



***Evropski pokret***  
Crna Gora

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# **Economic migrations from Montenegro to the EU**

European Movement in Montenegro  
Podgorica, September 2016

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Emigrations from Montenegro driven by the goal of improving one's standard of living are not a novelty. However, the wave of people seeking asylum in one of the EU countries reached its peak in 2015. To be more precise, in Lower Saxony, the only area where Montenegrins are allowed to apply for asylum, over 3 142 persons<sup>1</sup> did so in 2015 (from January 1<sup>st</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup>), putting Montenegrins at second place, behind Syrians, with regards to the number of submitted requests for asylum. Even though the recent statistics show that this trend significantly subsided in 2016, the causes and consequences of the aforementioned movements of the Montenegrin population, primarily from the North, have to be investigated and addressed properly in order to prevent new waves of emigrations. Certainly, the number of asylum seekers from Montenegro to the EU countries is not as significant as compared to other states (in Germany, we're not even in the first ten countries), including the Western Balkans region. Nevertheless, the problem is pervasive enough for the state itself, both from the numerical point of view and with regards to the image of Montenegro as an EU applicant.

The goal of this report is to initiate a more encompassing analysis of this phenomenon, starting with researching the current institutional and legislative framework in Montenegro, including the existing statistical and other data on the local and national level, as well as conducting thorough interviews with representatives of national institutions, international organizations, local municipalities and the EU states which are a part of this problem. By analyzing the data gathered within this policy brief, we hope to arrive to conclusions related to challenges and shortcomings causing or contributing to this problem, and at the same time, through conclusions and recommendations, point at the right direction towards their solutions.

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1 Data which the Ministry of Interior of Montenegro received from Germany.

## Legislative and institutional framework

In Montenegro, no law exists which regulates the area of illegal emigrations and asylum seekers who are Montenegrin citizens. The basis on which this question is regulated lies within the readmission and memoranda signed with individual countries and the EU itself. In the Stabilization and Association Agreement (2007), the cooperation between Montenegro and other EU member states with regards to illegal migrations from both sides was defined as follows: *“The contracted parties shall cooperate in order to prevent and control illegal immigrations. In that regard, Montenegro and EU Member States agree to readmit all its citizens who are found to be illegally residing on the territory of Montenegro or on the territory of one of the Member States of the European Community. The contracted party also agree to conclude and thoroughly implement the Agreement on Readmission, including the obligation of readmitting citizens of other countries and stateless persons”*<sup>2</sup>. This obligation has also been confirmed by the *Agreement between the Republic of Montenegro and the European Community on the Readmission (returning and admitting) Persons without the Residence Permit*. Moreover, several individual agreements on readmission have been signed with Norway, Kosovo, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Macedonia and Moldavia. In this way, Montenegro is obliged to accept all its citizens whose residence permit has been denied.

At the national level, there are two strategies which directly and indirectly deal with this question: *Strategy for Integrated Border Management in Montenegro for the period 2011-2016* (maintaining the structure of border management in the state, controlling the migration movements)

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2 Stability and Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States and Republic of Montenegro, Chapter VII – Justice, Freedom, Security, Ch.83:[http://durbin.cdtmn.org/durbin/images/dokumenta/SSP\\_CG\\_i\\_EU.pdf](http://durbin.cdtmn.org/durbin/images/dokumenta/SSP_CG_i_EU.pdf)

