

# REGIONAL INITIATIVES IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE : AN ASSESSMENT

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## Emergence and Classification of Recent Regional Initiatives in SEE

Mushrooming of regional initiatives in South Eastern Europe region is one of main trends in recent development of cooperation among the Balkan countries. This paper tries to overview and analyze the following initiatives:

- SEECP (South East Europe Cooperation Process – “Balkan cooperation”),
- SECI (South east Europe Cooperative Initiative), Royaumont process (RP),
- BSEC (Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation),
- CEI (Central European Initiative),
- CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Area), Stability Pact in SEE (SP) and Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII).

The causes actually emphasizing the need for enhanced cooperation among Southeast Europe's States are as follows:

- A necessity to get closer to the European Union and other European integrations; In the same time, cooperation within Southeast Europe should also contribute to overall European “architecture”;
- Interdependence among neighbors, particularly in view of relatively limited national markets, rather low levels of economic development, a necessity to develop infrastructure and to regulate a growing number of economic and social issues at regional/international level;
- A need for a better exploitation of one or more common resources, and for market liberalization;
- External pressure by the European Union and other powers on Balkan States to set up a better and more efficient bilateral and multilateral cooperation;
- Models of other subregions in Europe or beyond to be followed (such as Benelux States, Scandinavia, Mediterranean or Baltic States);
- Along with centrifugal trends, the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia resulted in a considerable void, actually calling for new forms of cooperation.

The first attempts of developing multilateral cooperation in the Balkans date back to the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the Balkan *Entente*, the Balkan Pact, proposals on a Balkan Federation, etc.). More recently, in 1970s, there were attempts to establish a multilateral technical and economic cooperation in the Balkans at an expert level. The process, culminating in the Balkan cooperation at the level of foreign ministers (1988-90), has been ended by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia<sup>1</sup>.

New initiatives, emerging only by the end of 1980s and in the course of 1990s, have been linked to two processes:

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<sup>1</sup> Balkan cooperation in this period, see: Medjunarodna politika: *Initiatives balcaniques, Cahiers*, Belgrade, 1988. p. 52; M.Stojkovic, A.Damian: *Savremeni procesi i odnosi na Balkanu (Contemporary Process and Relations in the Balkans)*, IMPP, FPN, Belgrade, 1997, pp. 475-486; Th. Veremis: "The Balkans in Search of Multilateralism" in *The EC and the Balkans, Proceedings of the Conference, Corfou, 1993*; EKEM, Athens, pp. 241-250.

- The first wave of Southeast Europe cooperation initiatives appeared in 1988/92, directly resulting from the dissolution of the Eastern Block and its Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. There was urgent need to replace these organizations by new modes of interstate cooperation, in order to help integration into the European Community. So, the Central European Initiative (November, 1989), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (June, 1992) and Central European Free Trade Area (December, 1992) were launched.
- The second wave of Southeast Europe's cooperation initiatives is linked to the former Yugoslavia's disintegration and the end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (later on, in Kosovo as well), and the need to redefine the pattern of mutual relations in the region, as well as in a wider Balkan area. (Conference of Southeast European Countries, 1996; Royaumont Process, 1996; SECI 1997; Stability Pact, 1999).

Development of a multilateral cooperation – as a basis of economic progress, political and economic stabilization and strengthening of neighborly relations – stands for a *general objective* of all regional initiatives.

From the viewpoint of *covered areas*, the initiatives can be *classified in two main groups*. The first includes the initiatives enveloping large fields for cooperation and envisaging numerous bodies and forms (i.e. the Central European Initiative, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Cooperatin Process in SEE). Herein, the CEI and SEECF envisage cooperation in political, economic and technology areas, while the BSEC has been restricted so far to all non-political sectors. Other initiatives for regional integration are more limited in terms of cooperation areas: the CEFTA covers trade, only; the SECI includes concrete, but limited projects in domains of economic cooperation and ecology; the Royaumont Process dealt with the “civil society” cooperation.

Fields of concrete economic cooperation activities are most diverse and include all issues that might be of interest to countries and significant for the region. Thus, active workgroups within the Central European Initiative and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation cover: telecommunications, energy, transport, infrastructure, agriculture, civil defense, migration, small enterprises, statistics, training and education, science and technology, tourism, finance, environmental protection, eradication of transborder and organized crime, etc<sup>2</sup>.

