

TRANSFORMACIJA REGIONALNEGA SODELOVANJA NA PODROČJU OBRAMBNIH REFORM – ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA CLEARINGHOUSE ZA JUGOVZHODNO EVROPO

TRANSFORMATION OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN DEFENCE REFORMS – A CASE STUDY OF SOUTHEAST EUROPE CLEARINGHOUSE

Professional article

Povzetek Regionalno obrambno sodelovanje na območju Jugovzhodne Evrope je razvejano in raznovrstno. Tudi Republika Slovenija ima bogato tradicijo sodelovanja v regionalnih pobudah. Z vidika praktičnih oblik sodelovanja na Zahodnem Balkanu ima posebno vlogo pobuda Clearinghouse za Jugovzhodno Evropo (JVE), v kateri ima strateško vodilno vlogo, skupaj z ZDA, prav Slovenija. Dejstvo, da je bistveni člen regionalne povezave, pa predstavlja vrsto izzivov in priložnosti. Pobuda je presegla prvotno zastavljene cilje, saj je odprla nove možnosti regionalnega sodelovanja, nova konkretna in dolgoročna orodja za krepitev regionalne stabilnosti in integriranega sodelovanja, močno pa je okrepila tudi prepoznavnost, ugled in zaznavanje profesionalnosti slovenskih predstavnikov in države kot celote.

Pobuda se je zaradi neformalne narave in izjemne prilagodljivosti pokazala kot pospeševalnik različnih oblik in vsebin regionalnega sodelovanja sploh. Slovenija, razen z vidika svoje vodilne vloge, ni znala dovolj izkoristiti možnosti sodelovanja v pobudi, delno tudi zaradi slabe odzivnosti in nezadostne ravni ambicij obrambnega resorja. Predvideni sprejem nacionalnih strateških dokumentov za delovanje na Zahodnem Balkanu bo najbrž ena zadnjih priložnosti za bolj usmerjen, prepoznaven, prožen, integriran in učinkovit pristop države k obrambnemu sodelovanju v regiji.

Ključne besede *Zahodni Balkan, regionalno sodelovanje, obrambne reforme, Clearinghouse za Jugovzhodno Evropo, regionalni projekti, regionalni centri, izmenjava primerljivih izkušenj, pragmatični pristop.*

Abstract Regional defence cooperation in Southeast Europe is diverse. Slovenia has a rich tradition of cooperation in regional initiatives. From perspective of practical cooperation in the Western Balkans the Southeast Europe Clearinghouse initiative, where United States and Slovenia play a strategic leadership role, has a special place. This fact presents many challenges and opportunities.

The initiative has outgrown initial expectations and goals, since it opened up new perspectives for regional cooperation, while introducing new specific and long-term tools for strengthening regional cooperation. It also strengthened the visibility, recognition and the perception of professionalism of Slovenian representatives and the country as a whole. The informal character and extreme adaptability helped make the initiative a facilitator of various forms and topics of regional cooperation. Slovenia, beside having a clear lead role, failed to fully use the opportunities within the initiative, partly because of slow recognition and low level of ambition within the defence system. The anticipated adoption of national strategic documents on priority cooperation in the Western Balkans may present one of the last opportunities for a more focused, recognizable, flexible, integrated and effective approach towards cooperation in the field of defence reforms in the region.

Key words *Western Balkans, regional cooperation, defence reforms, Southeast Europe Clearinghouse, regional projects, regional centres, exchange of comparable experiences, pragmatic approach.*

Introduction Contemporary international security environment is characterized by the presence of transnational sources of threats that increase inter-dependence of the international community entities¹. Countries develop similar threat perceptions which may also lead to connecting national interests and common efforts towards common goals (Murray and Viotti, 1994, p. 10, Plano and Olton, 1988, p. 10–11). With the end of the Cold War and the changed nature of conflicts, regional security cooperation has been gaining in importance² (Anastasakis and Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2002, p. 1) and has become a permanent element of contemporary international relations (Svetlozar, 2009, p. 85).

In accordance with the United Nations Charter, regional cooperation is a major tool for addressing political and economic issues, before they develop into challenges requiring global response. Moreover, cooperation among countries belongs to one of the ten principles of the Decalogue of the Helsinki Final Act of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) which govern relations among countries. The countries have undertaken the commitment to promote mutual understanding, good neighbouring relations and international peace, security and justice, and to improve the living conditions for the population. To this end, regions³ have

¹ See also the Resolution on the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia adopted on 26 March 2010, RS Official Gazette, nr. 27/2010 dated 2. 4. 2010.

