

MONTENEGRO AND NATO – CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT: Foreign policy agenda of Montenegro from the restoration of independence was moving into direction of European and Euro-Atlantic integrations. There was a high level of consensus in the country, especially when it comes to joining the European Union. Montenegro has formally started negotiations with the EU in late July 2012, and now is at the door step of NATO bearing in the mind the commitment to contribute to the preservation of peace at the regional and global level. Montenegro in July 2009 made a decision to engage the army representatives in the ISAF mission in Afganistan. The officials expect the invitation for membership in NATO to the end of this year, but it is more evident that not everything in this story depends on Montenegro.

Key words: NATO, shallenges, perspectives, security, reform.

Introduction

After the SFRY was disintegrated and the communism collapsed in this region, Montenegro remained in a state union with Serbia. In the early 2000s, the Government of Montenegro decided to gradually return the functions and authorities, previously devolved to Federation by the 1992 Constitution, under the jurisdiction of the State of Montenegro. Thus Montenegro started the process of establishing its own economic, monetary, legal, political and security system, while moving towards regaining its independence at a referendum. Under pressure from the European Union, the Montenegrin governing authorities signed the Belgrade Agreement on March 14th, 2002, which set forth the parameters for a new joint state established under the name of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, thus agreeing not to hold a referendum on

independence in Montenegro over the next three years. After a very difficult negotiation process participated actively by the EU and the Venice Commission, the majority necessary for the declaration of independence was set at 55% of voters who cast their ballots. It ensured high legitimacy to the referendum results on 21st May 2006, of 55.5% in favor of independence wing and the regaining of independence of Montenegro at 86.5% of turnout at the polls. The way Montenegro regained its independence was the reason that it was recognized by most countries and became a member of the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe shortly afterwards.

On July 3rd 2006 the Parliament of Montenegro adopted *the Declaration of Independence of Montenegro*, which marked the membership in the NATO as a strategic priority.³² The major focus of the first Government in the independent Montenegro was directed towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration and the development of political and military cooperation with NATO.³³ It did not take long for Montenegro to start official relations with the NATO. The relations actually began the same year when Montenegro regained its independence. Since Montenegro formally began a Membership Action Plan (MAP) in 2009, it is currently one of the first official NATO-aspirant countries to be given the full NATO membership. Although Montenegro expected to be invited to join the NATO during the summit in Wales in September 2014, it did not happen for several reasons. The NATO allies made such a decision primarily due to the current Ukraine crisis, as well as the opinion that Montenegro should continue to implement the conditions and standards of its reform agenda that will bring it closer to the NATO membership. The most vital of these reforms concern meeting the following four issues: strengthening the rule of law; facing and fighting organized crime; balanced funding of the security sector; public support for Montenegrin aspiration to join the NATO.

Montenegro in the Partnership for Peace

Official relations between Montenegro and the NATO began on 29th November 2006, when Montenegro was invited to join the PfP during the Riga Summit. Next month Montenegro was given the status of observer in the Adriatic Charter. The invitation for the PfP membership was received only six months after Montenegro regained its

³² Dubljević Radonja, "Pet godina od Deklaracije nezavisne Crne Gore", Matica, proljeće 2011, p.10

³³ Rezolucija o neophodnosti ubrzanja procesa integracija Crne Gore u evropske i evroatlantske strukture, Službeni list Crne Gore, 9. Oktobar 2010.

independence, which is a remarkable achievement and confirmation of Montenegro's commitment and dedication on its path to Euro-Atlantic integration.