and *Strategy for Reintegration of Persons returned on the Basis of the Agreement on Readmission for the period 2016-2020*. The first Strategy deals with illegal migrations primarily with regards to the passage of asylum seekers through Montenegro and potential applications for asylum, leaving Montenegrin emigrants without a special definition. The other Strategy directly concerns persons who return to Montenegro and, as it was only adopted in 2016, its effects are to be seen. The Strategy itself recognizes some of the key problems of economic emigrations from Montenegro, defining Germany, Sweden, Belgium and Luxembourg as priority destinations of departure, as well as Podgorica, Berane, Bijelo Polje and Rozaje as primary destinations of arrivals. Moreover, this document recognizes inefficiencies of the system and insufficient coordination of institutions in Montenegro, as well as a lack of communication with the structures in the EU countries when it comes to providing information on persons returning to Montenegro. The Strategy also recognizes the necessity of focusing on reintegration in the sense of education, specialization and employment opportunities. However, the practice has so far shown a non-existence of adequate data which are a prerequisite for further steps. Even though it is difficult to monitor the process of leaving Montenegro for asylum seeking, the process of returning these persons to Montenegro is an opportunity to gather data in a detailed manner regarding the structure of all individuals who return to Montenegro, which is lacking at the moment.

The Ministry of Interior is in charge of the area of migrations in Montenegro. The Directorate for foreigners, migrations and readmission and the Directorate for asylum operate within the Directorate for administrative interior affairs. However, the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior primarily concerns the migrations of the population within Montenegro, as well as the immigration of foreigners, while when it comes to the emigrations from Montenegro, the focus is mostly on the readmission. In addition to this, the citizens of Montenegro who leave the country with

the purpose of seeking asylum are not obliged to “check-out”, leaving no data on the number of such cases at the Ministry of Interior’s disposal. Apart from them, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare is in charge of the area of migrations through the Sector of relocated and internally relocated persons, readmission and asylum affairs, which consists of two departments: the Department for relocated and internally relocated persons and the Center for asylum affairs. However, the primary focus of this Ministry is also on the asylum seekers who arrive to Montenegro or the emigrants from Montenegro upon their return. What’s more, important roles are also being fulfilled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integrations, as the institution which serves as an intermediate in international agreements and communications with international organizations. Also, the Administration for the Care of Refugees, Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT), Employment Office, as well as the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education all have an indirect impact in the process of readmission, but a direct one with regards to the reintegration and they ought to be actively included in an interdepartmental cooperation in this field.

As far as international organizations operating in through their offices in Montenegro are concerned, the most important role for this specific aspect of migration, is played by the International Organization for Migrations (IOM), however, its field of activity is also limited to helping the returnees who voluntarily apply for asylum.

## Asylum seekers from Montenegro – Structure and Motivation?

In Montenegro, there are two registers<sup>3</sup> of data gathered on migrations, but neither contain information of the emigrants from Montenegro.

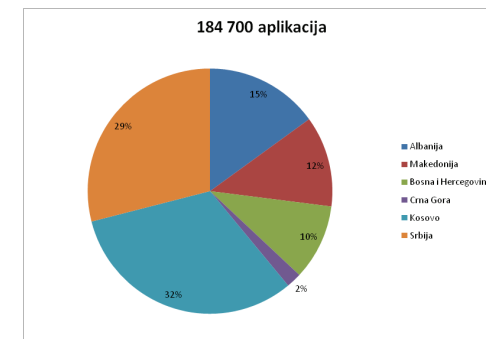
3 Register of Residence and Register of Foreigners.

MONSTAT is not in the possession of numerical data regarding the asylum seekers from Montenegro, or the returnees on readmission. This data is missing at the level of local municipalities as well, with the exception of Petnjica, where a partial record of persons emigrating from that particular area is kept.

At the EU level, EUROSTAT is keeping track of the asylum requests record in each Member State. Since the requests from Montenegro to Germany are most prevalent, the following table represents average numbers of submitted requests for EU asylum, and individual data for Germany, with the time frame of the past 8 years:

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
EU28 <sup>4</sup>	275	270	405	635	1,260	945	1,845	> 4,000
Germany	55	95	95	125	395	380	1,270	3,635

Such numbers are results of branding Montenegro as a “country of safe origin”, in order to distinguish highly important cases during the period when migrations are one of key EU problems. The number of migrants from Montenegro is not that drastic if we compare absolute values to those in the Western Balkans region, as it is shown in the following chart<sup>5</sup>:



4 The table is citing EUROSTAT data taken from Montenegro: Germany’s Balkan stipends –Asylum and the Rozaje exodus (ERSTE Stiftung and European Stability Initiative, January 2015)

5 European Asylum Office, Asylum Applications from the Western Balkans: Comparative analysis and trends, *push-pull factors and responses*, 2015

However, in spite of this fact, the number of emigrants from Montenegro to the EU who seek asylum is most certainly significant if we take the size of Montenegrin population into consideration and the ratio of the number of persons left with the size of the country. This prompted German officials in 2015 to issue warnings with regards to the problems arising from trends of sudden increases in asylum requests, linking them with the Montenegro's image and future in the no-visa regime.

