

# The Europeanization of Political Parties in Montenegro

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to examine the impact of the process of Europeanization on the relevant political parties in Montenegro in the period between the 2009 and 2012 parliamentary elections by focusing on an in-depth content analysis of their election manifestos. The article argues that the EU has demonstrated a limited impact on Montenegrin changes due to the existence of a strong influence of internal factors which hinder the transformative power of the EU. This assertion is particularly observable in the case of the EU impact on Montenegrin parties where the political elite expresses its unwillingness to comply with the EU requirements. The study claims that the influence of Europeanization on domestic changes will be limited in the following period unless the political elite demonstrates true political will to fully align with the EU accession conditions. The research findings may serve as a suitable framework for providing new scientific insights, as well as for the enhancement of current scientific knowledge related to this particular field.*

**Keywords:** *Europeanization, European integration, political parties, election manifestos, Montenegro*

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## 1. Introduction

The article seeks to examine the process of Europeanization of the political parties of Montenegro, a country which is not yet an EU Member State. Rather, Montenegro has the status of a candidate country for the EU membership, and is currently positioned as a frontrunner among the Western Balkans (WB) states. Like in many other European countries, Montenegrin parties play a crucial role in the country's political processes and, thus, undoubtedly affect the domestic changes. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, it is of great importance to determine the scope and the outcome of the EU impact on Montenegrin parties as the main factors of domestic change by observing the top-down approach of European integration on political actors.

In accordance with the aforementioned, the main research line of the paper is to determine whether the Montenegrin parties have decreased or increased their interest in the concept of Europeanization in the period between the two parliamentary election rounds in 2009 and 2012, bearing in mind the remarkable progress which has been made by Montenegro in the European integration process. By using a methodological framework, the article attempts to provide the answer based on the defined research question: *have EU policies*

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*become prominent in the election manifestos of Montenegrin political parties between the parliamentary elections of 2009 and 2012?* Furthermore, the intended contribution of the paper is to identify the current level of Europeanization among the Montenegrin parties by analysing their manifestos in the context of European integration. By focusing on political parties as the main domestic political actors (not on civil society actors, veto players etc.), the paper aims at reducing the possibility for the creation of research gaps, given the role they play in every society, including Montenegrin. However, one article limitation may be caused by the author's choice to examine Montenegro as a single case study rather than the whole Western Balkans region (as a single unit). On the other hand, the conducted empirical analysis, along with the description of recent external and internal events within the single case study could constitute a suitable framework for providing new scientific data, as well as for the enhancement of current scientific knowledge related to this particular field.

The paper has the following structure: The first part of the article analyses different theoretical approaches to the concept of Europeanization of the WB in order to present various theoretical debates. Along with the examination of Montenegrin post-referendum politics and society, this part of the article tries to provide an overall empirical case study of both internal and external factors which undermine the process of Europeanization of Montenegro. The second part of the paper attempts to present the outcomes of the conducted empirical content analysis of the Montenegrin parties' election manifestos during the parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2012. Finally, the third part of the article tries to provide discussions and conclusions based on the findings of the empirical analysis.

## **2. Current developments**

Among the academia and political elites, there is a generally accepted view that the process of Europeanization of the Western Balkan countries (WB)<sup>2</sup> has become much more challenging, demanding and complex than it was the case with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Unlike the Eastern enlargement policy, which can be evaluated as a successful EU foreign policy, the WB face numerous serious obstacles, both internal and external, which prevent smooth reforms of their political, economic and social system. The historical legacy, ethnic and religious issues, border issues, return of refugees, secessionist movements, rise of nationalism based on ethnic differences, strength of national identities, contested states, limited statehood, weak state capacities, clientelism, corruption, organized crime, as well as the dysfunctional economy, are some of the issues which significantly hinder the development of the WB (Elbasani 2013; Börzel 2011; Börzel and Risse 2012; Keil 2013; Beiber: 2011; Noutcheva and Aydin-Düzgüt 2012; Freyburg and Solveig 2010; Dzihic and Wieser 2008). These obvious internal political and socio-economic problems to a large extent call into question the peace, stability and security of the region, thus opening the possibility for the EU to engage more actively in the process of building consolidated democracy and developed liberal economy of the WB.

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the Western Balkans refers to a group of countries located in South-East Europe which are not EU members, but which have expressed their willingness to join the EU. The Western Balkans include: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia (FYRoM), Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo.

The literature on Europeanization demonstrates serious concerns regarding the future of the WB due to the limited EU impact on domestic politics, and points out that the Europeanization of the WB is shallow. Although since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the EU has adopted a number of strategic documents which confirm the Western Balkans membership perspective, the impression is that this incentive did not ring out well among the regional countries. More specifically, taking into account the individual integration dynamics of each country, the WB have not adequately fulfilled the accession conditions stipulated by the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) as an integral part of the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) nor have they adequately implemented the *acquis communautaire*. Moreover, the WB have demonstrated problematic democratic reforms by “complying inconsistently with membership criteria, rather than flatly refusing to fulfil them” (Freyburg and Solveig 2010:264).

