



# International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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## Human Rights Committee 143rd session

### Summary record of the 4188th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 5 March 2025, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Soh

## Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant  
(*continued*)

*Second periodic report of Montenegro (continued)*

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant**  
(continued)

*Second periodic report of Montenegro (continued) (CCPR/C/MNE/2;  
CCPR/C/MNE/QPR/2)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Montenegro joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation to resume replying to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in 2024, the Government had adopted a new strategy for the prevention of violence against children covering the period 2025–2029 and an accompanying action plan, replacing the previous strategy, which had come to an end in 2021. The new strategy was based on a “zero-tolerance” approach, drawing from the recommendations set out in the Global Status Report on Preventing Violence against Children of 2020 and the child protection standards promoted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. It included measures to enhance the monitoring of all forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence against children, to address outdated beliefs about the rights of children in Montenegrin society and to strengthen child protection laws through a multisectoral approach, engaging all stakeholders, including civil society. Independent mechanisms for monitoring the situation of children’s rights would be established.
4. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the national preventive mechanism was part of the Office of the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (Ombudsman). The mechanism monitored the conditions of persons deprived of their liberty in prison facilities, and its annual report was presented before the parliament each year in a public session. With the technical support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Government was working to establish, by 2026, a mechanism for monitoring follow-up to the recommendations of international human rights bodies and mechanisms, including the universal periodic review.
5. Restrictions in the law on legal gender recognition based on self-determination, including the limitation of its scope to Montenegrin nationals, were necessary to ensure a balance between human rights and security concerns, to protect family rights and to ensure that the law would be enforceable in practice. The law had been well received in consultations with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Early marriage, understood as marriage in which one of the contracting parties was a minor, was permitted in certain circumstances, provided that prior authorization had been received and all conditions stipulated in law were met. Those conditions were not limited to the consent of both parties. Early marriages concluded without such authorization were unlawful and subject to prosecution under criminal law.
6. While the State continued to conduct awareness-raising campaigns discouraging selective abortion, for reasons related to the privacy of medical records, it lacked data on persons using abortion services, the reasons for their use of such services and the sex of the aborted fetus. Efforts to prevent selective abortion were hampered by the lack of such data. A bill on the Ombudsman’s Office was being drafted, setting out measures to ensure that the institution would be granted A status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and strengthening the role of the deputy ombudsman for protection against discrimination.
7. **Mr. Quezada Cabrera** said that he wished to know what measures were being taken to reduce overcrowding and improve detention conditions in the country’s prisons and police facilities, which reportedly suffered from structural deficiencies, including a lack of access to natural light and open-air spaces and irregular provision of food. In the light of reports of overcrowding in psychiatric institutions, he would welcome information on the implementation, budget and scope of the deinstitutionalization strategy covering the period 2025–2028. He would be particularly interested to learn whether it provided for alternatives

to institutionalization, such as community-based care services, for those who no longer needed institutional care.

8. He would be grateful for an update on the situation of the Constitutional Court following the 2024 removal of one of the Court's judges by the parliament, which some claimed to be unconstitutional. He would also welcome the delegation's comments on reports that the Minister of Justice, as a member of the Judicial Council, had unduly interfered in decisions made concerning judicial appointments. It would be useful to receive a full account of working conditions in the courts and the measures taken or planned to improve those conditions and reduce the backlog of cases. An explanation of the amendments made to the Law on the Judiciary Council in 2024 would be welcome, as would clarification of the term limits for executive judicial positions.

9. He would appreciate further details of the proposed amendments to the Law on Free Legal Aid, as referenced in paragraph 103 of the State Party's second periodic report (CCPR/C/MNE/2). It would also be useful to receive information on the procedure for applying for legal aid, plans for the continuation of activities to raise public awareness of the legal aid system and the financial resources set aside for that purpose.

10. **The Chair** said that, in the light of reports of significant gaps in the country's response to trafficking in persons, he would welcome information on any plans to strengthen the Anti-Trafficking Operational Team, including by increasing its resources and assigning specialized officers to regional offices, and on the measures taken to strengthen the capacity of labour inspectors and law enforcement officials to better detect and respond to trafficking, particularly in labour and sexual exploitation cases. He would like to know whether the State Party planned to expand the capacity of shelters for victims of trafficking and to establish separate facilities for child and adult male victims. Information about any actions taken to improve access to compensation and ensure sustainable, State-funded victim support, including through recovery and reintegration programmes, would also be welcome.

