



## **Civic Movement URA (United Reform Action) Application for EGP Membership EGP Committee Recommendation Letter**

### **General Introduction**

The European Green Party (EGP) conducted a study visit in August 2019 and a fact-finding mission in early March 2020, as part of the application process of Montenegrin political party URA (United Reform Action).

URA has officially applied for EGP membership in October 2019. The EGP has been in contact with URA since 2018. Since then, their party leader attended the Council in Berlin (Germany) in November 2018. After their application, a delegation was invited to the following Council in Tampere (Finland) in November 2019.

In August 2019, the study visit included meetings with different structures of URA, activists from NGOs and civil society, supporting citizens movements and struggles with several cases of environmental destruction. The visit showed that URA is a well-established party, respected and in cooperation with civil society, and with a potential to grow.

In March 2020, the EGP delegation to Montenegro was made up of Thomas Waitz (Co-Chair), Mar Garcia (Secretary General) and Mélanie Vogel (Member of the Committee responsible for Montenegro). This mission included meetings with the central leadership and Political and Advisory board of URA, their Youth and Women Forum, several local councillors and the local board in Budva. Other meetings were organized with EU Ambassador Orav Aivo and German Ambassador Robert Weber, NGOs Hocu da ostanem and Kor - Coalition for Sustainable Development, LGBT Forum Progress, the chief editor of Balkan Insight, and a Professor of International Environmental and Private Law at the State Law university.

### **Montenegro**

Since 1991 the DPS (Democratic Party of Socialists) has been the ruling party in Montenegro. They employ different means to retain control over public jobs, business and media. Corruption is embedded in all levels of society. The Montenegrin society is very polarized due to family, ethnicity and religion grouping. These divisions have a large effect on political structures and are fueled by the ruling party, enabling them to be portrayed as a stabilizing factor. Geographically Serbs live in the north, Montenegrin in the center, Albanians in the South and the coast is mixed. The religious divide follows the ethnic and is also reflected in political parties.

All opposition went into boycott in 2016. Some of the opposition came back to Parliament in 2018, not URA. They do participate in a working group, which also includes the Prime Minister and civil society. They will return to Parliament would there be electoral law reform. Last year the government brought laws on religious freedom, that included a clause on registered church properties. This resulted in large protests, mainly fueled by the influential Serbian church, which are still ongoing.

Montenegro has adopted a lot of legislation and regulations in line with the EU, but many call for more monitoring and screening of actual and correct implementation, in light of lack of capacity and interest for deep reforms, but also suspicion of corruption and inefficient spending.



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### **URA**

The party was founded in 2015 and came as a split from Pozitivna, when Pozitivna turned more towards the ruling party and eventually supported them in the parliament preventing the government from falling.

URA elects its leadership and other bodies during a congress every four years. The executive board consists of a president and three vice-presidents. The board has 63 people, of which they elect 21 as the presidency that meets monthly. In all boards apart from the executive board, local boards have to be proportionally represented. These local boards enjoy full political autonomy, as statutes are decentralized. URA has an active youth wing. The party program is based on five pillars: rule of law, environmental protection, and deep economic, educational and health reform.

During the fact-finding mission, we received positive comments about URA. The party has a clear profile as a civic and democratic party, being mostly recognizable on democratic reform issues. URA is recognized as a pro-European and opposition party, a combination which is not common on the Montenegrin political spectrum. They are very supportive of NGOs and citizen initiatives.

The party is positively evaluated by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Belgrade, the responsible office for Montenegro. The foundation of Groenlinks has also done a fact-finding mission to Montenegro, with positive conclusions.

URA wants to grow and has identified several areas for development. They want to expand and diversify their policy and program areas, to develop concrete and implementable proposals. Secondly, they want to attract and promote more experts in the areas of political activity. They want to raise their visibility, diversify their political profile and representation, and support needed efforts for gender equality in their internal structures.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

URA's official application letter arrived in October 2019. Following the procedure as described in the EGP Rule Book (Article 5 - Procedure for admitting new members), a fact-finding mission was organized. The fact-finding mission allowed us to get in-depth knowledge of the party structures, positions, results and external perception. From our observations and talks we could gather that URA is a well-established party with financing, activity, a structure and program that fulfills EGP's values and criteria.

URA is recognized and mainly positively evaluated and cooperates with civil society, academia and other stakeholders. They are acknowledged as a political party and advocate against national, ethnic and religious divisions that define the political landscape in Montenegro.

**Considering the positive cooperation and visits we had over the last year, the EGP Committee recommends to its Member Parties and to the Skopje Spring Council to accept URA as a candidate member.**

*\*Full reports from the study visit and fact-finding mission are available to delegates upon request.*