
CROATIA-MONTENEGRO DISPUTE EXPOSES WIDER EU ENLARGEMENT PROBLEM

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Croatia is blocking Montenegro from closing an EU accession chapter that the bloc's other 26 member states are prepared to close, the latest in a series of long-running bilateral disputes that have turned into a wider test of how far existing EU members can use the enlargement process to exert pressure on aspiring members.

The dispute is not an isolated feature of Montenegro's negotiations. EU member states have repeatedly used their ability to veto decisions in the accession process to press candidate countries over bilateral disputes, from Bulgarian objections relating to North Macedonia's identity and language to [South] Cyprus's blocking of Turkey and Slovenia's use of the process against Croatia.

In Montenegro's case, Croatia has withheld support for closing the chapter covering EU transport rules and has also blocked progress on foreign policy and judiciary-related areas. At an intergovernmental conference in July, Zagreb prevented Montenegro from closing Chapter 31, covering foreign, security and defence policy.

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