

143rd IPU Assembly, Madrid, Spain, 26 – 30 November 2021
General Debate on Contemporary challenges to democracy:
Overcoming division and building community
Speech of the Head of the Permanent Delegation of the
Parliament of Montenegro to IPU Ms Jovanka Bogavac

Honorable President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

Distinguished Speakers of Parliaments,

Fellow Members of Parliaments,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is our true honour to be present in the company of our respected colleagues from an impressive number of sovereign states and my particular pleasure to have an opportunity to address you in the name of the Parliament of Montenegro.

Our countries have reached a different levels of democratic standards, but each one of us isn't spared of the contemporary challenges which are affecting democracy. We gathered here with the same mission, to discover best approaches for enhancing trust in democracy and institutions, reinforcing open and constructive dialogue and building more inclusive societies.

We are not here to talk about politics, our main topic is democracy, but let me just briefly say that Montenegro's last parliamentary elections, held in 2020, led to the first transition of power in a democratic setting since the introduction of the multi-party system, which is another confirmation of democratic capacities of our country.

Recognizing the important role of parliaments in overcoming challenges to the functioning of democracy and enabling broader public engagement in decision-making processes, allow me to share recent accomplishments of the Parliament of Montenegro.

Having in mind that openness and transparency are key elements for democratic legitimacy and strengthening accountability, I am proud to inform you that the Parliament of Montenegro is the most transparent parliament in the former Yugoslavia region, according to the results of the survey on the degree of openness of the parliaments in this region. This survey was conducted in the first quarter of 2021 and it was based on more than hundred indicators. Parliament of Montenegro ranked first, by meeting 77.89 percent of the set openness criteria.

Our Parliament's openness to citizens and civil society was also welcomed by the European Parliament (in the Resolution from May 2021) as well as the European Commission, which stated in its Report on Montenegro for 2021 that the Parliament improved the transparency of its work, communicating with the public and stepped up its legislative and oversight role overall.

We are especially proud on the recent joint project of the Parliament of Montenegro and the European Parliament – the Citizen's Assembly, an innovative instrument in the implementation of democracy, which is enabling citizen participation in decision and policy making process. This was the first time for the Citizen's Assembly to be organised in a country outside the European Union, allowing citizens to be directly involved in the work of the Parliament. Also, our Parliament is the first parliament where the implementation of this instrument was supported by the EU institutions. This event was a great occasion for the representatives of public to share their views and recommendations on the concrete topic (corruption in the health care system and public sector), previously conducted through the panel of citizens. Parliaments' affirmative duty is to further promote citizens' understanding of the role of the parliament and this project was the best example of performing this task.

Among the priorities of the current convocation of the Parliament of Montenegro are transparency and publicity of its work, with the goal of further strengthening citizen's trust in the Parliament. Since the beginning of the 27th convocation, Parliament of Montenegro has managed to realize numerous project that significantly contributed to the openness of the Parliament, enabled easier access to information, but also raised level of accountability and commitment of Members of Parliament.

For the first time, all sessions of the parliamentary working bodies are broadcasted live via official YouTube channel, which is a big step forward, having in mind that in the previous period, only sessions of the Parliament were streamed. We are especially proud about the launching of a parliamentary channel, in cooperation with the national public broadcaster. This channel broadcasts sessions of the Parliament and its committees, as well as the most important news from the Parliament, and the programme scheme will be upgraded in the near future, with content suitable for younger viewers.

Allow me to note that our Parliament's openness towards the NGO initiatives is also highly recognized and appreciated. Representatives of civil society often attend the sessions of the parliamentary working bodies, where they have an

opportunity to voice their opinions, ask questions and give their recommendations.

One of the most recent projects of the Parliament of Montenegro is launching the e-Petitions portal, which enabled direct communication of citizens with the Parliament and institutions in Montenegro, giving them opportunity to raise issues related to legislative activity, submit their petitions and requests. This portal provides full accuracy, confidentiality, transparency and legality of the necessary procedures and is an alternative method for the citizens to exercise their constitutional right to contact an institution exercising public authority and obtain a response.

Perceiving the youth of Montenegro as the future of our country, Parliament of Montenegro often opens its doors for students from elementary schools, high schools as well as universities. Earlier this month, the Parliament of Montenegro successfully implemented the educational program „Simulation of the Work of Parliament“, which was implemented in the partnership with UNICEF, for the benefit of high school students. They had the opportunity to get acquainted with the law-making process in all its phases, acquire new knowledges and develop skills necessary for involvement in political processes.

Parliament of Montenegro has also been implementing (for nine years already) educational program called Democratic workshops, which aims to enhance young people's interest in political processes and enables them to get better understanding of the work of the parliament and its members. This program is dedicated to the elementary school students, so the workshops are carefully designed to be appropriate for this young age. In my opinion, it is never too early to begin learning about democracy, and that's why I consider this program as very valuable.

Last but not least, recognizing the importance of greater involvement of women in politics, as underrepresented gender, allow me to briefly inform you about the forming of Women's MP Group in the Parliament of Montenegro. This Group was the initiative of the first Vice-Presidents of the Parliament in the history of the Montenegrin multi-party system, and it is composed of female MPs from all political parties represented in the parliament. This is an excellent example of women's solidarity, having in mind that all female MPs stepped out of the party barriers and united, despite numerous differences in opinions, with the common goal of recognition of gender equality at all levels of decision-making.

Parliament of Montenegro will remain committed to achieving the highest democratic standards, with the main focus on maintaining credibility, accountability and transparency. In this manner we are highly appreciating this opportunity to learn about good practices in other countries, in order to overcome obstacles we are all dealing with in these challenging times.

Thank you for your kind attention.