



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Montenegro external relations briefing:  
Brdo-Brioni Summit – the way to speed up the EU integration  
process?**

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## **Brdo-Brioni Summit – the way to speed up the EU integration process?**

### **Abstract**

*In September, the Brdo-Brioni Summit was organized in North Macedonia, which brought together officials from the Western Balkan countries and the presidents of Croatia and Slovenia. Taking into account the foreign policies of the countries of the region and the fact that they all aspire to be part of the EU community, this year's Summit discussed the potential and challenges of the integration process faced by Montenegro and other countries in the region. Although this and similar forums contribute to greater discussion and problem solving, the issue of EU integration of Montenegro remains very challenging, taking into account the previous period in which no progress was made and the announced structure of the future Government.*

### **Introduction**

The foreign policy of Montenegro is, at least in a formal sense, oriented towards EU integration. Therefore, it is of great importance to participate in events aimed at strengthening the EU path of Montenegro and contributing to regional cooperation that can influence the acceleration of that process. One of the summits that were initiated with the aim of intensifying the EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries is the Brdo-Brioni Summit, which was initiated by Croatia and Slovenia ten years ago, with the aim of encouraging the Western Balkan countries in the EU integration process, but also to serve as an example of solving open issues between countries.

### **What are the conclusions of Brdo - Brioni Summit 2023?**

At the beginning of September 2023, the Brdo-Brioni Process Summit was held in Skopje, North Macedonia, which brought together the leaders of the countries of the Western Balkan region, as well as the presidents of Croatia and Slovenia. This year's summit was also attended by the president of Montenegro. This and meetings and events similar to these

gatherings are significant from several aspects, because the countries of the region have the opportunity to discuss common issues and challenges, but also offer a platform for deliberations on potential solutions and strategic actions that may be undertaken in the forthcoming period. Also, the events contribute to a greater connection and discussion of open issues between countries, so that any encouragement of constructive dialogue. Furthermore, these dialogic exchanges significantly contribute to the pursuit of viable solutions to the predicaments at hand. It also contributes to promotion of enhanced regional cooperation, which is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of EU integration.

At the Summit, the importance of EU integration of the Western Balkan countries and the need to implement reforms in order to speed up this process were pointed out. In addition to pointing out the need to speed up the EU integration process, the topics discussed at the Summit also refer to climate change and youth migration, i.e., policies and measures aimed at retaining young people in the countries of the region. The conclusions of this year's discussion and dialogue were presented through the Skopje Declaration. What questions and conclusions are found in the Declaration? The Declaration emphasizes the commitment of the countries of the Western Balkans region to the intensification of the integration process, stressing that the goal of joining the EU is 2030 at the latest. prosperity, the functioning of democratic institutions, and public administration". In order to improve the integration process, the Declaration pointed out the importance of regional cooperation, the importance of joint performance in relation to common problems and challenges.

In this regard, the need for greater commitment to conducting reforms in order to improve the situation in the area of "the rule of law, prosperity, the functioning of democratic institutions, and public administration" was emphasized".<sup>1</sup> In order to improve the integration process, the Declaration pointed out the importance of regional cooperation, the importance of joint action in relation to common problems and challenges.

Another issue discussed in the Declaration is climate change. Taking into account that the consequences of climate change are becoming more and more apparent, the need for a common approach, greater cooperation between countries at different levels was emphasized. In this regard, it is of great importance to carry out activities in the direction of achieving green growth,

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<sup>1</sup> President of the North Macedonia (2023) Declaration from the Meeting of the leaders of the Brdo – Brijuni Process participating countries, press release, available on: [https://pretsedatel.mk/en/deklaracija\\_bbp\\_skopje-2/](https://pretsedatel.mk/en/deklaracija_bbp_skopje-2/)

but rather to focus on the production of renewable energy sources, in order to reduce the carbon footprint. Therefore, it is also important to define policies and projects that will be focused on renewable energy sources, so that the domestic policy is in line with the EU policy and the support provided in this segment.

The challenge faced by all countries of the Western Balkans, including Montenegro, is the emigration of young people. The problem that has been expressed for a long period of time can affect the state of the economy, considering that human resources and the population represent a significant factor of economic growth. The problem is further expressed through the emigration of the highly educated population. At the Summit, this issue had a special place, where the Declaration emphasized the importance of the region's cooperation with the EU to keep young people in their home countries, which would potentially go in the direction of encouraging the circulation of brains, improving the education system, business environment etc<sup>2</sup>.

### **In which direction is Montenegro going?**

The issue of EU expansion has recently been significantly updated, taking into account the events on the international scene, first of all taking into account the war in Ukraine. Therefore, the discussion among EU members about the accession of candidate countries to the EU has increased. At the end of August this year, the President of France presented a proposal on multi-speed Europe, in relation to the EU enlargement. What about Macron's proposal of multi-speed Europe? This proposal assumes of the need to apply a different approach taking into account the new circumstances, that is, it consists in reforming the integration process in the direction of speeding up the integration process for countries "who were favourable", while a slower integration process would be foreseen for other countries.<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, at this year's Brdo-Brioni Summit, the positions of two EU countries, Slovenia and Croatia, which oppose this proposal of the French President, were presented. It is also questionable how much support the other member countries would give if the discussion on this issue were on the agenda. However, it should be borne in mind that this initiative does not represent an official proposal that is discussed at the level of EU member states, but only a

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>France Medias Monde (2023) Macron calls for 'multi-speed' Europe to cope with enlarged bloc, available on: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20230828-macron-calls-for-multi-speed-europe-to-cope-with-enlarged-bloc>

proposal or thinking of the President of France. In general, the war in Ukraine influenced the EU to turn more towards Ukraine and Moldova with the aim of their inclusion in the EU together. This influenced the intensification of the debate about the EU enlargement policy among the EU countries.<sup>4</sup>

The reform process should represent the fulfilment of certain requirements and criteria, so that certain countries should not relax their requirements or, on the contrary, impose stricter requirements on other countries. Therefore, the process of integration and the process of implementing reforms should be applied in the same way and with the same intensity to all candidate countries for the EU. Three years ago, the EU adopted an amended methodology for accession to the EU, so the potential reform of this process and the establishment of new rules could slow down the integration process of the candidate countries. Although Montenegro gained the status of a candidate in 2012, and although it implemented a significant part of reforms during the period until 2020, it decided to continue the EU integration process according to the new methodology. However, no progress was made in this direction during the previous three years.

In the coming period, the most significant factor that will influence the further EU path of Montenegro is the structure of the new government. Although it has not yet been formed, according to announcements, it is not expected that it will be composed of political parties that advocate and are oriented towards EU integration. It is expected that the new government will be made up of political parties that have been in power for the last three years, during which no progress was made in the EU integration process. Although declaratively and formally political parties are in favour of EU integration in practice, during the past few years, they have not shown it. It will be especially challenging to conduct the EU integration policy, taking into account that it is expected that there will be political parties that are pro-Russian and pro-Serbian in the future government.

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Taking into account the new geopolitical circumstances, the issue of EU integration has gained more importance. One of the goals of the summit that was organized in Skopje was to

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<sup>4</sup>Radio Slobodna Evropa (2023) Predsjednici Hrvatske i Slovenije protiv „EU u različitim brzinama“, available on: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/severna-makedonija-skoplje-proces-brdo-brioni-zapadni-balkan-eu/32587143.html>

include the integration of the Western Balkan countries into the EU. Therefore, the Declaration was adopted, by which the participating countries accept the implementation of activities in order to fulfil the goal. However, the internal conditions and political instability that characterize Montenegro represent a significant barrier and limitation on that path. The lack of concrete actions during the last three years has influenced the strong slowdown of Montenegro in that process. Although extraordinary parliamentary elections were held a few months ago, the new government has not yet been formed, which wastes time for the implementation of reforms. An additional challenge is the composition of the new Government, which, according to announcements, will include political parties that are not EU-oriented.