



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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**FIRST MEETING OF THE EU - MONTENEGRO  
STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION COUNCIL  
Joint Press Release**

The Stabilisation and Association Council (SA Council) between the European Union and Montenegro held its first meeting on 14 June 2010. The meeting was chaired by the Spanish State Secretary for the European Union, Mr. Diego Lopez Garrido, on behalf of the High Representative Catherine Ashton. Montenegro was represented by Mr Milan Roćen, Minister of Foreign Affairs. The meeting was also attended by Mr Stefan Fuele, Commissioner for Enlargement.

The European Union welcomed the holding of the first meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the EU and Montenegro, following entry into force on 1 May 2010 of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). The SAA will provide the contractual framework within which the EU and Montenegro will intensify their co-operation and take stock of developments in their relationship. The SAA marks a new qualitative stage in bilateral relations, implying significant new obligations and engagement. The SAA will be the core of bilateral relations.

The SA Council recalled the ministerial political dialogue meeting on 23 February 2010 which reviewed bilateral relations, political and economic developments in Montenegro and in the region. It confirmed the constructive relations between the parties and the concurrent views on developments in the Western Balkans.

The SA Council was informed by Montenegro about its submission, on 15 December 2008, of an application for membership to the European Union. The EU noted that the application is being assessed according to the principles set out in the Treaty on European Union and the criteria defined by the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993, as well as the December 2006 European Council conclusions on the renewed consensus for enlargement and the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association Process. The Council will return to the matter when the Commission has presented its opinion.

**P R E S S**

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The SA Council highlighted the importance of regional cooperation which is as essential element of the Stabilisation and Association Process. Pointing to regional cooperation and reconciliation efforts in the Western Balkans, the SA Council appreciated the results of the High Level Meeting in Sarajevo on 2 June. It welcomes the constructive role of Montenegro in maintaining regional stability and fostering good relations with other Western Balkan and neighbouring EU countries, Montenegro's satisfactory cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the continued active participation of Montenegro in various regional initiatives in South Eastern Europe, including the Central European Free Trade Agreement, the Central European Initiative, the Adriatic Ionian Initiative and the South East Europe Cooperation Process which are or will be presided over by Montenegro.

The SA Council reviewed developments related to the political criteria. It noted that Montenegro has continued to make progress in addressing issues related to democracy and the rule of law which are fundamental aspects of the political criteria for EU accession. The Constitution is on the whole implemented effectively. The EU welcomes the fact that parliamentary elections held in March 2009 met almost all OSCE and Council of Europe standards and the orderly conduct of municipal elections in May 2010. The EU calls for further efforts to meet the recommendations of the 2009 ODIHR report, including on minority representation and for the completion of the alignment of the electoral legislation with the Constitution. The SA Council noted that, upon request of the Government of Montenegro, the Venice Commission drafted an expert opinion on the Bill on the Election of Members of Parliament and the Members of Local Parliament, which is to be taken into consideration in the process of finalising the Bill.

The SA Council noted that Montenegro is further pursuing the completion of its legal framework and strengthening institutional and administrative capacity. The EU encourages Montenegro to focus particularly on the implementation of legislation enacted and further improve administrative capacity, which remains limited, including for the non-trade-related provisions of the SAA and for its implementation. The EU encourages Montenegro to step up its current efforts on improving administrative capacity and establishing a professional, accountable, transparent and merit-based civil service free of political interference.

The SA Council also reviewed progress on judicial reform, which is a key European Partnership priority, noting that further progress has been made in Montenegro, notably regarding the adoption of a new Criminal Procedure Code, the functioning of the Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils and reductions in court case backlogs. The EU calls Montenegro to step up efforts to ensure independence of the judiciary and the prosecution from political influence, as well as to enhance the accountability and efficiency of the judicial system.

The SA Council supported the good progress achieved in enhancing the legal and administrative framework regarding efforts in the fight against corruption and organised crime. The SA Council was informed by Montenegro of specific results which it had recently achieved in this field. The EU considers that corruption and organised crime continue to be particularly serious concerns and called on Montenegro to step up its efforts to effectively implement legislation, strengthen investigation capacities and coordination of law-enforcement agencies. It recalled that greater efforts to establish and empower independent supervisory authorities are necessary.

The SA Council noted positively that in Montenegro the legislative framework was already broadly in place on human rights and the respect for and protection of minorities, in accordance with the Copenhagen political criteria. The EU encouraged Montenegro to implement measures to fulfil its commitments in these areas. The EU further highlighted the need to improve awareness of the judiciary about all aspects of human rights violations and added that further efforts are needed in the area of fighting ill-treatment and torture as well as ensuring access to justice for all citizens.

The SA Council noted that Montenegro has achieved some progress on freedom of expression. It welcomed drafting of a set of laws in accordance with the recommendations and conclusions of the EC as well as Montenegro's commitment to further step up its efforts in this area. The EU stressed the importance of respecting media freedom, which is a fundamental pillar of good governance and accountability, as well as the importance of strengthening media self-regulation to foster ethical and professional standards.

The SA Council was informed that Montenegro is committed to improving the efficiency of its legal and institutional framework on anti-discrimination, on the fight against domestic violence as well as on social dialogue. The EU underlines the need for further improvements in the above areas. The EU encourages Montenegro to take action to progress on children's rights, to improve trade union representations and social dialogue and to combat discrimination against LGBT persons in line with EU and international standards.

The SA Council welcomes the good inter-ethnic climate in Montenegro which is creating conditions for further progress in this area. It looks forward to further improvement, in particular through better cooperation between the authorities and the Minority Councils and better representation of persons belonging to minorities in public administration, police and judiciary as well as in the parliament and local government. The EU welcomes specific steps which Montenegro is taking to improve the situation of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) population but also notes that the RAE population continues to face very difficult living conditions and that further activities should be taken in order to prevent any kind of discrimination of the RAE population, to improve their access to education, social protection, health care, housing and employment.

The SA Council acknowledged that displaced and internally displaced persons need to be provided with clear legal status and access to fundamental rights. Montenegro informed the SA Council on its efforts to implement the government's action plan in order to address this issue. The EU encourages Montenegro to make further efforts in order to find a sustainable solution to the situation in the Konik camp.

The SA Council welcomed the progress and efforts of Montenegro to become a functioning market economy. It noted that the small and open Montenegrin economy was harshly hit by the global financial and economic crisis. It considers important the several measures taken in adjusting to a more balanced growth model - and encourages to continue in this vein - as economic diversification would mitigate the current risks of a large exposure to a limited number of sectors.

Concerning public finance, the SA Council acknowledged that improving the quality of public finances by restraining current public spending while enhancing productive expenditures would strengthen the basis for future growth. Noting that the competitiveness of the economy still needs improvement, the EU calls on Montenegro to continue

implementing the structural reform agenda, upgrading infrastructure and skills, enhancing institutional capacity and sustaining efforts to enhance the rule of law.

The SA Council welcomed that Montenegro is aligning its legislation and capacity with European standards and implementing contractual commitments, in particular in areas such as trade liberalisation and customs. It acknowledged that in other areas, such as statistics, energy, transport and intellectual property rights progress needs to be intensified and that further progress on quality standards, veterinary and phytosanitary control is necessary to fully benefit from trade concessions under the SAA.

The SA Council welcomes that Montenegro had implemented the Interim Agreement well and contributed to the smooth functioning of the various joint institutions such as the Interim Committee and thematic Subcommittees. The EU recalled that the entry into force of the SAA in the areas of justice, freedom and security, free movement of workers, right of establishment and free movement of capital and services as well as on transport, audiovisual and electronic communications.

The SA Council welcomed the holding of the fourth Inter-parliamentary meeting between representatives of the European Parliament and the Parliament of Montenegro in October 2009 advanced the parliamentary dimension of EU-Montenegro relations.

The SA Council noted that Montenegro is currently eligible for components I (Transition Assistance and Institution Building) and II (Cross Border Cooperation) of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The financial allocations are of a total of € 100,9 million between 2009 and 2011. The SA Council appreciates the initial steps taken by Montenegro to prepare for decentralised management of IPA funds and encourages Montenegro to further strengthen related efforts in this regard.

The SA Council welcomes the participation of Montenegro in the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for research, technological development and in the Entrepreneurship and Innovation component of the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme and Culture 2007 - 2013. The EU looks forward to Montenegro's participation in further Community programmes in the future.

The SA Council exchanged views on the developments in the Western Balkans. The SA Council noted that Montenegro has aligned itself to 92,7% of the EU's CFSP declarations in 2008, 95,8% in 2009 and 100% in 2010. It expressed satisfaction about the upward trend.

Montenegro informed the SA Council on activities concerning the regional initiatives it is presiding over, namely the Central European Initiative and the Adriatic Ionian Initiative. The EU warmly welcomes these efforts. It notes with great satisfaction that Montenegro will take over the chairmanship of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) in a crucial moment when the SEEC will have to give political guidance to the implementation of the new strategy and work plan of the Regional Cooperation Council. It wishes Montenegro well in these endeavours. The SA Council fully supports efforts to rationalise regional cooperation and improve the efficiency of the RCC.

The SA Council welcomes the establishment of the Regional School for Public Administration (ReSPA) in Danilovgrad and looks forward to its future operations.

The SA Council was informed by the EU that the bilateral non-surrender agreement of Montenegro with the United States of America is still not in line with relevant EU guiding principles concerning arrangements between a State Party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the USA.

The SA Council welcomed each delegation's decision to nominate SAA co-secretaries (M. Antonio Krcalovic for Montenegro and M Jonas Jonsson for the EU).

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