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## *Policy brief*

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# Strategic communication of the Euro-Atlantic integration processes

## I Summary

The Government of Montenegro has marked the Euro-Atlantic integration as one of the foreign policy priorities. Therefore, in 2007 the Communication Strategy for the Euro-Atlantic integration of Montenegro has been adopted as a strategic document with regard to informing the public on Euro-Atlantic integration. The Strategy's objective was to win public support for the NATO membership of Montenegro.

By proposing this practical policy, the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT) wants to influence the enhancement of communication by the Government of Montenegro and other interested parties regarding the issue.

The polls indicated that citizens do not have enough information based on which citizens could shape their opinion on the issue. A problem on its own is the fact that there is no open and continuous public dialogue on Euro-Atlantic integration during which all sides involved in the dialogue would be able to publicly present their arguments and views.

Based on the number of activities directed at moving Montenegro closer to NATO, there are three ministries that lead

the way with regard to the scope of work – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior. However, media analysis indicates that their activities in communicating Euro-Atlantic integration are not proportionate to their role, and the communication is not well-coordinated. Other Government ministries have also not been communicating clearly and precisely with citizens, which is also what the CDT's interlocutors have perceived regarding the topic.

In addition, a key flaw in the campaign so far is reflected in the perception of the critics that the campaign has been predominantly that of the governing coalition (and serving their interests), and not a national strategy which is of importance for the Montenegrin society as a whole.

That is exactly the reason why it is necessary to get the opponents to the Euro-Atlantic integration more actively involved in public dialogue. The Parliament of Montenegro, as well as political parties, also dealt with the topic insufficiently. Their role in inciting and creating public dialogue on the topic has been very small. The situation is similar with the academic community as well. The product of such a situation is inevitably a rather passive media barely interested in the topic except when it concerns an important event, such as a visit of a high-ranking NATO official, etc.

In order to inform its citizens, the Government of Montenegro has to identify communication target groups, coordinate the communication on the topic better, think of clear and correct messages and enhance cooperation with the media, civil society, Parliament and political parties. Also, it is necessary that the Government opens itself for dialogue with its opponents.

Just like many other countries, Montenegro is “sensitive” to certain security issues, from natural disasters to international crime and terrorism, and these are the topics that should be used to approach a wider public. The possibility of using new technologies (Internet campaigns) should not be neglected, which would open new possibilities for including young people in the discussion of Euro-Atlantic integration.

## II What is NATO in the Montenegrin public arena?

By adopting the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Montenegro, The Parliament of Montenegro defined the NATO membership as one of its foreign policy priorities.<sup>1</sup> The official relations between Montenegro and NATO started on 28 November 2006 when Montenegro was invited to join the Partnership for Peace.

In October 2007, the Communication Strategy for Euro-Atlantic integration of Montenegro was adopted, as a strategic document of the Government of Montenegro defining the goals, actors and mechanisms of informing

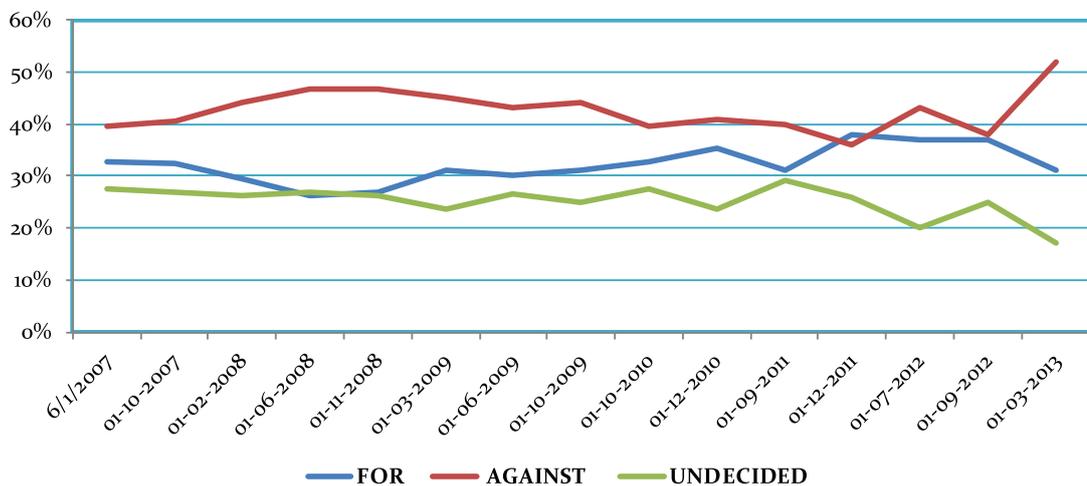
public on the Euro-Atlantic integration of Montenegro. The document states the following as a basic goal of the Strategy: „Increasing the level of informing the Montenegrin public on the Euro-Atlantic integration, enabling the highest possible level of support for the NATO membership of Montenegro, as well as raising the international public awareness of the Montenegrin accession process.“<sup>2</sup>