Apparently, the EU has demonstrated certain discrepancies in terms of fulfilling the promise of the European future for the WB from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, the EU has proven not to be an effective state building actor due to the lack of experience in state building processes, absence of clear criteria within the *acquis communautaire*, as well as the notable disagreements which exist between different Union institutions and the EU Member States (Beiber 2011:1785, 1793; Keil: 2013:349; Börzel 2011:11; Keil and Arkan et al. 2015:16). Secondly, apart from the WB “stateness problem” (limited statehood), it is the EU strategy of conditional external initiatives based on “the principle of carrot and stick” which significantly undermines the EU’s credibility as a normative power and at the same time negatively reflects on the region’s willingness and motivation to implement the EU norms and rules stipulated by the SAP (Börzel 2011:12-15; Börzel and Risse 2012:203; Notcheva 2009:1081; Elbasani 2013:8; Keil 2013:348; Beiber 2011:1791). Thirdly, in the light of the recent EU enlargement waves from 2007 (Bulgaria, Romania) and 2013 (Croatia), there is a lack of consensus about the future of the enlargement process among the EU Member States - “enlargement fatigue” which gravely affects the continuation of alignment with the Copenhagen criteria and effective implementation of the *acquis communautaire* among the WB (Dzihic and Wieser 2008:81). As a result, the progress of these countries towards the EU membership is limited. While, on one hand, the EU has offered these countries a membership perspective to stabilize the region and overcome the problems caused by the weak and contested statehood, on the other hand, the limited statehood of the WB countries undermines their compliance with the EU norms and rules (Börzel 2011:5).

Evidently, the limited EU impact on domestic politics is the result of a lack of commitment of both sides – i.e. the EU’s and the WB completion of the effective democratic transition and consolidation. However, despite different integration dynamics which exist among the WB, Montenegro is one of the countries in the region (with the exception of Croatia) which stands out as a positive example of the European integration process based on the observable EU impact on domestic changes.

In the light of examining the process of the Montenegro's Europeanization as a separate case study, the literature of Europeanization demonstrates its continuous development. Various types of research on Europeanization in the course of time have influenced the creation of separate research areas such as: Europeanization of old, new and candidate

member states, as well as the Europeanization of political parties within the EU and non-EU member states (Carter et al. 2007; Kulachi et al. 2012; Vachudova 2008). Therefore, for the purpose of this research, it is of particular importance to focus on the Europeanization of the political parties of Montenegro – a country which has received the candidate status in the negotiation process for EU accession.

The study of the Europeanization of political parties towards the status of the EU candidate countries has become the most significant issue within the European Studies, especially in the political discussions among the political scientists during the period prior to the fifth wave of enlargement in 2004 (Sedelmeier 2011:7). Nowadays, it is evident that scholars have devoted little attention to the present day potential and candidate countries from the Western Balkan region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia) when it comes to determining their level of Europeanization, and the EU impact on domestic actors in the EU enlargement policy. Specifically, by observing Montenegro as a separate case study within the European integration process, the scholars have demonstrated limited interest in the issue of EU impact on Montenegrin domestic changes and politics, by failing to determine the degree of European policy implementation in domestic politics. Namely, most researchers have dealt with the Europeanization of the Montenegrin party system, but significantly little attention has been dedicated to the analysis of the process of Montenegrin Europeanization through the study of domestic parties and their manifestos. Therefore, this article will try to fill this research gap by focusing on the analysis of domestic parties and their manifestos during the parliamentary elections of 2009 and 2012.

In line with the above, this paper seeks to examine the process of Europeanization of political parties using the example of Montenegro as an EU candidate country. The selection of this specific topic is justified given the fact that the issue of Europeanization of Montenegrin parties is characterized by the lack of the domestic and foreign literature in this specific field, indicating insufficient interest and will of international and domestic scholars to conduct the research. Granted, several studies have been conducted in this field of EU impact on the Montenegrin party system, however with little attention devoted to a more specific research of the EU influence on domestic parties (Stojarová and Emerson et al. 2010; Fink-Hafner 2008; Fink-Hafner and Ladrech 2008; Vujović and Komar 2008).

In their first study, Komar and Vujović (2007) examined the process of Europeanization in Montenegro by focusing on the analysis of the domestic party system in the period 1990-2007, as well as on the aspect of building consensus on European integration among the parties and citizens of Montenegro. However, regarding the Europeanization of domestic parties, the authors provided a brief content analysis of four Montenegrin parties after the 2006 parliamentary elections. In addition, in his recent work Vujović (2015) examines the impact of the Europeanization process on Montenegrin parties by focusing on the dynamics of the relationships within the domestic party system, as well as its interaction with the actors of the European integration process in Montenegro. Similarly to his previous study, the author briefly examines several parties (3 ruling and 3 in opposition) after the 2012 parliamentary elections in order to identify the differences in the manifestations of the party consensus related to the EU integration.

To conclude, the article tries to provide new scientific insights on the EU impact on Montenegrin parties. Unlike the authors who have mostly examined the process of Europeanization in Montenegro by analysing the party system and the internal political situation (and domestic parties to a lesser extent), the novelty in this approach will be in the examination of the EU transformative power in Montenegro on the domestic parties by focusing on their election manifestos during the parliamentary elections of 2009 and 2012.

## **2.1 Post-referendum Political Context of Montenegro**

Since the declaration of independence from Serbia in 2006 to this date, Montenegro has made evident progress towards the compliance with the Copenhagen criteria and harmonization with the *acquis communautaire*. As a result, Montenegro has positioned itself as the frontrunner among the WB. As of 21<sup>st</sup> December 2015, twenty-two negotiating Chapters, including the rule of law Chapters, 23 – Judiciary and fundamental rights and 24 – Justice, freedom and security, have been opened, and two Chapters (25 – Science and research and 26 – Education and culture) have been provisionally closed (Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro 2015).

