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Critical points in the further development of Montenegrin society

**AS BASED ON EXPERIENCE IN THE
WORK OF CDT**





CDT's contribution to the "Alliance for Europe"

This document is the Center for Democratic Transition's (CDT) way of contributing to the dialogue that the Government has initiated with relevant social stakeholders. The drafting of these suggestions was one of the obligations we took upon ourselves at a meeting with Prime Minister Duško Marković, held in the scope of the "Alliance for Europe" Initiative on February 19.

This year marks our anniversary, as CDT has been present and advocating for a better and a more just society for 20 years now, and publication of this document is yet another way of marking the occasion. This paper tackles what we believe to be the "critical points" in the process of fulfilment of the political criteria for EU accession, as it builds upon our long-term experience in this as well as other areas of project management.

The document is not centered around accomplishments made in the development of Montenegrin society thus far, but on the phenomena that slow down, threaten or hinder such development, in line with our understanding of the main idea behind the initiated dialogue.

Most of our suggestions approach European integration from the standpoint of internal circumstances of the country.

Our goal is to thus try and give yet another contribution to overcoming the main weakness of our political scene - the modest political content in Montenegro. Ideas that are genuinely political give way to petty politics. The document therefore recalls statements of wise thinkers whose ideas we should all be revisiting.

A common solution to all of the key problems lies in resuming the initiated dialogue as soon as possible. The success of the ensuing dialogue will be measured only by positive changes to the current state of play, both before and after the coronavirus. Some of the problems can be solved within a fairly short time frame, while others will take more time. The success of the "Alliance for Europe" Initiative depends on the will, openness and determination

of all stakeholders, especially major ones. Although there is little time left, we believe that there is still room for Montenegro to take steps towards a modern democracy. "Every obstacle seems insurmountable if one is ready to retreat before it", as **Mihailo Lalić** wrote.

The CDT's analyses, practical policy proposals and other publicly available and thus verifiable publications further elaborate the ideas presented herein. Given that this is a policy document, we did not think it necessary to add references to documents that our conclusions are sourced from, but they remain available to all interested parties.

We remain open to all well-intended suggestions and constructive criticisms of our views expressed in this document and to publicly discussing its contents.

Podgorica, May 2020



II

Leave no room for “mono-national truths” as they are the cause of conflict and evil

The Constitution of Montenegro is one of the most important outcomes of the will of the Montenegrin citizens as expressed at the referendum. How one perceives this clearly expressed will is how they will perceive the Constitution.

A part of the political elite from both sides seems to forget that Montenegro is a civic state, and the concept of “mono-national truth” threatens to grow into official policy. Affirmative action is more often used as a means of political trade-off than as an instrument for the affirmation of minority rights.

Official discourse gives more and more validation to “coexistence”, the term that was imported from a nearby area which, unlike Montenegro, was afflicted by conflicts in the recent past. Proponents of this flawed policy of “multiculturalism” actually aim to show that relations between people in Montenegro are a matter of coercion of sorts. They believe that such coexistence should replace the authentic lives genuinely shared by those who live here and perceive this country as their own. Symbolically, this concept is leaning towards one of the darkest products of nationalism - two schools under one roof.

The state is wavering in standing up to the dangerous endeavours to “Bosnianize” Montenegro, an option increasingly offered to citizens. The “division” of territory, culture or economic wealth as per population census percentage entails a great risk. A policy of awarding benefits to peoples instead of citizens also means tearing down the foundations of a modern state in like manner as civil society was broken down in almost all countries of the former SFRY.

Strong dams should be put up to shield against such intents. In this regard, state policy should be seeking inspiration from **Koča Popović’s** message that nationalism is the lowest form of social consciousness and that “mono-national truth”, being what it is, cannot in fact be the truth. There should be fewer political calculations and much more political determination and compliance with the Constitution.

