

**The Western Balkans: How to Overcome Obstacles on the Road
Toward the EU
(President of the Parliament of Montenegro in Washington,
07.02.2019)**

- I would like to thank the Transatlantic Leadership Network for organising this gathering which brings together leaders from the Western Balkans and our USA partners. Only through conversation and agreement we can reach a solution which will ensure the safe and Euro-Atlantic future to the Southeastern Europe.
- Montenegro has never had dilemmas about the value system to which it belongs. We have clearly established the path that we want to follow. We have set the goals that we want to achieve - membership of NATO and the EU. I remind you that Montenegro is the only state which become a NATO member between the two summits, which was a kind of recognition for the vision and unequivocal commitment of our state to the Western values.
- In 13 years since the renewal of independence, we have achieved visible progress. Membership of NATO was crucial for us, in order to enhance our sovereignty and territorial integrity, while benefits of membership in economic sense have been already visible.
- We have continued implementing our reforms devotedly, since they are important for better living standard of our citizens. Out of all candidate states, we have progressed the most in the negotiation process, therefore we expect to become the first next member of the EU.
- We also expect more active and realistic approach from the EU members states when it comes to the enlargement. Each candidate country should be admitted when it is ready for membership. In our opinion, regatta is the only just principle.
- It is in our interest that all countries of the Southeastern Europe become a part of NATO and the EU. Europe cannot

be complete and strong enough without the Western Balkans integration. We are ready to share our experiences and knowledge with all who is interested in this.

- During its history, the EU had six enlargement waves, reaching the number of 29 member states. During that time, it changed and perfected its enlargement policy, which has resulted in detailed and demanding process for membership acceptance. Due to its transformation power, the enlargement policy is the most successful EU policy.
- Countries of the Western Balkans, with the support of the USA and the EU, must be strengthened institutionally and economically in order to develop tools for deterring and defending themselves from hazardous influence of certain states which do not share the same values.
- We are all encouraged by the solution of a long-running dispute between Macedonia and Greece, which has unblocked Macedonian path towards NATO and the EU. I personally congratulated Macedonian officials on this, during my recent visit to that country, since the resolution of open issues demands readiness for courageous actions and compromise.
- Responsible politicians are aware of the fact that sometimes they have to adopt difficult and unpopular decisions if they want to lead their state towards safer and more prosperous future.
- We also believe in the positive outcome of the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. That is a complex problem, which, aside from the issue of functionality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is the biggest burden for our Region.
- Montenegro is ready to give its contribution to the European family of nations. We are already behaving as an EU member when it comes to common foreign and security policy; also, we are devoted to regional cooperation and have excellent relations with all our neighbours.

- It is important that the USA and the EU send a clear message that enlargement policy must be continued, in order to prevent both - slowing down of the EU path of the candidate countries and creating of the space for the strengthening of Russian influence.

We in Montenegro have witnessed the attempts of third parties to stop our reform path and make influence on our Euro-Atlantic commitment. I will remind you of the narrative by the officials and media in Russia with regard to our NATO accession.

Europe should be bigger and stronger and those are two complementary processes.

The alliances which are closed for new energy and ideas are becoming less attractive. The EU must not allow this to itself due to the values it represents and differences it champions. New term of the European Parliament and new European Commission should analyse seriously their relation towards the enlargement policy, so to make more resolute strategic political decisions.

- You have a very significant role here - to keep the attention of Washington on our region, since you are proven friends of the Western Balkans.
- The USA must remain present in our region - not to solve our problems instead of us, but to prove that they are interested in the future of the region within the EU and NATO, where all the Western Balkan countries naturally belong.