

# Encouraging Reform RESULTS



## SUZANA PRIBILOVIĆ

MONTENEGRIN MINISTER  
OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

*The results achieved in public administration reform encourage us and confirm that we are on the right track, but also oblige us to work even more dynamically to create a more efficient administration that will provide proper service to citizens and the economy. This is not an easy process, but for us there is no higher priority than increasing our citizens' quality of life*

Public administration reform is also one of the key pillars of the current programme of fiscal stabilisation and European integration. We discussed the current phase of this important work with Suzana Pribilović, Minister of Public Administration in the Government of Montenegro.

“Montenegro has achieved significant progress in the area of public administration reform over the last two years, which is also confirmed by our partners from the European Commission, but we must also be aware that this is a long-term process,” says our interlocutor.

“The government's 2019 works programme envisages significant legislative activities, including amendments to one of the most important laws in the field of democracy: the Law on Free Access to Information, in order for us to improve the normative framework in this area and create the conditions for the more efficient realisation of the right to freely access information, but also laws and in the field of eGovernment,” says Pribilović. “Likewise, the adoption of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Inspection Oversight is also planned

for 2019, the aim of which is to introduce a higher level of quality and legality to work, given that this law applies to all administrative areas. This is especially important when it comes to deciding on the rights and obligations of citizens and other persons, or parties,” says Montenegro's public administration minister.

**■ A more efficient administration also implies a series of technical innovations. How much have you invested to date in e-services, and whose professional and financial support do you rely on?**

- Digitalisation is recognised in Montenegro not only within the scope of activities of the Ministry of Public Administration, but of the entire government. Strategic goals in areas of public administration reform and development of the information society need to rely on the activities of all bodies in public administration, so it is important that all bodies - each within its own scope of work – envisage financial resources and professional capacities that can respond to modern

## SUPPORT

The Ministry relies on the professional and financial support of many European and international institutions and organisations in the developing of E-services

## FOCUS

One of the key goals in the reform of public administration is improving the functioning of local government units and strengthening their capacity

## STANDARD

All activities that we implement in Montenegro are directed precisely towards providing higher quality of public services, which will enable our citizens to have a European quality of life

technological challenges. E-services are mostly provided through the eGovernment portal, which is the central point for the digitalisation of public administration services, and is therefore the greatest burden on the Ministry of Public Administration, which every year issues funds for the improvement of existing systems, but also for the development of new innovative solutions. However, considering the speed of technological development and the growing innovation trend in ICT, I consider that future investments should be increased significantly. In addition to budget allocations on an annual basis for the development of e-services, we receive support from the EC through sector-specific budget support in cooperation with SIGMA, while cooperation is also realised through projects that are applied for with the World Bank and the European Bank for Development Bank. Furthermore, long-standing cooperation with the UNDP has already resulted in financial assistance, but also the expert assistance provided by this organisation. On the other hand, the Ministry of Public Administration utilises regional cooperation mechanisms via RESPA projects, and it is also important to mention other programmes, such as TAIEX, IPA projects etc. It also shouldn't be overlooked that Montenegro's membership in many European support programmes, such as ISA2, cooperation within the framework of the programme implemented by the Western Balkan 6, provides an additional impulse for sharing experiences and applying good practise.

### ■ How close is the goal you've set for Montenegro to provide the European quality of public services?

- All activities that we implement in Montenegro are directed precisely towards providing higher quality of public services – quality that will enable our citizens to have a European quality of life. It is difficult to talk about numbers or percentages, or even the level of the current quality of public services. The major differences in government budgets for these purposes are not sufficient to draw a conclusion on the quality of services provided. A lower level of expenditure can be

a sign of efficiency in providing services to citizens and businesses, but it can also be a sign of insufficient funding, in which case certain activities can't be provided, or can't be provided in a high-quality way. Simultaneously, the lower level of these costs can also be the result of economies of scale in the administrative services of larger countries. Similarly to this, high expenditure can be a signal



**The Ministry of Public Administration coordinates the process of developing of E-services on a daily basis, and also works – in cooperation with other bodies – on improving existing services and developing new ones**

of significant inefficiency in the administration and “over-funded” government services, just as it may also point to the engaging of a large number of employees on certain jobs, disregarding the principle of economies of scale and the coordination of the activities of different institutions. This

is why we've focused in our analyses on two important indicators of GDP per capita in purchasing power parity, WGI – an indicator of the effectiveness of the government. The WGI Index for Montenegro is 2.6 and we are the best in the region, although we are below the EU average, where this index stands at 3.6.