The results of the Communication Strategy in the field of informing the Montenegrin public are not satisfactory. All opinion polls indicate that a large number of citizens are indecisive regarding the issue. In the public discourse there are only a few emotional or ideological arguments that are being used. However, what is lacking is information for those citizens who opt for rational reasons.<sup>3</sup>

The approach of the Government of Montenegro to this topic can primarily be described as passive. In their regular work, high-ranking government officials rarely talk about Euro-Atlantic integration.<sup>4</sup> For those who do, the communications most often boil down to the many times repeated phrase – that Euro-Atlantic integration is the strategic priority of the country. The communication on Euro-Atlantic integration is uninventive and often times unclear, and it consists of many phrases that the citizens are unfamiliar with and that do not attract attention.

The three ministries in the Government of Montenegro which deal the most with Euro-Atlantic integration – the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of the Interior communicated very poorly with the citizens on this topic. It seems that despite the attempts, the Government did not succeed in

**Chart 1** - Citizens' opinion on the need for Montenegro's membership in NATO – 2007 - 2013<sup>5</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Montenegro, Article 2, Clause 4, <http://www.osce.org/montenegro/19733?download=true>

<sup>2</sup> Communication Strategy for Euro-Atlantic integration of Montenegro, <http://www.odbrana.gov.me/files/1193306238.doc>

<sup>3</sup> An informed citizen is the person that has enough reliable information or knowledge to be able to understand the subject matter or situation and make an appropriate judgement or decision.

<sup>4</sup> Press clippings from the last 7 years indicate that members of the Government rarely talked about Euro-Atlantic integration, and even when they did it was only a few members of the Government that talked about the topic.

<sup>5</sup> Since 1999, CEDEM has continually been conducting opinion polls regarding Political public opinion in Montenegro, thereby creating a full empirical overview of the structure of political public opinion in Montenegro. In addition to investigating standard criteria of political public opinion (citizens' trust in government institutions, the Government, political/public figures, political parties, media), certain current domestic policy issues are often in the focus of the polls (such as citizens' views towards Montenegro's EU and NATO membership, etc.) <http://cedem.me/en/programmes/empirical-research/political-public-opinion.html>

clearly coordinating the communication to go directly towards citizens. The Government has obviously opted for talking about NATO as less as possible from the angle of defense and security, and focuses more on economic and financial aspects of membership.<sup>6</sup> However, the ministries of Economy, Finance and Tourism – have not managed to offer the wider population good quality arguments on the topic.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, the Government often announces that NATO standards also mean that countries would receive assistance in case of natural disasters, as well as the implementation of international standards of environmental protection. However, this was not explained well to Montenegrin citizens, which is why it is necessary to have the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism as well as search and rescue services more actively involved, on both national and local levels.

In our opinion, another characteristic of the Government's approach towards communicating Euro-Atlantic integration is closeness and one-sidedness. Despite the original attempt to involve NGOs in the implementation of the strategy, including also those NGOs that were not supportive of NATO membership<sup>8</sup>, a good quality dialogue with opponents to the membership failed to be established. The majority of activities in which the Government participated were perceived by the interested public as self-promotion, and not as education and raising awareness. In addition, a large part of Government's activities has been taking place in a like-minded environment. Public dialogue on the topic is not being encouraged, and that is the basis of a democratic system which could bring visible progress when it comes to this topic. Direct dialogue with opponents has been scarce, and the dialogue through media, which is also a common way of communication pro et contra regarding a topic – has been missing completely.<sup>9</sup> It seems that the Government often opted for ignoring the opponents to NATO membership, refusing to involve in public dialogue with them.

