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INTEGRATION OF MONTENEGRO

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MONTENEGRO AT THE DOOR TO EUROPEAN FUTURE

By: Predrag Zenović, PhD – Chief Negotiator of Montenegro with the European Union

The year behind was one of the most dynamic chapters on Montenegro's European path. Guided by clear goals and determination to overcome obstacles, our country, like a marathon runner who patiently and resolutely covers every section of the path, managed to keep the position of a forerunner among the countries of the Western Balkans in the process of European integration. Commitment of the Government of Montenegro, negotiation structures

and administration inspired a new momentum in reforms, creating the feeling of ownership. While the beginning of this year was filled with optimism and clear plans for overcoming many-years-long challenges, its end was marked with concrete successes – proof of work, dedication and vision of a country determined to secure a better future for its citizens.

The turning point in the year was the 16th Intergovernmental Conference where Montenegro got the positive Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR) which confirmed it met the interim benchmarks in the field of the rule of law. This recognition, which gave Montenegro the opportunity to deblock its negotiation process and continue the process of temporary closing of negotiation chapters, was a result of committed work and implementation of reforms in line with more than 80 complex interim benchmarks. These benchmarks included key aspects of the rule of law which constitutes the foundation of the European Project, including reforms and appointments in judiciary,





fight against corruption and organized crime, as well as processing attacks against journalists.

Our analysis of the European Commission Report shows that there is a significant progress in 30 negotiation chapters. In addition to this, European Commission commended Montenegro for faster progress than in the previous report in as many as 13 chapters. Particularly prominent is the progress in fundamental chapters 23 and 24, that refer to the rule of law, where for the first time after years of stagnation, the progress was assessed as good. This is the first time that Montenegro got the assessment of very good progress in the year behind, and it did not happen only for one but for two negotiation chapters: 7 – Intellectual Property Law and 10 – Information Society and Media. Keeping the pace of reforms in all chapters, Montenegro improved its preparedness in as many as four chapters, and for the first time it got the assessment of “advanced preparedness” in Chapter 7.

This Report instilled new energy into the negotiation process and encouraged motivation of all stakeholders. At the same time, it became a challenge to maintain the achieved results and build them up with a clear indication that the reform course can become a permanent feature of our European path. Closing of three negotiation chapters (7, 10, 20) in December marked the finale of a successful integration year. These chapters, related to intellectual property, digitalization and industrial policy, confirm our ability to meet European standards, through amendments of the Law on Copyright, new laws on media and audiovisual services, as well as the new Industrial policy 2024-2028, that strengthens competitiveness of economy and

aligns us with the EU goals.

Success was not possible without a thorough process of aligning legislation and continuous cooperation with European institutions. This is a result of collective efforts invested by administration, negotiation structure and all stakeholders included in the process. At the same time, closing of the chapters symbolizes not only what we achieved, but also what we are to expect – further work on reforms, strengthening of institutions and administrative capacities and preparation for new chapters that we are to close on our European path.

REFORM AGENDA: INVESTMENT INTO EUROPEAN FUTURE

Montenegro's progress on the European path is not reflected only in the negotiation successes, but also in securing significant financial support from the Growth Plan of the European Union. Reform Agenda is an ambitious plan tailored to the needs of the small and open economy, with a view to developing new sectors and increasing diversification. The goal is to create more competitive and more resilient economy, attractive for investors and less susceptible to external shocks.

Reform agenda is primarily focused on four priority areas: improving business environment and developing private sector through facilitating access to funds for small and medium-size enterprises through more favourable financial frameworks; digital transformation and energy transitions that include projects for improving infrastructure for renewable energy sources, while digitalization includes development of e-government, digital education tools and strengthening of information literacy of citizens; development of human capital that includes investment in education and increasing employability of youth through lifelong learning and practical work; modernization of education systems, with a particular focus on digital education and adaptation of labour to future market needs, has a goal to ensure better connections among education institutions and economy, which creates possibilities for practical learning during the studies and better chances for employment after graduation. Equally important is the reform of the legal system which remains in the core of all changes because it constitutes the basis for developing society of equal chances and secure business



environment. Increasing transparency in decision-making, improving judiciary and strengthening protection of rights of all citizens additionally reinforce trust of citizens and European partners in Montenegro's commitment to the reforms.

In addition to all these aspects, funds from the Growth Plan of the European Union, including the first tranche of 29 million euros envisaged for the end of 2024, are intended for the projects that will bring concrete benefits.

CHALLENGES, REFORM OBLIGATIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

The successes we achieved give us a good reason to be optimistic, but also require us to keep the pace of reforms and face the remaining challenges. Strengthening justice system, improving administrative capacities and fight against corruption remain priorities. Transparency in appointments, particularly in the justice system, is of key importance for strengthening the trust of citizens and alignment with European standards.

Lack of administrative capacities remains a challenge, which is why Montenegro is conducting the analysis to identify weaknesses and define measures for improvement. Fight against corruption remains a foundation for strengthening trust between institutions and citizens.

Environment protection, with an emphasis on implementation of European standards, implies significant investment and strategic planning. These challenges constitute an opportunity to test Montenegro's maturity

and capability, which will strengthen citizens' trust and confirm our commitment to European integration.

The year behind has shown the power of working together. IBAR, three Intergovernmental conferences, the best European Commission report so far, SEPA and Reform Agenda, as well as three temporarily closed chapters - a genuinely European year in the history of this country. European Western Balkans gives an annual award for contribution to European integration and this year this award went to the Government of Montenegro. Administration, civil society and citizens contributed to achieving concrete results that have additionally reinforced our position on the European map. One of the initiatives that reflects this collective energy is the Barometer 26, the document proposed as a mechanism to accelerate European integration, and confirm our broadest social consensus.

The focus remains on the rule of law and fight against corruption, since they constitute the foundations of a democratic society and a basis for legal certainty. With these reforms, we will not only make progress in integration, but also create a higher-quality life for our citizens. On the basis of concrete results, we are building the future where security, prosperity and equal opportunities become reality. The promise from the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit is becoming reality. Montenegro is again leading in the regatta of candidates that, navigating the turbulent seas of the modern world and its geo-political challenges, spreads the message of the great European idea.

MALGORZATA LAKOTA-MICKER FOR "EUROKAZ"

POLAND STRONGLY SUPPORTS MONTENEGRO'S EUROPEAN FUTURE

By Marko Vešović, RTCG

"We cannot even think that Montenegro might not be in the EU in the years to come. We believe it will use the opportunity that is ahead, and this is even more true since the EU has changed its approach, opened to dialogue and recognized the need to accept new members, said the Chargé d'affaires in the Embassy of Poland Malgorzata Lakota-Micker in the interview for "Eurokaz".

She spoke about priorities in the forthcoming Polish presidency in the EU, relations with Montenegro, enlargement policy...

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

Enlargement is the best EU instrument to strengthen and promote peace, democracy and the rule of law and prosperity in Europe. That is one of the best channels for promotion of European values like democracy and the rule of law. It increases the level of security and stability of our environment. And now, when there is a war waged in the Eastern border of Poland, the consequences of which we also feel, we appreciate security even more. We witness hybrid attacks every day, growing geopolitical tensions and violations of the rules of previously established international order. Only united can we overcome the increasingly serious difficulties, fight against disinformation and expansion of great powers. Poland supports EU

enlargement to the countries of the Western Balkans. We have always advocated it, but under one condition – the will of the countries that aspire to membership and their individual progress must be visible.

Poland is highly interested in seeing close cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans and the EU. It is dedicated to maintaining a permanent political dialogue in all areas of common interest, including, of course, foreign and security policy and internal reforms. Among the countries of the region, Montenegro achieved the best progress in Euro-Atlantic integration. It has been a NATO member since 2017 and aspires to become an EU member very soon. With its participation in the negotiations, the number of meetings and discussions held at the highest level in Brussels, as well as the consultations in Podgorica, Montenegro has sent a clear signal that it does not see its future outside of the union of states and nations as the EU. The Intergovernmental conference in June gave an additional impetus. The positive IBAR became a synonym for European future. EU has shown that it appreciates efforts and commitment. I must admit that it is with admiration that I follow the activities undertaken in the year behind by the Minister of European Affairs Maida Gorčević, leaders of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vice-President of the Government Filip Ivanović and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ervin Ibrahimović, as well as the Chief Negotiator with the EU Predrag Zenović. A valuable contribution to that process was also given by the President Jakov Milatović and the Prime Minister Milojko Spajić, who both sent a clear message to the EU Member States: "We want Montenegro to become the 28th member of the EU by 2028".

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

Poland presided the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2011. At that time, we took the presidency in an exceptionally difficult period in the history of European integration, when EU dealt with the crisis of its own identity, trying to answer the question of whether further enlargement of EU is justified or there is a need to give it up. Europe also dealt with the financial and economic crisis, crisis in the Euro zone, crisis in Belarus, crisis of European neighbourhood policy, which led to



Malgorzata Lakota-Micker, charge d'affaires in the Embassy of Poland

Photo: Aleksandar Jaredić

divisions inside of the EU and increase of xenophobia among nations and states within the EU. If we also know that in 2009 the Lisbon Treaty came into force and many issues related to the Treaty and presidency had to be clarified, we can say the first presidency was an enormous challenge for Poland. It demanded maturity in action and responsibility. The presidency in 2025 will not be easy either. It will take place in slightly different circumstances and the key emphasis will be on the issues related to security in a broad sense. During the first presidency, we supported Republic of Croatia, that we call the leader of the region, on its path towards the EU. Today we cannot even imagine that Montenegro might not be in the EU in

the years ahead. We believe it will use the opportunity that exists. This is even more true given the fact that EU has changed its approach, opened to dialogue and recognized the need to accept new members.

Montenegro is one of the youngest countries in Europe that is fighting with numerous problems, corruption, organized crime and problems in the justice system. In the positive report of the European Commission, published on 30 October 2024, the efforts of Montenegro were positively assessed. In 12 months only, Montenegro restored the trust of the EU, met interim benchmarks for chapters 23 and 24, got the first IBAR in the history of the EU, became the first candidate country that accessed SEPA, ensured approval for the Reform Agenda in the amount of more than 380 million euros and organized two Intergovernmental conferences. These are good reasons to be proud, but also signals that Montenegro must not decrease its level of efforts. The motto of the Polish EU Presidency will be "Security, Europe!" and that is what Montenegro should focus on at the moment. Faced with the foreign influence, subject to interference of third countries and disinformation already for a long time, the country should care for security of its citizens. Dialogue and understanding should ensure solutions for all disputable issues, both in contact with the neighbours, above all Croatia, and in the Montenegrin political scene.

From your perspective, what will the European path of the region look like in the future, particularly for Montenegro, in light of all current trends in the EU and expectations that EU has from the countries of the region?

We live in difficult times when Europe is put at a test. War in Ukraine is going on for three years already. The conflict between Cyprus and Turkey and the restored Israeli-Palestinian conflict weaken individual economies of the countries and strain the established order. Donald Trump is preparing for re-taking power and is warning that USA will leave NATO structures if Europe doesn't start taking its membership in the Alliance seriously.

Poland will therefore try to secure a security of Europe in a broad sense, not only the military security, but also the internal, economic, energy, information, food and health dimensions of security. As I said, Poland sees WB in the EU,

but we underline that there are no shortcuts to the EU. You should focus on implementation of appropriate reforms, cherish good relations with neighbouring countries and adapt to the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. As for the reforms, the exceptionally important ones are those related to the rule of law, justice system, fight against corruption and functioning of democratic institutions. Particularly now, when the world is torn by conflicts, building good relations with the environment and regional cooperation should be of key importance. Poland has a positive opinion about the reform agenda that was presented by the Western Balkan countries, as a part of their growth plans. We support activities related to the common regional market and we actively participate in the Berlin Process. In the perspective of the Polish presidency in the EU and V4, with the appropriate approach and taking part in the Three Seas Initiative, Poland will try to strengthen its image of a leader in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and share its experience with the countries that strive for EU membership. Through the Three Seas Initiative, Poland will also support the tasks of the Presidency to enlarge EU to the countries of the Western Balkans. One of the platforms for exchanging experience will be, among other things, the 10th Summit and Business Forum of the Three Seas Initiative planned for April 2025 in Warsaw and a significant number of other meetings on the highest level. As for the Western Balkans, we promote reconciliation and share our experience from the accession process. Among other things, the projects implemented in the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, like Enlargement Academy and seminars on reconciliation in Krzyzowa, organized for WB partners together with Germany, serve that purpose.

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

Reforms in the field of the rule of law, included in the first negotiation cluster, constitute the basis of the accession process. The first cluster is opened as the first one and will be closed as the last one. The rule of law in Montenegro refers to the issues like independence of judiciary, fight against corruption, organized crime, securing freedom of the media and fundamental rights. EU will certainly support Montenegro in the reforms in this field because, as we know, they are among the priorities of the country. During the accession process, all the reforms and moves

of the authorities in this field are thoroughly monitored by the European Commission and Member States. Changes have been noted lately in relation to election and appointment of judges, election of judges to the Judicial Council, shortening the time for solving judicial cases and actions for combating corruption in judiciary. Cooperation between prosecution bodies and judiciary has been strengthened, and stronger legislation has been introduced for the criminal offences of trafficking in human beings, drugs and arms. Continuation of these activities and more efficient implementation of the adopted reforms will be decisive for achieving European standards and acceleration of the accession process. Poland will certainly support Montenegrin reforms in the field of the rule of law, which are of key importance for the state and will certainly be a topic of discussion of our ministers.

What is your opinion about bilateral relations between Poland and Montenegro?

Relations between Poland and Montenegro are described as very good and friendly. They are characterized by mutual respect, joint interests and wish to strengthen stability in the Western Balkan region. Poland, as a member of the European Union and NATO, actively supports Montenegro in its process of integration in the EU and cooperates with Montenegro within the North Atlantic Alliance, sharing experience related to modernization of the armed forces and participating in the joint military exercises. President Andrzej Duda and his wife paid an official visit to Montenegro in 2021. In 2022 Montenegrin President Đukanović paid a return visit to Poland. Polish-Balkan MP group is active in the Polish Sejm, while Polish-Montenegrin parliamentary group of friendship is active in Montenegro. Bilateral cooperation includes political, economic, cultural and social aspects. Montenegro is one of the favourite destinations for vacation of tourists from Poland, whose number increases every year. Of course, this is in proportion to the number of air connections, including those of the National Air company LOT and Ryanair or Wizzair. Thanks to the EU Erasmus+ programme we have an increasing interest, mostly of Montenegrin students to study in Poland. Popular universities include Warsaw, Katowice, Wrocław, Opole, Szczecin. Polish researchers eagerly participate in the conferences organized by Montenegrin universities

and co-organize events dedicated to the region. Polish archaeologists have been implementing research in Risan for more than twenty years, where a Polish group of archaeologists from the University in Warsaw discovered parts of an antique city from the 4th century BC and a large number of valuable artefacts. In 2024, Polish side, in cooperation and with support of the Central Archive for historic records in Warsaw, after more than hundred years, transferred valuable archive materials from the time of Principedom and Kingdom of Montenegro to the Archive of Montenegro. I think that there is room for improvement in the field of cooperation in economy, because we have a relatively low level of trade, although it is on an increase. Poland exports machines, mechanical equipment, chemical products, food products and industrial products to Montenegro. Montenegro exports small amounts of products to Poland, mostly aluminium and agricultural and food products. Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Podgorica is putting efforts into promoting Polish products and Polish companies in Montenegrin market. An example of that is the Fair of Polish products that is organized every year in the shopping mall Big Fashion in Podgorica. I think that Polish entrepreneurs see an increasing potential in the sectors like tourism, renewable energy sources and infrastructure and therefore they will be included in various events that the Embassy of the Republic of Poland will organize next year. We will try to share our experience with Montenegro in the field of environment protection and renewable energy sources. We are putting efforts into supporting Montenegro in many aspects. During the pandemic, Poland was one of the countries that delivered a large number of vaccines against COVID-19 to Montenegro, within the Polish development aid we delivered medical equipment to Montenegrin health centres, ultrasound device to the Clinical Centre and we equipped dental ambulances with dental chairs. In 2024 we improved security in the mountains by marking the selected climbing tracks in Bjelasica. For years, in cooperation with the Association of Poles in Montenegro, we have been offering classes of Polish language free of charge to interested Montenegrin citizens. I think that in 2025 Poland will be even more popular in Montenegro thanks to the Embassy that is preparing interesting projects with a view to intensifying Polish-Montenegrin relations among members of various age groups and professions.