Since readmission is the primary aspect of this question which is both legally and institutionally regulated in Montenegro, the data available concern the number of persons returned to Montenegro, as it is stated in the following table<sup>6</sup>:

	Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
1.	Germany	76	160	163	139	188	726
2.	Sweden	32	43	39	25	24	163
3.	Luxembourg	-	5	10	38	28	81
4.	Belgium	4	7	3	1	1	16
5.	Switzerland	6	7	4	12	9	38
6.	Others	27	39	19	17	12	114
	<b>Total</b>	145	261	238	232	262	1.138

This way, a number of persons is shown who were returned to Montenegro from each of the aforementioned countries in the period between 2011 and 2015. If we compare the number of those who applied for asylum with those who were returned, it is clear that a large number of cases has not been solved yet. According to the data of the Ministry of Interior, in the period of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 to September 9<sup>th</sup> 2016, 204 requests for

<sup>6</sup> Strategy of Reintegration of Persons returned based on the Agreement on Readmission for the period of 2016-2020, along with the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for 2016, April 2016, pp. 14

readmission were recorded, out of which 15 were accepted. Here it is important to point out that not all of these requests are necessarily connected to asylum seekers, there are other types of illegal migrants who could be working illegally in another country or evading prison sentences in Montenegro.

According to the Strategy, an increase in the number of returnees is explained by shortened procedures in EU Member States and the adoption of a more expedient process of readmission. This information of particular importance: according to the International Organization for Migrations in Podgorica, which helps persons who voluntarily return to Montenegro, there have been 27 such cases in the period January-September 2016. Also, it should be noted that not all citizens of Montenegro return on the basis of readmission, so it is virtually impossible to talk about precise numbers. What is evident is the existence of a significantly lower number of those who returned through readmission than the total number of returnees.

In 2015, the European Asylum Office published a research<sup>7</sup> containing analysis of questionnaires filled by asylum applicants, so-called "push and pull" factors. *Push* factors are those which can be related to the dissatisfaction of the potential asylum seeker with the situation in the country which they're running from, hoping to find better conditions for living. According the research, the factors include:

- 1) Social problems of certain groups;
- 2) Access to labor market and unemployment;
- 3) Lack of social infrastructure (f.e. social services of the system and social welfare structures for persons with disabilities);

<sup>7</sup> European Asylum Office, *Asylum Applicants from the Western Balkans: comparative analysis of trends, push-pull factors and responses*, 2015

- 4) Existence of parallel social systems(f.e. vendetta or blood revenge);
- 5) Lack of public health system in the country of origin or problems with the health of particular groups;
- 6) Problems related to education.

Interviewed citizens of Montenegro cited the situation on the labor market in the Western Balkans region as the deciding factor of the departure from their own country. Also, an important factor was recognized as the lack of social infrastructure, as well as social problems of particular groups. The problems in the public health system were rated moderately important, while as the least popular factors problems in education and vendetta were mentioned.

On the other hand, the *pull* factors are deciding reasons attracting potential asylum seekers to a particular country. In this case, the survey recognized:

- 1) Long procedures of data analysis;
- 2) Subsidies and privileges;
- 3) Presence and role of existing diaspora;
- 4) Employment availability(legally or illegally);
- 5) Geographic proximity;
- 6) Healthcare
- 7) Return programs and similar packages;
- 8) Role of tourist agencies and organizers.

When asked about the most important factors, Montenegrin emigrants

mentioned healthcare, employment availability, followed by the presence and role of the existing diaspora, as well as the subsidies and privileges. Long data analysis procedures and geographic proximity were deemed less important.

It is interesting to notice that not every *push* factor can be paired with its *pull* counterpart. To be more precise, among the most important factors mentioned are social privileges and healthcare, as well as employment availability, albeit illegal one.

## Why are asylum seekers primarily coming from the North?

The problem of emigrations from Montenegro is mainly connected to its Northern region. This situation is not surprising considering the disproportion in the economic, infrastructural and cultural development of the Southern, Central and Northern part of Montenegro.

The official Strategy of the regional development of Montenegro for the period of 2014-2020 points out the problem of disproportionate regional development as one of the key factors of insufficient general economic development of Montenegro, including its competitiveness on the international market. The northern part of Montenegro is recognized as the most vulnerable in that regard. The problems of economic and social nature (poverty, unemployment), negative birth rate and insufficient resources exploitation overcame the potential reflected in the North's arable land, hydro-potential, coal, lead and zing reserves. Main advantages of the Northern region have not been utilized, which was confirmed by the information that only 7% of the total foreign investments were realized in this region in the period from 2006 to 2011.

This region is facing a drastic decrease in its population. Such disparity was also recorded by MONSTAT in its monthly reports recording the movement of persons inside Montenegro, indicating that the northern municipalities face a larger number of those who are leaving than of those who are coming to stay. For example, according to the census from 2011, there are 6 713 permanent residents in Petnjica, while in 2003 that number was equal to 9 878 residents, while in 1981, the region which Petnjica is a part was populated by 10 539 residents. In Savnik municipality, in the period from 1948 to today, there has been a consistent decrease of the population: from 7 512 in 1948 to 2974 in 2003 and only 2077 according to the 2011 census. In this regard, Pljevlja found themselves in the worst situation counting only 31 060 citizens, which is 5 858 less than the 2003 census and 16 000 less than in the 1971. In Bijelo Polje, the difference between the last two censuses amounts to a decrease of 4223 residents.

As far as employment is concerned, according to MONSTAT results published in 2014, the unemployment rate at the national level is 18%, while in the region the distribution is as follows: Southern region 6.7%, Central region 13.4% and Northern region 39%.<sup>8</sup>

If the development of the North in the past couple of years is taken into account, certain progress is visible, however, there is still a glaring disproportion in the development, which is further hindered by emigrations to other parts of Montenegro and abroad. Regardless of several initiatives created in the past couple of years (Program of stimulating the development of competitive entrepreneurs, micro, small and medium companies in the Northern region of Montenegro and less developed municipalities, Program of stimulating the development of clusters in Montenegro for the 2012-2016 period and the Program for increasing regional and local competitiveness through a harmonization with the requests of interna-

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<sup>8</sup> *Montenegro in numbers 2015*, <http://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/publikacije/CG%20U%20BROJKAMA/Monstat%20-%20CG%20u%20Brojka-ma%202015.pdf>

tional business models), citizens of this part of Montenegro are insufficiently motivated to stay in their Municipalities.

## Findings from the interviews

Within the research conducted, we interviewed employees across organizations and institutions in Montenegro that directly or indirectly deal with this issue, as well as employees from the two municipalities in the northern region of Montenegro. The main aim of the interviews was not only to collect data that is presented within the study, but also exchanging the opinions on the trend and methods to solve a wide range of problems related to the issue of economic emigration from Montenegro, in terms of asylum seeking.

The interlocutors mostly agreed on the lack of access to comprehensive data, and mainly emphasized two major causes: insufficient inter-institutional coordination at the national level and inefficient communication between Montenegro and the countries that are asylum seekers' destinations. The first problem is related to the lack of a common database, underdeveloped capacities and lack of financing of the state institutions. Second problem relates to the different procedures and difference in their duration, in the different countries of the European Union, as well as the absence of communication upon the return of the unsuccessful asylum seekers. Nevertheless, interlocutors from Ministry of Interior stated that the procedures are significantly accelerated, and that all cases of readmission are successfully implemented.

