



Weekly Briefing

**Montenegro external relations briefing:
Regional initiatives aimed at improving security policy
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

Regional initiatives aimed at improving security policy

Abstract

In security-challenging times and new trends characterized by risks associated with maintaining stability and security, joint problem solving is of crucial importance. There are several initiatives on the regional level related to the improvement of security policy, and new geopolitical trends impose the need for a new approach and innovative security mechanisms. In order to strengthen the security policy and full compliance with the European Common Foreign and Security Policy, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania founded a new initiative QUAD. In addition, when it comes to support for NATO, in the last period, according to the survey among citizens, the support for the NATO Alliance by Montenegrins has decreased, which is the opposite of the trend recorded at the level of all NATO member countries.

Introduction

In order to strengthen the security sector and conduct security policy at the regional level, various initiatives were launched during the previous period. Common to all platforms is regional cooperation in solving numerous problems and challenges in the sphere of safety and security. Despite the fact that not all countries of the Western Balkans are members of the NATO Alliance, all initiatives related to the field of security do not bring together all the countries of the Western Balkans. New circumstances on the geopolitical scene and international relations require a different approach and constant tracking of changes. Therefore, many initiatives have been launched to respond to the challenges brought by the new weather.

Western Balkan QUAD - A new initiative of the countries of the Western Balkans

During the previous month, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia and Kosovo founded a new regional initiative "Western Balkan QUAD - 100 percent compliance with EU policy". This initiative was initiated by North Macedonia and joined by the other three countries. The goal of this strategic platform is full compliance with the European Common Foreign and Security Policy, taking into account the geopolitical situation, as well as the consequences of

the war in Ukraine on economic trends, security and energy supply. Montenegro, like the other member countries of this platform, fully aligned its security policy with EU policy, since Montenegro followed the EU decisions regarding the introduction of sanctions against Russia in 2022. The full alignment of security policy with EU policy is the best-rated segment of the reform process in the previous year's Progress report prepared by the European Commission. This is one of the common characteristics (policy regarding the sanctions against Russia) of the countries that are members of this platform, thus showing the commitment and direction of the foreign policy that is directed towards the EU and NATO¹. Therefore, this platform actually implies confirmation that these four countries follow EU policy.

Although each Western Balkan country is oriented towards the EU, four countries are included in the initiative, while two Balkan countries are Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are not part of it. However, the initiative is not limited to the mentioned four countries, there is also the possibility of joining Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in this initiative. Given that the focus of the initiative is the alignment of security and foreign policy with EU policy, where sanctions against Russia are in the foreground, a possible reason for disagreement with the initiative (by Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) is the attitude towards these sanctions.

Although there are a certain number of regional initiatives aimed at accelerating the EU integration process, this initiative can additionally contribute to the negotiation process. A joint approach in the implementation of security policy and foreign policy contributes to strengthening joint action, stability in the region and solving challenges in this domain. QUAD is not part of any of the existing initiatives, but a new one aimed at harmonizing policies towards the EU².

Meeting within Initiative A5

Montenegro also participates in other initiatives aimed at maintaining the stability and security of the region. Within the framework of the US - Adriatic Charter (A5), a meeting of foreign ministers of member states and observers was held. The A5 initiative was founded in 2003, and Montenegro joined in 2008. It consists of the countries of the Western Balkans,

¹Analitika (2023) Zemlje regije formirale novi savez: U njemu nema Srbije, available on: <https://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/zemlje-regije-formirale-novi-savez-u-njemu-nema-srbije>

² Radio Free Europe (2023) 'Zapadni Balkan QUAD', inicijativa kojoj nedostaju dve države Zapadnog Balkana, available on: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/sankcije-rusija-balkan-rat/32347295.html>

namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia and Croatia and the USA, while the observer countries are Kosovo, Slovenia and Serbia. The initiative represents an excellent platform for promoting NATO principles and values and could represent a significant factor in accelerating the EU integration process. The goal of its establishment is focused on joint action in the direction of strengthening the defence mechanism and improvement of defence capacities. In terms of new security challenges, this initiative represents one of the most important models of cooperation. Therefore, this platform can contribute to strengthening regional cooperation and promoting Euro-Atlantic integration.

The meeting was devoted to the discussion of current security and political challenges, which imposes the need to adapt this A5 initiative to new conditions and trends. Therefore, it is planned that in the coming period, the joint focus should be on establishing new initiatives that will complement the existing ones and that will contribute to the improvement of regional cooperation. Regarding this and similar initiatives, Montenegro has a clear commitment that these platforms contribute to the stability, security and prosperity of not only Montenegro, but also of all the countries of the region³.

These regional initiatives are of great importance considering the new geopolitical relations and situation. For the Western Balkan region, a common approach to solving problems and challenges is needed, which is made possible through these and individual initiatives in the field of safety and security. In addition, the importance of these initiatives and NATO membership is reflected in the overview and analysis of the situation in the Western Balkan region and the improvement of cooperation and a clearer commitment to the NATO Alliance, taking into account all the risks arising from the war in Ukraine and the influence of Russia on the countries of the Western Balkans.

Less support for NATO in 2022 in Montenegro

Despite security risks and new geopolitical trends, in recent years, a decline in NATO support has been recorded in Montenegro. This indicates the need for a clearer and stronger orientation and commitment of Montenegro for Euro-Atlantic integration. As the EU integration process has stagnated and domestic political issues have taken precedence over

³ Government of Montenegro (2023) Regionalne bezbjednosne inicijative su garant dugoročne stabilnosti naših država, available on: <https://www.gov.me/clanak/regionalne-bezbjednosne-inicijative-su-garant-dugorocne-stabilnosti-nasih-drzava>

Montenegro's strategic orientation in recent years, it is possible that this was reflected in the attitudes of citizens regarding NATO membership. In any case, greater commitment to membership in NATO is needed.

In the period of new security challenges, the role of the NATO Alliance is of crucial importance. According to the NATO' Annual Report for 2022, support for NATO has increased in 2022. Based on the survey among citizens in 30 member countries, 70% of citizens answered "I would vote for my country to remain a member of NATO". This percentage is higher compared to 2021 and 2020 for 8 percentage points. However, in comparison to the other counties, the lowest percentage was recorded in Montenegro (48% of citizens would answer that they would vote for Montenegro to remain a member of NATO). Almost a third of citizens (32%) answered that they would vote for Montenegro to leave NATO, which is 21 percentage points higher in comparison to the average for all NATO countries. At the same time, the largest percentage of those who would like to leave NATO, among all surveyed counties, is in Montenegro⁴. In comparison with the previous two years, there is a slight decrease in NATO support, which is the opposite of the trend in all countries in general. In total, in 2021, 50% of citizens of Montenegro stated that they would vote for the country to remain a member of NATO, which is 2 percentage points more compared to 2022. Also, 24% of citizens stated that they would vote for Montenegro to leave the NATO Alliance⁵. This percentage is even lower in 2020.⁶

On the other hand, in 2022, the belief of citizens of Montenegro that NATO contributes to security increased, i.e. 55% of citizens stated that "membership in NATO makes it less likely that a foreign nation will attack our country". In comparison with the previous two years, the percentage increased by 9 percentage points.

During the previous period, security policy has been at the top of every country's priority. New geopolitical trends characterized by an increase in security risk due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine have imposed the need to create new programs and initiatives and adapt policies to new conditions and realities. All these initiatives should contribute to the joint solution of

⁴ NATO (2022) The Secretary Generals Annual Report 2022, available on: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/3/pdf/sgar22-en.pdf

⁵ NATO (2021) The Secretary Generals Annual Report 2021, available on: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/3/pdf/sgar21-en.pdf

⁶ NATO (2020) The Secretary Generals Annual Report 2020, available on: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/3/pdf/sgar20-en.pdf

problems and challenges, especially in the countries of the Western Balkans, which are highly exposed to the risks of the new reality. Therefore, cooperation in order to ensure the stability and security of countries is of great importance. The establishment of new initiatives, such as QUAD, can contribute to Euro-Atlantic integration and a stronger connection of member countries, among which is Montenegro with NATO and the EU.