AFTER SEVEN YEARS OF STAGNATION, MONTENEGRO TEMPORARILY CLOSED THREE NEGOTIATION CHAPTERS: A SIGNIFICANT STEP TO FULL-FLEDGED MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU

By Mirjana Ivanović, consultant within the EU4ME project

After seven years of stagnation in the process of European integration, Montenegro has made a great success and temporarily closed three negotiation chapters on 16 December in the Intergovernmental Conference in Brussels. Those were the Chapter 7 (Intellectual Property), Chapter 10 (Information Society and Media) and Chapter 20 (Entrepreneurship and Industrial Policy). With the total of six temporarily closed chapters, including the three that had been closed in the past, Montenegro justified its position of a forerunner in the European integration process in the Western Balkans.

„This success is a result of committed work of all of us who believe in Montenegro's European future. Closing the three chapters we have proven that we are committed to the reforms and to achieving European standards, but also that we have capacities to be a part of European family. This is also Brussels' recognition of our invested efforts, work and results”, said the Minister of European Affairs Maida Gorčević for Eurokaz.

She underlined that the progress achieved in the negotiations was a clear confirmation of Montenegro's credibility and commitment to its European path.

PROGRESS IN THE FIELD OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Head of the working group for the negotiation chapter 7, Nebojša Mugoša, expressed satisfaction with the fact that three chapters were closed. He noted that Montenegro achieved great success and got a deserved recognition of the results it had made.

“Temporary closing of Chapter 7 confirms significant progress in legislative alignment and implementation of intellectual property law. Two sets of amendments to the Law on Copyright and Related Rights adopted this year, which implemented the Marrakesh Agreement and EU directives related to it, Directive on Single Digital Market and the so called “Satellite and Cable” Directive No 2, constitute a progressive legal framework for exercising rights in this field,” said Mugoša for Eurokaz.

He also clarified that protection of intellectual property rights had numerous benefits both for individuals and for economy, but that there was still room for raising awareness and the level of knowledge in this field.

Intellectual property rights, clarifies Mugoša, are private rights, while the number of procedures for their registration and protection from violation primarily depends on the interest of the right-holders. The largest number of procedures for protection of industrial property rights in Montenegro (trademark, patent, design) is related to protection of trademarks and they are most frequently processed by the Market Inspectorate and Customs Administration.

“Last year, Market Inspectorate conducted more than 800 inspection controls in the field of industrial property rights, out of which in 108 controls they established violation of trademarks. As for copyrights and related rights, the largest number of procedures, which is



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Foto: Međuvladina konferencija, Brisel, 16. decembar 2024.



Foto: Međuvladina konferencija, Brisel, 16. decembar 2024.

around 200 a year, are conducted before Commercial Court of Montenegro. As for registration of rights, around 2.5 thousand international and about 500 national applications for registration of trademarks on average are submitted yearly, while the number of applications for registration of patents and industrial design, particularly the national ones, is much smaller", said Mugoša.

He added that, in the period ahead, Montenegro would be dedicated to implementation of the legislative framework and strengthening of administrative capacities.

DIGITALIZATION AND SECURITY IN THE FOCUS

Temporary closing of Chapter 10 reflects significant progress in development of information society and media. Ružica Mišković, Head of the working group for

this chapter, says for Eurokaz that citizens of Montenegro already enjoy numerous benefits of the progress in the fields of electronic communication, cyber security, digital services and media pluralism.

„We are developing a more modern eGovernment portal and improving cyber security through establishment of the Cyber Security Agency. A significant investment in telecommunication infrastructure ensures that citizens can enjoy the most modern services", said Mišković

She underlined that citizens already feel the benefits of reforms through electronic services like eHealth and eEducation.

"Media strategy, the first ever adopted in Montenegro, through its goals and activities, defined particularly the issues of how to combat i.e. eliminate hate speech and disinformation and how to strengthen capacities with a view to ensuring more adequate conduct in media space", clarified Mišković and emphasized how important

it was to educate citizens about more secure behaviour in digital space.

Temporary closing of chapters is not the end of obligations for Montenegro – European Commission does not sleep and doesn't let us even to take a nap. Although our country aligned with legislation in this field, there is a whole set of new EU acquis the alignment with which we must keep working on.

SUPPORT TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INDUSTRY

Implementing policies within Chapter 20 – Entrepreneurship and Industrial Policy, Montenegro will improve competitiveness of enterprises, facilitate access to European market and contribute to development of modern, innovative economy, on the principles of sustainable development, noted the Head for this negotiation chapter, Maja Jokanović.

She said for Eurokaz that Montenegrin companies would feel numerous benefits through implementation of measures and activities defined within the entrepreneurial and industrial policy that are focused mostly on continuous improvements of business environment and strengthening competitiveness of economy.

„Numerous activities have already been continuously implemented in these fields, which has contributed to the successful temporary closing of this chapter. A particular emphasis was put on removing business barriers through concrete activities and cooperation among different sectors, and additionally on the implementation of activities in the field of combating informal economy, where a whole set of various measures is designed. It is also important to note the adoption of the new Law on Settlement of Monetary Obligations, the adequate implementation of which will prevent delays in payments and ensure an additional form of protection to micro, small and medium-size enterprises who have problems of the lack of liquidity due to the long payment periods”, said Jokanović.

„It is important to emphasise results of implementation in key areas of this chapter in providing support for the strengthening of processing capacities and modernization of industry, development of innovation infrastructure, support to start-ups and small and medium-size

enterprises, as well as in digital transformation and further development of industry on the principle of “green” business operations”, said Jokanović.

All the activities that are implemented within this chapter, as she noted, contribute to development of a fair and competitive business environment, increase of employment and investment, with a focus on supporting the sector of micro, small and medium-size enterprises that constitute a key pillar of every economy.

Commenting the period ahead, she said that it would be necessary to ensure further continuous improvement of business environment in line with the principles of the EU industrial and entrepreneurial policy, strengthening of administrative capacities for implementation, with a dialogue between private and public sector to ensure joint efficient implementation of entrepreneurial and industrial policy, as well as sectoral policies within this chapter.

CONTINUATION OF THE EUROPEAN PATH

Although closing of three chapters is a great success, Minister Gorčević is warning that this result is just one of the steps on the demanding European path.

“Temporary closing means that we are on the right path, but reforms must be consistently implemented to ensure sustainable progress and meeting of all EU standards”, she said.

The Minister underlined that commitment to reforms and implementation of the European acquis must be additionally intensified to secure successful finalization of the negotiation process.

Montenegro has an ambitious plan to close all the negotiation chapters by the end of 2026, which would make it ready for becoming the 28th member state of the European Union by 2028.

The Minister emphasized that years ahead are of key importance for implementation of reforms, particularly in the fields of the rule of law, economic governance and administrative capacities.

„We are convinced that, through joint efforts and strategic planning, we can achieve this goal and join the European family, which is our vision of future,” concluded Gorčević.

GROWTH PLAN OR HOW TO BE FASTER IN REACHING EU AVERAGE STANDARD OF LIVING?

By Bojan Vujović, Director General of the Directorate for Coordination of EU Financial Support

Being aware of the need of Western Balkan countries to make the process of accession to the EU dominantly a process of economic integration, instead of a process dominantly conducted through a political dialogue, on 8 November 2023, European Commission adopted a proposal of the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. The key goal of the Plan is to accelerate enlargement process and achieve EU average economic development level faster, i.e. to ensure a faster economic convergence of the Western Balkan region. The key premise of this new approach of the European Union is that the implementation of reforms, with generous financial support, will have a positive effect on the economic growth of the candidate countries. A number of announced EU initiatives that are connected with the new plan, like introduction of facilities for the flow of goods, services and money, will aim at strengthening economies of the Western Balkans and preparing them to become a part of a large, EU Single Market.

A new Reform and Growth Facility was proposed for the region of the Western Balkan, amounting to six billion euros for the period 2024-2027. EU Regulation 2024/1449 stipulates that the financial support package includes a combination of 2 billion euros of EU grants and 4 billion euros of loans from international financial institutions allocated under favourable conditions. On the basis of the stipulated EU methodology (based on the formula that includes variables like number of inhabitants and gross domestic product), the new Plan will allocate 383.5 million euros for Montenegro for the four-year period. The structure of this amount includes 273 million euros of loans that EU will grant under favourable conditions, and 110 million euros of EU grants.

This financial support is conditioned by implementation of a number of reform measures in different areas of public policies, as well as by meeting additional criteria in the

field of democracy, rule of law and human rights. These criteria are defined individually for each of the Western Balkan countries in the format of the Reform Agenda – the official document that the countries submitted to European Commission for approval. Along with the announced reforms, to ensure financial support, the countries must comply with other general requirements in the field of macro-economic stability, good public finance management, transparency and budget supervision.

After comprehensive consultations with the European Commission, on 26 September 2024, the Government adopted Reform Agenda 2024-2027 for the EU Reform and Growth Facility. The approval of the European Commission was granted in October. Final document comprises 32 indicative priority reform measures within four policy areas, 14 policy sub-areas (sectors) and 130 steps defined as necessary for implementing the reforms. The defined steps also contain performance indicators that will constitute the basis for monitoring progress in the implementation of reform measures and for EU assessment of whether the requirements for allocation of funds are met.

In parallel with the adoption of the Reform Agenda, we are working intensively on using the opportunity that EU has offered through the remaining pillars of the Growth Plan. All citizens and business entities will have easier payment operations with the countries included in the Single Euro Payment Area (SEPA), since Montenegro has become its formal member in November this year. In addition to this, we are to see very concrete benefits from gradual integration into the single digital market, like membership in the Digital Hub, use of the Single Digital Wallet, better accessibility of wireless Internet in public areas in our municipalities and larger scope of application of digitalized services.

Although the proposal of the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans is perceived in different ways in the countries of the region and in the EU Member States, it has certainly triggered an essential question that cuts across the accession process: How fast can we achieve the average level of development of EU Member States and how can EU help our citizens to have the same standard of living as the citizens of the EU? Designing the Growth Plan, European Commission used the results of a special study of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development from early 2024 – “Can Western Balkans reach the EU standard of living?”. The results of the used econometric model were not encouraging at that time

– without the Growth Plan, in the best case scenario, the region could reach the EU average standard of living in 2046, and in the worst case scenario in 2093. Now, with the Growth Plan, it is clear that, if the plan designed in this way is fully implemented, number of concrete benefits – starting from financial support of the EU, through influence of accession to certain areas of the European market and implementation of large structural projects, all the way to the financial effects of the reforms that we will implement – will have a positive impact on the economic growth rate in the medium run. The time will certainly show whether such an effect, with all the multiplication factors, will be sufficient to fulfil the ambitious announcements of the European Commission that this plan might double the economic growth rate of the region by 2030 and shorten the period in which the region could achieve the average growth and development rate of EU27.

In case of Montenegro, the Growth Plan is an instrument the implementation of which will go hand in hand with the acceleration of the negotiation process. It will be the element that will help ensure that, already in this accession stage and in daily life, we are assured that European Union

perceives us as a future member state. Responsibility of the Government, Parliament, judiciary, prosecution service and the entire system of institutions will therefore in the period ahead be even higher – to implement timely and in a high-quality manner all the reform measures that we will undertake through the Reform Agenda. This process of implementation of reforms should not be perceived only as a mechanism that will help us to get additional financial support from the European Union. The financial support is clearly important, but it is much more important that we create better and fairer conditions for economic activity for each of us through the key reforms, like reform in the management of state-owned companies, improvement of the work of inspection services, digitalization of public services, alignment with the EU Energy Market, upgrading of the education system, building new schools and kindergartens and the reforms in the rule of law. It is the only way for us to have an opportunity to use this set of reforms to contribute to further transformation of the society, which will make the moment of our accession to the EU only the final formal confirmation that Montenegro is fully a part of the European Union.



Foto: Bojan Vujović, Izvor: Vlada Crne Gore

IN THE YEAR IN WHICH MONTENEGRO CLOSED THREE CHAPTERS AND GOT A POSITIVE IBAR, THE GOVERNMENT

MAJORITY OF FORCES IN POWER SUPPORT, WHILE OPPOSITION CRITICIZES THE PLATFORM ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

By Milan Žugić, MINA Agency

Podgorica – “Everyone who is a part of the “Barometer 26” will be able to say that they led Montenegro to the European Union (EU)”, said the Prime Minister Milojko Spajić presenting this document that, in his opinion, affirms a joint obligation of the key parliamentary political stakeholders in Montenegro to cooperate with the view to successfully concluding the EU accession negotiations by the end of 2026.



Foto: Vlada/arhiva

BAROMETAR 26

Prezimanje zajedničke obaveze za završetak pregovora sa EU do kraja 2026. godine

UVOD

Polazeći od Ustava i načela kojima se štite slobode i prava svih građana u demokratskoj i suverenoj državi Crnoj Gori, bez diskriminacije bilo koga, ovaj dokument afirmiše zajedničku obavezu ključnih parlamentarnih političkih aktera u Crnoj Gori da saraduju u cilju uspješnog zaključivanja pregovora o pristupanju EU do kraja 2026. godine. Ovo je javni izraz zrelosti crnogorskog društva, kao i odlučnosti političkih partija da daju prioritet državnom interesu u odnosu na partijski, pružajući podršku svim reformama potrebnim za završetak pregovora sa EU. Potpisnici prepoznaju jedinstvenu priliku za Crnu Goru koju pruža trenutni zamah politike proširenja EU. Osjetljiva, društveno-polarizujuća pitanja koja bi mogla predstavljati digresije i političke slijepe ulice odnosno pitanja koja bi odvušla fokus sa procesa pristupanja EU - neće se aktualizovati u parlamentarnom diskursu bez širokog društvenog konsenzusa koji se može artikulirati kroz mehanizam razrješenja.

OSNOVNI PRINCIPI

The Government presented “Barometer 26” in the press conference on 26th November, when Mr Spajić said that the ambition of the Government was to ensure closing of 30 chapters in two years.

“This is the most ambitious project in Montenegro ever, and it implies huge efforts of all stakeholders in power and the entire society. Everyone who becomes a part of the ‘Barometer 26’ will be able to say that they led Montenegro to the EU”, underlined Mr Spajić and added that this was the topic above all national issues and that all divisions should be put aside.

This ambition, said Mr Spajić, implied closing of 30 chapters in two years. “I think you can understand the magnitude of the ambition that this Government has. We need everyone, MPs, leaders, all the leaders in the society that helped to conduct the census completely and in the right manner through reconciliation. That is how we would like to see that everyone celebrates 2028 that is a completely realistic year for Montenegro’s accession to the EU”, said Mr Spajić.

This document emphasizes four basic principles: duty to implement European reform agenda, transparency and public responsibility, focus on the unity of the state, special treatment of polarizing issues and good neighbourly relations and relations with EU Member States.

European Parliament rapporteur for Montenegro, Marjan Šarec, thinks that every document, that aims at bringing politics together around a common goal is welcome. “It was proven in the past, not only in Montenegro, but also in other countries, that if politics has a common goal, and if it puts aside the existing disagreements about certain

issues of internal policy, then it has concrete tasks too. Another issue is whether all stakeholders have sincere intentions. If there are such intentions, then the initiatives are successful", said Šarec for the new issue of "Eurokaz".



foto: www.gov.si /arhiva/

Asked about how important it is at this moment that all political stakeholders in Montenegro unite so that the state can reach its goal – membership in the EU, Šarec responded that it was of great importance. "This is not the first time that Montenegro is in such a situation. It took political wisdom and strength and a high level of unity to achieve independence. Another important project was membership in NATO, where Montenegro proved to be a reliable partner that the Alliance can count on. And that is how we got to the third historic moment that is happening right here and right now. To implement such a great project you must have strength, will and unity (of course not 100%, but sufficient to achieve results). I am speaking from the experience of Slovenia as a state and from my own political experience", said Šarec.

Opposition parties have not supported Barometer 26.

DPS said that "Barometer 26" was a lame attempt to conceal anti-European character of a significant part of the ruling majority. Civic Movement URA said that Barometer 26 was not a call for consensus of all stakeholders, but a "political life belt for saving Miloško Spajić who was aware that in the Government and in the majority he did not have consensus about European path". SD said that Barometer 26 did not contain essential responses to European challenges, but also served as a tool for political fight within the current parliamentary majority.

Most of the parties that are in the Government supported the platform "Barometer 26"

PES said that closing of the chapters 7, 10 and 20 constituted an additional encouragement to finalize the mission of the Barometer 26 platform within

the set deadline, which would ensure closing of all chapters by the end of 2026.

New Serbian Democracy said that they were not against the initiative and that they would support it. Social People's Party declared they would support Barometer 26 that affirmed the joint obligation of the key political stakeholders in the state to cooperate with a view to ensuring successful finalization of the negotiations on accessing the European Union by the end of 2026.

Šarec emphasizes that the most important thing is to know the needs of certain time and what to do, to use the window of opportunities that is opened. "When the window shuts, it is too late. Some countries were on a good path to the EU couple of years ago, but due to various circumstances and wrong politics they found themselves in uncomfortable position. Today is the time that demands focus on closing the chapters, and I am not talking about quantity only, but the quality too. And all the issues that provoke strong emotions in the society and divide people should be left for some other time. That is what I think and recommend, but I am not one of the leaders in Montenegro and I do not have that type of influence on politics. In the end, I will only mention that 80% of Montenegrin citizens are positive about accession to the EU and that is capital that should not be wasted easily. We should not forget that everything we do, we do for better life of Montenegrin citizens and future generations," concluded Šarec.

In the reception organized on the occasion of closing of three negotiation chapters with the EU within the Hungarian presidency, prepared by Prime Minister Spajić and Ambassador of Hungary Jozsef Negyesi for the diplomatic corps, members of Government and Parliament, Mr Spajić said that membership in the EU was not only the task of the Government, but of the entire society. He reminded of the platform "Barometer 26" that had a goal of bringing together all stakeholders in the society that could contribute to that goal. "True and sincere intentions will be clearer when certain stakeholders express their opinion about Barometer 26. That will mean that we know what the situation is and what are the forces that we will go forward with. Because the only way for us is forward", said Spajić.

In the process of accession negotiations Montenegro opened all chapters and temporarily closed six.

SLOVENIA IS WIND AT MONTENEGRO'S BACK, BUT IT IS THE ENGAGEMENT OF MONTENEGRO THAT IS OF KEY IMPORTANCE

By Jovana ĐURIŠIĆ

PODGRORICA – Although Poland will take over EU Presidency in January, our country has great hopes for Slovenia's support in the period ahead. A reason for that is the fact that, in the following five years, European Parliament rapporteur for Montenegro will be Marjan Šarec, a Slovenian who knows Balkans well, while his compatriot Marta Kos will be in the position of European Commissioner for Enlargement.

Although she emphasized that there would be no shortcuts and that nobody would get a lenient treatment in the enlargement process, candidate countries still hope that the fact that Ms Kos is from the Balkans will be the wind at the back of their aspirations to join EU.



Evropski parlament

As soon as she took over the duty, Ms Kos emphasised that, during her term of office, one or several countries could finish the enlargement process. She referred to the former joint country as a proof that she knew the region of the Western Balkans well.

She confirmed, in front of the European MPs, that she would secure that the path to join EU remained fully merit-based. »I am for ambition, but there cannot be any shortcut and I will never jeopardize quality because of the speed« emphasized Kos.

On the other side, Marjan Šarec, who once was a Prime Minister of Slovenia, already visited Montenegro and talked with the officials about the task he is entrusted to do in the following five years.

Asked how important for Montenegro was the fact that people from the region, who knew Balkans, were in important positions, Šarec said for Eurokaz that it was very important in every aspect.

»It is difficult to work on something if you do not know it and if it takes a lot of time for you to understand things. Balkan was always a specific region, and it should be treated as such. There were cases in the past that some envoys from Western countries took a wrong approach to problems because they did not understand the point«, said Šarec for Eurokaz.

Attitude of Slovenia, which he shares as one of persons in official position, says Šarec, has always been pro-accession



not only of Montenegro, but also for other countries of the Western Balkans, but he reminds that all of that is worth nothing without Montenegro's engagement.

»As for the role of Marta Kos and me, we now represent the European Commission and European Parliament so that it should be taken into account when we speak about attitudes. Our task certainly is to contribute to successful integration as much as we can. But without engagement of Montenegro, i.e. persons in power and also of opposition, we will certainly not be able to succeed. Because, in the end, the leaders of Member States decide and the last word belongs to them«, said Šarec.

He was, as he says, in that role once, when the decision was being made to start negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania.

»So, I know very well how the things are. I certainly am of the opinion that the country that is making progress must be rewarded, so that the willingness does not disappear. But Montenegro cannot relax either, not for a single moment«, underlines the Member of European Parliament.

No country's veto may be a tool for achieving interests

Speaking about the initiative of Slovenia and Germany seeking for abolishment of veto related to bilateral disagreements with neighbouring states, Šarec says that the proposal is rooted in the past experience with the integration process and that Slovenia knows that really well based on its own experience.

»We Slovenes had to make some compromises that were painful sometimes. But as I mentioned Northern Macedonia, I think that is the most blatant example of blackmailing a country due to bilateral issues. That is why such endeavours should be prevented in the future because no EU country's veto may be a tool for achieving own interests of that country. EU is bigger than individual countries and it is only if we are all together that we can be strong and successful. But of course, not everything is on EU countries, the policy of the countries that want to join EU should be aware what important issues are and which are the ones that just make turmoil in the society« concluded Šarec.

FOUR SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS THAT MONTENEGRIN PARTNERS PARTICIPATE IN

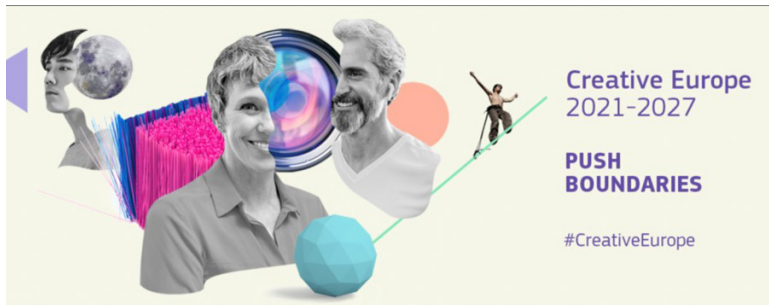
SUB-PROGRAMME MEDIA – IDEAL FOR FILM MAKERS

By Bojana Milićević, journalist of the Radio of Montenegro

Sub-programme MEDIA of the Creative Europe is ideal for support to making movies, says Ivan Marinović, a Montenegrin director, scriptwriter and producer awarded many times. Funds within this sub-project supported his movie, a hit comedy „Alive and Healthy“, but also a film project in the minority Montenegrin co-production „Children Sing Hits“ that is still in the preparation stage.

„Application for the funds within the sub-programme Media is complex and demanding. Criteria are challenging and strict, which is ideal for us who work on film production. MEDIA gives us free hands to use the funds that we get in the way we consider the best, of course, for the purposes of the project. MEDIA helps us to bridge the second stage of development of a film project, i.e. allows the production to survive even where the outcome of the project is uncertain“, said Marinović. After a six-month suspension due to the necessity to align national legislation in the field of audio-visual media services with the EU Directive 2018/1808 on AVM services, since August 2024 Montenegro has again become a full-fledged member of the MEDIA sub-programme. Montenegro restored its full-fledged participation after the Parliament adopted the Law on Audio-Visual Media Services.

Marinović underlines that the authorities must be careful to avoid that due to the „inertia of the system“ and adoption of legislation the access to such important European funds is hindered. He emphasizes that the support of the sub-programme MEDIA is exceptionally important both financially, but also in the context of credibility in the co-production circles that the project gets in that way.



Most of the calls within this programme were published this autumn and they will be closed in the spring next year. In the current financial perspective since 2021, according to the data of the Film Centre, there are four successful projects with Montenegrin partners. The Ministry of Culture and Media expects audio-visual sector to show additional interest for a number of current calls, and that the priorities of the calls will offer a space for them to improve their work, activities and capacities, as well as to network with similar organizations on the level of Europe.

„Participation in the MEDIA sub-programme of Creative Europe is particularly important because the funds are intended solely for the audio-visual sector to develop projects, do distribution, gaming, audience development, and make networks of cinemas and festivals“, says the Ministry of Culture and Media.

After the temporary suspension of participation in the programme was lifted, the Film Centre from Montenegro, as a coordinator of the MEDIA sub-programme, organized comprehensive info days attended by representatives of Montenegro's audio-visual sector. The Film Centre emphasizes that all current calls are presented, and that they expect the number of applications from the Montenegrin audio-visual sector to be larger than in the past.

Ministry of Culture and Media announced that they were trying to share continuously all the available information with the audio-visual sector, providing at the same time support in the process of applying, seeking for adequate partners, understanding of the process that sometimes was not simple for the organizations that apply for the first time. The goal, as the Ministry said, was to encourage use of available funds and tools that were accessible for Montenegrin cultural, creative and audio-visual sector, so that the organizations and institutions in this field could build their capacities to obtain these funds and be prepared for using structural

funds that would be available after we became a full-fledged member of the European Union.

LARGER NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS IN THE CALLS FOR THE SUB-PROGRAMME CULTURE

Ministry of Culture and Media is continuously implementing activities related to promotion and presentation of the programme Creative Europe, organizing info days, workshops and trainings for writing successful applications and managing projects, including the film management in projects.

“In the last couple of years, we have received a larger number of applications within the calls for the sub-programme Culture, but we are aware that the capacities of organizations and professionals in the field of culture must be additionally strengthened to ensure more successful participation in all international funds and initiatives that provide financial grants for



the field of culture”, clarified the Ministry. As they say, within the sub-programme Culture they are currently implementing 15 projects with participants from Montenegrin organizations and institutions, and the final results and contracts for the previous call for European projects are yet to be seen.

DURMITOR- INSPIRATION- CREATION-INNOVATION

By Mirjana Ivanović, Consultant within the EU4ME project

Inspired by the beauty of Durmitor, persistent in the intention to ensure better life to citizens, the management of the municipality of Žabljak decided two years ago to improve their capacities to use EU funds in a better way. “That decision led to seventeen applications submitted to eight EU programmes. One was successfully implemented, two are at the beginning of implementation (value 425,354.97 euros), while eleven is in the evaluation stage waiting for their final decision (value of the submitted project proposals is 2,666,700.00 euros)”, said Jasminka Jagličić, the consultant of the president of municipality for EU funds and international cooperation. Life under Durmitor is considered a privilege, and with a team of four, she currently works diligently on the implementation of two innovative projects.

“Nikola Tesla said that there was no object so much worth studying as nature. This thinking motivated us to get included in two innovative EU projects For.REST and BIOMIMICRY”, said Ms Jagličić.

She clarified that the intention is to use the For.REST project to position Žabljak as the centre of forest tourism, while the project BIOMIMICRY is expected to position this municipality as the centre of application of biomimicry in architecture, based on biodiversity of Durmitor.

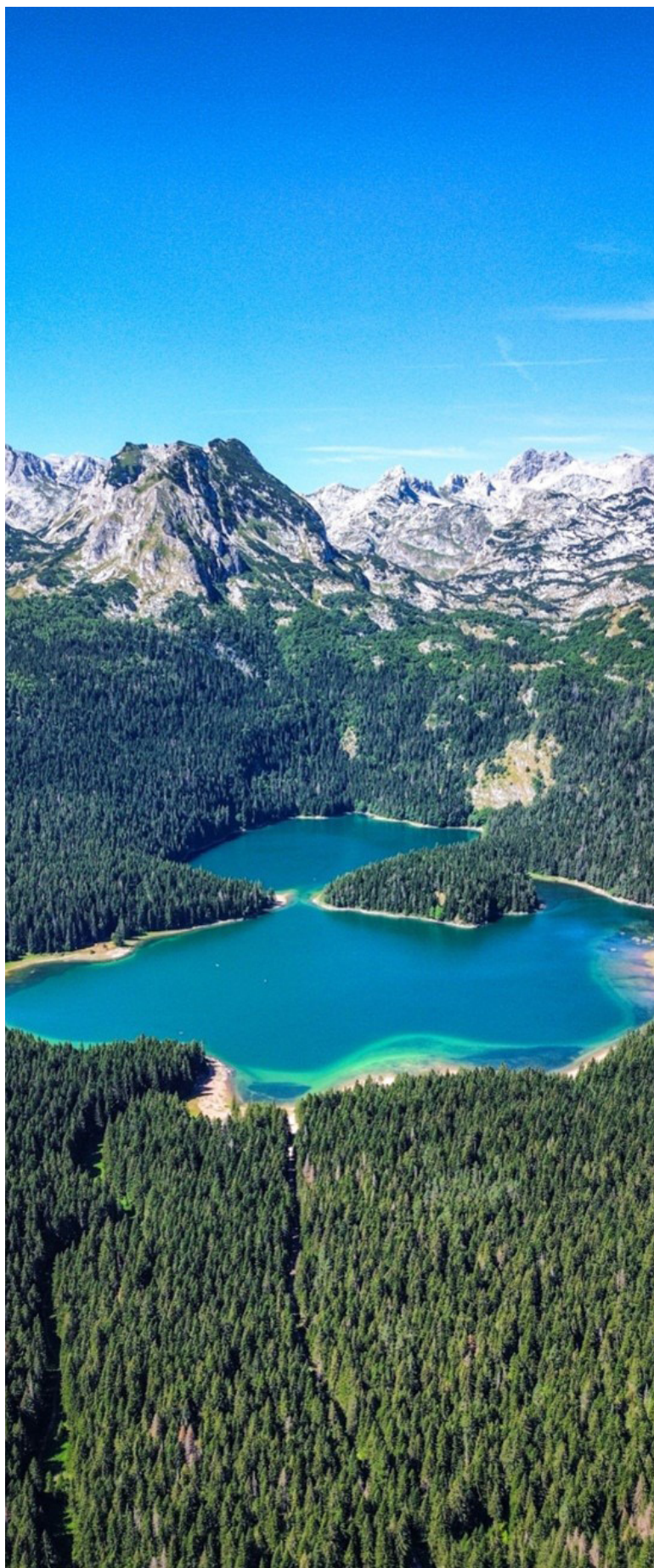
“BIOMIMICRY project (Inspired Habitat Design Solutions for Biodiversity Protection and Restoration) promotes biomimicry as a science discipline that provides innovative models for protection and restoration of biodiversity through scrutiny of nature and its harmonic

processes. Applying the principles of biomimicry, inspired with natural phenomena, this project deals with the challenges of individuals, community and the society, encouraging the aspiration to achieve harmony with nature and sustainable development”, said Ms Jagličić and added that the project was 1.5 million euros worth and that it would be implemented within 36 months.

As Jagličić, who is also the project manager, says, the first stage of the project will deal with the analysis of Durmitor’s biodiversity, natural habitats, as well as with studying the possibility of their application in architecture.

“For a number of selected “models”, we will be seeking for technical-technological solutions, so that in the last stage of the project we can apply them to the existing architecture of public buildings of the municipality of Žabljak. The project will develop a data base of





biodiversity (habitats) for the territory covered by the project (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Montenegro), to be used in architecture", said Ms Jagličić.

She added that the modules for education of architecture would be developed at a later stage.

"Trainings lasting for several days will contribute to upgrading the knowledge about methods to study nature and taking inspiration from its processes, so that they can be applied in architecture for achieving better integration of buildings into the environment. The focus is on sustainable and responsible buildings that use renewable energy sources, reducing the generation of non-degradable waste, managing emissions of harmful gasses responsibly and contributing to preservation of oxygen", said Ms Jagličić.

The municipality of Žabljak emphasizes that biomimicry is a multidisciplinary science that implies cooperation of researchers from several areas and that the project will contribute to better communication within academic community. Strategy for protection of biodiversity of Adriatic-Ionian region through application of biomimicry will be developed as well. The leading partner in the project is Research and Educational Centre Mansion Rakičan (Slovenia), while the project is financed by INTERREG VI B IPA ADRION.

As for the project For.REST (Forest tourism in the cross-border region between Serbia and Montenegro), its purpose is to create an innovative tourism product – Forest tourism!

"In the beginning of the project, we will assess the cross-border territory Serbia-Montenegro from the perspective of forest tourism development, and then we will prepare a unique itinerary of forest tourism connecting local tourism operators", said Ms Jagličić.

The project will be implemented through four training sessions intended for certified tourist guides, and a unique guidebook for forest therapy will be developed. This guidebook will ensure additional training for 10 selected and certified guides from both sides of this cross-border territory. We plan certification, marking, development and equipping of 20 km of forest tracks, known as "forest resorts".

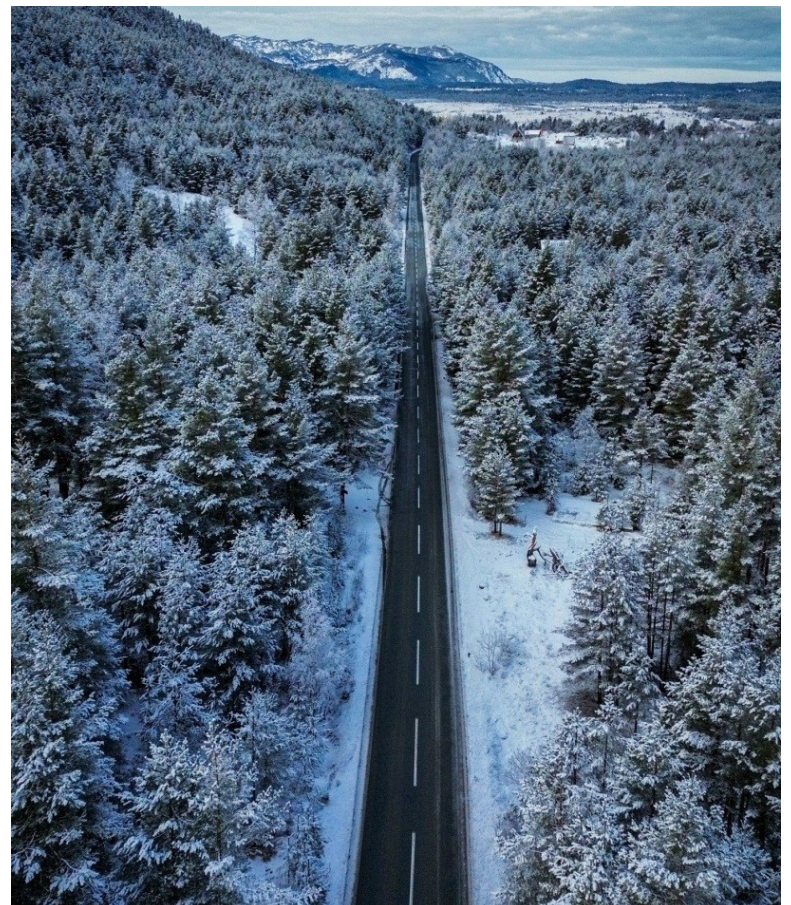
"These tracks will be equipped with light infrastructure, observation posts and posts for feeding birds, creating the space for harmony with nature and unique experience of



forest therapy. Apart from this therapeutical dimension, tourists will be able to watch birds in their natural habitats, follow their way of life and enjoying authentic connections with the forest", clarified Ms Jagličić.

In addition to the municipality of Žabljak, as the leading partner, this project also includes the Centre for protection and studying of birds (Podgorica), Special reserve of nature UVAC and Society for protection and studying of birds of Serbia. The value of this project is 249.354,08 euros. The project For.REST is co-financed by the European Union within the financial instrument of pre-accession assistance (IPA II) through the Programme of Cross-Border Cooperation Serbia-Montenegro 2014-2020. The contract for co-financing from European Union funds was signed with the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia – Department for contracting and financing programmes from the European Union funds. In the end, Ms Jagličić extended an open invitation from Žabljak to everyone who loves nature.

"If you find inspiration in Durmitor, if you have a wish to make a creation and transform it into an innovation, you are welcome to Žabljak in Durmitor. Studying nature, you will learn about yourself", said Ms Jagličić.



RESOURCE CENTRE: FIRST MONTENEGRIN HOME OF ACTIVISM

By Nevena Purlija, CRNVO

Centre for Development of Non-Government Organizations (CRNVO), with the support of the Delegation of the European Union in Montenegro, presented on 1st October 2018 the first Resource Centre for civil society organizations (CSO) in our country. The project of the Resource Centre, that is now in the II and III stage, is a continuation of previous activities of CRNVO in the field of developing civil society and creating encouraging environment for its work. As such, the Resource Centre grew into a kind of the Home of Activism in Montenegro.

Resource Centre, as a new format within CRNVO, serves as a service centre for daily support to civil society organizations, but also to individual activists. Services of the Resource Centre include capacity building programmes, helpdesk services, research, public events, fairs and conferences, as well as many other activities tailored to the needs of beneficiaries.



The project „Resource Centre for organizations of civil society in Montenegro – Stage III“ is implemented in partnership with non-government organizations Natura, Nada (Hope), Bijelo Polje Democratic Centre, Novi Horizont (New Horizon) and Bonum. National Resource Centre and five local resource centres provide comprehensive services of legal, financial, communication and administrative support to all civil society organizations.



SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Numerous services offered by the Resource Centre include registration of civil society organizations, legal and financial support for daily work, maintenance and upgrading of mailing lists with more than 1500 members, consultations in preparation and implementation of projects financed from national, bilateral and EU funds, as well as daily information about public calls, tenders and news relevant for civil society organizations through CRNVO mailing list. The Resource Centre also provides support in the issues related to communication and cooperation with the Government and local self-governments, contributes to development of strategic and other documents that are related to civil society, encourages networking and partnerships with organizations in the state and in the region, offers information about national policies in certain areas and provides mentorship support in submitting initiatives.

National and local resource centres also provide premises free of charge for civil society organizations to organize meetings, press conferences, focus groups, small trainings and similar events. Through three stages of the project, we



organized a large number of trainings tailored to different levels of development of civil society organizations, from small organizations to those of medium level of development and the developed ones. The topics included strategic development, mobilization of the community and citizens, communication and public relations, writing project proposals, managing social networks, collecting funds, financial management and reporting.

We in the Resource Centre are particularly proud of our Digital Toolbox for civil society organizations that provides a number of useful tools for civil society organizations. We particularly emphasize the Base of CSOs that ensures all the organizations, particularly the newly established ones and smaller ones that cannot develop their own websites, to make the most important information about their organizations available and to be visible in that way to potential donors and associates. Apart from the Base of CSOs, the Toolbox contains other valuable resources like a Base of Donors, Civil Society Facility Base and video instructions that cover topics from communication of projects to registration in the PADOR platform.

Within the project, the Resource Centre also prepares a quarterly newsletter. In a clear and condensed way, it provides information about activities of Montenegro's civil society, but also about the topics relevant for competent authorities, institutions and Delegation of the EU.



25 YEARS OF COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIVIL SECTOR

CFor 25 years already, CRNVO is advocating for an influential, credible and develop non-government sector, as well as for better conditions for its work. Therefore, the establishment of the Resource Centre was a logical continuation of the many-years-long work and an opportunity to improve and modernize that work and adapt it to new conditions and needs in Montenegro. We will continue working with the same mission and goal, offering support to all civil society organizations and citizens in Montenegro.

All services that CRNVO provides are free of charge and their goal is to empower civil society organizations to contribute actively to development of participatory democracy in Montenegro and to strengthen their own capacities. That is why the Resource Centre advocates a dialogue with the Government, local self-government and other institutions, building the relations based on respect for laws and mutual respect.

The Resource Centre remains open for all civil society organizations and individuals that wish to contribute to development of the society. We will continue advocating European values, freedom of expression and the rule of law, because those values constitute foundations of our work and commitment.

