

Society

Policy Brief: Active citizen participation can be catalyst of social change in Montenegro

by EWB 30. 10. 2023.



Montenegro Flag; Photo: Pixabay / Sergei Petrov

VIENNA – Through the development of local communities and their civil input from below, Montenegro can help accelerate the reforms that are necessary for the country to become a part of the EU, concludes Policy Brief [“Rebuilding democracy from below: A case of local communities in Montenegro”](#), published within the WB2EU Network.

It is added that civil inputs could also improve the socio-economic position of vulnerable groups in multiple parts of the state, and decrease social and political inequality among different individuals and groups.

“The democratic potential that lies in local

communities, as legally defined governing bodies, needs to be utilised in order to address the ongoing crisis of democratic governing in Montenegro and help the country to accelerate key reforms in the EU accession process”, authors stresses.

They recommend that local communities at the outset must have their own working spaces, as well as professionalisation of individuals working with them, whose work will be remunerated by the municipalities.

The second recommendation says that all local communities should open bank accounts, and municipalities should allocate specific funds from the budget for them. “Control over fund outflows from the bank accounts of local communities should be carried out by local communities. Official email addresses and dedicated websites should be set up for more efficient communication with citizens, ensuring complete transparency.

Policy Brief recommends that local communities should have a compiled population register for their locality on their websites.

The authors explain that local communities (LCs) in Montenegro are primarily and fundamental community for solving local issues. According to Montenegrin Law on Local Self-Government, they are defined as a starting point for solving the problems of citizens in the most narrow localities. A local community is thus a legal, governing entity that has the possibility of complete, separate functioning in relation to local self-government (LSG), where the LSG governing a municipality, as a higher authority has to delegate some of its’ jurisdictions to an LC governing a certain locality inside the

municipality, authors add.

Policy Brief cites results of the survey conducted by the Center for Civil Liberties (CEGAS) and media outlet Vijesti on the topic of the role and activities and local communities. On a sample of 682 citizens from 22 municipalities, 76.7% citizens responded that they never had contact with the LC governing the locality where they live, while only 6% responded that their LC helped them achieve some of their rights at some point. According to survey, 97% of citizens responded that they don't know anything about the finance managed by their LC.

The authors assess that the principle of decentralisation, as a key principle of local governance, as well as the legal solution defining the work of local communities in Montenegro, thus do not exist.

“LCs do not function in practice, and they do not fulfill their designated role as such. In the past, they were usually most visible during electoral campaigns, when they usually served as a space of gathering for those supporting the structures in power. Without knowledge about LCs, as can be seen from the survey results, citizens are often forced to address the immediate local issues to the National Assembly or the central government, which is not in charge of solving the immediate issues in specific localities”, authors write.

They stress that the examples from Montenegro alone can help for better understanding why LCs, their activities and practices, as well as active citizen participation on the ground, can be catalysts for social change.

Policy Brief show a few examples of LCs from

Montenegro that have been able to establish themselves as functional through citizens' initiatives and actions that transformed the communities in which they were active.

"Examples of three different LCs in three different Montenegrin municipalities have used alternate, innovative, and active citizen participation initiatives, mechanisms to promote change, sustainable development, environmental, educational, and cultural practices, community building, etc. However, they also showcase how a lack of institutional channelling of such practices through LCs and local engagement presents a challenge for establishing such practices as norms rather than exceptions", authors assess.

They conclude that examining the LCs in the context of democratic transformation in Montenegro is a case worth further exploring, given its potential as on-ground case studies of democracy, democratic institutions, and democratic governing in practice, but also for the development of social and economic policies and strategies that are more inclusive and sustainable.

The Policy Brief is published in the framework of the WB2EU project. The project aims at the establishment of a network of renowned think-tanks, do-tanks, universities, higher education institutes and policy centres from the Western Balkans, neighbouring countries and EU member states that will be most decisive for the enlargement process and Europeanisation of the region in the upcoming years. The WB2EU

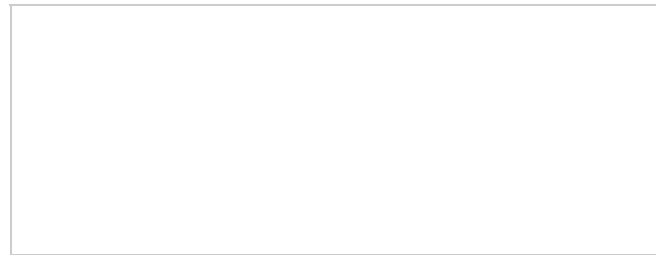
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