On the other side, the process of subregional cooperation implies a *number of obstacles*, such as:

- lack of tradition in multilateral cooperation;
- underdeveloped economies and limited cooperation resources (in terms of finance and human resources);
- the region's peripheral position with regard to Europe's leading integration centers, i.e. a dominating or exclusive political and economic orientation of most countries in the region towards cooperation and integration with developed Western countries and Central European ones (EU, EFTA, CEFTA, etc.);
- longstanding and unresolved regional disputes and conflicts, including the issues of ethnic minorities;
- lack of region's political and economic coherence;
- differing national, political or economic interests and trends, along with nationalistic, populist governments, not so interested in advancing relations with neighbors;
- insufficient international encouragement to regional cooperation, especially in terms of effective international funds or political impulses.

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<sup>2</sup> See also M. Uvalic: “Regional Cooperation in SEE”, in Th.Veremis, D. Daianu: *Balkan Reconstruction*, Franc Cass, London, 2001, 55-75.

## Aims and Achievements of Individual RIs

The main objectives of the regional initiatives in the SEE region could be summarized as being the following:

- They support *economic development and political reforms*;
- They provide a platform for *regional cooperation and stabilization* (both bilateral and multilateral);
- They help the process of *European integration* of the countries in the region.

How far did each of those regional initiatives fulfill those objectives in recent years? This section tries to assess activities of each Regional initiative, against above-mentioned three objectives.

The Sofia Declaration of June 1996 has renewed in a way the former initiative on Balkan cooperation, dating back to late 1980s – but under a new name and including different participants (the *Conference on Good Neighborliness, Stability, Security and Cooperation in Southeast Europe – CSEE, later called Cooperation Process in SEE - SEECP*). Unlike most cooperation initiatives in the Balkans, this one stands for an “autochthonous attempt” by very SEE States. Though several conferences at ministerial level and four summits of heads of State or government have already been convened over past years, the Conference has seemingly not produced any longstanding or actual result in political or economic domain. The process of its institutionalization is still at a starting point.<sup>3</sup>

*SEECP has been, for several years, a typical “declarations oriented” initiative, without greater achievement – except high-level political meetings and political declarations. Its greater achievement, until now, was the signing of the “Charter on good neighborly relations, stability, security and cooperation in the SEE” and organization of several summits of SEE countries. It has very few concrete achievements, due to the lack of any “implementation mechanism”. However, there is recent tendency from the Stability Pact to support the SEEPC as an example of “project ownership” by the SEE countries.*

*It has some merits in improvement of regional cooperation (objective 2), with no achievements with regard to objectives (1) and (3).*

The establishment of the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation*, which has primarily been encouraged by Turkey, along with Russia, resolute to open up vistas for a new “non-hegemonic cooperation.” Regardless of the existing incoherence among the Region’s countries, it has managed to develop a rather large and diversified institutional cooperation framework (ranging from summits, numerous “workgroups” and a permanent secretariat, to meetings by businessmen, parliamentarians, etc.). The BSEC has avoided tackling purely political issues. A Charter, signed in 1998 turned it into an international organization.

*BSEC has shown more vitality and imagination than expected at the beginning, with a number of institutional and project ramifications. Still weak on implementation level, it can claim some unique achievements among the RIs, such as a launching of Black Sea Trade and Cooperation Bank (Saloniki). Moreover, BSEC is recently trying to achieve more project-oriented profile.<sup>4</sup>*

*Its impact is mainly on the objective (2) with slight results with regard to the objective (1) and (3).*

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<sup>3</sup> In principle, the fields of activities of the SEECP are very large and cover: political cooperation, confidence building measures, trade and investment, cross-border cooperation, transport, telecommunications, energy, infrastructure, environment, social and cultural cooperation, justice and crime prevention (see “*Saloniki declaration*” from 9,6,1997).

<sup>4</sup> See Y. Vasilianakos and S. Karaganov, “The Creation and Evolution of the BSEC: An Assessment”, *The Southeast European Yearbook 1997-1998*, ELIAMEP, Athens, 1998, p. 244. Official documents are published in PERMIS: BSEC, *Handbook of Documents*, Vol. I-III, Istanbul, (1995,1996, 1998).

The *Central European Initiative* has been set up at Italy's initiative, as an attempt to create a new form of cooperation between some European Economic Community members and some East European States. Starting with a membership of four (the so-called "Quadrilateral"), today's CEI has grown into a 17-Member-States organization. Having assembled countries from the European Union, the Central Europe, the Balkans and the Commonwealth of Independent States, it probably stands for a most comprehensive instance of a multilateral cooperation in this part of Europe. The Initiative has launched a number of diverse projects. Its role could be described as a kind of exercise in regional cooperation, a preparation for integration into the European Union. Speaking about its comparative advantages, one should indicate the active participation by two European Union's developed Members-States (Italy and Austria), as well as an interaction between its general ideas and proposals, and the operational support provided by its Secretariat incorporated within the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, London. On the other hand, the Initiative's political effects have been rather limited, in spite of ambitions (annual summits of prime ministers, political declarations, "political dialogue," missions abroad, actions by "CEI Troika," etc.)<sup>5</sup>.

