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EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OFFICE IN 2021

SUPPORT TO
INSTITUTIONS
AND PROCESS

Author: Zorka Kordic, Montenegro's Chief Negotiator with the EU

**A crucial year for negotiations with the EU**

"Montenegro knows what it needs to do," said the Enlargement Commissioner Varhelyi, presenting the European Commission's report to members of the European Parliament in October 2021. The year behind us is an indicator that we are following the European path with a clear vision, commitment and perseverance, despite a very challenging geopolitical environment in regard to EU enlargement policy, the EU strategic autonomy debate and different perceptions of individual EU member states about its future.

The key principle in negotiations with the EU has always been the principle of balance - that everything that is achieved in all chapters of the *acquis communautaire* should be accompanied by progress in the field of rule of law. The nature of the accession process since the opening of negotiations with the EU in 2012 is based on this balance: tangible rule of law reforms, accompanied by efforts to meet the objectives of the 33 negotiating chapters - both in terms of alignment with EU *acquis*

and capacity building for its full implementation. The Communication of the European Commission in the introductory part of the Enlargement Package for 2021 explicitly states that the general balance in this sense has been preserved in Montenegro, which excludes any possibility of violating the so-called balance clause, with priority now being given to meeting the interim benchmarks for Chapters 23 and 24.

Respecting this key requirement, we must understand that this year we are at a turning point in the negotiations, when an additional step forward is expected from all segments of society. Practically for the first time since the opening of negotiations, the focus is more than ever on the synergy of all three branches of government, in order to enter the final phase - get a report on the interim benchmarks for Chapters 23 and 24 and start the closure of all other chapters. Intensive cooperation between the Government and the Parliament, primarily in the adoption of key regulations, is needed more than ever, and improving dialogue and reaching consensus in the Parliament on key appointments in the judiciary is an absolute priority.

In such a complex external and internal context, in the past year, the European Integration Office worked in several areas to direct the work of institutions in the EU negotiations process, strengthen the negotiating structure, intensify dialogue with EU member states and monitor the process of implementation and programming of IPA funds, as well as the process of strategic communication about the EU.

Restructured and strengthened negotiation structure

Montenegro's negotiating structure has been completely restructured in the past year and currently has over 800 members. During this year, it was developed in a comprehensive, gradual and - most importantly - inclusive way, through the engagement of all those actors in our society who have expressed a desire to support the process

Three sessions of the Collegium for Negotiations were held, as well as three sessions of the Rule of Law Council, three coordination meetings of the Chief Negotiator with

all heads of the working groups, two sessions of the new Negotiating Group for 6 negotiators for clusters and two sessions of the new Committee on European Integration and numerous plenary and thematic sessions of individual working groups (a total of 33 working groups).

During the last Intergovernmental Conference with the EU, held on December 13, 2021, a revised priority framework for Chapters 23 and 24 was obtained, based on our intensive planning activity. Furthermore, it was stated that there have been significant improvements in the structures dealing with the rule of law.

So far, working groups have been strengthened and enhanced for 29 negotiation chapters bringing together actors from the public administration and the civil sector, while for the remaining four chapters restructuring activities have been completed and their formal completion is nearing the end. All 7 subcommittees of the Stabilization and Association Council were successfully held and roadmaps have been prepared for the closing benchmarks for individual chapters.

The new negotiating group, led by the Chief Negotiator, is responsible, inter alia, for preparing, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Action Plan to address the recommendations from the European Commission's 2021 Report.

As an additional mechanism for better planning and monitoring of the implementation of obligations from the negotiation process, the new Committee on European Integration monitors the implementation of Montenegro's Programme of Accession to the EU on a weekly basis and is in charge of its continuous improvement.

Political dialogue with the EU member states has been strengthened

This year, for the first time, we are attending political Intergovernmental Conferences with the EU with the participation of the Prime Minister. Intergovernmental Conferences are held in order to strengthen the political dialogue with the EU member states in the context of applying the revised enlargement methodology.

In order to prepare more efficiently for holding this type of conference with the EU, the European Integration Office analysed the elements of application of the revised methodology, prepared appropriate positions in intensive cooperation with Council of EU and maintained intensive contacts with EU member states' teams. In this regard, over 40 meetings of the Chief Negotiator with relevant interlocutors from the EU were held, as well as bilateral consultations in the field of European integration with France and Poland. Systematic cooperation between the Office and the prestigious General Secretariat for

Key results

- ★ **Montenegro's Programme of Accession to the European Union 2020 – 2022 prepared**
- ★ **New Committee for EI established**
- ★ **Round of consultations in the EI area has been launched with NGO**
- ★ **Memorandum of Cooperation with the Legal UCG Faculty of Law**
- ★ **Europe Day in Kotor, Bar and Bijelo Polje**

73,4%
public support for EU accession

35+ events
which affirmed the EU accession process

10+ meetings
with Parliamentary Committee on EI



European Affairs of France (SGAE) has been established. Montenegro has successfully participated in two political Intergovernmental Conferences - in Luxembourg in June 2021, during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU and in Brussels in December 2021, during the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU. These are formats where the most important elements of the negotiation process are discussed at the highest political level with the EU member states, primarily the country's foreign policy orientation, as well as key priorities in the rule of law, focusing on future steps in the short and medium term.

Continuously high level of citizens' support for EU membership maintained

This year, we were particularly guided by the principle that the European integration is the strongest cohesive factor in our society, and made every effort to implement

the Strategy for Informing the Public about Montenegro's Accession to the EU and managed to maintain continued strong support of our citizens for EU membership of over 73%.

The fact that as many as 84% of citizens would vote for joining the EU if the referendum was to be held now, instils hope for finding constructive solutions and strengthening of dialogue on EU agenda obligations, which has encouraged us to intensify communication with all actors in our society.

The European Integration Office has participated in

Key results

- ★ Montenegro's Programme of Accession to the European Union 2020 – 2022 prepared
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over 40 events that affirmed the EU accession process, including the European Day in Kotor, Bijelo Polje and Bar. We have launched an updated round of consultations with NGOs, improved cooperation with the Faculty of Law of the University of Montenegro and intensified cooperation with the Parliamentary Committee on European Integration, with over 10 meetings and consultations.

A Blog on the process of Montenegro's accession to the EU was launched on the website www.eu.me, where officials of the European Integration Office on an almost weekly basis diligently prepare articles on EU sectoral policies, trends and directions of development of the *acquis communautaire*, as well as on key elements and benefits of using support from IPA funds.

Good practices in the use of IPA funds have been improved

This year, we also worked on improving the structure for IPA funds programming, thus new interministerial groups for programming IPA III for the period 2021-2027 were established. The most important planning document for the use of IPA funds, the so-called Montenegro's Strategic Response has been prepared, and the successful continuation of Montenegro's participation in all 9 cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes for the period 2021-2027 has been ensured.

Together with the ministries, we have managed not only to prepare the IPA 2021 programme with a total value of 32.5 million euros, but also to start the preparation of the IPA 2022 program, with a total indicative value of over 70 million euros.

This year, 27 new projects have been contracted within 4 cross-border cooperation programmes - Mediterranean; Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro; Serbia-Montenegro; Montenegro-Albania; the total amount of these projects is 11.34 million euros, of which over 3 million euros have been earmarked for Montenegrin partners.

In terms of improving the instruments of EU support for infrastructure, this year we had two sessions of the National Investment Commission in its new composition and together with the ministries carried out a comprehensive update of the Single Project Pipeline. Approved EU support through the Western Balkans Investment Framework amounted 23.4m euros this year.

Overall, we had a year of intensive activities in which the European Integration Office directed the planning of the EU accession process, provided comprehensive support to our institutions in terms of obligations related to political and expert part of the EU negotiations and the use of pre-accession funds and played a key role in coordination of these processes, with active expert support to the Prime Minister in the field of European integration. All this would not be possible without European Integration Office team of great and dedicated professionals, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their thoroughness, knowledge, patience and vision.

CLUSTER 2 - INTERNAL MARKET

ACCELERATED HARMONIZATION OF LEGISLATION AND MORE EFFICIENT IMPLEMENTATION TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE EU INTERNAL MARKET

Author: Milena Lipovina Bozovic, State Secretary for Economic Development Policy in the Ministry of Economic Development

In accordance with the recommendations of the European Commission, Montenegro, by adopting a new methodology in negotiations with the European Union, grouped 33 thematic chapters into six clusters. The cluster approach will enable Montenegro, which has opened all negotiating chapters and temporarily closed three chapters, faster sectoral harmonization and integration by strengthening synergies between related chapters within the cluster, but also among the clusters themselves. Also, grouping chapters into clusters created conditions for focusing on key sectors and identifying the most important and crucial reforms, but also provided strong political engagement at a higher level.

The intention is to speed up the entire negotiation process and provide clear and tangible results that are in interest of the citizens of Montenegro. After the closing of the cluster, i.e. all chapters from one cluster, the candidate country would start functioning as an EU member in that area, and this approach is especially



important from the point of view of early integration. Certainly, the methodology is less important than the true commitment to the European perspective and the reform agendas that candidate country should fulfill on that path.

a) Importance of clusters

The second cluster - the Internal Market - is the cluster that contains the largest number of negotiating chapters (9). This cluster includes all chapters and sub-areas related to the freedom to provide services, freedom of movement of goods, workers, capital, but also chapters dealing with intellectual property, competition, consumer and health protection, company rights and financial services. The importance of the cluster is reflected in Montenegro's preparation to meet the requirements of the EU internal market and is of great importance for possible early integration measures. The focus of this cluster is the improvement of competition protection policies and creation of preconditions for the development of a well-regulated market economy in Montenegro, characterized by a competitive market and a high level of consumer protection.

According to the latest Report of the European Commission on Montenegro for 2021, out of the nine chapters in this cluster, six chapters have moderate level of preparation (1,3,4,8,9,28), two chapters have good level of preparation (6 and 7), and one chapter some level of preparation (2).

The key institutions participating in the activities necessary to meet the requirements in the chapter are the Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Ecology and Spatial Planning, Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare, Ministry of Capital Investments, Ministry of Health, Central Bank of Montenegro, Agency for Protection of Competition, Employment Agency, Directorate for Inspection Affairs, etc.

b) Cluster benefits

In order to gain a better insight of the importance and scope of chapters from this cluster, the following is an overview of key topics addressed by individual chapters, with the emphasis on the importance and benefits for Montenegro, its economy and citizens. The summary is also presented in Table 1.

Chapter 1 - Free movement of goods

Free movement of goods brings numerous benefits to citizens and the business community. Montenegro's accession to the EU enables Montenegrin producers

access to the EU internal market with over 450 million consumers for the sale of their products, easier access to a wide range of suppliers and consumers, lower unit costs and greater commercial opportunities. As part of the EU single market where the same rules apply to all member states, conditions are being created for quality Montenegrin products to become competitive on the European market, and at the same time for quality imported products to be placed on the Montenegrin market. In addition, by joining the single market, Montenegrin consumers will have the opportunity to choose more goods of better quality, at lower prices. By respecting high safety standards, greater safety of products placed on the Montenegrin market will be ensured, and detailed information on products will be available to Montenegrin consumers.

Chapter 2 - Freedom of movement for workers

Thanks to the freedom of movement of workers, citizens of the Member States have the right to freely choose where to work within the EU's borders. Upon joining

Table 1: Benefits for citizens and the economy - by chapters

P 1 - Free movement of goods	P 2 - Freedom of movement for workers	P3 - Right of establishment and freedom to provide services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unobstructed placement of goods on the EU market• Greater safety and quality control of products• Reduced costs• Recognition of certificates issued in Montenegro	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater mobility on the labor market• All employment rights as for nationals of a member state• Equal social security• The right of family members of workers to join and receive family benefits• European Health Insurance Card• Mutual recognition of qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simplified registration procedures• Cross-border establishment of companies• Improving the business environment• Better quality of services at lower prices
Chapter 4 - Free movement of capital	Chapter 6 – Company law	Chapter 7 - Intellectual property law
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liberalized capital market• Liberalized real estate market• Cross-border payments within the EU same as payments within the country• Intensified activities on combating money laundering and terrorist financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved business environment• Simplified procedures• New forms of companies• Enhanced business environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater security of intellectual property rights holders• Stimulation of creativity• Acceleration of technological development• Fight against piracy
Chapter 8 - Competition	Chapter 9 - Financial services	Chapter 28 - Consumer and health protection
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equal position of companies on the market• Restructuring of public enterprises• Lower prices, better quality of goods and services• Preventing market abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better stability of financial system• Greater security for users of financial services• More diverse offer of services on the market	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better efficiency of consumer protection• Higher health and safety standards for products• Better and more efficient health care

the EU, Montenegro will be able to ensure its workers moving to another EU member state the right to work without a work permit (after a transitional period), equal access to the labor market and employment and the right to equal social security as citizens of the Member State in which they are employed. In addition, members of their families will be provided with the right to join the worker and exercise rights such as family benefits, pensions, social security. The freedom of movement of workers within the EU is further facilitated by EURES, the European Employment Services network. EURES aims to provide all EU citizens with the same employment opportunities, despite language barriers, cultural differences, administrative challenges, differences in labour legislation and shortcomings in the recognition of foreign certificates. With the accession to the EU, the Montenegrin public employment service - the Employment Agency of Montenegro - will become part of the EURES network. This will provide Montenegrin citizens, both job seekers and employers, with information and employment mediation services in other EU member states. Thanks to the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), EU citizens are free to move between and stay in the Member States, knowing that they will receive adequate medical treatment if they become ill or have an accident abroad.

Chapter 3: Right of establishment and freedom to provide services

The right of establishment and freedom to provide services guarantees the mobility of companies and professionals within the EU. In relation to the cross-border provision of services, Montenegro's accession to the EU will allow Montenegrin individuals and legal entities to freely provide services in each EU member state without the establishment, while the right of establishment will enable Montenegrin businessmen to start and carry out economic activities in one or more EU Member States. Improving the business environment, through streamlined procedures for registration and establishment of companies, creates preconditions for opening of the Montenegrin market and increasing investments, new jobs and better quality of services at

lower prices. In the field of postal services, access to the common market contributes to better quality and lower prices of postal services. Furthermore, the system of recognition of professional qualifications will enable the citizens of Montenegro to perform their activity in the EU member states

Chapter 4 - Free movement of capital

By joining the EU and achieving full liberalization of capital movements, citizens will have access to a wide range of activities abroad, such as opening bank accounts in foreign banks, granting loans to non-residents, buying shares of foreign companies, investing, buying real estate, as well as a greater choice of financial institutions for doing business. For companies engaged in financial services, the benefits are reflected in the successful performance of cross-border activities and greater investment opportunities and acquisition of ownership of foreign companies

Chapter 6 – Company law

In the area of commercial law, the benefits of alignment with the EU acquis are manifold. Conditions are being created that will make business more efficient, more competitive and sustainable in the long run, and which will later enable Montenegrin companies equal treatment in the EU internal market. Also, harmonization of legislation establishes transparent rules for investors and avoids creating legal uncertainty for companies' operations. Clear and simplified procedures and the establishment of an electronic system for company registration, encourage the development of small and medium-sized enterprises as a generator of economic development.

Chapter 7 - Intellectual property law

The key benefits for the society relate to the increase of the degree of legal certainty for holders of intellectual property rights. Upon accession, Montenegrin inventors will enjoy the same degree of protection of their rights in the EU internal market. Adequate legal framework for the protection of intellectual property rights also affects the improvement of the business environment and the

attraction of foreign investments, and consequently the creation of new jobs. Montenegrin companies, especially SMEs, which are holders of intellectual property rights (patent, trademark, design, etc.) will become more competitive in the EU market

Chapter 8 - Competition

Competition policy ensures equal position of companies and development of a dynamic market, with a better offer of goods and services. Applying competition rules encourages entrepreneurship and efficiency, creates wider choice for consumers, and helps reduce prices and improve the quality of products and services. In a competitive market, companies have a motive to lower prices and offer a greater choice of products or services of better quality to consumers. Competition encourages companies to reduce their costs by investing in increase of productivity. In addition to the benefits for consumers, compliance with competition rules creates conditions for increasing the competitiveness of our economy and the inflow of foreign investments.

Chapter 9 - Financial services

EU membership will bring benefits to financial market participants, primarily through greater integration of the financial market, as well as to the users of financial services: citizens, entrepreneurs and investors. They will have at their disposal a greater and more diverse offer of financial services, while through increased competition, entrepreneurs and citizens will have benefits, especially when it comes to the offer of banks and products and services of non-bank financial institutions. Increasing the transparency of information by financial institutions will ensure greater protection of users of financial services, and thus stronger public confidence in the banking

system and encourage stability and preservation of the financial system.

Chapter 28 - Consumer and health protection

After the accession, the position of Montenegrin consumers in contractual relations with entrepreneurs will be further strengthened, primarily in terms of transparency of rights and obligations, overcoming various forms of consumer fraud and better protection in cross-border disputes. Companies operating in the Montenegrin market will be obliged to pay much more attention to the consumer, taking into account his remarks and requirements and his legal rights. Accessing the Rapid Information Exchange System (RAPEX) will further contribute to raising the general level of product safety and preventing the sale of products that pose a risk to the health and safety of consumers. Harmonization with the EU health policy will provide Montenegrin citizens access to quality and efficient health care.

c) Next steps

Although Montenegro has continued to make progress in the area of competition and the internal market, especially in aligning legislation with the *acquis* and strengthening of institutions, this process will be further strengthened and accelerated in the coming period, with particular emphasis on improving implementation in line with recommendations of the European Commission. That is why, through the recently adopted Action Plan for addressing the recommendations from the European Commission Report, an ambitious agenda of activities has been set, in order to have major and visible progress in all chapters of this cluster for the next reporting period. The following table presents the key activities in the coming period.

Table 2: Key activities from the AP for addressing the recommendations from the EC report for the next six-month period, by chapters

C 1 - Free movement of goods	P 2 - Freedom of movement for workers	P3 - Right of establishment and freedom to provide services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of the Law on Technical Requirements for Products and Conformity Assessment • Adoption of Law on Market Surveillance of Products • Adoption of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Efficient Use of Energy • Strengthening capacities of accreditation and standardization bodies while ensuring full membership in international organizations • Capacity building in the Directorate for Inspection Affairs in the area of market surveillance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the capacity of the Employment Agency of Montenegro • Starting activities on drafting the Law on Amendments to the Law on Foreigners • Strengthening human resources in the MoH in relation to international health insurance activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of full electronic registration of companies • Adoption of the report for the establishment of the Single Contact Point with the Action Plan • Intensive inter-ministerial coordination and harmonization of legal acts with the Services Directive • Starting activities on drafting the Rulebook amending the Rulebook on the type and manner of submitting data of postal operators
Chapter 4 - Free movement of capital	Chapter 6 – Company law	Chapter 7 - Intellectual property law
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining the draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Property Legal Relations • Preparation of the Draft Law on Insurance • Preparation of the draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Payment Operations • Finalization of the draft Strategy for the prevention and suppression of terrorism, money laundering and terrorist financing 2022-2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining the Draft Law on Accounting • Amendments to the Law on Business Organizations – continued harmonization of national legislation • Work on amendments to the Law on Capital Market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of the National Intellectual Property Strategy 2022-2025 • Submitting draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Copyright and Related Rights (which contains provisions related to measures against intermediaries) to the EC for review • Preparation of an analysis of results achieved in the area of investigations, criminal prosecution and outcome of initiated proceedings, with reference to the amount of fines imposed
Chapter 8 - Competition	Chapter 9 - Financial services	Chapter 28 - Consumer and health protection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt the Law on Compensation Procedures for Violations of Competition on the Market • Adopt the Decision on a regional aid map in Montenegro • Improving the state aid register • Capacity building of the Agency for Protection of Competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the Law on Credit Institutions and the Law on Resolution of Credit Institutions, as well as 38 bylaws • Preparation of the proposal of the Law on Insurance • Preparation of the Draft Law on Open-End Investment Funds with a Public Offering, the Draft Law on Alternative Investment Funds and the Draft Law on Pension Funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining the proposal of the Law on Consumer Loans • Strengthening capacities of the Network of Competent Authorities in the implementation of the Central Information System for Consumer Protection and improvement of website potrošač.me • Strengthening capacities of competent inspections of Administration for Inspection Affairs • Continue alignment of national legislation in the areas of patients' rights in cross-border provision of health care services and substances of human origin

In order to achieve real and sustainable progress in the accession negotiations within the Internal Market cluster, but also in the overall process of European integration, it is crucial to focus attention of stakeholders on implementation of key reforms in these areas and realization of benchmarks for closing of these chapters. By gradually introducing individual policies and programmes, the EU will bring additional momentum to the overall reform processes, with targeted support of sectoral reforms in the interest of Montenegrin citizens and the economy.

TOWARDS THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY - AMBASSADOR CHRISTIAN THIMONIER INTERVIEW FOR EUROKAZ

FRANCE SUPPORTS MONTENEGRO ON ITS EUROPEAN PATH

Author: Marko Vesovic, Portal RTCG

Ambassador of France, H. E. Christian Thimonier in the interview for Eurokaz stated that France is standing by Montenegro to provide support in all areas on its European path. On the occasion of the forthcoming French Presidency of the EU, Thimonier said that progress in chapters 23 and 24 will be monitored with the utmost care.

EU enlargement to the Western Balkans will certainly be high on the agenda during the French Presidency of the EU in the first half of the year. What will France insist on during the EU presidency when it comes to Montenegro and its obligations under the European agenda?

President Macron put two international priorities on the agenda during the presentation of our Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first half of 2022: Africa, whose development is a major issue for our entire continent, and the Balkans, as the main stake in completing European construction. France thus expressed the wish, between the Slovenian and Czech presidencies, not to lose sight of the essential challenge of European politics, in addition to other global challenges we wanted to highlight: climate, control of tech giants, progress towards European sovereignty.

In the recent past, Montenegro has set an example of a confirmed political will to join the Union, becoming a

leader in the region. It has every opportunity to remain a leader despite a certain slowdown that has been recorded for several years and which can turn into a stalemate if all political actors do not agree to continue on a well started the journey. The country has many resources and its full loyalty to the Common Foreign and Security Policy remains a strong sign of its perseverance on the European path. Another thing, apart from the technical aspects, that will hold our attention is loyalty to the basic values that make up the European Union and create its identity: respect for the rule of law, respect for minorities, separation of politics and religion and gender equality. We want to promote these values through various events in Montenegro during our Presidency, without neglecting concrete actions in favour of environmental and climate transition.

Do you share the opinion that it is important for the EU itself for the Western Balkans to be its integral part? If so, why is this important?

Everything is connecting us with the Western Balkans - in the past our common history - Rome and Byzantium, as well as human exchanges that continue today in the diaspora. The intellectual and human space of the Balkans lays in Europe. As President Macron pointed out at the beginning of his term in his speech at the Sorbonne dedicated to Europe: The Western Balkans have their envisioned place in our Union and an invitation to join in. The wars that marked the breakup of the former Yugoslavia reminded us of the shortcomings and ruptures that are running through this area, which is not next to ours, but is embedded in it. Its security is inseparably linked to ours. Our environmental, migration and civilization challenges will not be fully met without its presence. Our Europe will remain materially and strategically unfinished until these countries are integrated in a real and efficient way into the European political and economic space.

It is in the Union's interest to ensure that its political, economic and social standards, which the citizens of these countries strongly desire, are applied: its international credibility is also at stake. In order to gain respect from the outside, it cannot afford a space that would be a grey

area used for human trafficking, corruption and external intervention. Let us not forget that this European path is primarily strong and legitimate due to the explicit desire of the citizens of the Balkans to join us.

How do you assess the progress of Montenegro on the European path and what should we focus on during the French Presidency?

The Commission's latest Progress Report and the conclusions from the Intergovernmental Conference, held on December 13, are clear enough. We encourage Montenegro to return to the path of reforms, especially with regard to the consolidation of the rule of law, which is at the heart of the new methodology that France promoted two years ago with other Member States. Progress in Chapters 23 and 24 will be monitored with the utmost care, especially with regard to the functioning of the judicial system and the following of recommendations of the Venice Commission. For that to happen, a constructive dialogue of political parties with a sincere intention must finally be established in order

to put an end to the current paralyzed situation. Without functional institutions, we will not be able to progress on the path of European integration. In addition, for several years now, there has been a growing gap between reforms on paper and their implementation, with the risk of disappointing citizens and encouraging scepticism on the European side. We must think together and act to maintain the European hope. The Government has just announced the establishment of an operational agenda to correct perceived shortcomings and delays: we welcome this initiative and will fully support its implementation. It must be allowed for all good will to unite on a project that is the project of more than three quarters of Montenegrins.

Do you think that the EU helped the Western Balkans enough during the corona virus pandemic?

The European Union and its member states have been at the highest level of solidarity in this crisis, making it clear that everything that affects you affects us and vice versa. This has resulted in multiple activities, primarily the delivery of vaccines. I just want to point out the French donation of 117,000 doses of vaccines, on December 15, to help face the new wave. During her visit and with the donation of the state-of-the-art equipment, President von der Leyen expressed the collective solidarity of all Europeans with Montenegrins. In this area, as in all others, the Union is the first to provide assistance to the Balkans. However, it is necessary to really use this assistance and we may be concerned to see that the vaccination rate in the region expresses distrust or cultural differences, which maybe reflect the path that remains to be taken to unite the European spirit on certain topics. However, the EU's recognition of vaccination in Montenegro reflects our pursuit of unity and will to progress towards greater integration, even during the crisis.

Is France ready to provide expert support to Montenegro in closing the most complex chapters in negotiations with the EU?

France wants to support Montenegro in all areas on its European path. This is the first instruction given to the ambassador. The French expert, that we engaged and financed, is constantly available to the Chief Negotiator,



Kristijan Timonije Ambassador of France

Mrs. Zorka Kordic, and ensures continuous contact with the embassy and the competent French authorities. Two members of your Office have just been welcomed in Paris by the General Secretariat for European Affairs to find out how our “control tower” is functioning in terms of European cooperation. They were able to better convey your expectations and provide very useful information to improve our communication and cooperation. Recently, our liaison judge for cooperation with Southeast Europe was in Podgorica where he met with his colleagues, in order to develop our cooperation in judicial reform. We hope that the political conditions will be met for the judicial system to function, because without an institutional framework and without political momentum, the best technical cooperation will not be able to yield results, despite the quality and good will of experts.

HEAD OF THE MISSION OF MONTENEGRO TO THE EUROPEAN UNION, AMBASSADOR PETAR MARKOVIC

ALL BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE OUTCOME OF MONTENEGRO'S EUROPEAN PATH

Author: Jovana Duisic, Pobjeda

In October this year, Ambassador Petar Markovic took over the duty of the Head of the Mission of Montenegro to the EU. After a long period without an ambassador, Markovic was faced with an important task - to bring the country closer to Brussels within his competencies. Although convinced that the Government is achieving important results on the road to the EU, Markovic calls on all branches of government in Montenegro to take responsibility for the outcome of Montenegro's European path.

You recently commenced your term as the Ambassador of Montenegro to the EU, after that position was vacant

for a long time. What did you set as priorities at the beginning of your term?

That is right. After completing all the procedures related to the appointment - obtaining the agrément, the President's decree and the opinion of the competent committee of the Assembly, I arrived in Brussels in mid-October and immediately started working. The first weeks on the new position were marked by three efforts.

First, support for the Government in the diplomatic offensive against the EU institutions. Since taking office until today, the Mission of Montenegro to the EU (MEU) has organized five ministerial visits, one visit of the Prime Minister to Brussels, and recently held second political Intergovernmental Conference. Each of these visits lasted several days, with a busy agenda of meetings focused on various institutions of the Union, all with the aim of presenting successfully implemented and planned reforms from the European agenda.

Second effort was the internal consolidation of the MEU. Each new management brings a different leadership style, and my goal is to improve communication between personnel so that we can support each other in fulfilling our tasks and all together achieve more and work better in synergy. Related to this is a higher degree of compliance with the “headquarters” in Podgorica. During a long period without ambassadors, certain parts of our administration communicated directly with their homologues in the EU. Now that we are back to the regular situation, that role of the mediator in diplomatic communication and representation needs to return to where it belongs naturally and institutionally - to our country's Mission to the EU.

Thirdly, I have already fulfilled one of the promises made at the Committee on International Relations and Emigrants and opened a new Twitter account of the Mission that will significantly improve the visibility of Montenegro in Brussels and its activities in the process of joining the Union. I take this opportunity to invite your readers to follow us on @MONTENEGROinEU! The impressions of our European partners instil confidence that diligent work on fulfilling these initial three tasks successfully results in a significantly greater presence

of our country in the centre of the EU.

“It is expected that he will present his country as a front-runner for joining the bloc, and his main task will be to monitor the final phase of Montenegro’s accession to the EU with a renewed commitment to the rule of law”. This is how the reputable Politiko recently presented you. How justified are such expectations?

Diplomatic-consular mission does not create but only represents the policy of its state, and in that sense the continuation of the status of the front-runner for the EU accession and renewed commitment to the rule of law primarily depends on all competent decision makers in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government in Montenegro. However, within the limits of my competences, I make great efforts to justify the expectations of Politico Europe as the largest media house specialized in EU reporting. In my meetings with the representatives of the member states and EU institutions, I am presenting Montenegro as the most logical choice of the Union to prove that the enlargement policy is alive and vital. We are the only candidate country that has opened all negotiating chapters, which already has a European currency, which fully joins all EU foreign policy decisions, and the only country in the Western Balkans that does not have the burden of bilateral disputes with its neighbours. In addition, Montenegro is a very committed member of NATO with traditional geostrategic, and now economic orientation towards the

West. Because of all this, we deserve to be the next new member of the Union. This is a winning narrative that the Mission will convey. Its credibility, however, depends on the persistence of the rule of law reforms, without which there will be no new temporary closing of the negotiating chapters.

It has been 12 years since Montenegro started negotiations with the EU. During that time, all chapters were opened, but a small number of chapters were closed, which further prolongs Montenegro’s European path. How do you expect the negotiations will go ahead in the coming period, given that Montenegro has adopted a new negotiation methodology?

So far, our public had the opportunity to get acquainted with all the advantages and challenges of the new methodology of accession negotiations, primarily thanks to the precise and timely clarifications of the European Integration Office and the Chief Negotiator. This new approach aims to speed up the process and comparatively bring the most benefits to candidates who are still in the phase of opening chapters because, according to the new methodology, entire clusters are now opened instead of just chapters as was previously the case. On the other hand, individual chapters are still being closed. Our decision to commit to the new methodology is primarily a reflection of our commitment to the European perspective. And we expect a key benefit from the measures of early integration, which will





gradually give us access to the benefits of membership in certain sectoral policies of the Union even before becoming a member state.

Another novelty are the political Intergovernmental Conferences, which differ from the previous more technical ones in the greater degree of political responsibility and obligations of both sides. The guiding idea is that the accession process should now be more than technical harmonization and that all political forces and the citizens themselves should gather around it. Montenegro ends the year with two such Intergovernmental Conferences, highest ever citizen support for membership and a new incentive to speed up negotiations with a much clearer picture of priorities in meeting the rule of law interim benchmarks. The goal of all of us now should be to fulfil them as much as possible by the end of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU, so that at the next Intergovernmental Conference we can note this progress and get the agreement of the EU to start compiling the Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR), which could allow Montenegro to continue closing other chapters in 2022.

In its report on Montenegro, the European Commission reaffirmed that the country needs radical reforms

in the field of rule of law, fight against corruption, depoliticization.

Do you expect that the new Government could implement at least some of these reforms required for the EU accession in the near future?

Absolutely. Following the consolidation of the state administration and negotiating structure this year, which could not take place overnight in a country that has gone through a democratic electoral change for the first time in history, the Government has, in the recent months, accelerated all processes within its competences in Chapters 23 and 24. Many results were achieved during the summer and autumn, which, unfortunately, meant that they were not stated in this year's report, which mainly covers the period from June of the previous year to June of the current year. This means that they will be the subject of the next report. However, what is expected of Montenegro is a balance of results that primarily includes not only the Government but also the judiciary (for example, final judgments) and the Parliament (amendments and adoption of new laws). That is why it is important that all branches of government take responsibility for the outcome of Montenegro's European path. I am convinced that support of the citizens on one

hand and European partners on the other for speeding up that path will be a sufficient motive for all relevant actors to deliver these results without delay. No one should have an excuse for not achieving these results.

Montenegrin officials often criticize the EU, stating that Brussels has not done enough to help Montenegro to speed up its European path. What is your opinion?

After the EU summit in Brdo near Kranj in October this year, doubts about the commitment to EU enlargement to the Western Balkans have been resolved in a way that we can be satisfied with. The European perspective of the region has been confirmed, and the countries will be given almost 30 billion euros of financial support and investments in the next seven years (which is planning period of the long-term EU budget). Therefore, the door is definitely open, but it depends on us, our administrative capacities and political wisdom, whether and how much we will succeed. Among the Member States you will always have those who are “friends” of enlargement and those who are sceptical about it. In the coming period, our diplomacy must focus on calming the fears of the latter and providing arguments in favour of our membership to the former. When it comes to the EU institutions themselves, Montenegro has allies in them. We must not be tempted to find excuses for unfinished homework in others. Last week, for example, the news that the Unit for Montenegro was closed in the Directorate General for Enlargement resounded in our public. This was interpreted as proof that Montenegro is not in the focus of the European Commission. Such tendentious interpretations do not contribute to a better communication with the EU institutions and do not give a full picture of the situation. Namely, it is true that the internal reorganization of DG NEAR has been going on since the spring, as a result of the new negotiation methodology. Until this year, each country in the accession process had “its own” organizational unit in the Commission. After the adoption of the new methodology, the Commission decided on a paired approach, meaning that Montenegro and Serbia as the only candidates conducting the negotiations will be combined in one unit, Northern Macedonia and

Albania as candidates for membership who have not yet started membership negotiations get their combined unit, and a joint directorate for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo as potential candidates for membership is established a similar way. Therefore, Montenegro hasn't been set aside. The task of our diplomacy is to adapt to the new organization of the Commission's negotiations by taking care that the new organizational structure does not produce unfavourable political consequences. Paired directorates unavoidably lead to comparisons and greater potential for mutual competition of the countries to which they relate. Therefore, in the coming period, we must pay special attention to what our larger neighbour is doing and try to preserve our status as the most advanced candidate country. For the Mission, this primarily means that all ministries that have not sent their experts to the Mission should do so as soon as possible, because the Mission of the Republic of Serbia has greater human resources, so I see the greatest potential for progress in exploiting comparative advantages. For the system as a whole, I do not see the danger of this change in the EC if we continue to fulfil our commitments. I only invite all actors in Montenegro, including the academic community and the non-governmental sector, to join us in emphasizing the expectation that the so-called regatta principle and individual merits, which is at the heart of enlargement policy, must not be called into question at any cost.

Do you think that there are real threats that some third countries (Russia, China, Turkey) could take the place of Brussels, if the EU does not show more interest in Montenegro and the Balkans?

The danger of the influence of third countries is real, documented and expected. Although I have never been a supporter of the application of natural laws to social phenomena because they are two fundamentally different domains, they can serve as a good portrayal. The vacuum left by the Union preoccupied with other issues instead of the Balkans would almost naturally be filled by another power. Also, the corrective role of the Union and its conditionality policy is proving to be the most beneficial foreign policy brake for the spread

of corruption or non-Western policy models in our country. That is why there is a strong awareness among the domestic public and among our European partners about the importance of strengthening the role of the Union in the politics of the region.

What are you especially proud of since you became ambassador?

I am most proud of my colleagues working in the Mission because in the past few months we have worked together to make our country more visible, more European and better represented in Brussels. I would like to mention the presentation of credentials to the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council, which took place in the past two weeks, meaning that I am now officially accredited as the head of our Mission to the EU. The meetings with Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel were a great opportunity to reaffirm Montenegro's leadership role as a candidate for EU membership and our commitment to the reform process and good neighbourly relations in the region. In addition to already mentioned intensification of reforms in relation to the recommendations from the EC Annual Report on Montenegro, I am especially pleased that last month we signed agreements with the EU Creative Europe and Horizon Europe, which will significantly increase access of our creative industry and science to the most developed forms of cooperation and resources. Additionally, it was announced that by the end of the year we will completely adapt our COVID certificates to the European ones. This will facilitate travel and exchange with Europe despite the pandemic and more contacts of our citizens with the countries of the Union that are a guarantee of deeper Europeanization of our society.

EU SUPPORT VERY IMPORTANT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIJELO POLJE

Author: Slobodan Sebek, PR of the Municipality of Bijelo Polje

Since 2008, the European Union has financially supported several infrastructure projects in Bijelo Polje with 8 million euros, the most important of which are the construction of the City Garage, Sewerage Network, Wastewater Treatment Plant and Cross-border Railway Station.

Through bilateral programmes and grant schemes of line ministries, 18 projects with a total value of over 2 million euros were implemented.

One of the most important projects implemented within the Joint EU-Montenegro Programme for Employment, Education and Social Inclusion is the first Telecare service for social protection of the elderly.

Thanks to the first social protection service in Montenegro, which was established by the Home for the Elderly in Bijelo Polje last year, more than 200 control visits and 300 telecare services were delivered to 25 elderly citizens in Bijelo Polje municipality. The project involves a doctor, psychologist, nurse and geronto-housewife who are available to users through the application and who are required to come to the site once every 15 days, visit users and provide them with care and assistance.

Through this project, equipment for the service was procured, an operational software web application was created, technical staff was selected and trained to work in the Telecare service, and the elderly were trained to use technical and communication devices, which was a prerequisite for establishing this virtual service.



Telecare service is the first service of its kind in the region and it proved to be very useful, especially during the COVID 19 pandemic. The total value of the project is 195,000 euros, of which the contribution of the European Union is 185 thousand euros.

Another significant project "Joint Action for Better Service", implemented by the Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities "Tisa" through the cross-border cooperation programme Montenegro - Serbia will enable equipping cabinets for Neurofeedback and Biofeedback equipment, as well as making of a salt room.

This project will try to solve a long-standing problem, which is the lack of a day centre for persons with disabilities above the age of 27. The total value of the project is about 272 thousand euros and is being implemented in partnership with the Association for Assistance to Mentally Challenged Persons from Novi Pazar.



Kordic also signed a memorandum of cooperation with the NGO Multimedia Montenegro and visited the "EU Corner", a project implemented by the NGO, which is funded by the EU.

The Mayor Petar Smolovic thanked the EU Delegation to Montenegro and the European Integration Office for their support and pointed out that more and more issues are being resolved at the local and regional level, because local governments are addressing problems and needs of citizens. He said that local and regional authorities have the main role in the process of developing and improving the standard of living, emphasizing that the sense of Europe and the European way of life lays in local and regional differences, but also in their cooperation.

He pointed out that in the previous period, the Municipality, through EU funds, received significant funds for numerous infrastructure projects, but also for the implementation of projects with partners in order to improve living conditions of vulnerable groups.

Ambassador Popa: The EU will continue to support the development of Bijelo Polje

"The visit to Bijelo Polje is my fifth visit this year to the municipalities in the North, as a very important part of the country. We will continue to work with local communities throughout Montenegro to help the development of all its regions," said the Head of the European Union Delegation to Montenegro, Ambassador Oana Cristina Popa, during her first working visit to the municipality of Bijelo Polje.

She met with the President of the Municipality, Petar Smolovic, and discussed the most important issues concerning Bijelo Polje and the role of local communities



Europe Day in Bijelo Polje

The Chief Negotiator visited Bijelo Polje as part of the project Europe Day in Your City, where she had a meeting with the leaders of the Municipality, and participated in the public debate "The Importance of Montenegro's EU Accession". Together with the Mayor Petro Smolovic she visited the Public Institution "Bijelo Polje - Day care centre for the elderly" and the Joint Technical Secretariat office for the cross-border programme Serbia - Montenegro.



in the process of European integration.

"I am pleased to visit Bijelo Polje, a successful community with great development potential, which we have supported so far, and we want to continue to do so," said Popa.

The working visit focused on several European projects being implemented in Bijelo Polje.

European Local Democracy Week organized for the first time in Bijelo Polje

Bijelo Polje is the first municipality in Montenegro to join the celebration of the European Local Democracy Week in the cities of 49 countries that are taking part in this event.

The President of the Municipality Petar Smolovic and the President of the Municipal Assembly of Bijelo Polje Nemsal Omerhodzic organized a working breakfast with the representatives of the parties in the local assembly, where they discussed strengthening of democracy at the local level, European integration and environmental protection.

The activity that aroused the greatest interest was the "simulation" of the session of the Municipal Assembly of Bijelo Polje, in which students from three high schools from Bijelo Polje had the opportunity to ask questions to the leadership of the Municipality. The high school students showed great interest in the projects that are being implemented and concern young people, at the same time pointing out certain shortcomings in the city that should be addressed in order to significantly improve the living conditions of young people. They were introduced to the application "System 48" - which is used for reporting and addressing municipal issues.

The beginning of greening of the area "Otoka" in Loznice was marked by planting trees, which will be an integral part of the sports and recreational zone, while members of the Communal Police and officials of the Secretariat for Rural and Sustainable Development of Bijelo Polje were giving away eco-friendly shopping bags as part of the "Save the Nature" campaign.



MONTENEGRO AND HEALTH TOURISM

WELLNESS & SPA ATTRACTIVE TO FOREIGN TOURISTS ALL YEAR ROUND

"Prices of health services in Montenegro are significantly lower compared to Western European countries and a number of Balkan countries, making them extremely competitive," said Bojanic

Author: Milos Rudovic, ND Vijesti

Health tourism could become one of the leading tourist products of Montenegro, where the only Wellness&Spa in the country could have a substantial role - the Herceg Novi Institute "Dr Simo Milosevic."

Health tourism is recognized as the only one of the four top priority areas from the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3). Montenegro is the first country to adopt the S3 Strategy, which is not a member state of the European Union.

The document points out that the global health tourism market will grow at an annual rate of 19% in the next few years.

Relying on the S3 Strategy, in mid-October, the Government adopted the Health Tourism Development Programme for the period to 2023.

The representative of the Ministry of Economic Development, Sandra Bojanic, points out that the Programme has recognized the Institute, which was founded in 1949, as a partner institution in achieving all envisaged targets.

"Prices of health services in Montenegro are significantly lower compared to Western European countries and a number of Balkan countries, making them extremely competitive," Bojanić told the Eurokaz.

Foreign nationals, for example, spent more than 95,000 nights at the Institute in 2019, and almost a third were health tourists from Norway, and the rest were mostly tourists from the region and other Scandinavian countries. As a unique combination of hotel and health and rehabilitation center, with the help of non-invasive methods and through the experienced application of natural factors of Igalo (healing sea mud, mineral water, mild Mediterranean climate), each guest is accessed through an individual medical program.

The Programme emphasizes that the Institute has a chance to become the leading center for medical rehabilitation and physical therapy of diseases of the musculoskeletal system in the region and Europe. The planned investment would amount to 60 million euros, while the possible income is 120 million euros.

Speaking about the income, the Herceg Novi Municipality told Eurokaz that they collected about 80,000 euros from the spa in 2019 only on the basis of the sojourn tax.

The Municipality led by Stena Katic said that the Institute is the most important brand of health tourism in Herceg Novi and the whole of Montenegro.

"It is an institution with more than seven decades of experience in tourism and medicine, which, thanks to highly qualified staff, has gained a world reputation," they told from the Municipality to Eurokaz.

The highly qualified staff is mostly hired from the nearby Faculty of Applied Physiotherapy.

Around 45 years ago, the School of Physiotherapy was founded, which in the meantime has grown into the Faculty of Applied Physiotherapy

Applied physiotherapy through basic and specialist studies is currently attended by slightly above 200 students from Montenegro and the region. This year, 41 students completed their basic studies, last year 39, and in 29 students in 2019.

"Physiotherapy students perform their professional practice at the Institute, where experienced experts pass on the latest knowledge from rehabilitation. This type of education makes up a significant part of overall studies and directly relies on theoretical medical education acquired in teaching," the personnel from the Faculty told Eurokaz. The website of the Faculty indicates that many students of this study programme, after completing their studies, found business and professional engagement throughout Europe and the Middle East, where they gained a high reputation for their work and expertise.

Currently, as the personnel from the Faculty pointed out, a new accreditation of this programme is underway, which, in compliance with the principles of the Bologna Declaration, will be organized through three-year basic and two-year master's studies. The Municipality management also said that they will designate a new building for the needs of the Faculty.

"The Institute and the Faculty have created experts whose knowledge and skills have long been recognized in the world and because of which people from all over the

world came to Montenegro for rehabilitation," said Kristina Zuber Djukanovic, a former student of the Faculty and applied physiotherapy specialist, to Eurokaz.

Zuber Djukanovic welcomes the intention of the Faculty to introduce master studies, but due to the constant improvement in that area, she also emphasizes the need to introduce doctoral studies.

In order to recognize highly competent staff, the Chamber of Physiotherapists was founded more than five years ago, and 400 people are currently licensed to work.

The interlocutor of "Eurokaz" points out that special attention in this part must be paid to the quality of staff that health tourists are used to, because, according to her, during the season there is a large number of persons who present themselves as physiotherapists, but they neither have the necessary education nor license.

"Galeb" to be promoted to a five-star villa

Since it is recognized as a strategically important brand for the development of health tourism, the representative of the Ministry of Health, Natasa Zugic, emphasizes the need to invest in the modernization of the Institute, which has a tradition of seven decades.

"The first vision of Montenegro for health tourism was recognized by the author of the Health Tourism Development Programme led by "Fidelity Consulting" and Milos Vukcevic is that in 2024, the health tourism will be the most important segment of Montenegro's year-round health tourism offer, with the Institute as a carrier of development," said Žugić, the head of the Directorate for Development and Planning of Health Tourism.

The Institute has several buildings. The main building "Phase 1" was built in 1973, and later connected by a footbridge with the "Phase 2" of the Institute, whose construction was completed in 1986. Within the Institute, since 1986, there is a complex that once belonged to the President of SFR Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito - Villa Galeb.

Zugic points out that, among other things, that it is necessary to do the reconstruction that will ensure energy efficiency of the complex, renovate therapeutic spaces (hydro, Chinese and electro therapy) in accordance with European standards, introduce new therapeutic technologies and bring Villa Galeb to the level of an exclusive facility with five stars.

The presence of information and communication technology (ICT) in all priority areas of the S3 Strategy,

including health tourism, can be a support in many aspects, especially in health, said the representative of the Ministry.

The new digital infrastructure provided by the Electronic Health Card and the use of Telemedicine as one of the health services would enable cross-border electronic data exchange in a secure, efficient and interoperable way, thus ensuring continuity of care for EU citizens, regardless of which countries the tourist comes from, which would provide him/her with comfortable, efficient and timely health care, and ultimately the tourist's commitment to stay in Montenegro, " Žugić said in an interview with Eurokaz.

Health tourism improves the quality of life

According to the definition of the World Health Organization, health tourism is "a complex economic activity in which an important place is occupied by professional and controlled use of natural healing potentials, physical medicine procedures and programmed physical activities to maintain and improve physical, mental and spiritual health of tourists, as well as the improvement of their quality of life."

Health tourism includes those types of tourism that have primary motivation, contribution to physical, mental and/spiritual health, medical and wellness activities that increase the capacity of individuals to meet their own needs and function better as individuals in their environments and society.



MONTENEGRIN INNOVATIVE AND SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY READY

Author: Bojana Milicevic, Radio of Montenegro

Development of software solutions that will facilitate the integration of renewable energy sources and storage systems, as well as its management at both local and regional levels, all with the objective of reducing CO2 emissions - is a key goal of the "CROSSBOW" Project, whose implementation reached its final stage. This Project is implemented by the Montenegrin Electricity Transmission System (CGES) within the Horizon 2020 Programme. Numerous benefits, vast positive experience, close cooperation with the academia, and incentives to participate in similar programmes in the energy area, are just some of the reasons why the CGES engineer Biljana Ivanović is recommending companies, the scientific community and innovators to apply for participation in the Horizon Europe project (2021-2027), which Montenegro joined in the first half of December.

"The CGES is actively working on the development of proposals for new projects that will trigger current topics in the energy area," said Ivanovic.

They say from the Ministry of Economic Development that the Montenegrin innovative and scientific community is ready to participate in the most ambitious European programme for financing research and innovation, worth EUR 95,5 billion, on an equal basis with institutions from EU member states. The funds designated for the development of entrepreneurship and innovation can significantly increase the competitiveness of the Montenegrin economy, they emphasized from the Ministry of Economic Development.

"Moreover, this Programme implies the use of a common research space, thus our researchers, scientists and innovators are enabled to improve their competences in the EU countries, which increases their visibility at the international level. Through a range of support instruments grouped into three pillars - scientific excellence, global challenges and European industrial competitiveness, innovative Europe - Horizon Europe enables new

jobs, the use of talent funds, and promotes industrial competitiveness and strengthens the impact of investment in the European Research Area, "they explained from the Ministry.

Their colleagues from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MPNKS) add that Montenegro's participation in this Programme is pivotal for the negotiating Chapter 25 - Science and Research, which includes providing the necessary capacities in the field of research and technological development.

"It is crucial to involve all actors in the Programme, especially representatives of the scientific research community, with the objective of ensuring that the European funds are used to the fullest extent, and that our researchers are adequately recognized, both in Europe and around the world," the MPNKS underlined.

In order to achieve the above objective, they have appointed the Network of National Contact Persons for the Horizon Europe Programme, which for the first time involves officials from both the science department and the Ministry of Economic Development. Associates from the University are also part of the Network. They emphasize from the MPNKS that the Horizon Europe Programme at the very beginning offered special opportunities for the countries of the Western Balkans - a special twinning Western Balkans call worth EUR 21 million, which is intended to strengthen research capacity.

In addition to the Network of National Contact Persons, the Ministry of Economic Development will work to encourage the participation of Montenegrin innovators in European Programmes and through a dedicated Innovation Programme. They also reminded that the Innovation Fund was established in order to strengthen competitiveness in Montenegro.



#HorizonEU



"As part of the common European research space, our entrepreneurs, innovators and scientists are enabled mobility and training throughout the EU, where they have the use of state-of-the-art research infrastructure such as new technologies, laboratories, etc.," the Ministry of Economic Development said.

The Chamber of Commerce is also ready to acquaint the business community with the benefits of the Horizon Europe Programme. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports and the Ministry of Economic Development, they organized the first networking of partners through the Horizon Europe Programme. In addition to the plenary part, the participants had the opportunity to participate in virtual bilateral meetings with the companies from the region and the world in order to establish contacts and make first steps in achieving possible cooperation. Marija Raspopovic from the Chamber of Commerce explains that it is difficult to expect a Montenegrin company, organization or institution to be the holder of a project within the Horizon Europe Programme, and that participation through consortia is more realistic. To that end, as Raspopovic announced, the Chamber of Commerce will in future, by organizing similar events, try to help potential participants to find partners to participate in the Horizon Europe Programme.



HORIZON EUROPE

A NEW GENERATION OF IPA PROGRAMMES AND VALUABLE PEOPLE FOR NEW PROJECTS

Author: Bojan Vujovic, Deputy Chief Negotiator, National IPA Coordinator

I often think how many times each of us and probably every day walks through the park, crosses the bridge, gets on the train that runs on the reconstructed railway, easier and faster to get to work on the new bypass around the city, without even noticing the board with EU flag and a humble statement that is the project whose results we see and use funded by the European Union, with the inevitable IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Support)? And it is difficult to count how many projects whose results cannot be seen directly, but whose benefits make our lives easier every day. Cleaner water flowing in our rivers due to new wastewater treatment plants, through food and milk whose quality we now measure with new equipment in modern laboratories, safer new border crossings, new apartments for displaced persons, are just some of them. Of the many numbers we often use, much better conditions for the elderly in new nursing homes, accommodation for asylum seekers, faster and safer blood transfusions, new ambulances or a satisfied farmer who has just sat in a new tractor or installed a solar panel on the cottage in the Katun are even better illustrating this reality, and the list is getting longer and richer every day with new projects.

And this strange knowledge that using all the opportunities offered by EU funds with every new project we can make life better, safer and more beautiful for the people around us is every day and almost the only motivation for a team of persistent employees in the European Funds Sector of the Office for European Integration, which deal with EU funds. There are almost 30 of them and they do their best every day so that, respecting the strict procedures and rules of the EU, we do not miss any new opportunity or call for projects, that the approved projects are implemented without compromising trust of the EU colleagues. And each of them carries with them a small world of their

programme or project, and on that very day they hurry to send a report to the European Commission, or to check if everything is going according to plan with the preparation of new projects description. With a multitude of new ideas, creative and valuable, and yet unobtrusive, they make every day of working in such a team a kind of privilege for which I will probably never thank them enough. And day after day, the seven-year financial period for which the EU allocates funds for all these projects, the last from 2014 to 2020, passes very quickly.

And with each new seven-year period, colleagues from the European Commission define some new rules and principles for granting IPA support, so that we can implement new projects faster and more efficiently. Therefore, one of the strongest messages of commitment to the EU enlargement process came on 15 September from Strasbourg, where the European Parliament adopted a new legislative framework for IPA support to the Western Balkans and Turkey from 2021 to 2027. The third generation of the IPA programme, or IPA III, worth EUR 14, 2 billion, brings new rules and new opportunities for project financing. This time, the objective is to implement projects as quickly as possible and with significant results for the citizens of the beneficiary countries. In order for each of EUR 14, 2 billion to reach exactly the most needed target and the greatest results, the European Commission will evaluate projects prepared by beneficiary countries each year on the basis of strategic importance and project readiness. And each country will receive funding for each important and well-prepared project, whether it is strengthening institutions, adopting new standards, building infrastructure or a new cross-border cooperation project. Focus on results, key reforms and long-term economic growth and development will be key guidelines

for the use of IPA III funds.

And it is precisely these great people that I mentioned, but also valuable colleagues from the relevant ministries and other institutions, who are responsible for the fact that we have already almost approved new projects for the first IPA III programs, i.e. 2021 Programme. With new projects worth more than EUR 30 million, the EU will support key reforms in agriculture, transport and the environment. Simultaneously, they are dedicated to the development of new programme documents that will enable us to announce new calls in 9 cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes.

With the unequivocal commitment of the Government and the support of the EU, every new project and new idea is created by people and their creativity, which is why they are so precious. I believe that IPA III, but also much larger amounts of funds from the EU structural funds that await us after membership, will continue to prove at every step that EU integration is a process that brings significant benefits to society as a whole.

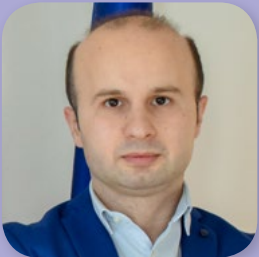
If you continue to view the EU accession process as something strange, distant and reserved only for the Government or officials in the institutions, perhaps some of the results of EU-funded projects will lead you to change your mind. Visit the inevitably renovated Besac Fortress and the reconstructed Old Prison in Kotor, or the summer stage in Stari Bar in a new guise. Discover the old cobblestones in the Dzidzarin olive grove under the Stari Bar and see how many old olive trees have been marked, or just talk to some of the many Erasmus exchange students in one of the EU member states. You can come up with a new idea yourself and shape it into a project. I believe that in the period until 2027, we will find ways to finance it from one of the IPA III programmes.



**New Instrument for
Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)**

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TRILATERAL PROGRAMME BETWEEN CROATIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND MONTENEGRO - A SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

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The development process of the Cooperation programme for the period 2021-2027 is already quite advanced, while at the same time the work on the implementation of projects from the IPA II perspective is reaching its end, with already visible track record of numerous projects implemented in Montenegro.

Although the results of EU projects are usually illustrated by statistics, which are extremely representative in terms of regional cooperation, both in terms of the percentage of utilized funds and the number of implemented projects, we will use the opportunity to review concrete results, which steadily continue to contribute to the community even after the completion of the projects in the territory of all participating countries. Simultaneously, the results confirm the importance of the territorial focus of EU cohesion policy, which is achieved with the support of available funds, by directing programme activities to specific mapped areas.

Numerous successful projects indicate significant interest among beneficiaries, who do not stop at territorial borders, but with their enthusiasm, as a rule, manage to overcome complex administrative procedures, update their ideas and, ultimately, make meaningful contributions to areas where support is most needed.

What certainly remains one of the results of territorial cooperation, no less important than material benefits, is the relationship of cooperation established by countries in the region through joint work on developing and implementing project ideas - and as an added value, opens the opportunity for candidate countries to adopt confirmed successful practices through many years of direct cooperation with EU member states.

One of the most successful examples of regional cooperation, according to the programme coordinating bodies at the level of the three participating countries, but also according to the European Commission, project

beneficiaries and the general public, is the trilateral cooperation programme between Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

In order to maintain the necessary accuracy in the review, we will focus exclusively on the activities of Montenegrin beneficiaries, because the intersection of results on a trilateral basis would require a much more extensive analysis. It should certainly be borne in mind that each of these results has an adequate reflection on the territory of the other two countries, and thus this text provides a kind of insight into the nature of the entire Programme.

Interreg IPA cross-border cooperation programme for Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro 2014-2020, which covers a significant part of the region, draws on the experiences of cooperation in the previous period (2007-2013) these three countries implemented in bilateral format - through cross-border programmes Croatia-Montenegro, Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro. In the meantime, there is a need to bind the countries into a single programme area, with a more significant regional reach and a more intensive effect of cooperation at the level of the overall space.

Based on the conducted preparatory research and situation analysis, the common needs of this area were identified, but also the capacities of the states to overcome the existing challenges, such as insufficiently efficient network of health institutions, inadequate level of preparedness for disasters as a consequence of climate change, non-use of renewable energy sources, lack of connection between the tourism sector and other sectors in the economy, incomplete valorization of cultural and natural resources, lack of certain capacities, innovative skills and knowledge in the field of entrepreneurship.

Within the new trilateral programme, Montenegrin organizations and institutions are implementing 45 projects, which include all municipalities from the program

area (Herceg Novi, Kotor, Tivat, Budva, Bar, Ulcinj, Cetinje, Nikšić, Podgorica Danilovgrad and Tuzi), ministries and public institutions, tourism and non - governmental organizations - which have recognized the appropriate space to deal with their engagement and expertise, in cooperation with cross - border partners, addressing a number of open issues.

Through projects aimed at improving health and social protection services, numerous health institutions in Montenegro, including the Ministry of Health, the Institute of Public Health, general hospitals and health centers, actively participate in training programmes and informing the public about the impact and treatment of certain diseases, and thus creating a framework for a more innovative and flexible way of acting in the provision of health services.

In terms of sustainability of these projects, of particular importance is the procurement of equipment for diagnosis and treatment of diseases involving various types of cancer (ON TIME, MELAdetect), procurement of telemedicine equipment (TELE.DOC), improvement of infrastructure in the laboratory diagnostic sector (LAB-OP), protection of the population from the consequences of the COVID-19 virus and improvement of the diagnostic procedure in case of epidemics (ERI Health), improvement of the quality of services for patients with drug-resistant epilepsy and Parkinson's disease (NeurNET), improvement of the treatment of trauma patients (TELE.DOC), improvement of palliative care services (IMPHACT), somatopedic, typhological and speech therapy services (ASIQ), as well as the quality of social and health care services for persons with disabilities (ER2 - S2). These projects additionally envisage the establishment of tools for the exchange of medical data, in the form of a reference network of centers and hospitals, e-health applications and platforms for certain diseases.

As the programme area is features by the richness of natural resources, diversity of biodiversity and many protected areas, projects related to environmental protection, in the period 2014-2020, significantly contribute to achieving EU standards in these specific areas. The project partners are also jointly undertaking activities for land use and landslide management (SAFEarth), establishing energy efficiency teams and introducing an energy efficient public

lighting system (IRENE), training of competent institutions for flood and fire protection and equipping emergency management centers (Flood & Fire).), implementation of pilot projects for the installation of photovoltaic panels (INGRID), encouraging the energy sector to use wood biomass as the main energy source for heating (Wood Key), installation of solar parks (INER).

Taking into account the factors of sustainable tourist offer and its diversification, projects aimed at adding value to the tourist potential of cultural and natural heritage, contribute to improving the tourist offer in Montenegro through various modalities: from reconstruction of historical fortresses and museums (Fortress Reinvented, FORTITUDE, Heritage REVIVED), through investments in infrastructure for active outdoor tourism (ADRIATIC CANYONING), through the construction of tourist infrastructure that provides visitors with access to endemic species of flora and fauna (Epath), improving quality standards in cycling tourism (CIRO II), all the way to improving tourist infrastructure for nautical tourism (NAUTICA CBC).

Activities in the field of tourism have found their place in the formation of certain clusters in projects that are primarily aimed at improving competitiveness, which is a response to the need of the programme area to link business activities, clusters and research institutions, and thus create a more favorable business environment. Within these projects, cross-border networks of clusters in the field of creative industry, tourism and food industry (BACAR), as well as networks of clusters in the field of information and communication technologies (CODE) were formed, laboratories for product testing and standardization (STRONGER) and the Biochemical Laboratory for Agricultural Product Quality Control (GREEN CBC), the Cross-Border Olive Development Center (COOPeR) has been established, and the application of innovative models has strengthened the competitiveness of organizations for cross-border business (2 CODE) and start-ups (CROWN) .

This review could certainly grow into a much longer list of diverse and equally relevant project activities and partner institutions, but the aim of this article is to briefly present the results of the programme and provide only a preliminary insight into the importance of trilateral cooperation projects.

Having in mind that in the period 2021-2027 we expect much larger funds under this programme, as well as the potential for another dimension of cross-border cooperation, in the form of projects of strategic importance, we need to look at new opportunities and identify areas that could be the subject of interest in new era projects.

The overall process is even more complex, but equally inspiring in the age of the pandemic, which once again reminds us of the importance of overall cohesion, through which we can achieve resilience and balanced regional development.



COLLAGE OF PHOTOS FROM THE EVENT













