

EU–MONTENEGRO
STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (SAPC)

MINUTES
of the
24th Meeting

18 and 19 September 2025
Podgorica

The meeting started on 18 September 2025, at 15.24, presided over by Mr Dejan ĐUROVIĆ, Co-Chair from the Parliament of Montenegro

Mr Dejan ĐUROVIĆ, Co-Chair of the SAPC from the Parliament of Montenegro, opened the meeting and welcomed the SAPC members from both parliaments, the President of the Parliament of Montenegro, the Minister of European Affairs of Montenegro, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Denmark to Montenegro, the Ambassador of the European Union to Montenegro, as well as other participants of the meeting. He then invited the President of the Parliament of Montenegro to address the Committee.

Mr Andrija MANDIĆ, President of the Parliament of Montenegro, in his opening remarks recalled the results achieved in the European Union accession process since 2023 - the unblocking of the process, the receipt of a positive IBAR, the closing of three negotiating chapters at the end of last year and one in mid-2025. He pointed to the intensive work aimed at closing a further five chapters by the end of the year (Chapters 3, 4, 6, 11 and 13), as well as the evident internal readiness to close an additional two. He also referred to the opposition's support during key votes in the Parliament, but also to occasional extra-institutional actions undertaken by the opposition at a time he described as a very unfavourable for Montenegro.

The President of the Parliament recalled the high level of public support in Montenegro for EU membership, noting that it was the responsibility of the authorities to translate this aspiration into reality. He stressed that the objective was to close all negotiating chapters by the end of the year to come and to create the preconditions for EU Member States to provide strong political support for Montenegro's accession. In this context, he expressed confidence that, with the support of Members of the European Parliament, Montenegro could achieve its goal of becoming the first next member of the Union by 2028.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as set out in the draft document.

2. Adoption of the Minutes of the 23rd EU-Montenegro SAPC meeting

The minutes were adopted as set out in the draft document.

3. Opening remarks by Mr Dejan ĐUROVIĆ and Mr Thomas WAITZ, 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

Co-Chair Dejan ĐUROVIĆ stated that the goal embodied in the accession of Montenegro to the EU by 2028 was not merely a plan of political parties or institutions, but a vision shared by politicians with citizens, implying responsibility, perseverance, and readiness to implement reforms in line with the defined timeline. Reform processes were neither simple nor easy, but they were aligned with the interests of citizens, ensuring stronger institutions, greater legal certainty, and better economic prospects.

In this context, Mr Đurović recalled the key results achieved by Montenegro between the two meetings of the SAPC, particularly highlighting the provisional closure of Chapter 5 – Public Procurement, as well as the adoption of a number of laws aimed at fulfilling obligations in the negotiation process, with special emphasis on the set of laws within the electoral reform framework. He concluded by expressing confidence that the EU-ME SAPC would continue to be a place of cooperation, dialogue, and joint action, as well as that the support of the European Parliament would remain an important pillar for Montenegro on its European path.

Mr Thomas WAITZ, Co-Chair of the SAPC from the European Parliament, stated that he shared the optimism of the European institutions regarding Montenegro's progress in fulfilling its obligations under the negotiating chapters, and that the defined plan for Montenegro to become a member of the EU in 2028 could be realistic provided that the current pace of progress and constructive decision-making practices were maintained. He particularly welcomed decisions adopted within the reform processes through broad political consensus, emphasising the importance of joint action by all political actors. He reiterated the importance of further progress in the area of the rule of law, which was a priority for both MEPs and the Member States themselves, as well as the complexity of Chapter 27 – Environment.

Ms Maida GORČEVIĆ, Minister of European Affairs, addressed the meeting on behalf of the Government of Montenegro and emphasised the key importance of close and constructive cooperation between the Parliament and the Government, stating that only through coordinated, transparent, and unified action could results expected by the citizens of Montenegro and European partners be achieved. She presented the key results of the Government on the European path through the negotiation process and work on the closing of chapters in the areas of the rule of law and strengthening of the judiciary, the fight against organised crime and corruption, electoral reform, social policy and human rights, as well as economic development.