11. He would appreciate further details of the Government's strategy to improve awareness of and training on data protection and privacy rights for State officials and the evaluation of the impact of such training. It would also be useful to receive information on the budget of the Agency for Personal Data Protection and Free Access to Information, measures to protect its independence, the number of complaints submitted to the Agency and their outcomes, and the number of data protection cases brought to court. He wondered whether there were plans to adopt a new data protection law. In the light of persistent concerns about unlawful surveillance, he would welcome clarification of the existing legal and procedural safeguards governing access to databases held by legal persons, including banks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the mechanisms in place to ensure compliance with those safeguards. It would be useful to learn whether the State Party planned to amend article 8 of the National Security Agency Law to introduce judicial authorization for access to databases held by legal persons and to strengthen independent oversight of intelligence gathering. Information on remedies for individuals subjected to unlawful surveillance or unauthorized data access would also be welcome.

12. Recalling that the 2004 assassination of Duško Jovanović and the 2018 shooting of Olivera Lakić remained unresolved, he said he would like to know what concrete steps the State Party had taken to enhance journalist safety, ensure accountability in the event of attacks on journalists and prevent future attacks and would welcome an update on the implementation of the Media Strategy 2023–2027. He would appreciate an explanation of the work of the Commission for Monitoring Attacks on Journalists, including clarification as to whether its findings were publicly available. He wondered what measures had been introduced to prevent the misuse of strategic lawsuits against public participation, known as SLAPPs, against journalists and would welcome data on SLAPP cases, including their outcomes and the remedies available to targeted journalists. Lastly, he would be grateful for any updates on the draft law on the national public broadcaster of Montenegro and the draft law on audiovisual media services, including clarification as to whether the drafting process had involved stakeholder consultations.

13. **Ms. Tigroudja** said that, in the light of reports that persons arriving at the border, including persons in need of international protection, were increasingly turned back,

including to countries deemed unsafe in the sense of international refugee law, she wished to know what measures the State Party planned to take to ensure the effective implementation of the principle of non-refoulement, for example, by drawing up a list of safe countries to protect against refoulement to countries where applicants might be subjected to ill-treatment, and to ensure that border crossings were not lawless zones for people in need of protection.

14. It would also be useful to receive clarification as to whether legal aid was available for procedures relating to birth or nationality registration, determination of stateless status and application for refugee status. She would be grateful if the delegation could comment on reports that Ukrainian refugees faced obstacles in enrolling their children in education and gaining access to healthcare, and reports that there were obstacles to the statelessness determination procedure and that stateless persons had difficulty gaining access to health and other basic services.

15. She would welcome the delegation's comments on reports that there was a hostile environment in Montenegro for NGOs working in the areas of women's rights and the rights of LGBTQ+ persons and those raising awareness of corruption. In that regard, it would also be interesting to receive clarification as to whether the State Party planned to adopt a "foreign agents law" that would reduce civic space and an update on the participation of NGOs in anti-corruption monitoring mechanisms. Information on legal protections for whistle-blowers would also be welcome.

16. **Mr. Ndiaye** said that he would welcome further information on the State Party's efforts to amend its Law on Free Access to Information, including on restrictions on public access to information. He would be interested to hear more about the ways in which the proposed amendments would ensure greater transparency and compliance with international human rights standards, particularly with regard to inclusion, accountability and empowerment. Despite the increase in documents made available to the public through an open-source database, there were reports of an increasing tendency to classify public information without a clear justification. He wished to know what mechanisms were in place to prevent the misuse of classification rules to restrict access to information. He also wondered what measures had been introduced to address concerns about "administrative silence", or situations in which public authorities either failed to respond to requests for information or were slow to do so. He would appreciate specific examples of independent monitoring mechanisms or organizations to which citizens could appeal to ensure that refusals to provide information were justified.

17. He would like to know what concrete measures had been taken to ensure that implementation of the Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs and the Legal Status of Religious Communities fully protected the right to freedom of religion, without discrimination, and that the amendments to the Law in 2021 were in line with international human rights standards. He wondered whether the State Party had consulted with religious communities when drafting the amendments to the Law, and if so, how their contributions had been taken into account.

