



No 14

EUROKAZ

MAGAZINE ON EUROPEAN
INTEGRATION OF MONTENEGRO

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Ministry of
European
Affairs

EUROKAZ

Magazine on European Integration of Montenegro

BROJ: 14

PUBLISHED BY:

Ministry of European Affairs

EDITORIAL BOARD:

Department for Informing the Public about the
Negotiation Process of Montenegro's Accession to
the European Union

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THIS WILL BE THE YEAR OF MONTENEGRO'S GREATEST SUCCESS ON THE EUROPEAN PATH

By Maida Gorčević, Minister of European Affairs

In the first half of 2024, Montenegro almost entirely put its social and political focus on European integration. We haven't missed the opportunity we were given at the beginning of the term of office of this Government, and we put together all the efforts on the internal and external level to deliver results. We used the intensified communication with the heads of European institutions to convey messages of firm determination that in the agreed time frame we would meet the set benchmarks.

The greatest challenge we had on the integration path up to that point was meeting the interim benchmarks for the Chapters 23 and 24 (IBAR), not only because undertaking the necessary steps for meeting those benchmarks was challenging, but also because all other processes were put on hold until that obstacle was overcome. That is precisely why, since the beginning of the term of office of this Government, we saw only diligence and commitment of the part of the Government and the Parliament aimed at meeting all the obligations needed for the positive IBAR in record time. Development of legislation, consultations with the European and the Venice Commissions, constructive public debates, efficient response of the Parliament and unanimity in voting were the features of the process that in only six months put Montenegro in the core of the EU enlargement policy and restored our image of a leader in European integration. The recently received positive IBAR was a turning point in our European aspirations and a clear signal of the European Union that hard work would be recognized if we were up to the expectations of the European agenda.

The commitment that led us to this success will not dwindle in the period ahead in which we will have

to include the broadest range of stakeholders in the society to work together in the final stage of Europeanization of Montenegrin society. We already started the last round, and the Ministry of European Affairs has started the finalization of the dynamic plan for closing the remaining chapters. In this way, we will have firm grounds to hope we can deliver everything required in this process in 2026. The first important goal that we aspire to, after IBAR, is closing the largest number of chapters ever, which we will do by the end of the year in the next intergovernmental conference within the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. That will mark the end of this year as the most successful for Montenegro's European path so far. It will also lay solid foundations for our full-fledged membership in four years at latest.

To be able, as a society, to go successfully through the process of consolidation into a functional democracy worthy of being described as European, we must ensure that our citizens understand short-term and long-term benefits of alignment with the European acquis, but also feel the benefits of membership already during the negotiation process. It is clear that our European partners have the same opinion, since they have been showing their affirmative attitude towards the integration of the Southeast European countries into the EU through various funds, like Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans. The Growth Plan that facilitates convergence with the EU standard of living, ensured 383 million euros for Montenegro to finance initiatives from the Reform Agenda whose potential for transformation of the society, particularly in terms of human capital development, is precious. In



Maida Gorčević

addition to this, 100 million euros grant intended for the construction of the second section of the Princess Ksenija highway, will serve as an encouragement for equal economic development and generate a new investment momentum. The good position that we have earned by our efforts in the perception of European counterparts is additionally confirmed by the recently received six grants for the environment protection and energy sector of the total value of 75 million euros that EU approved for Montenegro in the Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF).

We have now reinforced our relations with our European partners, restored our role of a forerunner in the enlargement process, achieved an enviable degree of unity when it comes to the work on European agenda and showed that we have a clear vision and orientation that we do not depart from. We can therefore be optimistic that, if European integration depends on the objective merits, Montenegro will certainly be the next member of the European Union by 2028.

MONTENEGRO AND EU WORKED TOGETHER TO COME TO THIS HISTORIC MOMENT

By Oana-Cristina Popa, Ambassador, Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro



Why is IBAR important? IBAR is important due to various reasons, many of which have already been presented, so I will not repeat them. But the reason number one is that without IBAR a candidate country, according to the New Accession Methodology, cannot go any further.

We can think about it as a video game, if you wish. You cannot go to the next level before finishing the previous one! So, IBAR is necessary, but it is not sufficient. IBAR is definitely not the end of the game! It is actually a new beginning, but it opens the path to endless opportunities for speeding up the accession process and get closer to Montenegro's accession.

Probably the most important thing about IBAR that was not sufficiently mentioned, and that is why I am bringing it up, is that this IBAR is the first one! It is the first for Montenegro, but it is also the first for the European Commission. This has never been done before! Because, on one side, a new requirement was introduced, a new methodology, but at the same time, Montenegro is the first candidate country that is going through this process.

Getting the IBAR was a phenomenal and unbelievable team work on all levels, vertically and horizontally, on the technical level, political level, and diplomatic level, where Montenegrin side, Delegation of the EU, all Montenegrin institutions, negotiation team and our excellent colleagues in the DG NEAR in Brussels and in the Council and COREPER, EU Ambassadors and now also the ministers in the Council, all worked together in an unprecedented show of unity, to reach this historic moment for Montenegro.



AMBASSADOR OF HUNGARY MR JOZSEF NEGYESI FOR "EUROKAZ"

MEMBERSHIP OF MONTENEGRO IN THE EU WILL PROVE THAT ENLARGEMENT IS A REALITY

By Marko VEŠOVIĆ, RTCG

Montenegro's progress is a message for the entire region that, with genuine reforms, candidate countries can get close to the membership in the EU. We hope that the example of Montenegro will inspire reform efforts in other countries of the Western Balkans, says in the interview for „Eurokaz“ the Ambassador of Hungary in Montenegro Jozsef Negyesi. In the light of Hungarian Presidency in the Council of the EU, he says that Budapest highly appreciates the fact that Montenegro entirely reformed its legislative framework in the last ten years.

Enlargement of the EU to the Western Balkans will probably be high on the agenda of your country's Presidency. In that context, how do you see the situation in Montenegro, particularly after the positive IBAR?

The topic of accession of Western Balkan countries to the EU is indeed high on the list of priorities of the Hungarian Presidency. I personally consider the enlargement policy to be the most successful policy of the European Union that largely contributes to security and economic development of the EU. Our Presidency will work on ensuring progress in the EU enlargement process in line with the new methodology, on the basis of the Commission reports, with the merit-based approach, and taking into account the capacity of the Union to absorb new members.

Hungarian Presidency will put efforts into achieving genuine progress with the candidate and potential candidate countries. Credible enlargement policy

is a geostrategic investment into peace, stability, security, and prosperity in Europe. We want to put a particular emphasis on the regular political dialogue with those countries, supporting them in meeting the Copenhagen criteria.

EU has a fundamental interest in stability of the Western Balkans and our Presidency will therefore support deepening of concrete cooperation projects with the Western Balkan countries, particularly aimed at improving regional cooperation and stability. Hungarian Presidency will put efforts into organizing the EU-Western Balkans summit in the region during its term of office, and plans to organized intergovernmental conferences with the candidate countries that are ready for that. The goal is to ensure that EU remains the number one economic and political partner for the region, which will prevent further breakthrough of the third countries and their increasing influence. It is in the vital interest of the EU to have a stable and reliable region as a partner in its direct neighbourhood and to ensure it will become a part of the EU in foreseeable future.

Budapest highly appreciates the fact that Montenegro has fully reformed its legislative framework in the last ten years, adopting more than 150 laws and related enactments. In addition to this, fight against corruption and organized crime, as well as protection of human rights, keep improving.

In the case of Montenegro, all negotiation chapters have been opened since the summer of 2020, and so far only three have been closed. According to the new enlargement methodology, no further chapters could be closed before Montenegro meets the interim benchmarks for the rule of law chapters (23 and 24). However, the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) of 26 June 2024 confirmed that interim benchmarks were met and set the closing benchmarks for chapters 23 and 24. This opened the possibility for closing of other negotiation chapters during the Hungarian Presidency. On Montenegrin side, the goal is to close about seven negotiation chapters during our presidency, which will be wholeheartedly supported by our state in the following six months.

