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CITIZENS OF MONTENEGRO OUGHT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE EU

Centre for Civic Education (CCE) expresses its concerns regarding recent Eurobarometre results, which show a decline in trust, but also a high degree of unawareness of citizens of Montenegro about the European integration process, which confirms our previous findings from the project “Europe in my city”. In this context, CCE calls on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI) to implement the actions contained in the Communication Strategy related to informing the public about the EU and Montenegro's preparations for membership, which has been previously adopted, and whose implementation and results are significantly lacking, which contributes to this negative trend.

Eurobarometre is a survey that is conducted annually for the purposes of the European Commission, and was primary conducted in Montenegro in the form of the field study in the fall of 2011, while the analyzed results were published in March 2012. The data show that almost 60% of examinees are poorly informed about the EU integration process, where especially indicative is the fact that the same percentage of 60% of the Montenegrin students believes that they are insufficiently informed on the process. Afore-mentioned data are almost identical to data collected earlier by the CCE, through the project "Europe in my city," which was funded by the EU Delegation in Montenegro. This study, conducted in nine Montenegrin municipalities, showed that support for the EU integration process decreases and varies significantly from municipality to municipality. Thus, in the municipality of Kolašin it is only 46%, Herceg Novi 51.4%, while the highest was in Pljevlja (83.2%). At the same time, a high proportion of the citizens of these municipalities would like to know more about the process, and that percentage is, on average, at 55%.

These data should be used in order to take effective actions to improve the situation. Although CCE, with its partners, primary introduced its findings almost a year ago, and has repeatedly pointed to it, whereas the Eurobarometre did during spring, this had no effect to the MFAEI to devote its attention to this issue. It would seem that the MFAEI does not sufficiently recognize the importance and necessity of the citizens of Montenegro to be impartially and timely informed about the process and about the reforms whose implementation is required on the road to the EU. Entering into negotiations reinforces commitment to intensively communicate with citizens, since, **although the Government is the one that has the primary responsibility for this work, it is not only the Government which is going to join the EU but all of our citizens.**



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Communication Strategy for informing the public about the EU for the period of 2010-2014 is another indicator of the formal, but not substantive efforts to include Montenegrin public in this process. The strategy is not being implemented, action plans that should accompany its implementation are absent, and the only result of previous work in this area is a report adopted by the government, which for the most part consists of NGO activities, implemented through projects independently and without the support of the competent authorities. **Such an attitude towards their own documents and identified needs of the citizens, attains even a clearer outline in the treatment of civil society representatives in the working groups for the preparation of negotiations, which, throughout the very practical examples, questions the government's rhetorical commitment to cooperation with civil society and aspiration that the process is not keep kept in an enclosed circle of like-minded.**

The process of Montenegro's accession to the EU tests the ability to assume the obligations and responsibilities of membership, but also the benefits that derive from the same. The success rate of this process implies fully informed citizens of Montenegro and their support. **If the support fails, the process can not be successful. Therefore, the citizens and professionals need to provide more information about the rights and obligations that arise from membership, as well as the advantages, disadvantages, costs and benefits of the EU membership, especially in certain sectors. In addition, those who interact with the citizens on a daily basis must have equal opportunities to participate in the preparation of the negotiations, because it gives the legitimacy to the same negotiations, having in mind the structure of power in Montenegro.**

CCE will continue to contribute to the increase of knowledge and information of the public about this process through the project activities, however, with no system support, and track records of those institutions which are entitled to conduct this process, there is a concern that these results will be very limited and will in the future lead to the increasing decline of support of the citizens of Montenegro to the EU accession.

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