² More on the regional security theory at: Buzan, Barry, 1991. *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post Cold War Era*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf. Lake, David in Morgan, Patrick, 1997. *The New Regionalism in Security affairs*. In: Lake, David in Morgan, Patrick, ed. *Regional Orders*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania.

³ There are various definitions of the term region acc. to Morgan (1997, p. 25–26). However, there are individual key elements indicating its existence, i.e. specific awareness level of its members and the environment about the existence of the region, geographical vicinity and interaction, inter-dependence of its members, a certain level of autonomy in relation to the global system and a high level of political, economic and cultural similarity. Regional cooperation is, after all, the reflection of external, international factors and internal dynamics (Anastasakis and Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2002, p. 2).

developed appropriate institutional structures and cooperation regimes, in particular intra-regional initiatives, which advance greater coherence of the region and establish common values and the feeling of loyalty. The more successful they are in this process, the greater the chance that cooperation will be successful (Šabič and Bojinović, 2007, p. 317–318, and Svetlozar, 2009, p. 88).

Initially, it is necessary to stress the limited ambitions of this article, the purpose of which is not to provide a comprehensive overview of various initiatives in the region, although this issue would deserve a special debate, but rather to deal with a special case of the Republic of Slovenia, which through its Ministry of Defence (MO) identified and found its regional opportunity, and in a successful, innovative and practical example partly justified the occasionally empty slogan of Slovenia being a regional expert or leader. The focus of the author is on regional cooperation in the area of defence.⁴

The article derives from the author's experiences as an active participant in all development stages of the regional Southeast Europe Clearinghouse Initiative (SEEC), ranging from the design of its conceptual framework in 2004 up to the present time. Moreover, during the past few years the author has acted as a permanent co-chair of SEEC. This role provided an excellent opportunity for applying the method of observation through participation and regular discussions with participants. The article provides an analysis of the basic documents adopted within SEEC and its mechanisms (e.g. databases). It also includes an analysis of secondary sources, which allows a better understanding of the development of regional cooperation in Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans.

Based on the classical theoretical assumptions about the role of regional cooperation in international relations (developed by the authors such as Ernst Haas, Robert Keohane and Philippe Schmitter) or recent research on regionalism (Martin Dangerfield and Charles King), regional forms of cooperation can be analysed in terms of their type (given the initiative for their launching – externally or by the countries from the region⁵), membership, institutions and priority policies (Svetlozar, 2009, p. 90–91). In addition, the analysis covers the development aspect of the regional initiative in question, which enables a more comprehensive understanding of the otherwise complex subject matter.

⁴ *If we focus on the current international security cooperation projects in the region and the relevant role of the Republic of Slovenia, we can use the typology as defined in the target research project »Science for security and peace 2004–2010« from 2007, where the division is used between defence cooperation, including military and crisis management cooperation, cooperation in search and rescue, research and development, with a focus on security, and cooperation in defence industry.*

⁵ *Often an initiative is launched from the outside and is then moving to an increasingly big regional ownership; a tendency that has also been actively supported within SEEC.*

Following the turbulent period of the 1990s, on the turning point of the new millennium, the Western Balkans⁶ witnessed a revival of defence cooperation.⁷ Confidence and security building were on the rise among the countries in the region. At the same time, a security regime had to be introduced in the conflict-prone and a deeply divided area (Anastasakis and Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2002, p. 5). Particularly in the aftermath of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, several regional cooperation initiatives were generated that nowadays combine a number of processes and projects in various security areas and with various actors (state and non-state). Today we speak about a multi-layered and a multi-level process of regional cooperation which involves both top-level political dialogue and individual practical, project-based cooperation, as well as bilateral cooperation based on regular cooperation programmes among the countries, and more formal regional forms of cooperation (Dangerfield, 2004, p. 205).

The region has been largely influenced by the US, European Union and NATO.⁸ According to Karel Deutsch (1957), Europe has sought to build stability and implement the concept of security community in the region of Western Balkans following the example of the Western, Central and partly Eastern Europe. Reaching reconciliation through regional cooperation that would lead to political understanding and economic and social flourishing has become a requirement for the EU membership.⁹ At the same time, the European future and the perspective of the EU and NATO membership have become major tools of conflict prevention and a mechanism for the transformation of defence systems or the driving force of promoting regional cooperation (CRP, 2007, p. 103–111).¹⁰

⁶ *Individual authors often question the existence of the Western Balkans region. Historically speaking, this area was mainly divided among various power poles, except for Yugoslavia, which resulted in a weak regional identity. The Balkans is a geographical name for the territories in Southeast Europe, situated south of the Sava and the Donava Rivers. The countries often refused the name »Balkans« because of its negative connotation and connection with conflicts and tensions attributed to this area by the international community. This has led to the use of terms, such as Southeast Europe or the Western Balkans. However, our premise derives from a region that has been significantly shaped by external factors, among them the stabilisation and accession process in the European Union as the major ones. The region has connected the countries with a membership perspective that were left as part of an unresolved story of European stabilisation and integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures (Delević, 2007, p. 11–16).*