The cooperation of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro resulted in developing the Presentation Document which was then drafted and passed by the Government and presented in Brussels at the NATO headquarters, on April 25th, 2007. This document stressed the membership in NATO as one of the most significant political and security priorities of Montenegro, and highlighted the following actions to be taken in order to achieve this goal in the forthcoming period: developing bilateral and multilateral political cooperation at the regional level and within NATO; enhancing cooperative military relations with the NATO Partners and Allies; implementing the defense system reform and building up long-term defense capabilities and military forces that would be interoperable with the NATO member states' forces; reinforcing a system of democratic control of the armed forces; raising public awareness among the citizens of Montenegro and clarifying the benefits of membership in NATO to its public.³⁴

On the very same day when the Presentation Document was introduced at the NATO headquarters in Brussels, Montenegro and the NATO signed *the Agreement on security of information with NATO (eng. Agreement on security of information)*, along with a bilateral Agreement that mutually guaranteed the minimum standards required for the protection of exchanged information and provided the State authorities of Montenegro access to the information marked under a certain level of classification.³⁵ Conclusion of the said Agreement has created the conditions for an active role of Montenegro in the PfP and the access to the NATO documents which are necessary in the implementation of practical actions in the field of scientific and military - technical cooperation, holding joint military exercises, etc. The first inspection control regarding the implementation of this Agreement was carried out at the beginning of March 2010. After this visit, the Security Office submitted the official report including a positive assessment of the measures undertaken on the protection of the NATO classified information.³⁶

³⁴ Presentation document of the Republic of Montenegro, www.odbrana.gov.me

³⁵ Tahirović Mehmedin, „Crna Gora na putu u NATO“, Podgorica 2010, p. 59

³⁶ Ibidem, p.61

PfP Mechanisms and Tools

Participating in *PARP* mechanism was the first step within the PfP activities. After receiving the PARP Questionnaire sent by the NATO in mid 2007, Montenegro started working on the replies which were officially delivered in September of the same year. PARP compliance assessment experts visited Montenegro in December. After the compliance procedure was successfully completed, 32 partnership objectives were agreed on to be met by Montenegro within a two-year timeframe, whereas the PARP assessment and partnership objectives were officially adopted by the end of March 2008. As far as the Montenegrin partnership objectives were concerned, this first PARP set of partnership objectives mostly focused on the activities related to the implementation of language learning, budget planning, building up the interoperable military units, developing planning and budgeting procedures, as well as drafting the Strategic Defense Review.³⁷ If we look at the figures, 26 out of 32 partnership objectives are related to the Ministry of Defense and the Army of Montenegro, 4 to the Police Directorate, 1 to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and 1 to the Directorate for Personal Data Protection.³⁸ In June 2008, Montenegro received the second PARP Questionnaire, prepared its reply and submitted it to the NATO by the end of September 2009. Montenegro delivered its reply to the third PARP Questionnaire in October 2010, and completed the compliance of the PARP assessment in March 2011. The reply to the fourth PARP Questionnaire was delivered in October 2012. Montenegro will harmonize the PARP assessment for 2015 with the Allies on the grounds of this reply.

The Presentation Document was submitted to the NATO on June 24th 2008, on the day Montenegro entered the Intensified Dialogue with the NATO, whereas it was adopted on the North Atlantic Council meeting on July 15th 2008. All the important issues that the State should address by the date of its accession to the full NATO membership are put forth in the IPAP of Montenegro. The main goals set out in the IPAP include the following:

*Political and security issues; The defense, security and military objectives;
Public information, science, the environment and crisis management issues;
Administrative issues and Information Security.*³⁹

³⁷ Tahirović Mehmedin, „Proces planiranja i revizije PARP“, Partner, no.3, 2008, p.10.

³⁸ Ibidem

³⁹ Individualni partnerski akcioni plan Crne Gore i NATO, Podgorica 2008, p.7

The first annual assessment of IPAP conducted by the NATO delegation in March 2009 resulted in a positive evaluation given by the Alliance. Another NATO PfP mechanism, *Intensified Dialogue* (eng. *Intensified dialogue, ID*) was being implemented simultaneously with the IPAP.

Four meetings have been held within the Intensified Dialogue between Montenegro and the NATO, as this mechanism is implemented in the form of meetings between the North Atlantic Council and the high representatives of the relevant State.

Intensified Dialogue between Montenegro and the NATO was finalized during the meeting of the North Atlantic Council on March 9th 2009, after it was concluded that the Alliance was satisfied with the progress achieved in establishing relations with Montenegro. Certain expectations which followed the invitation for participation in this programme, such as the invitation for participation in the Membership Action Plan, were considered to have been fulfilled due to a successful completion of the Intensified Dialogue.

