

Irena Radovi: Speech - Regional Conference "AML/CFT and anti-fraud procedures for instant payments"

Speech by Dr Irena Radovi, Governor of Central Bank of Montenegro, at the Regional Conference " AML/CFT and anti-fraud procedures for instant payments", Podgorica, 5 February 2026.

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Distinguished representatives of the European Commission, the European Payments Council, and the World Bank,

Esteemed colleagues from the central banks of the Western Balkans,

Esteemed representatives of the banking sector,

Dear colleagues and partners,

It is a privilege to welcome you to Montenegro and to open this regional event at a particularly important moment for the future of European payments integration in our region.

I am particularly pleased that we are joined today by more than forty representatives of central banks from across the Western Balkans, reflecting the region's strong commitment to cooperation, knowledge sharing, and coordinated preparation for the introduction of instant payments and deeper integration into the European payments ecosystem.

Montenegro is honoured to host this dialogue and to contribute actively to shaping regional readiness for SEPA and instant payments, building on the progress we have achieved domestically and our determination to share experience and support common regional advancement. This gathering demonstrates that closer coordination among Western Balkan central banks is becoming an important pillar of our collective European integration path.

Your presence here today reflects more than professional cooperation. It demonstrates a shared strategic responsibility.

The transition toward instant payments is not simply a technological upgrade. It represents a transformation of financial markets, regulatory expectations, and the level of trust that citizens and businesses place in the financial system.

For the central banks of the Western Balkans, instant payments are not merely a modernization project. They represent a strategic pillar of our European integration and of our shared commitment to operate fully in line with the standards, discipline, and values of the European financial architecture.

From a national perspective, Montenegro's accession to SEPA marked a historic milestone. It demonstrated that a small economy, supported by a strong partnership between the central bank and all eleven commercial banks operating in Montenegro,

can successfully align with complex European regulatory and operational standards when institutional commitment, technical expertise, and strong cooperation with international partners are combined.

Allow me to particularly acknowledge the strong engagement of all eleven commercial banks operating in Montenegro, whose track record and commitment clearly demonstrate the sector's readiness to jointly deliver one of the most demanding transformations of our payment ecosystem. Their active role, both in the SEPA accession process and in preparations for instant payments, confirms that this reform is truly a system-wide effort and a shared national priority.

Building on our joint achievement, the implementation of the TIPS Clone project, planned for July 2026, represents the next decisive step.

Instant payments will significantly improve efficiency, accessibility, and competitiveness of financial services, benefiting citizens, businesses, and the overall economy. At the same time, they will further anchor Montenegro and the Region within the evolving European digital payments infrastructure.

However, innovation without security is unsustainable. Instant payments compress transaction timeframes from hours to seconds. This operational reality fundamentally changes the risk landscape. It reduces the margin for detection, intervention, and recovery, particularly in the areas of money laundering, terrorist financing, and increasingly sophisticated fraud schemes.

For regulators and supervisors, this requires a profound shift in approach. Traditional supervisory tools are no longer sufficient. Real-time monitoring, advanced analytical systems, and strengthened institutional coordination are becoming essential safeguards of financial stability and integrity.

Over the past two years, the Central Bank of Montenegro has therefore undertaken substantial reforms to strengthen its AML/CFT and supervisory framework in full alignment with European Union legislation, SEPA operational requirements, and Eurosystem best practices paving the way for successful closure of chapters 4,9 by 2025.

We have intensified supervisory expectations, strengthened institutional capacities and partnerships with the NCBs of the Eurosystem, delivered dissuasive multi-million-euro fines and worked closely with the banking sector to ensure that innovation is supported by robust risk management, strong governance, and technological preparedness.

Our message to the financial sector is clear and consistent: innovation and compliance are not competing priorities. They are mutually reinforcing foundations of sustainable financial development.

This workshop is therefore particularly valuable. It provides a platform to exchange experience, examine lessons learned from EU Member States, and discuss concrete operational solutions for real-time risk monitoring, fraud prevention, and institutional

coordination. These discussions are critical for Montenegro, and the entire Western Balkans, as the region moves toward deeper integration into SEPA and European payment infrastructures.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the European Commission for its strategic guidance and long-standing support, as well as to the European Payments Council and the World Bank for their technical expertise and partnership. Their contribution has been instrumental in transforming policy objectives into practical implementation.

We view this cooperation as part of a broader regional responsibility. Financial stability, payment system resilience, and digital trust are increasingly cross-border public goods. Strengthening them requires coordinated cooperation, knowledge sharing, and consistent supervisory standards across the region.

Montenegro is fully committed to this path. Our objective is not simply to meet accession benchmarks. Our objective is to contribute actively to the strength, stability, and credibility of the European financial system as a future member state.

By working together, we can ensure that the transformation of payments remains safe, inclusive, and resilient.

I am confident that the discussions over the next two days will produce practical guidance, strengthen institutional cooperation, and support our shared objective of building a secure and integrated European payments environment.

Thank you for your partnership, your expertise, and your continued support. I wish you a successful and productive exchange.

Thank you.