

Montenegro: a problematic EU candidate

On 17 December the Council of the EU officially granted Montenegro EU candidate status. This decision is a signal for the Balkan countries that the enlargement process is being continued. However, it cannot be expected that accession negotiations will begin soon since they are on condition that ambitious reforms and an effective fight with corruption and organised crime are introduced.

Before launching the negotiations Montenegro will have to fulfil a series of conditions, among them, to harmonise electoral law with the constitution, to increase the potential of the public administration, to guarantee freedom for the media and to intensify cooperation between the government and civil society (e.g. non-governmental organisations). Due to the venal situation in politics and the economy, the major challenge will be to guarantee independence to the judicial system and to effectively tackle corruption and organised crime.

The Montenegrin political scene is dominated by the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) of the current prime minister, Milo Diukanovic that has been continually in power since 1991. The party's hegemony has perpetuated a system of informal influences and extends its control to the media, economy, administration and judicial system. This makes it more difficult to combat corruption and organised crime which often involves people connected with DPS.

Four days after EU candidate status had been granted to Montenegro Prime Minister Diukanovic, who is accused of involvement in smuggling cigarettes by the Italian prosecutor's office, handed in his resignation. He will however maintain control over the government as the leader of DPS and through his informal influences. Igor Luksic, the present finance minister, will probably be appointed new prime minister. This move means that the current structure of power will be preserved and will constitute the main obstacle to effectively fighting corruption and consequently to meeting the conditions set by the EU.

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