In addition, up to this moment, the cooperation with opposition parties which favor membership in NATO is lacking. This approach resulted in having a significant part of public critics seeing this project as a one-party project or, more extremely, as a one-man project.

This closed approach has caused insufficiently good quality communication with media representatives, a part of NGOs dealing with the topic, but also with the academic community in Montenegro. Besides the lack of communication with the media, the public was not presented with any serious and good quality analysis of media coverage of these topics.

The activities of the Parliament of Montenegro regarding the explanation of the topic to citizens are completely lacking. Such an approach contributed to the public perception that membership of Montenegro in NATO is not the national priority, but the priority of the Government of Montenegro, or even only the priority of the governing party. We have reached the situation in which the politically most important institution in the country is completely outside of the Euro-Atlantic integration processes. The debate on the need for membership of Montenegro in NATO has never been on the Parliamentary agenda.<sup>10</sup> There has never been a serious discussion on the need for the Parliament to have a working body which would supervise the Government regarding the topic.

Political parties and candidates were obviously avoiding the topic during election campaigns, due to opportunistic reasons and their assessment that that was not something which would mobilize the voters and bring them more votes. The lack of communication with the voters' base lead to an absurd situation that the membership in NATO has the support of over 60% of parliamentarians<sup>11</sup> and only 30% of voters, which rightfully brings into question the legitimacy of the decision on membership if brought by the Parliament of Montenegro in these circumstances. Some political parties avoid an-

<sup>6</sup> Press clippings from the last 7 years indicate that members of the Government opted for talking about NATO membership in an economic context, and that discussions about security context mainly boiled down to sporadic statements by defense ministers.

<sup>7</sup> An attempt to explain economic benefits is the text written by the Finance Minister, Igor Luksic, Economic Benefits for Montenegro from NATO membership, which was published in the magazine Security in October 2008. <http://www.mif.gov.me/files/1225721978.pdf>. However, even in this article, economic benefits were explained very generally and with few concrete arguments.

<sup>8</sup> The first Memorandum on cooperation between the Coordination Team for implementation of the Communication Strategy for Euro-Atlantic integration and NGOs was signed on 8 February 2008. The Memorandum was based on the principles of transparency, cooperation, independence and accurate and objective informing of citizens. One of the co-signatories to the Memorandum was Nansen Dialogue Center, one of the first organization in Montenegro which questioned the decision of Montenegro to become a NATO member.

<sup>9</sup> The press clippings in the past 7 years indicated lack of arguments exchange between supporters and opponents to NATO membership through media.

<sup>10</sup> The Parliament of Montenegro, its 23rd and 24th convocation (2006-2009 and 2009-2012), discussed on several occasions the laws and amendments to the law on military and defense. In addition, decisions were reviewed on deployment of Montenegrin soldiers to peace-keeping missions and reports on participation of the Montenegrin army in those missions. As part of these discussions, there were occasional discussions on the NATO and Euro-Atlantic integrations of Montenegro. However, there were never discussions on the need for Montenegro to become a NATO member or over alternatives to the concept.

<sup>11</sup> The Parliament of Montenegro has 81 representatives. The governing coalition "European Montenegro" has won 39 seats and through its election program it openly advocated membership of Montenegro in NATO (<http://www.naprijedcrnagoro.me/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Naprijed-Crna-Goro.pdf>). Full-fledged membership of Montenegro in NATO is also the program principle of the Bosniak Party, which is one of the constituents of the executive government and has 3 seats in the Parliament (<http://www.bscg.me/ciljevi/>), and of the opposition's Positive Montenegro, which won 7 seats in the elections (<http://www.pozitivnacrnagora.me/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Positive-Montenegro-Programme-in-English.pdf>). Its support for Montenegro becoming a NATO member has been expressed on several occasions by representatives of the Croatian Citizen's Initiative, which has one representative, and by the Albanian political parties which currently have 2 representatives in the Parliament. This means that 52 out of 81 representatives in the Parliament explicitly support NATO membership. In addition, the Movement for Change, which is a part of the coalition Democratic Front and has 5 representatives in the Parliament, indirectly eludes that NATO offers a better perspective for Montenegro, while its highest officials have often publicly expressed their support for the integration. ([http://www.promjene.org/images/documents/Program\\_PZP.pdf](http://www.promjene.org/images/documents/Program_PZP.pdf), strana 71).

