



Weekly Briefing

Montenegro External Relations briefing:

Montenegro - country with important role for Western Balkan stability and cooperation

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Montenegro – country with important role for Western Balkan stability and cooperation

It seems that recent events confirmed leading position of Montenegro in maintaining stability and promoting cooperation among Western Balkan countries. This is confirmed at recent conference organized by Montenegrin Chamber of Commerce in Budva, Montenegro. The conference guests confirm recognition of Montenegrin huge importance for the region, not only in economic area, but also in contribution to the political stability and good relations among Western Balkan countries that are not always at the same side of the table. This empowers Montenegro in EU accession process. However, Montenegrin attempt to establish and hold strong good relations with PR China is visible through continuous presence of new agreements between two countries.

The Montenegro 2018 Economic Conference - confirmation of good EU perspective and good relations between Montenegro and other Western Balkan countries

The conference organized by the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro, is held on October 25-26, 2018 in Budva. This is one of the most important economic meetings in the region, which brought together more than 700 participants, among which are decision-makers, representatives of the business and academia of the Western Balkans, as well as international institutions. But, is it only about economy and commerce?

The theme of the Conference was "The Balkans and the European Union - a five-year cycle of the Berlin Process". So, it is clear that pure economic cooperation, organizers wanted to contribute to strengthening regional cooperation and further European integration processes. Also, to show the strength and leading position of Montenegro in ability to bring together regional leaders for the same table.

The results of the Berlin Process so far, the vision of the future of the Western Balkan countries and the progress made in the reforms that the Region will integrate into the European Union were subject to six panels attended by presidents and high-level members of the regional countries, the representatives of line ministers, representatives of the European Commission, the chambers of commerce of Europe and the Balkans, international financial organizations and investors, leading negotiators in the integration process, and leaders of companies that achieve outstanding business results.

Beside the organizer, the conference was opened by Mr. Sebastian Kurz, Chancellor of the Republic of Austria - the country that chairs the Council of the European Union. The opening speech also had the President of Montenegro, Mr. Milo Djukanovic. What message this sends?

Montenegro is able to attract most important EU persons to talk about Western Balkan accession to EU, and what is more important, this admits that Montenegro has one of the best perspectives to join EU in 2025 or even before that year. This would not be surprising, if these words are not told by one of the most conservative EU politicians, Sebastian Kurz, who previously was several times pessimistic regarding EU enlargement and Western Balkans accession. Actually, he stated that "the European Union will be complete only when the countries of the Western Balkan become members of the European Union", and shared belief that integration works only with cooperation in politics and economy. He stated (contrary to his previous cautious statements) that the EU has a clear vision of peace and prosperity in Europe and "stability and security in the long run for the region and the EU can only be provided if Western Balkan region is part of the EU". However, it is questionable if he sees Western Balkan countries as part of EU only because of migrant crisis, since he several times in the past pointed out that the migrant crisis has shown that the region is decisive for the entire EU. However, what is clear is that he also sees Montenegrin EU perspective better than ever. This confirms that Montenegrin path to EU until 2025 is real. The speech of Austrian Chancellor was probably

encouraging for Montenegrin leaders, i.e. Prime Minister and President of Montenegro. At the same event, they stated that Montenegro remains fully committed to regional cooperation and economic integration. As a full member of NATO and as a country that opened the 31 chapters in negotiations with the EU, Montenegro is continuing the process of introducing European standards. It seems that in the past thirty years the European perspective of the Western Balkans has never been more certain and the Balkans has never been in a better position. However, this does not mean that we are not exposed to risks. It seems that some of the risks are precisely related to the instabilities that come as a result of different processes on the global scene. First of all, this refers to the rapid growth of protectionism and populist ideas, but also the tension between the great powers. In May next year, elections for the European Parliament will be held. Their results could fundamentally change the EU. If extreme populist parties were to gain more political significance in the European Parliament, this could endanger EU enlargement policies.

However, another important message of the conference is that Montenegro may be the only one in the region to be able to face representatives of states that disagree on the political scene. This is reflected in the fact that at one of the panels in addition to the Montenegrin Prime Minister, the representative of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj and the Deputy Prime Ministers of the Republic of Serbia, Rasim Ljajic and the Republic of Macedonia, Koco Angushev, also took part. Certainly there is a difficult way to overcome regional disputes, but Montenegro seems to have the best relations with its neighbors, as its capacity to promote dialogue on various topics between countries in the region.

Maintaining good relations with PR China

One of the important part of the external relations of Montenegro is certainly its relationship with PR China, which has been intensified in recent years. Excellent relations between Montenegro and PR China are not only present today, but exist before the independence of Montenegro in 2006.

Interstate relations have been strengthened by cooperation in numerous investment projects. First of all, economic cooperation is based on projects related to the construction of highway, revitalization of the railway, development of the Montenegrin energy capacities, i.e. the construction of wind power plants and in the field of maritime transport, i.e. renewal of the naval fleet. In order to further strengthen cooperation, in the previous period, representatives of Montenegrin institutions had different meetings with representatives of Chinese state institutions, as well as the Ambassador of China to Montenegro.

In addition to the cooperation in the field of realization of significant investment projects, there are different fields where cooperation between these two countries can be further established. Montenegro has large untapped potentials in various sectors which could be of interest to Chinese companies and investments. In this case, there is a space for establishing cooperation in the tourism sector. Namely, as PR China has become a major factor for the development of tourism at a global level, such trends may certainly have a significant impact on the further development of tourism in Montenegro.

The great potential for cooperation between PR China and Montenegro has the "Belt and Road" initiative and the "16 + 1" mechanism, in which, among other countries is Montenegro. Through this initiative, economic relations and bilateral co-operation between Montenegro and China will be further enhanced.

In the recent period, within the framework of this initiative, cooperation between these two countries has been established in the field of environmental protection. Namely, the President of Montenegro met with the Minister for the Environment and PR China at the conference on environmental protection, which was organized by the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro in accordance with the Budapest and Sofia Guidelines for Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. To this end, a Coordinating Mechanism for Environment based in Montenegro has been established, which further contributes to the relations between Montenegro and PR China

Collaboration between Montenegro and PR China is also developing in the field of science and education, where there are already signed agreements between the University of Donja Gorica and Chinese universities, as well as student exchange programs between universities has been established.

In the coming period it can be expected the strengthening of good relations. This is also indicated by the cooperation so far, but also the readiness of both parties to continue and intensify cooperation. Namely, at a recent meeting with Ambassador of the PR China, Montenegrin Prime Minister expressed his conviction that Montenegro will continue its broadcasting and substantive cooperation with PR China, but will continue the further development of political and economic relations between the two countries, which is characterized by high political dialogue.

In addition, important meeting with the ambassador of the PR China in Montenegro was the Vice-President of the Parliament of Montenegro, where activities of current investment projects in Montenegro were analyzed, in which Chinese companies take on a key role. First and foremost, it was the construction of a highway and the construction of the wind power plant “Možura”.

Previous weeks confirmed strong Montenegrin devotion to building trust and good external relations with regional countries, European Union, but also with other powers like China. Its position in EU accession process is more clear, but there are still certain risks. On the other side, it seems that many themes – economic, educational, cultural, etc. connect Montenegro with China and Montenegro sees its interest in it.