić, 171 housing units for the residents of the Konik Camp in Podgorica, 96 flats in Vrela Ribnička in Podgorica, 94 flats in Berane, 28 houses in the territory of the entire state, while flats were bought for 36 families in Herceg Novi. Thanks to this Programme, the project of the Home for Elderly and Disabled Persons has been implemented in Pljevlja, while the Military Complex Trebjesa has been renovated for the needs of the home for elderly and disabled persons in the municipality of Nikšić.

Delegation of the EU in Podgorica says that contracts were signed for 9 sub-projects of the total value of the approved grants of 25.3 million euros and national contribution of 5.5 million euros. They add that the obstacles in Montenegro were frequently related to the non-existence of local urban plans, which, for example, posed problems in the construction of 50 individual houses in our country.

Success and benefits of the RHP are undisputable. Delegation of the EU assessed that the RHP had achieved its goal and contributed to reconciliation in



the region. „This programme is an exceptional example of the joint efforts of the countries of the region and international donors aimed at achieving peace, reconciliation, and integration. That is our joint success and EU is proud of being the largest donor,“ emphasizes the Delegation of the EU in Podgorica.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare also agrees that the RHP has achieved its goal. National coordinator of the Programme, Budimirka Đukanović, underlines that this donor programme opened the door for cooperation in the region and successfully contributed to the reconciliation process.

“Permanent and coordinated commitment of the international donor community played an important role in the programme. Trust has been built, while the exchange of information between partner countries has become a practice”, says Đukanović. She emphasizes that, in addition to reconciliation, a very important element is also the fact that the refugees and displaced persons are put in the focus of the Programme through recognition of their vulnerability and the need to have tailored housing solutions.

Đukanović also underlines the positive impact of the Regional Housing Programme on generating jobs in Montenegro.

“Within the Programme, a large number of contracts was signed with local companies. This did not only encourage generating new jobs in the construction sector, but also in other sectors in the region, like in companies that do business in the field of distribution and transport”, concludes Đukanović.

## EUROPEAN UNION WILL DICTATE TO MONTENEGRO HOW TO KEEP THE EUROPEAN CURRENCY

# THE RISK THAT USE OF EURO MIGHT BE BANNED IS NEGLIGIBLE

*By: Marija Mirjačić, Vijesti*

**Montenegro unilaterally introduced euro as an official currency in 2002. Within the negotiation chapter 17 this issue will be settled by Brussels administration proposing a solution that Montenegrin authorities will agree with**

Although Montenegro unilaterally introduced euro as its official currency, based on the statements of the European officials made so far and opinions contained in the relevant EU documents, we consider the risk of prohibition of using euro as the official currency in Montenegro to be negligible. However, that risk must not be ignored, and it is a challenge for Montenegro.

This is what Milica Kilibarda, Head of the Working Group for Negotiation Chapter 17 (Economic and Monetary Union), says for "Eurokaz". She adds that the issue of euro is considered within the Council for Financial Stability.

In June 2018 Montenegro opened the negotiation chapter 17, which was followed by the issuance of five benchmarks it has to meet. The last requirement is formulated as follows "Montenegro agreed to the solution developed by the EU regarding the way to implement the EU framework for adoption of euro. This benchmark will be considered in a later stage of the negotiations, after a consensus is reached in the EU and that will be one of the last that will be addressed directly before Montenegrin membership in the EU."

In its numerous reports, European Commission (EC) noted that Montenegro unilaterally introduced euro in 2002. That was done with a tacit agreement of the European officials. According to the European rules (convergence criteria), to be able to use euro as its currency, a country has to be an EU member

and comply with the key criteria of the Maastricht agreement that include budget deficit of 3% of the GDP and public debt of up to 60% of the GDP. Deficit and public debt of Montenegro have not been within the legal boundaries so far.

Kilibarda emphasizes that there is a clear commitment of both EU and Montenegro when it comes to using euro as a legal currency in Montenegro.

