

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

GOOD NEIGHBOUR

Montenegro and regional cooperation

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Montenegro continuously demonstrates its commitment to good regional relations.



In addition to the constructive role of the state in regional cooperation through active participation in various regional initiatives, the country has demonstrated its full commitment to the continuous development of good neighborly relations.



This area is an example of the effectiveness of the EU external incentives and the readiness of domestic governing structures to comply with the requirements on the path to EU membership.

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The views and opinions in this analysis „Good neighbor - Montenegro and regional cooperation“ are partially expressed in the “EU’s Failure in Europeanizing Montenegro”, doctoral thesis of the main author, defended at Masaryk University in 2018.

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Summary

Three decades since the fall of communism and two decades since the last conflicts have been traumatic for the region. Although all economies, at least nominally, have fitted their functioning into modern economic flows, the prolonged transition, the legacy of the previous regime and conflicts, as well as unresolved social challenges continue to place a heavy burden on the countries of the region. Lagging behind the European Union (EU) average is obvious in almost all aspects of life and it will take a lot of time, effort and investment to bring the region closer to the EU standards. The trauma that region has experienced in recent decades is most visible in emigration, and the consequences of the so-called brain drain is to be felt.

Good neighbourly relations and dedicated work on improving regional cooperation are important European integration links of all countries aspiring to EU membership. Stability in the region and strengthening the rule of law are the conditions for the Europeanization and modernization of these societies and the preconditions for the EU accession that these countries have to satisfy.

Since declaring independence in 2006, Montenegro has played a constructive role and made visible progress in strengthening regional co-operation and maintaining good bilateral relations with countries in the process of joining the EU. This refers to active participation in numerous regional initiatives, as well as to Montenegro's political commitment to the development of good neighbourly relations in the region to the greatest extent.

In this regard, the positive impact of the EU on Montenegro in strengthening state efforts for regional cooperation, building regional stability and improving good-neighbourly relations, but also fostering a climate conducive to solving outstanding bilateral issues, is noted. This area is an example of the effectiveness of the EU external incentives and the readiness of domestic governing structures to comply with the requirements on the path to the EU membership. It should be noted that meeting the criteria of regional cooperation does not require the adoption of specific EU legal norms, and therefore depends primarily on the external pressure of the Union and the willingness of the political elite in the country to respond to these requirements.

Of course, more outstanding issues remain, and to fully

address the conditions of the Stabilization and Association Process, Montenegro should achieve a peaceful conflict resolution with Croatia over the demarcation of the border around the Prevlaka peninsula by submitting it to international arbitration before reaching the EU entrance as well as to make more efforts to resolve outstanding issues with Serbia, including border demarcation, dual citizenship and problems concerning position of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Montenegro.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations of Montenegro requires consideration of several interdependent factors, especially political, geographical and cultural. It also includes a review of the EU accession process, which prioritizes the strengthening of regional cooperation and bilateral relations for all candidate countries.

At the beginning, it is necessary to define the political - geographical, but also the time framework. Although there are scientifically established regional temporal and spatial norms, there are also oscillations in each state depending on internal processes. Also, it should be considered that a seemingly mutual beginning or transitional experience after three decades has evolved into its specific national / local stories, in the outcomes of which we find the cultural and historical characteristics that shape these countries, and thus Montenegro.

During the primary analysis of the development of good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation of Montenegro in the process of European Integration, two variables were taken before and during the negotiations:

- conditions of the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) and accompanying harmonization,
- implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA).

The defined subset of issues that are the subject of the research is related to the main research framework which aims to provide insight into the effectiveness of the EU's influence on the institutional and political preferences of Montenegro in regional action. In addition, the importance of the established methodology is in the guidelines for the specific operationalization of research.

The analysis used primary sources, which include official documents of Montenegrin institutions, as well as EU institutions. Also, secondary sources based on relevant literature were used, which encompasses academic and practical analyses of regional policy, thematic reports of domestic and international civil society organizations, as well as media archives.

Finally, conclusive analysis of European and Euro-Atlantic relations provides an assessment of the impact of European

integration on Montenegro's bilateral relations and access to regional cooperation. This synthesis establishes an important basis for a realistic assessment of the current position of Montenegro and its relations with its neighbours, as well as the position in regional cooperation, taking into account the already achieved and planned memberships in international intergovernmental organizations.

CONTEXTUALIZING ENVIRONMENT

The factors that define the region are heterogeneous and range from geographical, political, cultural, historical, economic, as well as interest. Thence follows that the region can be determined by objective borders, such as mountains and rivers, cultural and historical peculiarities, spheres of interest of states or international organizations. Consequently, the borders of the region can portray on neighbouring areas, again depending on the point of view or value assessment.

The first, and oldest term that still define the region in which Montenegro is located is the Balkans or the Balkan Peninsula. The Balkans imply a geographical area in south-eastern Europe with various definitions and meanings, including geopolitical and historical. The region takes its name from the Balkan Mountains that stretch across Bulgaria from the Serbian-Bulgarian border to the Black Sea coast. The Balkan Peninsula is bordered by the Adriatic Sea in the northwest, the Ionian Sea in the southwest, the Aegean Sea in the south, the Turkish Sea in the east and the Black Sea in the northwest. The northern border of the peninsula is differently defined, and it is most often assumed that these are the flows of the rivers Soča, Sava and Danube.

The regional term Balkan originated in the early 19th century and became popular in the 20th century. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the term "Balkans" was freighted with negative widespread political connotations, associated with the war conflicts and fragmentation of territories. Partly due to such, but also related political connotation of the term "Balkans", at the beginning of the 21st century, it was replaced by the increasingly popular term "Southeast Europe".

Southeast Europe (SEE) is a geographical region of Europe consisting primarily of the Balkan Peninsula. There are matching but also conflicting definitions of where precisely Southeast Europe begins or ends, and its relation to other areas of the European continent, especially to the northern border or the position of Greece. However, it is generally accepted that the sovereign states and territories that the region consists are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Eastern Thrace (part of Turkey). Sometimes Moldova and Slovenia are included.

Montenegrin regional relations are related to the Balkans and Southeast Europe, but not exclusively to the above-defined borders. In terms of regional relations, priority is given to neighbouring countries, especially due to unresolved border issues, economic issues and the legacy of transitional justice, but also countries that currently have the same or similar foreign policy situation, or more precisely - foreign policy priorities that are predominantly related to European integration. There are also economic interests, so Montenegro has much more intensive cooperation with Turkey than with Romania. Finally, within Montenegrin regional relations, an intensive relationship with Italy should be considered, but as the primary regional initiatives are related to the region of Southeast Europe, this analysis focuses on the relations between Montenegro and the countries of that region. That is, the primary review of regional relations refers to Montenegro's relations with Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Macedonia and partly with Italy.

REGION THROUGH THE RECENT HISTORY

After the fall of communism in the late 1980s, the region entered the last decade of the 20th century with hope for the future. However, it turned out that the transition of the 1990s would shake the fragile social systems of these countries to the ground, and the wars in the former Yugoslavia would slow down the development of the region. War and difficult economic transition are key factors that characterize the development of the region, and the prolonged unresolved transitional and socio-economic problems have brought the countries of the region, whether EU members or not, into a phase of frozen transition whose end is not in sight.

Croatia declared independence on 25 June 1991, and the implementation of that declaration came into force on 8 October 1991. Meanwhile, tensions escalated into an open war between Croatian military and police forces on the one hand and the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and Serb rebel forces on the other. In August 1995, victory of Croatian forces marked the end of the war, which resulted in the migration of about 200,000 Serbs from Croatia. The remaining occupied territories were returned to Croatia according to the Erdut Agreement, which was signed on November 1995, through a process that was ended in January 1998. On 29 October 2001, Croatia signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union, and applied for EU membership in 2003, gained candidate status in 2004 and launched accession negotiations in 2005. Croatia became EU member country in 2013, and previously joined the NATO alliance on 1 April 2009.

The modern history of *Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)* has been marked by war. The armed conflict in B&H occurred between 6 April 1992 and 14 December 1995. The main warring parties were the forces of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the forces of Herceg-Bosna and the Republika Srpska. The symbols of this conflict became the besiegement of Sarajevo and the genocide in Srebrenica. The war ended with General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina formally signed in Paris, on 14 December 1995, while peace negotiations were held in Dayton, Ohio, and ended with the Dayton Agreement reached on 21 November 1995. B&H signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU on 16 June 2008, and entered into force on 1 June 2015. The application for EU membership was submitted on 15 February 2016, and

in December 2019, the EU Council adopted conclusions on the Commission Opinion on the application, which identified Bosnia and Herzegovina as a candidate country for EU membership. The accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to NATO has been under negotiations since 2008.

The person who marked the history of *Serbia* at the end of the 20th century is Slobodan Milošević. After the disintegration of the SFRY, Serbia and Montenegro formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Serbia did not suffer the devastation of the wars of the 1990s on its territory, but its economy was destroyed due to economic sanctions imposed by the UN. The conflicts in Kosovo, which deteriorated into open war in 1999, caused NATO intervention that primarily affected military, economic and civilian targets in Serbia. Serbia has effectively had no control over Kosovo since 1999, and after the Yugoslav wars, Serbia became home to the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Europe. After the fall of Milošević regime, the FRY was renamed as State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, which ceased to exist on 21 May 2006, when Montenegro restored independence in a referendum. On 5 June 2006, the National Assembly of Serbia declared Serbia the legal successor state of the former state union. The Assembly of Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, which Serbia immediately condemned and continued to deny recognition of the state to Kosovo. Serbia's application for EU membership was submitted on 19 December 2009, and it was granted candidate status on 1 March 2012. The EU approved opening negotiations for Serbia's accession on 28 June 2013, and negotiations officially started on 21 January 2014. By December 2019, Serbia had opened 18 out of a total of 35 chapters and 2 chapters have been provisionally closed.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008, and by September 2020, 113 UN member states recognized its independence, including all direct neighbours except Serbia. However, 15 states subsequently revoked the recognition of the Republic of Kosovo. Russia and China, as well as some EU members, have not recognized Kosovo's independence. The Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU was signed on 27 October 2015 and entered into force on 1 April 2016. It should be noted that it has not been ratified in every member state because

23 of the 28 EU member states have recognized Kosovo as an independent state. Kosovo has the status of a potential candidate.

North Macedonia officially celebrates 8 September 1991 as Independence Day. This country remained at peace during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Several minor changes have been agreed on its border with Yugoslavia during the demarcation. North Macedonia was destabilized by the war in Kosovo in 1999, when several hundred thousand Albanian refugees from Kosovo have been moved to the country. Later, between February and August 2001, these migrations caused ethnic conflicts, mainly in the north and west of the country. NATO forces put an end to the war. Pursuant to the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the Macedonian authorities have increased the scope of political participation and cultural recognition for the Albanian minority. Decades-long name issue with Greece was resolved only on 17 June 2018, by the Prespa Agreement, which was signed by the foreign ministers, in the presence of the prime ministers of the two countries. Consequently, the EU approved the start of accession negotiations with Macedonia on 27 June 2018. On 5 July 2018, the Macedonian Parliament ratified the Prespa Agreement, which entered into force in February 2019. On 12 July 2018, NATO invited Macedonia to start accession negotiations, and on 27 March 2020, Northern Macedonia became the 30th member state of that alliance. Macedonia submitted its application for EU membership on 22 March 2004, the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU entered into force on 1 April 2004, and on 16 December 2005, the country was granted candidate status. After resolving the political problems, i.e. the veto of Greece, on 1 April 2018, the EC again recommends the opening of the accession negotiations, and on 26 March 2020, the EU decides to open negotiations with Macedonia.

When communist system collapsed, *Albania* demonstrated its commitment to an active process of joining the EU and NATO. In 2009, the country together with Croatia, gained active membership in NATO, and became one of the first countries in South-East Europe that signed the Partnership for Peace document. In addition, Albania applied for EU membership on 24 April 2009, and a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU entered into force earlier that month. It was granted candidate country status on 27 June 2014, and on 1 April 2018, European Commission recommended to open accession negotiations with Albania, while the EU makes a decision on opening negotiations on 26 March 2020. During the 1990s, Albania has been faced with a period of great economic turbulence and population outflow, while in the 21st century marked a relative stabilization.

When communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was executed in the Romanian revolution in December 1989, the National Salvation Front (FSN), headed by Ion Iliescu, came into power in *Romania*. This country has pursued a programme

of economic reform and privatization focusing to the free market and applying a gradual reform rather than shock therapy. Economic reforms continued, although modest economic growth was recorded until the 2000s. During this period, Romania has become more closely integrated with the West, becoming a member of NATO in 2004 and of the European Union in 2007.

In November 1989, demonstrations on ecological issues had been held in Sofia, which soon took on the character of a broad campaign for political reform in *Bulgaria*. In February 1990, the Communist Party left power in a wave of protests, and in June 1990, the first free elections since 1931 were held. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (the new name of the Communist Party) won the elections, and a new Constitution was adopted in July 1991. Bulgaria joined NATO in March 2004 and became member of the EU on 1 January 2007. Economic and political conditions have markedly improved, although economic growth has not been as high as expected, while unemployment and emigration remain challenges.

Since the liberalization of *Turkey*, primarily in economic terms, the country has recorded stronger economic growth and greater political stability during 1980s. Turkey applied for full membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1987, joined the EU Customs Union in 1995 and started accession negotiations with the European Union in 2005. Negotiations with Turkey have progressed slowly, with only 16 Chapters of the 35 have been opened, of which only one was closed until 2016, when Turkey and the EU agreed to accelerate negotiations. The stagnation is recorded again when the European Parliament called on the EU governments to suspend negotiations with Turkey until further notice due to more frequent and drastic human rights violations and problems related to the rule of law.

SHAPING MONTENEGRO IN THE LAST THREE DECADES

Montenegro has changed three state statuses since 1990

League of Communists of Montenegro won Montenegro's first multi-party elections in December 1990 and transformed into the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) in June 1991. Unlike other former Yugoslav republics that opted for independence, the citizens of Montenegro decided in the referendum to remain in union with Serbia. Of the 66 percent of the population that voted, the affirmative answer was given by 95.94 % to the question *"Do you agree that Montenegro, as a sovereign republic, should continue to exist within the common state — Yugoslavia, totally equal in rights with other republics that might wish the same?"*.

