

Head of Unit for Montenegro within the European Commission's Directorate General for Enlargement
Mr. Dirk Lange

Dear Mr. Lange,

This letter is to inform you that we are extremely concerned about recent developments in Montenegro in relation to country's efforts to successfully combat corruption and organized crime. Having in mind the overall commitments and promises given upon opening the chapters 23 and 24, we strongly believe that Montenegrin Government cannot afford to leave anyone behind who is willing to support the country journey towards the membership in the EU family.

Specifically, we are concerned about recent developments whereby the Montenegrin authorities decided to reduce amount of data published in the Company Register and State Cadastre Register. The direct impact of these changes will be that to undermine but also efforts of the civil society organizations and media to investigate cases of corruption and organized crime and to hold government to account.

We note that, while the police and prosecution in Montenegro still have limited results, there is a solid track record of possible corruption and organized crime cases having been disclosed by civil society and media using information from mentioned public registries. Most of the high level corruption and organized cases were initiated by civil society organisations, such as MANS using in part data obtained from public datasets. It is hence of utmost importance that information from those registries remain public and unrestricted.

Restricting the amount of information on companies, their owners and property will negatively impact the business environment and the investment climate for EU companies interested investing in Montenegro, leaving them uncertain about whom they are dealing with.

Currently, most of the countries from the region, some of the EU member stated and even some off shore destinations are providing more information about companies and their owners then the Montenegro currently does. Furthermore, European Union Member States, as well also other democratic countries around the globe, are currently arguing for greater transparency of data in their registries In June 2013, leaders such as Barak Obama of the USA, David Cameron of the UK, and Angela Merkel of Germany adopted the G8 Open Data Charter which specifically mentions company registers as a "high value data set" which should be made available "for improving democracies and encouraging innovative re-use of data".

We also believe that, as part of the process of EU integration, Montenegro should be introducing higher standards of transparency of government operations and delivering - not less - information to its citizens. It is therefore regrettable that we are witnessing moves from the Montenegrin authorities in the opposite direction, intentionally depriving public from information that could help uncover and take action against illegal acts corruption.

If the shutdown of the data held in Montenegro's key registries persists, it will be likely to have a negative impact on recent weak results in combating corruption in and organized crime, as stated in the newest Progress Report for Montenegro. Having in mind that public

records are a very powerful tool for civil society and media to support the country overall efforts in fighting corruption, we urge you to address this issue with representatives of Montenegrin Government, especially in light of the upcoming opening of the negotiation chapters 23 and 24.

Respectfully,

Carl Dolan, Transparency International Liaison Office to the European Union
Drew Sullivan, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project
Gavin Hayman, Global Witness
Helen Darbshire, Access Info Europe
Vanja Čalović, MANS