

Western Balkans Summit: The EU pushes for economic and military alignment

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At the EU-Western Balkans summit held on June 5 in Tivat, Montenegro, the European Union’s leading powers—above all, Germany—pushed for the fastest possible integration of the Western Balkan states into the EU.

The EU is accelerating the incorporation of the Balkans not for democratic or social reasons. Under the guise of “stability,” “reforms” and “European perspective,” the region’s states are being brought into line with Brussels and integrated into European war policy. Under conditions of the Ukraine war and growing rivalry with Russia, China and increasingly also the US, the EU is seeking to bind the Balkans more closely to its economic, military and geopolitical interests.

Although the summit adopted no binding decisions, its thrust was unmistakable. The German-French initiative by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and French President Emmanuel Macron for a “gradual rapprochement” of candidate countries met with broad approval at the summit.

European Council President António Costa, who chaired the summit, described enlargement as a “geostrategic interest” of Europe. Merz declared that the EU must prove it is “capable of and willing to enlarge.” He lamented that it was a failure that no new member has been admitted since Croatia joined 13 years ago. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen wants to make the process “faster and more credible” and called enlargement a “geopolitical imperative.” Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was also present.

Behind the formula of “gradual integration” lies a model that incorporates the candidate states into central EU structures even before full membership—but without voting rights. Von der Leyen put it bluntly: Sectors of the internal market were being opened to companies from the Western Balkans, and in return these countries must carry out reforms to create “level playing field” conditions for European capital.

This effectively means their geopolitical, economic and military subordination without full political rights.

As early as 2023, the EU had promised up to 6 billion euros for “reforms and investments” under the so-called Growth Plan. However, these funds are tied to closer integration into the EU single market, regional economic cooperation and comprehensive “reforms”—i.e., opening up markets, privatization, austerity and the subordination of the region to

the interests of European capital.

Summit host Montenegro is considered a frontrunner. The country is the most advanced candidate and aims to become an EU member by 2028. It is already a NATO member and has introduced the euro. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said his country, which holds the EU Council presidency in the first half of 2027, would “do everything to promote and accelerate this process.” Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin, whose country holds the EU Council presidency in the second half of 2026, also hoped “to remove all obstacles so that the remaining negotiation chapters can be closed.”

For the other five states—Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia and Kosovo—negotiations are less advanced.

As past EU enlargements have shown, integration on the terms of the European powers means a further deterioration in the situation of the vast majority of the population. These countries are already scarred by poverty, unemployment and emigration. At the same time, the governments of the Western Balkan states are politically extremely fragile, enjoy no popular support for their right-wing policies and are frequently deeply entangled in corruption and crime.

This combination repeatedly leads to fierce social protests. In recent weeks, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Albania against the government. The immediate trigger was the approval of several luxury tourism projects on the island of Sazan in the Karaburun-Sazan Marine National Park and in the Narta Lagoon, including at Pishë Poro beach near Zvërnec, which belongs to the Vjosë-Narta Protected Landscape. Beneficiaries of the project include Donald Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner and a network of companies and corrupt Albanian politicians.

In Serbia, nationwide protests against President Aleksandar Vučić repeatedly take place, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina thousands of people protested for several days in the capital Sarajevo in February. The trigger was a tram accident in which one person was killed. This caused pent-up anger to boil over about dilapidated infrastructure, a lack of safety checks, and the corruption and indifference of the political elite.

The governments, which are under enormous pressure, welcome rapid attachment to the EU in order to preserve their

own privileges and those of the extremely narrow upper classes. Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama called for a faster pace in enlargement. Last year he stated his country was aiming for EU accession by 2030 and described himself as an "EU fanatic."

Serbia's President Vučić, who had stayed away from the last EU-Western Balkans summit, declared that Serbia would implement all recommendations of the Venice Commission according to European standards and emphasized that the summit had injected new energy into the enlargement process. This was received favourably in EU circles after Vučić had repeatedly criticized European policy towards Russia in recent years.

The ruling class in Europe expects integration will bring not only new markets, raw materials and investment opportunities. At the summit, it became clear that this "geopolitical investment" is primarily directed against Russian and Chinese influence in the region.

In its official summary, the European Council stressed that the alignment of the Western Balkan states with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy was an expression of a shared strategic orientation. Central to this are strengthening the region's armed forces through the European Peace Facility, security and defence partnerships, building "cyber resilience" and measures against "foreign information manipulation."

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation, close to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which maintains an overseas office for Serbia and Montenegro in the Serbian capital Belgrade, commented that we were in "a geopolitical competition with other actors such as Russia or China." Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl (CDU) visited all six candidate countries last November. "That Russia and China want to engage here cannot be in our interest," he made clear.

Between 2000 and 2021, China realized around 122 infrastructure and energy projects in the Western Balkans, primarily through lending. In terms of energy supply, countries like Serbia are largely dependent on deliveries from Russia.

Although the war against Russia was not officially on the summit agenda, the issue was omnipresent, also in connection with a possible EU accession of Ukraine.

Parallel to the Western Balkans summit, the EU is pushing ahead with Ukraine's integration. Two days before the summit, on June 3, the new Hungarian government under Prime Minister Péter Magyar withdrew its veto against Ukraine's EU accession. A week after the summit, on June 12, Council President Costa and Commission President von der Leyen jointly declared that all member states had agreed to open the first negotiating cluster with Ukraine and Moldova. This is a further escalation against the nuclear power Russia.

The EU has long regarded the Balkans as part of its geopolitical sphere of influence. The summit was fully in line with the disastrous record of German and EU policy in the region.

The destruction of Yugoslavia was driven decisively by Berlin, which sought to revive its historical sphere of influence in the Balkans after German reunification in 1990. In 1991, the Kohl government pushed for international legal recognition of Slovenia's and Croatia's secession, while knowingly accepting the prospect of ethnic civil war.

The 1999 NATO war, in which Germany participated for the first time since World War II with combat missions in the Balkans, completed the destruction of Yugoslavia and subjected the region to the dictates of the IMF and World Bank. Bosnia became a de facto IMF protectorate. In 2006 and 2008, the EU and the US further pushed the secession of Montenegro and Kosovo.

How much the great powers treat the Western Balkans as a colonial protectorate is shown by the very office of the "High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina"—an unelected body with powers to enact laws and dismiss elected officials. For years, the German Christian Social Union (CSU) politician Christian Schmidt ruled there effectively as colonial governor. In May 2026, Schmidt resigned because of a sharp conflict with the US.

The Trump administration had openly pressured Schmidt, including threatening to put him on the US sanctions list, while at the same time dropping the punitive measures imposed against the Serbian nationalist and Trump friend Milorad Dodik, whom it patronizes. When the US then sought to push through its own candidate for Schmidt's succession, Berlin, Paris and London were opposed, thereby triggering a conflict with Washington.

The EU and Germany no longer view the Balkan states merely as an energy and raw materials corridor, a reservoir of cheap labour and an instrument to repel migrants but increasingly also as a strategic outpost against Russia and other rival powers.



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