Since February 2007 Montenegro is taking part in the PfP programme *Science for Peace*, which links scientists from the NATO member and partner countries. Montenegro has also been implementing the GEPSUS Project since December 2010, (*Geographical Information Processing for Environmental Pollution – Related Security within Urban scale Environment*) dealing with the simulation of accidents that result in uncontrolled emission of air pollutants and the release of poisonous gasses. There are more on-going projects, such as the project of *Harmonization of Seismic Hazard Maps for the Western Balkan Countries*, with the Institute of Hydrometeorology and Seismology of Montenegro as a leading partner in this project, as well as the project entitled *Increasing the Clearance Capacity for Unexploded Ordnance in Montenegro*, which is going to be implemented in stages by 2016, with the Directorate for Emergency Situations as a project leader.⁴⁰

Security and Defense Sector Reform

In order to start with the activities in the PfP, it was necessary to draft up some of the most important strategic documents in a very short time, so the Strategy on National Security was adopted in June 2006, while the Defense Strategy and the Law on Army, as well as the Law on Defense were adopted in July 2007. The Ministry of Defense

⁴⁰ Alijansa za nauku, www.natomontenegro.me, august 2014.

of Montenegro was established at the end of 2006, ie at the time when Montenegro had already become a member of the PfP. This was followed by the adoption of the new Constitution, given that during the post-referendum period the 1992 Constitution had been effective. The adoption of the new Constitution required two-thirds vote in the Parliament, so it took a while before the new Constitution was passed on 19th October 2007. The constitutional and legal preconditions for the reform of the security sector were met by passing the new Constitution.

Activities and operations aimed at the equipping and modernization of the Army of Montenegro will also be one of the main objectives during 2015, just as they used to be in the previous years. Five key priorities have been specified in this regard: purchase of equipment for reserve forces; modernization of Command - operations center; supply of multi-purpose transport helicopters; purchase of modern radars for air surveillance; setting up an operational center in the Air Force of Montenegro.⁴¹

The new Strategy on National Security was passed by the Parliament at the end of November 2008, the new Defense Strategy was adopted the next month, whereas the new Law on Army of Montenegro was passed on December 23rd 2009. The Strategy on National Security confirmed the commitment of Montenegro to undertake all necessary actions to meet the requirements of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The Strategy outlined Montenegrin desire to establish good relations with the NATO and indicated that the integration into the NATO is deemed a security interest and objective of Montenegro. Complementary to the objectives set out in the Strategy on National Security, the Defense Strategy of Montenegro stated that Montenegro is focused on the implementation of developing operational capacities necessary for obtaining the full membership in the NATO, in order to achieve its strategic defense objective.⁴²

Montenegrin 2009 Law on Army stipulates democratic and civilian army control.⁴³ In terms of its organisation, Montenegro has opted for a fully professional standing army. Montenegro has observed the international standards regarding the size of its Army forces, so a total number of active duty members comprises 0.39% of the state population. The armed forces include all the three military branches – the army, air force and the navy. Considering the NATO's initiative that, in addition to the financial and military resources, each member state should also have appropriate human resources

⁴¹ „Partner“, mjesečnik, Ministarstvo odbrane Crne Gore, no.61, 2014, p.9

⁴² Strategija odbrane Crne Gore, Službeni list Crne Gore, december 2008.

⁴³ Zakon o Vojsci Crne Gore, Službeni list Crne Gore, 23. Decembar 2008.

available, there has been an emerging need to enhance administrative capacities as a necessary precondition for the further integration process of Montenegro. Therefore, Montenegro has had to seek assistance from NATO partners through various projects, such as the Norwegian project of *Defense and Security Sector Reforms* (eng. *Defense and Security Sector Reforms, DSSR*), American *Programme of International Education and Training* (eng. *International Military Education and Training Programme, IMET*), an arrangement signed with the US corporation Military Professional Resources on training the Montenegrin contingent for peacekeeping operations. Special attention has been paid to strengthening the administrative capacity of the Ministry of Defense, as the key institution in the process of building up an effective defense system. Consequently, the *Development Strategy for Human Resource Management (HRM) in the Ministry of Defense of Montenegro* was adopted in March 2014, as the first strategic document in the field of human resources management in the relevant ministry. The principles of competence and professionalism in the civil service that the NATO particularly insists upon are those which must be primarily followed in the process of strengthening administrative capacities. The reform of the *National Security Agency*, as a security – intelligence service operating as an integral part of the Montenegrin security system, is extremely important within the overall process of the security sector reforms. This Service is defined as one of the components of the intelligence and security sector of Montenegro by the 2014 *Law on Basic Principles of Montenegrin Intelligence and Security Sector*. The security sector reforms, including the NSA, require a new, reformed National Security Agency, which, in addition to protecting the national security interests, will also operate as a linking point of the NATO intelligence community. A significant progress has been achieved in the NSA reform process over the last few years. 22 bylaws and general acts were adopted during 2012 and 2013, as well as the 10 regulations in the area of financial management and control. The relevant state authorities are currently working on amendments to the NSA Law. As indicated by the *Bill on Amendments to the Law on the National Security Agency*, the adoption of this law has been proposed with the aim to improve the legal framework of the NSA operations, within the process of Euro-Atlantic integration and the implementation of recommendations related to the invitation to join the NATO that Montenegro received. The Government of Montenegro established the *Bill on Amendments to the Law on the National Security Agency* at its session on June 5th

2014, while the Assembly of Montenegro adopted it on 17th February 2015. Montenegro will finalize the reforms cycle in this area upon the completion of the NSA reform.⁴⁴

Participation of Montenegrin Army Members in NATO-Led Missions

The Army of Montenegro took part in the ISAF peacekeeping mission in 2010, and their deployment lasted until the end of the mission, ie 31st December 2014. During that period there were 10 rotations of Montenegrin soldiers in Afghanistan, and 10 contingents of armed forces members were deployed with the ISAF mission. During the first 3 years of deployment within the mission, Montenegrin contingents were involved in the tasks of securing the base Pannonia in Pol-e Chomri. Since March 2013, Montenegrin Army troops have been disposed in the base Marmal with the task to protect the coalition forces. The last, 10th Montenegrin contingent in ISAF mission included 15 members. Following the completion of the ISAF mission, a new, NATO-led mission called *Resolute Support* was launched, with Montenegrin Army members participating. Currently 15 members of the Army of Montenegro are deployed within the *Resolute Support*, with the responsibility to provide security to the allied teams for training the Afghan national security forces, advise, and provide in-place and on-the-move assistance.⁴⁵

The Citizens of Montenegro and NATO

The Communication Strategy on Euro-Atlantic Integration of Montenegro was adopted in October 2007. As a strategic document with regard to informing the public on Euro-Atlantic integration, the Communication strategy has been an instrument for achieving a clear goal, ie to keep the public fully informed on the issue, in order to ensure a successful implementation of the Euro-Atlantic integration process.

The Government formed the Coordination Team for Implementation of Communication Strategy on Euro-Atlantic integration of Montenegro, competent for drawing up and implementing six-month action plans, as well as for preparing semiannual reports for the Government. The funds for the implementation of the Strategy are allocated from the State budget. Monitoring the Communication Strategy implementation will be realized, *inter alia*, on the basis of public opinion polls. What is interesting for

⁴⁴Tahirović Mehmedin, Petrić Renato, „Integracija Crne Gore u NATO“, Podgorica 2015, p.121.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p.152-155.

analysis and of great importance to the Euro-Atlantic integration process are actually public opinion polls, ie the results of these surveys.