⁷ *For the history on regional integration in the Balkans see also: Kut, Sule and Sirin, N. Asli, 2002. The Bright Side of Balkan Politics: Cooperation in the Balkans. Journal of Southeast Europe and Black Sea Studies, January 2002, 2(1), p. 10–23.*

⁸ *According to Olli Rehn, a former European commissioner for enlargement, the development of regional cooperation is in the best interest of all West European countries. It is a key factor of political stability, security and economic development. From this viewpoint, regional cooperation forms the basis of the EU relationship with the region and the stabilisation and accession process leading to the EU membership. The former Secretary General of NATO regarded cooperation in the Western Balkans as necessary, taking into account more than 50 years of European experiences of the integration as facilitator of trust, stability and development (Seroka, 2008, p. 15).*

⁹ *The reason is simple. The countries should overcome differences and disputes with their immediate neighbours so as to prevent the spreading of conflicts to the NATO and EU level (Seroka, 2008, p. 15–17). Moreover, the countries making contributions to regional goals are willing to assume commitments deriving from the EU membership (Dangerfield, 2004, p. 204).*

¹⁰ *Without external input it would be unreal to expect that the countries from the region managed to generate sufficient political will for cooperation with former adversaries. Weak economies, mistrust, weak democratic institutions and wartime experiences are the factors more likely to have hindered than encouraged cooperation (Seroka, 2008, p. 17–18).*

Regional initiatives¹¹ often entail an important political component, especially during the time when individual countries of Central and Southeast Europe were paving their way towards the integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Moreover, the form of meetings themselves is important, therefore these initiatives often involve regular meetings at the ministerial level. The two examples, among the others, are the Southeastern Europe Defence Ministerial (SEDM) and the Adriatic Charter (A-3/A-5)¹². These initiatives are appropriately formalized and structured, and may, among other things, also include organizing committees, different working bodies and political declarations. Another significant effect or goal of such initiatives can also be a regular exchange of information, declarations of regional solidarity, joint statements of intent, cooperation plans, special projects, and the similar. In line with the increased participation of countries in multinational operations and missions, tendencies have occurred towards more pragmatic and target-oriented regional cooperation in defence reforms as well as multinational operations and missions. With reference to cooperation of the A-3 group in multinational operations and missions, including participation of its countries with a trilateral medical unit in Afghanistan, Multinational Land Force (MLF)¹³ should also be mentioned as a formal initiative with specific and limited goals, and membership.

The major forms of regional and multilateral cooperation in defence and security area which involve an active engagement of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia include the Southeastern Europe Defence Ministerial¹⁴, the Regional

¹¹ See CRP, 2007, p. 114–238, and Delević, 2007, p. 17–29.

¹² *The Adriatic Charter is an initiative, whose members seek, individually and collectively, to intensify reform-related and other efforts towards strengthening security, stability and welfare of the entire Western Balkans. It is a forum intended to assist the countries from the region in their accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures. The initiative was created after the model of the Baltic Charter from 1998. The idea about its creation appeared first at the Prague NATO Summit in 2002, among top-level representatives of the US, Albania, Croatia and Macedonia. On 2 May 2003, the foreign ministers of these countries signed a charter on strategic partnership on the way to the Euro-Atlantic structures, i.e. the Adriatic Charter (A-3) in Skopje, thereby officially marking the launching of the initiative. In September 2008, A-3 members decided to invite Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro that became full members in December of the same year with the signing of appendix to the charter (A-5) during the OSCE ministerial in Helsinki.*

¹³ *The MLF of Italy, Hungary and Slovenia was established in 1998 based on a special agreement. It represents a very successful form of international military cooperation in the region. Its achievements include joint training and participation in multinational operations and missions, as well as the building and integration into the concept and practice of European battle groups (EUBG).*

¹⁴ *The Southeastern Europe Defence Ministerial (SEDM) initiative was created in 1998 with the aim of strengthening peace, security and stability, and consolidating trust among the countries of Southeastern Europe. Cooperation of the member countries follows the spirit of NATO Partnership for Peace Programme and has the function of a mechanism transferring the experiences of NATO and EU member countries participating in SEDM to candidate countries through participation in working groups. Members are also Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Greece, Macedonia, Rumania, Turkey, USA, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Montenegro and Serbia.*

Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre¹⁵ (RACVIAC) and the Southeast Europe Clearinghouse¹⁶. A detailed analysis would reveal that they are primarily targeted at providing assistance to countries in the process of joining Euro-Atlantic integrations. In addition to cooperation within SEDM, contacts have also been established at the operational level. In case of SEEC, in particular, the activities have mainly developed according to the »bottom up« principle, i.e. from the expert level upward. Over years, this successful cooperation has strengthened and become more specialized. It can even be claimed that we have witnessed a major transformation of the initiative and change of some fundamental principles of regional cooperation in general. The SEEC initiative has laid the foundation and offered the tools facilitating the introduction of conceptual changes to regional cooperation in defence reforms of the Western Balkans. This is an entirely new chapter in regional cooperation, both from the perspective of the region and the role played by the Republic of Slovenia.

1 SOUTHEAST EUROPE CLEARINGHOUSE INITIATIVE

The Southeast Europe Clearinghouse initiative was launched in 2004 by the US¹⁷ and the Republic of Slovenia¹⁸ as the initiators and permanent co-chairing countries and by the countries of the Western Balkans – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. Based on the past experiences with the official forms of cooperation, the founders intended to introduce an informal initiative sufficiently flexible and capable of pragmatic project-based approach.¹⁹ Additional fundamental principles were also voluntary participation and cooperation.

¹⁵ *The Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre (RACVIAC) is an international, independent and non-profit regional academic organization founded in October 2000. Its purpose or goal is to encourage Southeast European countries to efficiently implement arms control agreements and strengthen trust and cooperation in the region. Following its 2008 transformation to the Centre for Security Cooperation (RACVIAC – CSC), the organization focused its efforts on the further stabilisation of the region and provided additional support to relevant efforts of the international community. Priority tasks of the centre therefore became the organization of programmes in support of reforms, connected with the democratic control of the armed forces, improvement of civil-military cooperation standards and other issues connected with defence sector reforms, and provisions of »soft security«. Among its members there are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Greece, Moldova, Montenegro, Rumania, Serbia, Turkey, Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and others.*

¹⁶ *In 2004, Slovenia and the US, together with the countries of the Western Balkans, launched an informal Southeast Europe Clearinghouse (SEEC) initiative. In addition to the countries from the region, it includes approx. 30 other countries and several international organizations. The primary purpose of the initiative is the exchange of information on defence systems and cooperation in key areas of defence reforms. Another interesting initiative is the Stability Pact which was transformed into the Regional Cooperation Council in February 2008. As a regionally managed, target oriented and efficient framework of regional cooperation it is designed to support the countries in their integration into Euro-Atlantic establishments.*

¹⁷ *Initially, the American side participated with the representatives of the United States European Command (US EUCOM), and since 2008 with the representatives of the Office of the Secretary of Defence (OSD).*

¹⁸ *Slovenia is represented with the MoD Defence Policy Directorate personnel.*

¹⁹ *Informality and voluntarism, in addition to concrete projects, are two major advantages of this initiative. See: Joint Statement of the Southeast Europe Clearinghouse, 30 November – 1 December 2004, Ljubljana, Slovenia, http://www.seecdb.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=6.*

The launching of the SEEC initiative was based on the aspirations of all participants, especially countries from the region, to eliminate any duplication and dispersion of cooperation in defence reforms resulting from the distribution of various forms of the existing cooperation. The intention was hence to provide an added value to cooperation in defence reforms and to the efforts at rationalizing the management of the available resources. Of crucial importance was also the assistance offered to the candidates for NATO and Partnership for Peace membership and the creation of the information exchange forum.

The first conference of the Clearinghouse initiative held on 1 December 2004 in Ljubljana was attended by more than 30 countries²⁰ and 5 organizations. Conference participants drafted a special joint statement²¹ which, among other things, aimed at »avoiding duplication of effort in the region, optimizing limited resources and synchronizing activities, while achieving shared goals«. They also noted that the three candidates for NATO membership (Albania, Croatia and the Republic of Macedonia) and the two countries aspiring for the Partnership for Peace membership (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro) should clearly define their requirements concerning defence reforms, so that other participating countries and organizations could provide help and support, and identify areas of cooperation for the benefit of all concerned. The joint statement stressed very clearly that the SEEC initiative was not to replace any of the existing forms of cooperation, but rather to introduce new quality and transparency, and to avoid duplication.

1.1 Phase one of SEEC development – the supply and demand concept

With reference to the basic goals declared in the joint statement, the participants decided to create a database which would provide a clear overview of requirements of the countries from the region in various areas of defence reforms. It should be pointed out that this alone was a significant achievement. Since SEEC is an informal initiative and hence without personnel of its own, this task was entrusted to the MoD Defence Policy Directorate that created the database in cooperation with the ministry's CIS experts. The operation of the database had to be simple and most of all useful. A connection tool was also put in place for the information exchange and communication purposes. After a few years, the management of the base was delegated to the Montenegro's Defence Ministry, also in the spirit of bigger regional ownership. The database offers a lot of important information. Special mention should be made to the list of SEEC's points of contact that is regularly updated. The list includes officially appointed contact representatives of individual countries and organizations functioning within the initiative, and provides regular information about the key activities.

²⁰ Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Estonia, Finland, France, Macedonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Rumania, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom, DCAF, RACVIAC, NATO.

²¹ Joint Statement of the Southeast Europe Clearinghouse, 30 November – 1 December 2004, Ljubljana, Slovenia, http://www.seecdb.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=6.

The contents of the database were designed according to the demand principle in the form of clearly expressed project-related requirements of countries in the region, different categories of defence reforms and the relevant cooperation offers of other parties. In substantive determination of individual defence reform areas, the database derives from NATO categorization, whose main sections also include various policies and organization, human resource management, training, capabilities, communication, real estate, multinational operations and missions, arms control, non-proliferation and other. After two years of operation, the base has been populated with data on requirements and offers, which allows comprehensive analyses and situation assessments. The initial assumptions about the duplication of effort in the region have been confirmed in the analysis of the database, indicating the risk of duplication in some key areas.

Table 1:
Part of data
derived from
the supply
and demand
analysis of
the SEEC
database

AREA	NEEDS	OFFERS
Human resource management		
General	Croatia (4 + 4/SPECTRA), BiH (2)	Denmark, UK, USA, Czech Rep., Poland, additional options possible - RACVIAC, NATO
Downsizing of personnel and retirement	Croatia (2), Albania (1), Serbia (3 ²²), Bosnia and Herzegovina(2)	
Recruitment and candidate selection	Bosnia and Herzegovina (1), Serbia (1)	
Military infrastructure – Simulations Centre	Albania, Serbia, Macedonia	Latvia, Slovenia, Poland
Command and control	Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia	Denmark, Slovenia, USA
Public relations	Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia	UK, Netherlands, RACVIAC, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, Estonia
Legal requirements	Serbia, Albania	Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Rumania
CIMIC	Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia	seminars (Slovenia, Denmark), Poland, NATO

The analysis (Table 1) has indicated duplication both on the part of supply and demand. Countries and organizations populated the base with very similar requirements and offers. It was therefore decided that the most economic method of addressing defence reforms in the relevant areas would be the regional approach, both in terms of a more integrated approach towards similar subject-matter issues and from the viewpoint of exchanging comparable experiences among the countries in the region facing similar challenges and tasks. This eventually marked the conclusion

²² Number of requirements broken down by projects.

of phase one of the SEEC initiative, that is the »demand and supply« phase, and the focus of activities has been transferred to phase two with attention directed at various aspects of the regional approach.

1.2 Phase two of SEEC development – regional approach

The key areas of defence reforms identified as important for several countries on the basis of the database analysis included training for multinational operations and missions, training for the media, personnel management, defence planning, disarmament, medical support and others. A detailed needs' description of individual countries indicated several similarities, but also opportunities for a more rational approach to avoiding duplication of activity and the collective added value. Here we owe some clarifications from the aspect of organization and contents of the regional dynamics of SEEC activities. Looking at the evolution of the SEEC initiative through the eyes of modern time, it can be established that the regional approach developed in two directions. The first was the strengthening of regional cooperation in the key areas as identified in the database through direct connections among individual countries from the region. Such cases were, for instance, identified in personnel management, medical support training²³ and dog training. Also based on the analysis of database and key areas, some countries dedicated a lot of effort to the practice of regular regional expert meetings, conferences and workshops on various individual professional topics.

In order to deal comprehensively with the critical reform issues of the region, Slovenia organized a 3-day regional conference on defence planning in July 2007. The meeting format provided the opportunity for a concept-based move to a higher quality level. A number of statements reconfirmed the value of significant and useful exchange of experiences, information and good practice among the countries of the region facing similar challenges. The new quality was hence the exchange of comparable and similar experiences and their immediate use. The conference was also attended by Slovenian experts in NATO and EU defence planning. This regional event uncovered another conceptual point of interest, that is the possibility for cooperation of different countries and organizations in the events with diverse regional participation that facilitated not only condensed, quality and comprehensive transfer of information and knowledge, but also a more rational approach towards the events