To succeed in the accession process, Montenegro must maintain national consensus on key issues, understanding that the progress in this field is in the

national interest and that it should not be jeopardized by any political instability. It is only with full political alignment that Montenegrin leadership will be able to meet the accession criteria successfully and get the political support of EU member states for European integration of the country.

Montenegro's progress is a message to the entire region that, with appropriate reforms, candidate countries can get closer to the membership in the EU. Let us hope that the example of Montenegro will inspire reform efforts in other Western Balkans countries.

What do you think about Montenegro's progress on the European path, and what do you think we should focus on during the Hungarian Presidency?

Montenegro reached the important stage in the IGC on 26 June, but its accession process has not entered the final stage. It has only overcome the political preconditions that constituted formal obstacles for

completion and simultaneous or consecutive closing of thematic chapters. This definitely is a visible progress in Montenegro's accession to the EU, but EU integration requires hard and complex institutional, legal and political changes and alignment in many fields. So now many of these legal and political alignments have to be done in numerous technical chapters within the preparations for Montenegro's membership in the EU. Hungary intends to provide all types of political and expert assistance and advice that a country presiding the Council of the EU can offer on the platform of already stable and consistent Hungary's support to Montenegro's accession to the EU. However, it is only Montenegro that can and should meet the goals and requirements in the negotiation chapters. As soon as they are met and European Commission recognizes that fact, Hungary will act and submit the results to all EU Member States, to ensure closing of the finalized negotiation chapters without any delay. Hungary expects, on the basis of a realistic but ambitious plan and in a close cooperation with Montenegro, that this can be achieved in a large number of negotiation chapters in the second half of this year.

We would consider important and tangible result of the Hungarian Presidency if Montenegro could make a genuine progress to membership in the EU by closing other negotiation chapters. Each closed chapter will signalize important progress and shorten the still rather long list of the difficult tasks that Montenegro is to accomplish before joining the EU.

From your point of view, what will be the future European path of the region, particularly of Montenegro, in light of all the current developments in the EU and expectations that EU has from the countries of the region?

To finalize its preparations for joining the European Union, Montenegro has to meet the conditions set in the negotiation chapters. They constitute the formal and technical preconditions for membership in the EU. Meeting them effectively and implementing them can be naturally achieved in a longer period of time before and after accession of Montenegro to the EU. The time framework and concrete conditions will be defined in the final state of Agreement on



Foto: Ambasador Nedešić

Accession of Montenegro to the EU. These details and circumstances remain in the scope of the Agreement that closes the entire process between Montenegro and the EU.

Political and institutional requirements for Montenegro's accession to the EU will be defined within the EU based on the results of the ongoing debates and considerations among the Member States and EU institutions. Understanding and perception of goals, rationality and effects of EU enlargement have transformed significantly in the last two years. Thus, the political opinions and willingness to accept EU enlargement deeply changed. EU is a political union of 27 states where national positions of Member States can change significantly due to changes in their governments after democratic elections. Let us hope that the possibility of change in the political composition of the European governments will not impact the current consensus that is in line with the coherent position about the strategic importance and necessity of EU enlargement that Hungary has for many years.

Montenegro's success that we want to see would not only be a recognition of its efforts and transformation, but could also act as a motivation and a role model for all other candidate or potential candidate countries in the Western Balkans. Membership of Montenegro in the EU will prove that EU enlargement is our reality, and it would put an end to the scepticism and delays that are so characteristic for some EU members for a long time. The example of Montenegro should serve as an inspiration, while the practice established in the process of its accession can provide a directly applicable and useful experience for other countries in the region.

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

Rule of law is the key principle of the European Union, while compliance with it is the key principle for every country that wishes to integrate into the EU, including Montenegro. Rule of law is necessary for democracy. Sustainable democratic values constitute one of the basic requirements for EU membership, and the rule of law is the corner stone of democratic values.

Montenegro must show its dedication to implementing legislative and judicial reforms aimed at strengthening the rule of law. This includes ensuring independent judiciary, efficient legal framework, and impartial implementation of the law. EU will carefully monitor progress in these areas as a part of the accession process. Maintaining the rule of law is of essential importance for fighting corruption and organized crime that constitute serious challenges in Montenegro and many other countries that aspire to join the EU.

Respecting human rights is another fundamental aspect of the rule of law. Montenegro must ensure protection of human rights for all its citizens, including minorities, but also harmonize its legislation with the EU standards in this respect. This includes issues like freedom of expression, independence of the media and rights of minorities.

Strong legal framework and respect for the rule of law are of essential importance for attracting foreign investment and promoting economic stability. Investors want to have predictability and legal certainty, which can be ensured only in the environment with consistent rule of law.

Maintaining the rule of law increases public trust in the state institutions and promotes good governance. It promotes transparency, responsibility and governance based on rules that are of essential importance for efficient functioning of democracy and for building of trust between state and citizens.

In that context, it is not surprising that the progress in solving the issue of the rule of law is the key factor in Montenegro's accession negotiations with the EU. EU will closely monitor Montenegro's alignment with the standards of the rule of law and provide assistance and guidelines to support reforms in this field.

To sum up, dealing with the rule of law is not important only for Montenegro's integration in the EU, but is also a priority for the overall democratic development, economy, and social cohesion of the country. Given the above, it is clear that European Union will continue treating the issues in the field of rule of law in Montenegro after the positive IBAR as a high priority, particularly in terms of further reforms of the justice system, freedom of the media, anti-corruption policy or efficiency in the fight against organized crime.

What is your opinion about the bilateral relations between Hungary and Montenegro?

In the relations of Hungary and Montenegro there are fortunately no open issues. The strong presence of Hungarian capital in Montenegro and the fact that we have been consistently supporting Euro-Atlantic and European aspiration of Montenegro constitute the key pillars of our bilateral relations. The specific fields of cooperation have been the economy, European integration, protection of minority and human rights, security policy and cooperation in culture and education. Hungarian investments in Montenegro include the CKB bank that is owned by OTP, ONE that is owned by 4iG and Hunguest Hotels Montenegro owned by Hunguest Hotels.

In the field of bilateral expert assistance, since 1 July 2016, Istvan Lakatos, PhD is the expert for human rights in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, while since February 2019 Csaba Toro, PhD has been working as an adviser for integration in the former Office for European Integration, i.e. the current Ministry of European Affairs, providing support to Montenegro's accession to the EU.

WHAT DO THE RESULTS OF ELECTIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT MEAN FOR CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE BALKANS

RIGHT-WINGERS ARE ENCOURAGED, BUT THE ENLARGEMENT IS NOT JEOPARDIZED

By Jovana ĐURIŠIĆ, Pobjeda

PODGORICA – Right-wing parties in the Balkans feel encouraged by the results of the European Parliament elections where the right-wing parties won a larger number of votes than in the previous elections, but the political dynamics in the region is not the same as the



Foto: Aleksandar Ivković

one in the EU, so it cannot be expected that the situation in Europe will be mirrored in the Balkans. That is what the editor of the portal "European Western Balkans" and the researcher in the Centre for Contemporary Politics Aleksandar Ivković says for Eurokaz.

In the recent elections for the European Parliament, the conservative European People's Party (EPP) won the largest number of seats, while the parties of the far right won a significantly higher number of the seats than they had before.

The results of the elections for 720 new members of the European Parliament have shown that the parties in two right-wing groups – European Conservatives and the Reformists and Identity and Democracy Group – have increased their number of MEPs by 13, from 118 in the previous European Parliament to 131 in the new one.

The success of the right-wing block is, however, somewhat greater if we take into account that some of the largest right-wing parties in Europe, like Alternative for Germany, are out of these groups and that the number of MEPs that they have is not within the 131.

The greatest losers of the elections are the French President Emmanuel Macron and the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Macron's party Renaissance won 15% of votes, while Marine Le Pen's National Rally won 32%, which led the French Head of State to call for early parliamentary elections in his country. In Germany, in spite of numerous scandals, including the hiding of Nazism, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) won a larger percentage of the national votes (16%) than any of the

three parties in the Scholz's coalition. Therefore, he is faced with the calls to call for early national elections, like Macron did.