Over the past nine years, the citizens' attitude towards the NATO membership has been different comparing to the public opinion on the EU accession, as Montenegro is also an aspiring EU member. While the attitude towards the EU accession is consistently positive, it is not the case with the NATO. The explanation for this situation may be found in several reasons, such as the specific nature of the NATO alliance, the lack of information among the citizens on the core concept of the Alliance, the recent history with the NATO involvement in the region and the country that Montenegro was a part of, etc. Based on the public opinion poll conducted by the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) in June 2008, and needed for the Communication Team for Implementation of Communication Strategy, only 27,6% of citizens supported the idea of joining the NATO, with 38,5% opposed and 33,9% undecided. The poll conducted by the Centre for Monitoring (CEMI) in January 2009 showed that 39,5% of citizens supported joining the NATO, 37,9% opposed, while 7% did not have an opinion. The poll conducted in November 2013 by the CEDEM showed that 45% of population had a positive opinion on the membership in the NATO, while 38% opposed and 17% did not have an opinion. The poll taken in September 2014 by the CEDEM showed that 35% of the citizens supported the membership in the NATO, while 45% opposed and 20% did not have an opinion. The same poll provided the information on the population structure, ie the membership in NATO is mostly supported by the citizens with completed primary education, civil servants and state employees, 35-45-year-old citizens, as well as the Albanian nationality population. In March 2015, the support for the NATO membership reached the level of about 38%.⁴⁶

After considering the data given above, we can come to the conclusion that the public opinion and general attitude towards the idea of Montenegro joining the NATO is rather unstable, still showing a slight, but continued and prospering tendency of growth in favour of the NATO integration.

The latest public opinion polls taken by "IPSOS Strategic Marketing" and "Damar" in the first half of June 2015, resulted for the first time with the majority of eligible voters who would support the country's NATO integration process. According to the survey conducted

⁴⁶ Stavovi javnog mnjenja Crne Gore o NATO integracijama, CEDEM (Centar za demokratiju i ljudska prava), Podgorica, decembar 2013, septembar 2014; Ivanović Katarina, „NATO i Zapadni Balkan: komparativni procesi pristupanja i članstva u NATO“, magistarski rad; www.fpn.co.me

by the agency "Damar", 41.6% of citizens said they would support Montenegro's membership in the NATO, while 39.7% would be against it, and 18.7% of the respondents said they would not know. The survey taken by the agency "Ipsos" shows that in case of a referendum, 47% of citizens would vote for the membership, while 41% would be against it.⁴⁷

The Communication team of the Government claim the support for membership in the NATO has increased by about 10% comparing to February 2015. The key reasons for supporting membership are the following: the NATO would guarantee Montenegro's sovereignty and remain a source of stability in the Balkans, preventing any new war conflicts in this region, while on the downside the main reason against the support is the fact that the Alliance bombed Serbia and Montenegro. The percentage of citizens who support NATO has increased due to the public expectations that Montenegro could receive an invitation to join the Alliance, but also due to an intensified campaign carried out by political parties and the civil sector, state the reps of the agencies that conducted the polls.⁴⁸

Intensified and Focused Dialogue between the NATO and Montenegro

As soon as the framework agenda for the Wales Summit was set on 24th June 2014, during the meeting of the NATO member states' foreign ministers held in Brussels, it was obvious and clear that Montenegro would not receive the invitation to join the NATO at the Wales Summit held at the beginning of September 2014, as the issue of enlargement was not included in the agenda. The decision made in June by which Montenegro was not going to be invited to join the Alliance was confirmed at the Wales Summit. In the final Summit Declaration it was outlined that the NATO welcomed Montenegro's progress with reforms and its constructive role in the Western Balkans. Accordingly, the NATO has launched intensified and focused dialogue with Montenegro, and the Alliance will decide on the invitation for membership by the end of 2015.⁴⁹ The form and content of the dialogue will be related to the continuing process of reforms in already mentioned four key reform chapters for Montenegro. Thus NATO has expressed

⁴⁷ „Vijesti“, 24 June 2015.

⁴⁸ „Vijesti“ 25 June 2015.

⁴⁹ Wales Summite Declaration issued by the Head of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, issued on 5. September 2014.

willingness to invite a country to join the Alliance in-between the summits for the first time in its history, based on the decision passed by the foreign ministers, which would be a precedent in the NATO's enlargement policy. As stated in the Declaration, the NATO has encouraged Montenegro to continue with its progress especially in areas such as strengthening the rule of law and reforms of the security sector. Increasing public support for Montenegro's membership in the NATO has been assessed as particularly positive.

