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# **DRAFT REPORT**

on the 2022 Commission Report on Montenegro  
(2022/2202(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Tonino Picula

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on the 2022 Commission Report on Montenegro (2022/2202(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<sup>1</sup>, 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 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 on 'competition policy', were opened,
- 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 Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III)<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council meeting of 19-20 June 2003,
- having regard to the declarations of the EU-Western Balkans summits of 17 May 2018 in Sofia, of 6 May 2020 in Zagreb, of 6 October 2021 in Brdo pri Kranju and of 6 December 2022 in Tirana,
- 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),

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<sup>1</sup> [OJ L 108, 29.4.2010, p. 3.](#)

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1.

- 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 Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled ‘An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0641),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 19 October 2021 entitled ‘2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2021)0644), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘Montenegro 2021 Report’ (SWD(2021)0293),
- having regard to the Commission’s Overview & Country Assessments of July 2021 of the Economic Reform Programme of Montenegro and 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 EU-Montenegro Intergovernmental Accession Conference of 22 June 2021 and of 13 December 2021,
- having regard to the 11th EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Council of 14 July 2022 in Podgorica,
- having regard to the declaration and recommendations adopted at the 20th meeting of the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, held on 2 December 2021,
- having regard to Montenegro’s accession to NATO on 5 June 2017,
- 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<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 December 2021 on cooperation on the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to its recommendation of 23 November 2022 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning the new EU strategy for enlargement<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on Montenegro,
- having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0000/2023),

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<sup>3</sup> [OJ C 362, 8.9.2021, p. 129.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [OJ C 251, 30.6.2022, p. 87.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [OJ C 167, 11.5.2023, p. 105.](#)

- A. whereas enlargement is the EU's most effective foreign policy instrument and a strategic and future-oriented geopolitical investment in peace, stability and security;
- B. whereas nearly 80 % of Montenegrin citizens support future EU membership;
- C. whereas Montenegro remains a candidate for EU accession and a NATO ally;

### ***Commitment to EU accession***

1. Commends Montenegro's long-standing commitment to EU integration, underpinned by a high level of public support; reiterates its support for Montenegro in this regard; stresses that progress in negotiations depends on meeting interim rule of law benchmarks; regrets that no chapters have been closed in the past six years;
2. Regrets the fact that high political tensions and polarisation, the failure to build consensus on matters of national interest and a lack of cross-party dialogue have stalled progress on EU-related reforms and plunged Montenegro into a deep political and institutional crisis;
3. Takes note of the results of the presidential elections held in March 2023 and the early parliamentary elections held in June 2023; encourages the President, the new parliament and the government to focus on the key reforms needed for the country to make progress in EU integration, and remains ready to cooperate with all political actors to support the country in maintaining its strategic course;
4. Welcomes Montenegro's continued full alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy, including all of the sanctions adopted following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; commends its material and humanitarian support to Ukraine;
5. Welcomes Montenegro's active involvement in EU common security and defence policy missions and operations, and in NATO missions;
6. Remains seriously concerned by malign foreign interference, destabilisation efforts, hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns by foreign actors in Montenegro; notes that religious institutions can be used as a tool for external influence and condemns Serbian interference in this regard;
7. Condemns the unprecedented cyberattack of August 2022 against Montenegro's digital infrastructure; urges Montenegro to actively enhance its resilience in this regard by adopting the strategy on countering hybrid threats and the relevant action plan;
8. Calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service to improve the EU's visibility in the country;
9. Encourages Montenegro to re-engage in parliamentary cooperation through the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee;

### ***Democracy and the rule of law***

10. Regrets the adoption of the controversial Law on amendments to the Law on the President by the Parliament of Montenegro in December 2022; welcomes the Constitutional Court's launch of the procedure for reviewing the law's constitutionality;
11. Welcomes the appointment of three new Constitutional Court judges as a step towards resolving the constitutional crisis; regrets the fact that the Constitutional Court was left without a quorum since September 2022; calls on the new parliament to finalise judicial appointments as a matter of priority;
12. Reiterates its call for local-level elections to be held on the same day; welcomes the fact that elections in 14 municipalities were held on the same day in October 2022; calls for a robust legislative framework in this regard;
13. Notes that the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections were competitive and well-managed overall, and that candidates were able to campaign freely and enjoyed equal opportunities to reach out to voters; remains concerned about the vulnerability of the media to internal and external influences in terms of campaign coverage;
14. Urges Montenegro to put in place a credible and effective criminal justice response to corruption; notes the improvement in the prevention of corruption and the positive trend in the work of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption;
15. Notes the efforts being made in the fight against organised crime through legislative changes and the arrest of key figures; notes the rising numbers of final convictions, but remains concerned by the lengthy trials and frequent adjournments;
16. Welcomes the second Citizens' Assembly in Montenegro and the follow-up visit of its participants to the European Parliament;

### ***Fundamental freedoms and human rights***

17. Calls on Montenegro to step up its efforts to combat hate speech, online harassment, politically biased reporting and foreign influence in the Montenegrin media;
18. Expresses its concern about the deep political polarisation in the media landscape and the pressure being put on the local media market by expanding regional media competition;
19. Welcomes some positive steps, such as the introduction of tougher penalties for attacks and threats against journalists, and the establishment of the ad hoc commission for

monitoring violence against the media; reiterates, however, the need for the effective implementation of its findings and recommendations;

20. Urges Montenegro to conduct the population and housing census by the end of this year in line with EU and international standards;
21. Welcomes the country's multi-ethnic identity and calls for the further promotion of and respect for all languages, cultural heritage and traditions of local communities; regrets the fact that societal polarisation and divisions have intensified; emphasises the need to protect the rights of all minorities and urges for strengthened, applied and implemented institutional and legal frameworks in this regard, including a new anti-discrimination law;
22. Calls on Montenegro to improve access to justice and to ensure better follow-up and enforcement of rights in proceedings on domestic violence, as well as enhanced protection;
23. Regrets the ongoing prevalence of discrimination against persons with disabilities; calls for the effective implementation of strategies to address the gaps in upholding the rights of persons with disabilities across sectors and policies;
24. Notes with concern the signing of the Fundamental Agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church amid criticism by civil society and political disagreements;
25. Underlines the key role of civil society organisations in functioning democracies;

### ***Reconciliation and good neighbourly relations***

26. Notes Montenegro's active participation in regional cooperation; recalls its hesitations about the Open Balkan initiative and notes Montenegro's participation in the June and September summits as an observer;
27. Welcomes the recent agreements in the context of the Berlin Process;
28. Calls for concrete steps to be taken to resolve long-standing bilateral disputes in a constructive and neighbourly manner;

### ***Socio-economic reforms***

29. Positively notes the reported budget surplus for the first quarter of 2023 and the projected economic growth in 2024; welcomes the easing of the inflation rate, but notes that it remains one of the highest in Europe;

30. Notes the decrease in Montenegro's public debt, but remains concerned by debt-related vulnerabilities; calls on Montenegro to take further steps towards the sustainability of public finances and to develop measures to reduce the informal economy;
31. Welcomes Montenegro's decision to terminate its citizenship by investment programme on 31 December 2022; emphasises, furthermore, the need for further alignment with EU visa policy;
32. Encourages Montenegro to make the best use of the EU funds available under the IPA III and the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, including the Youth Guarantee in the Western Balkans;

***Energy, the environment, sustainable development and connectivity***

33. Welcomes the Commission's energy support package for the Western Balkans;
34. Calls on Montenegro to accelerate its sustainable energy transition; underlines that all new renewable energy projects must comply with the EU *acquis* on concessions, State aid and the environment;
35. Calls on Montenegro to step up the development and adoption of the National Energy and Climate Plan; calls on Montenegro to improve waste management practices and to protect water quality;

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36. 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, Government and Parliament of Montenegro.