

MONTENEGRO

Summit for Democracy Written Commitments

Support for free and independent media

The Montenegrin government is developing a "Media Strategy 2022-2026" in order to strengthen media freedom and create an optimal framework for free and professional journalism. The Strategy's focus is on creating a safe environment for journalists and resolving cases of journalist attacks, achieving financial sustainability for the media, complete de-politization of the public sector, strengthening regulator independence, and combating hate speech and misinformation. We have formed a working group to revise a set of media laws in order to bring them fully in line with the standards of developed democracies. These are the Media Law, the National Public Broadcaster RTCG Law, and the Audiovisual Media Services Law. Draft media regulations are developed in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media representatives, regulatory agencies, and international partners, primarily the Council of Europe and the European Union. The creation of a new Rulebook for the Distribution of Money from the Fund for Media Pluralism will allow for the transparent distribution of 344,000 euros in financial support to the media dealing with topics of public interest.

We launched a dialogue with the Parliament, Media Union representatives, and the NGO sector to improve existing solutions to criminal justice protection of journalists through modalities of qualified forms within existing crimes in order to, in addition to judicial reform, enable increased attention of institutions, particularly in cases of journalist attacks.

During this Government's tenure, the State Prosecutor's Office recognized criminal acts involving journalists or their property in six cases. All cases have been fully resolved. This government will continue to fight for free speech and a safe environment for journalists without exception, effectively and fully committed. The executive bodies will pay special attention to the full coverage of unresolved cases of journalist attacks from previous decades.

Fight against corruption

The government established two key anti-corruption bodies during its first year in office: The National High-Level Anti-Corruption Council and the Rule of Law Council. The Deputy Prime Minister chairs the National Council for the Fight Against High-Level Corruption, which is in charge of coordinating and synchronizing the activities of all institutions in charge of resolving specific high-level corruption cases.

The Rule of Law Council's role is to coordinate and monitor the implementation of obligations under Chapters 23 and 24, which are critical in Montenegro's accession to the European Union, as well as to make recommendations to competent institutions for urgent action to implement these obligations. It is made up of the Prime Minister, who also serves as the Council's President, the Ministers of Justice, Human and Minority Rights, and the Interior, as well as the heads of relevant public institutions, executive and judicial bodies, and the Director of the Anti-Corruption Agency.

The Bill on Confiscation of Proceeds of Crime, which introduces a civil concept of confiscation, is the key tool prepared by the government in this regard. According to this Bill, initiating a permanent confiscation of property would exclude a final conviction as a pre-condition. This law would concentrate the procedure of permanent confiscation of property gain on the property gain itself rather than the owner of that property. This approach does not rule out the possibility of conducting a financial investigation and a final procedure of permanent confiscation of property even after a conviction, if there is a reasonable suspicion that a particular property gain was obtained through criminal activity. The creation of a strong legal basis for the judiciary to confiscate illegally acquired property is a government priority, with the goal of creating conditions for the formation of strong, independent, and professional national institutions whose development is significantly slowed or blocked due to corruption.

The government intends to pass the Law on Amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information by the end of the year, which is one of the fundamental tools for investigative journalism and non-governmental sector work in the fight against corruption. The European Commission approved the law after an inclusive process and collaboration with non-governmental organizations.

In addition, the new Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Prevention Act establishes the Register of Politically Exposed Persons, the Register of Accounts and Safes, increases the transparency of the Register of Real Owners, and expands the list of taxpayers.

The new Internal Affairs Law envisages the establishment of a new organizational unit within the Ministry of the Interior, the Anti-Corruption Unit (JAK), which will control not only the income

and lifestyle of officials, but also the lifestyle, income, and property of their spouses, children, and persons related to them. This is the first time such a unit has been established in Montenegro, and the officials and head of this unit will report directly to the Minister. Furthermore, it is intended to focus on the Ministry employees who perform public procurement activities as well, and to supervise the law's implementation, as well as to strengthen employees' integrity.

In the meantime, we expect that, based on an assessment of the EU's results and in accordance with the priorities of the next phase of negotiations, we will create conditions for obtaining final benchmarks for Chapter 23 as one of the key issues, conditions for attracting credible foreign investments, and conditions for developing the economy on a sound foundation free of corrupt influence.

