

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Study Group Regional Stability in South East Europe (RSSEE SG)

“Regional Security Cooperation in South East Europe in the Aftermath of North Macedonia’s NATO Accession“

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PfP Consortium of Defense
Academies and Security
Studies Institutes



Executive Summary of Recommendations:

- **EU:** Accession negotiations should be started without further delay with both Albania and North Macedonia.
- **EU/US:** EU summit participants should seek to include civil-society’s positions wherever possible into conclusions about the WB.
- **EU/US:** Parliamentary bodies in charge of democratic oversight of the intelligence, security and defence sector need more support in the WB.
- **EU/US:** Full political support must be provided to the High Representative in BiH in the Peace Implementation Council (PIC).
- **BiH institutions:** A new strategy of BiH for the prevention and fight against terrorism has to be adopted.
- **NATO:** Kosovo should be invited to join the PfP.
- **EU/US/WBc:** Kosovo should be included in all regional co-operation programs.
- **EU:** Formal negotiations should start with Serbia on Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) issues.
- **Serbian government:** Refrain from interfering in the domestic politics of neighbour countries on the basis of controversial slogans like “Srpski svet” (“Serbian World”).
- **EU/US:** Cooperate with domestic actors in Montenegro to consolidate the political situation.
- **EU/US/WBc:** The numerous additional regional initiatives should be scrutinised to show unnecessary duplications with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

Situation Analysis

With North Macedonia, the third of the six Western Balkan (WB-6) states joined NATO in March 2020. However, three Western Balkan states (Bosnia and Herzegovina/BiH, Kosovo as well as Serbia) remain outside the North Atlantic Alliance for different reasons. Kosovo is the only Western Balkan state not yet included in NATO’s Partnership for Peace. Against the background of this diverse security-policy situation, paralleled by open conflict issues within and between the Western Balkan states, the status and sustainability of the transition of the security sector in the individual states more than twenty years after the end of the war deserves closer examination. Furthermore, the state of security relations within the region and how they can be positively developed with the help of the EU and NATO must be explored.

The launching of the “Open Balkan” initiative while promoting regional cooperation, has also created a dividing line between the countries that support it (Albania, Serbia and North Macedonia) and the rest of the region which opposes the initiative. While the initiative has its merits, it is interesting to see it function in the face of harsh opposition from the latter group of countries, and witnessing the challenges of stream-lining this effort with the “Berlin Process”. Much space remains to foster regional cooperation between the WB6 in various areas. Stagnation in the EU accession process has implications for the state of play of democracy in the region. Montenegro and Serbia are the countries negotiating accession, yet with no visible progress recently.



Despite delivering on their obligations, Albania and North Macedonia are in a limbo as their negotiating frameworks have not been adopted due to the Bulgarian and other vetoes. The EU has also not adopted a decision regarding visa-free travel for Kosovo, although the Commission has assessed that the conditions were fulfilled a long time ago. These circumstances increase the region's fragility and significantly decrease the potential for substantive democratic reforms. At the regional level several key trends and challenges can be identified. As to the trends, regional cooperation seems to be more effective than bilateral cooperation, as the latter can be burdened with disputes. Similarly, technical cooperation is more advanced than political cooperation in the region. Regional security cooperation is led from outside of the region, i.e. mostly by EU and NATO efforts. As for the challenges, the key topics are 1) terrorism threats due to the radicalisation of the youth, 2) widespread disinformation, linked also to the radicalisation issue, 3) a potential migration crisis, also as a result of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and 4) energy security. All of these challenges are also shared in the broader European context, pointing to the need of the EU to deal with the region in its own policies as well.

Current Challenges per Country

Kosovo

Due to non-recognition by four NATO members, Kosovo remains the only country in the region that has not joined Partnership for Peace (PfP) and it is the second country in the Euro-Atlantic sphere together with Cyprus which is not partner in the PfP, with Kosovo being blocked by non-recognising EU member states. Current outlook for NATO membership is bleak. Kosovo's external security continues to depend on the highly expensive KFOR mission.

Kosovo's participation in regional security and defence initiatives and organisations, remains very limited due to the non-recognition of countries in the wider region. It participates in limited capacity in the Adriatic Charter (status of observer, full membership blocked by BiH) and the Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre (limited to civilian component, participation in the activities entailing military component are blocked by non-recognising countries). It is fully excluded from all activities of the South East Europe Defence Ministerial.

Kosovo's international security cooperation has been enhanced through the cooperation with the EU, by signing a working arrangement establishing cooperative relations between the law enforcement authorities of

Kosovo with EUROPOL. Kosovo has an outdated security strategy as of 2010. The previous Kosovo government has drafted the new security strategy 2021–2030. However, its adoption has not been followed by the current government.

From a geographical point of view, the southern border of Kosovo is secure. However, the northern border with Serbia is not and carries potential security risks. In terms of parliamentary oversight, the parliament lags behind in terms of oversight of expenditures of Kosovo security institutions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The complex situation in BiH continues to impede the possibility of progress for regional and security cooperation. The appointment of the new High Representative has been opposed by Republika Srpska, in a continuous line of boycotting state institutions. The 2016 defence reform which defines the structure of the armed forces has still not been implemented. The implementation of the reform program 2021 as a key document for cooperation is also blocked. The EU integration process is not disputed, but there is slow progress in meeting the pre-conditions to be granted candidate status coupled with enlargement fatigue on the side of the EU. At the regional level there are ambivalent relations with neighbouring Croatia and Serbia and good relations with Montenegro and North Macedonia.

Security cooperation is slowly moving forward. Due to objection from the BiH entity Republika Srpska the new Commission formed by the Council of Ministers in BiH is tasked with NATO cooperation, instead of integration. EUFOR's engagement in the security sector has not been publicly disputed, but Republika Srpska could change its stance and Russia may not want to enlarge the mandate to EUFOR. There is some progress in PfP programs, with newly set 35 partnership goals which determine the cooperation of NATO and BiH in the security sector.

Albania

Albanian citizens perceive that there are no real threats to the country, mainly because of Albania's membership in the NATO alliance. There is a paradoxical situation with Greece, which remains the only country in the region with which Albania has direct unresolved issues, such as the state of war from 1940 that is still in power, although both countries have signed joint peace agreements and are NATO allies. These create a certain sense of insecurity and threat in Albanian public, Greece, however, has been very supportive of Albania. In terms of security issues with other foreign actors, Albania has strong ties with Turkey

illustrated by the new military agreement with Turkey in 2020; in 2021 Albania was part of military training in Anadolu for the first time. There is no Russian influence, investment or warm feelings in Albania towards Russia, and the Chinese presence has decreased in Albania in the last years.



Serbia

Serbia cooperates both with the West and Russia (extensive security cooperation with Russia and Belarus, as well as participation in a number of military exercises such as the “Slavic brotherhood”). This is evidenced by the purchases of military equipment from both sides, sending signals to every potential partner. In terms of regional cooperation, Serbia has engaged in “vaccine diplomacy” as it obtained vaccines the earliest in the region, which it also used to exert influence.

Serbian foreign policy has only been partially harmonised with European foreign policy due to non-alignment with EU positions related to Russia and China. At present, Serbia participates in three missions within the Common Security and Defence Policy. There have been only few reforms in the security sector and there have been many reports pointing towards politicisation and state influence coupled with no parliamentary oversight. The latest example of such tendencies is the draft law of internal affairs, recently proposed by the minister of interior.

Its Europeanisation process is not moving forward, as the country has so far opened 18 negotiating chapters out of 35, but only 2 chapters have been closed, with no progress made the last two years. The erosion of democratic governance is very serious, leading to authoritarian tendencies in Serbia. The work of the civil society is under attack from the government and there is a tendency to criminalise NGOs. Cooperation between the state and the civil sector is almost non-existent or limited. The EU is aware of all this but does not provide much support for NGOs.

The Belgrade – Pristina dialogue is moving backwards and the two sides are further apart than they were in 2012. The more Serbia loses control over Kosovo, the more it can increase activities and seek benefits and political gains in Republika Srpska and Montenegro. These activities already take place, such as support for BiH Presidency Member Dodik’s statements concerning separatism, although Vučić, Serbia’s President, is very careful of what he says on his commitment to the territory of BiH.

