



# Weekly Briefing

**Montenegro Social briefing:**  
**The role of think tanks in Montenegro**  
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## **The role of think tanks in Montenegro**

Independent research and policy institutions, in the first place think tanks, have crucial role in spreading ideas of political and economic freedom and development and pressuring governments to implement them in practice. They also significantly contribute to the stock of knowledge and scientific results. The existing think tanks in Montenegro could be divided on those dealing with economic, or socio-economic, and other issues. These think tanks are more concerned with issues of democracy, corruption, electoral reform, etc. These issues are also significant from the aspect of gaining democratic legitimacy, which is essential for the EU accession process. The impact of these institutions varies.

### ***Economic Think Tank***

Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognoses (ISSP) is the first economic think tank in Montenegro founded in 1998. The creator of the idea of founding ISSP is Professor Veselin Vukotic and several of his associates. ISSP has been established with the goal of conducting public and objective economic research that will contribute to the transformation of the economic system of Montenegro and the change of the existing way of thinking, as well as training young people how to successfully operate in the new environment. ISSP implements projects under six programs: (i) macroeconomic analysis, (ii) economic research, (iii) econometric analyses and projections, (iv) public advocacy, (v) publishing and (vi) education.

ISSP focuses its activities on the main issue of economic policy including: public finances and tax policy, foreign trade, monetary and financial system, labour market and social policy, pension system, institutional development and regional cooperation. ISSP research, policy papers and other analytical studies create a forum for debates and allow policy makers and the business community to make projections and plans based on objective and accurate data. In addition, its research and local and regional seminars enable decision-makers to define priorities. ISSP is recognized as an important contributor to economic reform activities as a source of information and analysis and as catalyst for changes in economic policy.

Since its founding, in the past two decades ISSP has recorded significant results in its work and has had significant impact on Montenegrin economy and society as a whole. First of all, these are:

(i) preparation of the document on the strategic vision of development and economic reforms in Montenegro, where the strategic vision is based on economic

freedoms, private property, open economy, institutions of the market economy, the Euro as official currency, as well as development of Montenegro as a micro-state; (ii) ISSP published the first independent projections of Montenegro's GDP for 2001, (iii) In cooperation with international consultants, the Economic Reform Agenda for the period 2002-2006 was initiated, which was accepted by the Government of Montenegro; (iv) Advocacy for the introduction of the DM as official currency, and later introduction of the Euro; (v) Creation of the first Macroeconomic Model of Montenegro over a decade and a half ago, which has been improved in the previous period and currently ISSP is the first institution in Montenegro that regularly publishes projections of GDP and other economic indicators for Montenegro; (vi) Initiating the reform of the pension system; (vii) Initiating the reform of the statistical system; (viii) ISSP prepared the first Human Development Report for Montenegro; (ix) ISSP has prepared the first Transition Report; (x) First estimate of the profile of the poor and poverty in Montenegro; (xi) Conducted Survey on households of Roma, Ashkela and Egyptians, refugees and internally displaced persons; (xii) Initiating the reduction of taxes and the introduction of a proportional income tax for citizens.

The economic problems of the Balkan countries, even of Montenegro, are the problems that are most preoccupied with the governments of the countries of the region. The fact is that almost all governments in the region are easily condemned in the public that they are unsuccessful on the economic plane. Exception is not even Montenegro. Therefore, the role of think tanks on the economic plane may be the most important. Nevertheless, although the ISSP in the past proved that it represented the generator of ideas that dragged the Montenegrin economy when they were adopted by the Government of Montenegro as official goals and policies, it seems that the Government sometimes has short-term goals that overcome the recommendations and expertise provided by the ISSP. One of the evidence for this claim is the Unaccepted Agenda of Economic Reforms proposed by the ISSP in the past (2007), based on the principles of reduced administration, efficient civil servants, an environment favourable to business through the abolition of certain administrative barriers, structural reforms in all domains of socio-economic policies, etc. Later coping with economic problems, such as the huge growth of state and foreign debt, is proof that the ISSP was right.

Think-tank has been provided and still contributes greatly to the economic prosperity of the country. In addition to the fact that ISSP has implemented various projects and programs for which the state often did not have the capacities, this think tank educated various types of experts that can focus on developing the country's prosperity. This organization is currently a research hub, or a place where in one place special information, technical experts and research talents are

collected. With all of these characteristics, this organization can play an intermediary role at all levels.

However, it seems that economic think tanks in Montenegro, especially Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognoses achieved much more in abovementioned goals than think tanks that operate in the area of other issues, such as politics, democracy, etc. The reason could be found in the longer existence of this institution (20 years), as well as, in the fact that this institute during entire existence represented and still represents a scientific research hub employing mainly young people with PhD or Master diploma.

### ***Other think tanks***

On the side of think tanks dealing with other issues there are some think tanks that had some impact and results in society during recent years such as Center for democracy and human rights, Centre for Civic Education, Centre for Monitoring and Research, Institute Alternative, etc.

Center for democracy and human rights (CEDEM) is established 20 years ago and it is the oldest political think tank in Montenegro. The mission of CEDEM is to raise awareness on the importance of successful democratic transition and to research, analyse and follow process of transition, as well as to contribute to strengthening civil society and democratization process as a whole. The main areas of their action are rule of law, human rights, Euro-Atlantic integrations, social inclusion, security and defence and empirical research (political public opinion and other opinion polls). Two years younger think tank, Centre for Monitoring and Research (CeMI), is established with main objective to provide support for continuous monitoring of the transition process and reforms, as well as provide support to reforms and strengthening of the political system' institutions and CSOs through proposing and monitoring the implementation of public policies in the three main areas: democratization and human rights, fight against corruption and Euro-Atlantic Integrations. During previous eighteen years, CeMI as a research centre for the creation and representation of policy proposals, has contributed to changing social and political circumstances in Montenegro.

In addition to these think tanks in the field of public policies, the non-independent and non-partisan think tank Institute Alternative is also active. Research of Institute Alternative are focused on five programs: public administration, accountable public finance, parliamentary programme, security and defence and social policy. Their work is consisted of pointing out to the key problems, opening the questions, monitoring the implementation of public policies and providing recommendations and therefore influence decision-makers

in order to improve policies in the direction which is in the interest of whole society.

Centre for Civic Education (CCE) is established with mission to contribute to the development of civil society and participation of citizens in policy shaping and decision-making through the education of various actors in the field of democracy, human rights and European integration. Its work is organized within three main fields: Europeanisation and Democratisation, Human Rights and Active Citizenship. During its action of more than a decade and a half, CCE contributed to improvement of citizens' education in the field of democracy, human rights and European integration of Montenegro, encouragement of citizens to actively participate in decision-making processes, promotion of anti-corruption policies and so on.

### ***Conclusion***

In addition to various initiatives, today's role of think tanks in Montenegro relates to the process of monitoring reforms, analysing the process and making criticisms. However, sometimes the attitudes of these think-tanks sometimes are perceived as openly supporting a particular political party or direction, which is questionable.

However, despite these rare misunderstandings, cooperation between the state and think tanks is of great importance when it comes to developing and implementing strategies for social and economic progress. The big problem of think tanks in Montenegro is the fact that these organizations can often define their activities only on the basis of financial capabilities and not on the basis of the overall needs of the society. Hence, state strategies related to economic progress and EU membership, should provide a permanent but not temporary role to think tanks, while through the available innovative funding lines government should reduce the dependence of think tanks on foreign funds. With this kind of approach to think tanks, the governments of the countries (like Montenegro), which attach importance to economic progress and membership in the EU, can be signatories of much more successful activities and bearers of better results.

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