### ■ You have been praised in EC reports for your innovative approach. What do the economy and citizens gain thanks to this approach?

- This primarily implies the possibility of all citizens being able, in the period ahead, to access any E-service, using material means

with which they can electronically prove their legal identity – with a new ID card. Likewise, in the same way they will also be able to sign any document electronically. For example, private citizens or registered companies will be able to open a bank account without being physically present, firstly by identifying themselves electronically, and then by electronically signing a contract with the bank. This also implies the possibility for private citizens and registered companies to realise all of their needs in contact with state administration bodies, without the need to bring any documents - “acting ex officio”.

### ■ Which services will be available to them this year?

- The Ministry of Public Administration coordinates the process of developing of E-services on a daily basis, and also works – in cooperation with other bodies – on the improvement of existing services and the development of new ones. This year it is important to mention the improvement of the e-participation system and the re-launch of the e-petition portal, which we hope will impact on the increased transparency of the work of state administration bodies, as well as the better quality participation of citizens in the process of creating public policies. Moreover, this year we've also improved the functionality of electronic scheduling, such that in the coming period we will agree with the bodies regarding services that will enable citizens to schedule appointments for services that are provided at the counters of institutions, thereby increasing the quality of services. When it comes to the improvement of services, we expect the greatest shift in increasing the sophistication of services that will be achieved through the implementation of electronic identification systems, electronic payments. With the implementing of these systems, electronic services will be more accessible and simpler, while the state will have insight into electronic payments of administrative charges, which is not currently the case. It is vital to improve interoperability via a unified system for the exchanging of electronic data, which will largely achieve the principle that data once entered into the original registers is entered will not have to be re-entered, but rather will be utilised through the electronic exchange of data. We are working in cooperation with the Ministry of Education on the implementation of a service to enrol children in pre-school institutions, and we are communicating intensively with local government units in order for us to recognise the services that will be offered to citizens by the end of the year.

### ■ To what extent is public administration at the local level involved in this reform, which also implies the significant modernising of their services?

- The Strategy for the Reform of Public Administration is also directed specifically towards the development of local self-government, and one of the key goals in this area is improving the functioning of local government units and strengthening their capacity. This is a particularly important process that implies a series of activities that should ensure the more efficient provision of services on the



**Public administration reform is a long-term and continuous process, but it is true that we've set the realisation of certain activities by 2020, and I think we're on the right track to realising most of them**

part of municipalities and the more efficient performing of their tasks. In this direction, state administration bodies and local self-government bodies have both worked in the previous period on creating an appropriate legal framework and creating the conditions for its implementation. When it comes specifically to the modernisation of services at the local level, we have launched a series of activities in the field of advancing local government operations and monitoring contemporary trends, through the digital transformation of processes in local government and the transformation of key business processes in providing services through the utilising of information and communication technologies. In cooperation with local governments, and on the basis of information that we collect from them, plans include the conducting of analysis of the predisposition to exchange documents of state administration bodies with local governments, developing guidelines for the standardisation of local websites, creating a catalogue of electronic services at the local level and an E-services portal at the local level.

### ■ This reform implies about 3,000 employees being made redundant, with severance pay provided for them to leave their positions in public administration. How much of a burden on public finances does that represent?

- The optimisation plan doesn't imply that everyone will leave the administration solely on the basis of receiving severance payments, because other mechanisms also exist, but there is certainly great interest in this type of redundancy and it will definitely be predominant in the coming period. This question is certainly sensitive from the financial perspective, which is why we are approaching it with special attention and considering all options in close cooperation with our colleagues from the World Bank. We think that we will ultimately establish a system that will help in the full implementation of the optimisation plan, and which will not financially endanger the system in the short or the long term. ■