"When the Chapter 17 was being opened, the then Enlargement Commissionaire Johannes Hahn underlined that in the course of negotiations the EU would establish how the existing framework for introduction of euro was to be applied in case of Montenegro and that after the accession to the EU Montenegro could continue using euro provided that it did not jeopardize its economic stability and competitiveness. In its joint position for this chapter, when referring to the issue of using euro as a lawful currency in Montenegro, European Commission reminded of the negotiation framework for Montenegro which says that the "current use of euro in Montenegro is completely different from membership in the Euro Zone". This issue will have to be solved in the course of negotiations. From the moment of accession, Montenegro will participate in both economic and monetary union as a Member State with derogation and it will join the Euro Zone after the Council renders decision thereon based on the assessment of whether the requirements are met. In addition to this, EC says that Montenegro stated in its negotiation position that



*Photo: Opening negotiation chapter 17 – Economic and Monetary Union – 25 June 2018, Luxembourg*

it “wishes to keep euro as the only lawful currency, but that it understands that the fact that it uses euro currently is completely different from being a member of the Euro Zone,” explains Kilibarda.

She says that after the opening and defining the benchmarks for temporary closing of the chapter 17, a video conference took place with a view to obtaining certain clarifications related to the set benchmarks. It was attended by the representatives of the working group for chapter 17 and representatives of the EC. In relation to the benchmark number five, they repeated the above given positions of the EU and underlined that this benchmark was unusual, and that the EU had to work on finding the solutions.

Asked about a realistic deadline for closing this chapter and meeting the fifth benchmark, Kilibarda said that the assessments were that the Chapter 17 would be closed in a later stage of the negotiations and that its closing would inter alia depend on the overall progress that the state would make.

Kilibarda emphasized that, as EC underlined, the benchmark number five was a challenge for the EU as well, particularly in terms of finding a solution that would be approved by all EU Member States.

“That is time-consuming. It is certain that the framework for introducing euro will be changed, so EU should be the first to propose a model for solving this issue”, says Kilibarda.

## CAPACITIES FOR PROTECTING EURO AGAINST COUNTERFEITING HAVE BEEN ENSURED

Kilibarda says that it is very important to note that the Central Bank of Montenegro (CBM) has secured technical and administrative capacities in the field of protection of euro against counterfeiting, which was recognized also in the EC reports on Montenegro's progress.

“Within this year's Progress Report for Montenegro, EC gave a positive assessment regarding a part of the Chapter 32 – Financial Control - that refers to the field of protection of euro against counterfeiting.

The Report says that “Montenegro's legislation on protecting the euro against counterfeiting is in place,” and that “the country has the necessary structures for technical analysis and classification of counterfeited money”, says Kilibarda.

She also underlines that this year's EC Report notes that the decision on authenticity and fitness checking and recirculation of euro banknotes and coins “has been fully harmonised with the relevant Decision of the European Central Bank (ECB).”

## UNILATERAL INTRODUCTION OF EURO IS YET TO BE DISCUSSED

Representatives of the EU Delegation in Montenegro say for “Eurokaz” that Montenegro's using euro, based on the decision rendered by Montenegrin authorities in special circumstances, is completely different from membership in the Euro Zone.

“Unilateral use of euro is yet to be discussed with Montenegro's authorities within the accession negotiations. As for the progress in Chapter 17 in

the course of accession negotiations, Montenegro is considered to be moderately prepared in the field of economic and monetary policy, with clearly defined goals and deadlines within the action plan for harmonization with the *acquis communautaire*”, say representatives of the EU Delegation.



