




Weekly Briefing

**Montenegro external relations briefing:
Diplomatic Choices of Montenegro under the New Situation**
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

Diplomatic Choices of Montenegro under the New Situation

Summary

The new situation in security policy has brought numerous challenges. Taking these new trends into account, Montenegro has directed its external policy as well. In relation to the war in Ukraine, Montenegro harmonized its foreign policy with EU policy. First of all, it condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine and introduced sanctions against Russia that are in line with EU decisions. Also, due to membership in NATO, Montenegro harmonized its security policy with the Alliance policy. Taking into account the Russian influence in the Western Balkan region, the acceleration of the reform process and EU integration is of key importance, which would reduce Russia's presence and interference in political processes in the region. Integration into the EU and NATO of all the countries of the region would ensure the stability and security of the entire region.

Introduction

The new geopolitical situation somehow threw the countries out of balance, so that after a relatively peaceful period during the previous decade, they actively discussed the course of external and security policy. Montenegro, although a small country and without the power to determine the course of international policy, has also taken a position on the issue of external policy, taking into account the previously determined path of development.

In accordance with the EU external policy

As a candidate country for membership in the EU, which has been implementing the reform process for a decade and is working to fulfil the criteria for joining the EU, but also as a member of NATO, Montenegro has fully harmonized its external policy with EU policy. Montenegro showed its orientation in the implementation of foreign policy in the new geopolitical conditions when it condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

In March Montenegro adopted a package of sanctions against Russia, which was previously adopted by the Council of the European Union. Making such a decision shows

Montenegro's solidarity with Ukraine. The adoption of sanctions was accepted differently among the political parties that were in power in Montenegro during that period, given that some political parties that supported Russia in the attack on Ukraine were in power. The division within the Government made the process of imposing sanctions longer than expected. Sanctions against Russia were introduced after two failed attempts.

Sanctions that have been introduced against Russia are aimed at different areas, such as finance, transport, trade, travel and others. The airspace for Russian planes was closed, the assets of a number of companies and individuals and others were frozen. In this way, Montenegro joined the countries that condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine and that introduced sanctions against Russia. In response to the imposed sanctions, Russia put Montenegro on the list of "enemy countries" and imposed sanctions on Montenegro and other European countries. This further worsened relations with Russia, which had been strained at the diplomatic level during the previous period¹.

This course of Montenegro's foreign policy represents an additional deflection from Russian influence on Montenegro and the general presence of Russia in the Western Balkan region. The presence of Russia in this region has existed for a long period of time, and that is why there are political parties that represent and support the politics of Russia. Relations with Russia were not only strong in the diplomatic sense, but also in the economic sense, especially after the restoration of independence sixteen years ago. A significant number of Russians invested in real estate on the Montenegrin coast, resulting in large numbers of Russian tourists, as well as a significant inflow of investment from Russia in Montenegro. Tourists from Russia are still one of the most important for the tourism industry of Montenegro. Also, during previous period FDI from Russia are significant. Relations with Russia began to deteriorate as Montenegro adjusted its foreign policy and brought it closer to EU policy, which contributed to the reduction of Russian influence. Montenegro introduced sanctions against Russia as early as 2014 (due to the annexation of Crimea), where Montenegro showed its foreign policy orientation, following EU policy. Also, Russia was against Montenegro joining NATO, because it would lose its influence on Montenegro. In order to prevent such a decision, during the parliamentary elections in 2016, Russian citizens were involved in a coup attempt. Therefore, with the membership of Montenegro in the NATO Alliance in 2017, the relationship between the two countries has been further deepened. Change of government in 2020, Russian presence

¹ Mirkovic Milika (2022) Montenegro imposes sanctions on Russia, March External Briefing for Montenegro, China-CEE Institute, 2022

increased again, since the government was made up of political parties and individuals that propagate Russian politics². However, as Montenegro leads the policy of EU integration, it has harmonized its policy with the external policy of the EU. In the last report of the European Commission for Montenegro, external relations and foreign, security and defence policy were rated the best, considering the fact that Montenegro has fully harmonized its foreign policy with the EU's policy in relation to Russia.

Considering that Russia's presence in the Western Balkan region is pronounced, and the fact that there are strong traditional relations between countries, such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the war in Ukraine can further strengthen Russia's influence. Therefore, the conduct of EU integration policy is of great importance. However, even though EU integration is one of the main policies and directions of Montenegro's external policy, during the last period Montenegro has achieved only limited progress on this path. This was also assessed in the latest European Commission Report on the progress of the integration process of Montenegro.

Security policy

As a member of NATO, Montenegro has a security policy that is in line with NATO policy. In the new security conditions and risks brought by the war in Ukraine, membership in NATO represents one of the important decisions made in the previous period. Taking into account the new security risks, the New Strategic Concept was adopted at the last NATO Summit held in Madrid. One of the focuses of the new Strategic Concept is the Western Balkans, i.e. the need to maintain security and stability in this region. Accordingly, in the coming period, NATO Alliance will pay attention on the region, taking into account the risks that exist in the case of security due to the presence of Russia in this region and it was decided to support all countries that intend to join the NATO Alliance³. In addition, Montenegro is involved in various initiatives aimed at promoting regional cooperation in the field of security policy. These mechanisms can contribute to the greater security and safety which further leads to a more stable and prosperous region. In October, the twelfth 2BS Forum 2022 was organized, where issues related to the future and security of the Western Balkans were discussed in the

² Mirkovic Milika (2022) Montenegro 's international relations in the context of the war in Ukraine, February External Briefing for Montenegro, China-CEE Institute, 2022

³ NATO (2022) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, available on:
https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf

context of new trends. This Forum is actually one of the most significant events in Southeast Europe dedicated to security policy.

In the context of new geopolitical events, US senators from the Democratic and Republican parties proposed a draft of the Western Balkans Democracy and Prosperity Act. The goal of this act is to increase and strengthen relations between the US and Western Balkan countries, help in the fight against corruption, improve the rule of law, democratic and economic reforms, contribute to the development of civil societies, independent media, transparent, accountable, citizen-responsive governance, and political stability, work on expanding NATO membership, strengthening security cooperation with Montenegro and other NATO country members, continue to support Montenegro in the EU accession negotiation process, reducing Russia's influence in the region and more⁴.

New geopolitical conditions, the war in Ukraine have also brought new security risks. Montenegro has fully harmonized its external policy with the EU. Montenegro joined the EU countries in imposing sanctions on Russia. Also, as a member of NATO, it runs a security policy that is in line with NATO policy. First of all, Montenegro condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine and imposed sanctions on Russia following EU decisions. For a small country that is part of the Western Balkan region, where Russia's influence and presence existed from before, the implementation of the EU integration policy is of great importance. Strengthening and encouragement of the European and Euro-Atlantic orientation is not only important for Montenegro, but also of the entire Western Balkans region, due to the provision of stability in the entire region, given that the war in Ukraine can also bring security risks for the Western Balkans region.

⁴ Western Balkans Democracy and Prosperity Act, available on:
<https://www.cardin.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Balkans.pdf>