*CEI competes for the role of the "most complete" initiative (by a number of participants, number of institutions, number of fields and projects...). However, its orientation is somewhat diluted by the size of its ambitions. A number of its projects are simple, one-time events with no deeper impact on the regional situation.*

*Its achievements concern more the objective (2) and have some impact on the objective (3), with slight results on the objective (1).*

The *CEFTA* started as an "economic component" of the so-called Visegrad Group (set up in 1991). Its establishment has been suggested by the European Union, so as to avoid the process of the Union's free trade with Central European countries to negatively effect, i.e. to divert, the trade between neighbors in the region. As a basically multilateral agreement on free trade, implying bilateral trade arrangement between its Member-States the CEFTA lacks a developed organizational structure. However, it is still attractive to other States in Central and East Europe. Initially restricted to Central Europe, the CEFTA has been extended over past years to Slovenia, Rumania and Bulgaria, thus *de facto* becoming a form of subregional integration in Southeast Europe.<sup>6</sup>

*CEFTA is still a positive example of a concrete, long-term project with clear economic impact, despite its well-known and criticized shortcomings (problems of trade in agricultural products, too large application of safeguard clauses, small "trade wars" between its members). It has real impact on the objectives (1) and (2) with certain achievements on the objective (3).*

The *SECI* is an American initiative, standing for a continuation of the process launched by the Dayton accords. Its role is similar to that of the Royaumont Process (new forms and methods of cooperation in SEE), but fields of cooperation differ (economic issues and ecology). Being utterly pragmatic and narrow specified<sup>7</sup>, the SECI has so far attracted more attention and interest in the region than the Royaumont Initiative has. The SECI's major shortcoming is a lack of a special budget to finance its projects. Actually it stands for a "self-supporting program," though the United States' interest in the project facilitates loans from the international financial organizations.

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<sup>5</sup> CEI Documents - Executive Secretariat: *CEI - Political and Economic Documents*, Vol. 1, Vol. 2. Web site: <http://www.ceinet.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Ph. Kornfeld: "CEFTA Agreement, Introductory Note", *International Legal Materials*, 3 (1995), 3-5.

<sup>7</sup> SECI includes eight "project groups" dealing with: custom facilities, improvement of energy supply efficiency, development of transport infrastructures, pipelines linking, electricity supply systems linking, waters purification, micro credits to small enterprises and financial market cooperation in the region. V. K. Vassilis, "SECI", paper, *International Conference on SECI*, Institute for Economic Sciences, Belgrade, December 12, 1998.; SECI, Activity Report, February 2001, <http://www.unece.org/seci/>.

*SECI has lost some its momentum since its launching in 1996. However, it has achieved some concrete results (three “Memorandums of understanding” signed and financed by funds from the WB, USA and other sources), but its overall impact on the regional situation is poor. Discussion about its integration to the SP is on the way, which will depend on the position of new USA administration. However, there is high probability that the SECI will continue on its own, as there are more and more critics directed against Stability Pact.*

*It contributed somewhat to the objectives (1) and (2) with no progress concerning the objective (3).*

The onset of the *Royaumont Process* was closely linked with the Dayton/Paris peace accords on Bosnia-Herzegovina, when France, i.e. the European Union, initiated the adoption of the Royaumont Declaration on Stability and Neighborly Relations in Southeast Europe. Unlike most other initiatives for regional cooperation in Southeast Europe, the Royaumont Process has kept a low political profile (meetings of high officials figure as a major body). It has been mostly focused on the OSCE’s so-called third basket (cooperation in cultural areas, civil society, human rights and the like), but has not yet fully taken shape. The number and scope of its projects, which were carried out, was rather modest.

*RP may be a good case of best intentions combined with worst implementation. Altogether, it had poor results. It is already integrated to the SP.*

*Its impact to the objectives (1), (2) or (3) is close to null.*

Finally, the *Stability Pact in SEE* emerged as an outcome of Kosovo conflict, i.e. as the international community’s political reaction to a new wave of instability in the Balkans. The Pact was launched by the FR of Germany and the European Union, at the Cologne ministerial meeting on June 10, 1999. Actually, it is the latest attempt to be politically more efficient (level of foreign ministers or heads of State or government) through outside factors (the European Union, the USA and the OSCE Member-States) and contribute in the long run to lessening of tensions and regulating of relations in the Southeast Europe. The Pact’s functioning is carried out in the form of three “round tables” dedicated to democratization, human rights, etc. to economic cooperation, reconstruction and development, and to security issues. Inter alia, the Pact is supposed to facilitate mutual cooperation and coordination of various initiatives for regional integration in Southeast Europe.