III

No democracy without government control

The decades-long problem of lack of balance between branches of government has further been unfolding into dominance of certain institutions over the Constitution and culminated in the third re-election of Filip Vujanović as President of Montenegro. This opened up the constitutional Pandora’s box that has not been closed to this day.

If the Constitution represents the will of the citizens expressed at the referendum, then failure to comply with it means to trample that will. The Constitution is not an administrative act to be skilfully circumvented, but an articulation of a social agreement that should curb uncontrolled power. Montenegro is currently in a state where political control of institutions is seriously deficient. This lack of democracy is the root cause of the key problems in the state.

Not only is the parliament not the center of political life, key initiatives and control of other branches of government, but its institutional culture is permeated by rude and violent behavior, insults and incidents. Such a parliament has no authority or political power to control the government. On the contrary, the government is at ease. This kind of doing politics naturally ushers in a “scandal democracy” in lieu of consolidated democracy, and our political life is reduced to “irrelevant” events that take place between scandals.

No one truly controls the judiciary either, which is run by an acting head for most of the time. Judicial office holders can do as they please, even keep up with trends of third term re-elections set by the former president of Montenegro. And there is no one in the state who could actually do something about that.

Both the Constitution and laws should be amended so as to envisage genuine checks and balances of institutions and changes of political practices that are constantly causing crises and obstructions. Laws on parliament and government need to stipulate a democratic and efficient control of state powers. The Constitutional Court also needs to be thoroughly reformed. Most importantly, it takes political savvy and good will to abide by the Constitution and the law – it should not be about a competition at outmanoeuvring them. Or, as **Valtazar Bogišić** put it, “what everyone understands the same way, needs no interpreter.”

IV

The state faced with a dilemma: genuine reforms or (self) isolation?

Besides having legislature under its thumb, the Government also established dominance over various independent agencies whose purpose was to redress and “control” its decisions. We can hardly think of a single decision of these institutions that went against the proposals of the executive powers.

However, even such a dominant government did not muster the strength to resist phenomena that are just as dangerous - partitocracy and clientelism. Of course, these have taken their toll on public administration reform by limiting its scope. State administration remains a haven for, often not overly capable, party recruits. In order to secure a sufficient number of votes and the benefits of public office, the ruling parties have almost fully enclosed the institutions. There is little room for opponents, regardless of their abilities and skills.

This pattern of behavior has a far-reaching impact. Not only does it provoke frustrations of a large number of people and discourage education and training, but it also makes people want to leave the country. Slashing highly qualified workforce and replacing them with obedient and often mediocre staff is politically conservative and not in the public interest of a small country where skill is deficient as a matter of course.

That is why a genuine reform is necessary, primarily to rid the society of partitocracy and expand the political base and personnel pool for the sake of a future government. Then, decisions are to be made on the future of a public administration that is in tune with public interest. Each day that goes by without ending party dominance over the state is a step away from enlightened societies, dragging us down into the corridors of self-sufficiency. The decision is difficult but necessary - reform or isolation, as **Zoran Đinđić** once said.

V

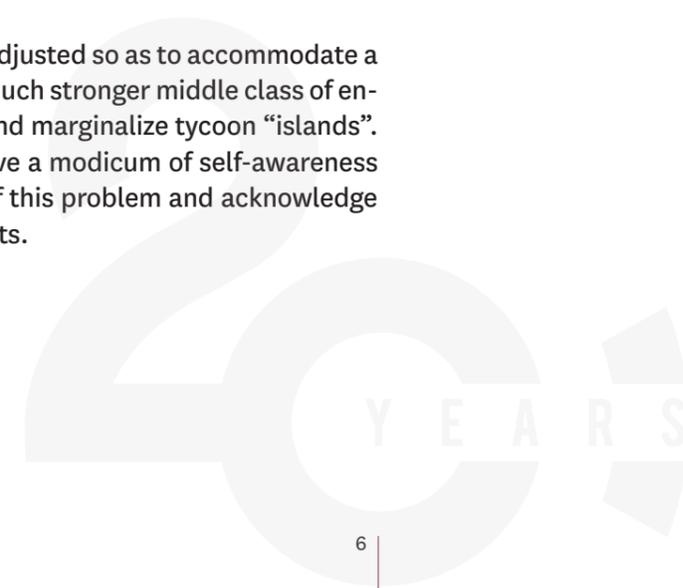
The new class is a danger to society in many ways

The wage and benefits policy that applies to some employees of the state proved to be unfair and unsuccessful. High earnings of those who manage public goods in the best interest of the public are reasonable. However, high wages and enormous additional material benefits for those with mediocre work results are highly problematic.

Also, more and more examples of privileged and government-affiliated businesses are emerging. If we add to the high-ranking officials and businesses affiliated to them the many middle-level managers, their partisan staff, privileged relatives, best men and so on - we clearly start to see the outlines of a new class. And that class, as **Milovan Đilas** wrote, aspires to dispose of state resources as if it owns them and follows the hierarchy when distributing them.

These deviations are the real and legitimate source of citizen dissatisfaction. They are the remnants of the past times and outdated political concepts that do no good whatsoever to society or public interest. In addition, they may be used as a means of establishing some other very dangerous political concepts. They were also utilized back in 1989, and effectively so, even though they were much less prominent back then. Recent church protests have shown that this kind of dissatisfaction of some citizens could also be harnessed to clericalize society.

The current economic model must finally be adjusted so as to accommodate a truly competitive market economy, create a much stronger middle class of entrepreneurs and citizens, eliminate poverty and marginalize tycoon “islands”. Let us hope that our decision-makers will have a modicum of self-awareness and the will to grasp the scope and danger of this problem and acknowledge the need for a fairer distribution of state assets.



VI

Redefine the purpose of the fight against corruption

The fight against corruption in Montenegro has been reduced to meeting outdated criteria contained in various EU membership action plans and communicating statistics that is subject to interpretation. We seem to have forgotten why we are waging this struggle along the way.

We fight corruption to prevent abuse by privileged individuals and groups and to uncover those we had failed to prevent. We are fighting to prosecute and purge the system of dishonorable officials and civil servants, to retroactively check for any suspicious accumulation of wealth or reduce gray economy and collect more tax revenue. We have fulfilled a few of these indicators only.

We can calculate the anti-corruption indicator by doing simple math - how much money did we seize from corrupt deals, how was it repurposed for the benefit of the citizens, how many new jobs were created, how many opportunities did we seize, and so on.

That is why we need a radical change of approach. This necessitates a strategic plan and evaluation of desired outcomes of combating corruption, as well as new and substantial indicators, rather than merely technical ones. We need to be confronting our own results frequently and openly. We also need a new policy of openness of institutions. Our experience is provincial, as **Radomir Konstantinović** wrote. That is why we need decisive action, so that we can reach substantial and authentic results in this field in the future, as successful communities do.

VII

Perform a “moral exercise” and make an agreement on elections

The authority of a government rests on the will of its people. If half the population distrusts this will, then elections will clearly not pave the way to stability, but will instead become a source of uncertainty, boycotts or possible conflicts.

Our political elites have proven themselves incapable of solving this problem in the parliament. The failure of electoral reform did not only demonstrate immaturity of society, but was also a dangerous waste of time. We reach election day without having a non-partisan electoral administration and without residence status settled for emigrants and expatriates.

Therefore, we can only take what's left. If a swift and efficient intervention takes place, that is, if there is a political will and the culture of political dialogue changes, we just might reach election day with more control over party financing, electoral registers, misuse of state resources, party-affiliated employment and with more professionalism in the work of national broadcaster and other institutions involved in elections.

Let the way in which **Predrag Matvejević** treated his political opponents be our inspiration in this process. His moral exercises should serve as lessons in political culture and the proper course of action in the processes that lie ahead.



