



“NATO Expansion: Examining the Accession of Montenegro”
Hearing of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Opening Testimony
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Senator Johnson, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee, I welcome this opportunity to explain why the Administration strongly and unequivocally supports Montenegro’s membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Article 10 of the Washington Treaty states that Allies may by unanimous agreement “invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty.” The Administration strongly believes that Montenegro’s membership in the Alliance will advance the democratic principles upon which NATO was founded, and that Montenegro will contribute both to the collective defense of NATO and the broader security of the Euro-Atlantic region as a whole, particularly in the Western Balkans.

The Senate’s advice and consent to admit a new member to the Alliance is a solemn undertaking that follows a thorough review of the candidate’s qualifications and commitments. A careful review of Montenegro’s candidacy shows that it has transformed its military to make it interoperable with NATO, enacted necessary reforms to meet the Alliance’s benchmarks for membership, and demonstrated solidarity with Allies by participating in overseas missions and aligning its foreign and security policies with those of the Alliance. Montenegro has demonstrated that it shares and will further advance the values of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law, and that it will be a net contributor to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Montenegro’s membership will also bring the Alliance one step closer to realizing the strategic vision of a Europe, whole, free and at peace.

Montenegro emerged as an independent nation ten years ago, in the aftermath of the tumultuous Balkan wars of the 1990s. Within a month of independence, it joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PFP) program. In 2009, it received a Membership Action Plan, allowing it to chart its own course towards membership in the Alliance. In 2008, it also began a parallel process of accession to the European Union (EU), and to date it has opened 24 of 35 chapters of the EU’s *acquis communautaire*. During its ten years of independence, Montenegro has emerged as a stable, multi-ethnic democracy committed to making tough but necessary reforms to its rule of law institutions, as well as its defense and intelligence sectors. It has established constructive and friendly relations with all five of its neighbors, thereby demonstrating a clear commitment to “contribute

toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations...by promoting conditions of stability and well-being” as set forth in Article 2 of the Washington Treaty.

Defense and Intelligence Reforms

As a NATO aspirant, Montenegro has adopted comprehensive reforms of its defense and intelligence institutions. In the defense sphere, Montenegro has right-sized its armed forces and developed sustainable military capabilities for national needs and international missions. These reforms have been guided by NATO’s Membership Action Plan and by Montenegro’s own Strategic Defense Review, which was completed in 2013 with the assistance of experts from the Department of Defense.

Montenegro’s defense reforms have transformed its military into a more agile, capable, deployable, and NATO-interoperable force. They include transitioning Montenegro’s land forces from a brigade-level to a battalion-level structure; modernizing its strategic human resource management policies and processes; developing logistics skill sets consistent with NATO best practices; amending Montenegro’s Law on Defense to allow for the adoption of NATO standards; and reorganizing the General Staff into a structure consonant with NATO practices.

Concurrently with these structural reforms, Montenegro has strengthened the operational capabilities of its Armed Forces through training and acquisition of modern NATO-interoperable equipment. An infantry company was certified in 2014 by the Alliance as fully interoperable, trained, and equipped in compliance with NATO standards, and Montenegro has officially declared it for use in NATO-led operations. Montenegro has also declared a second infantry company for NATO use that is currently undergoing the certification process. Likewise, Montenegro has undertaken deep, structural reform of its intelligence enterprise, making necessary changes to institutions and personnel with NATO’s guidance and supervision. Montenegro has also enacted important reforms to its rule of law institutions.

Montenegro’s Military Capabilities and Overseas Deployments

With a population of just over 600,000 people and a military force of just under 2,000 members, Montenegro’s accession to NATO will not significantly expand the Alliance’s military capabilities. However, what it lacks in size is more

than compensated by location, niche capabilities, and willingness to deploy its military forces overseas in support of Alliance missions. Furthermore, Montenegro’s compact territory located on the Adriatic coast, bordering two NATO Allies as well as PFP partners and EU aspirants, poses few military vulnerabilities or challenges for the defensibility of the Alliance. The inclusion of Montenegro’s 182 miles of Adriatic coastline will make almost the entire north shore of the Mediterranean Sea (save for just a few miles of Bosnian coastline) part of NATO’s operational space. As for its military capabilities, in addition to its land forces Montenegro has a capable rotary-wing squadron that is undergoing modernization, along with a well-trained and proficient coastal patrol and surveillance force with specialized boarding, diving, and underwater demining teams. Montenegro also spends about 1.7 percent of its GDP on defense, which ranks in the top quartile of the Alliance, and has a credible plan to reach the Wales Summit pledge of 2.0 percent of GDP spent on defense by 2024.

While Montenegro may be a small country with modest military capabilities, it has not hesitated to deploy those capabilities in support of U.S. and NATO security priorities. Montenegro has been with us in Afghanistan since shortly after its independence in 2006, and over the course of ten rotations has seen 20% of its armed forces deployed to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Resolute Support Mission. Montenegro has made multiple military personnel contributions to UN missions in Mali and Liberia, and is exploring a further role in UN peacekeeping missions. It has offered to contribute troops to NATO’s Kosovo Force (KFOR), which NATO is currently considering. In July of this year, Montenegro’s parliament approved its participation in the EU’s counter-piracy mission off the coast of Somalia, in which a boarding team will protect a UN vessel with the World Food Program.