In the new common state, Montenegro was 6.4 times smaller in territory than its ally, 15.9 times smaller in population, 17.9 times smaller in gross domestic product and 19 times smaller in national income. Implementing the policy of the Government from Belgrade and the Yugoslav People's Army - JNA (later the Yugoslav Army), Montenegrin leadership dealt sharply with political dissidents. Opponents of the war and proponents of Montenegrin independence were criticized by the ruling elite. Thus, the supporters of the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG), as well as other opposition parties, peace movements and associations, came under attack of the then authorities. In the whirlwind of the civil war in Yugoslavia, Montenegrin reservists in the JNA, led by the Montenegrin political leadership, took part in operations on the Dubrovnik battleground. More precisely, on 1 October 1991, several thousand members of the regular JNA troops from the territory of Montenegro launched an attack on Dubrovnik and its surroundings. The attack on former compatriots and the city under the protection of UNESCO was fuelled by organized manipulation and the campaign of the state media. This senseless war represents one of the darkest sides of Montenegrin history. In May 1992, the FRY was excluded from international organizations due to its involvement in wars in the region, and economic sanctions were imposed on it. The social product was around 2,300 USD in 1989, and in 1994 it fell to a real value between 200 and 300 USD. Unemployment rate has risen to 40%, economic giants were closing, there is an enormous decline in living standards, as well as shortages of food and consumer goods. As a result, the economic system collapsed, and the grey economy developed.

The new Constitution of Montenegro was adopted on 12 October 1992. Montenegro is defined as a state of the Montenegrin people, a democratic, social and ecological state, sovereign in matters that it has not conferred on to the jurisdiction of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

During 1993, Yugoslavia experienced the highest hyperinflation ever recorded of 120 billion percent per year. The controversial privatization of the economy began, and foreign currency savings of citizens were looted.

In 1999, conflicts erupted in Kosovo and Metohija caused by the aggressive policy of the authoritarian regime from Belgrade towards Kosovo Albanians that were seeking secession. Since the political negotiations in Rambouillet and Paris failed, NATO bombed the FRY on 24 March 1999. That intervention ended on 10 June 1999, with the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1244. According to certain assessments, 10 people were killed during the NATO bombing on the territory of Montenegro. During the NATO bombing of the bridge in Murino, on 30 April 1999, six civilians were killed. The final number of Montenegrin citizens killed during the Kosovo conflict and NATO bombing has not yet been determined.

Despite the difficult economic situation that befell it, Montenegro provided shelter to refugees from the areas affected by the war and conflicts 1991-1995 (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo). In 1999, the Commissariat for Displaced Persons registered 136,812 persons who found shelter in Montenegro. About 80,000 refugees came from Kosovo. Montenegro has provided shelter and protected refugees, the number of which is huge compared to the size of the country and the population, so practically every sixth inhabitant was a refugee.

With the removal of Slobodan Milošević from power and the aspirations of the Montenegrin leadership to reorganize relations, the FRY was renamed and reorganized into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Unlike the federal community such as the FRY, which Montenegro joined by giving it legitimacy in a referendum, the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was created by representatives of political elites, with the support of the international community. With the participation of the European Union, on 14 March 2002, the *Agreement on Principles of Relations between Serbia and Montenegro within the*

State Union (the so-called «Belgrade Agreement») was adopted. The Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was adopted on 29 January 2003, with the accompanying law on its implementation. Pursuant to Article 60 of the Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, it is envisaged that upon the expiry of a 3-year period *“member states shall have the right to initiate the proceedings for the change in its state status or for breaking away from the state union of Serbia and Montenegro”*¹, which Montenegro did.

In the referendum held on 21 May 2006, 55.5% or 230,661 citizens voted in favour of independence of Montenegro, while 44.5% or 185,002 citizens voted for a common state. Based on that result, the Parliament of Montenegro declared independence at its session held on 3 June 2006. The change of the state status is accompanied by a firm commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration. Thus, Montenegro became a member of NATO on 5 June 2017, and launched accession negotiations with the EU on 28 June 2012.

¹ Law on the Implementation of the Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, The Official Gazette of Serbia and Montenegro, 1/2003

IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ON THE NEIGHBOURHOOD RELATIONS

Stabilization and Association Agreement as an impetus

On 15 October 2007, Montenegro signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU, which entered into force on 1 May 2010. The SAA emphasized the need to develop regional cooperation and bilateral good neighbourly relations between countries that are in different stages of EU integrations, which is specified through Articles 14, 15, 16 and 17². At the same time, the EU is committed to supporting these efforts, both in cross-border and / or regional projects, through technical assistance programmes.

The SAA stimulated Montenegro to demonstrate additional commitment to strengthening regional co-operation and good neighbourly relations, not only with the remaining Western Balkan countries that have signed the SAA, but also with EU Member States and other candidate countries for or EU membership that are not encompassed by the Stabilization and Association Process. This remains one of the most important political conditions for Montenegro's progress in the accession process.

It should be noted that before the signing of the SAA, Montenegro conducted certain activities during 2006 and 2007 aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and gaining full membership in regional initiatives. This was intensified when the state was granted candidate status in December 2010, i.e. during 2010 and 2011.

Neighbours must cooperate

Since declaring independence in 2006, Montenegro has taken a markedly constructive approach in establishing good bilateral relations with neighbouring countries, EU Member States and other enlargement countries in the region that have not signed the SAA.

Bilateral relations with Albania, BiH and North Macedonia have progressed significantly during this period. Albania and Northern Macedonia were among the first to officially recognize Montenegro as an independent state on 12 June 2006, while diplomatic relations between these countries were established on 1 August 2006 and 14 June 2006. Bosnia and Herzegovina

² Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Montenegro, http://www.skupstina.me/images/dokumenti/pristupanjeu/Sporazum_o_stabilizaciji_i_pridru%C5%BEivanju.pdf

recognized Montenegro's independence on 21 June 2006, and diplomatic relations were established on 14 September 2006.

In line with SAA commitments, Montenegro signed an Agreement on police cooperation with Slovenia and Romania in 2007.

Montenegro, as a candidate country for EU membership, has continuously demonstrated political will to improve regional cooperation through active participation in regional initiatives, maintaining regional peace, security and stability and developing good neighbourly relations with countries in the process of integration, as well as EU member states.

In this context, between 2012 and 2016, Montenegro played a constructive role in regional initiatives, such as CEFTA, CEI, MARRI, RACVIAC, AII, SEECF, RSS and the US-Adriatic Charter. Furthermore, the state supported regional initiatives that affirm regional reconciliation, such as the Igman Initiative and the RECOM Initiative³.

Willingness to engage in strengthening regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations was also expressed through the Montenegrin initiative *Western Balkans Six* (WB6), launched in 2013 by the then Prime Minister of Montenegro Igor Luksic. The initiative envisioned a high-level political dialogue that would lead to the institutionalization of relations between non-EU Western Balkan countries and the acceleration of their EU accession process through the formation of a Joint Western Balkans Parliament⁴, unification of the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) and the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) with the aim of establishing a regional centre for the fight against corruption and organized crime, i.e. kind of joint Balkan police force (BALPOL). Also, the need to find ways to mitigate the negative effects of the global economic crisis on the stability and preservation of the regional market was emphasized. According to the working document, the support of Croatia and Slovenia was expected to simplify the unhindered border crossing in the region, envisaging the abolition of passports as personal documents required for those crossings. The first meeting of

³ Reports on the implementation of SAA obligations, EC Report

⁴ According to the proposal of Montenegro, each country would delegate 10 representatives, Portal Analitika, The Western Balkans six at a session of the UN General Assembly <https://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/115583--zapadnobalkanskasestorka-na-sjednici-generalne-skupstine-un>

political directors was held in Budva in July 2013⁵. However, this initiative has not functionally worked.

In an attempt to further enhance regional cooperation and help the countries of the region on their path to the EU, the initiative known as the **Berlin Process**, was much more successful.⁶ It was launched on 28 August 2014, by German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The Berlin Process was supported by the European Commission, and especially by the EU member states - Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, as well as numerous international donors. The first summit of the Berlin Process was held in Berlin in 2014 under the auspices of Germany, followed by annual summits in Vienna, Paris, Trieste, London and Poznan.

The Berlin Process emphasizes the importance of linking people (social dimension), economy (economic dimension) and states (political dimension) of the region through cooperation in the fields of transport, infrastructure, economy, youth cooperation and civil society development. Some of the results of the Berlin Process include the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), the Western Balkans Chambers Investment Forum (WBCIF) and the Western Balkans Fund (WBF), but also the encouragement of networking of civil society organizations in the region through summits and forums, Business Forum, Youth Forum, Western Balkans Summits).

Through this process, communication and cooperation between the countries of the region was strengthened through the Energy Community of South Eastern Europe, especially in terms of energy security, energy efficiency and climate protection. Also, development of trans-European transport networks in Western Balkans was agreed. Further, at the core of the Berlin Process since its launch has been the resolution of bilateral disputes, which is an additional mechanism for overcoming them. It is of particular importance given that this must be done before EU accession. Through the Berlin Process, EU member states also stressed the need to intensify regional cooperation in the Western Balkans through the reconciliation process as a key element for promoting peace and stability and overcoming the legacy of the past.

Cooperation as a common interest

Based on the indisputable progress of the country in the area of development of regional cooperation and improvement of bilateral relations with the countries of the Western Balkans, there are three main reasons why Montenegro has shown readiness to implement EU requirements in this area.

First, there is no influence of domestic so-called 'veto players' on issues related to building regional stability because it is not a threat

to their private interests. There is an objective presumption that meeting the requirements of the Stabilization and Association Process through the country's participation in regional initiatives and resolving open bilateral disputes has not burdened or endangered the interests of internal actors. The provisions of the SAA in this section are aimed at the development of regional relations between the countries that aspire to membership, as well as with EU member states, but also the establishment of steadier economic and trade contractual links between the Union and these states, which so far has not called into question the position of the so-called 'veto player'. This is accompanied by other less demanding factors, support and participation in regional initiatives in the promotion of reconciliation, which undoubtedly strengthens regional cooperation and develops good neighbourly relations in the region. In particular, this refers to RECOM Initiative and the Igman Initiative, as civil society initiatives that, in cooperation with the EU, have made significant efforts in positioning the process of transitional justice in the post-Yugoslav space by connecting high-level regional political representatives, but also by working with citizens throughout the region and various social groups.

Second, domestic ruling elites have demonstrated noticeable political will to comply with EU requirements. Given the fact that strengthening regional cooperation and improving bilateral relations with neighbouring countries do not jeopardize the political survival of the ruling elites, it could be assumed that this fulfilment of requirements on the path to the EU was very useful for domestic stakeholders. It is obvious that Montenegro's commitment to the development of good neighbourly relations, through existing initiatives or launching new ones, but also through active participation in the peaceful settlement of open bilateral disputes between post-Yugoslav states has had a significant impact on strengthening the position of the former ruling structure and its legitimacy as a factor of stability in the region. Taking advantage of these political peculiarities in the region, the Montenegrin authorities have managed to profile themselves as necessary actors supported by the EU in regional processes, both at the regional and EU level.

Thirdly, we can witness a more active role of the Union and its Member States in the process of promoting regional cooperation through the development of good bilateral relations. The Western Balkans Summits within the Berlin Process have significantly contributed to strengthening regional relations by establishing a clear roadmap in the areas of infrastructure, energy, transport, youth cooperation, education and science. Moreover, these forms of multilateral cooperation have had a double effect. Originally, by supporting and strengthening regional political, economic and trade cooperation, the Union sought to strengthen its relations with the Western Balkans as a reliable economic and trade partner and an active promoter of the European integration process. On the other hand, the joint regional commitment to the EU accession process has created conditions for improving political relations in the region, and thus resolving more sensitive and complex open bilateral issues, i.e. border demarcation, recognition of minority rights, issues of displaced persons and missing persons, restitution of property, etc.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Diplomarius No. 1, 2013

⁶ Berlin Process, Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, Berlin, 2014

MONTENEGRO IN THE BROADER CONTEXT

Relations with EU

Reports of European institutions on Montenegro's progress in the EU accession process and the supervision exercised by credible actors in Montenegro over the activities of relevant state institutions in these areas, regional cooperation and the state's relations with its neighbours are assessed positively. This is part of the progress that Montenegro has made in accession negotiations with the EU and in strengthening Montenegro's Euro-Atlantic integration, which has resulted in full-fledged NATO membership.

Commitment to the values of transatlantic cooperation and the improvement of regional and good relations with neighbours was also confirmed by the representatives of the new government in Montenegro. In the parliamentary elections held on 30 August 2020, the decades-long domination of the DPS ended. After the announcement of the official results, the three leaders of the winning coalitions signed an agreement stating that the new government will work on strengthening the alliance with NATO and will implement reforms aimed at Montenegro's accession to the European Union. However, the authorities in Montenegro will face challenges that require full reform orientation, courage and determination in dealing with problems and solving them.

The European idea is one of the basic integrative ideas in Montenegrin society and state. Therefore, it is important that Montenegro also formally fulfils the requirements to become a full member of the European Union as soon as possible.

When it comes to regional cooperation and relations with neighbours, Montenegro continuously records positive assessments. Thus, 2020 European Commission Report states that on the issues of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, *"Montenegro remained constructively committed to bilateral relations with other enlargement countries and neighbouring EU Member States"*.⁷

⁷ 2020 European Commission Report, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/montenegro_report_2020.pdf

As this is one of the important segments of the EU accession process, the continuity of these assessments indicates that with a clear political will and reform undertaking, Montenegro is able to assume the obligations of EU membership. The attitude of Montenegrin institutions towards issues in this area should be a guide for the actions of government officials in other areas to achieve the country's membership in the European Union within a reasonable time.

Relations with NATO

National and citizen security is one of the most important issues of every modern state. Montenegro has decided to strengthen its commitment to European values by joining NATO, whose purpose is to ensure peace and security in the Member States, both politically and militarily.

Official communication between NATO representatives and the state of Montenegro began in 2006, when Montenegrin independence was restored. After joining the Partnership for Peace in the same year and establishing a mission to NATO in 2007, Montenegro was invited to start implementing the Membership Action Plan in 2009. Accession talks were particularly intensified during 2014 and 2015, and in 2017 Montenegro officially became a full member of NATO.

Considering that its founding treaty and other important documents always reminds that NATO is committed to the principles of the United Nations Charter - particularly to maintaining peace, freedom, basic democratic principles and the rule of law, Montenegro has committed itself to promoting and advocating these values, especially in its neighbourhood. Among the neighbouring countries, NATO members are also Albania, Italy and Croatia, but Albania is the only one of these three neighbours that is not a member of the European Union.

The role and importance of Montenegro as a NATO member is expressed when considering the unstable Balkan area. BIH, Kosovo and Serbia are not NATO members, but the concept of military neutrality of that country is generally accepted in Serbia, divided political views are expressed in BIH over the question of whether BIH should become a NATO member. In Kosovo, the central issue remains initiating further steps in the accession and joining EU, as well as the issue of visa liberalization with the European Union.

In terms of developing regional relations and cooperation with neighbours, Montenegro's NATO membership has had positive effects primarily on further stabilization of the situation in the region. Consequently, this has contributed to the further affirmation of the values by which the transatlantic partnership is recognized in the region.

Relations with the neighbours

There are two key values we strive for in our region - stability and reconciliation. Such objectives of regional cooperation are the result of war conflicts and a large number of inherited disputes within societies, as well as between countries in the region. Establishing stability and reconciliation strengthens the foundation of the principles of the rule of law, political pluralism and the market economy on which both societies and states in the region should be based.

Montenegro is continuously demonstrating its commitment to good regional relations. This is reflected in the participation of Montenegrin representatives in 35 regional organisations and initiatives programmes, as well as in the contribution to improving the overall state of relations between the countries of the region. The 2020 European Commission Report notes that *"Montenegro remains committed to regional cooperation and plays an active role in building a more stable and secure region through participation in around 35 regional organisations and initiatives."*⁸

Review of the programmes, organizations and initiatives in which the representatives of Montenegro have participated and still participate is enough to conclude that the Montenegrin contribution to regional relations is excellent.

Here we list some of them: CEFTA, Energy Community, Transport Community, SEEC, Regional Cooperation Council, Western Balkans Fund, Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII), EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR), Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), South-Eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN), Center for Security Cooperation (RACVIAC), Central European Initiative (CEI), etc.

The basis for strengthening links between the countries in the region is, first of all, further deepening of regional economic integration, to which Montenegro is fully committed. The latest initiative created at the end of 2019, which seeks to further connect the markets of countries in the region, is the idea of Mini Schengen. This idea aims to form a unified market in the Western Balkans and to fully enjoy and enable the free movement of people, goods, capital and services to all citizens in the Western Balkans.

⁸ 2020 European Commission Report, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/montenegro-report_2020.pdf

The idea of Mini Schengen has so far been accepted by Albania, Northern Macedonia and Serbia, while for various reasons, primarily political, but also economic and other, the remaining countries in the region have not yet signed this initiative.⁹ Strengthening regional economic cooperation is undoubtedly one of Montenegro's priorities in the field of further development of regional relations, but this does not mean that one should not make a careful assessment of what an initiative can provide to the state.

Today's Western Balkans initiatives for the development of a common economic space are building opportunities for reconciliation and prosperous coexistence in the region, which could be compared with beginnings of reconciliation in post-war Europe, when economic integration initiatives secured the restoration of trust amongst deeply conflicted actors. Montenegro cooperated closely with other countries in initiatives that had such a goal, which should be strengthened by the new government as well.

Mutual relations between Montenegro and other countries in the region

Good neighbourly relations are a prerequisite for the democratic progress of the Western Balkans. Montenegro achieves the best results in the EU accession process precisely in the field of improving cooperation with its neighbours. The exception is relations with Serbia, which are continuously unstable and tense.

Some decisions of the Montenegrin authorities, such as apologies for the aggression committed in Croatia during the '90s, payment of war reparations to Croatian citizens in the case 'Morinj', as well as to the families of deported BiH citizens in the 'Deportation' case, cooperation in resolving the issue of missing persons, as well as recognition of Kosovo as an independent state, had a positive impact on the development of good neighbourly relations.¹⁰

Croatia and Italy are neighbouring countries, members of the EU and NATO. Both countries supported Montenegro in the process of accession and joining the EU, as well as in the process of acquiring the status of full membership in the NATO alliance. The unresolved territorial dispute between Montenegro and Croatia does not cause any problems, both sides are demonstrating patience and

⁹ Al Jazeera Balkans, Benefits and obstacles of 'mini-Schengen', <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/teme/2020/10/3/prepreke-iprednosti-mini-schengena?gb=true>

¹⁰ Večernji list, Montenegro paid 1.43m euros to Croatian detainees, <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/crna-gora-hrvatskim-logorasima-isplatila-1-43-milijuna-eura-1274010>; Balkaninsight Avoiding remembrance of deadly war deportations, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/25/crna-gora-izbegavanje-secanja-nasmrtonosne-ratne-deportacije/?lang=s>

their actions contribute to creating an atmosphere for resolving the dispute in the spirit of tolerance and friendly relations. It would be appropriate and correct to say that bilateral relations between Montenegro and Croatia and Montenegro and Italy are good.

Albania and Northern Macedonia are (in)directly neighbouring countries of Montenegro, members of NATO but also countries that aim to become full EU members. The common foreign policy goal of these three countries is EU membership, while NATO membership provides conditions for further development of good bilateral relations. The report of the 2020 European Commission Report on Montenegro assessed that Montenegro's relations with both Albania and Northern Macedonia are good. While there are no serious disputable issues with Northern Macedonia, maritime delimitation between the two countries remain pending, but it is considered a "technical issue".¹¹

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are Montenegro's neighbours that are neither members of the EU nor NATO. In this context, a part of good neighbourly relations concerns the support of Montenegro to these two countries to go through the stages of integration that Montenegro, which has made progress on the path to accession to the EU, has already gone through as successfully and efficiently as possible. Relations are continuously good and there are no indications that any deterioration of Montenegro's bilateral relations with either of these two neighbouring countries is possible.

Montenegro's relations with neighbouring Serbia are rather complex. These relations are pervaded by the rich history of very close relations between the two countries, but also by the misunderstandings of the political elites of the two countries, especially in the last two decades. After the dissolution of the State Union in 2006, bilateral relations between Montenegro and Serbia have not been further developed due to the unwillingness of both political elites to resolve border demarcation, dual citizenship and the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). Consequently, even 14 years after the restoration of Montenegrin independence, there is no full acceptance of this fact in Serbia, which often contributes to tensions. Also, the position of official Serbia towards the internal processes in Montenegro was not always within the framework that defines respect for the neighbouring country, its decisions and the right of its actors to resolve their internal issues in Montenegro itself. This was also expressed during the last parliamentary elections held on 30 August 2020. It remains to be seen whether the new Montenegrin government will succeed in improving bilateral relations through communication with the Serbian authorities or whether the status quo will remain.

¹¹ RTCG, Border with Albania is a technical issue, <http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/187323/granica-s-albanijomtehnicko-pitanje.html>

GOOD POLICIES ARE THE BASIS OF THE GOOD LIFE

Overall, performance of Montenegro in the field of developing good bilateral relations with the countries of the region, especially good relations with neighbours, including the field of regional cooperation are positive. Such effects are partly due to the actions of those stakeholders who created and directed policies in Montenegro towards the countries of the region and the region itself, while partly they were created under the influence of the European Union institutions that are dedicated to the integration of the Western Balkans with the European Union. There are numerous incentives and other mechanisms available to the European Union in an attempt to predominantly affect the integration process of the Western Balkans with the EU. Here we will mention only some of them.

One of the incentives for a successful policy of regional and bilateral relations with the countries of the region, as well as Montenegro's relations with its neighbours, is the credible perspective of EU membership, which was explicitly announced for Montenegro in 2018. It was announced that Montenegro and Serbia can expect EU membership by 2025 if these countries meet the requirements for obtaining full membership status.

In a situation where there are no relevant stakeholders in Montenegro, neither in society nor in politics, who oppose accession of the state to the European Union, this was very important and useful fact for creating additional energy to accelerate the process of European integration. When it comes to regional relations and bilateral relations with countries in the region, this message had the expected effect. Hence, Montenegro can be perceived as a good example of the actions of a candidate country when it comes to criteria in this area.

The second incentive concerns the financial support and solidarity that the EU continuously provides and directs to Montenegro. The latest such case was the payment of EUR 28 million grant to the Montenegrin state budget to help Montenegro mitigate the economic and social effects of the coronavirus crisis. And that is just part of the grant, which totals EUR 40.5 million.

When it comes to financial assistance, the European Union provided over EUR 610 million in the period from 2007 to 2020. That money is directed to various stakeholders of the society (agriculture, social policy, competitiveness and

innovation, transport, environment and climate, rule of law, etc.). The European idea implies certain values on which the Union is based and built, but it also represents solidarity and financial assistance, especially in crisis situations. This is one of the elements on the basis of which the EU institutions exert influence, and the EU creates an attractive force.

The third incentive is made by EU representatives who work directly with representatives of Montenegrin institutions. Thus, for example, the dialogue on the comprehensive reform of the electoral legislation that lasted in Montenegro from July to December 2019 would be impossible without the mediation of the Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro. When it comes to position of the EU in a country that is a membership candidate, such as Montenegro, then it is clear that the EU is trusted which is a relevant determinant for perceiving the strength of EU action in this area.

A specific mechanism on which the process of European integration is based is the conditionality applied by the EU, which has proved to be very successful. This policy implies that there is a goal that a non-member state should achieve. Obtaining either some kind of assistance or recording progress in the process of European integration depends on achieving that goal. This means that there are precise criteria on the basis of which the further sequence of steps in the relations between the EU and that country is determined. Conditionality is considered an effective mechanism for the development of European integration, especially the policy of EU enlargement and represents a mechanism that is often used in relations between the EU and the country that wants to become a member.

All the listed mechanisms and many others that are not mentioned here make the European Union very influential when it comes to the process of European integration of the Western Balkans. Nevertheless, the values on which the European idea and the Union are based today are of key importance. European values are the greatest strength and the strongest magnet for the admission of new members to the EU. They were the basis for initiating the process of integration of European states after the Second World War, and today they contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the Western Balkans, reconciliation in the region and full inclusion of the region in the European family of states and people.

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GOOD NEIGHBOUR

Montenegro and regional cooperation



Since declaring independence in 2006, Montenegro has taken a markedly constructive approach in establishing good bilateral relations with neighbouring countries, EU Member States and other enlargement countries in the region that have not signed the SAA.



Strengthening regional economic cooperation is undoubtedly one of Montenegro's priorities in the field of further development of regional relations, but this does not mean that one should not make a careful assessment of what an initiative can provide to the state.



The attitude of Montenegrin institutions towards regional cooperation issues should be a guide for the actions of government officials in other areas to achieve the country's membership in the European Union within a reasonable time.

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