**In its numerous reports European Commission noted that Montenegro unilaterally introduced euro in 2002. That was done with a tacit agreement of the European officials.**

# THE POWER OF DIVERSITY – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

*By: Ivana Moretti, President of the Association Our Children Podgorica*

Being a part of the European Union means truly sharing and respecting the values of human rights and freedoms, equality, and fairness in a society of open opportunities for all citizens. The core of that idea is that nobody may be left behind or excluded from the society, regardless of any personal characteristics or circumstances. The topic that is particularly related to these values is the topic of the rights of persons with disabilities and opportunities for them to get education and job qualifications. In that context, the EU is dedicated to creating environment in which every person, regardless of disability, will have access to education and opportunities to be prepared for the labour market.

When we talk about disability, it is important to note that it is not a condition, but many conditions that are very different from each other. The same disability may have different variations. The most challenging among them are intellectual disabilities that are most vulnerable to social exclusion.

Associations in Montenegro that deal with these topics, unfortunately remain in the shadow, although they have very complex and specific expertise in the field.

This article therefore aims at emphasizing inspiring stories and examples from Italy that illustrate how joint efforts and support can transform lives of persons with Down Syndrome and ensure that they become appreciated and productive members of the society. This is a story about inclusion, training and support that encourages hope and change of stereotypes, opening doors for new opportunities for all.

Coordination of associations of persons with Down Syndrome in Italy was established in 1987 and it has 54 members. CoorDown is an official body for

dialogue with all institutions regarding the issues and rights of persons with the Down Syndrome in Italy. It has recently developed a Guide "Ready to Work" that provides ideas, opportunities, and resources to support persons with intellectual disability on their path to find jobs. This Guide is intended for institutions, companies, experts and parents and its goal is to raise awareness about the importance of work in the lives of persons with Down Syndrome and to promote their independence and employment in the entire country.

To get relevant data about employment of persons with disability, CoorDown launched a survey couple of months earlier, first in Italy and then on the global level. So far, they have published more than 2500 interviews, and the survey is still open. The data show that the rate of employment of persons with Down Syndrome is very high, but that it is affected by the fact that most of interviewees are members of professional association and therefore have special support in their life projects and employment.

In Italy, preliminary data show that among the persons with Down Syndrome who do not work, 91% wish to work, not only in bars or restaurants (31%), but also in the field of fashion and entertainment (25%), in offices (11%), in the farm (8%), in shops or warehouses (7%) or elsewhere (18%). Among those who work, 75% are very happy with their jobs, 70% have excellent relationship with their colleagues, but only 19% spend time with them after work. The data of territorial associations show that in Milan, 50% of members of the association of persons with Down Syndrome have jobs, while in Florence that percentage is as many as 67%. Despite these two successful examples, the rate of their unemployment in Italy remains high.

Every person with Down Syndrome is unique and has different interests and abilities and therefore there is no job that would be particularly appropriate for all of them - this varies from person to person. With an appropriate training and support, persons with Down Syndrome have the ability to do various tasks, including the jobs that require complex thinking and initiative.

We can see persons with Down Syndrome working on computers, maintaining premises and plants in



Foto: Ivana Moretti

the botanical garden, serving in restaurants, making pasta, taking care about warehouses in supermarkets.

Retail, administration, and hospitality industry are only some of the fields where young people with disability could be employed in our country. It is therefore important to change the perspective and to overcome the concept of them as a "protected category", at least when it comes to the cultural aspect. Persons with Down Syndrome should be perceived as workers that can bring value to the companies.

Research shows that work performances and productivity are not a problem. When a person with Down Syndrome has a job that he/she likes, with proper training and support – the quality of work is guaranteed. It is particularly important to underline that including them in a working environment improves their quality of life and development abilities, but also the overall work of the companies that hire them. All of this clearly shows that, if given a chance, persons with disabilities may become respected and productive members of the community.

A proof of that is the example of the Italian project Jobmeteo, where pharmacies in Monza and Brianza organized a practice for young men with Down Syndrome. All of this shows that, with appropriate

training and support, through cooperation of professional associations and companies, a positive practice can be built, bringing real results instead of reinforcing stereotypes.