18. Further information on the measures taken by the State Party to investigate and punish religious hate speech in public and in the education system, including Islamophobic hate speech, would be useful. He would also welcome detailed information on the current status of property disputes between religious communities and the State, including the number of properties and communities involved and the mechanisms in place in cases where religious property had been transferred to the State.

19. He would appreciate further clarification of the registration procedure for religious communities. In particular, he wished to know whether there were any applications for registration that were pending or that had been rejected, and if so, on what grounds. He wondered what criteria had to be met for a religious group to be officially recognized and how the State Party ensured that that process was non-discriminatory. He would appreciate clarification of the status of implementation of the agreements between the State Party and religious communities, such as the Holy See, the Islamic community and the Jewish community, and information on the steps taken to conclude agreements with religious groups that were still under negotiation, such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church and six other Protestant evangelical churches, in accordance with the obligations under the Covenant.

20. **Mr. Carazo** said that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe had indicated in their reports on the 2023 elections that their recommendations on campaign financing had not been fully implemented and that the mechanisms in place were inadequate to effectively verify donations, cheques received and some disbursements. In addition, the report had pointed out that there was no record of expenditure prior to the registration of candidacies, expenditure related to face-to-face campaign activities or expenditure on advertising on platforms such as Google. Despite the fact that third-party campaigning activities were prohibited, there were no sanctions for non-compliance with the third-party ban. Furthermore, the legal framework for campaigns and their financing did not ensure the transparency, integrity and oversight of the finances of political campaigns. He therefore wished to know what progress had been made in implementing the recommendations of the Office and the Council on electoral reforms and how Montenegro was ensuring that those reforms were effectively implemented.

21. He wondered what specific measures had been taken to ensure that the State Electoral Commission functioned with full impartiality and independence and what mechanisms were in place to prevent political influence in its decision-making processes. In view of the allegations of vote-buying, voter intimidation and misuse of public resources during the elections, he wished to know what concrete measures had been taken to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable, how many cases had resulted in convictions and penalties and whether the public had been informed of those measures, convictions and penalties.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.50 a.m. and resumed at 11.20 a.m.*

22. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the Strategy for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions for the period 2023–2026 and the corresponding action plan provided for the continued reform of the prison system. The strategy aimed to prevent torture or ill-treatment, uphold human rights, strengthen the capacity of the Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions and the Probation Service and promote the rehabilitation and social reintegration of prisoners. In order to address the problem of overcrowding at the psychiatric hospital in Dobrota and improve conditions for prisoners with special health conditions, construction work had begun on a special unit of the Institute, known as the Spuž Prison. Some 60 per cent of the work had been completed. The Government had made efforts to ensure that the new prison facilities were adequately funded and staffed.

23. The Government had adopted action plans to implement the recommendations of the European Court of Human Rights in the cases of *Bigović v. Montenegro* and *Bulatović v. Montenegro* with a view to ensuring that the violations of article 3 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights) did not recur.

24. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in December 2023, the Ministry of the Interior had issued an instruction on follow-up to the recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The instruction provided for the equipping of police officers with audiovisual recording devices with a view to documenting their actions and the acquisition of special vehicles for the safe transport of detainees. There were also plans to renovate existing facilities and build new ones.

25. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in May 2024, the Government had adopted a new Judicial Reform Strategy for the period 2024–2027 and an accompanying action plan for the period 2024–2025, which aimed to: strengthen the independence, impartiality and accountability of the judiciary; increase efficiency; and improve access to justice, transparency and trust in the judiciary. In the context of negotiations on accession to the European Union, comprehensive reforms were being carried out, including improvements in criminal law.

26. The Council of Europe had expressed concern about the membership of the Minister of Justice of the Judicial Council. The Minister, who was a member of the Council under the Constitution, had limited powers and did not participate in disciplinary proceedings involving judges. The Minister also did not participate in decisions on the promotion, dismissal and appointment of judges. In the light of the concerns expressed by the Council of Europe and

its Group of States against Corruption, together with the European Commission, it had been decided to amend the Constitution to exclude the Minister from the Judicial Council.

27. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in addition, the Minister of Justice could not chair the Judicial Council and was not a member of any of the Council's commissions. Some restrictions were therefore already laid down in the Constitution. It had been advisable for the Minister to sit on the Council in order to facilitate communication between the judiciary and the executive. Notwithstanding the decision to exclude the Minister from the Council, every effort would be made to keep open the channels of communication between the Council and the Ministry of Justice.

28. Amendments made to the Law on the Judicial Council, including the broadening of the range of offences subject to disciplinary action and a stiffening of the penalties, had increased the accountability of the judiciary. Serious disciplinary offences could now prevent judges from being promoted or from becoming court presidents.

29. A working group had been set up to draft a separate law on the employment rights of judges, including remuneration, in order to support the independence of the judiciary. To that end, the Supreme Court President had proposed salary increases for lower court judges. The Supreme Court was also monitoring the backlog of cases at the Administrative Court. The backlog was partly due to an increase in the number of cases, in particular those concerning free access to information and administrative silence. Amendments to the Law on Administrative Disputes aimed to streamline procedures and address the influx of cases.

30. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the Law on Free Legal Aid, as amended in 2024, provided for free legal aid for victims of torture, victims of crimes against sexual freedoms and children seeking protection of their rights. Free legal aid for persons in vulnerable categories was provided only by lawyers with specialized knowledge in domestic violence and child protection. Those lawyers had to have at least three years of experience and specialized training. The Law aimed to increase the number of persons eligible for free legal aid and recognized the need to include more vulnerable categories. Free legal aid covered the costs of legal advice, the filing of pleadings, communication with the relevant institutions and proceedings before notaries. It also included administrative procedures related to social welfare, healthcare and disability rights and the costs of sign language interpretation. The Law did not restrict access to other legal aid from legal clinics or organizations. Technical and administrative support for obtaining free legal aid was provided by specialized services in ordinary courts. Efforts were being made to raise awareness of the right to free legal aid.

31. **A representative of Montenegro** said that a public awareness campaign organized by the Supreme Court with the support of the Council of Europe had led to an increase in the number of applications for legal aid from victims of domestic violence and trafficking in persons. In addition, as part of a project set up by the Court and the University of Montenegro, the design of which had been informed by experiences in Croatia, judges from around the country had given law students the training they needed to provide vulnerable persons with legal aid.

32. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in addition to the ongoing development of a new national strategy, a number of measures had been taken to combat trafficking in persons in recent years. One example was the establishment of the sale of children as a separate offence, as recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

33. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in 2024, more criminal proceedings than in previous years had been instituted against persons suspected of the offence of trafficking in persons. Some of the victims had been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, while others had been forced to beg or to work.

34. **A representative of Montenegro** said that a wide range of governmental and non-governmental institutions was represented on the governmental team set up to combat trafficking in persons, which coordinated the steps taken within the framework of the Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. Training organized to build the capacity of the relevant specialists – police officers, social workers and the staff of the migrant reception centre, for example – focused on identifying and protecting victims and on working with

groups of people who were vulnerable to being trafficked. Seven police officers had been assigned to investigate suspected cases of trafficking in persons. The Agreement on Strategic Cooperation between Montenegro and the European Police Office had been revised a number of times, most recently in May 2024, since its initial adoption in 2007. The revisions had been made to ensure that the Agreement remained fit for purpose.

35. A State-funded shelter for children who were victims of trafficking, which had a total of 10 beds in separate quarters for boys and girls and was accessible to persons with disabilities, had opened in April 2024. Shelter personnel cooperated with social workers, healthcare personnel, teachers and school administrators and others. The children's shelter, like the country's shelter for women who were victims of trafficking, was managed by an NGO.

36. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, since 2019, when her country's courts had for the first time handed down prison sentences to people convicted of trafficking in persons, considerable progress had been made towards ensuring that traffickers did not go unpunished. Convictions had been secured in two trials conducted by the high courts in 2024.

37. The Supreme Court, which was represented on the team that coordinated efforts to monitor the implementation of the Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, had helped organize workshops to train officials, front-line officials in particular, to inform trafficking victims of their rights and provide them with the support they needed. As part of a project supported by the Council of Europe, lawyers had received specialized training on the provision of legal aid to victims of trafficking in persons. Under a law adopted in 2015, victims of violent crime, including trafficking in persons, were entitled to monetary damages. That law would enter into force when Montenegro became a State member of the European Union. Guidelines on the award of such compensation would be drafted in the coming months.