*Stability Pact is by far the most ambitious endeavor in the family of Regional initiatives in the SEE until now. It pays attention to all aspects of regional cooperation and stabilization, especially with regard to development, reform and security in the region. It includes different political levels of cooperation and takes into consideration the importance and the role of IFIs (its active members are the World Bank, EIB and EBRD). However, it leaves to desire in the field of institutional organization. There are also large shortcomings in the field of implementation process (slow financial mobilization and implementation). Although the system of “donors conferences” is part of the overall process, the control of the financial part of the organization is still under direct control of IFIs (World Bank etc and the European Commission. Moreover, questions arise with regard to overlapping and of compilation from other RIs (i.e. driving sources and ideas from other initiatives, different projects started in other frameworks...). After the first year of a “honeymoon”, SP (including its Coordinator) is under increased criticism, both from European and American side, both from donors and from beneficiaries of the initiative<sup>8</sup>.*

*Until now, SP has marked some points on the objectives (1) and (2) with limited realization with regard to the objective (3).*

AII is too recent to have any impact on the ground until now. Its merit, compared to CEI, is to include Greece, among the participants.

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<sup>8</sup> V. Gligorov: “Notes on the Stability Pact”, in Th.Veremis, D. Daianu: *Balkan Reconstruction*, Franc Cass, London, 2001, 12-19.

*It is likely to be oriented on the objective (2), with some slight impact on the objective (1) and very limited realizations on the objective (3).*

*PSA of the EU (Process of Stabilization and Association) is the most serious long-term project, initiated by the EU, leading in due time to complete integration of the SEE countries to the European structures. It enhanced previous “regional approach” of the EU towards some of SEE countries, now called “Western Balkans”. Its main elements are: political conditionality, unilateral trade preferences, EU financial assistance (program CARDS), cooperation in the fields of justice and home affairs and other important sectors, negotiations and conclusion of the Stabilization and Association Agreements.*

*Thus, its strong points are on the objectives (3) and (1) with limited but certain impact on the objective (2).*

*Table 1. Regional initiatives – fields of theirs activities*

SECTOR	Stability Pact	SECI	BSEC	CEI	SEE/CP	CEFTA	AI
Human rights	*			*	*		
Minorities							
Good govern	*						
Local govern							
Media	*						
Parliament. Coop.	*		*	*	*		
Migrations	*						
Refugees							
Trade	*	*	*		*	*	
Infrastructures develop.	*	*	*	*	*		
SMEs	*	*	*	*	*		*
Priv. dev/Busn							
Foreign invest.	*	*	*				
Telecom.		*	*	*			
Environment	*	*	*	*	*		*
Education/Cult.	*		*	*			*
Human res. dev/Youth							
Science/Techno.			*	*			*
Cooperation							
Energy	*	*	*		*		
Agriculture			*	*		*	
Bank/Finance	*	*	*				
Transport		*		*	*		
Tourism			*	*			
Social dev.	*						
Military reform/coop	*						
Justice/Home Affairs/	*		*	*	*		
Combating org. crime							
Anti-corruption	*	*	*	*			
Civil protection	*		*				
TOTAL	18	10	16	13	9	2	4

*Table 2. Regional initiatives – qualitative assessments*

- Essay in methodology -

N.B. assessments are based on five grades: very positive (++), positive (+), neutral (0), negative (-), very bad (--)

Assessment	STABILITY PACT	SECI	BSEC	CEI	SEE/CP	CEFTA	AI
Institutional organization	0	0	+	+	0	+	+
Implementation and monitoring mechanisms	+	+	0	+	-	+	0
Number of sectors – their scope/coverage	++	--	+	+	0	-	0
Quality of sectors included (with regard to the regional needs)	+	++	0	0	0	++	0
Financial support/contacts with IFIs	+	0	+	+	--	-	?
Project orientation of the RI	+	++	0	+	--	0	+
Policy impact	+	0	+	+	++	+	+
Economic impact	+	0	-	-	--	++	0
Regional impact	+	+	++	+	+	++	+
Impact on the European integration	+	0	0	+	+	++	+
TOTAL (+ is 1 point; 0 is ½)	10.5	8.5	8	8.5	5.5	11.5	7

## Conclusion

At this stage, some conclusions can be drawn:

One could stress an undoubtedly positive role played by the very presence and overall performance of various initiatives and multilateral frameworks in Southeast Europe. They encourage cooperation between administrations, business and other circles in the region, reduce different barriers, facilitate communication in the region and set up contact “networks.” Their very presence and performance have some influence on public opinion and helps create consciousness of shared goals in the region and overcoming narrow-minded nationalism and sense of a national “self-sufficiency.” They facilitate transborder projects and attract international finance.

Regardless of regional initiatives’ positive role on a “micro-level”, one should state that these initiatives and forms of multilateral cooperation have not thus far crucially assisted Balkan States to get integrated into the European Union, nor made a more fundamental change in the region’s political, economic and social settings. In other words, they have not managed to stop the process of “Balkanization” that was additionally encouraged by the Kosovo crisis. Subregional initiatives have produced just “limited concrete results.”<sup>9</sup> This can be explained by various factors, ranging from insufficient political support to lacking finances and other problems (participating-States’ inadequate experience, scant political and economic preconditions for action, absence of clear-cut objectives and action plans, etc.). The size and structure of the Balkan’s trade and economic flows, just proves the thesis on Balkan States’ prevailing course towards the European Union and developed Western countries. The cooperation between neighboring States is rather limited, which is typical of economically peripheral regions. Therefore, one cannot still refer to a substantial change in economic and social subregional ties, produced by regional initiatives when compared with the preceding period.

<sup>9</sup> Such ECE assessment refers to other subregions as well; see UN/ECE: *Cooperation and Coordination of Activities with Other Organizations and Institutions and Subregional Groupings Active in the ECE Region*, 51<sup>st</sup> session, E/ECE/1334, Feb. 2, 1996, p.

Southeast Europe regional initiatives have been designed from the very start as forms complementary to the integration process articulated around and within the European Union. They figure as a supplement to the European architecture, and not as a substitute to SEE countries' integration into the European Union and other pan-European organizations.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the SEE region's possibly delayed integration, lagging behind the European Union's processes, has a feedback effect on the regional cooperation initiative's role and results, and the latter's influence on the situation in the region.

Regional initiatives mainly represent today one of the various methods by which international community tries to influence the situation in the South Eastern Europe. Input from inside the region is real, but still not sufficient.

Despite lack of success during the Nineties, years 1999 and 2000 have witnessed new efforts, including launching of several new initiatives, such as the Stability Pact in SEE, Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII) and EU Process of Stabilization and Association of Western Balkan countries (PAS).

Number, membership and the way of some Southeast Europe regional cooperation initiatives have emerged, put forth the issue of their mutual complementariness and competitiveness. Each regional cooperation arrangement has had its own autonomous development and agenda, thus often resulting in activities' overlapping. There have been attempts to overcome such phenomena within regional arrangements themselves. Basically, the problem is not to be traced in the number of initiatives, but in how to make them coordinate and divide labor.<sup>11</sup> A specific network of contacts and mutual cooperation between these integration arrangements has been somewhat developed, gradually and spontaneously (observers at meetings by other initiatives, exchange of information, expert contacts, shared high level meetings in particular domains, such as transport /CEI, BSEC/, fight against smuggling /CEI, BSEC/ and the like). Eventually, the issue of "merging" several regional initiatives, including considerable overlapping membership should be tackled.

The common trends of recent initiatives are the following:

- They are top-down initiatives, as their predecessors;
- They have stronger political backing than before;
- They are more project oriented than some precedent initiatives;
- They try to combine political/economic aims with more direct financial input of IFIs/donors;
- They cover more sectors (over-encompassing) and try to fill some gaps and missing points, such as security, home and justice affairs, support to private sector development; SMEs programs etc.

*As a final conclusion, despite certain progress made by Stability Pact and EU Process on Stabilization and Association and taking all the aspects of the situation in the region, we can conclude that Regional Initiatives have not achieved, until now, the necessary breakthrough that needed for rapid economic development, modernization and stabilization of the region.*

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<sup>10</sup> "L' UE conçoit la coopération régionale dans le sud-est de l'Europe comme un complément essentiel aux politiques spécifiques adoptées par les pays de la région dans le cadre de leurs relations avec l'Union, comme un élément de leur vocation européenne, en non comme un obstacle à celle-ci", Commission des CE: *Rapport au Conseil sur la coopération régionale en Europe*, Bruxelles, 01.12.1997, COM (97) 659 final, p. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> This is supported by the fact that many pan-European organizations have fairly well coordinated their jurisdictions. For instance, the UN/ECE, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the OECD, etc.



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