



Weekly Briefing

**Montenegro external relations briefing:
Strengthening relations between Montenegro and United States
Milika Mirkovic**

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.
Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin
Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.
 +36 1 5858 690
 office@china-cee.eu
 china-cee.eu

Strengthening relations between Montenegro and United States

In the last period, the attention and engagement of the United States of America in the Western Balkans region has increased compared to the previous period. Namely, the US appointed a special envoy from the State Department for the Western Balkans, who visited Montenegro in September, and one month later, the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Mr. Mike Pompeo visited Montenegro and North Macedonia. These significant visits by US officials to Montenegro also show the good relations between the two countries, as well as present the respect to Montenegro as a state in the Western Balkans region. In addition, the US could make a major contribution to the EU integration of all countries in the region, so their presence seems to be of the great importance.

Secretary of State of the United States of America visited Montenegro

In early October, Secretary of State of the United States of America Mr. Mike Pompeo visited Montenegro. In addition to Montenegro, the Secretary of State also visited Northern Macedonia as part of his tour of Europe. Otherwise, two years ago Montenegro was visited by the Vice President of the United States, Mr. Mike Pence when was organized the US-Adriatic Charter Summit of Leaders of the Region, focusing on the security of the region. The visit by the Secretary of State, after two years, is a significant visit for Montenegro in terms of external relations with the US and it indicates the importance of Montenegro as a partner in this part of Europe.

Mr. Pompeo had meetings with President of Montenegro, Mr. Djukanovic and Prime Minister Mr. Markovic. Both sides see the US Secretary of State's visit as a confirmation of the long-standing relations between Montenegro and the US, and that the visit is a "confirmation that the two countries are nurturing friendship and alliance" (Government of Montenegro, 2019). Among other things, this visit is a sign of appreciation of Montenegro and observation as a partner in addressing important issues in the region. For Montenegro, but also the entire region, Prime Minister Mr. Markovic sees the strategic importance of the presence of both the US and the EU in the Western Balkans, and any additional support in the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the region is important.

Namely, Montenegro is pursuing a policy towards integration and connection of WB countries and a policy of promoting EU values in the region. The appointment of a Special Envoy from the State Department for the Western Balkans represents a significant support and impetus to EU enlargement policy. First of all, encouraging a policy of enlargement and opening of accession negotiations with Albania and Northern Macedonia, but also resolving open issues between the Western Balkan countries was also the subject of a State Department special envoy mission that visited the region last month and met with the president and Prime Minister of Montenegro. Strengthening US diplomatic relations with the Balkan countries and appointing a special envoy to deal only with issues in the Balkans is a signal that the US plans to be more present and active in this region than in previous years. In this regard, Montenegro and the US share the same views on the prosperity of the entire region, where the way to overcome the problem in the region is its integration into the EU, which is one of the important reasons for advocating for enlargement policy.

The President of Montenegro also expressed such an attitude at a meeting with Assistant Secretary of State of the United States, Mr. Philip Reeker, in New York, during his participation in the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly. This meeting also emphasized the European perspective of Montenegro and that path is the only good solution not only for the Balkans, but also for Europe. The US's affection for the integration of Montenegro into the EU was also indicated by Mr. Pompeo during his visit to Montenegro.

In addition to Montenegro – US relations, President of Montenegro, Mr. Djukanovic pointed to long-standing cooperation between these two countries, where he emphasized the great support of the US to Montenegro in the earlier period, playing a significant role in maintaining peace and multiethnic harmony in the country. Montenegro has support from US since the nineties’.

One of the important segments of the relationship between Montenegro and the US is the security policy and membership of Montenegro in NATO, where, according to the Montenegrin Prime Minister, the US played a significant role during the process of Montenegro's accession in NATO Alliance. Strengthening US - Montenegro relations could be achieved through regional initiatives such as the A5, and in particular within NATO. As a NATO member, Montenegro has a significant role to play in maintaining stability throughout the region. In this case, Montenegro and the US share common priorities in terms of security and goals arising from such a policy. In this regard, at the end of October, the US and Montenegro signed a

contract to equip the Montenegrin Army, which entails the purchase of 67 armored vehicles worth 36 million EUR. Equipping the army in accordance with standards is also a signal of Montenegro's commitment to meeting NATO's goals. By the way, this acquisition represents the first procurement in last 40 years. During the whole period Montenegro did not invest in equipping the Army with armored vehicles.

Greater US presence in the Western Balkans, and thus in Montenegro, could have positive effects on growth of investments from US, which would consequently have a favorable impact on the economy. According to the latest data of the Central Bank of Montenegro, the share of foreign direct investment from the US in the total inflow is 1.6% (Central Bank, August, 2019). Increasing US investment would have significant effects, not only in financial terms, but also in bringing new business standards, new knowledge and skills, ideas and contributing to increased competitiveness of the economy.

Montenegrin President meets with Western Balkans leaders in Brussels

As previously known, all Western Balkan countries have oriented their policies towards EU integration and the adoption of a European value system. However, in the recent period, enlargement policy has been undefined, and last developments are in focus on delay in starting of negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania by European Council. Opinions on this issue were contrary among EU officials. On the one hand, there is President of France, Mr. Macron, who opposed and refused to start negotiations between the EU and the two Balkan countries. However, on the other side, the European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Mr. Hahn believes that the EU is responsible for delaying the start of negotiations. The European Commission President Mr. Juncker shared a similar opinion, and the US expressed disappointment with such situation.

As the EU's enlargement policy and Western Balkans perspective in the EU integration process has recently become unclear, US support seems to be of the great importance. One in a series of events has been organized in Brussels to encourage discussion on the Western Balkan region' issue and the latest challenges in the EU integration process. President of Montenegro, Mr. Djukanovic attended an informal meeting of Western Balkans leaders organized by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Mrs. Federica Mogherini. The meeting was also attended by the presidents of Serbia and Kosovo, Prime Minister of North Macedonia and members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this regard, Mr. Djukanovic stressed that "common impression is that the latest EU decisions

were disappointing and that in some way they compromised the credibility of EU policy towards WB countries". Montenegrin president also said that the EU policy pursued by the Western Balkans is not in the best European interest from the point of view of this region, since Montenegro and other neighboring countries are not only countries in the Balkans but also countries in Europe, so the need for a common a European perspective. The view of the President of Montenegro is that a united Europe, which would include WB countries, is the best model of positioning Europe on the global stage and that such perspective should be taken into account given the changes in relations between countries at the global level and the "need of some non-European countries to penetrate their interests in Europe". In this case, support in EU integration of Balkan countries is very important.

However, despite the unclear situation regarding enlargement policy, Montenegro does not plan to abandon and change its policy course in relation to the European one that it has pursued so far. In any case, it is important to have clear views and answers on questions regarding Western Balkan countries' integration.