nouncing to their voters their clear stance regarding membership of Montenegro in NATO, placing the burden of this decision on a possible referendum. The political parties that support, but also those that oppose the membership, have never offered citizens serious political platforms which would explain important facts regarding the Euro-Atlantic integration.

### III Is Montenegro prepared for receiving the invitation?

Judging by announcements of domestic and international officials, Montenegro is close to receiving the invitation to join NATO. Although at this moment it is difficult to give an exact assessment when that might occur, the indications are that that could happen at the next NATO summit where expansion is to be discussed.

Regardless of the decision during the next NATO summit, the fact is that the Government of Montenegro works on fulfilling political and technical requirements for NATO membership, but does not explain to the citizens whether there are any benefits from that for the country and society. If that happens, not only military and police would enter the NATO alliance, but the country of Montenegro as a whole. Therefore, all segments of society should be prepared for the membership.

Opinion polls indicate that there are a huge number of indecisive citizens, and based on direct communication which the CDT had with thousands of citizens<sup>12</sup>, we can conclude that those who do have an opinion base it on two arguments alone. The majority of those supporting the membership believe that the membership in NATO is a stop on the way to the EU, while its opponents base their resistance on the negative experience from the 1999 NATO intervention. The large number of indecisive citizens indicates that these arguments are not satisfactory to a certain number of rational voters who are waiting to be offered information and rational arguments.

The dilemma referendum vs. decision in the Parliament is not relevant at the moment, because in both cases it is necessary to have politically informed and rational voters who would be capable to choose the policy or the program which leads to achieving social objectives in the most rational way. This cannot be accomplished without a thorough campaign of informing the voters and the promotion of public dialogue and debates over



various security concepts. In addition, Montenegro has not received the invitation yet, and the issue of the manner of making the decision can be in the focus only if the invitation is received.

## IV Two strategic solutions

In order to receive the invitation for NATO membership, Montenegro has to fulfill several requirements, one of which being large support of citizens for membership. The Governments of all countries which wanted to join NATO had to undoubtedly show that their citizens wanted to become a part of the Alliance.

The level of support in various countries differed, and that largely depended on the political history, but also the current political situation. Some countries run to NATO from their bad past and ambitious neighbors and they had huge public support for that, while other countries had to invest a lot of time and effort to inform their citizens and win their support.

The situation in Montenegro significantly differs from those in all other countries waiting for their membership invitation. Although we share a historical heritage, recent war past and public sentiments toward the non-alignment project with Slovenia and Croatia, our situation is indeed specific. Montenegro is the first country whose government advocates NATO membership, although we were, less than 15 years ago, in war with NATO, although at the time we were formally a part of a larger country - Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Therefore, communicating this topic to citizens requires taking into consideration a large number of factors and special subtlety while deciding over further steps in that direction.

### 1. Through a campaign of numbers, without informed citizens

One of the options for the Governments is to strategically wait for the decision-making moment regarding membership invitation and not conduct any major activities in the meantime. Upon receiving the invitation, the Government may opt for a short, but intensive campaign, resembling election campaigns, and in a short period homogenize the electoral body. That way, in a short period of time and with expressed decisiveness, increase of support could be expected.

This approach would include running the campaign from a closed circle consisting of a few institutions and individuals who were leading the process so far. Staying in that closed circle would mean better coordination of all participants in the process and their better discipline during the implementation of the campaign. Similar systems function almost based on the principle of a "military" delegation of responsibilities, so an efficient result can be expected.

On the other hand, this approach would certainly lead to lower quality information for citizens, because a significant number of participants (media, opposition par-

<sup>12</sup> Since the Info Center on Euro-Atlantic Integration has been opened (November 2012), about 700 citizens took part in various events organized by the Center. Parallel to that, 2500 final year high-school students in several Montenegrin municipalities participated in the CDT's workshops about NATO, of which a written evaluation has been made.

ties supporting membership, NGOs, academic community) would be left outside the process.