38. **A representative of Montenegro** said that foreign nationals could inform the border police of their intention to seek international protection, and once they did so they were expected to file an application for asylum within 15 days. In general, asylum-seekers stayed in Montenegro, which was a transit country, for two to three months. The Law on International and Temporary Protection of Foreigners, which had entered into force in January 2018, and the accompanying secondary legislation, were fully compatible with European Union Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection. The deadline for making decisions on applications for asylum was six months. As a rule, the deadline was met, even in complex cases.

39. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the bill on privacy and data protection was expected to be signed into law in the third quarter of 2025. The Personal Data Protection Agency, an independent agency, monitored the activities of the institutions that collected and processed personal data. Under article 8 of the National Security Agency Law, records were to be kept of the identification numbers of the National Security Agency officers who accessed such data, as well as the date and time of such access.

40. The Agency reported to a parliamentary committee that was responsible for overseeing the Agency's activities. A bill that had been endorsed by the committee would, when it was made law, amend the National Security Agency Law to ensure that the Agency could be held to account, including by providing for the establishment of a special supervisory office, not part of the Agency, and the repeal of provisions pertaining to the Chief Inspector.

41. **A representative of Montenegro** said that charges of abuse of authority had been filed against the former director of the National Security Agency, Dejan Peruničić, and another officer. The cases against the two officers had been joined, and the trial was ongoing.

42. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in a bid to protect the right to freedom of expression, attacks on journalists and other media personnel had been made a specific criminal offence, and support had been provided to the commission responsible for monitoring efforts to investigate such attacks. The members of the commission, which was fully operational, included two prosecutors; its recommendations were transmitted to all relevant institutions, and its reports were made public and posted on government websites.

43. A law on the national public broadcaster had been adopted in 2024 to prevent undue political interference with radio and television programming and with the procedures for the appointment of members the broadcaster's management board. The adoption of the law, which had been recommended by the European Commission for Democracy through Law, was evidence of his country's commitment to freedom of expression.

44. **A representative of Montenegro** said that three prosecutors had been assigned to investigate the killing of journalist Duško Jovanović, and a number of witnesses had been heard. Work on the case had intensified over the previous year. The trial of five of the alleged assailants charged with grave bodily harm in the Olivera Lakić case was ongoing. Four defendants were currently standing trial for their alleged involvement in an attack on another journalist, Ana Raičković.

45. **A representative of Montenegro** said that a bill on free access to information had been withdrawn from consideration for technical reasons. Very recently, however, it had been resubmitted by the drafters, and the parliamentary committee responsible for considering it had been asked to make consideration of the bill a priority.

46. Under the Constitution, the term of office of Constitutional Court judges ended when they reached the mandatory retirement age. The Court was also required to inform the parliament of the reasons for the departure of its judges. In one recent case, the Court had failed to meet that requirement, and a judge who had reached retirement age had appealed the decision to remove her from the Court. The decision had not been overturned, however.

47. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the Government recognized that it might be necessary to amend the Constitution to clarify the procedure relating to the retirement of Constitutional Court judges.

48. Religious communities had been involved in drafting the Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs and the Legal Status of Religious Communities but not in the process of amending it in 2021. He was not aware of any cases in which property owned by a religious community had been transferred to the State. The conditions governing the restitution of property rights to religious communities would be set out in a separate law that would be drafted by a multidisciplinary commission. The agreements regulating relations between the Government and the Islamic and Jewish communities were being successfully implemented, under the oversight of the relevant joint committees.

49. **Ms. Tigroudja**, stressing that the Committee had received numerous, consistent reports of human rights violations committed at the country's borders and of an increase in pushbacks, said that she would like further clarification on that point. It remained unclear why the Law on Free Legal Aid did not apply to asylum-seekers, some of whom were victims of trafficking in persons.

50. **Mr. Carazo** said that he would like to know what mechanisms were in place to prevent covert interference in Montenegrin elections by foreign actors, including the financing of political activities. The Committee had received reports that the parliament had delayed consideration of a request from the public prosecution service to lift the immunity of a member of parliament accused of hate speech. He wondered why the delay had occurred and when the situation would be resolved. He would appreciate additional information on women's access to decision-making positions in the public sector. Lastly, the Committee recommended that the Government should encourage the participation of civil society organizations and the Ombudsman's Office in the treaty body reporting process.