Not surprisingly, after gaining its independence, for a short period of time Montenegro made quick progress in the European integration process as a result of two lucky factors: the status of the country, which is not contested either internally or externally, and the unanimous consensus of all political parties towards the EU membership (Keil 2013:350). Although there are continuing disagreements between the ruling and opposition parties, the question of Montenegro's membership in the EU is a strategic priority of all entities. The party's support for EU integration corresponds with the public support, as 65% of the population believes that the EU membership would be beneficial for Montenegro (Eurobarometer Report 2014:84). Likewise, the latest EU official report has stressed that Montenegro continues to broadly implement its obligations under the SAA. However, more importantly, this document has emphasized the areas which are identified as requiring improvements: implementation of the new electoral legislation, public administration reform, improvement of judicial system, decisive fight against corruption and organized crime, strengthening of the rule of law and protection of human rights (European Commission Montenegro Report 2015).

Still, Montenegro's progress towards the EU membership does not depend on the capacity of domestic actors to induce governmental structural changes. Rather, it is a completely driven project in which the EU has positioned itself as a major actor of domestic change (Keil and Arkan et. al 2015:83). Consequently, Montenegro, as the smallest country among the post-Yugoslav states, seriously suffers from the issue of limited statehood i.e. weak state capacities "due to a lack of resources (staff, expertise, funds), as well as institutionally-entrenched structure of corruption and clientelism" (Börzel 2011:10).

By using the external incentive models as a tool of transformative power, the EU has influenced the process of democratization and consolidation of statehood in Montenegro and slightly empowered institutional capacities in order to comply with the EU norms and rules. Correspondingly, the EU transformative power was seen in two cases in Montenegro: the visa liberalization process, so far the strongest conditionality mechanism towards the

WB, and the recommendations stipulated in the EU's Opinion of Montenegro's preparedness for the EU membership (Keil and Arkan et. el 2015:96; Radeljić et. el 2013:125). As it is the case in other WB, the Montenegrin political elite very often uses EU initiatives (policies and institutions) to ensure the survival of the current governing authority, promote its own party programme, satisfy the voters or remain in power. The extent to which the EU and domestic initiatives influence each other largely depends on the prominence of certain EU policies (visa liberalization, recommendation for opening accession talks, judicial reform, rule of law, corruption and organized crime etc.) for voters. In the absence of public interest for certain EU policies, norms or rules, the EU will face a limited impact on domestic institutional change in the WB (Borzell and Risse 2012:200; Keil and Arkan et. el 2015:97).

However, although Montenegro has demonstrated certain progress towards the EU membership, the country still encounters internal political problems which need to be addressed prior to the EU accession. The Montenegrin society is a deeply divided society. The issues of statehood, nationhood and national identity have continued to play a significant role in the political life of Montenegro, whereas different interpretations of these categories between Montenegrins and Serbs consequently affect the internal political dynamics and processes within the society and development of the political situation. By the same token, several policies adopted by the DPS government in the post-referendum period which aimed at the reconstruction of Montenegrin national identity (recognition of the Montenegrin language, adoption of new state symbols and detachment of the government elite from the Serbian Orthodox Church), have to a large extent contributed to the Serbian minority's non-acceptance of Montenegro as their homeland (Džankić 2014a:356,362-371; Morrison 2009:223). Furthermore, the decision of the Government to recognize Kosovo as an independent state in 2008 as well as the proclaimed activities towards the NATO membership have also been perceived by the Serbian parties as clear examples of anti-Serb policy. Namely, the anti-NATO policy of the Serbian parties has significant public support with the 37.3 % of the population against Montenegro's membership in the Alliance and 36.6% for it (CEDEM Survey 2015:5). Unlike the Serbian minority, the Montenegrin Bosniak-Muslim and Albanian communities, respectively, see Montenegro as their homeland mainly due to the adopted provisions in the Constitution of Montenegro which define the state as a civic rather than a national state (Džankić 2014a:357; Morrison 2009:224).

One of the major problems in the Montenegrin politics is its internal structure (Morrison 2009:229). Montenegro is the only post-communist country with one political party, – Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), ruling without disruption since the introduction of the multiparty system (Vuković 2013:73; Morrison 2009:230; Džankić 2014b:44). Vuković (2013:79) holds the view that the reasons for long-term political rule of the DPS can be observed from various perspectives: "the political culture of the country in which the government has never been changed in elections, its size that allows incumbents to rather easily establish and maintain clientelistic network, the "aura of invincibility" around the DPS as well as the charismatic leadership of its president Đukanović, six-time Prime Minister and the head of the independent movement, the inability of opposition parties to come together behind a competitive political platform, and Western support for the Montenegrin ruling elite".

