



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# **Response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, Dominique Waag**

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 18, 2023

Ambassador Waag, dear Dominique, welcome back to the Permanent Council and thank you for your detailed report. The ongoing work of your Mission to implement its mandate and 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, in partnership with the government of Montenegro, remains of critical importance to this Organization. The ability to improve human security on the ground in visible and tangible ways through the programs and activities of Field Missions such as yours is among the most consequential aspects of the OSCE's work.

What is at stake is vital. Montenegro is at a political crossroads. In addition to its war of aggression against Ukraine, Russia is also persistently sowing division and promoting instability across the Western Balkans, and does so through a range of influence operations, proxies, and disinformation campaigns. Nowhere were these efforts more apparent than in Russia's role in the attempted coup in Montenegro in 2016. This reality only further illustrates the critical role OSCE Missions such as yours play in assisting participating States to increase the resilience of their democratic institutions.

Ambassador,

The Mission's close partnership with the Montenegrin government as described in your report is impressive. Your work with the Parliament and State Election Commission is clearly supporting important efforts to build more resilient democratic institutions. The value of these efforts was reinforced by the democratic outcomes of the October municipal elections and the April presidential elections, which inaugurated a peaceful shift in power that we too often take for granted. ODIHR also noted that the April elections were competitive and fundamental freedoms were respected, even as it recommended further electoral reforms.

Similarly, your team's work on media freedom and media literacy, including promoting journalistic standards, the safety of journalists, and access to information all directly reinforce Montenegro's resilience and show the Mission's capacity to implement its mandate. My delegation also appreciates the opportunity to hear directly from one of your beneficiaries, Ms. Sunčica Bakić, Director of the Agency for Electronic Media, during yesterday's informal meeting. On that point, your report addresses the foreign ownership of commercial media outlets and the challenge to electronic and print media posed by online platforms. I am interested to hear more from you on the effects of online and social media on public opinion in Montenegro, and particularly their use by malign actors to spread disinformation and exacerbate societal and political division.

We commend your work with Montenegrin authorities and journalists' self-regulatory bodies to counter hate speech while respecting freedom of expression, as well as your efforts to combat gender-based violence and integration of gender equality across your various lines of effort.

I also want to compliment your team's engagement with civil society partners in Montenegro. Montenegro has a very vibrant civil society, which we see as a key aspect of its democratic resilience, and we look forward to continued collaboration with civil society organizations in Montenegro to reinforce the country's path towards European integration.

Montenegro is an important U.S. ally and a vibrant multiethnic democracy. Your team's continuing support for the implementation of reforms necessary for European Union membership remains essential. But we all know that you cannot effectively implement your mandate without a reliable annual budget. For too long, a small number of participating States have played politics with the OSCE's budget, impeding the work of the Organization in a petty effort to score political points. Now is the time to move past parochial agendas, to support the work of the OSCE, and to support the work of the OSCE's Mission to Montenegro. I urge all delegations to move with urgency and approve the Chair's 2023 Unified Budget proposal.

Ambassador Waag, thank you again for your leadership at the OSCE Mission to Montenegro and the dedicated work of your team over the past year across all three dimensions of security. You continue to have our full support.

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