

OPINION EDITORIAL

VISIBLE PROGRESS ALONG THE PATH OF REFORM **By Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro Janina Hrebickova**

As I come to the end of my three-year term as Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, I am proud that I have been able to lead the Mission at a key moment in this country's history in terms of helping Montenegro to advance the reform process, in close co-operation and co-ordination with Montenegrin and international partners. Government, institutions, media, the people of Montenegro were and remain our key partners - indispensable partners, and I had an excellent collaboration with all of them.

I would like to commend Montenegro's achievements thus far in its role as a recognized factor of stability in the region. Such sustained national efforts have delivered tangible results for the people as the country progresses towards its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

At the political level, I was happy to observe this year how national leaders were able to bridge their known differences by reaching a compromise in the public interest, by establishing a political dialogue and later with the formation of a broad-based coalition government.

I am looking forward to see the newly established Government and all the stakeholders focusing on working constructively on the return of political dialogue in Parliament in the interest of the country. Leadership, a long-term vision and willingness to compromise will again be needed to ensure the fullest implementation of all adopted laws and agreements. To further support progress of reforms, let me emphasize that it is vital that dialogue take place in Parliament and relevant fora in an inclusive way, and with participation of civil society.

In noting the recently completed parliamentary elections, the ODIHR preliminary report that, together with the rest of international observers in the country, have stated that the people of Montenegro had had a chance to express their free choice in voting. Since 2006, when the country gained independence, we have witnessed the biggest number of national and international election observers.

I am sure that the ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, once published, will provide recommendations for Montenegrin partners, the Mission and international partners to further develop strong and independent election institutions, ones that enjoy wide public trust. In any case, any changes that are made will necessarily take time, dedication and commitment by all stakeholders in order to be successfully implemented.

I am pleased to say that over the last 12 months, in co-operation with our international partners, the Mission was able to provide assistance to the State Election Commission (SEC). Our international experts provided mentoring and coaching support to the SEC members and staff and also helped to develop programmes relating to daily operations, education and training, voter education and public outreach.

Let us not forget that this was the first time that this institution had ever received international assistance.. I look forward to seeing what Montenegro can achieve with continued OSCE support when it holds its presidential and local government elections scheduled for 2018.

Looking at the broader picture, as we know only too well, in this current millennium, many challenges exist within a highly complex and ever evolving security environment. Unprecedented waves of refugees and migrants have affected the region and tested the unity of the international community, extremist movements promote radical ideologies that threaten peaceful coexistence, and acts of terrorism continue to endanger innocent communities and families from Vancouver to Vladivostok. We are witnessing brand-new security threats to our freedoms, to our peaceful and democratic way of governance and to our physical safety, and together we all need to work hard to defeat those threats.

Therefore, the need to empower diverse and pluralistic communities and promote dialogue, respect for human rights, rule of law and tolerance is greater than ever. Intensified regional co-operation is absolutely vital in ensuring that the global world today can remain both peaceful and stable. In this respect, I would like to commend the Montenegrin authorities for playing such a positive and constructive role in the region.

Moreover, having worked here since the early 1990s, I am pleased with what the OSCE has been able to accomplish not only in Montenegro, but across the entire Western Balkans region. The OSCE, as an organization, continues to play an important role in post-conflict rehabilitation, promoting human rights and building democratic institutions. It does it hand in hand, in a complementary manner with international partners and other regional organizations. Without doubt, strong partnerships offer the best guarantee for broad participation in regional mechanisms, effectiveness and continued national success for the Western Balkans.

At any rate, as I sign off for one last time, allow me to reassure the citizens of this country that the Mission stands ready to support the authorities and citizens as they continue to progress along the path of reform

I have little doubt that this beautiful country, with wonderful people who love it despite the challenges - as there is no such a country in the world without those - will continue to achieve many great and important things in the years to come, to improve the lives of ordinary Montenegrin citizens, to cement its already strong relationships with its neighbours and to reach out to the whole democratic world. I look forward to seeing this happen again as I did since Montenegro re-gained its independence a decade ago.