In January 2015, the Embassy of Hungary in Montenegro officially became a NATO Contact Point Embassy for cooperation between Montenegro and the NATO. Hungary strongly supports Montenegro on its path to NATO integration, believing that Montenegro has met all the necessary criteria to become the next NATO member state.

In his recent statement, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has confirmed that NATO will make a decision by the end of the year on whether to invite Montenegro to join the Alliance and will not prolong the decision until the Warsaw Summit in July next year. During the press conference in the central NATO headquarters, he has reminded that the dialogue with Montenegro has been intensified and focused. The results, said Stoltenberg, are visible.

"NATO has observed the steady progress Montenegro is making in the intelligence sector, defense sector and the area of the rule of law. We will address the progress you have made and decide by the end of the year," said Stoltenberg.⁵⁰ Montenegro has accepted this as considerable encouragement.

Conclusion

Montenegro is among the smallest countries of the Western Balkans, when it comes to the size of the territory and the population number. However, the geopolitical position of Montenegro, which has an exit to the Adriatic Sea, is of great importance for the whole region and even the whole peninsula. Membership in NATO of this territorially small but geostrategic ally very important country is certainly the objective of the Alliance itself. What NATO gets with Montenegro's membership is a step forward in the strategy of rounding the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region, as a region integrated into its system of collective defence. On the other hand, the benefits for

⁵⁰ „Vijesti“, 3 July 2015.

Montenegro that are most often heard in the Montenegrin public stage by supporters of NATO membership can be grouped as several arguments⁵¹:

- *Preserving the territorial integrity and sovereignty* – Although Montenegro is not threatened by external aggression, due to historical experiences, this reason must be considered reasonable. The very nature of the Western Balkans region, which throughout the history did not have longer periods spent in peace, was sufficient to seek the guarantee for the territorial integrity and sovereignty in the international organisation of this calibre. If we take into account the circumstances in the completely international community, in which no country is able to independently deal with security threats and security risks, then the NATO membership is the best solution for Montenegro.

- *Reform of the national security system* – We already talked about the fact that, after the restoration of independence, Montenegro had to be committed to building of its institutions and not their reform. Through NATO mechanisms, the process of building and reform of all elements of national security was cheaper and more effective.

- *Lower costs for the defence sector* – For Montenegro, the country with still under-developed economy, the NATO's *smart defence* system is of utmost importance, which is more cost-effective than a system of total defence for which Montenegro would not have financial or resource funds.

- *Participation in the collective security system* – Membership in NATO is a guarantee of right to invoke Article 5 of the Articles of Incorporation of NATO, which, at the time of soft security challenges in the international community, is a clause of great value. It is not possible to independently find the response to modern challenges and threats. Cyber crime and terrorism represent one of the major global threats to modern security, and NATO is the only organisation that systematically deals with the protection from these phenomena.⁵²

- *Stable and dynamic development* – Since the end of World War II, NATO members have not been in a longer period of peace and without armed conflicts. This is a quality recommendation for foreign investors who want to invest in Montenegro. With its membership in NATO, Montenegro would be a safe destination for investments and it would send a message to investors about the security of their capital in a safe and non-conflict environment. Being in the company of the most powerful countries, which function on identical values, democracy, the rule of law and human freedoms, is of utmost

⁵¹ Tahirović Mehmedin, Petrić Renato, „Integracija Crne Gore u NATO“, Podgorica 2015, p.188-189

⁵² Ibidem

importance for a country like Montenegro, which needs to develop its economy and society as a whole.⁵³

Opponents of NATO membership believe that Montenegro does not need this membership, since it has no territorial claims towards neighbouring countries and they have no territorial claims towards Montenegro, and that there is no threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty. They argue that the Alliance bombed Serbia and Montenegro and that there were civilian casualties in the territory of Montenegro. Then, they are convinced that this will lead to a deterioration of relations with Russia, which have a long historical tradition. They also express fear that Montenegro will be in greater danger of terrorism, as a NATO member, because of the role of this alliance in various conflicts in the world. Finally, they consider that citizens in a referendum should make the final decision on Montenegro's membership in NATO.

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