In addition, in case this approach is implemented, citizens would not make their choice based on arguments for and against membership in NATO, but on party bias and loyalty. That would increase the existing problem of having the Euro-Atlantic integration not to be perceived as the national priority, but as a project of governing parties. In the long-term, this creates a new problem and a new political division, so a large number of citizens could deny the legitimacy of the decision on NATO membership.

Besides, the flaw of support achieved this way is that it is not genuine and is therefore short-lived. Any oscillations on the national or international scene might lead to the collapse of this kind of support.

The Government of Montenegro changes the structure and the people dealing with the coordination of the Euro-Atlantic integration and communication activities, which leads to the conclusion that the Government itself is not fully satisfied with the results achieved so far. In addition, based on the statements of high-ranking government officials<sup>13</sup>, it can be concluded that they opt for a more open and more inclusive approach. Choosing the first option would not be aligned with the proclaimed openness and transparency.

## 2. Through communication and information to understanding and support

The other approach would include a continuous, strategically consistent and open communication, based on an honest approach and sharing of accurate and objective information. What the participants in the process should set as the goal is a safe and integrated state, and not NATO membership on its own.

Introducing participants who do not belong to the executive power system would increase legitimacy of the decision made later on, and it would also offer a significantly larger pool of information which would not come from only one center. This approach would contribute to the transparency and democratic nature of the entire process.

This approach should lead to the majority of citizens having enough information on the advantages and disadvantages of NATO membership and the thorough explanation thereof, but also all other alternative security concepts.<sup>14</sup> This also means being considerate towards the opponents, giving up on extreme positions and leading a dialogue in order to find the most rational and the best solution for Montenegro.

A negative side of this approach is that actions which include participants from all parts of society are much more difficult to coordinate, and it is much more difficult to send a unified and clear message. The CDT's opinion, based on detailed analysis of both positive and negative aspects of both options, is that openness and

transparency, and well-informed citizens are the most important part of this process. Therefore we recommend that future activities should be implemented based on this model.

In the end, the decision supported by well-informed citizens has to be respected, because its legitimacy is undoubted.

## V Recommendations

After becoming aware of these problems in the process of communicating the Euro-Atlantic integration to citizens, the CDT, with the support of the UK Embassy, started the project aimed at gathering as many opinions as possible on the topic, and, based on that, at helping the Government of Montenegro enhance the communication. The CDT discussed this topic with over 50 state and political parties' officials, media, academic and NGO representatives, and there was also an online consultation process conducted with interested citizens. None of the CDT's collocutors from any of the sectors was fully satisfied with the Communication Strategy or the way it was implemented. In addition, a comparative analysis was made between the Montenegrin Communication Strategy, and the strategies based on which communication and informing of citizens was conducted in Slovenia, Slovakia and Hungary. The objectives of these strategies, target groups and communication channels, were carefully analyzed with special emphasis on dealing with the media and the role of other sectors in society. The best examples were used as the starting basis for working on recommendations for enhancement of the communication between the Government of Montenegro and its citizens. A team consisting of NGO, media and the Government representatives analyzed the comments and recommendations obtained through various meetings, as well as from the comparative analysis of the strategies, and proposed the best ways to enhance communication with Montenegrin citizens. Based on everything mentioned above, the recommendations for the Government of Montenegro have been prepared and they are contained in this document.

### 1. Identifying target groups

In order to approach strategic communication in any area, it is necessary to determine who it will be communicated to, i.e. what are the target groups. Therefore it is necessary that the Government starts with regular and comprehensive quantitative and qualitative research in order to understand the view of citizens regarding Euro-Atlantic integration.

