

# Montenegro's Upcoming NATO Membership – Internal, Regional and International Implications

## Policy Recommendations<sup>1</sup> Study Group Regional Stability in South East Europe

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ATLANTIC COUNCIL  
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### Executive Summary of Recommendations:

- Political parties from Montenegro: calm down the NATO accession issue after the elections – be politically as transparent as possible and stick to the democratic rules in line with the Montenegrin Constitution.
- Governments from South East Europe: enable more cooperation between the regional intelligence services in the fight against organized crime and terrorism.
- EU and NATO: use the dynamics in the NATO enlargement process to initiate a security dialogue between Belgrade and Priština/Prishtina.
- Belgrade and Priština/Prishtina: see such a security dialogue as a chance to substantially improve the security environment.
- NATO: use tools from the PfP to enhance the cooperation with Kosovo, even before its membership in the PfP.
- NATO: enhance the cooperation with Serbia in the scope of PfP.
- NATO: take a pro-active stance to overcome Macedonia's hurdles to become a member country.



for Peace Program (PfP) the military-political program of bilateral cooperation between partner countries and NATO. From that point on, Montenegro has achieved a lot. It has implemented numerous reforms in order to improve democratic standards. During 2007, Montenegro submitted the questionnaire on the Planning and Review Process (PARP). The following year, NATO approved the beginning of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) process for Montenegro which resulted in the invitation to implement the Membership Action Plan in December 2009.

### Situation Analysis

Soon after regaining its independence on 21 May 2006 Montenegro decided to take the Euro-Atlantic integration path. The integration into NATO and the EU became two main foreign policy goals. In November of the same year, relations between Montenegro and NATO became official after Montenegro received the invitation to take part in the accession to the Partnership

### Montenegro's Accession to NATO and its Possible Effects on Internal Stability

In 2009, Montenegro's parliament decided in favour of allowing its soldiers to participate in international missions and operations. One year later, in 2010, Montenegro was recognized as the 44<sup>th</sup> non-NATO country contributor to the ISAF operation in Afghanistan. To the present day, 364 members of the Armed Forces of Montenegro, or 18% of the total

active soldiers registered in the Armed Forces, have served in international peace and stability missions.

The Armed Forces and the entire defence sector need to be adapted to the new strategic and security landscape, as well as the interests and objectives be defined at the national level. The reform of Montenegro's defence sector includes a set of restructurings in the areas of planning, financing, organization of the Armed Forces, management and control, as well as building institutions and the necessary infrastructure.

At the time of regaining its independence, there were over 6000 soldiers situated on Montenegrin territory,



while today their number has been significantly reduced to 1,950 members of Armed Forces. Graduating from brigade to battalion, the organization has provided more efficient structure units within the Armed Forces and adapted a wide range of security challenges and standards of modern armed forces. Bearing in mind that one of the greatest security risks for Montenegro is surplus ordnance in the warehouses of the Armed Forces, the number today is significantly lower than in 2006, being reduced from almost 11,000 tons to around 2,112 tons.

In order to stay professional and capable, the Armed Forces of Montenegro have recognized the importance of investing in training. Since 2006, 58 soldiers have completed their education at various prestigious military academies abroad. Currently, there are 28 cadets of the Armed Forces of Montenegro being educated in Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Croatia and the United States. In 2013, Montenegro conducted a new Strategic Defence Review and is currently developing a long-term development plan for its Armed Forces. These documents will provide a basis for a comprehensive reform of the country's defence system.

Montenegro has committed to participate in the post-transition mission in Afghanistan after 2014, which

will be non-combat in nature and focus on training, advising, and assisting Afghan National Security Forces under the Resolute Support Mission.

The tireless work and readiness to reform its whole system was rewarded with the official invitation to join NATO, announced on 2 December 2015. At the ministerial meeting in May 2016, NATO members signed the Accession Protocol. Montenegro attended the NATO Summit in Warsaw under the „invitee“ status. The ratification of the Protocol on the Accession of Montenegro will be finalized by spring 2017.

The main question is whether the decision on the integration of Montenegro into NATO should be decided in the parliament or decided directly by its citizens in a referendum. However, according to the constitution, parliament is not obliged to organize a referendum on this issue, because Montenegro is not losing sovereignty by joining NATO. Certain groups in Montenegro believe that the government is afraid to call a referendum on the matter. Their main argument is that Montenegrins are highly against the country's further involvement in NATO, but numerous polls state otherwise. According to the latest surveys, 76.6% of the citizens of Montenegro think that the country will become a full member of NATO. There is also the question of the relationship with Russia and how the accession of Montenegro into NATO will affect it.

### **Intraregional Security Cooperation – Chances and Impediments**

The Balkan Peninsula, more specifically the SEE region, has always been a point of interest for both the East and the West. In the last decade Montenegro has actively worked on joining the Western family through reforms of its entire system, which had negative impact not only on the relationship between Russia and Montenegro, but also on Russia's relations with countries being already NATO members. According to estimations this could jeopardize the already vulnerable stability in South East Europe.

However, most of the neighbouring countries of Montenegro, in particular Albania, Croatia, Kosovo and Macedonia, appreciate Montenegro's upcoming NATO membership. More distanced or neutral reactions to this issue came from politicians in Serbia and Serbian politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In general, Montenegro's progress in approaching NATO membership is perceived as a positive signal also by the other candidate and aspirant countries to overcome their political hurdles for NATO membership. This applies above all to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. Currently, Kosovo is the only South East European country that is not taking part in any integration into a security-political framework. This unsatisfying situation is contrary to the spirit of cooperative security.