She stated that, through active consultations with the EU, international partners, experts, and representatives of civil society, Montenegro had continued to work on securing broad support for the European integration process, and called for the necessary consensus for the successful implementation of all forthcoming reforms on Montenegro's path towards the EU.

Ms Pernille DAHLER KARDEL, Danish Ambassador to Montenegro, addressed the Committee on behalf of the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Ambassador noted that Montenegro had demonstrated readiness, determination, and perseverance to become the next member of the European Union. She commended the previous results and the progress made on this path, expressing confidence that Montenegro would provisionally close several additional chapters by the end of the Danish Presidency. Referring

to the current geopolitical circumstances, the Ambassador stated that enlargement policy represented a strategic imperative, and that the future of not only Montenegro but also the Western Balkans was in a united, secure, and stable European Union.

Mr Johann SATTLER, European Union Ambassador to Montenegro, emphasised the European Union's commitment to the enlargement process as one of its most important strategic priorities. Montenegro remains a frontrunner in this process, having achieved particularly significant results at the end of the previous year, while the closure of a further five negotiating chapters can be expected by the end of the current year. He acknowledged the key role of the Parliament of Montenegro and stated that broad political consensus had been of exceptional importance in the reform processes, particularly with regard to electoral legislation. He reiterated the importance of further progress in Chapters 23 and 24, and particularly highlighted the issues of filling vacant positions in the Constitutional Court, the Judicial Council, and the Prosecutorial Council. He also addressed the importance of progress in Chapter 27 – Environment, emphasising the current issue of the construction of a wastewater treatment plant, which should be resolved. He announced the adoption of the European Commission Montenegro Report in the autumn, with comprehensive assessments across all benchmarks in relation to all negotiating chapters.

Mr Andrija NIKOLIĆ, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, pointed to the responsible approach and important contribution of the opposition to the timely finalisation of Montenegro's accession process to the European Union, recalling the support given to all legislative acts and decisions that were of importance for Montenegro's European agenda. He expressed concern that certain actions and policies of the ruling majority which, in his view, had limited human rights and freedoms and undermined the antifascist heritage of society, called into question the country's democratic development and its chance of joining the EU. He emphasised the need for a greater presence, joint engagement, and more frequent communication of European officials with representatives of pro-European political forces and reputable CSOs, in order to ensure that the common goal of Montenegro's EU membership would be truly achieved by the end of the current decade.

Ms Tsvetelina PENKOVA, Member of the European Parliament, acknowledged the outstanding progress achieved by Montenegro through the closure of several negotiating chapters, and welcomed the ambition and readiness of political actors to cooperate with one another in order to achieve the shared goal of Montenegro and the European Union. She also referred to the challenges along this path that should be addressed, relating to media freedom, as well as the fight against organised crime and corruption. She called for the deepening of cooperation in the sectors of industry and energy, both at regional level and at the level of the European Union.

Mr Gordan STOJOVIĆ, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, recalled the steps taken by the Government of Montenegro with the aim of improving the standard of living of citizens, as well as ensuring sustainable economic growth. He expressed satisfaction with the encouraging messages from Brussels, particularly those indicating that Montenegro's membership in 2028 was realistic and achievable.

Ms Sunčana GLAVAK, Member of the European Parliament, emphasised the importance of security and political stability as prerequisites for economic, as well as any other, development, and of the rule of law as a prerequisite for progress in the accession process. She pointed to challenges related to the filling of vacant positions in the Constitutional Court, the

fight against corruption, as well as strengthening media freedom and the protection of journalists. She particularly stressed that there was significant room for improvement in the area of media and freedom of expression. She called on Montenegro not to turn towards ideologies that look to the past, but to look towards the future, which also represented a shared perspective of the countries of the region.

Mr Boris MUGOŠA, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, focused his remarks on the issue of the applicability of laws adopted in the accession process, including those that had been a condition for the closure of negotiating chapters. He raised concerns regarding the willingness of the ruling majority to implement the adopted legislation, highlighting in particular the pending procedures for the appointment of members of the Council of the Agency for Audio-Visual Media Services and vacant positions in the judiciary, as well as the influence of politics on the aforementioned selection and appointment processes.