Opinion polls conducted so far were mainly focused on percentages of opponents and supporters, sometimes revealing some demographic indicators as well. However, what is necessary is to periodically conduct in-depth opinion polls, focused on answering the question why such a large number of citizens is indecisive regard-

<sup>13</sup> The statement by the Defense Minister Milica Pejanović-Đurišić on the Forum 2BS, June 2013, <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/pejanovic-durisic-izbori-skrainuli-nato-clanak-132513>

<sup>14</sup> In the public arena in Montenegro, there is often talk about neutrality as an alternative to NATO membership, but without any serious elaborations on what that would precisely mean.

ing this issue. It is important to detect key prejudice of citizens and thereby define the questions in opinion polls. Based on these opinion polls, the Government should obtain information over what it is that citizens base their choice on, why is somebody for and somebody against it, what are the truths and misconceptions among citizens.

This should be the first step in formulating a better communication strategy with citizens which will help define messages, channels and mechanisms of communication.

## **2. Enhancement of internal coordination**

By introducing the position of the National Coordinator for NATO, the Government has sent the message that it wants to enhance the coordination between institutions dealing with this topic. The first step in the area should be to define a new, better way of coordinating, primarily, three key ministries – Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration and the Ministry of the Interior – but also all other state institutions which have any role in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration. Better coordination would mean not only successful coordination of task implementation and meeting NATO membership requirements, but also a coordinated communication of all government activities in the area with the Montenegrin citizens. State institutions have to start explaining to their citizens what is it that they are doing in the area of Euro-Atlantic integration and why it is that important.

Responsibilities from the areas of rule of law, police reform, border management, development of the protection and rescue system, which are understandable to citizens and important for their daily life, and which are according to the Annual National Programs (ANP) the responsibilities of the Ministry of Interior, are barely communicated to the citizens. Also, the role of this Ministry in Euro-Atlantic integration is not sufficiently recognized. In addition, the attempt to explain NATO membership by future economic benefits for Montenegro should be left for economy experts – heads of economy, finance, agriculture and tourism sectors – because general politicians in the previous period have not succeeded in explaining this economic argument.

## **3. Clear and accurate messages**

The Government of Montenegro must internally unify the messages sent to citizens regarding the topic, in order to avoid the situation that the Government receives different messages, sometimes even different information, from different addresses. The messages have to be accurate and designed together with experts. The Government should identify and explain key reasons for Montenegro's joining NATO, but also to provide an answer to the most frequent criticism and arguments by the opponents to NATO membership.

The Government has to stop ignoring criticism and opposing views, avoiding difficult questions and topics, such as the 1999 bombardment, and idealizing Euro-Atlantic integration as the solution for all problems. It is of key importance to inform citizens on the topic realistically and honestly, to accept certain flaws in every concept, and to offer reasonable arguments based on which the best of the offered options can be selected.

Communication has to be innovative; new channels of communication have to be opened, the public should be addressed through social media, but also the visual identity of government campaigns has to be improved.

## **4. Establishing cooperation with the non-governmental sector**

To a certain degree, other participants in the process – the media, NGOs, academic community, and especially the Parliament of Montenegro and political parties, are also responsible for informing citizens on Euro-Atlantic integration. However, the Government of Montenegro, as the leader of the project has more responsibility – it is responsible for initiating, coordinating and encouraging other social sectors to deal with the topic.

### **4.1. Cooperation with the media**

It is necessary for the Government to significantly improve cooperation with the media in the process of communicating the Euro-Atlantic integration, because the media is the key channel of communication with citizens, and it has an irreplaceable role in passing accurate and clear information to citizens. The CDT believes that, instead of communicating through public announcements and sporadic events, a constant mechanism of communication should be designed together with media editors and through an informal body consisting of representatives of the Government and the media which would in regular communication exchange information and remove dilemmas. In addition, our recommendation is that the Government should do an analysis of the media coverage of topics relating to the Euro-Atlantic integration in order to determine what the media has been reporting about already, and what has remained uncovered or insufficiently covered. That way, through a coordinated and strategic approach, citizens would be offered information on all topics regarding the Euro-Atlantic integration of Montenegro. Obstacles in communication with the media so far have been difficulties with finding expert collocutors and sources of information relating to the Euro-Atlantic integration. The Government should, therefore, share with the media the information on contact persons in state institutions and what their field of expertise is, so that journalists would know who to contact for information on concrete matters. In addition, we believe that the Government should appoint a person who would deal with communication and the development of cooperation with the



media. The CDT recommends that the Government should organize additional training and study trips for journalists covering the topic of the Euro-Atlantic integration.

