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The Balkan country is the first European country outside Western Europe and the European Union to legally recognise gay and lesbian couples.

By Rachel Savage

Thomson Reuters Foundation (01.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2O02Fcs> - Montenegro voted to legalise same-sex civil partnerships on Wednesday, becoming the first European country outside of Western Europe and the European Union to legally recognise gay and lesbian couples.

The law received 42 votes in the 81-seat parliament, Blanka Radosevic Marovic, a director in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, after it was rejected by parliament in July 2019.

The vote in the Balkan country, which is in advanced negotiations to join the European Union, was welcomed by its leaders on Twitter as affirming "European values".

"A great step in the right direction for (Montenegro) society, its democratic maturity and integration processes," Prime Minister Dusko Markovic tweeted.

Montenegro "is one step closer to joining the most developed world democracies," President Milo Dukanovic said on Twitter. "Born free and equal in dignity and rights!"

The country, with a population of about 620,000 people, becomes the 32nd United Nations member to recognise some form of civil partnership for same-sex couples. Gay and lesbian couples can marry in 28 U.N. countries.

Three Serbian lesbian couples launched legal cases last year challenging their country's lack of same-sex civil partnerships, while Bosnia's government is considering whether to introduce similar legislation.

LGBT+ campaigners welcomed the law, which will come into force in a year's time after regulations have been finalised and government clerks trained.

"I honestly I wasn't expecting it," said John Barac, executive director of LGBT Forum Progress, an advocacy group. "It's really extraordinary, it's a big day for all of us."

Montenegro's government has promoted LGBT+ rights with an "action plan" for 2019-2023 including proposals such as anti-discrimination training for police and health workers but faced opposition from a socially conservative society.

Opposing members of parliament described same-sex civil partnerships as imposed by "global world Satanists" during the lawmakers' debates on Tuesday, Barac said.

Lawmakers who opposed the bill did not vote on Wednesday, a spokesman for Montenegro's prime minister said.