Montenegro also contributes to global security in other ways. It contributed \$1.2 million for the sustainability of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces during the period from 2015-2017. In 2015, Montenegro made a sizable donation of ammunition in support of counter-ISIL efforts in Iraq, and it made an additional donation of mortar rounds to the counter-ISIL Coalition this year.

Security and Stability in the Western Balkans

It is the Administration’s firm belief that the benefits of Montenegro’s NATO membership to the United States cannot be measured solely by the additional military capabilities or operational space that Montenegro affords the Alliance. Rather, the benefits of accession must be seen more broadly in terms of

the security and stability that Montenegro’s membership will project to the Western Balkans, a vulnerable region that was wracked by war less than a generation ago.

The history of NATO enlargement shows that the benefits of this process accrue not just from the pooling of military resources, but from the security, stability, and cooperative relations that NATO membership brings to those countries that commit to NATO’s founding principles. From the accession of post-Francoist Spain in 1982 to that of the post-Communist states of Central Europe after the end of the Cold War, the benefits of collective defense and the habits of multilateral military cooperation have had a transformative effect across the entire region, cementing historical reconciliation among erstwhile adversaries and allowing commerce and prosperity to flourish across Europe. NATO’s latest round of enlargement in 2009 to Croatia and Albania finally brought the transformative benefits of this enlargement process to the Western Balkans. Montenegro’s accession as the 29th member of the Alliance will further project security and stability into the Western Balkans and demonstrate to the region’s remaining NATO and EU aspirants that the implementation of tough but necessary reforms has a real payoff.

We are less than a generation removed from a decade of war in the Western Balkans. While the region has come a long way since then, we have an obligation not to forget our commitment to realizing a Europe whole, free, and at peace. In many ways, the Western Balkans remains a piece of unfinished business and, as recent headlines from the region demonstrate, reconciliation is incomplete. However, despite the recent resurgence of demagogic populism and nationalism across Europe, it is telling that every single country in the Western Balkans has chosen to pursue Euro-Atlantic integration as the best guarantee of its long-term peace, security, and prosperity.

In pursuit of these Euro-Atlantic aspirations, Montenegro used its ten years of independence to build constructive and peaceful relations with all its neighbors. As a former constituent part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Montenegro retains peaceful and constructive relations with both Serbia and Kosovo, having been one of the first nations in the world to recognize Kosovo’s independence. It has actively pursued close diplomatic and military cooperation with Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina through the Adriatic Charter organization. It has also built partnerships widely across Europe through its active participation in NATO’s Partnership for Peace, contributing for example to one of NATO’s Trust Funds for Ukraine. It is for these reasons that some of the most

dedicated and articulate supporters of Montenegro’s NATO membership are its neighbors in Southeastern Europe -- Croatia, Albania, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey.

Finally, for the non-NATO countries in the region, whether they be NATO or EU aspirants or both, Montenegro’s accession to NATO will clearly demonstrate the Alliance’s commitment to maintaining an “Open Door” and prove that sometimes difficult reforms and tough decisions will eventually have positive consequences. NATO’s remaining aspirants have therefore all embraced and applauded Montenegro’s membership in the Alliance.

Countering Russia’s Malign Influence and Standing on Principle

As a final consideration, although we no longer live with the stark dualities of the Cold War, it is no secret that Russia has publicly opposed Montenegro’s bid for NATO membership and taken active measures to shape public opinion in the Western Balkans to oppose its accession. Through its backing for non-governmental organizations and politicians who oppose NATO membership, Russia has proven yet again that it is willing to interfere with a sovereign country’s right to choose its own alliances -- despite the fact that Montenegro lies some 800 miles from the nearest Russian border and poses no geopolitical threat to Russia.

Particularly in the last 12 months, a sophisticated foreign-financed propaganda campaign has sought to undermine popular support for NATO accession, despite parliamentary votes in September 2015 and June 2016 that overwhelmingly confirmed the consensus within the Montenegrin parliament in support of NATO membership. In spite of this mounting pressure from abroad, Montenegro has stood by its principles, rejecting a Russian bid in 2013 to use a Montenegrin port for its naval vessels and aligning itself with EU sanctions against Russia following Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

Montenegro’s NATO membership will be a powerful rebuke to Russia’s malign influence in the Western Balkans and demonstrate that no third country has a veto over NATO’s decision to admit new members. It will also confirm that countries whose values are aligned with ours and who pursue a responsible foreign and security policy are free to choose their own destiny without regard to outside coercion and intimidation.

Conclusion

Senator Johnson, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee, Montenegro is ready for NATO membership. Its accession to NATO will demonstrate to other countries in the Euro-Atlantic space that NATO’s door remains open to those nations that share our values, implement difficult reforms, and meet the requirements for membership. Its accession will advance the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans and promote regional reconciliation, stability, and peace in that historically volatile region. Its accession will result in a net positive contribution to the overall security of Europe.

It is my great honor to appear before this Committee and to advance the longstanding bipartisan goal of realizing a Europe whole, free, and at peace by supporting Montenegro’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.