



Montenegro: which challenges for EU accession?

Montenegro applied for EU membership in 2008, two years after its independence. While the second [Commission progress report](#) of 10 October 2012 acknowledged the country's efforts to tackle its main challenges, it stressed that problems remain.

State of play

In line with a [new EU approach](#) to accession negotiations, from the beginning of [talks](#) in June 2012, attention was given to Montenegro's [main challenges](#): negotiation chapters 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (Justice, freedom and security).

Corruption, rule of law, organised crime, freedom of expression

The Commission acknowledges "some progress" in the fight against **corruption**: a [law](#) on the prevention of conflicts of interest forced MPs to resign from publicly-owned company boards and civil servants to declare assets. [Whistleblowers](#) receive better protection in the public and private sector. However, very few cases of high-level corruption (involving large projects, ministers, MPs, the judiciary, heads of public companies, the Real Estate Agency, etc.) have resulted in asset seizure. [Analysts](#) blame a lack of political will, capacity and judicial independence. Corruption, the Commission concludes, "remains widespread". As for the **rule of law**, Montenegro has improved selection procedures for judges and is planning to depoliticise appointments of prosecutors and members of the Judicial and Prosecutorial Council. Publishing court verdicts has rendered the judiciary more accountable, but it needs to demonstrate independence and efficiency and improve monitoring of conflicts of interest and corruption in its own ranks. **Organised crime** groups have infiltrated the public and private sectors, but the authorities have temporarily seized over €40 million in assets. The [US State Department](#) says that Montenegro is a source, transit and destination country for victims of sex trafficking and forced labour. The Commission attests "progress" in

Montenegro's fight against organised crime. In the area of fundamental rights and **freedom of expression**, the Commission identifies "progress". However, a 2012 EP DG EXPO Policy Department [briefing](#) cites Montenegro's relatively [low international ranking on press freedom](#). It also highlights a backlog of defamation and other court cases against media and journalists. **Prime Minister** Milo Đukanović [said](#) in December 2012 that the government would continue the work on accession negotiations in a responsible way.

Irregularities during elections?

Fraud has been alleged both after the **parliamentary** elections of October 2012, and the **presidential** ballot on 7 April 2013. In the former, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), which under Đukanović has governed since 1989, was declared winner. In the latter case, both candidates [claimed](#) victory, until the State Electoral Commission [declared](#) the incumbent, Filip Vujanović, winner. [OSCE observers](#) said that both candidates (who are pro-European) were able to campaign freely, but that campaigning was mixed with state activities. The Commission's progress report agrees that rules on party and campaign financing should be reinforced. The Commission has [asked](#) the country's authorities to investigate [both](#) fraud allegations.

European Parliament position

The [draft resolution](#) by Charles Tannock (ECR, UK) on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) praises Montenegro's positive role in regional cooperation, but mentions border issues with its neighbours. AFET calls for a stronger role for the Montenegrin Parliament in the accession negotiations and in improving transparency of state institutions, which would contribute towards the fight against corruption. On funding of political parties and election campaigns, Montenegro should implement the [recommendations](#) of the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption.