



Weekly Briefing

**Montenegro external relations briefing:
Strengthening regional cooperation in order
to improve the EU integration process**

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Strengthening regional cooperation in order to improve the EU integration process

Summary

During July, the PRESPA Dialogue Forum was organized with the participation of officials from Montenegro. The aim of this Forum is to foster discussion on the integration of Western Balkan countries into the EU. As the EU integration process has slowed down in recent years, organizing such as conferences is of great importance for exchanging views and initiating discussions on a number of regional and global issues. In order to strengthen and advance EU integration process, the new initiative has been launched - B6, consisting of the countries of the Western Balkans. It is expected that this initiative will also contribute to strengthening regional cooperation and accelerate the process of joining the European community. Recognizing the importance of these events for Montenegro's external policy and strategic development, Montenegro actively participated in their implementation.

Introduction

Strengthening cooperation at the level of the entire region is one of the important components of the process of joining the EU community. Intensifying discussion on various issues and looking for solutions to regional challenges is imperative in creating a stronger relation and network of countries in the region. To this end, various initiatives and mechanisms have been initiated during the previous period in order to establish greater unity in the region and improve the EU integration process. In its activities so far, Montenegro has clearly shown its commitment to the EU and through its participation in numerous initiatives has shown its commitment to regional stability.

Montenegrin officials at PRESPA Forum

At the beginning of July, an international conference "2021 PRESPA Forum Dialogue" was organized in Northern Macedonia, entitled "Western Balkans: The Missing Puzzle for Completing Europe". The PRESPA Dialogue Forum is created by the Government of North Macedonia with the aim of building actors from all countries to build long-term relationships

and cooperation, as will strengthen partnerships. This year's conference brought together officials from the Western Balkans to discuss the region's European path and EU integration. Namely, the conference was attended by government officials and diplomats from across the region, as well as representatives of local authorities, academia and the business community, and representatives of civil society organizations. This and similar events provide an excellent opportunity to discuss and exchange views on various issues in the field of economy, politics, international relations and other issues that are important for the development of the entire region.

As one of the countries in the region, Montenegro has actively participated in this dialogue. In fact, participation in this conference is another confirmation of Montenegro's commitment to the EU path and EU integration. Also, participation in this event is a confirmation of Montenegro's commitment to strengthening relations with the countries of the region and generally strengthening good neighbourly relations, which is of great importance for the EU integration process.

Montenegro has showed its pro-European orientation by participating in another conference that has been organised during the July, i.e., "Western Balkans: The key puzzle piece of the European Security" conference which was organized by GLOBSEC in Bratislava. As Montenegro is a NATO member and a country aspiring to the EU, it has an important role to play in maintaining stability in the region. Due to such a role, Montenegro participated in this event, where new security challenges were discussed after a year of pandemic, as well as the geopolitical impact of third countries, primarily Russia, China and Turkey.

With a view to advancing the region's integration into the EU, during the previous years a large number of regional initiatives have been launched with the aim of improving relations within the region and strengthening capacities towards EU integration. Montenegro has committed its foreign policy and strategic direction to EU integration and has shown its readiness and commitment through participation in regional and EU initiatives, by providing support and contributing to their implementation through the implementation of numerous activities and plans in this area.

When it comes to initiatives, a very important issue concerns of their successful implementation and achievement of the desired results. In that case, the number of initiatives,

forums and mechanisms is not important. More significant are the effects that these initiatives have and lead to improvements throughout the region. Therefore, it is very important to direct strengths and capacities towards achieving goals that result in a more advanced region and a closer region to the EU community, because in some situations there seems to be repetition and overlap of activities under different initiatives, which could lead to unnecessary loss of resources and time.

Despite the initiatives and efforts on the part of Montenegro and the countries of the Western Balkans in general, the process of EU enlargement has slowed down in recent years. The stalemate in enlargement policy may be due to disagreements within EU officials over enlargement policy. The adoption of the new enlargement methodology is expected to intensify this process. Certainly, the messages that could be heard from European officials during the past period were not encouraging for the Western Balkan countries, so they seem to have led a decline in enthusiasm for joining the EU. The divergence in attitudes towards EU enlargement and the decline in interest for the Western Balkans region has contributed to a greater presence of third countries throughout the region. However, the ultimate goal of the entire region is its integration into the EU, which is one of the main messages of this year's conference.

In addition to the importance of Montenegro making progress in EU integration, the course of reforms in other countries is also important for Montenegro's accession to the EU. Namely, progress in the EU integration of other countries, whether it is the opening and closing of new negotiation chapters or progress in implementing the reform process and resolving open issues is important for Montenegro too, regardless of whether it is not directly involved in a particular process or activity. As a country that is part of the region, progress in other Western Balkan countries has positive effects on Montenegro's position on the EU path. Therefore, the presence and involvement of Montenegro in various regional issues could only have positive effects.

B6 – New regional initiative has been launched

Working together and solving problems together is one of the key development strategies of the entire Western Balkans region. As mentioned above, during the previous period, the EU integration process was very slow, which was further complicated by changes

in the methodology of accession, where all countries in the region have embarked on the process of adapting to the new conditions of accession. In order to accelerate the process of EU integration, a new initiative was formed at the regional level - B6, whose slogan is "Having good relations with your neighbours is wise, but having them as friends is a real victory!". This informal platform was established in Northern Macedonia just before the PRESPA Dialogue Forum. In this way, through the strengthening of cooperation between the countries of the region, the capacities in the direction of accelerating EU integration will be strengthened. Through the planned meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all six countries, it is expected to intensify cooperation, especially in the fields that are of great importance for the EU integration process. Also, deepening and strengthening mutual communication is in the interest of each country, because the exchange of opinions, views, proposals and comments will be faster and easier, which will further contribute to faster resolution of potential problems and defining future steps.

As for other countries, involvement in this format is important for Montenegro, too. Although Montenegro has completed all negotiation chapters and although it has a significant part of the implemented reforms and achieved results on this EU path, it is important to strengthen regional cooperation and be involved in the issues and relations of other countries. Without strong good-neighbourly cooperation, progress is very difficult.

The organization of such and similar conferences and meetings are important mechanisms for intensifying dialogues and important places to discuss various issues and seek answers to the challenges posed by new global trends. Therefore, participation in various joint initiatives gives a synergistic effect in overcoming challenges. The PRESPA Forum brought together representatives of various institutions from across the region, so that suggestions and views from different sides could be heard. This reflects the importance of these gatherings. Certainly, the conference showed a clear commitment and EU perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans and that Europe is not complete without the countries of the Western Balkans. To this end, a new informal platform B6 has been initiated, which can contribute to the intensification and improvement of the EU integration process through the strengthening of regional cooperation.