51. **Mr. Quezada Cabrera** asked whether adequate financial resources had been set aside for the implementation of the action plan on deinstitutionalization and whether the plan covered alternative solutions for people who no longer needed institutional care, such as community care services. He wondered how the Supreme Court planned to address the backlog of court cases, including in the administrative courts, within a reasonable time frame.

52. **Mr. Ndiaye** said that the delegation had yet to clarify what measures were taken when public authorities failed to respond to requests for information.

53. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the Government firmly denied any allegations of pushbacks. All persons who entered the territory of Montenegro were given



the opportunity to inform the border police that they were seeking international protection. Under the Law on International and Temporary Protection of Foreigners, asylum-seekers were entitled to legal aid, which was delivered by the Ministry of the Interior, in collaboration with an NGO. Furthermore, all foreign nationals had access to lawyers who could represent them in proceedings before the Ministry of the Interior and the administrative courts.

54. **A representative of Montenegro** said that access to legal aid was guaranteed by law to victims of trafficking in persons, as well as to victims of domestic violence or sexual offences. The Supreme Court monitored the work of administrative courts and was drawing up a plan to increase the rate at which they dealt with cases. The plan would be finalized by mid-2025. Representatives of administrative courts had spoken publicly about the challenges they faced and the abuses that sometimes occurred.

55. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights had proposed introducing quotas to improve the representation of women in public sector leadership positions. Specifically, it had recommended that at least one deputy prime minister should be a woman and that women should chair at least one quarter of all working groups. Parliamentary committees and the boards of State-owned enterprises were already subject to gender quotas. There had been a slight improvement in the country's Gender Equality Index score since 2021.

56. Public figures, including women in political office, were inevitably exposed to criticism but must not be subjected to hate speech. There were plans to introduce legislation that clearly distinguished between criticism as an act of freedom of expression and hate speech. The Law on Gender Equality would be amended to establish penalties for violations.

57. **A representative of Montenegro** said that a mayor who was also a member of parliament had been accused of making public statements that constituted racial and religious hate speech. The Supreme State Prosecutor's Office was seeking to have his parliamentary immunity lifted in order to prosecute him.

58. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the Committee on Comprehensive Electoral Reform had been established in late 2023. Its work had been suspended in December 2024 on account of the political situation. It had since resumed its work with two additional participants – one from the governing coalition and one from the opposition – and the deadline for the completion of its work had been extended to the end of 2025. The Committee had drawn up a preliminary draft law on the financing of election campaigns. Some NGOs had been involved in its work but only to a limited extent.

59. **A representative of Montenegro** said that a strategy on deinstitutionalization and an accompanying action plan had been adopted in December 2024. The implementation of the strategy would be funded through a substantial budget appropriation, as well as donor funding of more than €50 million. One aim of the strategy was to improve child protection and to support the implementation of related international documents such as the European Union Strategy for a More Effective Fight against Child Sexual Abuse. The strategy called for the development of a stronger social and child protection system, within a specified time frame, through cooperation between all competent authorities and collaboration with civil society. It also called for improvements to the legislative framework and covered issues such as the licensing of service providers and the accreditation of training programmes.

60. The Government had not received any complaints of religious hate speech against whole religious communities or members of those communities. Such complaints were handled by the Ombudsman's Office. The negotiations on an agreement governing relations between the Government and various Protestant churches were still under way.

61. There was no law or bill on foreign agents. Any public statements that might have been made on the subject had not led to the drafting of legislation. Montenegro was committed to protecting freedom of expression and dealt with threats to that freedom in accordance with the relevant international standards.

62. Since the submission of his country's report, significant reforms had been undertaken in the legislative and institutional spheres, in cooperation with the European Commission, as part of the country's efforts to meet the requirements for joining the European Union. Those efforts had involved not only the Government and the civil service but also civil society and individual citizens. His Government remained fully committed to implementing the Covenant and would continue to strengthen national legislation to that end.

63. **The Chair** thanked the delegation for engaging in the constructive dialogue, which had spanned a wide range of topics and had covered both the progress made by the State Party and the challenges that it continued to face.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*