Ivković, however, thinks that the topics that are discussed in the EU have not yet arrived to the Balkans, and that therefore the results of European elections will not have any direct impact on the circumstances in our region.

-Right-wing parties in the Balkans most probably feel encouraged by the results of the elections for the European Parliament. However, the primary reason for that is their belief that these elections announced that in some of the important EU countries – like France and Germany – the structures in power would change, and that the new authorities would be in stronger agreement about foreign politics and geopolitics with “our” right-wingers. That has not yet happened, and we will have to wait to see if such expectations are justified – says Ivković for our magazine.

It is believed, however, that the vote for the right-wing parties in the elections for the EP that created the basis for their good results, was primarily the vote against national elites.

-In the Balkans, many right-wing parties are in power, i.e. they already make a part of the ruling elite, and therefore the political dynamics is not the same and it cannot be expected that the situation from Europe will be “mirrored” in the Balkans. In addition to this, some topics that are discussed in the European Union – migrations, environmental standards, etc. – have not yet arrived in the Balkans, so no direct parallel can be drawn in that either. It is correct though that the current situation in Europe is favourable for the growth of populism everywhere, including the Balkans, and that should be an alarm for anti-populist parties – says Mr Ivković.

As for the enlargement policy and the fear that, due to the strengthening of the right-wing parties, this policy might be pushed aside, Ivković believes that, in spite of the fact that in the previous European Parliament the topic of enlargement was low on the list of priorities when the Commission started working in 2019, it became much more prominent after the war in Ukraine started in 2022.

-In addition to the opening of negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, we could see some progress in the Balkans too. This progress was certainly partly motivated by the new geopolitical situation. Last year European Union started a serious discussion about the internal reforms that must be implemented before new members join, which is also a good sign for the candidate countries. European Council that met at the end of June invited the European Commission to make an overview of the areas in which these reforms are needed by 2025 and put preparations for enlargement among the strategic priorities for the period 2024-2029. Based on this, since this Commission is the Commission of continuity, this can be interpreted as good news for enlargement advocates, because they want these processes to continue – says Ivković.

Soon after the elections, the key functions in the EU were distributed too. Thus, the new “trio fantastico” will include the former and current President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, but also two new faces – Antonio Costa – former Portuguese Prime Minister who will fill in the office of the President of the European Council and the former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, who will replace Josep Borrell in the position of the Head of the European diplomacy. Their appointments have shown that, in spite of the strong right-wingers, the key roles belong to the “European-oriented” politicians, whose political positions lie on what is the core of the EU – unity, alliance, but also strong support to Ukraine and enlargement.

Ivković thinks that it is precisely the new composition of the Commission and the Parliament that can ensure serious progress towards the enlargement in the following five years, for which, as he says, there is currently a political will.

-However, it is primarily a product of necessity – the Russian attack against Ukraine – and not of any enthusiasm for European Union enlargement. That is why it is difficult to forecast what will actually happen, because it depends on many factors, including inter alia how the war in Ukraine will end and who will be in power in the most important EU Member States by the end of this decade. I think that enlarging the block by 2030 (rather than by 2028) is realistic at this moment, at least for Montenegro, but that the will for that in the

European Union lies on shaky grounds, so the things can still change – says Ivković.

That is why, as he concludes, it is difficult to make any forecasts, but it can be noted that the candidate

countries should use this enlargement momentum that currently exists to implement reforms that the citizens will benefit from, regardless of when the membership will happen.



Photo: The European Parliament

GROWTH PLAN FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS: AN IMPORTANT INSTRUMENT FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KEY REFORMS ON THE EUROPEAN PATH AND ACCELERATING ECONOMIC GROWTH

By Bojana BOŠKOVIĆ, State Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and Negotiator for the Cluster III – Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth

The new European Union initiative - Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, was announced for the first time by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen on 31 May 2023 during the GLOBSEC 2023 Forum in Bratislava. It was officially adopted on 8th November 2023 within the 2023 Enlargement Package.

The goal of the initiative is to use the economic potential of the region and to provide room for an intensified inter-regional economic cooperation and trade in the short- and medium run.

The Plan is based on four pillars which aim at:

1. Enhancing economic integration with the European Union's single market (alignment with the single market rules);
2. Boosting economic integration within the Western Balkans through Common Regional Market based on EU rules and standards;
3. Accelerating fundamental reforms
4. Increasing financial assistance to support the reforms through a Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, worth 6 billion euros in grants and loans, conditioned on fulfilling the fundamental reforms from the pillar above.

To achieve ambitious goals defined in these pillars of the Plan, an appropriate regulation has been adopted, envisaging the new EU Reform and Growth Facility.

The value of the EU Reform and Growth Facility for the entire Western Balkans is 6 billion euros for the period 2024-2027. The regulation defines that the package of

financial support includes a combination of 2 billion euros in EU grants and 4 billion euros in favourable loans.

According to the defined methodology, the amount determined for Montenegro is roughly 383 million euros - the combination of about 255 million euros of favourable loans and 128 million euros of EU grants.

The plan is that, out of the total amount of support, a half, i.e. about 190 million euros, will be allocated in

form of a direct budget support, while the other half of the funds will be allocated for financing infrastructural projects and they will be implemented through the mechanism of the Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF). According to the announcements of the European Commission, the plan is to allocate 7% of the total amount at the beginning of the Growth Plan implementation, while the rest is to be allocated in six semi-annual tranches of support that will depend on the level of implementation of the planned reforms.

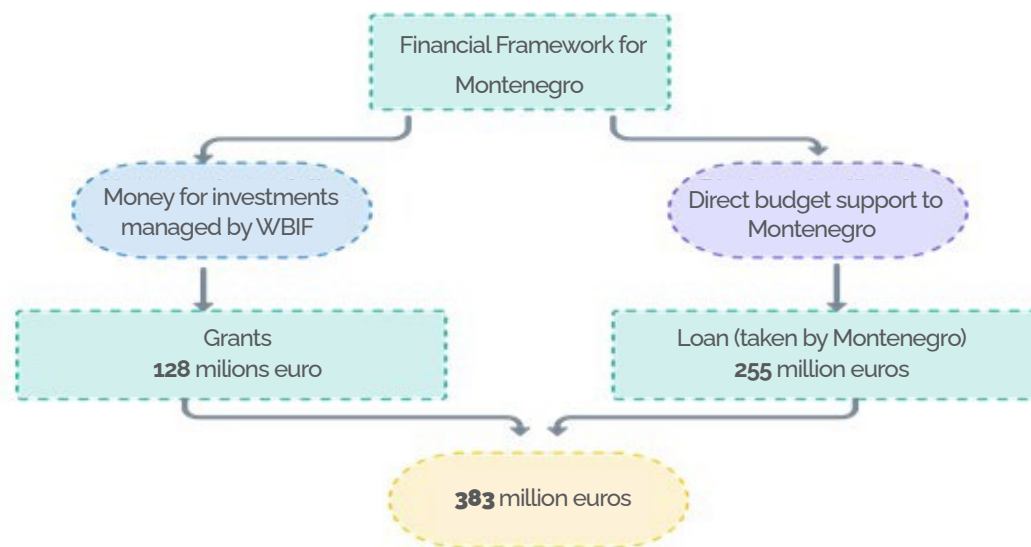


Image 1: Financial framework for Montenegro

Reform Agenda

To meet the requirement for allocation of funds within the third pillar of the Growth Plan, Montenegro and other beneficiaries of the support in the region are expected to align their reform plans with the EU, i.e. to prepare and adopt a document titled Reform Agenda for the EU Reform and Growth Facility. This document should contain a list of reform measures with detailed activities and indicators.

The goal of the Reform Agenda is to use the European Union incentives available through the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans to implement key reforms in the areas of strategic importance for accelerating the economic growth.