This is a significant roadmap for us too, showing us that we must not underestimate persons with disability, but insist, as heralds of change, on a different and better approach that will result from hard and joint efforts and bring benefits to those who need our support and understanding to use their full potential.

In the Association Our Children from Podgorica we are putting efforts into ensuring work practice and work training for persons with Down Syndrome. In our printing press facility children are trained in embroidery, printing, making jewelry, etc. We hope that our initiative will become sustainable in the long run, but also that it will be improved through the opening of a coffee shop where person with disability could be trained for work but also have space to spend time with friends and be better and more genuinely integrated in the society.

## **GENDER EQUALITY TALKS**

# **YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW: 80 YEARS OF FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN MONTENEGRO**

*By: UNDP Montenegro Gender Equality Team*

Women's Movement was established 80 years ago in Montenegrin town of Kolašin. It marked the beginning of the emancipation path for women and the entire Montenegrin society. However, although eight decades have passed since women won their political and economic rights, processes of re-patriarchalization of societies and jeopardizing of human rights are warning us that the fight for freedom has not yet been finished, and that the equality that is guaranteed in Montenegrin legislation has not yet been fully achieved.

UNDP Montenegro created the room for dialogue about key issues for achieving gender equality. Inviting participants to discuss the situation in the field of human rights, this year's Gender Equality Talks, as a part of the global campaign „16 Days of Activism“, have offered a unique opportunity for a comprehensive assessment of the situation in the field of gender equality. UNDP organized the Gender Equality Talks in cooperation with the Embassies of the Czech Republic and Austria in Montenegro, Delegation of the European Union, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Parliament of Montenegro, Montenegrin National Museum, Public Institution Museums and Galleries of Podgorica, Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts, Municipality of Kolašin and Centre for Culture in Kolašin, civil sector and other partners.

Gender Equality Talks were not only a formal manifestation of support, but also a confirmation of deep dedication to creating an inclusive society that cherishes gender equality in all segments of life.

The campaign was started in the Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts with a discussion on investing in the prevention of gender-based violence against women, where representatives of the Government of Montenegro, academic community, media, non-governmental organizations, diplomatic corps, and human rights activists shed a light on the various manifestations of the retrograde processes on the global level that are spilling over to Montenegro as well.



Gender based hate speech and violence against women online and in public space have indicated to the challenges of today's world and shown that the fight for gender equality must be waged on various fronts. The statistics showing that one in three women experiences a form of physical or sexual violence during her life sounds devastating, but at the same time urges us to ensure a serious and urgent response of all stakeholders in the society. Public discourse in Montenegrin society frequently reflects deeply rooted patriarchal matrices, normalization of gender stereotypes and limitation of the freedom of expression of individuals. Expectations of „male“ and „female“ behaviours are firmly rooted in language, which creates serious obstacles for implementation of women's human rights. Gender stereotypes open the door to sexism in personal and professional realm and make state authorities responsible to be sensitive to cases of stereotypization, degradation and dehumanization of women.

Media have the key role in shaping attitudes and perceptions in the society. They are recognized as a powerful tool to influence public opinion and they can play the key role in combating hate speech and sexism. It is equally important to combat hate speech through social media, and in the largest number of cases it targets women that stepped out of the private sphere and became active participants of social and political processes. Women are the key in developing







experience with violence with, revealing the debt and complexity of this problem.

One of the events within the Gender Equality Talks was dedicated to the important anniversary – 80 years since the establishment of the women's movement in Montenegro on 5-6 December 1943 in Kolašin. Since then, Montenegro has been going through a strong emancipation process, while development of women activism of that time laid foundations for the modern international and national legislation. Talks about this topic were based on historical context of development of women activism which liberated Montenegrin women but they also dealt with various social and political trends that posed numerous challenges before women and women's movement. Reflecting on the 80 years of fight for women's rights and human rights, participants of the talk agreed that, in spite of the achieved results, the process of fighting for rights and freedoms has not been finished, particularly given the challenges of the retrograde processes and re-patriarhalization of the society. The event was also an opportunity to promote the publication "Conquering Freedom – We Need the Right to Vote to Use it for Peace" that contains the calendar of key events related to rights of women and emancipation of the society.

The campaign "16 days of Activism against Violence against Women" and Gender Equality Talks did not only

communities that encourage dialogue, reconciliation, and cooperation. Equal participation of women in peace processes is the key for developing sustainable policies that contribute to reduction of violence in the society. Experience of other countries, like Czech Republic, show how important it is to include men in the processes for change, because achieving gender equality is not possible without participation of all.

A particularly inspiring talk was dedicated to the topic of multiple discrimination, as a special form of violence faced by women with disabilities. This open talk provided precious insights into the structural obstacles that women with disabilities face on a daily basis, not only due to their disabilities, but also due to patriarchal matrices and prejudice in the society. Women with disabilities are frequently faced with violence that goes beyond institutional, structural, and economic, all the way to psychological and physical, which can lead to complete isolation. Women with disabilities are three times more exposed to gender-based violence, including domestic violence, violence committed by intimate partners, by carers, or within institutions. This event was an opportunity to share the alarming data, established by UNDP in Montenegro in cooperation with the non-governmental organization IKRE from Rožaje that almost one thousand women with disabilities from Northern Montenegrin municipalities shared their



offer an opportunity to remember the achievements, but also the platform to discuss the future. That was shown in the event organized in the Parliament of Montenegro, dedicated to the political path of women since they won the right to vote. The panellists emphasised the imperative of new forms of association and an organized response to the challenges that women face in the political arena. The process of ensuring political participation of women does not finish in obtaining the right to vote. On the contrary - it is where it begins! Through an overview of the historical context of political participation of women in Montenegro, the event emphasized the importance of active engagement and support to women in politics. Implementation of the quota for women is one of the steps to achieve balance in political representation. However, it was noted that the quotas themselves were not sufficient, but that it was necessary to work on creating an inclusive political environment conducive to equal participation of all citizens regardless of their gender. Women in politics are today faced with challenges that limit their full participation. Those challenges must not be ignored but have to be subject to deep analysis and joint action to create conditions for equal political participation of women.

Recognizing the power of art and culture in achieving gender equality, Montenegrin theatre audience had an opportunity this year to learn more about the processes that have led to political, economic, cultural and all other rights of women through the play "Political history of Women in Montenegro" produced by UNDP and directed by Marija Perović. Just like seven years ago, when the play was performed for the first time on the occasion of 70 years since women won the right to vote, the response of the audience in the Centre for Culture in Kolašin and in Montenegrin National Theatre were exceptional. This educational journey was made on the basis of historic material, and it offered to Montenegrin audience an authentic call to fight for women's rights in Montenegro. It also concluded this year's campaign in a creative way with a clear message that gender equality in all spheres of life is still a far-fetched goal, but also a clear civilization vision that Montenegrin society and women of Montenegro will not give up on.

## THROUGH CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION TO PROTECTION OF THE ENDEMIC PINE TREE SPECIES IN LOVČEN

*By: Stefan Bulatović, Ministry of European Affairs*

Munika, the endemic two-needle pine tree that grows on steep and rocky karst in the Balkan Peninsula and in the Apennines, also grows on the slopes of Jezerski vrh. This rare and protected species discovered in 1863 got its Latin name (*Pinus heldreichii*) after the German botanist von Heldreich.

Habitat of munika has been endangered for decades by the black pine tree (*Pinus nigra*), which is not originally from this area, and also by erosion that the terrain is subject to. Research of the Service for Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development of the Public Company "National Parks of Montenegro" (PCNPM) have shown that in the location of Jezerski vrh there is a danger that this rare species of pine tree, that is included also in the European Directive on Habitats - NATURA 200 - will be completely degraded.

„In the research of our expert service, we have recognized the potential danger for munika, and the research done in the territory of Albania and Italy have produced similar results. On that basis, our company has decided to establish cooperation with Albanian and Italian partners with whom we designed the project LASPEH aimed at protecting munika and preserving its habitat in the territory of Southern Adriatic," explains Maša Vučinić from PCNPM.

In addition to PCNPM, the LASPEH Project has established partnership between 5 institutions, including: Regional park of nature „Coastal Dunes from Torre Canna to Torre San Leonardo“, as the leading partner, Administrative Authority of the Regional Natural Reserves of the Eastern Coast of Taranto; Municipality

of Guardia Region and National Agency for Protected Areas of Albania. The project that is worth a bit more than half a million euro has been supported through Interreg IPA programme of cross-border cooperation Italy -Albania-Montenegro 2014-2020, co-financed by the European Union.

To increase the level of protection of munika in the National Park Lovćen, PCNPM first developed the plan of conservation and established the key habitats that require particular attention. On the basis of the plan developed by Prof Danka Caković, PhD from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics of the University of Montenegro, concrete measures for revitalization of munika's habitat were designed.

According to Slobodan Stijepović who led the activities of revitalization, several measures have been implemented in the field, including securing of favourable conditions in the habitat, stopping the erosion processes and establishing conditions for spontaneous growth of munika in this region.

„The first measure of revitalization was to remove the trees of black pine tree that have a negative impact on the munika trees because these two speices grow in similar or same habitats and become competitors to each other. It is important to say that we removed only those black pine trees that were broken, de-rooted or had no prospects to survive,“ says Stijepović.



The second step, says Stijepović, is to stop the erosion by erecting supporting walls.

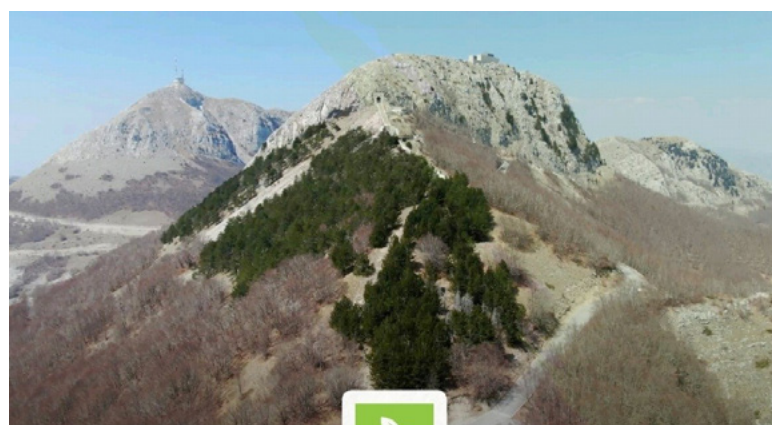
„The supporting walls have been built by cut black pine trees, and we used the branches of those trees as the supporting bolts. Tree trunks were laid vertically in relation to the slope of the terrain and thus conditions have been created for primary stopping of slides of the stone and gravel that were already moving,“ says Stijepović.

The third step implied securing conditions for development of vegetation in the targeted area.

„We spread land above supporting walls. It was the land that we brought from the surrounding area, and it was used to create ideal conditions for spontaneous growth and development of new munika trees. In this way, natural terraces have been established, very convenient for easy establishment of vegetation, and we did all of this without bringing any plants here that are not from this area,“ says Stijepović.

Maša Vučinić adds that particular attention is dedicated to education on the protection of habitats.

„We realized how important it is to educate the community about preservation of nature and therefore we worked actively on raising the awareness on the importance to preserve habitats and the need to protect endangered plant species. This activity included



**Interreg - IPA CBC**  
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**LASPEH**

more than 400 children of school age, students and volunteers and every one of them was included in their own way in the implementation of certain activities in the project", underlines Vučinić.

In cooperation with the partners from Italy and Albania, we developed a joint transnational strategy with a view to establishing integrated approach to protection that goes beyond borders.

„Joint transnational strategy ensured intensive cooperation of expert and science community and exchange of experience and knowledge about the species, which will in the forthcoming period result in more efficient measures of protection and preservation of nature. It promotes long-term sustainability because it has been recognized that the eco-systems and species are connected regardless of the borders between countries," adds Vučinić.

Success of this project has been recognized also by the Interreg IPA programme of cross-border cooperation between Italy, Albania and Montenegro, and the partners in the project got an opportunity to use the mechanism of capitalization to continue their activities on preservation of this endemic pine tree species and strengthening of the protection system.

„Not only that this project will contribute to preservation of endangered habitats, but it will also serve as inspiration for future efforts on protecting our national parks", concludes Vučinić.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT „CROSS-BORDER ROUTE – GREEN EYES“ AS A CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION

*By: Biljana Pinjatić, Municipality of Nikšić*

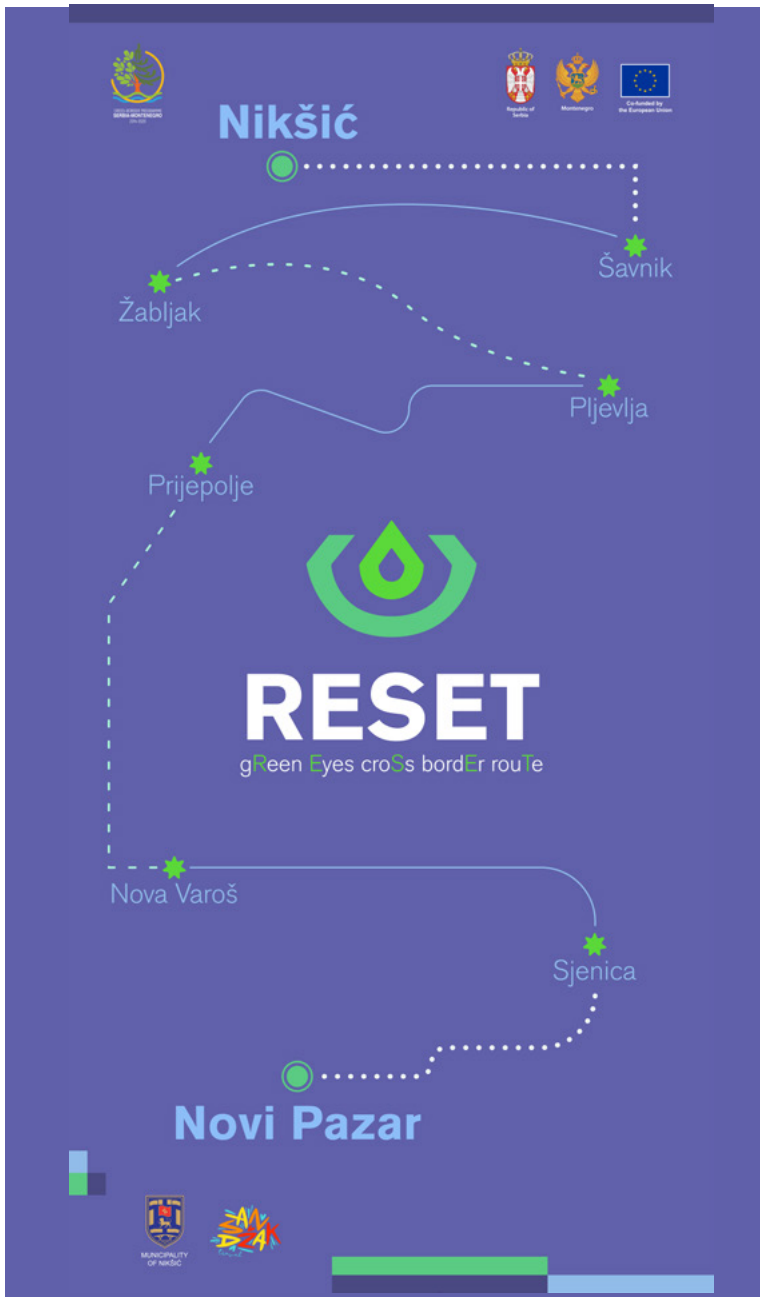
Within the CBC Project „Serbia – Montenegro", the Municipality of Nikšić and the Regional Tourism Organization „Sandžak" are implementing the project „Cross-Border Route – Green Eyes" – RESET. Tourism Organization of Nikšić is an associated partner.