Resource Centre remains open as the first address to all civil society organizations and individuals who plan to contribute to development of the society in all segments in the form of association or organization. We will continue working together for European values, joined around the principles of the freedom of expression and the rule of law, because those values constitute foundation of the work of non-governmental sector and our core commitment.



MONTENEGRO A PART OF INTERREG EUROPE PROGRAMME: SHARING SOLUTIONS FOR BETTER POLICIES

By Danijela Anđić, National Contact Person for Interreg Europe Programme

A year ago Montenegro joined the programme of inter-regional cooperation Interreg Europe and thus became a part of a broad programme territory which creates opportunities for sharing solutions and knowledge about policies. The Programme aims at ensuring that investment and innovation implemented by authorities lead to integrated and sustainable solutions for all people and all areas.

Acting as a place of contact for regional and local authorities, the programme aims at ensuring exchange of good practices and successful policies that will provide adequate responses to challenges and bring to more

efficient management of the regional development policies. The Programme is focused on the key priority – Better Cooperation Management – that is worked on through six thematic areas: Smarter Europe, Greener Europe, More Connected Europe, More Social Europe, Europe Closer to Citizens and Better Regional Management. Each of these topics is anchored in the cohesion policy of the European Union and it is precisely this diverse approach that ensures beneficiaries of this programme to cooperate on the topics of common interest in line with the regional needs.

PARTICIPATION THROUGH TWO CALLS

Having the available budget of 394 million euros, the Programme supports exchange of good practices and solutions in the territory that includes 36 European states, 27 of which are European Union Member States, five IPA countries, Norway, Moldova, Switzerland and the regions of Ukraine that are not under control of Russian forces.



As one of the seven countries that joined the programme in the advanced implementation stage, Montenegrin beneficiaries had the opportunity to have cooperation through two calls. Restricted call was purposefully created for the newcomers in the programme by ensuring that they could join one of the 150 projects from the First and Second Call that were already in the implementation stage. Choosing the topics of Smarter and Greener Europe, four Montenegrin projects joined the pool of 55 projects approved within this Call.

With the budget of roughly 380 thousand euros, Montenegrin institutions and organizations will, in the following three to four years, work on the improvement of implementation of regional development policies that support adoption of the Corporate digital responsibility in small and medium-size enterprises, improvement of the policies in the field of cycling, i.e. in contribution to decarbonization of transport through transfer from individual motor vehicles to transport by bicycles; improvement of the policies of planning green mobility on the basis of hydrogen and development of appropriate infrastructure, as well as in providing support to authorities in putting the future skills to the core of double transition for smarter and more resilient development.

In addition to this, Montenegrin beneficiaries participated in the Third Call within which in mid-December 113 project proposals were approved. These projects will address all six topics of the programme. Among these 113 projects, there are 12 submitted by Montenegrin institutions and organizations. They participate in 10 approved projects with the budget of about 1.5 million euros.

PLATFORM AS ANOTHER TOOL TO IMPROVE POLICIES

The platform for learning about policies is the second pillar of the Interreg Europa programme that together with the projects of inter-regional cooperation helps regional, local and national authorities to develop and deliver better policies. It is based on good practices in the field of regional development policies and strives to encourage learning about policies across the programme territory.

It is the space where European community that deals with policy development can use knowledge and experience of its colleagues and experts that act on the regional level. It is the place where information about different topics

are offered through thematic publications, online and live events, as well as through direct communication with a team of experts.

Beneficiaries of this service can establish contact with policy makers that are faced with the same or similar challenges, learn from the experience of their colleagues, get useful advice in relation to their daily work in policy development and build professional capacities, or share their own experience in policy making and choose the topics that the experts from the Platform will process through publications and events. Another good side of this Platform is that its benefits can be used at any moment, by the end of the programme period 2021-2027.

Be it through projects or services of the Platform, Montenegro's participation in the Interreg Europa programme opens the possibility to strengthen inter-regional cooperation and exchange knowledge and experience with the partners from the EU and other participating countries. Investment in better cooperation management and aligning local and national policies to European standards can contribute to faster development of capacities of national institutions, which is a significant step to Montenegro's integration in the European Union.



MINISTRY OF EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AND
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE
AND INNOVATION, WITH THE EU
FINANCIAL SUPPORT, IMPLEMENTED
THE CAMPAIGN DEDICATED TO
DEBATING ON EU TOPICS

SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS „BUZZED“ ABOUT EUROPEAN UNION

By Jelena Kulidžan, consultant within the EU4ME project



European Union was a „buzz word“ in the last two months among young people across Montenegro. Within our EUbuzz campaign, 18 schools from 16 Montenegrin cities organized school debate tournaments on EU topics, presenting opposite arguments for whether and why Montenegro should become a member of such a union. „The EUbuzz campaign thought me and my peers a lot about the EU and that is very important because it is us that will become adults when Montenegro becomes a Member State in 2028. Regardless of whether we were in the affirmative or in the negative team, we had to do a lot of research and learn about the organization, which extended our views and maybe changed some of our opinions about the EU“, said Maksim Vešković, a pupil of the first year in the grammar school „Slobodan Škerović“ in Podgorica after winning the school debate tournament with his team.



Maksim is one of more than 300 debaters who, together with their mentors, participated in the EUbuzz campaign implemented by the Ministry of European Affairs and Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, with the financial support of the European Union through the projects EU4ME and European House. The goal of the campaign that lasted from October to December was to inform the young about EU topics, encourage them to critical thinking and motivate them to take an active part in the processes in their society.

Guidebook on Buzzing about European Union was developed for these purposes. It was prepared by Melita Rastoder Ljaić from the Ministry of European Affairs. She explains that in the Guidebook she did not deal with political issues, but with the issues from daily life, the values, development and opportunities that arise for young people.

„Through membership in the EU many countries experienced transformation in the field of economy, education, human rights, but also in terms of strengthening institutions and democracy. Membership in the EU can bring numerous benefits, but also certain challenges. To be able to make wise decisions, we must analyse all aspects, all the advantages but also potential obstacles that are ahead of us. That is why it is important to talk about what membership in the EU means for us as a society. Through these debates, we learn to discuss, to present arguments, but also to respect each other“, added Ms Rastoder Ljaić.



In addition to new knowledge about EU, participants in the Info Days had the opportunity to learn more about the skills required for successful debating, presented by Krsto Vuković, leader of the Montenegro's Debate programme.

„The best effects in the process of acquiring knowledge most frequently come through discussing the topic of learning, i.e. through critical thinking pro et contra. In the EUbuzz campaign, the debate formats set the requirements to acquire knowledge about EU and position Montenegro in the integration processes, but also equally important, the requirements to raise awareness about democracy, rule of law, responsibility and other values and standards that we adopt on the personal level as citizens“, emphasized Mr Vuković.



The winning teams in school competitions, their members and mentors, were awarded certificates and prizes (50 euro vouchers for a bookshop) in the ceremony in Podgorica on 13th December. The event was opened by the Chief Negotiator of Montenegro with the European Union Predrag Zenović and the Ambassador of European Union in Montenegro Johann Sattler.

„I wish to thank you sincerely for the commitment and wish to learn about the union that you will be shaping together as their full-fledged citizens. You are the generation that will soon make decisions about what Montenegro should look like in the European Union. That is why I invite you to continue – to explore and learn, to be a part of the programmes that connect you with your peers across Europe. Through projects like EUbuzz you are already showing that you are not waiting for changes, but make them“, said the Chief Negotiator.



After talking to the young, Ambassador Sattler emphasized that the future of Montenegro is in good hands.

„I want you to understand one key message today: European Union is not a one-time project established long time ago and frozen in time. That is the process of a continuous dialogue, adjustments and development. And through EUbuzz, you have already become a part of that process. Listening to you, I could clearly see that Montenegro will not only become a part of European Union, it will enrich European Union. Your energy, your creativity and your commitment will make EU stronger and more diverse“, said the EU Ambassador.

Secondary schools from Podgorica, Tuzi, Bar, Kotor, Tivat, Herceg Novi, Budva, Nikšić, Danilovgrad, Bijelo Polje, Pljevlja, Petnjica, Rožaje, Mojkovac, Žabljak and Berane participated in the EUbuzz campaign.







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