



ANALYSES

What are the consequences of the latest decision by heads of States and Governments EU that the absorption power will be removed from the enlargement criteria

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Gerald Knaus, director of the European Stability Initiative (ESI), on the next steps for Montenegro in the process of European integrations



GERALD KNAUS, DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN STABILITY INITIATIVE (ESI), ON THE NEXT STEPS FOR MONTENEGRO IN THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATIONS

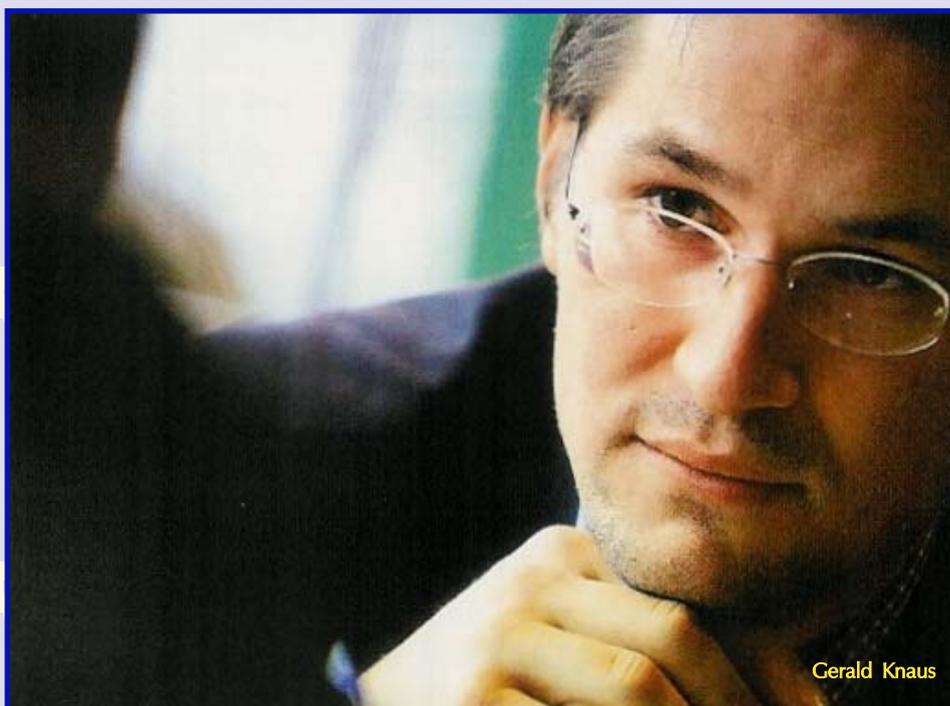
I believe Montenegro could surprise quite a few skeptics

At the moment some Western Balkan countries, including Montenegro, do not have contractual relations with the European Union. This is an anomaly that needs to be corrected, and soon. An SAA is the very first step, and a precondition for further steps, such as submitting a membership application and opening negotiations – said in the interview for *EIC Bulletin* Mr Gerald Knaus, president of the European Stability Initiative, international institute for research and European policy analysis based in Istanbul and Berlin.

"In the case of Bulgaria, Romania or Turkey obtaining candidate status and beginning official negotiations were the real turning points also for the economy and social development. It is at these moments that expectations (also of outside investors) adjust and people begin to see eventual accession as likely or even inevitable. This starts the virtuous circle of Europeanisation that has transformed Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Greece, the Baltic States or Bulgaria in recent decades or years".

● **What is the next step that Montenegro must take in order to proceed with the association process?**

Montenegro needs to conclude SAA as soon as possible. It will



Gerald Knaus

then be told not to submit an application for membership, advice that was also given to Macedonia and Croatia and that both countries decided to ignore at the time. I think Montenegro should probably also ignore such advice and submit a formal application for membership as soon as its SAA is concluded. Montenegro should also prepare for an effective campaign to explain to EU policy makers and the interested European public the reasons why it is ready for negotiations and how these would advance the European project. This will be a challenge in light of current skepticism in the

EU, but it is one that other countries have also overcome in the past.

● **How would you assess the current Montenegrin perspective with regard to European integration?**

In the coming year Montenegro has an opportunity to redefine its international image, and to prove that it is capable of following in the footsteps of Macedonia and Croatia. If this period is used effectively, and if – a big if – there emerges a solid domestic consensus behind EU accession, the perspective is encouraging and Montenegro could

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● **What is your estimate as to the length of pre-accession period for Montenegro? How much does this depend on the overall situation in the region, given the EU's preference for en bloc enlargements?**

As for the timeframes for accession, I do not think there will be another en bloc enlargement: Croatia is far advanced, Turkey is already negotiating, Macedonia is already a candidate. However, each

step by any of these countries helps the others, because it keeps enlargement on the agenda and opens more doors. The EU is based on keeping its promises, and as we have seen in the past year, it has kept its promises to Croatia, Turkey and Macedonia. Regional cooperation and joint lobbying can also help, as they have in advance of the 2003 Thessaloniki summit.

I do not think there are any alternatives to EU accession for the Balkans, neither regional groupings nor special partnerships. On the other hand, free trade and opening economies to outside competition help the region. I do not believe there is anything sinister in recent European proposals for a free-trade area, certainly nobody in Brussels has any illusions about recreating a mini-Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia has gone the way of the Dodo, it is history, a matter for historians. The only real Euro-region in the Balkans that can emerge is when all countries are full members of the EU.

What ESI has been advocating in a series of reports since 2002 is that further economic liberalization in the Balkans should also be supported by a European commitment to putting the Western Balkans on the European cohesion map. Cohesion is a central concept in the EU: helping poorer regions catch up, not through transfers of wealth for consumption but through support for investments that raise productivity, develop infrastructure and human capital. The sooner the whole Balkans is part of both the European internal market and its area of cohesion, the better for every European.

surprise quiet a few skeptics.

● **What are the main preconditions for Montenegro to advance in this process?**

Having a strong, cross-party consensus is one precondition for Europeanisation: changes in government should not call into question the overall direction of policy. Projecting an image of stability to the world is a second precondition.

A willingness to learn from previous candidate is a third. I would suggest sending a plane full of top Montenegrin administrators to the Baltic states to see how Estonia or Latvia have implemented Europeanisation, and then bring these lessons – and the Baltic energy – back to Podgorica. Finally, it is crucial to find ways to positively surprise a European pub-

lic and EU civil servants in Brussels – who have generally low expectations of small states in the Balkans. This requires being proactive and imaginative. For instance, Montenegro might already now prepare to do the x-ray of its public administration that would be required once it submits an official application (by answering the EU questionnaire).

● **According to you, what are Montenegro's advantages, and what are its main weaknesses in that respect?**

It is both an advantage and a challenge to be a small country with a small administration. A few determined people, and a credible strategy how to strategically use limited financial and human resources can make a huge difference. Montenegro does have an image problem in parts of the EU (less so in the US), but the conduct of the referendum has certainly helped to correct this.

● **Which country in the region, according to you, has made most progress towards EU, and why?**

Obviously Croatia has been doing well, in part because it is economically in a better position, in part because it managed to deal with its ICTY obligations, and in part because it prepared itself well when it submitted its membership application. Serbia has been the biggest disappointment: expectations in 2000 were high, and I wonder what would have happened if Serbia–Montenegro would have submitted an EU membership application already in December 2000. But this is the past, and it would be very important for the whole region that by mid-2007 all countries have SAAs and that all of them are on their way to being official candidates.

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