South East Europe is of importance for achieving lasting and overall stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. Therefore, increased cooperation regarding the global security challenges should be a priority with the goal to prevent further spreading of terrorism and radicalization as well as human trafficking and organized crime. By improving the current bilateral agreements and implementing the right strategies, a safe and secure South East European region can overcome the burden of its history.

Additional efforts should be put on joint action for environmental protection, in particular through systematic exchange of information, bilateral and multilateral agreements and concrete common projects mainly in the border areas. Furthermore, development of cooperation in fields such as human dimension, democratization, justice and the rule of law, inter-ethnic tolerance, free circulation of ideas and individuals, youth education, programs to eliminate misperceptions and prejudices is essential in order to improve regional cooperation and strengthen the stability and security of the South East European region. In order to solve common problems, cooperation is essential, but the real challenge is to establish permanent and effective mechanisms that will focus on resolving the issues of the South East European region.

### **International Views on the Security-Policy Development in South East Europe**

The European Union – despite its symptoms of crisis – is now the most influential factor in South East Europe due to the fact that the US foreign policy focus turned more to the Middle and Far East. However, we cannot ignore the influence in the region of the US, Russia and Turkey.

While Montenegro's economy has been dependent on Russian investors since the country declared independence from Serbia at the referendum in 2006, it also became politically independent from Moscow. However, the Kremlin refuses to completely lose its influence in the country, and tries to maintain it by supporting those opposing political parties in Montenegro, which have a pronounced pro-Putin and anti-NATO orientation.

Economic investments in the region are sustaining the interest of different subjects whose political influence is on the line. The current important new investments in the Western Balkans comes from Azerbaijan, Turkey and Arab countries. Russia and Turkey want to use economic investments to keep or enhance their political influence in the region. But here they are surpassing each other, given the fact that the focus of Turkey is in the Muslim parts of the region which are of minor interest to Russia.

The biggest influence in this region holds the EU, regardless of the historical ties between the Western Balkan countries and Russia. The Balkan countries



clearly stated their willingness to join the EU, regardless of the difficulties the EU is currently facing.

### **Summary of Recommendations Regarding Montenegro's Accession to NATO and its Possible Effects on Internal Stability**

- The political parties should clarify their standpoints concerning NATO membership of Montenegro and at the same time declare their willingness to accept the subsequent decision of the newly composed parliament concerning the ratification process (referendum or parliamentary decision), as well as to refrain from mobilizing their followers to demonstrations or violent acts challenging the outcome.<sup>2</sup>
- A part of the political elite avoids to take a stand. These politicians hope that the voters will give them an answer and help them to determine their positions. Apart from Hungary and Slovenia, all other NATO membership decisions were taken by national parliaments. The government and the opposition should take the decision regarding the referendum as an indication on how to move forward.<sup>3</sup>
- Political leaders and parties should be more open, especially in the period after the elections. Taking a clear position on major political issues should improve the relation with Western partners but also rebuild public trust in institutions.
- Projecting stability is crucial to Montenegro and it also affects the whole region – if Montenegro is stable, it will increase the stability of neighbouring countries as well.
- Combat operations are not mandatory. Every member state can reject or accept to join various operations, just like Germany refused to contribute military forces to Libya.
- A survey study should investigate the perceptions and collective memory related to NATO. This could be useful to gather the key issues and clues in



launching an information campaign.<sup>4</sup>

- When it comes to the internal political situation in Montenegro, it is recommended that all political actors should stick to the democratic rules in line with the constitution.

### Intraregional Security Cooperation – Chances and Impediments

- NATO and the EU should initiate confidence-building measures between Belgrade and Priština/Prishtina in the area of security.<sup>5</sup>
- Such confidence-building measures could facilitate Kosovo's future participation in the PfP. This would improve the overall security situation in the region, in particular between Serbia and Kosovo.<sup>6</sup>
- The bilateral security situation between Belgrade and Priština/Prishtina should be included by the EU in the agenda of the Belgrade-Priština/Prishtina dialogue.
- In regard to global security challenges there should be more cooperation between the regional intelligence services in fighting against organized crime and terrorism. Establishing a Regional Center of Intelligence could prevent this region from becoming more suitable for the spreading of radical Islam and organized crime.

### International Views on Security-Policy Development in SEE

- NATO should enhance cooperation with Kosovo by using the instruments of the PfP, i.e. Partnership Action Plan and the Planning and Review Process of the Partnership.<sup>7</sup>
- NATO should enhance its cooperation with Serbia in the scope of PfP, regardless of the fact that Serbia will not become a NATO member in the foreseeable future.
- NATO should take a more pro-active stance towards Greece when it comes to resolving the “name issue” with Macedonia so that this former Yugoslav Republic could become a NATO member as soon as possible and enhance the stability of the region.
- Despite of the current geostrategic rivalry, Russia and NATO should use all opportunities to resume cooperation in the fight against terrorism and other global security challenges, both within the Russia-NATO Council and beyond.
- Despite of its deficiencies, the EU integration process for this part of South East Europe will remain the most important vehicle for fostering regional consolidation until further notice. Therefore, pro-active integration policies of the EU as well as a clear orientation on democratic and legal standards by the candidate countries would be necessary.

1 These policy recommendations reflect the findings of the 33<sup>rd</sup> RSSEE workshop on “Montenegro’s Upcoming NATO Membership– Internal, Regional and International Implications”, convened by the PfP Consortium Study Group “Regional Stability in South East Europe”, the Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna/Austria, the Directorate General for Security Policy at the Austrian Ministry of Defence and Sports, Vienna/Austria and the Atlantic Council of Montenegro, from September 22 to September 25 in Budva/Montenegro. They were prepared by Milena Savović, Atlantic Council of Montenegro.

2 This paper was written prior to the parliamentary elections in Montenegro.

3 Ibid.

4-7 Not all participants agreed on this matter.