DRAFT REPORT

on the 2021 Commission Report on Montenegro (2021/2247(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the 2021 Commission Report on Montenegro (2021/2247(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States of the one part, and the Republic of Montenegro, of the other part, which entered into force on 1 May 2010,

– having regard to Montenegro’s application for membership of the European Union of 15 December 2008,

– having regard to the Commission opinion of 9 November 2010 on Montenegro’s application for membership of the European Union (COM(2010)0670), the European Council’s decision of 16-17 December 2010 to grant Montenegro candidate status and the European Council’s decision of 29 June 2012 to open EU accession negotiations with Montenegro,

– having regard to Montenegro’s accession to NATO on 5 June 2017,

– having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council meeting of 19-20 June 2003,

– having regard to the Brdo Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit of 6 October 2021,

– having regard to the Berlin Process launched on 28 August 2014,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled ‘Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0057),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled ‘Economic and Investment plan for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0641),


having regard to the Commission’s Overview & Country Assessment of the Economic Reform Programme of Montenegro of July 2021,

having regard to the joint conclusions of the Economic and Financial Dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkans and Turkey, adopted by the Council on 12 July 2021,

having regard to the Commission communication of 29 April 2020 entitled ‘Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery’ (COM(2020)0315),

having regard to the fifth meeting of the Accession Conference with Montenegro at deputy level of 30 June 2020 in Brussels, where negotiations on the last screened chapter, Chapter 8 (competition policy) were opened,

having regard to the EU-Montenegro Intergovernmental Accession Conference of 22 June 2021 and of 13 December 2021,

having regard to its previous resolutions on the country,

having regard to its recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit,

having regard to its resolution of 19 May 2021 on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Montenegro,

having regard to its resolution of 15 December 2021 on cooperation on the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans,

having regard to the declaration and recommendations adopted at the 20th meeting of the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC), held on 2 December 2021,

having regard to the joint declaration of the Second European Parliament-Western Balkans Speakers’ Summit of 28 June 2021, convened by the President of the European Parliament with the leaders of the Western Balkan parliaments,

having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0000/2022),

A. whereas each enlargement country is judged on its own merits, and the implementation of necessary reforms determines the timetable and progress of accession;

B. whereas Montenegro is the most advanced of candidate countries in its negotiation process, having opened all 33 screened chapters of the EU acquis and provisionally

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4 OJ C 15, 12.1.2022, p. 100.
5 Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0506.
closed three;

C. whereas 80% of its citizens support the country’s future membership of the EU;

D. whereas during the Intergovernmental Conference of 22 June 2021, Montenegro accepted the revised enlargement methodology based on thematic negotiation chapter clusters and the phasing-in of individual EU policies and programmes;

**Commitment to enlargement**

1. Welcomes Montenegro’s continued commitment to European integration and the unwavering support of its citizens for membership of the EU; underlines that progress in the negotiations continues to depend on meeting the rule of law interim benchmarks;

2. Notes that all 33 screened chapters have been opened, but regrets that none have been closed since 2017; encourages Montenegro to specifically focus on meeting the interim benchmarks in Chapters 23 and 24 and thereafter on closing chapters;

3. Calls for constructive and inclusive political dialogue and commitment of all parliamentary parties to overcome the current polarised political climate and strengthen the functioning of state institutions in order to achieve substantial progress in key EU-related reforms;

4. Notes the vote of no confidence in the government on 4 February 2022 and the ensuing dismissal of the Parliament’s speaker; calls for the formation of a new government as soon as possible and the election of a new speaker in line with the constitution, democratic norms and the pro-European aspirations of an overwhelming majority of Montenegro’s citizens;

5. Notes the protests against possible minority government organised by the Democratic Front and strongly condemns the support expressed for the Russian Federation on the day of the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine; recalls Russia’s persistent interest in destabilising the country;

6. Regrets that key positions in negotiating structures have remained vacant for a long time; urges the authorities to re-establish a fully functional negotiating structure as soon as possible;

7. Welcomes Montenegro’s continued and full alignment with EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, including its announcement of support for the latest EU sanctions against Russia, and its active participation in EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations;

8. Encourages Montenegro to make best use of the EU funds available under the Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA III) and the Economic and Investment plan for the Western Balkans;

**Democracy and the rule of law**

9. Is deeply concerned by the continuing political tensions between and within the
executive and legislative powers, and by the boycott of the parliament, which continues to slow down the reform process;

10. Is concerned about the lack of progress on judicial reform, including on the still pending appointments to key independent institutions and the judiciary; encourages the Montenegrin authorities to fully implement the Venice Commission’s recommendations concerning the risks of politicisation of the Prosecutorial Council;

11. Reiterates its strong recommendation that Montenegro should hold local elections simultaneously across the country;

12. Is worried about widespread corruption and urges Montenegro to boost the criminal justice response to high-level corruption and create conditions for the effective and independent functioning of judicial institutions and independent bodies dealing with corruption;

13. Welcomes progress in the fight against organised crime and on international police cooperation, and the increase in the number of organised crime cases investigated and prosecuted;

14. Encourages further strengthening civil society participation in reforms and ensuring functional consultation and cooperation mechanisms;

15. Welcomes the first Citizens’ Assembly organised on 4 November 2021 by the Parliament of Montenegro in cooperation with the European Parliament;

Respect of fundamental freedoms and human rights

16. Notes the limited progress on freedom of expression; encourages Montenegro to step up its efforts to fight disinformation, hate speech, online harassment, politically-biased reporting and foreign influence in the Montenegrin media;

17. Expresses concern about the high degree of polarisation in the media landscape, in particular the growing volume of disinformation spreading ethno-nationalist narratives that negatively impact democratic processes in the country;

18. Strongly condemns attacks and harassment of journalists and calls for them to be investigated, sanctioned and for there to be effective judicial follow-up; welcomes the proposal to introduce tougher penalties for threats to or attacks on journalists;

19. Welcomes some positive steps, such as an ad hoc commission for monitoring violence against the media, the revision of laws on media and on the public broadcaster RTCG, and public consultations on a media strategy for 2021-2025;

20. Condemns all violent acts during the demonstrations in Cetinje linked to the inauguration of the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church; condemns Serbian interference in this regard;

21. Notes that the population and housing census is likely to take place this year, and expects it to be conducted in line with EU and international standards;
22. Notes that gender-based violence and violence against children is still of serious concern;

23. Welcomes progress on the protection and promotion of LGBTIQ rights and the first same-sex marriage in July 2021;

24. Regrets that persons with disabilities continue to face discrimination; notes that the reform of the National Disability Determination System is under way;

Reconciliation and good neighbourly relations

25. Commends Montenegro’s constructive role in regional cooperation and welcomes the implementation of actions under the Western Balkans Common Regional Market; encourages efforts to find and implement definite and binding solutions to bilateral disputes, including border disputes;

26. Notes Montenegro’s continued cooperation under the Sarajevo Declaration Process; welcomes the adoption of the resolution on Srebrenica of 17 June 2021; welcomes the joint commemoration of Morinj camp victims; notes that since 2006 just eight war crime trials have been held and only low-level perpetrators have been tried; underlines there should be no tolerance for genocide denial, inflammatory rhetoric or the glorification of war criminals;

27. Calls on the Montenegrin authorities to take concrete steps to build resilience and cybersecurity as it faces increasing pressure from third country interference;

The economy

28. Expresses its concern about the persistently high unemployment rate; reiterates the need for better alignment of the education system with the job market;

29. Welcomes the announcement of the ‘Europe Now’ initiative and calls on the authorities to make the best use of available EU pre-accession assistance in this regard;

30. Expresses concern over Montenegro’s growing vulnerability owing to the increase of its public debt, in particular to China, and the new EUR 750 million loan taken by the government without consulting the Parliament;

31. Notes with concern the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Montenegro’s economy;

32. Welcomes the announcement of public services digitalisation and development of transactional electronic government services to enhance economic recovery;

33. Welcomes the signing of the Association Agreement to the Horizon Europe programme (2021-2027);

34. Urges Montenegro to take more action to prevent money laundering, strongly condemns the so-called ‘golden passport’ scheme and regrets its extension until December 2022; stresses that citizenship by investment carries security risks and potential for corruption, money laundering and tax evasion;
Environment, energy and transport

35. Welcomes the adoption of a national climate change adaptation plan and encourages Montenegro to speed up reforms in line with the EU’s 2020 climate and energy policy framework;

36. Reiterates its call on Montenegro to take urgent measures to preserve protected areas, and to continue identifying potential Natura 2000 sites;

37. Notes with regret the damage to the Tara River linked to building the Bar-Boljare highway; calls on Montenegro to closely monitor the environmental impact of transport infrastructure construction;

38. Calls on Montenegro to address illegal waste disposal;

39. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and to the President, the Government and Parliament of Montenegro.