

**INTRODUCTORY SPEECH OF THE MINISTER OF EUROPEAN AFFAIRS ALEKSANDAR  
ANDRIJA PEJOVIĆ AT THE CONFERENCE ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTH  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE NEGOTIATIONS**

**29 June 2017**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear members of the Government, Presidents of Municipalities, and representatives of local self-governments, representatives of the diplomatic and international community, Parliamentary representatives, negotiators and chiefs of working groups of the negotiation structure, representatives of the public administration bodies, political parties, universities and institutes, business community, civil society and foundations, thank you all for being here today with us, to jointly mark the day when we, five years ago, opened the negotiations with the European Union. The list of people presents here today shows how broad this process is and how many individuals and institutions are involved in it, which proves best how important the negotiations are for Montenegro.

Although it was not such a long period of time, the last five years were for Montenegro a period of significant and, I can freely say, fundamental social changes which enabled us to make enormous step forward. This step is not reflected only in our progress toward the EU membership but most of all in our firm resolution and devotion to ensure, through providing a higher life quality for our citizens, that Montenegro is anchored in its position in the European family of nations which share the same or similar goals, policies and cooperation mechanisms.

The facts prove how successful we were in this mission. They are clear and irrefutable. Five years after opening negotiations, Montenegro has 28 opened chapters. 3 of which are provisionally closed, and each day we are closer to the EU membership. For a young state which marked the eleventh anniversary of the restoration of independence, this is a great success. This result can bother only those who either do not see their future in the European Union or do not wish their country well.

I remind that so far we submitted negotiation positions for 30 chapters and met the opening benchmarks in 12 out of 13 chapters in which they were defined, as well as that we are on the right track to soon meet the last benchmark in chapter 8 – Competition. This supports my belief that the final openings of chapters are in front of us.

Beside opening chapters, at the same time we worked hard on meeting requirements for the closure of chapters. Good results were recognised and rewarded at the recently held Intergovernmental Conference where we closed chapter 30 – External economic relations. Bearing in mind the internal preparedness and firm determination of the Government to intensify the reform processes in the following period, I am convinced that we will soon be in the position to meet the closing benchmarks and create conditions for the closure of several more chapters; for example those related to commercial law, intellectual property law, information society and media, entrepreneurship and industrial policy, Trans-European Networks. In parallel, we will continue to work on meeting closing benchmarks in other chapters so that we could finalise the accession negotiations until the

end of this Government's term of office and get prepared for the membership. The Prime Minister has clearly declared this to be the ultimate priority in his exposé, as well as recently on the occasion of Montenegro's accession to the Alliance.

Certainly, what may be the most important thing that marked the previous five-year period is the work on Chapters 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and 24 – Justice, Freedom and Security. Through the fulfilment of 83 interim benchmarks, the implementation of the action plans resulted in completed legal framework, which is aligned with quality European regulations and follows the good standards, substantially strengthened institutional framework and clear track record accompanying them in practice.

Lately, we can often hear the following question: Could it be better and could we do more?

Certainly, it can always be better and we can always do more, but having in mind the conditions under which Montenegro conducts negotiations, I am sure that we did our best in most fields, while in other fields we learned our lessons and gained the experience for a better work in future. I will remind you that we are the first country to negotiate under the new approach, which is focused on the rule of law and that, when compared with previous enlargements, more emphasis is currently put on the implementation of policies and achievement of specific measurable results, which makes this process more demanding and more complex for the countries of the Western Balkans. We no longer negotiate on the mere transposition of the acquis and drafting of laws, we also prove today that the system is already producing results in practice, and that takes time.

In addition, bear in mind the fact that the countries of the region have different dynamics of advancement towards the EU, and that currently only two countries conduct the accession negotiations. Today we talk about the fact that the region did not manage to position itself as a group of countries that fulfil their obligations equally and perform the activities required for maintaining the balance in regional approach. Montenegro would like other countries in the region to make as fast and quality steps forward as possible in order to advance towards the membership. In that context, we generously help our colleagues from the neighbourhood in exchanging experience, knowledge and skills we obtained in the previous period. At the same time, we strongly support the fact that the progress towards the EU membership can be based only on individual merits.

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the Union itself changed during the last years due to internal and external crises. Today, it is not the same EU it was five years ago and I do not expect that the Union will be the same even at the moment when Montenegro completes its negotiations and joins the European family. It is important for us to know that we are approaching transformative organisation, which becomes increasingly focused on the inside, i.e. its challenges and plans for the future. The concept of future development of Europe is also present in every negotiations-related discourse. Today, following the March summit in Rome, the multi-speed Europe concept represents an integral part of the discussion which policies will be additionally developed in the forthcoming period, i.e. what kind of the EU we will join.

As we are all aware, the Union of today or tomorrow is not the same one that conducted negotiations with Slovakia, Slovenia, or Estonia some twenty-odd years ago, in the period when the Schengen system was in its infancy and euro was being conceived, nor is it the Union that sees the enlargement policy as one of the best policies. Quite the contrary, today, the support for the enlargement in the EU countries is at its historically lowest level, sometimes showing that almost 75 per cent of the population in some countries view negatively the future enlargement of the Union. This is a fact and reality that we need to always take into account when we talk about the further accession of Montenegro and other Balkan countries.

However, despite all of that, in five years of conducting the accession negotiations, through a very committed, professional, and responsible work of the public administration and the civil sector, we drew to a close the process of opening chapters and have successfully embarked on the process of their provisional closure.

Our task was by no means simple or easy. The negotiating process was a big challenge for the small administration of a young country, and we welcomed it with great enthusiasm and motivation. In the previous five year, we did not merely adopt new regulations and found institutions, but we also learned and worked on ourselves. Through the work on the reform processes we grew and changed. Our public administration is now much more experienced and efficient in implementing European policies. In a whole range of areas we can today say that we are no different from EU Member States.

But most importantly, the first and foremost reason why we do this is Montenegrin citizens. They are the reason why we strive to build a better and more prosperous society, and I believe that in the past five years we have managed to do just that. I am confident that we have substantially enhanced the fundamental rights, improved the conditions for education and mobility, ensured better quality of products and services and better security of citizens, established better standards for the development of industry, created better conditions for domestic producers, safer transport, higher quality energy supply, health, and better preserved environment. The results in the practice attest to the internal changes and transformation taking place within the Montenegrin society.

As the country of the region that is closest to the membership and in that segment a leader in the region, our role is even more demanding and responsible, both towards our citizens and towards our neighbours and European partners. But, with its resoluteness and commitment, Montenegro is proving worthy of this historic task.

However, as I have noted on several occasions, our goal is not mere EU membership. The goal is the journey itself during which we will ensure that the reforms we carry out improve the lives of all people in Montenegro. This is why in the negotiation process priority is given to the quality of reforms and sustainability of the established system. We know that a lot of challenging work lies ahead. We are very pleased by the fact that the whole Montenegrin society is involved in the process of European integration and that we have a stable support of citizens for EU membership. This gives additional strength and obligation to this Government to continue, together with other parts of society, carrying out European reforms and take the country towards the community of European countries and peoples.

Thank you for the attention.