VIII

Improved media landscape to be set as government priority

The Government, the Parliament and other state actors have been inefficient in resolving a number of issues that burden the media and the environment they operate in, both in terms of informing and misinforming citizens. Media laws, which should be the framework for solving these accumulated problems, have been two years in the making, while the situation in the media is getting worse day by day.

The first issue that needs to be addressed is ensuring the true independence of national and local public broadcasters. Furthermore, putting a stop to attacks and threats to journalists, improving regulatory control, assisting in setting up high-quality self-regulation and ensuring better pay for journalists are just some of the issues awaiting resolution. Also, there are the issues of how to properly counteract misinformation and build the resistance of the media and citizens against these phenomena.

It is very important that the Government acknowledges that the whole society, of which it is a part as well, needs media that are serious and professional, regardless of whether they support government policies. The media should control politics and power, and not create an enabling atmosphere for them, as **Miroslav Krleža** had warned. Media landscape must be improved, and the Government is responsible for taking the first steps towards positive change. Part of the responsibility, of course, lies with the media, which must reverse their negative work practices.

IX

No one should be allowed to become politically “immersed” in foreign policy orientation

The significant work, energy and effort invested so that Montenegro could make the most important historical turn in foreign policy orientation could be called into question if the very policy is not constantly upgraded and improved. Without identifying specific initiative-oriented foreign policy “niches”, the results achieved thus far might be sidelined. This is even more the case when we consider the lack of any written strategy, i.e. a written and comprehensive framework for conducting foreign policy.

In addition, it is important to know that, being a small country, Montenegro is subject to negative external political and economic influences, especially from countries with democratic deficits. It is reasonable to conduct a policy of pursuing self-interest and cooperating with all countries, but there should also be serious mechanisms for warding off the negative effects of these processes. For now, these mechanisms boil down to the narrative of a “hybrid war” that threatens Montenegro, but it is the threats that are less visible that are much more serious and dangerous.

Small and large states do not share the same notion of equality. Big countries often have a “stunted” sense of cooperation. It is necessary to devise a system that will make it impossible for any individual involved in foreign policy to get politically “wrapped up” in it and neglect the interests of the state – as **Veljko Mićunović** wrote.



X

Rid the identity of “ephemeral drama and national pathos”

Regardless of how one perceives the importance of identity policy, the fact remains that Montenegrin citizens can make choices from a very limited pool of alternatives. They are offered an “anti-individual” identity that hinges on trauma for the most part – regardless of whether the trauma dates back to 1389 or 1918.

There has never been a serious and open social debate to tackle all segments of this issue. The following question has never been properly tabled: what exactly is our identity? Instead, parties and religious communities have taken upon themselves the exclusive right to decide on the said matter.

The official understanding of identity and the alternative nationalist identity matrices are too confining for most people. The fact that these matrices are not embraced does not mean that citizens of Montenegro have doubts about their identity, despite the often allegations. Unfortunately, identity is predominantly reduced to “Orthodox” or inter-religious bickering, although such an identity might have many more facets to it than meets the eye, which are in no way less important.

All this is accompanied by more or less successful attempts to revise our history. Both the distant, anti-fascist past, as well as the recent one. Today we have fabrications even about Slobodan Milošević and his FRY, the last national socialist construct in Europe of the twentieth century, but also about its “war for peace”. In addition, his nationalist counterparts from regional countries, who fought the war with him side by side and in harmony, have been getting approval lately. Unfortunately, our education system does not have a quality response to these phenomena.

All of the this prompts a much more open policy in this field, a policy that will not build identity on traumas but on successes, as enlightened societies do. The solution is in expanding and modernizing the identity matrix, i.e. introducing the policy of interculturalism. Or, as **Veljko Milatović** brilliantly defined it when discussing Njegoš and the Montenegrin and Yugoslav identity at the same time, an identity which must be deprived of “the ballast of the romanticizing and folklore naivety, Orthodox and civic mythomania, which serves as a decorum for ephemeral drama and national pathos”.