However, besides his political capabilities to maintain and consolidate power in Montenegro, the current Prime Minister and the President of the ruling DPS, Milo Đukanović has created a “tight-knit clan” of his closely related allies who possess strong political and economic power and deeply affect domestic internal political processes in the society (Morrison 2009:229). The existence of a democratic system obscures the real situation in the country, where the ruling DPS continuously controls many aspects of society, particularly in the domain of pressure on voters employed in the state and public institutions, as well as a sporadic pressure of DPS party activists on the neutral voters and those with a poor financial status. Furthermore, clientelism and patronism play a significant role in the DPS strategy of remaining in power for many years (Ibid. 2009:229). By the same token, Mocht`ak (2015:111) has done an analysis of parliamentary and presidential elections in Montenegro from 1990 to 2013 and argued that the escalation of electoral violence continuously occurs, detecting the DPS as a “potential incendiary factor igniting political conflict”. Similarly, Džankić (2014b:44) holds the view that the citizenship policy in Montenegro as an “image of the nation” and an “image of politics” was an important mechanism which enabled the survival of the DPS rule: “by embedding the `image of the nation` in the citizenship legislation, the ruling Montenegrin elite reinforced their political agenda. By entrenching the `image of politics` in the citizenship law, they managed to produce conditions favouring their electoral victories and thus enabling the party’s institutional dominance”.

Still, it is evident that the rule of law is still not the dominant principle in Montenegro. Strong political influences on the judiciary are not providing equal chances for all, nor the full respect of human rights, especially when it comes to most vulnerable groups who feel insecure. Frequent attacks are seen on journalists and media property and the authorities failed to produce a track record in these investigations, and smear campaigns were noted against civil society activists who are critical towards the ruling coalition, which are not properly also handled by the authorities. Last but not least, violations of human rights are evident in the case of members of the LGBT community. The Government still does not possess an effective mechanism in order to protect their constitutional rights, particularly in the case of freedom of assembly and free movement (Vučković 2015). The NGO “Freedom House” issued a report in October 2015 stating that Montenegro fell from free to party free country due the restrictions on the freedom of peaceful assembly and repeated disposal of the LGBT pride parade. It was clearly pointed out that “Montenegro’s progress toward EU membership, even as the entrenched government of Prime Minister Milo Đukanović sanctioned the harassment of independent media, tarnished the bloc’s image as a purveyor of good governance and democratic norms” (Freedom House Report 2016:8).

The above presented discussions regarding the Europeanization of the WB, with a particular emphasis on the post-referendum political context in Montenegro, have indicated the existence of the European Union’s influence on domestic politics although “its impact is patchy, often shallow but certainly not spurious” (Börzel and Risse 2012:194). Essentially, the understanding of these two aspects will help us in detecting the process of change among the Montenegrin parties through the analysis of their election manifestos, paying special attention to the EU transformative power on the domestic political actors.

### 3. Operationalization of Research

Ladrech (2002:396-400) defines five areas of investigation to obtain the evidence of Europeanization in parties which could be used as a suitable theoretical framework for providing qualitative insights into the EU impact on Montenegrin parties. Following Ladrech's five areas for indicating the phenomenon of Europeanization of political parties (programmatic change, organizational change, patterns of party competition, party-government relations and relations beyond the national party system), the paper will use the first area - programmatic content, as one of the documents which is, apparently, most frequently changed and exposed to the EU impact.

Following the case study of the Europeanization of political parties in Montenegro, Komar and Vujović (2007) and Vujović (2015) provided a credible analysis of visible EU impact on domestic parties, where they presented apparent internal changes (party rhetoric changes, mentioning the EU in party manifestos) and the consensus of all domestic parties on the EU membership issue. The authors have made significant contributions to the identification of the EU institutional influence on domestic parties as a result of the parties' participation in the Delegation to the EU-Montenegro Stabilization and Association Parliamentary Committee. However, apart from the institutional aspect, the authors failed to provide more reliable findings about the EU impact on domestic parties through an in-depth content analysis of election manifestos. Thus, due to the focus placed merely on the identification of party consensus related to EU integration, the authors' results touched upon the Europeanization of Montenegrin parties only tangentially. The question is, does this tell us that the parties are more or less Europeanized or whether parties use an EU membership perspective as a buzzword to enhance their appeal?

In line with the above, the paper seeks to examine the impact of the process of the Europeanization of political parties in Montenegro between the 2009 and 2012 parliamentary elections by focusing on an in-depth content analysis of election manifestos of nine relevant parties and coalitions. These two dates have been carefully selected and they represent the time when Montenegro signed the SAA with the EU (2007) and the period when Montenegro officially started the EU accession talks (2012). The empirical analysis will be conducted on primary sources – election manifestos. The relevant parties are those political associations which won at least two seats in the respective elections (CMP/MARPOR 5<sup>th</sup> revised edition 2014:2). Therefore, the study does not include the analysis of manifestos of those ethnic-minority parties (FORCA, UDSH–DUA, Koalicioni Shqiptar (KS) "Perspektiva", Lista Shqiptare and Hrvatska građanska inicijativa in 2009 and 2012 elections) which won one seat in the Montenegrin Parliament.

Figure 1. A list of analysed political parties in Montenegro

Abbreviation	Full Name	English translation	Elections
KECG	Koalicija za Evropsku Crnu Goru <sup>3</sup>	Coalition for European Montenegro	2009
SNP	Socijalistička narodna partija	Socialist People's Party	2009

<sup>3</sup> KECG comprises of the strongest political party – the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), Social Democratic Party (SDP) and two national ethnic parties - Croatian Civic Initiative (HGI) and Bosniak Party (BS).



NOVA	Nova srpska demokratija	New Serb Democracy	2009
PzP	Pokret za promjene	Movement for Changes	2009
KECG	Koalicija Evropska Crna Gora <sup>4</sup>	Coalition European Montenegro	2012
DF	Demokratski front <sup>5</sup>	Democratic Front	2012
SNP	Socijalistička narodna partija	Socialist People` s Party	2012
PCG	Pozitivna Crna Gora	Positive Montenegro	2012
BS	Bošnjačka stranka	Bosniak Party	2012

Source: 2014 CHES candidate survey (scheme available at: <http://chesdata.eu/>)

The rules and definitions applied to measure the EU policy positions of all relevant Montenegrin parties will be conducted based on the handbook of Manifesto Project (CMP/MARPOR 5<sup>th</sup> revised edition March 2014) along with the use of self-defined categories. In addition, the paper will use MARPOR's definition of relevant parties as an indicator of those parties which have won at least two seats in the elections (Ibid. 2014:2). In addition, the use of the central question of the manifesto coding defined by the CMP/MARPOR will present a special contribution to the research: What are the statements of the party candidate? Which policy positions does the party candidate convey? (Ibid. 2014:9). In order to measure the policy positions of the relevant parties all over the world, including Montenegro, the Manifesto Project developed a system of 56 standard categories grouped in seven major policy areas. However, due to the specificity of the WB mentioned above, together with the stated intent to particularly measure the prominence of EU policies (not the entire political and socio-economic context) within the Montenegrin manifestos, it can be assumed that the defined coding procedures within the MARPOR may generate difficulties and potential ambiguities instead of obtaining qualitative insights and outcomes. Therefore, the study relies on the content analysis of Montenegrin parties' election manifestos with the use of eleven self-invented categories.

The SAA has been used as the basis for defining the methodological framework of the research – the integral part of the SAP as the contractual relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans. Montenegro's progress towards the EU membership entirely depends on the fulfilment of the accession conditions which are set on three different levels: the Copenhagen criteria – general conditions (stability of democratic institutions, rule of law, respect and protection of human and minority rights and functioning of market economy), conditions which are specific, unique and common for the WB (cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the Hague, regional cooperation and strengthening of good neighbourly relations, the return of refugees, ethnic and religious reconciliation, protection of minorities, freedom of the media, judicial reform) and specific conditions pertaining to Montenegro (decisive fight against corruption and organized crime, state institution reforms, judicial reform, free and fair elections, protection and improvement of human and minority rights) (Mišćević 2009:151,168; Đurović 2012:324-327).

<sup>4</sup> KECG comprises of the DPS, SDP and Liberal Party (LP).

<sup>5</sup>DF is a coalition consisting of NOVA, PzP, Democratic Party of Unity and a group of citizens.

However, this research will not consider certain EU requirements embedded in the SAA. Apparently, some policies appear in all three levels, while in the case of Montenegro's cooperation with International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the Hague (ICTY), return of refugees and ethnic and religious reconciliation, the state regularly fulfils the requirements stipulated in the SAA (European Commission Montenegro Report 2015:21,57). Therefore by omitting these three EU requirements, the defined category scheme will be employed on 11 categories related to the fulfilment of the political, good governance and economic requirements for the EU membership (democracy, rule of law, human rights, minority rights, regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, free elections, freedom of media, corruption and organized crime, judicial reforms, state institution reforms and liberal market economy). According to the Manifesto Coding Instructions, every positive category contains all the references of the negative category. As an example, "democracy positive" is a shift to "democracy negative" statements (CMP/MARPOR 5<sup>th</sup> reversed edition 2014:16). Therefore, positive references to these categories will be marked as "yes" while the negative statements will be labelled as "no". Furthermore, the use of direct quotations of manifestos will make special contribution to the content analysis.

#### 4. Outcome of research

##### *Party position in 2009*

*2009 parliamentary elections – Montenegrin political parties – content analysis of election manifestos*

Figure 2. Relative salience of European integration in the election manifestos

	<b>KECG</b>	<b>SNP</b>	<b>NOVA</b>	<b>PzP</b>
Democracy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rule of law	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Human rights	No	Yes	No	Yes
Minority rights	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Regional cooperation	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Free elections	No	Yes	No	No
Freedom of media	No	No	No	No
Corruption and organized crime	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Judicial reform	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
State institution reform	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Liberal market economy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Yes – Positive or favourable references to particular EU policy

No – Negative or no references to particular EU policy

The *KECG* offered the potential voters an election leaflet as a form of an official election programme. Although *KECG* strongly supports the EU membership, the coalition demonstrates prominence of EU policies only in a very broad, general sense: “By applying for the EU membership, we have created a realistic perspective for the Montenegrin future in the EU and proved that we are worthy of the renewed statehood achievements”(KECG 2009:1). The manifesto mentions a certain increase of salience of EU policies (minority rights, regional cooperation, corruption and organized crime, state institution reforms and liberal market economy etc.) in the coalition’s declarative support to the European integration process. Therefore, the manifesto (consisting of 224 pages out of which 2 with direct reference to the EU matters) apparently demonstrates prominence of EU issues only in a general and vague fashion failing to provide any clear elaboration on how to conduct or implement the mentioned EU policy. Instead, the party in its manifesto devotes a significant space to the emphasis of the government achievements in the European integration process: “In October 2007, we adopted the Constitution and formalized our relations with the European Union by signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA)” (KECG 2009:1). Overall, the *KECG* manifesto could be evaluated as general, short and vague, paying no particular efforts to prove that concrete measures or courses of action have been taken in order to fulfil political requirements for the EU membership.

The *SNP* manifesto strongly advocates Montenegrin policy of open doors towards the EU integrations in the chapter entitled “*Together for the European future of Montenegro*” highlighting the EU membership as an advantage and “the basic strategic objective and the means which will turn Montenegro into a modern, democratic, economically developed and socially responsible state for all its citizens”(CGO 2009:33). Although the EU policies make the salient points in the manifesto, the party still fails to offer specific solutions and measures as to how to address certain EU policy issues. Furthermore, the manifesto only generally elaborates on the benefits of the Montenegrin accession to the EU (strengthening of the economy and the rights of employees, protection against discrimination, better education etc.) without mentioning any specific details regarding the solution of these issues (CGO 2009:58). The novelty in this manifesto is the party’s effort to present the main political and economic obstacles (corruption and organized crime, political influence upon judicial and prosecutorial work, weak macroeconomic stability) which stand in the way of Montenegro’s accession to the EU (CGO 2009:59). Curiously enough, it is obvious that the party sees the EU as a sphere of pragmatic interests where the EU membership was observed as a benefit for domestic economy and social arena, specifying the national interest as the main reason for maintaining closer ties with the EU.

*NOVA* was the only party which does not support the Montenegrin membership in the EU, or at least it has an extremely reserved attitude towards the European integration process. Rather, due to its strong Russophile orientation, *NOVA* seeks to maintain closer ties with the current ruling party in Russia (Vijesti 2016).<sup>6</sup> In terms of the EU impact to the domestic change, *NOVA*’s programme expresses an extremely detached attitude towards

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<sup>6</sup> As a result of mutual cooperation, on 25 February 2016 the United Russia and *NOVA* signed an agreement on joint activities in Moscow.

the EU process, given the fact that not a single word has been dedicated to the EU issues. However, certain attention has been paid to the development of regional cooperation and strengthening of good-neighbourly relations: “New Serbian Democracy will specifically advocate for the strengthening of regional economic relations, especially with Serbia as the biggest foreign trade partner, and with the Republic of Srpska as an entity with the highest energy potential in the region” (CGO 2009:63).

Generally speaking, *the PzP* manifesto has reached a shallow degree of Europeanization. Apparently, the party leaders have demonstrated a certain lack of interest for providing more reliable data regarding the European integration process, as well as the adequate measures or courses of action, in order to address certain political issues which burden Montenegro on its European path. Therefore, the party positions towards the EU issues seem more likely to be a party proclamation of general objectives. In that respect, the chapter entitled “*The policy of European integration*” demonstrates the salience of the EU issues, however its content is very limited and vague, displaying only general solutions and measures in the form of bullet points.<sup>7</sup> Unequivocally, PzP is strongly in favour of the Montenegrin membership in the EU, which is stressed in the following statement: “We will be persistent in advocating for Montenegrin accession as a full member and partner of the European Union” (CGO 2009:21). By the same token, the manifesto has introduced several new important general measures, which has not been the case with the other Montenegrin parties: “we will present to the Montenegrin citizens the advantages of the EU membership, which would lead to a full consensus; we will protect Montenegrin national interests; we will make a global, regional and sector cost and benefit analysis of the EU membership, etc.” (CGO 2009:21). The described general party measures demonstrate that the EU transformative power upon PzP comes to effect slowly but its outlines are visible.

In all, Montenegrin parties demonstrate a visible degree of prominence of the EU policies in their manifestos but mostly in a general and vague fashion. The basis of the political division into referendum winners and losers (for and against the Montenegrin independence) continued to play a significant role among the members of political elite in their programmes. One might assume that the reasons for a certain reduction of the EU policies in their programmes should be sought in the submitted Montenegrin application for the EU membership at the end of 2008 i.e. before the elections.<sup>8</sup> Instead of emphasizing the importance of EU issues, during the electoral campaign, the parties addressed the resolution of the main internal socio-economic policy issues mainly due to strong influence of the global economic crisis on Montenegro in 2009. Furthermore, constant mutual accusations during the election campaign between the government and the opposition regarding the election irregularities and pressure on voters significantly reduced the relevance of the EU issues.

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<sup>7</sup> The chapter consists of 9 short bullet points.

<sup>8</sup> Montenegro applied for the EU membership on 15 December 2008 whilst the 2009 parliamentary elections were held on 27 March 2009.

**Party position in 2012**

2012 parliamentary elections – Montenegrin political parties – content analysis of election manifestos

Figure 3. Relative salience of European integration in the election manifestos

	<b>KECG</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>SNP</b>	<b>PCG</b>	<b>BS</b>
Democracy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rule of law	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Human rights	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Minority rights	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Regional cooperation	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Free elections	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Freedom of media	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Corruption and organized crime	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Judicial reform	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
State institution reform	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Liberal market economy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Yes – Positive or favourable references to a particular EU policy

No – Negative or no references to a particular EU policy

Similarly to previous elections, *the KECG* published the 2012 official manifesto in the form of a concise electoral leaflet. In comparison with the 2009 elections, the coalition in its manifesto demonstrates an apparent higher level of salience with respect to EU policy (human rights). The coalition frequently raised the issue of “restored independence” together with the mentioned EU policies although the issue of state-legal status had been determined in 2006. Likewise, the coalition advocated for a strong, general support of the Montenegrin membership in the EU by emphasizing only vague principles related to the European integration process: “The integration of Montenegro in the EU and NATO is the best framework both for maintaining the legacy of 21 May 2006 and the achievement of our development ambitions” (CGO 2012:98). Apparently, the content of the manifesto has been reduced to 143 words as it shows a significant limitation by highlighting mainly the examples of the government’s positive achievements in the EU accession process. “The decision made by the European Council to open the negotiations on the EU accession on 29 June 2012 is argument more which speaks in favour of the Montenegrin realistic perspective ” (CGO 2012:98). Overall, the 2012 manifestos did not express any shift in comparison to previous party programmes, failing to offer any clear elaboration related to specific EU policies.

