

CIVIC  
**Negotiations**

***The beginning of accession talks is the turning point in the development of a mature political culture in a country where clientelism and authority always had the upper hand over democratic principles and procedures.***

***Instead of always imagining it as something foreign, it is time we began to live the European idea***

By: Vladimir Pavićević and Daliborka Uljarević

Expecting to begin the accession talks with European Union this summer, the Government of Montenegro appointed **Aleksandar Andrija Pejović** as the chief negotiator. Soon after his appointment, Pejović organised consultations with the actors who should contribute to this process – heads of political parties, representatives of civil society organisations and other interested individuals and groups. Symbolically, this suggests that the Government has serious intentions to engage with a long-term, difficult process of genuine changes which, by the end of European integration, should transform Montenegro into a democratic society based on the rule of law. But what else will it take, apart from symbolic gestures, to really make Montenegro into a country ready for EU and better for its own citizens?

The first proposition which must be made clear in Montenegro is that the beginning of accession negotiations marks our understanding of European integration as the internal political choice to reform institutions, regulated and strengthen the judiciary, establish the rule of law and in the meantime harmonise its legal and economic system with all 35 chapters of EU *acquis* which are the core of negotiations. The chief negotiator should ensure Government's support for this position as the starting point for all future negotiations and swear by it on behalf of his team, from today until the beginning of negotiations, and all the way their very end. This is especially important in order to secure the commitment of all key actors in Montenegro to EU accession as a process of transforming the current mechanisms of governance and political action.

The second thing the chief negotiator should do immediately is to let the Montenegrin politicians know that the times when it was possible to reduce the process of European integration to technical tweaks, covering up the lack of will for genuine reforms, is now over. It should be openly acknowledged that the beginning of accession talks is the turning point in the development of a mature political culture in a country where clientelism and authority always had the upper hand over democratic principles and procedures. This would create the preconditions to transform the existing general support to the European integration process in Montenegro into a firm consensus on European values as the main factor of integration of the political community. Binding the political community together with a set of generally accepted ideals and principles would ensure stability of an otherwise fragile system.

The third area, which seems very important at this stage, is the way of selecting the working groups which would be in charge of preparing Montenegro's negotiating positions for each chapter, and would constitute the foundation of the pyramidal negotiations structure. Administrative and expertise capacities of the country are fairly modest vis-à-vis the task which awaits it. The experience in affairs that decide the major questions for the future of our citizens is equally modest. This is why it is necessary to create the space in these working groups for the representatives of civil society organisations and the academic community, which have the capacities to offer expertise, but also to add weight to the proposals of our negotiating team. The EU is founded upon dialogue and cooperation with the civil society, and the incorporation of the relevant representatives of this sector in the accession talks is both logical and necessary. Given the effective influence and importance of the civil sector in Montenegro, the authorities would be ill advised not to use these resources to further public interests.

Centre for Civic Education (CCE) is already prepared to monitor the accession talks and propose concrete solutions for specific issues closely related to the interests of our organisation – those in

Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights), Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security) and Chapter 26 (Education and Culture).

The very beginning of negotiations will be the most complex part of the accession process, because of its political implications and the need to establish a balance between the apparently conflicting aims of the “speed of integration”, “democratic control” and “participation of all stakeholders”. It is therefore essential to prepare for this process adequately in order to lay out a roadmap to EU.

Finally, the success of Montenegro's negotiations with EU will not only depend on the members of the negotiating team, but also on the degree to which individual and organisations active in different areas engage in this process through their own programmes. Government's negotiating team ought to recognise these programmes as important forms of assistance and support in attaining the big goal – EU membership. It should certainly refrain from the past practice of antagonising further such actors or of measuring their patriotism by extremely problematic meters.

The above recommendations should be read as part of the effort to turn Montenegro's “Europeanness” from a mere geographic fact into a genuine description of its system of values and quality of life of its citizens. Instead of always imagining it as something foreign, it is time we began to live the European idea.

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