North Macedonia

Since joining NATO in March 2020 North Macedonia has shown that it is on a good path in terms of democratic processes and security issues and has become a constructive partner that is trying to have good relations with neighbour countries. North Macedonia is also involved in economic cooperation initiatives, such as the Open Balkan initiative. However, despite these developments, the bilateral issue with Bulgaria is a barrier for North Macedonia to start the accession negotiations with the EU. This blockade is a significant threat to the overall support in the public for EU integration and NATO membership, as shown in recent polls and is likely to undermine future reform efforts overall.

Policy Recommendations

General Recommendations

- **EU:** Accession negotiations should be started without further delay with both Albania and North Macedonia.
- **EU/US:** Full political and legal support and flanking should be given for the work of the civil society, the independent media, independent think tanks and the democratic opposition in the parliaments in the Western Balkans.
- **EU/US:** EU Western Balkans summits, at least, should organise high-level civil-society conferences as privileged side events in order to allow the voice of civil-society and the other institutions mentioned above to be heard on the summit subjects addressed. EU summit participants should seek to include civil-society’s positions wherever possible into their conclusions and declarations.
- **EU/US:** Security-oriented international organisations, NGOs, and other stakeholders should support the development of the capacity of parliamentary bodies in charge of democratic oversight of the intelligence, security, and defence sectors.

With reference to Bosnia and Herzegovina

- **EU/US:** The EU institutions and member states, as well as the US need to provide full political support to the High Representative in BiH in their capacity as PIC members.
- **BiH institutions:** The BiH entity Republika Srpska must accept the decision of the Peace Implementation Council concerning the election and instalment of the new High Representative.
- **BiH institutions:** In order to adequately respond to modern security challenges, risks, and threats, the new security policy of BiH needs to be adopted as soon as possible.
- **BiH institutions:** With the assistance of security-oriented international organisations, NGOs, and other stakeholders a new strategy of BiH for the prevention and fight against terrorism needs to be adopted.

With reference to Kosovo

- **Kosovo government:** Kosovo should enhance bilateral security and defence cooperation with the US and key European partners.
- **NATO:** NATO should follow the example of EU in building practical relations with Kosovo in order to prepare the country for membership in the alliance. This is of crucial importance to speed up reforms and establish compatibility of the Kosovo Security Force with those of NATO.
- **NATO:** Kosovo should be invited to join the PfP.
- **EU/US/WB countries:** Kosovo should be included in all regional co-operation programs.

With reference to Albania

- **Albanian authorities:** The abrogation of the “state of war” law between Albania and Greece would create a friendlier atmosphere between the two countries and hence increase the security in the region.

With reference to Serbia

- **EU:** The EU should start formal negotiations in Chapter 31 on Foreign, Security and Defence Policy as a way of engaging with the country on these topics.

- **EU/US:** The EU and the US should provide more financial and public support for the operations of independent civil society in Serbia.
- **Serbian government:** In the context of the repeated stressing of the term “Srpski svet” Belgrade should refrain from interfering in the domestic politics of neighbour countries, in particular BiH and Montenegro.

With reference to Montenegro

- **EU/US:** The EU and US should engage with domestic political actors in Montenegro to prevent further destabilisation and the use of religion for political ends. A consolidated political situation is necessary to implement security sector reforms.
- **Montenegrin institutions:** Should take a proactive approach in promoting the benefits of NATO and EU membership in line with the commitment to their membership and integration in both.
- **Montenegrin institutions:** Should take a proactive approach regarding the links between human rights and the security sector.

With reference to North Macedonia

- **EU/US:** The EU member states and US need to provide continuous support to the implementation of the Prespa Agreement as an example to the region on how to solve difficult bilateral disputes.
- **EU:** The EU should recognise North Macedonia’s advanced position of its alignment with EU legislation in its accession negotiations.

With reference to the Regional Cooperation Council:

- **EU/US/WB countries:** The RCC is a regional cooperation institution. For that reason, the numerous additional regional initiatives should be scrutinised to identify any doublings of non-delivering programs.

These policy recommendations reflect the findings of the 41st RSSEE workshop on “Regional Security Cooperation in South East Europe in the Aftermath of North Macedonia’s NATO Accession”, convened by the PfP Consortium Study Group “Regional Stability in South East Europe” in Skopje, North Macedonia, 23 – 26 September 2021. They were prepared by Simoniđa Kacarska (European Policy Institute) and Predrag Jureković (Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna) on the basis of the proposals submitted by the participants. Valuable support in proofreading and layouting came from Mirjam Habisreutinger (Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna).