



***EU–MONTENEGRO
STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (SAPC)***

MINUTES

of the **23rd Meeting** of the EU–Montenegro
Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC)

**2 and 3 April 2025
Strasbourg**

The meeting started on 2 April 2025, at 15:01, presided over by Mr Thomas WAITZ, Co-Chair from the European Parliament

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as in the draft document.

2. Adoption of the Minutes of the 22nd EU-Montenegro SAPC meeting

The meeting minutes were adopted as in the draft document.

3. Opening session by Mr Thomas WAITZ and Mr Dejan ĐUROVIĆ, Co-Chairs of the EU-ME SAPC, and exchange of views on EU-Montenegro relations and the State of play of the accession negotiations, in the presence of officials from the EU Institutions and the Government of Montenegro

Mr Thomas WAITZ, Chair of European Parliament’s Delegation to the SAPC, opened the meeting and welcomed the SAPC members from both parliaments, Minister GORČEVIĆ and the guest speakers from the Institutions. He noted that, since the last meeting in April 2025, global political realities had shifted further, and that Europeans should stand together to defend their values and common interests. He said that Montenegro had made good progress and there was very strong support for its accession. Despite democratic disputes in the country, political leaders coming together to find solutions was important, so that efforts to conclude negotiations as soon as possible continued.



Mr Dejan ĐUROVIĆ, Chair of the Delegation of Parliament of Montenegro to the SAPC, spoke of the significant progress the country had made over the last months, including the closing of three chapters at the end of 2024. He said that the governing majority was fully committed to the EU path and the common objective of EU membership, even though this was not without obstacles. He was pleased that the opposition had recognised the importance of returning to parliamentary activities. He added that there was more intensive work ahead and that Montenegro had a responsibility towards its future generations to deliver on this objective of 80% of its citizens.

Ms Maida GORČEVIĆ, Minister for European Affairs of Montenegro, said that 2024 had seen an acceleration of the accession process and that now the focus would be the implementation of the Growth Plan and the legal framework to help deliver on the reform agenda. The latter was adopted in September 2024 and included 32 measures with 130 steps. She also noted the progress made in regional trade integration. She stressed that not only the government, but all societal and political actors were needed for this effort and for the political implementation required to take place in a short time. She outlined reforms in the areas of Rule of Law, digital policy, transparency, energy and electoral legislation. She concluded by saying that she appreciated the political support offered by the SAPC.

Mr Pawel ŁĄCKI, Chair of the Council Working Party on Enlargement - Polish Presidency, spoke of the importance of enlargement as an economic driver and to promote EU values, and of the new dynamism in the process. This was a priority for the Polish Presidency, including the security dimension of the policy, and they would do their utmost to take it forward. He said that the interim benchmarks on fundamentals, judicial measures and the three recent chapters provisionally closed were good signs of progress. He added that reforms efforts should be stepped up in the fight against corruption and organised crime, freedom of expression and media freedom. He also commended Montenegro's cooperation on foreign policy issues and its full alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as a strong signal of its strategic orientation. The future of Montenegro and its citizens lies in the EU and the Council encouraged Montenegrins to work together constructively to implement EU reforms. He also commended the European Parliament's strong support for enlargement.

Ms Barbara JESUS-GIMENO, Head of the Montenegro/Bosnia and Herzegovina unit, DG ENEST, European Commission (connected remotely), started by saying that the SAPC was an important platform, and that Montenegro was the country most advanced in the accession negotiations. The new Commission had signalled its strong commitment with the first official visit by Commissioner Kos to the region taking place in January 2025 in Montenegro. She said that political actors in Montenegro should come together without distractions and welcomed the cross-party agreement to consult the Venice Commission regarding the mandate of Constitutional Court judges. She stressed that Montenegro must revise its legal framework for judicial retirement in accordance with EU law and the Venice Commission's recommendations. She expressed concern over Montenegro's recent decision to expand the list of countries whose citizens may enter without a visa, warning that this could jeopardise the country's alignment with Chapter 24 obligations. She also welcomed the work



on electoral reform and on good neighbourly relations and looked forward to the closing of Chapter 31 on CFSP. She congratulated Montenegro on becoming a member of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA). Regarding the recent investment agreement between the Montenegrin government and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), she said that such agreements must comply with EU standards, particularly those related to public procurement. She added that Montenegro should work together with the institutions to attract investment also from EU. The Commission would continue to support Montenegro, notably with Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) projects 2025-2027 and on building administrative capacity to handle future funding and making full use of the Growth Plan.

Ms Zuzana MICHALCOVA SUTIAKOVA, Head of Western Balkans Division, European External Action Service (connected remotely), said that since the last SAPC in October 2024, there were positive results with the closing of three chapters. Her message was for Montenegro to focus on its EU path and maintain its clear geostrategic orientation. She warned that Russian malign influence remained a threat, and that work should continue to build resilience. She recalled that Montenegro was labelled a hostile country by Russia following its sanctions policy. She also noted that in March 2025 the Council approved EUR 6 million worth of assistance for the Montenegrin Armed Forces, through the European Peace Facility.

Mr Boris PEJOVIĆ, Vice-President of the Parliament of Montenegro, said that since the last SAPC meeting, the accession process was relaunched. He added that there was work ahead, but that he was encouraged by the opposition's agreement to normalise the political situation in order to move on electoral reform and to support other EU-related initiatives. He listed achievements such as economic growth, the increase of pensions and average salaries, the alignment with the Maastricht criteria, the reduction of the share of public debt to GDP and the stabilisation of inflation. He said the goal was to continue strengthening economic stability standards, to avoid a population exodus when Montenegro joined the EU.

Mr Marjan ŠAREC, Member of European Parliament, said that, both as member of the Delegation and as the Parliament's standing rapporteur, he was very involved with Montenegro. He noted that the process was relatively smooth because the existing obstacles were surmountable. He called for a balance between the quality and quantity of legislative measures and was aware that the job was not easy. He concluded that democracy was vivid in Montenegro, but that political unity was needed even more than in the past and that time was short.

Mr Ivan VUKOVIĆ, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, said that EU integration was the most important challenge for this generation of politicians. Given the country's small size and malign external influence, the EU was the only insurance policy for Montenegro to develop as a multiethnic democracy. The DPS party and the rest of the opposition had and would continue to support EU accession. That is why they signed the political agreement with the Prime Minister in March - to solve the constitutional crisis and clear up the EU path. He was concerned by the intentions and initiatives in the region of Serbia and its local partners in



Montenegro. If Montenegro succeed in joining the EU, it would be a success for the region and for the EU itself.

Ms Sunčana GLAVAK, Member of European Parliament, welcomed Montenegro's progress and said that Croatia supported Enlargement and the country's accession. She added that open issues should not be neglected. The question of missing persons was not a bilateral one but a European issue, as it involved humanitarian values and questions of justice. She voiced concerns for initiatives in relation to dual citizenship and to the Serbian language and called not to undermine the cohesion and European orientation of Montenegro. She stressed that accession is not only a technical process but about coming closer to European values. She highlighted disinformation as a big problem and said that EU funds via different financial instruments were a huge sign of commitment by the EU, and that they should be used efficiently.

Mr Thijs REUTEN, Member of European Parliament, said that both Montenegrins and the EU needed Montenegro to succeed, to show that Europeans were serious about finishing enlargement. He commended the constructive approach to ask the help of the Venice commission. He encouraged investing in more political work and bilateral relations with colleagues from member states' national parliaments. He stressed that the opportunity of the current momentum should be seized. He argued that all democratic forces in the country must unite on Europe and that there was room for political differences in other fields. He warned against getting distracted by those want to see us fail on this objective, including some within the European Parliament.

Mr Tomislav SOKOL, Member of European Parliament, expressed his support to Montenegro and said that the responsibility shown by the opposition on the issue of the Venice Commission demonstrated their concern about the EU path. He noted that the external influence of Russia and Serbia was a problem and warned that any citizenship law amendment could lead to major political and societal changes. The issue of missing persons with Croatia was not bilateral but a question of values issues. He concluded by saying he wished for a stable, pro-western and fully independent Montenegro.

Ms Tsvetelina PENKOVA, Vice Chair of the EP Delegation, said that the common goal was cooperation and prosperity in the Western Balkans. She added that building European autonomy and independence, including when it came to industry and energy supply, was another parameter to consider, made more important by the fluctuating global geopolitical situation.

Co-Chair ĐUROVIĆ expressed thanks for members' support of Montenegro. He said that the country was looking forward, not backwards, and agreed that it was important to control and be responsible with all funds arriving from the EU. He said the governing majority wanted to have as broad and democratic approach as support as possible including the opposition and national groups in country, with the aim to join the EU.



Co-Chair Dejan ĐUROVIĆ took over the chairpersonship of the meeting for the next agenda items.

4. Montenegro's Reform Agenda, with a focus on rule of law reform, including electoral processes

Ms Andela VOJINOVIĆ, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, said that 2024 was a turning point and cited the appointment of a Supreme Court judge and examples of the fight against organised crime and corruption. She referred to the suspension of officers and high officials in the security sector who were linked to criminal gangs and abused their office. She also cited the investigative committee on tobacco smuggling. These actions showed the determination to regain the trust of citizens in the police and the judiciary. There were also results in the fight against economic crime and money laundering, where the support of international partners such as the Commission and Europol was very important.

Mr Vladimir PREBILIĆ, Member of European Parliament, said that impressive work had been done and that Slovenia was very supportive of Montenegro's accession. He highlighted media freedom, appointments at the Radio Television of Montenegro - RTCG, harmonised municipal elections and good neighbourly relations as important topics to improve. He said that when Croatia joined the EU, despite the existence of bilateral issues, these were not used as conditional to an agreement, which helped both sides. He concluded that this geopolitical moment to be seized for accession, and that it would show other Western Balkan countries that accession was possible.

Ms Ana NOVAKOVIĆ ĐUROVIĆ, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, said that the opposition's activity shows that EU membership is the main foreign policy goal and the mechanism for internal reforms. There was currently a double race, to pass laws and to implement them, and they needed to focus on both. The media laws were not yet implemented, especially concerning the RTCG. Unfortunately, many important laws adopted were not going through public debate. She was concerned that the agreement with the UAE would suspend public national procurement law and allow to circumvent the legal order.

Mr Vasilije ČARAPIĆ, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, said electoral reform was important to improve the system and serve the people. The aims were to professionalise the state election commission, ensure greater transparency in the financing of campaigns, hold local elections on a single day, and enable preferential voting and open lists to improve legitimacy. Such an evolution of democracy should be based on a large consensus between the government and the opposition.

Ms Radinka ČINČUR, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, argued for more funds on gender-sensitive activities and the strengthening of gender equality, human rights and equality before the law. It was important to improve electoral legislation, eliminate discrimination and have quotas of 40% for the less represented gender at all levels of decision-making. She also



called for access to resources of elected representatives whether they are backed by a political party or not.

Ms Jelena BOŽOVIĆ, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, said that the ruling coalition had different positions and minority ethnic groups, but that all shared the EU commitment. She said that thanks to Europol and the Sky communication application case, there had been arrests of senior police officers involved with criminal organisations and smuggling. These, together with the inquiry committee set up on the murders of journalists, were concrete steps being taken.

Ms Friederike WUENSCHMANN, European External Action Service, expressed satisfaction of the EU Delegation that the parliamentary committee for comprehensive electoral reform had resumed its work, as part of the joint commitment in the political agreement of 15 March. Electoral reform completion was vital to enable the closing of all chapters and has appeared in several Commission reports and OSCE and ODIHR recommendations. She was looking forward to work on the financing of political electoral campaigns, amendments for the election of the President and the vetting and cleaning of voting register. Gender equality in political life was also priority as was the regulation of preferential voting lists, also for Roma candidates.

Mr Boris MUGOŠA, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, said that there were violations regarding processes at the RTCG, delays in the election of a Constitutional Court judge, delays on legislation on gender identity and issues with the Law on public administration and the civil service. While regional relations have their challenges, he said we should not be creating new sources of tension. The narrative that the governing majority is pro-European, and that the opposition is not, is not true. The opposition supported the laws and reforms passed and would continue to do so. However, he said Montenegro needed to work on the essence not only the process of reforms.

5. Security and cooperation in the Mediterranean

Co-Chair ĐUROVIĆ listed several challenges in the Mediterranean, such as the situation in Israel/Palestine, the tensions between Cyprus Turkey and Greece, Syria and other issues to do with maritime security. He said Montenegro supported peaceful and multilateral solutions to these. He also called for the strengthening of regional mechanisms such as the Union for the Mediterranean. He mentioned the smuggling of persons, weapons and narcotics by criminal gangs, which impacts the economic stability of Montenegro and neighbours like Slovenia. He concluded by saying that we must overcome local differences and recognise common interests, which would lead to comprehensive long term solutions.

Mr Admir ADROVIĆ, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, said that Montenegro's strategic position made it a transit point for smuggling, which affected internal security, the rule of law and the trust of its people. He gave examples of recent capacity strengthening of special police and judicial units to fight corruption, with the help of international cooperation.



High level corruption was a big and sensitive issue which required transparency and the protection of whistleblowers. He noted that Montenegro had 290 km of coast with important ports, where illegal activities, illegal fishing and environmental infringements must be prevented by increasing naval and coast guard security both with NATO and with the EU. He mentioned the threats on digital infrastructure from cyber-attacks, highlighting the need to inform citizens and increase their resilience to support democracy.

Mr Vasilije ČARAPIĆ, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, said that geopolitical changes and the Russian aggression in Ukraine have changed the perception of security in Europe. He highlighted NATO's response as important and as one that the EU could emulate. NATO's reaction was enlargement to include Finland and Sweden, and strengthening of internal capacities. In the region, all countries which are members of NATO are also in the EU except Montenegro and Albania. Therefore, expediting Enlargement was the way to go. Having a common defence policy was challenging for democracies, but Enlargement would be a way to address this challenge quickly. Montenegro had reached military spending of 2% of GDP, and while its defence contribution would be limited, it could be a liability if it were not resilient.

Co-Chair Durovic concluded the first part of the meeting at 17:46.

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Co-Chair Durovic opened the second day of the SAPC meeting on 1 November 2024 at 09.12.

Mr Carlo CICCIOLOI, Vice Chair of the EP Delegation, said that a strategy for the Mediterranean and Ionian Seas was important for Europe. He noted that trade of goods represented a big part of the economy, as well as services and tourism. He said we needed a shared vision of the people in the region and that the Italian government was making efforts to shift policy focus south towards the Mediterranean. This would allow closer relations with the flourishing continent of Africa. He concluded by referring to projects on blue growth, environment and ports to ensure the economic attractiveness of Montenegro and the region.

6. Sustainable tourism as an economic driver

Ms Tsvetelina PENKOVA, Vice Chair of the EP Delegation, said that tourism revenues must be ensured while protecting resources, supporting local communities and creating long term growth. Such environmentally responsible practices would enhance international reputation of Montenegro and align with EU values and policies. Eco-friendly accommodation and sustainable transport infrastructure must be developed. This would also require the involvement of local communities.

Co-Chair ĐUROVIĆ said that sustainable tourism was a fast growing, key element in the economy. The aim was to meet today's tourism needs but preserve cultural and natural resources and contribute to the local economy. This type of tourism (ecological, cultural and adventure) also created employment in areas such as agriculture and crafts. Waste management



and green transport progress would also benefit the tourism sector. The 2022 - 2025 sustainable tourism strategy was guiding this work.

Mr Boris MUGOŠA, Member of Parliament of Montenegro, said that tourism contributed 25 - 30% of the GDP and created profits, so it needed to be developed, while at the same time preserving the environment. From 2009 to 2019 tourist numbers doubled in the country and many concrete buildings were built on the coast, including illegal constructions. Montenegro needed to protect its national parks and UNESCO protected areas. He said the challenge was seasonality, and the need to prolong the few months for which the season currently lasts. Rural and health tourism were options, as was focussing more on the north, where the share in tourism was low. There were villages with big potential and there existed projects such as on energy efficiency in catering facilities in rural areas, which merited more funding. He also referred to the Long Beach in Ulcinj - 13 km long with protected dunes, plant and bird diversity - and said that a strategic investment for the whole beach there would be problematic if it circumvented national laws and if local authorities were against it. He concluded that we had to be cautious and balanced, attracting investment but not destroying state property and the environment.

Co-Chair Đurović concluded the discussion on this agenda item at 09.38 and adjourned to prepare the discussion and vote on the Draft Recommendations.

The meeting resumed at 10.37. Co-Chair Waitz took over the chairpersonship of the meeting for the remaining agenda items.

7. Adoption of Recommendations

A total of 48 amendments were submitted to the Draft Declaration and Recommendations, including 4 amendments from Members of the Montenegrin Parliament and 44 amendments from Members of the European Parliament. After voting, 19 amendments were approved by both delegations, with several amendments withdrawn by MEPs. The Final Declaration and Recommendations were adopted with one 'abstention' vote within the Montenegrin Parliament delegation and unanimously within the European Parliament delegation.

8. Any other business

None.

9. Date and place of the next SAPC meeting

Co-Chair Waitz said that the next SAPC meeting would be held in Podgorica in the autumn.

The meeting concluded at 11.46.

The Minutes were drafted by the Secretariat of the European Parliament Delegation to the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, in consultation with the Montenegrin Parliament Secretariat.