Interestingly enough, *the DF* manifesto does not contain a clear statement of the party’s strategic determination to support the Montenegrin road towards the EU membership.

However, the manifesto advocates for a moderate yet continuous aspiration towards the EU integration processes, taking into account discernible support for the EU membership and at the same time having a critical attitude towards the issue of substantial consensus on the participation in European integration issues, quality and dynamics. "It is completely true that the opening of negotiations with the EU is primarily the consequence of the situation in the EU itself, as well as in the region, rather than the reward for the achievements of the current authorities (...) No one from the outside guarantees us when we will become an EU member and what the quality of our life will be like in our state" (CGO 2012:37). The DF manifesto demonstrated a visible level of the EU domestic impact through the prominence of EU policies in its programme. Following its moderate pragmatism towards the EU membership, the coalition in the chapter entitled "*European integration*" notes the importance of joining the EU, which requires a broad domestic consensus. Correspondingly, the manifesto provides numerous significant and unusual measures which are essential for the Montenegrin progress in the process of accession negotiations: "to adopt the national programme of the European integrations for the period 2012-2016; to make a cost-benefit analysis of European integrations by each segment and cumulatively; to involve all relevant factors in the process of European integrations: opposition, NGO sector, universities, trade unions; etc (CGO 2012:78). In comparison to the previous, 2009 programmes (NOVA and PzP), the 2012 manifesto brings considerable and noticeable changes in the party, which reflects in the purposeful absorption of the EU policies (rule of law, judicial reform corruption and organized crime, human and minority rights, free elections and freedom of media etc.). Therefore, one may conclude that the EU domestic impact had a significant foothold in this entity, which provided meaningful measures in order to comply with the EU requirements.

Following its pragmatic attitude towards the European integration process, *the SNP* emphasizes its commitment to the EU membership but still not providing explicit support. "We will affirm the key role of the National Parliament of Montenegro in the negotiation process of Montenegro for a full EU membership" (CGO 2012:130). In comparison to the previous elections, the 2012 manifesto demonstrates a higher level of prominence of the EU policies (freedom of media) and offers reliable solutions and measures for compliance with the EU condition criteria. In its chapter entitled "*European integration and foreign policy*" the party strongly advocates for an active role of the parliament during the negotiation process, emphasizing the importance of transparent EU processes and active participation of all domestic political actors, so that the citizens could be better informed about the future challenges that lay ahead on the path towards the EU. Analytically speaking, both manifestos pay special attention to the issue of a decisive fight against corruption and organized crime, defining it as a priority problem which awaits Montenegro on its road towards the EU membership. Therefore, the party provided meaningful measures in order to resolve these issues: "to adopt a separate law which would define the establishment of a unique agency for combating corruption and organized crime with the authorization to impose sanctions and monitor other institutions engaged in this area" (CGO 2012:121). To sum up, in comparison to the previous manifesto the party programme shifts have been traceable (the protection of human and minority rights and freedom of media), demonstrating that the party achieved a visible but shallow degree of Europeanization as a result of the EU impact.

In terms of the Europeanization of domestic parties, the *PCG* manifesto expresses no particular interest towards the compliance with the EU requirements through the introduction of its programme in a form of political declaration (CGO 2012:103-110). Although the *PCG* strongly supports Montenegro's membership in the EU, its manifesto remains unclear and inconsistent, without paying any particular attention to the salience of EU policies. Furthermore, except for the reference to certain EU policies (democracy, state institution reform and liberal market economy) in a general and vague fashion, the manifesto makes no offer to provide adequate solutions and measures in order to address these policy issues. Therefore, this may lead to the conclusion that the *PCG* manifesto expresses a low level of the EU impact on domestic party due to the insufficient level of salience of EU policies.

Among the analysed parties *the BS* introduced the shortest version of the manifesto to voters.<sup>9</sup> In the terms of EU domestic impact, the *BS* manifesto demonstrates noticeable salience of EU policies, but its content is largely limited as it provides only declarative statements of commitments regarding certain EU policy issues. The party is committed to "political support to regional cooperation which must be undivided, real and dynamic in the monitoring of the needs of the entire region" (CGO 2012:16). Similarly, the party strongly advocates for the Montenegrin membership in the EU and NATO, however, only declaratively, i.e. in the form of bullet points, and without offering any detailed explanations to support their claims. Consequently, one might conclude that the party has defined general principles only in its manifesto, which corresponds to the EU policies but only declaratively.

In all, it would be reasonable to assert that the analysed manifestos indicated a higher level of prominence of the EU policies, as well as the relevance of the European integration process compared to the 2009 elections. The analysis revealed that the degree of Europeanization increased among the relevant parties between the two parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2012, which might correspond to the Montenegro's progress on the EU accession talks. However, the parties' attitudes towards the EU policies appeared in their respective manifestos mostly in a general and vague fashion, indicating a shallow and patchy transformative power of the EU upon the Montenegrin parties.