Mr Marjan ŠAREC, European Parliament's rapporteur for Montenegro, referred to the differing assessments and positions of the parliamentary majority and the opposition regarding the situation in Montenegro, expressing the view that the reality lay somewhere in between. He expressed satisfaction with the positive attitude of the European institutions towards Montenegro's progress and commended the work of Montenegro's negotiating structure. He stressed the importance of progress in the area of the rule of law and called for the urgent resolution of the issue of filling vacant positions in the Constitutional Court. He also referred to challenges related to Chapter 27, as well as to current developments concerning the construction project of a wastewater treatment plant. He concluded by stating that Montenegro should remain a civic state based on antifascist values and respect for the rule of law and human rights.

Mr Vasilje ČARAPIĆ, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, expressed great satisfaction with the results achieved by the Parliament of Montenegro in relation to electoral reform, which he assessed as a major success of both the parliamentary majority and the opposition. He stressed the importance of focusing on points of convergence among political actors in Montenegro, such as the rule of law, the improvement of living standards, and the European agenda. Regarding the appointment of Constitutional Court judges, he stated that this was a complex process which, in every country, required time, a thorough approach, and broad consultations. He recalled the consensus reached on the important issue of electoral reform and expressed confidence that a similar solution could be achieved with regard to other important issues.

Mr Tomislav SOKOL, Member of the European Parliament, commended the progress in the electoral reform process, and in particular the fact that both the ruling majority and the opposition contributed to the adoption of the legislation. He also welcomed the closure of additional negotiating chapters. He further pointed to certain unresolved issues between Montenegro and the Republic of Croatia, which, in his view, went beyond bilateral relations constituting a matter of fundamental European values. He also spoke about the importance of the fight against organised crime and the strengthening of the rule of law, and stressed that he continues to see foreign influence obstructing the country's European path as a key issue. He reiterated Croatia's support and emphasised that Montenegro's accession to the European Union had been a strategic, geopolitical, and security interest of his country.

Mr Thijs REUTEN, Member of the European Parliament, raised the question of the legacy of the current generation of politicians in the context of the European political architecture and

its geopolitical position. He called for joint action in countering forces seeking to undermine both support for Montenegro and support for the European Union in general, emphasising the importance of overcoming individual political interests.

Co-Chair Thomas WAITZ took over the chairmanship of the meeting for the next agenda item.

4. Progress in the rule of law area, with a focus on the vetting system and the fight against organised crime and corruption

Ms Andela VOJINOVIĆ, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, spoke about the vetting process in the police sector, stressing that it was being implemented in accordance with strictly defined, legally based rules and procedures, fully aligned with European standards. Referring to cases of detention of several security sector officials who previously held high-ranking positions, she stated that the implementation of vetting demonstrated care for the integrity of the police and for the establishment of trust in security sector institutions, primarily the police, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Defence. She also sees this process as justified in light of the increasingly significant results achieved in the fight against organised crime and corruption. She further spoke about the steps taken to strengthen the judicial system and referred to court proceedings underway against several former holders of the highest judicial positions, which, in her view, highlighted the importance of implementing vetting in this area as well.

Ms Sunčana GLAVAK, Member of the European Parliament, built on the remarks made by Ms VOJINOVIĆ, emphasising the importance of final judgments in cases involving so-called ‘big fish’, which were lacking at the moment. She assessed that stronger reforms were needed to strengthen citizens’ trust in the institutions of the system, and that Montenegro therefore had significant work ahead in this regard.

Ms Milena VUKOVIĆ, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, spoke about the situation in the Constitutional Court, which, as she stated, faced the risk of a blockage in its work due to vacant judicial positions. She also addressed political influence on the judicial system, as well as challenges in the implementation of adopted legislation, including selective application, which further undermined citizens’ trust in institutions. She considered vetting necessary for building institutions that were resilient to political pressure and corruption, emphasising the need for careful planning and implementation, as well as transparency of the process, in order to prevent political misuse.

Speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Justice, **State Secretary Sergej SEKULOVIĆ** noted that visible results had been achieved in the fight against organised crime and corruption, which was acknowledged by European institutions. He also referred to what he considered legitimate criticism and real challenges in Chapters 23 and 24 that required further work, including the length of court proceedings and the insufficient number of final convictions, the need for further alignment of the legislative framework, adequate financing of infrastructure, and more efficient confiscation of assets acquired through criminal activity. In this context, he informed the participants about the steps taken to address those challenges. He further spoke about vetting, emphasising that this process, if implemented appropriately, would further strengthen institutions and provide support to judges who performed their duties professionally and in accordance with the law.

Mr Tomislav SOKOL, Member of the European Parliament, stressed the importance of ensuring the uninterrupted functioning of the Constitutional Court, which he described not only as a legal but also as an important political issue. He expressed hope that the process of filling vacant positions in the Court would be carried out without obstruction, in the shortest possible timeframe, and that it would be based on consensus regarding the selection of the best candidates for the said positions. He called on all political actors to address this issue with the utmost seriousness.

Co-Chair Dejan ĐUROVIĆ underlined that the appointment of Constitutional Court judges had been an issue of particular importance for Montenegro, and that it was therefore necessary for the selection process to be conducted in a responsible and committed manner. He considers that the Parliament of Montenegro has an obligation to appoint a judge who, through integrity and professionalism, will contribute to strengthening the work of the Constitutional Court, rather than further burdening the already fragile trust of citizens in the judicial system.

Co-Chair WAITZ concluded the first part of the meeting at 17.58.

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Mr Thomas WAITZ, Co-Chair of the SAPC from the European Parliament, opened the second day of the SAPC meeting on 19 September 2025 at 9.10.

5. Social and Economic Reforms

Mr Vasilije ČARAPIĆ, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, expressed satisfaction with the fulfilment of all objectives in the field of electoral reform that he had referred to at the previous SAPC meeting, relating to the professionalisation of the State Election Commission, transparent and improved financing of electoral campaigns, as well as the holding of all local elections on a single day.

He provided more detailed information on all the above-mentioned results, including the agreement reached between the government and the opposition on the exact date for holding all local elections; the revised method of selecting members of the Central Election Commission, who would no longer be delegated by political parties but elected by a commission composed also of representatives of judges' associations, the academia, and the NGO sector; the near-complete alignment of the Law on Financing of Political Entities and Electoral Campaigns with ODIHR recommendations; and the increase of gender quotas from 30% to 40% for the underrepresented gender. He particularly emphasised the importance of the consensus achieved on such significant issues, through which, in his view, the Parliament of Montenegro sent a strong message about its readiness to implement even the most complex reforms within a short period of time.

Mr ČARAPIĆ also referred to the upcoming steps and further necessary reforms in this area, primarily relating to the regulation of the registers of permanent and temporary residence, the voter register, further amendments to the Law on the Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament, as well as amendments to the Law on Political Parties and the Law on the Election of the President.

Mr Marjan ŠAREC, European Parliament's rapporteur for Montenegro, noted that the results achieved in electoral reform reflected significant work and commended the progress made.

Ms Radinka ČINCUR, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro welcomed the agreements reached in the process of electoral reform, while also raising the question of the genuine willingness to implement the adopted solutions. She recalled a recommendation from a previous meeting concerning the importance of ensuring equal rights and access to resources for the work to all MPs, which, as she stated, had not been included in the amendments to the Law on Financing of Political Entities. She called for a reform that would result in the introduction of open electoral lists, allowing a certain number of MPs to be elected directly by citizens, while complying with quotas for the underrepresented gender.

Ms Sunčana GLAVAK, Member of the European Parliament, welcomed the positive developments in terms of the predictability of the electoral process and the holding of elections on the same day, more transparent financing of political entities, the professionalisation of the Central Election Commission, and the increase of quotas for the underrepresented gender. However, she raised concerns regarding the system of closed lists, in which party members were fully dependent on party leaders with regard to their position on the electoral list. She also pointed to ambiguities in the adopted laws which, in her view, called into question the possibility of effective implementation. She stressed the importance of a truly predictable political process for political stability in the country, as an important prerequisite for strong institutions and the rule of law, as well as for economic growth and development.

Mr Boris MUGOŠA, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, stated that a number of important solutions adopted within the electoral reform were not new, as they had existed in the form of proposals for the last several years, although there had been no political will to adopt them at the time. In this regard, he commended the achieved normative progress, stressing the essential importance of effective implementation. He considered that there was significant room for further improvement in order to strengthen citizens' trust in the electoral process, primarily in relation to the voter register, the registers of permanent and temporary residence, the necessary for opening electoral lists, the individual candidacies, as well as the media coverage during electoral campaigns.

Co-Chair Thomas WAITZ referred to the previous interventions, stating that EU Member States had different electoral systems, but that what was common and of key importance was the existence of transparent rules and procedures, as well as independent oversight. He stated his position on the rules concerning the financing of political parties, pointing to the sensitivity of donations to parties from entities with a certain interest, as well as the inadmissibility of donations originating from abroad. He congratulated the participants on the progress achieved in this area.

Ms Maja VUČELIĆ, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, also referred to the progress achieved in the field of electoral legislation, noting that the relevant ODIHR and GRECO recommendations had been fulfilled, as well as obligations towards citizens. She also mentioned the progress achieved in the area of the rule of law, which had been recognised by European institutions, and stressed the importance of an independent and professional judiciary and the swift appointment of Constitutional Court judges. She commended the Government for addressing issues for which there had previously been no political will, and called for Parliament to remain a key actor in all forthcoming changes in the accession process.

Co-Chair Dejan Đurović took over the chairmanship of the meeting for the next agenda items.

6. Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Arash SAEIDI, Member of the European Parliament, stressed the importance of preserving long-term sustainable development, drawing attention to the concept of balancing capital and the well-being of the local population, i.e. the necessary balance between tourism and agriculture. He considered the issue of developing and modernising agriculture in Montenegro to be urgent, in order for it to be able to face strong competition in this sector after accession. He recalled Montenegro's numerous assets, including the resources it possesses, which need to be preserved.

Ms Milica RONDOVIĆ, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, assessed the topic under discussion as one of the crucial for the future of Montenegro. She pointed to the complexity of Chapter 11, as well as to the results achieved in terms of the adoption of laws and secondary legislation, the establishment of institutions, and the implementation of projects. More specifically, she informed the meeting about the improvement and modernisation of sectoral regulations, resulting in clearer and more transparent procedures and greater investment security; the adoption of an implementation plan for the establishment of the Paying Agency and the introduction of an Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) in Montenegro; as well as the contracting of dozens of projects worth over EUR 20 million. Montenegro was actively working on strengthening administrative capacities, accelerating contracting and payments, protecting the quality and origin of its products, and enabling short supply chains to become the backbone of local development. Particular emphasis has been placed on creating the conditions for the effective implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy. Ms RONDOVIĆ concluded by stating that all the results achieved in this area demonstrated a strong commitment to the integration process and that Montenegro was a partner delivering results across the board.

Mr Vladimir JOKOVIĆ, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Montenegro, informed the meeting about the results achieved in fulfilling the obligations arising from negotiating Chapters 11 – Agriculture and Rural Development and 13 – Fisheries, expressing the expectation that negotiations in these chapters would be closed in the near future. He made particular reference to the adoption of a number of laws fully aligned with EU *acquis*, the continued implementation of strategic documents, the further strengthening of the institutional framework, as well as the implementation of numerous support measures, including under the IPARD III programme.

He further addressed Chapter 12 – Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy, which he assessed as particularly complex. He spoke about ongoing activities aimed at improving the situation across all areas covered by this chapter, including the preparation of the necessary legislative acts, the implementation of several sectoral planning documents, the strengthening of monitoring systems and animal health protection, as well as the upgrading of facilities for the production and distribution of food of animal origin, among others. He concluded by expressing his firm belief that, through continuous and dedicated work, Montenegro would also close this chapter by the end of 2026.