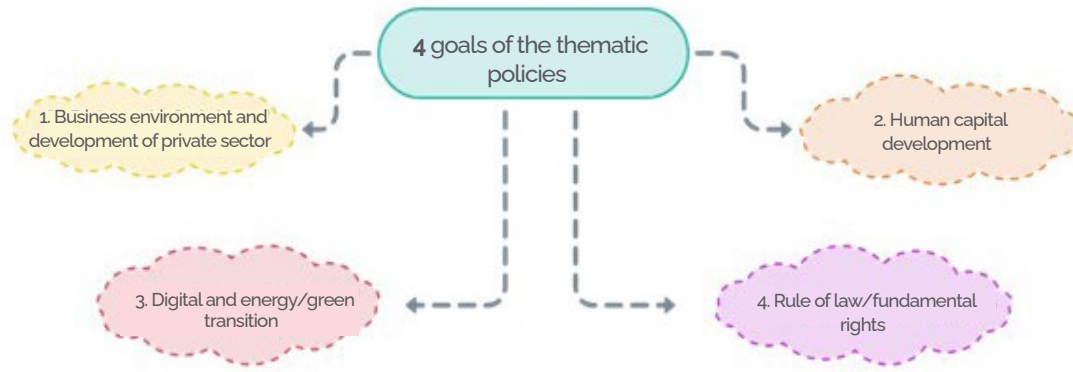
In this context, the Government of Montenegro, together with the EC, identified the areas of strategic

importance that should be included in the Reform Agenda through appropriate reform measures: (1) business environment and development of the private sector, (2) digital and energy/green transition, (3) development of human capital and (4) rule of law/fundamental rights.

After the initial consultations with the European Commission services, in its meetings on 5th and 7th December 2023, the Government adopted the first, and then the second draft, that contained an overview of the reform measures, submitted to the European Commission.

The first draft of the Reform Agenda provides a list of reforms in the field of business environment and development of the private sector, digital and energy/green transition and development of human capital, while in the second draft the list of reforms is

Image 2: Priority Areas

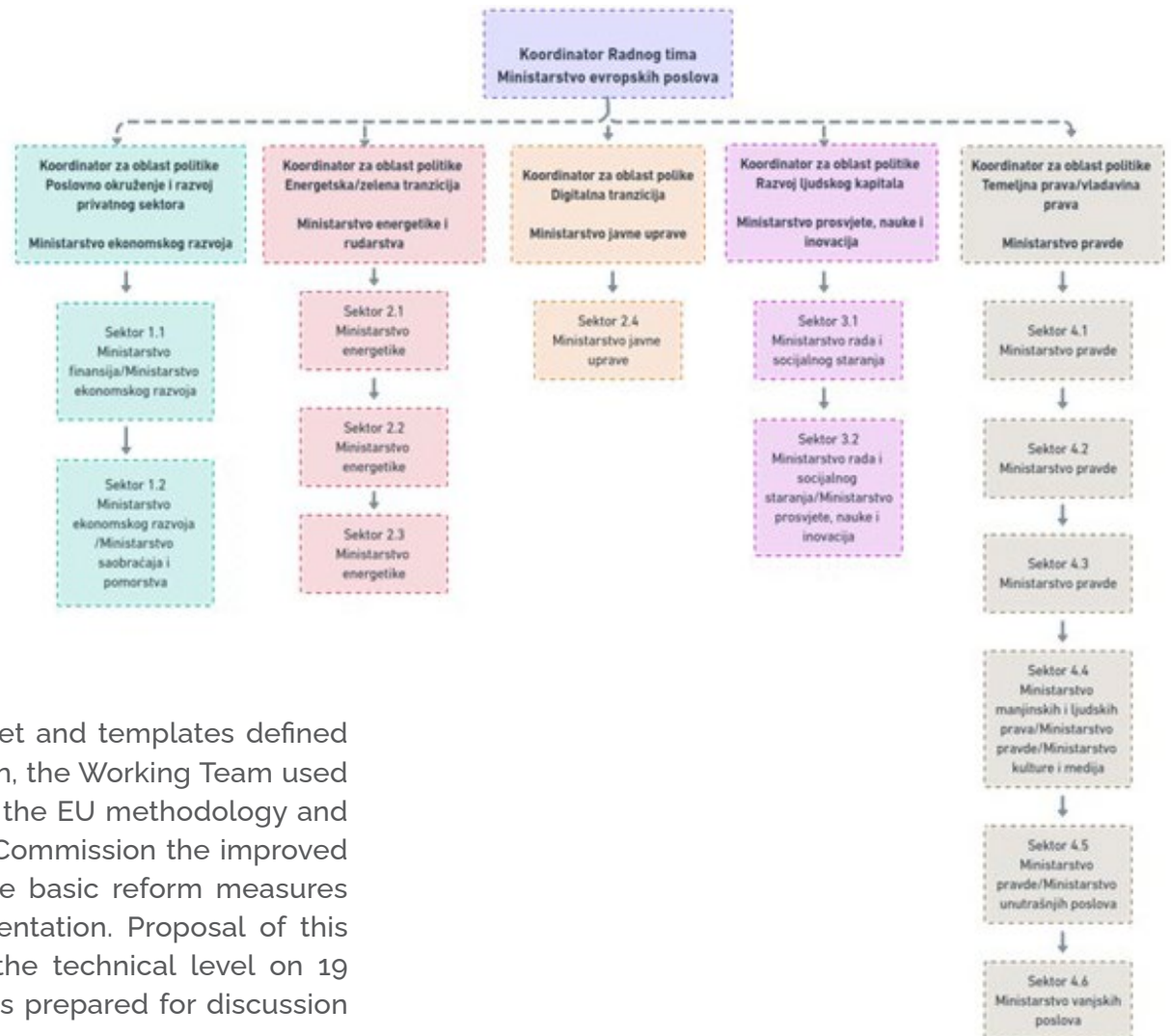


extended to include the reforms in the field of the rule of law (democracy, judiciary, combating corruption, fundamental rights and freedom of the media, combating organized crime, visa policy).

work on the preparation of the Reform Agenda, a working team for preparation of the Reform Agenda for the EU Reform and Growth Facility was established in late January 2024. Its work is coordinated by the Ministry of European Affairs.

With a view to ensuring more efficient and purposeful

Image 3: Working Team for Preparation of the Reform Agenda for the EU Reform and Growth Facility



In line with the deadlines set and templates defined by the European Commission, the Working Team used the several steps defined in the EU methodology and submitted to the European Commission the improved drafts of the proposal of the basic reform measures and steps for their implementation. Proposal of this document was agreed on the technical level on 19 June 2024, after which it was prepared for discussion in the Government.



of the Economic Reforms Programme (ERP), that is prepared by the countries in the process of dialogue about economic governance. Thus, the chapter on structural reforms will no longer be a part of ERP, but a part of the Reform Agenda, while ERP will remain only a macro-fiscal document.

The Reform Agenda contains a set of reforms that have already been recognized as important for achieving the benchmarks and criteria needed for membership. This new format is trying to give an additional impetus to their implementation. This is even more true since the financial support is conditioned by the implementation of the activities envisaged in the reform measures. In such a way, an additional responsibility is imposed on the decision makers and administration, to show a real level of commitment and efficiency in leading the reform process and implementing the reforms.

We should have in mind that the process of preparing the documents and implementing the measures comes with abundant documentation and, in that respect, it is demanding for the state authorities that participate in it.

After the formal adoption and submitting the document to the European Commission, two contracts will be signed – one regulating the processes and procedures of cooperation between two parties, and the other regulating the conditions of financing.

After this, a particularly important segment is monitoring and reporting about the implemented reforms. It should result in the semi-annual financial support.

According to the methodological approach of the EU, the first step in composing the full format of the Reform Agenda is to agree on the proposal of the basic reform measures and steps for their implementation. The reform measures agreed on in this way serve only as the basis to prepare the document in its full format, in line with the template provided by the European Commission. It should contain a narrative part with a detailed description of the situation and plans for each of the reform measures, as well as a description of the situation in the policy areas and areas that are defined as general preconditions for allocation of the EU funds.

The Final Proposal of the reform measures and steps for the Reform Agenda for the EU Reform and Growth Facility contains 32 indicative priority reform measures within four policy areas, 14 policy sub-areas (sectors) and steps defined as necessary for implementation of reforms. The defined steps also contain performance indicators that will constitute the basis for monitoring progress in the implementation of the reform measures and assessment of the EU on whether the conditions for allocation of funds are met.

The process of aligning the proposed document with the suggestions of the European Commission is in progress.



Why is the Reform Agenda important?

It is important to mention that, designing the Reform Agenda, as the document that contains an overview of the reforms that the state has to implement, the European Commission also modified the methodology

MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU₄HEALTH PROGRAMME

THROUGH EU₄HEALTH TO HIGHER QUALITY HEALTH CARE SERVICES IN MONTENEGRO

By: *Bojana MILIĆEVIĆ, RTCG*



Adequate use of the EU₄Health programme will contribute to the improvement, affordability and resilience of the health care system. It will ensure that the line ministry and other relevant institutions have a systemic approach to improving health and resolving deficiencies, says the acting General Director of the Directorate for IPA and other projects and infrastructure in the Ministry of Health, Amra Pepić for Eurokaz. She says that Montenegro has already applied to four calls through this programme, with the focus of the register for cancer, digitalization and tele-medicine, mental health, and improvement of capacities of employees to participate in this programme.

Montenegro joined EU₄Health programme in January. This programme is focused on the strengthening of health care systems in Europe and its budget for the period 2021-2027 amounts to 5.3 billion euros. To what extent is this important for Montenegro, and what does this mean for our health care system?

Since January 2024 Montenegro has been a signatory to the Agreement on EU₄Health programme (Europe for Health). Signing of this Agreement and using this programme in an adequate way will certainly contribute to the improvement, affordability and resilience of the health care system. Europe for Health maps health care as a specific sector and, through adequate participation of the state of Montenegro, i.e. its Ministry of Health and other relevant institutions in the health care sector, a systemic approach will be taken in the fields of promoting health and eliminating deficiencies within the national health care systems that covid-19

additionally emphasized and that are included in the other general goal of the programme. A very important thing for Montenegro and for its fast response to threats in the health-care sector is certainly digitalization of the health care system that, faced with the challenges of today's world became particularly prominent after the covid-19 crisis. Upgrading the capacities of staff and investing into employees is certainly one of the primary development directions for the Ministry. Participation in the program of this kind will contribute to the process of further integration of Montenegro into the European Union and will additionally accelerate the accession process. It is worth noting that, in addition to the EU Member States, Norway, Iceland, Moldova and Ukraine, Montenegro is one of the signatories, as a country candidate for membership in the EU, which is a success.

Has Montenegro already applied with some projects for funds within the EU₄Health programme? What do those project deal with and what is their worth?

Given the fact that this is the first year of participation in this programme, the Ministry of Health appointed relevant representatives in the programme committees and the national focal point. Montenegro used the opportunity and applied to four calls through this programme. Particularly interesting are the projects for register of cancer, digitalization and telemedicine, mental health, as well as upgrading of the capacity of staff for participation in this programme. We also organized an Info Day for relevant health care establishments, having the representatives of the programme informing us about the basics of the



programme. We plan to organize similar Info Days in our country in the period ahead. Of course, we will have competitive calls for projects in the period to come. This program targets non-governmental sector through special calls too. The overall value of the programme is 5 billion euros and these are huge funds that can generate great opportunities. Partnerships with European Union Member States in the field of exchange of knowledge, skills and experience are also very important.

How difficult is it to meet the requirements for obtaining the funds within this programme since it includes EU Member States? Has Montenegro requested support from European partners in developing projects?

As I already mentioned, the Ministry of Health applied for direct grants as a competent authority. This means we will be included in the fields that we applied for, and those projects are mostly led by EU Member States – the coordinators that have more experience in these fields. In that way all the countries are gathered around the same idea and they prepare project application with indicators and results that are appropriate for the policy of the country, and, of course, for the goals of the European Union that are in this programme particularly related to: Health 2020 – European Health Strategy, European Commission Cancer Plan, Digital Health Strategy, Strategy for Pharmaceutical Industry, etc.

Is there a plan to apply for funds for improving infrastructure of our health care establishments?

Already at the beginning of this year, the Ministry of Health started negotiations with the European Banks - EBRD, EIB and CEB. The goal is to contract the amount of 85 million euros for capital projects and 20 million euros for purchase of equipment. After the health care establishments submitted their priorities, data about equipment were sent to the banks that are

considering the proposed loans. It is very important that, as one of the results related to the equipment, we get a comprehensive analysis of the condition of equipment in all health care establishments. That will give us an overview of the current situation and define the goals of our future actions. As for infrastructural projects, there is a call for tenders for designing and constructing the General Hospital in Pljevlja, and we hope that next month there will be a call for tenders for the main design for the Health Care Centre in the “City Kvar” neighbourhood. There are no projects that are less important, all projects in the health care sector are equally important, but we are putting efforts into dealing with the challenges step by step. It should be mentioned that, through MEEP 2, the projects of energy efficiency in the health care establishments are being implemented. So far, nine of them have been adapted and the project is still going on. With the EBRD we are in the final stage of negotiating the projects of energy efficiency in the Clinical Centre of Montenegro, General Hospital Bijelo Polje and General Hospital Cetinje. With adequate infrastructure and equipment we definitely raise the level of health care.

Can membership in the EU4Health programme help Montenegro's progress in the overall process of negotiations for membership in the European Union, and to what extent?

As a candidate country for membership in the European Union, Montenegro has access to various programmes and funds of the EU, including the programme EU4Health. Participation in this programme helps Montenegro upgrade its health care system and improve health care for its citizens, in line with European standards. Several aspects of the positive impact on Montenegro's European integration could be underlined: improving the health care system in



terms of accessing funds for improving health care infrastructure and digitalization of services, alignment with the legislation i.e. application of EU standards and rules in the health care sector, building the capacities for exchange of knowledge and training health professionals, strengthening resilience to crises in form of strengthening capacities for responding to health care crises like pandemics, as well as improving the health of population through implementation of the projects for prevention of diseases and promotion of health. All of this helps Montenegro to improve its health system, reach EU standards and show preparedness for membership in the Union.

MONTENEGRO WILL INCORPORATE EUROPEAN MEDIA FREEDOM ACT AND DIGITAL SERVICES ACT INTO ITS LEGISLATION

RUDOVIĆ: MEDIA MUST BE PREPARED FOR MONTENEGRO'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU

By Milan ŽUGIĆ, MINA Agency



Foto: MINA



Photo: EP Website (Print screen)

Podgorica – Ministry of Culture and Media will establish a commission that should find the best model for incorporating Media Freedom Act and Digital Services Act, recently adopted in the European Parliament, into Montenegrin legislation, says the Director of the Directorate for Media in the Ministry of Culture Nedeljko Rudović, underlining that media must be prepared for Montenegro's membership in the European Union (EU)

On 14 March, with 464 votes for and 92 against, the European Parliament adopted the Media Freedom Act with a view to strengthening transparency in that sector and ensuring freedom of journalists in their work. This Act that came into force on 7th May, establishes a new set of rules for protection of pluralism and independence of the media in the EU. The Regulation includes, inter alia, measures for protection from political interference into editorial decisions and from supervision. The focus is put on independence and stable financing of public media, as well as on transparency of the media ownership and distribution of state advertising.

For the new issue of Eurokaz, Rudović says that media freedoms have been improved in Montenegro, but that the atmosphere should be created where no pressures, threats or denigrations are tolerated, and particularly no attacks against journalists. Rudović adds that media must be independent, and journalists protected from any kind of influence or attack.

“It is very important, particularly in the field of protection of the media, that Montenegro closely follows European legislation. European Media Freedom Act is an important document which additionally strengthens independence of the media



Photo: Ministry of Culture and Media

and protection of journalists from any influence or attack. This is particularly important for us in Montenegro where we still have an unsolved case of murder of the editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper "Dan" Duško Jovanović. In addition to this, it is particularly important to ensure independent and stable financing of the media", says Rudović.

He reminded that the Ministry of Culture finances the work of Montenegrin media through the Fund for encouraging pluralism and diversity of the media.

"Last year, the Fund for development of the media paid out almost 980 thousand euros. Out of that, 538.8 thousand euros were allocated to commercial and non-profit electronic media, while the total number of 54 projects of daily and weekly printed media and internet publications were financed. In addition to this, the Ministry of Culture and Media allocated 440 thousand euros for financing 3 projects dealing with different self-regulation mechanisms. From the following year, the Fund for media pluralism will be increased from 0.09% to 0.20% of the budget and new topics will be added that are of public interest and on the basis of which funds from the Fund can be allocated", says Rudović

He announced that the Ministry of Culture was to establish a commission that should identify the best model to incorporate the European Media Freedom Act into our legislative framework.

"For us it is very important and that is why we will establish the Commission that will analyse all the circumstances to ensure that this Act can become a part of Montenegrin legislation, not only formally, but in practice too, so that Montenegrin media are

prepared for the time when Montenegro becomes an EU Member State", says Rudović.

President of the Media Trade Union, Radomir Kračković, thinks that adoption of European Media Freedom Act is a significant step towards strengthening of independence, primarily of journalists, but also of the media, particularly the public ones, and towards prevention of illicit influence on their work.

"This document should ensure genuine reporting freedom to the journalists and give a strong impetus to further development of investigative journalism. It is very important that this Act will ensure stronger protection of journalists' sources and, I hope, also fair conditions in the media market. All of these are the reasons why Montenegro should incorporate this Act into its legislation as soon as possible. Strengthening of journalistic and editorial independence is of key importance for a higher degree of media freedoms in Montenegro because we see that numerous media are under some kind of political influence", says Kračković.

He said that protection of journalist and their sources from spying is also very important, if minimum conditions for their normal work are to exist.

"Securing long-term financial independence of the Public Service is important not only for the Radio and Television of Montenegro, but also for preventing unfair competition to the detriment of other media. Maximum support should also be given to ensuring transparency of ownership of the media, because that ensures a better insight into the motives of certain media for reporting in the way they do. All in all, in the entire world, including Montenegro, journalism is facing numerous challenges and documents like this Act should be fully implemented to overcome those challenges in an easier manner", says Kračković.



Photo: Media Trade Union

NIKŠIĆ – A CANDIDATE FOR THE TITLE OF EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE IN 2030

By Mato ULJAREVIĆ, Coordinator of the Initiative Nikšić 2030 European Capital of Culture

European Capital of Culture is the most important and the oldest initiative of the European Commission in the field of culture that was started as far as in 1985 by the Greek minister of culture Melina Mercouri. That initiative highlighted the cultural dimension of the EU as one of the pillars of the European idea. Throughout the years, the initiative went through transformations – in the beginning it constituted a recognition to the largest and most famous capitals of culture in Europe, and in recent years this title ensures that small and less known cities can profile themselves on the European level and get long-term benefits in the field of culture, tourism, and economy. Increasingly often, the „invisible“ towns, post-industrial cities and towns on the margins become centres of cultural events in Europe, thanks to their specific abilities to point to some important European issues from a new perspective and to enrich the European cultural mosaic through their arts programme.

Every three years, in addition to two cities from EU countries selected in advance, one town from the countries that are candidates or potential candidates for accession to the EU gets the right to the ECC title. This initiative attracted enormous attention in the region and thus several towns already participated in the competition and two got the title – Novi Sad for 2022, when Herceg Novi was a candidate, and Skopje for 2028, when Budva was a candidate. This year, in addition to two cities from the EU, Tartu and Bad Ischi, it is the Norwegian town of Bodo that will have the ECC title. It is the first European Capital of Culture that lies north from the Arctic circle. The title is allocated to cities regardless of their size, number of citizens or geographic position. Decisive is the idea of the



Photo: Mato Uljarević

city for a high quality and strategically planned arts programme, with a clear European dimension, that will at the same time achieve long-term benefits for the city and the surrounding area, like increasing international importance, long-term cultural development, increase of cultural production, tourism visits, etc.

The idea of Nikšić as a candidate for the ECC title is not new. Nikšić has the reputation of a city of culture, and it is recognized also as a centre of alternative music scene in Montenegro. After Budva did not get the title, the answer to the question which city could be the next candidate from Montenegro for the ECC title came naturally. The cultural scene of this town started its revival in recent years, cultural contents are increasingly diversified, number of events increased, while traditional manifestations set the preconditions for sustainable functioning. Municipal allocations for culture are on an increase year after year, while their share in the total budget of the municipality is among larger ones in Montenegro (8.14% in 2022 and, 7.72% in 2023).

The process of candidacy went smoothly from the very beginning, with the involvement and support of all key stakeholders on both local and national level. President of the Municipality of Nikšić Marko Kovačević proposed this initiative in 2023 to the Municipal Assembly that adopted it without any vote against it. This showed full political support on the local level. We soon formalized the work on the candidacy through the opening of the office of the Initiative Nikšić 2030 European Capital of Culture in the Innovation Entrepreneurship Centre Tehnopolis, which, as one of the important partners in the project, in cooperation with the Municipality of



Photo: Presentation of the initiative in the Book Fair in Podgorica

Nikšić secured the premises for the project office.

A precondition for success of the ECC project is the broadest possible inclusiveness and participation of all representatives of the cultural scene, but also of the civil sector and all interested citizens. The primary goal of the office Nikšić 2030 ECC is precisely to be an open space where everyone can get information about what ECC is, propose their projects and contribute with their knowledge, advice, and creativity. In recent months several hundreds of individuals, organizations, and associations from Nikšić and entire Montenegro presented their ideas in the Office.

Members of different groups in the society are directly involved in designing projects and creating audience development strategy. We mapped the key challenges, obstacles, and potential cultural scenes. In parallel with this process, Municipality of Nikšić started the process of adoption of the local Culture Development Programme, which is one of the formal preconditions for getting the title and which will ensure sustainability of planned activities.

The concept of Nikšić's candidacy has been designed with the idea to put the specific identity of the city into a broader, European context. We were exploring the culture of the city, the way of life and heritage to find those elements that can be relevant today on the European level. The first zoning plan of Nikšić,

developed by the famous architect from Trogir, Josip Slade, is based on the idea of a city that opens radially, creating a symmetrically organized human space modelled after famous European cities that have such a system of space organization.

Inspired by Slade's plan, the vision of the project Nikšić 2030 is based on the idea of a city open for new ideas and concepts, open for all differences and open for establishment of new and restoration of old connections. The city perceived as a square – space for meetings, communication, and connections. We connect to the rich European cultural heritage in our territory, with the nature that is around us and that we belong to, but also with the modern innovative practices. We also connect to each other in the community, we connect with other cities, with the region. And in the end, we connect with Europe.

Preparing for the European Capital of Culture, we are developing cooperation with other cities all around Europe, particularly the ECC cities and candidates for the ECC title. In the year that we are a candidate for the ECC title in the category of cities from non-EU countries (2030), ECC cities from Europe will be a city from Belgium and a city from Cyprus. Our team is in regular communication with the work teams from these cities, so that we can develop joint projects and help each other in this process, already in the first stage of candidacy.



Photo: Representatives of the Work Teams of ECC candidates for 2030 in a joint meeting in Cyprus



Photo: Workshop with high school students

DUE MARI: USING DIGITAL TOOLS TO REACH TRAVELLERS WHO SEEK FOR AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

Author: Stefan BULATOVIĆ, Ministry of European Affairs

The Project Nikšić 2030 ECC envisages a balanced cultural programme throughout the year that will include various forms of art expression, participatory cultural programmes that include citizens as performers, and not only as passive observers, as well as innovative projects in the field of culture, based on re-designing Nikšić as a centre of creative(!) industries. A number of preparatory activities has been planned for the period 2026-2029, intended for capacity development and preparing infrastructure for 2030 when Nikšić will be one of the most important points on the cultural map of Europe for 365 days.

Relevant institutions on the national level provided support to the project, led by the Ministry of Culture and Media, and we hope that very soon we will get a formal support from the Government, that the European Commission expects from us as a guarantee of sustainability of this initiative. The initiative has been supported also the by Speaker of the parliament Mr Andrija Mandić. On the occasion of the Day of Europe, the candidacy of Nikšić was presented also within the event „European Tour“ organized by the Ministry of European Affairs with the support of the Delegation of the European Union.

The key goal of the project is to maximize the benefits of ECC in the entire country and therefore the project Nikšić 2030 ECC is designed for cultural professionals, organizations, and audience from entire Montenegro. At the end of this year, we will know if Nikšić entered the second round of the competition. If that is the case, we are to implement even more intensive activities in 2025 when the final application is to be prepared.

The concept of ideal travel has gone through significant changes in the last couple of years. Instead of the conventional routes and traditional tours, tourists increasingly wish to explore the areas outside of the established paths. Nowadays they seek for the offers that can satisfy their curiosity and interests and in that they increasingly rely on digital technologies.

Recognizing these trends, institutions from Montenegro, Italy and Albania joined efforts and decided to design innovative tourism products focused on digital promotion of the region of South Adriatic and Northern Ionian Sea, as well as on the joint valorisation of the natural and cultural wealth of this territory. That has been made possible by the thematic project DUE MARI that is supported through the Interreg IPA programme of cross-border cooperation Italy-Albania-Montenegro 2014-2020, co-financed by the European Union.

„Our idea was to connect the region along the Adriatic and Ionian Sea into a unique destination to meet the needs of an increasing number of travellers who seek for an active vacation and authentic local experience, far from the places that most of the visitors gravitate to,“ explains Maja Kovačević from the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Sustainable Development and Development of the North of Montenegro for Eurokaz. She was in charge of this project in the earlier Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism.

In addition to Montenegrin ministry in charge of the field of tourism, partners in this project include the National Tourism Organization of Montenegro, Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania, Puglia Region, Molise Region and the company INNOVAPUGLIA S.p.A.

Total value of the project is 5.2 million euros, 85% of which are EU grants.

The key achievement of the project is the joint digital platform Due Mari, that presents more than 600 natural and cultural sites in the Italian regions of Puglia and Molise, Albania and Montenegro.

As Kovačević says, partners from these three states mapped their key natural and cultural heritage sites and posted them on the virtual interactive platform that the users can easily access and design their trip in such a way.

„When it comes to Montenegro, the platform contains 160 sites from all its municipalities. To the visitors, it offers a virtual walk through Montenegro's landscapes. For each site there is a brief summary of key information, and it is available in English and Montenegrin.

The three routes are made of the offered sites, one for Southern, one for Northern and one for Central region, and each of them is a mixture of different attractions worth visiting“, says Kovačević.

Thanks to this platform, numerous less known natural and cultural attractions from entire Montenegro

became accessible to national and foreign travellers who thus have an opportunity to learn more about potential micro destinations, but only to the extent needed to provoke their interest and motivate them to visit.

Zabojsko Lake near Mojkovac, archaeological site of the settlement Municipium S near Pljevlja, Vizier's Mosque in Gusinje, necropolis of Žugić Bare in Durmitor, Monastery Ždrebaonik and Tivat Salina are only some of the sites that are usually not in tourism brochures about Montenegro and that are valuable parts of the cultural and natural heritage of our country.

The platform also contains the sites from the UNESCO World Heritage List, like the Old Town of Kotor, Berat Castle in Albania, octagonal Castel del Monte in Puglia, as well as the antique Roman theatre Teatro Tempio di Pietrabbondante in the Molise region.

In addition to the digital platform, a replica of the printing press from the Printing House of Crnojevići was built during the project, as well as other authentic furniture that was used for the work of the press. In cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Media, which was an associate partner on the project, the



Photo: Due Mari: Church of the Virgin's Presentation



Photo Due Mari: Replica of the Printing Press

replica of the press and furniture are given to the National Museum in Cetinje and they are now exhibited in Biljarda.

As Kovačević says, the partners from Montenegro wanted to make a recognizable tourism product of the cultural and historic heritage.

„This is particularly important since, according to the World Tourism Organization data, 4 out of 10 tourists travel inspired precisely by the aspect of cultural tourism. In addition to this, the survey of opinions and spending of tourists in Montenegro conducted by National Tourism Organization confirmed that more than 65% of the respondents during their stay in Montenegro visited cultural sites, including museums, galleries and exhibitions“, she added.

The partners dedicated significant attention to the promotion of the project. They have a joint publication

in English ‘Due Mari Route It’ that presents numerous cultural and natural sites in Italy, Albania, and Montenegro. In addition to this, the partners from Montenegro made short promotion movies for each of the municipalities composed of the video materials made from the air. They were then given to local tourism organizations to better promote their tourism potentials.

Three interactive screens - totems were also purchased within the project. They were given for management to the local tourism organizations, and installed on visible locations in Podgorica, Kolašin and Bar. They will soon broadcast contents of those local tourism organizations, as well as the link to all virtual walks through the selected sites in Montenegro.

Kovačević is particularly proud of the fact that the ministry in charge of the field of tourism has shown the ability to manage such a large regional project, emphasizing the excellent cooperation that they have with the partners.

„Through the project DUE MARI we confirmed that in this region we can cooperate in a very nice and efficient manner, gathered around joint priorities and interests. I believe this is only the beginning of work on a better tourism, cultural and economic connections of Adriatic-Ionian region“, she concludes.



Photo: Due Mari: Cehotina River

EUROPE TURNS TO BICYCLES AS A SOLUTION FOR MANY PROBLEMS IN THE SOCIETY

By Blažo Crvenica and Stefan Bulatović, NGO Biciklo.me

Since the beginning of 21st century, Europe is faced with the ever-increasing climate, health, and economic challenges, that are mutually interwoven and increasingly complex. Pollution and health waves, obesity, cardio-vascular diseases, and raging inflation are only some of the problems that have a negative impact on the quality of life of Europeans. Montenegro is not an exception.

Air pollution is one of the burning problems in Montenegro. Particularly worrying is the increase in the emissions of damaging gasses from transport that contribute to global warming. According to the UNDP data from 2021, transport sector is responsible for 22% of CO₂ emissions, whereby as much as 95% of those emissions come from the road transport. On the other side, through the Paris Agreement, Montenegro committed to reduce CO₂ emissions by 2030 by 35% in relation to the baseline from 1990. It will be difficult to achieve that goal in the transport sector, if the continuous growth in the use of passenger cars continues, particularly since as many as three quarters

of those vehicles use diesel that generates the worst air pollution.

When it comes to public health, data of the Public Health Institute show that as many as 40% of children in Montenegro of the age of 7 are obese. This is particularly concerning if we take into account that obesity in childhood most frequently continues in the adult age, which is connected to the diseases like an increased blood pressure and diabetes.

In the field of economy, the standard of living is to a large extent conditioned by trends in the oil derivatives market, because every increase in the prices of fuel leads to the growth of prices of transport, services and goods. In addition to this, Montenegro is faced with invisible crisis known under the name „transport poverty“. Due to the lack of sustainable alternatives like public transport and adequate infrastructure for active mobility many citizens buy and use cars out of necessity, because their access to the basic services like education and health care is hindered.

Two Wheels Solutions

In such circumstances, Europe is increasingly aware that there is a simple solution for many complex problems of the modern society – bicycle. Benefits of using bicycles are well known: saving money and resources, preserving health, protecting environment and strengthening community. According to research, if an average man replaced only one of his/her trips a day by a bicycle ride, his/her carbon footprint would in a year be reduced by about half a ton of CO₂, which would save the CO₂ emission equal to the emission during a transatlantic flight from London to New York.

Numerous studies have shown a positive impact of the use of bicycles on physical and mental health. People who use bicycles to go to work have a significantly lower risk from developing cardio-vascular diseases (24%) or cancer (16%) than those who use cars to go to work. Research done in Scotland also showed that people who use bicycle to go to work run a significantly smaller risk of developing mental diseases like depression.

Bicycle is good for economy as well. Apart from being affordable to all layers of the society, various economic analyses have shown that the costs of building bicycle



infrastructure are several times lower than building the roads for motor vehicles. In addition to this, the analysis of the Danish ministry of transport has shown that every kilometre taken by bicycle brings to the state the net income of 16 cents, while every kilometre travelled by car costs the state 15 cents, mostly thanks to the savings in the field of health care. Additionally, it is established that use of bicycles brings 150 billion euros every year in the EU Member States, not only in the fields of transport or environment protection, but also in many other fields, like industry, employment, health care and social policy.

Strategic Efforts in the EU

In spite of numerous benefits, it seems that in our country, but also in a large number of other European countries, bicycles still do not have the treatment that they deserve, particularly in terms of investment into infrastructure. However, in the last couple of years, significant progress has been recorded in the strategic and legislative framework in the European Union. This progress created preconditions for bicycles to get a

high position in the political agenda of the Member States, but also of those that aspire to join the European family.

The first decisive steps were made through the European Green Deal, where the role of transport in achieving climate neutrality by 2050 was particularly emphasized. This is the framework that resulted in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, in which European Commission confirmed the importance of bicycles in reducing pollution. On the basis of this document, the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy for the Western Balkans was presented in 2021. It implicitly recognized bicycle as a part of the solution to climate neutrality.

The key moment for political support to the use of bicycles was the adoption of European Declaration on Cycling in early April 2024, during the Belgian presidency in the Council of the European Union. All three EU institutions – European Parliament, European Commission and the EU Council of Ministers signed the first official document where bicycle is



Photo: From the signing of European Declaration on Cycling

recognized as full-fledged means of transport. The Declaration says that bicycle transport is one of the most sustainable, most accessible, most inclusive, most affordable and the healthiest means of transport and recreation and emphasizes that the use of bicycles is of key importance for European society and economy. Adopting this declaration, EU institutions committed to undertake concrete measures aimed at encouraging bicycle transport.

Legislative Progress

In addition to secure, well connected, direct and comfortable infrastructure, for encouraging bicycle transport, it is of key importance to ensure appropriate parking spaces for bicycles. This refers particularly to housing buildings. The survey done by the NGO Biciklo.me shows that in addition to security, the key reason why people do not use bicycles in Podgorica is the fear from thefts and lack of space for storing bicycles in buildings. Similar data were obtained in many other European countries.

Recognizing these challenges, EU Member States adopted on 12 April this year the amendments to the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), that for the first time stipulated the standards for parking bicycles within all new housing and non-housing buildings. This Directive now, inter alia, stipulates that the investors are obliged to ensure at least 2 places per a housing unit for parking bicycles. Since the European Union directives are legal acts that impose to the Member States to transpose the stipulated provisions into domestic legislation, Montenegro will also be obliged to incorporate these amendments into its legislation.

The importance of parking space for bicycles is emphasized also in the recently revised Regulation of the Council of the EU that deals with the guidelines for development of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). Among other things, it stipulates that the railways and bus stations must have adequate spaces for storing bicycles. In addition to this, the revised regulation included the Western Balkan countries into the TEN-T network, and it particularly emphasized the obligation for larger cities to adopt Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP).

A View to the Future

The number of people using bicycles in Montenegro is continuously growing. This is influenced first of all by the promotion of bicycles on the local level, but also by the awareness of people who increasingly understand all advantages of using bicycles. However, Montenegrin local and state institutions are yet to work a lot in this field. It is of essential importance that decision makers and professionals, do not perceive bicycle as a type of recreation or fun, but primarily as an efficient tool for improving quality of life in our cities. That requires a strategic approach in planning of space and traffic, a balanced treatment of all means of transport and development of human-friendly cities, with a particular emphasis on availability, social equality, health, quality of the environment and economic sustainability. Bicycle can indeed be a development opportunity for Montenegro, not only in terms of mobility, but also in the fields of public health, environment protection and tourism. We are yet to see whether Montenegro will be able to use it.



Foto: Biciklo.me

COMPLETED “EUROPEAN TOUR”: MONTENEGRO TRULY CHERISHES EUROPEAN VALUES

By Mirjana IVANOVIĆ, EU4ME project

We had a tour in May in Montenegro, and it was the European one. It showed that our country is a part of Europe, and that it shares its values and should be a part of the European Union. Montenegro decided to celebrate the Europe Day in this way and thus the initiative “European Tour” included a number of culture, entertainment and sport events.

The programme included almost 30 different events covering various aspects of culture and social life, including educational workshops, arts exhibitions, sports, and music events, all aimed at promoting European spirit and unity.

These events were organized in the municipalities of Bar, Nikšić, Kolašin, Mojkovac, Berane, Žabljak, Petnjica and Pljevlja together with the Ministry of European Affairs and they were supported by the Delegation of the EU within the EU4ME project.

Being a part of Europe is primarily a matter of values and of the system and they cannot appear overnight but have to be built for years and even decades. It is



precisely why every step on our negotiation path is precious.

Adoption of EU values, and the structures that will support those values in public administration, private sector, all non-economic and other activities is a long process. But it is precisely a tour like this that will prepare us, so that when we become a part of the European community, it is a natural fusion and a perfectly logical sequence of things, and not a cultural or any other shock.

This is the type of the lesson offered, I believe, by the “European Tour” which essentially and symbolically presents the fundamental principles and ideals shared by European countries: Freedom and Democracy, by reminding of the freedom of expression, citizen participation and respect for human rights; Solidarity and Social Cohesion, through activities that involved vulnerable groups and many other citizens, and by insisting on regional representation during the tour; Environmental Awareness and Sustainability, through



Photo: Petnjica



numerous environmental actions and discussions aimed at ensuring sustainable agriculture; and Cultural Diversity and Education, through a fantastic culture and arts programme.

The carefully prepared programme of the Tour included discussions and lectures tackling European integration, economy, culture, and social issues, and giving an opportunity to participants to get a better understanding of the accession process and its implications. It was particularly challenging to organize the cultural programme that included exhibitions, traditional games, and other contents, which undoubtedly contributed to the promotion of rich Montenegrin culture and its place in the common European area.

However, particularly encouraging is a significant number of the young and the youngest citizens who were the true representatives of what we, as the country, strive to: personal and social quality. Over 2000 participants from seven municipalities were active in workshops and other events, but also discussed, on an equal footing and in a well-informed manner, the topics like tolerance, diversity, environment and human rights.





It was an opportunity to hear their voices and to encourage critical thinking. Children had the opportunity to express their ideas through art, literature and music and to think thoroughly about what the essence of "being European" is. Their creativity inspired the participants and showed that children had a lot to say and that our future in the EU, thanks to them, will be bright.

That is why maybe one of the most important messages of the Tour is the fact that EU is an incentive and the final goal that we must and can reach with our own capacities. Just like our municipalities that efficiently and professionally participated in the organization, showing that we have the competences. We just need motivation to put them to use. That is precisely what

the Tour offered to us, reminding us that Montenegro is not a part of Europe only in geographic terms, but that it truly shares and lives its values.

The project "European Tour" in Montenegro therefore strongly confirmed the vision that Montenegro should be a part of the European Union family. Through various events, including activities with children, it was



shown in a perfectly clear manner that we are already a part of Europe. Our local communities got a strong incentive and at the same time reconfirmed their own capacities to meet the requirements and challenges ahead.

During those days in May, EU reached seven cities directly and indirectly actually all the cities in Montenegro.

Not to say that we are on the driveway, but that we are already at the door.



PHOTO COLLAGE



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Zgrada Vlade u bojama EU i CG, povodom dobijanja pozitivnog IBARa



Međuvladina konferencija, Brisel

me4 eu
eu4 me
ja za evropsku uniju
da za mene
crna gora



Dodjela nagrada pobjednicima Konkursa „Moj grad na putu ka EU“



Forum „Pitaj ministra!“





Okrugli sto o Nacrtu PPCG-a



Potpisivanje Memoranduma o saradnji MEP-a i lokalnih javnih emitera



Prijem povodom dobijanja pozitivnog IBAR-a

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Proslava Dana Evrope, Podgorica



Samit Lidera ZB i EU, Kotor



MinistarSKI sastanak Plan rasta, Kotor



Dodjela nagrada pobjednicima Konkursa za najbolju novinarsku priču o procesu evropske integracije

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