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A ComDef Publication Fall 2010 U.S.\$10.00



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Montenegro - a Reliable Defense Partner

By Boro Vučinić, Minister of Defense, Montenegro



Montenegro, the youngest UN member, restored its statehood at the referendum held in May 2006. By that democratic act, it regained its international status recognized in 1878 at the Congress of Berlin. Although small in size, Montenegro is very rich in history and culture, and is best reflected in a harmonious coexistence with many nations and religions living in this area. Our country has been the only one that did not suffer fighting in its territory during the war in the Western Balkans.

One of the most important decisions, made by the Montenegrin government, following renewed statehood, addressed the need to establish the Montenegrin armed forces. As a state with 700.000 citizens, with a growing economy and without direct foreign threats, there was a debate as to whether our country needs or could afford armed forces. Conversely, there was a clear social consensus that security and stability of our region was still vulnerable: but also a belief that they are attainable. Therefore, we are firmly convinced today that complete stability of this region could be found within Euro-Atlantic integration of all the countries.

We believe that responsible states in the international community, and every future NATO member, should contribute to world peace and stability. Therefore, by deploying the Montenegrin armed forces personnel in peace keeping missions, our country is showing its commitment to keeping peace, and is giving its contribution to collective security. If one wants to be within the collective security system, then one cannot only be a user but should also give its contribution to that system functioning and development.

Participation of 31 Montenegrin soldiers in ISAF peace keeping mission is a confirmation of success in reaching full interoperability with NATO forces. During my first visit to Afghanistan in May this year, I had an opportunity to directly see their professionalism in performing their tasks, which was also confirmed by German and Hungarian commanders in the northern region of the country. An excellent preparation of our soldiers by the American company MPRI has also contributed to the success of our first mission in Afghanistan so far. I want to thank our partners, especially the USA and the state of Maine for their support in conducting defense system reforms and modernization of our armed forces.



Minister of Defence Boro Vucinic meets with members of the ISAF peace keeping mission in Afghanistan



NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen meets with the Minister of Defence of Montenegro, Boro Vucinic and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, Milan Rocen.

Montenegrin armed forces have been functioning for four years, and many things have been done regarding their modernization, in equipment as well as in training their personnel in acquiring new knowledge, skills and procedures. This brings them increasingly closer to the standards of NATO members. Although small in number, with only 2356 members, the armed forces consist of units of army, navy and air force.

Besides the peace keeping mission in Afghanistan, our soldiers also participate in UNMIL mission in Liberia, and our first officers will soon be deployed in EU mission NAVFOR ATALANTA, in order to contribute to fight against piracy.

After regaining its statehood, Montenegro has determinedly started its way to NATO and EU integration. We are convinced that those two alliances are the best framework to achieve national security and economic progress. This will bring a higher standard of living to our citizens, based on the model of developed countries in Europe and the whole world. Four years later, this has proved to be justified and useful in so many ways. As regards NATO integration, we believe that the benefits of future membership are significant, primarily in strengthening national, as well as regional security, which has a direct impact on all the countries in the Western Balkans region. Furthermore, it is very important for small countries like Montenegro to strengthen our position in international relations, with our strategic partner, the USA, and with numerous European states. Moreover, having in mind the experience of the neighboring countries and many countries from central Europe, we believe that NATO accession will ensure stability and attractiveness of our business market

for new investments, since safety is a prerequisite for capital. Being a European tourist destination, security provided by NATO definitely contributes to an increased interest of tourists for our country.

Montenegro has a significant geostrategic position in the Mediterranean, and by our joining NATO, the Alliance will cover the Mediterranean Sea, from its north side, with its members and partners, which will give a new dimension to that strategically important area. Therefore, I believe that our country will, in that sense, contribute to the overall security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Secondly, Montenegro, a country recognized as a factor of peace and stability in the Balkans, with its NATO membership, will continue to contribute to the stability of this region, where there are still certain open issues. Finally, our contribution to NATO missions, within our capacities, has, besides its effective contribution on the spot, a very symbolic message of our commitment to fight against terrorism and strengthening world peace.

Having in mind three years of our membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace cooperation program, Montenegro has been granted, with almost record speed, and due to its hard work, a Membership Action Plan (MAP), and has thus gained NATO candidate status. In those three years, by successfully meeting

our obligations, we have earned an absolute support of NATO allies to continue even more intensively with our way towards that status. MAP is an indicator and confirmation of success in our defense system reforms and other segments of our society, as well as both an incentive and obligation to continue the way we have started. The fact that MAP has helped nine countries so far to become NATO members speaks volumes about its importance. At the moment, we are working on our first Annual National Plan, which will start to be implemented in September this year. Since we are willing to make the most of our efforts to successfully reach the goals set in MAP, I am convinced that we will move towards full-fledged membership in an accelerated way, as we have done so far. We are additionally encouraged by the messages of the political leaders from the West, that Montenegro could be the first next NATO member.

The Minister of Defense of Montenegro, Boro Vucinic, was appointed in 2006 after extraordinary parliamentary elections following the referendum in which Montenegro renewed its independence. He is committed to implementing defense sector reforms, and fulfilling these standards on Montenegro's path towards NATO.