The project was developed out of the wish to create a new tourism route that will connect eight municipalities with both borders: Nikšić, Šavnik, Žabljak, Pljevlja, Prijepolje, Nova Varoš, Sjenica, and Novi Pazar.

The goal is to increase tourism attractiveness of the included area, with a focus on lakes and most important cultural and historical landmarks that lie along the route. The lakes will serve as natural resources that attract nature lovers, while the cultural and historical landmarks will provide a unique insight into the rich past of the included municipalities.

Each of these eight municipalities will contribute its unique characteristics and attractions, which will create a complete experience for tourists. Nikšić offers beautiful landscapes, near Krupac and Slano lakes, and hosts numerous manifestations and cultural events. Šavnik has Pošćenjska lakes and is particularly interesting for hiking and exploring the pristine nature. Durmitor, which belongs to the municipality of Žabljak, is a part of the UNESCO world heritage, while its Black Lake is one of the largest mountain lakes in Montenegro. This lake is surrounded by mountains and forests that make a very picturesque landscape.





Pljevlja cherishes a rich historical heritage, with medieval monasteries, while its surrounding is famous for its mountain lakes. Prijepolje is rich with beautiful rivers and canyons. Nova Varoš is a destination with traditional villages and natural landmarks. Sjenica offers beautiful landscapes, with lakes and mountains, and is particularly attractive for bird lovers. Sjeničko (Uvačko) lake is the largest colony of griffon vultures in the Balkans. Novi Pazar is characterised by rich history and cultural heritage, with a unique blend of various cultures and architectural styles. It is also famous for the lake Gazivode and surrounding mountains, which offer numerous opportunities for exploring nature.

Within this project, Nikšić will establish a tourism information point and develop the area near Krupac lake that is located near Nikšić and that is one of the key points on the route. This will offer peaceful area for visitor and an opportunity for various water activities.

On the other side, Novi Pazar will improve its tourism offer through purchase of a catamaran and development of the area near Gazivode lake. This lake, one of the largest in the region, provides not only an impressive landscape, but also an opportunity for various water sports and recreation.

As an important step towards the sustainable lake tourism, within the project we will have an academic conference, that will inter alia emphasize the importance of the joint efforts in preserving the beauty and ecological value of the lake areas.

In addition to these activities that will have a positive impact in terms of increasing attractiveness for tourists, a special emphasis will be put on strengthening the capacities of tourism providers through training. Trainings will be organized in four modules and will include various aspects of tourism industry, providing local stakeholders with the tools and knowledge necessary to improve services and hospitality.

This multi-dimensional approach is expected not only to increase the number of tourists in the forthcoming period, but also to improve the tourism infrastructure and services, which will all contribute to sustainable development of the region.

With a view to ensuring better promotion of this new tourism route, we plan to develop a mobile application, print a tourist map, as well as to develop a short movie that will present all the charms of this cross-border destination. Near the end of the project we will organize two promotional tours as well.

In addition to all of this, the project RESET is an exceptional example of how local communities can work together on developing tourism as a tool to ensure revival and prosperity of the region.

Implementation of the project will last for 24 months, while the total budget is 179,249.00 euro, 77% of which will be financed by the European Union.

# PHOTO COLLAGE















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