In addition, the general conclusion was that there is insufficient co-operation with non-governmental organizations when it comes to asylum and migration in general.

Finally, as one of the most significant problem imposed is the lack of ver-



tical and horizontal cooperation among and within institutions of Montenegro, between local and international structures, but also within international entities dealing with this issue. This lack of coordination and cooperation can be taken as the cause of most of the problems, but also a significant obstacle to resolving them in the future.

When it comes to the motivation of immigrants, interviewees in most cases considered that a “pull” factors are stronger, primarily the social benefits in a country which is the destination, but also the connections with the Diaspora. However, it must be emphasized that this is based on specific cases from practice, but there are no precise data. In addition, prevailing opinion is that the level of education, but also the level of awareness are powerful sources of information that should be in the core of attention in the future. Namely, those families and individuals who decide to seek asylum with the purpose of accumulating profit from social benefits and returning to the country of origin, must be educated about the different consequences. Namely, they should be informed about the restrictions they would face once recorded into the system as asylum seekers, for any potential endeavor as legal migrants.

Representatives of municipalities of Berane and Petnjica agreed that there is a huge problem in the emigration of young people, with high level of migration between cities in Montenegro, but as well in relation to migration abroad. Although it is the young municipality with 6 713 inhabitants, in Petnjica they have relatively precise data on the number of people who emigrated abroad - in 2015 and 2016, and this number is 104. When it comes to the structure, they are mostly young couples with or without children. On the other hand, for the municipality of Berane, as well as other municipalities in the north, there is no such data. With regard to the main reasons for the emigration of inhabitants in both municipalities, the most predominant reasons stated are the ones related to the economic situation. In the case of municipality of Petnjica, there have

been situations in which families had a decent life, but sold the property and when they returned they faced significant financial problems. In the case of municipality of Berane, main problems stated are unemployment and lack of opportunities for young people. In both municipalities, as long-term solutions to the problem following actions were recommended - creation of new jobs, development of small and medium enterprises and raising level of education.

## Recommendations and conclusions

Economic emigration with the aim of asylum seeking in the EU countries is a part of a complex problem and it is not possible to respond to this challenge in a short time frame. However, analysis of available data and interviews with experienced experts in this field, suggest that there are steps that should be taken in order to ensure quality of the living conditions of the citizens of Montenegro in near future. It is important to undertake both institutional changes and to educate potential asylum seekers about the disadvantages of leaving Montenegro in order to profit on social assistance of the host country.

- It is recommended to create a single database of all asylum seekers who return to Montenegro. This database should contain not only the age, place of residence of asylum seeker in Montenegro, but also the profile and the motives for emigration of each individual.
- It is necessary to develop a strategic document that will exclusively deal with the issues of economic emigration from Montenegro.
- It is necessary to develop horizontal and vertical coordination systems for dealing with issues of economic emigration, within the institutions in Montenegro, both at the local and the national level.
- It is recommended to strengthen intergovernmental cooperation in

order to timely exchange information on asylum seekers from Montenegro in the European Union.

- It is necessary to include a segment of economic emigration from Montenegro with the aim of asylum seeking, within the Montenegrin strategic documents dealing with the development of the North region.
- It is recommended to include civil society organizations in the work of the Working Groups dealing with the issue of migration management.
- It is recommended to implement a set of educational measures, especially focused on the citizens of the north of Montenegro from the municipalities of Petnjica, Rožaje and Bijelo Polje, on the situation of asylum seekers in the European Union and its implications in the future.
- It is necessary to create a plan of concrete incentives for jobs creation for less educated part of the population, through the organization of creative workshops and through involvement in manufacturing activities.
- It is recommended that Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT) includes the category of research on asylum seekers who return to the country of origin, in terms of structure and the number of these Montenegrin citizens.
- It is recommended that municipalities keep records on the structure of the citizens who return on the basis of readmission, and to create incentives for this category of the population.