Strengthening democratic reforms by strengthening cooperation with NGOs

The Council for Cooperation of State Administration Bodies and NGOs is being improved in order to contribute to a better dialogue between state administration bodies and the NGO sector and to strengthen the advisory role of this body. The state supports NGO programs and projects by allocating funds in the annual Budget Law equal to at least 0.5 percent of the total current state budget for NGO projects and programs, thereby improving cooperation between the state and NGOs and strengthening partnership and trust. This is one of the mechanisms for ensuring the quality of public policy implementation on the one hand, and the development and capacity building of NGOs on the other. The Strategy for Cooperation with the NGO Sector is currently being developed with the goal of further improving public administration cooperation with NGOs. This strategy proposes two strategic goals: strengthening partnerships with the civil sector in the field of public policy formulation and improving the provision of services to citizens in key areas such as social, cultural, and sports through collaborative efforts.

Defense of Fair and Free Elections - Draft Law on Registers of Residence and Stay

It is mandatory to update the register of residence, and thus the voter list, within the need to update, ie arrange the registers. The Working Group's primary task is to amend the Law on Registers of Residence and Stay in order to improve the legislative and regulatory framework of control, i.e. prescribing the legal basis for verifying the accuracy of data in the register of residence, with the ultimate goal of editing the register of residence. a complete and up-to-date registration of residence

The working group drafted amendments to the Law on Registers of Residence and Stay, which were then sent to the public for comment and suggestions, allowing the entire public to contribute to the best possible text. A broader consultation process is underway with representatives of the NGO sector, associations of Montenegrin emigrants in the diaspora, and representatives of political parties, which will present the draft law and allow suggestions and comments on it, all in the name of transparency. The procedure itself, as well as the development of better and more precise legal provisions for the purpose of keeping the register of residence accurate and up to date.

Advancing democracy through technology - digitization of justice and public administration

When it comes to the digitalization of the Montenegrin judiciary through the use of information and communication technologies, one of the key reform processes within Montenegro's EU accession, which we are developing through the strategic framework of the Program for the Development of Information and Communication Technologies in Justice 2021-2023. We anticipate that the Program will be realized through the establishment of the New Information System, which aims to increase the system's transparency and accessibility to the public and citizens, vulnerable groups, and international institutions, and is implemented through the strengthening of statistics, automation of processes, the use of web services, and increased information security.

The program will create a Business Intelligence System to produce reliable statistical reports from the judicial system, as well as connect national judicial systems, such as the e-Justice Portal initiative, to more efficient and faster data flow, and strengthen internal transparency to reduce corruption. The plan for digitalization and increased service accessibility is being implemented within the public administration department through a number of newly launched initiatives and programs.

The adoption of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Open Government Partnership Initiative in Montenegro until 2023 is currently underway in order to affirm new obligations and activities that will contribute to citizens' priorities and aspirations in relation to decision makers, a more efficient and accountable administration, and which will contribute to a sustainable and inclusive community, as well as better cooperation between the Government and civil society.

Montenegro Digital - Office for Innovation and Digitization was established to provide better public service to Montenegrin citizens through a deep understanding of user needs, technology, and design, as well as through gradual product development and adaptation to the actual user

experience. This will include proactive efforts to improve services, "interventions" that will assist in the analysis of "failed" projects through analysis, adaptation, and improvement, as well as the development of digital services.

Improving the "e-participation" service and launching the "e-petition" service to encourage and empower citizens to participate in the creation and monitoring of public policies. These services allow citizens and stakeholders to participate in public consultations and discussions, and improving them will allow citizens to provide feedback on the experience, benefits, and challenges of implementing public policies, which we anticipate will contribute to the credibility of policy impact evaluation and overall cycle quality. public policies, as well as increasing citizens' trust in institutions.

A Digital Academy for Civil Servants, Private Sector, and Academic Sector will be established in order to raise the level of education in the areas of programming, project management, human centric design, analytical thinking, and modern digital disciplines. This academy will be an online platform for learning and improving the knowledge and skills required to accelerate Montenegro's digital transformation. The academy's work will contribute to the improvement of capacities for innovative policymaking, the development of innovative services for citizens and special target groups, and the digitalization of public administration.

Open data management will be improved by improving the functionality of the open data portal, continuous testing of user experience, and the work of the Government Council for Open Data Management to identify challenges in the field of open data and propose solutions to these challenges, consider and launch open data management initiatives, activities, and projects, and improve cooperation with state and local governments in order to open as much data as possible. Open data are the foundation for further modernization and transparency of work, as well as increasing the efficiency and quality of services provided by the administration.

The "Take the Opportunity" platform will be established, allowing civil servants to spend 10% of their working time on projects, activities, or jobs that are not part of their primary job description. This can be done in other units or administrative bodies. The goal of implementing this new model of engagement is to contribute to the improvement of employees' knowledge and career development, which is consistent with the prescribed obligation and right of civil servants, but also to make better and more efficient use of available resources to better and more efficiently implement activities / projects / initiatives / other tasks.