## 5. Discussion

The research findings have revealed that the EU transformative power upon the Montenegrin parties is visible, but apparently limited in its scope and outcome. Certain visibility of the EU impact on domestic actors can be observed in the case of the party attitudes towards the European integration process where all parliamentary parties strongly support the policy of Montenegrin accession to the EU. By the same token, a clear pro-European orientation of all parties represents a novelty compared to the 2009 elections, where the conservative *NOVA* appreciably softened its pragmatic attitude towards the EU membership as a result of their joining the *DF* in 2012.

As a result of the achieved consensus among the parties on the issue of the EU membership, the EU influence on the Montenegrin parties increased between the two

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<sup>9</sup> *BS* manifesto consists of 5 pages.

electoral cycles. Correspondingly, the EU impact on the relevant parties (KECG, SNP, PzP, DF and BS) was observable in the increased prominence of the EU policies in their manifestos, which testifies about the certain visibility of the EU transformative power on domestic changes.

However, although the majority of relevant Montenegrin parties reached a noticeable level of Europeanization in their respective manifestos, it is also evident that the majority of the promises, solutions and measures in the respective party manifestos were principally general and vague. More precisely, the parties' attitudes towards the EU process are strongly in favour of the future membership but evidently without clear and accurate course of actions or strategies, which proves that the majority of parties (except DF) only declaratively support the European integration process. Therefore, it might be reasonable to infer that a certain degree of the EU influence on domestic parties is obvious, however with an apparently limited range. The reasons for the limitation of the EU domestic impact can be considered from several aspects. Foremost, the lack of domestic parties' interest in the issue of compliance with the EU requirements can be explained in light of both parliamentary elections, which occurred after Montenegro had submitted its application for EU membership, and opened official accession talks. Apparently, Montenegro's advance towards the EU membership was seen as a sufficient sign for the political elite to focus more broadly on the internal socio-economic issues, which led to the neglect of the relevance of EU policies. Another indicator could be the constant shaking of Montenegrin political soil as a result of frequent emergence of new parties on the domestic political scene (PzP in 2009 and PCG and DF in 2012). In line with this, instead of adopting the EU policies, the newly-established parties were devoting more attention to internal socio-economic endeavours to gain the support of the voters and to ensure their parliamentary status. A similar "election attitude" was noticeable among the "old" parliamentary parties.

Obviously, a major problem which significantly hinders the EU domestic impact is a lack of political will of the elite to adequately resolve current reforms of political issues by the compliance with the EU standards. Although the Montenegrin public strongly supports the country's accession to the EU, the political elite only declaratively emphasizes the EU membership as the most important foreign policy priority, unwilling to systematically and adequately solve political conditions which are set in the EU accession conditions. We have witnessed the situation where the political elite emphasizes only a strong declaratory support to the process of EU accession, but in practice the strategic party orientation to address certain political and economic criteria for the EU membership is not visible. To be more specific, in the field of decisive fight against corruption and organized crime, rule of law, judicial and state institutional reform, protection of human rights and improvement of liberal market economy, insufficient progress has been achieved in terms of providing clear and precise strategies or measures for their implementation. Furthermore, there is a reason for serious concern - insufficient attention paid to meeting other political criteria, such as freedom of media and free elections, as the prominence of these two political criteria was noticeable only in two opposition parties – SNP and DF. Moreover, putting these issues under the spotlight is of particular importance for all Montenegrin parties, including the ruling government coalition, given the fact that a lack of confidence in the election process, due to the alleged abuse of public funds for party political purposes ("audio recordings



affair”), caused some opposition parties (DF) to boycott the parliament in September 2015 (European Commission Montenegro Report 2015:7). Obviously, the lack of the parties’ attitudes in terms of effective compliance with the EU requirements had no impact on voters. The Montenegrin citizens opted for a particular party not based on the substance of its election programme, but based on the status of a charismatic personality. Therefore, we have a paradoxical situation where the coalition (KECG) whose manifesto was published in the form of the election leaflets won the highest number of seats two times in a row. The same case happened with the opposition parties (NOVA, PzP and PCG) that received significant support from the voters although they had dedicated little or no attention to EU issues.

Taking into consideration the above discussion, it may be concluded that although the Montenegrin political elite defines the EU membership as a strategic priority of the country, its members demonstrate only formal support to the European integration process mainly by using the “EU membership perspective” as a lever to strengthen their influence in the society as the means to keep them in power. The implementation of the EU norms and rules happen only in those cases where there is a strong public pressure to comply with certain EU policies.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

The article aimed to examine the impact of the process of Europeanization on the more relevant Montenegrin parties in 2009 and 2012 parliamentary elections by focusing on an in-depth content analysis of their election manifestos. By using a methodological framework, the study attempted to provide an answer based on the designed research question as to whether EU policies have become prominent in the manifestos of Montenegrin parties during the two parliamentary elections.

Therefore, based on the provided research findings it might be reasonable to conclude that the EU transformative power on domestic Montenegrin parties was visible in the general prominence of EU policies but apparently limited in its scope and outcome. The EU impact on the Montenegrin parties mostly varies, from the political subjects where the EU has had certain influence which resulted in introduction of concrete meaningful measures in order to comply with the EU requirements, to those political entities which failed to offer any clear elaboration related to EU policies, leaving the average voters without a clear and precise attitude and the course of action towards the issue of compliance with the EU condition requirements. As a final conclusion, it might be possible to expect that the influence of Europeanization on domestic changes will be limited in the following period unless the political elite demonstrates a true political will to completely align with the EU accession conditions.

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