²³ *A cooperation agreement between the countries of complementary capabilities in a similar area, i.e. with Serbia and its traditional Medical Academy capabilities, and the Republic of Macedonia providing quality training as part of preparation for participation in multinational operations and missions. The path to reaching the agreement led from the period of both countries fearing that the existence of a similar capability indicated a threat, through mutual expert-level relations, to an agreement on cooperation options based on the principle of mutual complementation. These patterns have also been evident in several other cases, where the progress was based on continued dialogue significantly strengthening mutual trust, on expert talks, transfer of decision making to defence policy directors, and the renewed expert-level dialogue. All this of course required a lot of time.*

in terms of finance, organization and contents as opposed to dispersed and non-representative activity.²⁴

Another direction of the regional approach was mainly marked by the talks among the countries from the region about the setting up of regional education and training centres in the fields arousing interest in the majority of countries. As this involves very important, politically sensitive and potentially long-term issues, the discussions clearly indicated the need for the launch of a new forum that would facilitate important and constructive talks at the relevant decision-making levels. The need for a regular exchange of information on defence reforms, multinational operations and missions, and intensive debates about the strengthened regional cooperation, including the establishment of regional centres, have led to the creation of a new forum of regular meetings of national armaments directors.²⁵

These forms of meetings that have become a major mechanism of the second, regional development stage of SEEC were unknown to the region before. As already mentioned, these requirements within the initiative appeared as pretty natural in the moment when special issues occurred about potentially structured and long-term forms of regional cooperation following some good examples of the current structural forms of cooperation in the Baltic areas, for instance the Nordic Initiative and the Baltic Defence Academy. A significant shift in the second stage of SEEC development was the third meeting of defence policy directors in June 2008 at Zgornji Brnik, where participants, according to the order of priority, identified the establishment of regional centres as their common interest. The first group included the Centre for Peace Support Operations' Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Centre for Media Training in the Republic of Macedonia and the CBRN-Centre in Serbia. The second position was earmarked for dog training and education and training in military medicine. A decision was taken to make arrangements for bilateral cooperation in dog training between Croatia and Serbia and to consider the options for closer cooperation at the bilateral level between Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia. The directors also decided to nominate working groups for individual centres, while the dynamics of their creation were entrusted to host countries. Naturally, the issue of potential establishment of multinational regional centres in the region of the Western Balkans was strategically important and complex, and could bring about long-lasting effects in the concepts of regional cooperation, closer links among the countries from the region, greater inter-dependence and, indirectly, greater security and stability in the region.

²⁴ *As part of the planned survey among the participants that was carried out by the representatives of the MoD Defence Policy Directorate, the assessment of a Serbian participant, head of J-5 in the General Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces, is particularly indicative. He pointed out that in his entire life he had never learned so much as in one day only, especially from his counterparts and planning experts from various countries of the region, who were faced with similar and comparable professional challenges. This is a clear statement of the opportunities provided through the regional approach. Following this example, the Republic of Slovenia organized the conferences on CIS and defence standardization in the year 2008, and the Republic of Macedonia conducted a workshop on planning documents.*

²⁵ *The level of defence policy directors involves regular meetings of the EU and NATO member countries. Four formal meetings and one informal meeting have taken place so far.*

1.3 Dispersion of organisation

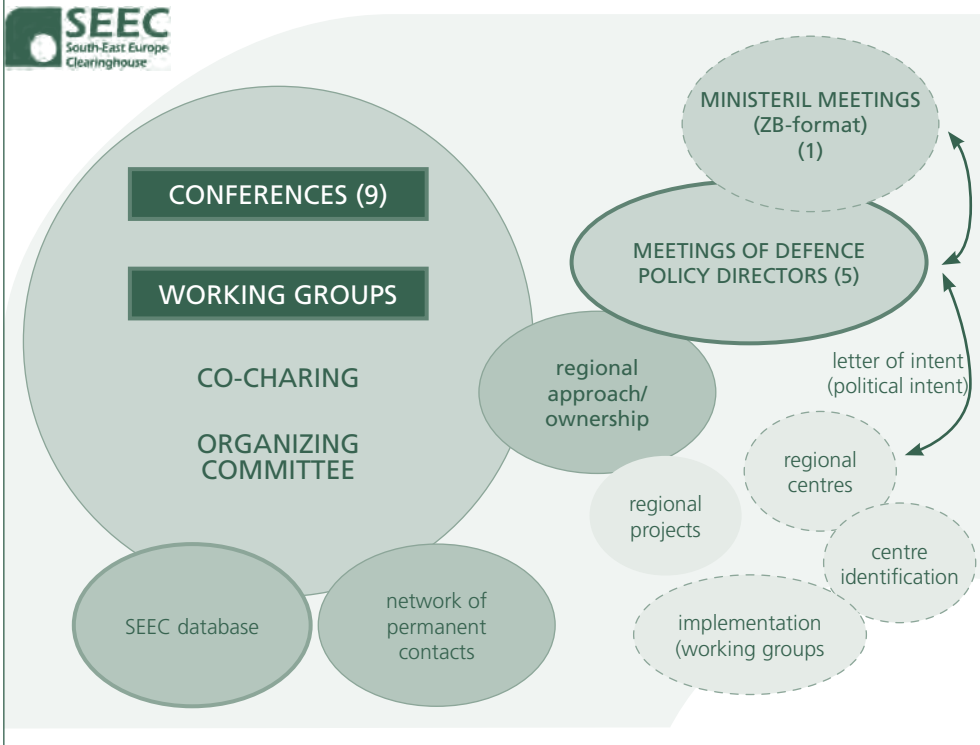
One of the consequences of the evolution of activity development concerning the Southeast Europe Clearinghouse initiative is its organizational diversity. A thorough analysis indicates an entirely understandable phenomenon, as the initiative has been eventually the hatchery of various forms of cooperation that also go beyond its framework. This fact can best be described with the introduction of the new mechanism of regular meetings of defence policy directors of the Western Balkans, following the model of NATO and the EU. These meetings were spurred by complex and difficult issues within the SEEC initiative, the treatment of which went beyond the framework of conferences and working groups from the perspective of the required decision-making level. The introduction of regular meetings of regional defence policy directors can be regarded as a major achievement of this initiative. In some cases, the dispersion of organization often made the overview and management of various activities difficult. The initial mechanisms in the functioning of the initiative at first included regular semi-annual regional conferences on topical events in the field of defence reforms in the region, and the working groups established in individual countries of the region to address open issues regarding defence reforms. Initially, conferences were frequently preceded by the meetings of the organizing committee that was primarily tasked with conference preparations. A number of issues of conceptual and strategic nature were, especially during the establishment phase, also addressed at regular working meetings and in contacts among the representatives of the permanent co-chairing countries, the US and the Republic of Slovenia.

2 EVALUATION OF THE SOUTHEAST EUROPE CLEARINGHOUSE INITIATIVE

Up to date, nine conferences, five meetings of defence policy directors and one defence ministerial meeting of the Western Balkans have taken place as part of the SEEC initiative. In addition, numerous meetings of working groups and seminars on specific areas of defence reforms have been organized. Particular attention should be given to the increased dynamics of the Peace Support Operations Training Centre (PSOTC) in Sarajevo and the CBRN-Centre in Kruševac whose working groups consider the possibilities for greater regional ownership. One of the ambitions of the countries from the region is also to establish a catalogue of all regional capabilities for English language training and various forms of training for multinational operations and missions.

It can be concluded that the SEEC initiative has proved to be an important challenge, a linking tool, an added value to the present forms of cooperation in the region, as well as an impulse and driving force in the search of new forms of cooperation. It has also become obvious that it would be difficult to follow the development of all sub-segments and initiative effects because of the great organizational diversity. It has been found out that a large quantity of information from the database, informal contacts within various SEEC formats, multilateral agreements and other, have contributed to the strengthening of bi- and multilateral forms of cooperation. SEEC,

Table 2:
Evolution of
SEEC process



however, has not received any feedback. From this point of view it could even be claimed that certain mechanisms and activities within the initiative functioned as an important catalyst for various forms of cooperation beyond the initiative. The best indicators of this are the introduction of meetings of defence policy directors, arrangements concerning the establishment of regional training centres and, last but not least, a formal document ensuring political guidance and commitment towards the implementation of arrangements and the upgrading of the success achieved in the form of a joint statement of all defence ministers from the region, signed on 18 November 2009 in Sarajevo.

SEEC should be looked at as an example of *sui generis* also from the perspective of the role of the Republic of Slovenia in the initiative. The Ministry of Defence recognized without hesitation in 2004 the value and significance of deliberations of J-5 of the US European Command about the potential introduction of an informal regional initiative for cooperation in defence reforms and its search for support and advice of the country often regarded as a role model for other countries from the region. The Strategic Planning Sector and Policies to the USEUCOM and the Defence Policy Directorate determined in a series of working meetings and discussions the basic parameters and areas of the future initiative. The US and the Republic of Slovenia used much of the first two years to stimulate dynamics, convince the participants about the usefulness of such cooperation and to develop concepts and tools (working group

concept, database etc.). This was followed by the period of intensive dynamics in the first stage of SEEC development that involved intensive work of the working groups, conferences and the exchange of defence reform information.

One of the major challenges in ensuring continuity of the initiative was of personnel character, which became evident in significant fluctuation of participants, also on the part of the co-chairing US side whose focus on SEEC processes was changeable due to the system of officer rotations. The responsibility of the Slovenian side was hence even greater, as it was necessary to provide a permanent team ensuring contribution through regular monitoring and promotion of development to support uninterrupted progress which would otherwise be extremely difficult given the personnel fluctuations. The Slovenian side took care of the historical memory and target orientation, although it often appeared that the initiative was at a standstill or sometimes even in regression.

Strategically speaking, the SEEC initiative contributed considerably to the strengthening of regional cooperation and long-term mutual trust at all levels. It improved the awareness about the rationality of approach, both from the viewpoint of organization, personnel, contents, as well as from the finance perspective. SEEC activities confirmed the conceptual importance of exchanging comparable experiences among the countries of the region. An important achievement of the initiative is the introduction of communications tool and database serving as a good information basis. Great success was the continuity of decision makers' meetings, political commitment on the level of defence ministers, and cooperation in multinational operations and missions. Given these great achievements it is easy to be self-critical. The SEEC initiative has revealed that in the absence of the regular flow of information it has been a real challenge to manage numerous forms of cooperation and trace the effects of various activities. Quite often the progress was very slow and tedious, mainly due to the lack of historical memory about the development, purpose and achievements of the initiative, periodic mistrust deriving from excessive protection of individual interests and the precedence level of approach innovation within the initiative. A key factor likely to exert significant influence on the further success of practical regional cooperation is enhanced regional ownership of all processes.

3 PERSPECTIVES OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The vision of future regional cooperation was co-shaped by the relevant ministers of defence who signed a letter of intent concerning the strengthening of regional cooperation on 18 November 2009 in Sarajevo and also with support of the regional centres in the Western Balkans. The implementation of principles and elements of the joint statement was entrusted to defence policy directors. The joint statement²⁶ clearly summarizes the achievements brought about by the Clearinghouse process

²⁶ *The initiative to sign a joint statement came from Slovenia. The document was drafted by the Defence Policy Directorate and then harmonized with all countries from the region. The joint statement can be accessed at: http://www.seecdb.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=42&Itemid=38*

and provides political guidance for further work. Among other things, the ministers pledged their commitment to the strengthening of regional cooperation as an important factor of building mutual trust. The ministers also undertook the commitment for the regular exchange of information on defence reforms, including the sharing of lessons learned and good practice. In addition, they welcomed practical forms of cooperation in the area of comparable reform-related challenges that had strengthened in the past years, stressed a new independent regional forum of regular meetings of defence policy directors, and expressed their support for the regular organization of defence ministerials. They found out that the directors' meetings, regular conferences and expert working groups ensure a solid foundation for enhanced, comprehensive and transparent defence and security dialogue. The joint statement stresses the importance of regional approach in addressing joint challenges also in the area of multinational operations and missions. The regional approach is highlighted as a rational and practical cooperation method, mostly from the viewpoint of the synchronization of limited personnel and financial resources.

A clear support was expressed for the introduction of regional centres that attract most attention in the region. These are the following three centres recognized by defence policy directors on the basis of expert recommendations: Peace Support Operations Training Centre in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Media Training Centre in Skopje (Macedonia) and the Chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence in Kruševac (Serbia). At the establishment of these regional centres, the signatories of the statement provided a guidance to consider the opportunities for common funding, management, use, planning and execution of education and training. This also clearly marked the conceptual division among the three institutions already functioning as national centres and their potentially modified regional role in the future. Moreover, there are additional possibilities for other forms of such cooperation. The ministers expressed their support for a wider promotion of regional centres, especially following the operational principle of professionalism and top standards of excellence. This is of course a demanding goal that needs to take into account the already existing centres of excellence within the wider context of the Euro-Atlantic integration.

The anticipated adoption of the Republic of Slovenia's national strategic documents on the activity in the Western Balkans will probably be one of the last opportunities for a more targeted, recognizable, flexible, integrated and efficient approach of the country towards regional defence cooperation. New mechanisms provide an excellent basis for a lasting cooperation in the region that will not be conditioned upon the integration into the Euro-Atlantic establishments but upon a sincere wish for long-term stability and cooperation for the benefit of the region as a whole. Most of all, it would be necessary to establish efficient mechanisms to prevent duplication and to ensure integrated operation, measurability of progress and process management. Such form of comprehensive and institutionalized cooperation would mean a huge step forward and the realization of an unprecedented vision of the region's progress never seen before. It would allow for strengthened mutual trust on the path

towards peace and progress in the region, and consequently the implementation of the basic national interests of the Republic of Slovenia. This would also indicate the implementation of basic goals and interests of the region and the wider international community, and an important model of cooperation that could be tested in other regions as well.

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