Co-Chair Thomas WAITZ referred to the issue of the competitiveness of Montenegrin agriculture on large and mass European agricultural markets. In this regard, he stressed the importance of specialisation, for which, in his view, Montenegro had very favourable prerequisites, but which must be based on market strategies, the specification of product origin, and the development of markets for such specialised products. He also pointed to the importance of supporting the domestic market, investing in high-quality domestic products, as well as the association of small agricultural producers in order to increase production and facilitate the placement of products on the European market. Mr WAITZ also spoke about the importance of diversifying the offer in the tourism sector, in particular the importance of linking tourism and agriculture, which would enable additional income and the preservation of rural infrastructure.

Ms Aleksandra DESPOTOVIĆ, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, stated that the parliamentary majority formed in 2020 had inherited an almost fully developed institutional and legislative framework, as well as largely fulfilled obligations arising from the negotiation process. In this context, she referred to sectoral laws adopted in the previous period and their alignment with EU acquis, as well as to strategic documents which, in her view, had been key to the development of agriculture in Montenegro. Speaking about the current situation, she stressed the importance of effective implementation of legislation and merit-based recruitment. Referring to the remarks by the Co-Chair, Mr WAITZ, she pointed out that the competitiveness of agricultural production in Montenegro was not at the level it could be, and that Montenegrin tourism was largely of a transit nature.

Co-Chair ĐUROVIĆ referred to the remarks by Mr SAEIDI and spoke about the reasons for the uneven development of Montenegro, in particular the expansion of construction along the coast and, in response, the adoption of the Law on the Legalisation of Informal Structures, modelled on Croatian legislation in this area. He also stated that the previous Spatial Plan of Montenegro had not supported the development of agriculture, which was no longer the case following the adoption of the current plan. He further stressed the importance of prioritising domestic producers over large retail chains, and, with regard to tourism, agreed on the need to diversify the tourism offer.

Co-Chair Đurović concluded the discussion on this agenda item at 10.40 and adjourned for a break ahead of the discussion and vote on the Draft Declaration with Recommendations.

The meeting resumed at 11.40.

6. Adoption of Recommendations

A total of 23 amendments were tabled to the Draft Declaration, namely one amendment by a Member of the Parliament of Montenegro and 22 amendments by Members of the European Parliament.

Following the vote, 12 amendments were approved (amendments No. 2, 4, 6, 12, 14, 17 and 19 tabled by Mr Reuten; amendments No. 3, 20, 21 and 22 tabled by Mr Sokol and Ms Glavak; and amendment No. 13 tabled by Mr Mugoša).

Three amendments were adopted in an amended form (amendments No. 8 and 16 tabled by Mr Reuten, and amendment No. 10 tabled by Ms Glavak and Mr Sokol).

A total of six amendments were not approved (amendments No. 1 and 5 tabled by Mr Sokol and Ms Glavak, and amendments No. 7, 9, 11 and 15 tabled by Mr Reuten).

Two amendments were withdrawn (amendment No. 18 tabled by Mr Reuten and amendment No. 23 tabled by Mr Sokol and Ms Glavak).

Prior to proceeding to the vote on the Draft Declaration and Recommendations as a whole, Mr Boris Mugoša, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, in a procedural intervention, thanked his colleagues from the European Parliament for their continued and consistent support to Montenegro, and stated that the text on which the vote was to be taken had not reflected the real situation in Montenegro, and that therefore the opposition representatives could not support it.

The Draft Declaration and Recommendations were adopted with one abstention (eight votes in favour within the delegation of the Parliament of Montenegro and five votes in favour and one abstention within the delegation of the European Parliament).

7. Any other business

Co-Chair WAITZ announced that the Citizens' Forum would be held in Podgorica on 19 and 20 September, where he would take part together with several MPs Montenegro. He welcomed the organisation of the forum, noting that close engagement with citizens helps decision-makers shape more inclusive policies.

8. Date and place of the next SAPC meeting

Co-Chair WAITZ said that the next SAPC meeting would be held in Strasbourg, preliminarily in April 2026.

The meeting concluded at 12.13.

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The Minutes were drafted by the Secretariat of the Montenegrin Parliament Secretariat to the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee