

23rd meeting, Brussels, 3 November 2026

JOINT DECLARATION

The EU-Montenegro Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) enables civil society organisations from both sides to monitor Montenegro's progress towards joining the European Union and to make recommendations to the Montenegrin government and the EU institutions.
The JCC is made up of 12 members: six representing the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and six representing Montenegrin organised civil society. During its current term, it is co-chaired by **Danko Relić**, member of the Andrija Štampar Association of People's Health from Croatia, and **Srđa Keković**, Secretary General of the Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro (USSCG).

1. State of play of EU-Montenegro relations and the accession process

1.1 The JCC welcomes the EU-Montenegro intergovernmental conferences held in June, July and October 2026, during which Montenegro provisionally closed further chapters of negotiations (chapters 2 – freedom of movement for workers, 8 – competition policy, 17 – economic and monetary policy, 18 – statistics, 19 – social policy and employment, 28 – consumer and health protection and 29 – customs union), bringing the total number of provisionally closed chapters to 21 (out of 33).

1.2 The JCC urges the authorities to finalise all reforms needed to meet the closing benchmarks of the remaining negotiating chapters, particularly on environment and climate change, and to operationalise judicial and prosecutorial information systems, the Cybersecurity Agency, digital identity, competition policy and governance of state-owned enterprises. It also calls on the authorities to reinforce administrative capacity in all EU acquis-related chapters, to implement EU relevant policies and be ready to fully assume the obligations of membership. The JCC welcomes Montenegro's close cooperation with the EU on countering hybrid threats and calls for implementation of the joint recommendations on disinformation, foreign interference and cybersecurity.

1.3 The JCC reaffirms its full support for Montenegro's EU membership and welcomes the ongoing work in the Council on drafting the accession treaty and the Commission's financial package as tangible signs that the negotiations have entered their final stage. It calls on Montenegro to maintain the momentum for reform and on the EU institutions and Member States to ensure a credible, merit-based and predictable path towards accession.

1.4 The JCC welcomes the EESC's preparations to receive members from Montenegro as soon as the Accession Treaty is signed. Through the Enlargement Candidate Members initiative, current JCC

members and other Montenegrin representatives are already contributing to the EESC's work and gaining practical experience that will support continuity and their future participation in the Committee.

1.5 The JCC stresses that good neighbourly relations, reconciliation and the constructive resolution of outstanding bilateral issues require sustained political investment and the meaningful involvement of organised civil society, which can help build dialogue, trust and public support across borders. It calls on all political and public actors to approach the painful legacy of past conflicts, including the wars of the 1990s, with care, responsibility and respect for established facts and the dignity of victims, and to refrain from statements or actions that could deepen divisions or undermine reconciliation.

1.6 The JCC urges all political actors to safeguard EU accession as a shared national priority and to rebuild and preserve the trust needed for constructive cross-party cooperation. It welcomes the political agreement reached between the parliamentary majority and opposition in July 2026 and the important reforms it enabled. It calls on all sides to sustain institutional cooperation and work together on the remaining reforms required for EU accession and Montenegro's democratic development beyond accession, in the interests of all citizens.

Specific sectoral recommendations

1.7 The JCC welcomes the adoption of key constitutional amendments aimed at strengthening the independence of the judiciary and the Central Bank, as well as progress towards removing immunity for members of the Government in corruption-related cases. It calls for renewed broad consensus on the remaining constitutional changes, including the lifting of government members' immunity in corruption cases and the introduction of prior integrity checks for designated prime minister and members of the government, and for adequate staffing and infrastructure, merit-based appointments and protection of judges and prosecutors from political pressure.

1.8 The JCC calls for measurable results in combating organised crime and corruption, including effective financial investigations and confiscation of illicit assets. At the same time, it underlines the importance of further strengthening the institutional capacity of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, while ensuring consistency, legal certainty and predictability in decision-making, particularly in the area of conflicts of interest. It also stresses the need for full financial independents and the consistent application of clear and transparent criteria in the selection and appointment procedures for the Agency's governing bodies, with a view to strengthening confidence in its integrity and effectiveness.

1.9 The JCC welcomes the restoration of the media regulator and public broadcaster councils to their full membership capacity and improved transparency of audiovisual media ownership. It calls for effective safeguards for editorial and institutional independence, stronger enforcement of access-to-information rules, protection of journalists, dedicated anti-SLAPP measures and full transparency of online media ownership and funding.

1.10 The JCC welcomes the adoption of the recommendation to amend the Labour Law and restore the retirement age from 66 to 67 years as the age limit for the automatic termination of employment by operation of law. However, the JCC notes that this binding legal provision, under which a special law cannot grant employees fewer rights than those provided for by the Labour

Law, is not being applied to all civil servants and public employees who are dismissed from service upon reaching the age of 66 under the special Law on Civil Servants and State Employees. The JCC calls on the government to urgently put an end to the continued discrimination against certain categories of civil servants and public employees on this basis. Furthermore, the JCC highlights the discriminatory nature of Article 101a of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Labour Law, currently under parliamentary consideration, which places private-sector employers at a disadvantage compared to employers in the public sector, and calls on the government to remove this provision.

1.11 The JCC points out that the Velje Brdo project does not represent an adequate policy response to citizens' increasingly pressing housing needs, as it involves extremely costly housing construction and apartment sales, further concentrates the population in the capital city, and excludes other municipalities. The JCC therefore calls on the government to adopt an affordable housing model based on a combination of public, social, cooperative and non-profit housing (state-funded housing construction), making use of the funds and resources allocated under the European Affordable Housing Plan.

Implementation of the Reform Agenda and the Growth plan for the Western Balkans

1.12 The JCC welcomes Montenegro's strong performance in implementing its Reform Agenda under the Reform and Growth Facility. It stresses that maintaining this leading position among Western Balkans partners requires a shift from formal compliance to effective implementation, supported by timely evidence transparent reporting on results, and systematic follow-up of delayed reform steps.

1.13 The JCC calls for the Reform and Growth Facility Monitoring Committee to take concrete actions, with a regular timetable, documentation circulated sufficiently in advance, clear records of decisions and with genuine participation of social partners, the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro and civil society organisations. Public authorities should explain how stakeholder input has influenced implementation.

1.14 The JCC welcomes the Commission's proposed financial package for Montenegro and the prospect of continuity between pre-accession assistance and future EU funds. It calls on the authorities to strengthen administrative and absorption capacity at national and local levels and to prepare transparent, mature project pipelines for funds and projects intended for cohesion, agriculture, border management, internal security, connectivity, employment and social inclusion.

The economic and social situation in Montenegro, including the 'Euro model'

1.15 The JCC notes continued economic growth, declining unemployment and easing inflationary pressures, while expressing concern that consumption-led growth and wage increases exceeding productivity may weaken competitiveness. It calls for prudent fiscal policy, a more predictable business environment, stronger private-sector development and measures against the informal economy and regional disparities. The JCC also underlines the importance of regulatory predictability, reducing administrative burdens and ensuring a level playing field for businesses.

1.16 The JCC notes, with concerns, the government's proposed 'Euro Model', aimed at increasing minimum wages and pensions from 2027. It welcomes the objective of raising living standards

and retaining workers, but stresses that reforms of this scale must be based on published fiscal, social, employment and competitiveness impact assessments and credible, sustainable financing including the impact on civil society organisations as employers, particularly those dependent on project-based funding and donations.

1.17 The JCC calls on the government to review the 'Euro Model' prior to its implementation through timely and meaningful consultation with representative trade unions, employers' organisations, the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro, other organised civil society, municipalities and the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund. It recommends ensuring safeguards for this and any other similar economic reforms.

1.18 The JCC expresses serious concern about the prolonged delays in the work of socio-medical commissions in the field of social protection, whose findings and opinions are prerequisites for decisions on entitlement to material benefits, social services and related rights. These months-long delays jeopardise the legal and social security of individuals and families, affecting their income and livelihoods. Noting that the competent parliamentary committee has already adopted conclusions and recommendations to increase the frequency of commission meetings and the number of commissions, the JCC calls on the competent institutions to implement these measures, ensure the commissions' function without interruption, and guarantee timely access to rights and compliance with legally prescribed deadlines.

1.19 The JCC recommends complementing revenue focused measurable outcomes with investment in competitiveness through productivity, innovation, vocational education and training, lifelong learning and quality employment. It welcomes Montenegro's improved PISA 2025 results, particularly in science, but notes that performance remains below the OECD average and calls for sustained education reform linked to labour-market needs.

2. Overview of the situation of organised civil society in Montenegro, including social dialogue

2.1 The JCC reiterates that an enabling civic space and meaningful social and civil dialogue are crucial for Montenegro's successful EU accession. It calls for early, inclusive and transparent consultation on legislation and reforms, and documented feedback explaining how contributions were considered.

2.2 The JCC expresses concern about the expiry of the General Collective Agreement in April 2026 and the resulting loss of a common framework for workers not covered by sectoral or company agreements. It calls on the government, trade unions and employers to conclude and implement a new agreement without delay.

2.3 The JCC stresses that Montenegro must demonstrate clear and measurable progress in strengthening social dialogue at all levels. Consultations with social partners should be systematic, timely and meaningful, and agreements reached through the Social Council should be duly reflected in government policy and legislation. The JCC calls on the government to introduce concrete measures to support the strengthening of the human and technical capacities of the social partners, enabling them to fulfil their roles adequately.

2.4 The JCC calls for the effective functioning of the Social Council and its working bodies, regular meetings with agreed follow-up, and sufficient institutional capacity for collective bargaining, labour inspection, occupational safety and health, employment policy and social inclusion.

2.5 The JCC reiterates that the government still has not amended the relevant regulations to clearly define an exemption whereby representatives of social partners and civil society organisations who are members of working groups and other bodies, as well as management boards, are exempt from being classified as public officials. The JCC calls on the government to address this issue urgently.

2.6 The JCC calls for enhanced transparency, legal certainty and inclusiveness in legislation and public funding affecting civil society. It urges the authorities to ensure that the new framework for non-governmental organisations safeguards freedom of association and calls on the competent ministry and the government to adopt the new Law on Non-Governmental Organisations as soon as possible, based on the broad consensus reached among all relevant stakeholders that would bring substantial improvements to the current legal framework. It calls once again for the 2027-2031 strategy for cooperation with civil society to reflect the EU civil society strategy.

2.7 The JCC welcomes the resumption of the Council for Cooperation between government institutions and CSOs and calls for regular, results-oriented meetings. It also urges predictable and transparent public funding, equal access to calls for proposals, and sufficient EU and national support for building the capacities of social partners and civil society organisations. The JCC further welcomes the ongoing work on the Draft Law on the Representativeness of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities and calls for it to be finalised and adopted following close consultations with representative organisations of persons with disabilities.

2.8 The JCC calls for the full independence and operational capacity of the Ombudsperson and for effective protection against discrimination, hate speech and violence. Particular attention should be given to Roma and Egyptians, persons with disabilities, women, children and other vulnerable groups, ensuring equal access to education, employment, healthcare and justice.

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This joint declaration was adopted by consensus. The JCC instructs its co-chairs to forward it to the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Council, the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC), the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission and the Montenegrin Government.

The next meeting will be held in Montenegro in the first half of 2027 (22 April). The agenda for the next meeting will be set by the co-chairs of this body. Among other topics, it will feature an assessment of the enabling environment for civil society and social dialogue.