



ALDA President Mr. Oriano Otočan Statement

June 2012: Montenegro has officially started negotiations with the EU

One more important step toward the European future of the Balkans has been made by Montenegro, the smallest country that gained its independence in 2006.

Since 2003, when the Thessaloniki Agenda was adopted, the EU enlargement in the Western Balkans has remained a top priority of both governments and citizens in these countries. Intensified monitoring over the progress made particularly with regard to respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic institutions has brought forward deep structural reforms in societies that have only recently closed, perhaps one of the most tragic page in their history.

Despite the raging crisis in Eurozone and the so called “enlargement fatigue”, the Western Balkan remains to be incorporated sooner or later into the EU. The process of harmonization with the EU standards has in the meantime become a clearly regulated set of procedures which all the candidate countries must comply with. Accession negotiations last as long as it is necessary, or as long as the criteria set in the accession chapters are fulfilled.

Each and every country, including certainly Croatia thus may become an excellent learning opportunity for others. Montenegro starts with the most complex chapters – human rights and the rule of law, more as an indication of substantial problems in these areas. The negotiation date has thus become an important date for all the citizens, but even more for the politicians who received more than a clear signal that reforms are necessary and urgent.

Moreover, the negotiation date is an exceptional opportunity for Civil society in Montenegro to intensify both issue based networking and advocacy actions for exerting their fundamental role – evaluation, monitoring and effective participation in the reform process marking an irreversible step into the future. It is them who could use this opportunity to the best of their capacity and also become a reliable partner so as to make the factual change happen.

As ALDA, also through our [Local Democracy Agency in Niksic](#), which was established in 2001, we will even closely follow, step by step, the process of this country toward the European future of the Balkans.

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