#### 4.2. Cooperation with NGOs and academic community

It is necessary to enhance the coordination with NGOs and involve more NGOs in cooperation in the field of the Euro-Atlantic integration. The Government has so far cooperated with the NGOs working on the promotion of NATO or on informing citizens on the Euro-Atlantic integration, but missed to include the NGOs dealing with, for examples, the issues regarding the rule of law and environment protection, which are included in the MAP. When allocating money for projects, it should be made sure that fair and equal conditions are ensured for activities of opponents to the Euro-Atlantic integration as well. Since this is tax-payers' money, and since among tax-payers there is equal number of those who oppose NATO membership, the Government is obliged to allocate the funds also for those NGOs which promote alternative concepts, or question the decision of Montenegro to become a member of the Alliance. Of course, when allocating the funds, it should be ensured that ideas and projects are of good quality, and that those who submit the projects have good public image and influence. In the previous period, the activity of academic community was almost completely lacking when it comes to analyzing the problem and opening a dialogue on the topic of Euro-Atlantic integration. It is necessary to identify academic experts in this area and incite social accountability of scientific community which has the obligation to deal with such important social issues.

#### 4.3. Cooperation with the Parliament

The role of Parliament in the Euro-Atlantic integration of Montenegro has to be strengthened. It is necessary for the question of integration into NATO to come to the Parliament's agenda – either through discussions and providing opinion on strategies, plans and reports of the Government regarding the issue, or through a separate document which the Government would propose for the Parliament's agenda. Since the Parliament so far has had no initiative in the area, we believe that the obligation of the Government of Montenegro, i.e. the parliamentary majority supporting the Government, is to initiate, through regular mechanisms, opening of new topics in the Parliament. The CDT believes that it is necessary to start a discussion on the plenum over this strategic priority of Montenegro, since the public is either divided or disinterested, and since it is a role of the plenum to inform the citizens on the most important strategies and policies. Besides, opening of the topic on a public session of the Security and Defense Board would definitely contribute to increasing citizens' awareness. In addition, it would be useful to initiate communication between the Parliament and the Government regarding enhancement of parliamentary supervision over the process (e.g. forming of a new board which would supervise the process of Euro-Atlantic integration).

#### 4.4. Communication with political parties

It is of crucial importance to more actively involve in communication over Euro-Atlantic integration both those political parties that advocate NATO membership, and those that oppose it. That is the basic democratic function of political parties – taking part in shaping political will of citizens and mediating between citizens and decision-makers. Potential membership of Montenegro in the NATO Alliance is a very important decision which will affect all future generations, and therefore it is of crucial importance for the majority of citizens to have sufficient accurate and objective information and be able to make a well-informed choice regarding the issue. Therefore both supporters and opponents to integration are responsible for citizens and they have to help citizens reach this complicated decision. Political parties which support NATO membership through their programs need to make an effort to explain to citizens the advantages of this choice. Those who object joining NATO need to offer an alternative foreign policy and security concept and explain the advantages thereof. What the Government can and has to do in the area is to initiate communication with political parties. That requires opening up for cooperation and coordination with those political parties supporting membership in NATO, but also opening of public dialogue and communication with political parties opposing the membership.

## VI Conclusion

Montenegro needs continuous and open communication between all relevant factors in the process. It is necessary to involve all ministries in creating a clear and open campaign whose task is to provide accurate and objective information.

The leaders in the process should set as their goal a secure and integrated country, and not NATO membership on its own. Also, in addition to state institutions, it is necessary for the Parliament of Montenegro, all parliamentary political parties, NGOs dealing with NATO (regardless of whether they are for or against it, or are only promoting public dialogue) - to have more active involvement in opening public dialogues on the topic. The academic community also needs to be more strongly involved, including university professors dealing not only with security issues but also all those issue which, in some way, are related to Euro-Atlantic integration – human rights, international law, etc.

The final goal for everybody should be better citizen awareness and the important possibility for all of them, based on good quality, accurate and objective information, to independently reach a decision and take a stance – what would be the best for Montenegro. Only active involvement of citizens in public dialogue and clear benefits from it for citizens and society as a whole can contribute to society's democratization.

