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## **SERBIA AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

### **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, the authors analyze the role of the Republic of Serbia in the regional initiatives in South Eastern Europe. The main objective of Serbia's participation in the regional forums of cooperation is the promotion of its foreign policy interests, but at the same time, it is also a necessity for all countries in the region. The authors also underline that the establishment of regional forms of cooperation is the obligation of the Western Balkans countries within the context of their European Union accession. The authors examine the possibilities for the promotion of Serbia's interests by strengthening its role in the multilateral frameworks of cooperation in the region of South Eastern Europe.

*Key words:* regional cooperation, Western Balkans, the Republic of Serbia, European Union, Regional Cooperation Council, CEFTA 2006, South East Europe Cooperation Process, multilateral relations

### **Introduction**

After the World War Two process of regional integrations started in all parts of the world. One of the oldest example of regional integration was creation of former the European Community (1951), nowadays known as the European Union. Almost at the same time other regional associations emerged in Europe – Benelux (consisted of

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Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg – since 1948), Western European Union (1948) and Nordic Council (1952).<sup>2</sup>

At its beginning, regional forums for cooperation prove to be very successful for overcoming of numerous problems and, at the same time, acceptable framework for facing to certain challenges. During the decades the number of these forums in Europe, as well their competences, increased (Baltic Assembly – 1990, the Visegrad Group – 1991, etc.).

At the beginning, goals of these multilateral forums were primarily connected to economic consolidation after the Second World War, but during the other half of XXth century they spread its range to other areas – from ecology to security.

Apart from Europe, during the last decades similar process emerged in other continents, too. Organization of American States was created in 1951. Almost all states from North and South America are its members. In South America was formed the Organization of Ibero – American States for the Education, Science and the Culture (1954), Latin American Free Trade Zone – LAFTA (1960), the Latin American Parliament (1964), Andean Community (1969), Common Market of Latin America MERCOSUR (1985), the Rio Group (1986), and Union of South American States (2008). In Africa exist the Economic Community of West African States (1975) and Southern African Development Community (1980) as well the African Union (2002). At the same time, in Asia are the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – ASEAN (1967), the Gulf Cooperation Council (1981), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (1985) and the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (2002). After the dissolution of the former Soviet Union in the territory of Eurasia were created the Commonwealth of Independent States (1991), Eurasian Economic Community (1996) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2001).

Same process of regional cooperation happened in the South-Eastern Europe before and after the cold war.<sup>3</sup> Some of these forums emerged before the armed conflicts in the territory of former Yugoslavia (Central European Initiative – 1989, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation – 1992, Alps Adriatic Working Community – 1978, Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe – 1973). On the other hand,

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<sup>2</sup> See: Dragan Đukanović (prir.), *Međdržavni forumi za saradnju u Evropi: uporedni modeli*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Duško Lopandić, *Regionalne inicijative u Jugoistočnoj Evropi: institucionalni oblici i programi multilateralne saradnje na Balkanu*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Evropski pokret u Srbiji, Beograd, 2001. i Jelica Minić i Jasminka Kronja, *Regionalna saradnja za razvoj i evropsku integraciju*, Evropski pokret u Srbiji, Beograd, Albanski institut za međunarodne studije, Tirana, Centar za institucionalni razvoj, Skoplje, Evropski pokret u Crnoj Gori, Podgorica, Helsinški komitet za ljudska prava u Bosni i Hercegovini, Sarajevo, Institut za međunarodne odnose, Zagreb, Kosovski institut za politička istraživanja i razvoj, Priština, 2007.

in order to foster democratic and economic consolidation this area, after the end of conflicts numerous regional initiatives were launched (Royaumont initiative – 1995, Southeast European Cooperative Initiative/SECI – 1996, Stability Pact – 1999, Adriatic-Ionian Initiative – 2000, etc.). Third phase in development of multilateral cooperation in the region of South Eastern Europe was marked by rationalization and coordination of numerous initiatives which goals and working fields were similar. This phase begun in 2006 by creation of Central European Free Trade Agreement – CEFTA and finished by transformation of Stability Pact into Regional Cooperation Council – RCC in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

Market of CEFTA region is very important for Serbia. Approximately 32% of overall export Serbia realize to these countries. Following table illustrates this fact.

*Table 1. Serbia and CEFTA: Exchange of goods*

	2007.		2008.		2009/10.	
	import	export	import	export	import	export
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.047,4	504,1	1.347,3	629,8	842,9	345,8
Montenegro	966,7	126,3	1.279,7	196,5	707,6	133,3
Macedonia	439,2	298,3	496,3	369,5	347,1	186,2
Croatia	331,2	527,4	439,2	549,2	236,9	300,1
Albania	80,8	11,1	76,8	13,3	52,4	4,9
Moldova	4,6	11,8	6,6	25,6	3,6	16,5
CEFTA in total	2.849,2	1.491,5	3.645,9	1.783,9	2.190,5	986,9
World in total	9.027,7	18.317,3	11.376,4	22.902,2	7.121,5	12.878,7
Relation CEFTA/world (%)	31,6	8,1	32,0	7,8	30,8	7,7

Source: <http://www.pks.rs/Default.aspx?tabid=3059>

It is important to emphasize that that process caused certain institutional connection of the Process of cooperation of South Eastern European countries with the Regional Council for Cooperation (RCC) seated in Sarajevo. At the same time, the RCC became top regional initiative which integrated more than twenty earlier initiatives which covered economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and internal affairs, security, development of human relations and intensifying of parliamentary cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Dragan Đukanović, „Transformacija Pakta za stabilnost u Jugoistočnoj Evropi – novi podsticaji regionalnoj saradnji“, in: Dragan Đukanović (prir.), *Međudržavni forumi za saradnju u Evropi – uporedni modeli*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd, 2007, str. 173–190.

<sup>5</sup> See Internet presentation of the Regional Cooperation Council – [www.rcc.int](http://www.rcc.int).



Source: <http://www.rcc.int/>

### **European Union and Regional Integrations in the Western Balkans/South Eastern Europe**

More or less, it is clear that the most of regional initiatives for cooperation in the South Eastern Europe were created under auspices of the United States of America and the European Union. Evidently, forming of these initiatives at the same time was supported both directly and indirectly by the other actors of the world politics. Significant financial support for regional initiatives was provided by the EU member states and its institutions as well.

Lots of documents issued by the EU institutions, in the first line by the Council and Commission, since the end of the 2005 underlines necessity that South Eastern European countries should take over responsibility for further development of multilateral cooperation. In that spirit concept was promoted of regional ownership over the existing foras of multilateral cooperation. Essence of regional ownership was to foster participation of representatives of the countries in the region and financing based on own sources. Very successful examples of acceptance of responsibility for functioning of the regional initiatives are Regional Council for Cooperation and CEFTA 2006.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Predrag Bijelić, „Trgovinska integracija Srbije: CEFTA, Evropska unija i Svetska trgovinska organizacija“, in: Edita Stojić–Karanović (ur.), *CEFTA i interesi Srbije*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd, 2008, pp. 83–102.



Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central\\_European\\_Free\\_Trade\\_Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_European_Free_Trade_Agreement)

At the same time, during the period of the Western Balkans countries accession to the European Union, parallel with settling bilateral issues concerning intensifying of the regional cooperation was emphasized. And that is the main reason why regional initiatives should not be observed exclusively as preparation for membership in this organization but also as model for developing future southeast dimension of the enlarged Union. In spite of that it is evidently that public opinion of the Western Balkans countries does not understand the significance of the regional initiatives.<sup>7</sup> As an illustration, political elite in the Republic of Croatia treat regional initiatives just as necessitate in the EU accession process and not like a long term strategy. On the other hand, majority of public opinion in Serbia is indifferent and similar is in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Pragmatically speaking, regional cooperation is of crucial importance for all Western Balkans countries not just in relation of their European Union perspective but in relation of every day life of their citizens. No one can deny that regional initiatives for cooperation in South Eastern Europe contribute to promotion of human and minority rights, developing capacity of administration, position of the media and parliamentary cooperation. They brought to significant progress in solving problems of refugees and internally displaced persons, developing of trade, infrastructure, private sector and foreign investments. In last few years progress was achieved in telecommunications, environment protection, education, science/technology, energy, agriculture and banking. Also, certain steps were taken in developing tourism and social development, but also in reforming of defense system, internal affairs and combat against organizes crime.

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<sup>7</sup> See public opinion polls on regional cooperation at web portal of the *Gallup Balkan Monitor* – [www.balkan-monitor.eu](http://www.balkan-monitor.eu).

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Coordination among countries in the region in matters of management of emergency situation and protection of the citizens was developed in same period. Almost each of mentioned regional initiatives dedicated its activity to fight against corruption at the regional level.<sup>8</sup>

As integral part of preparation for joining the EU, each country in this region has a task to harmonize its legislation with EU *acquis communautaire*. That is the reason why regional initiatives dedicate special attention to this aspect and why they are truly devoted to intensifying of the interparliamentary cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

Also, it should be mentioned a fact that Central European and Eastern European countries after the end of the cold war enhanced regional cooperation launching numerous foras (Central European initiative, Central European Free Trade Area – CEFTA and Visegrad Group). That helped them a lot to successfully terminate the EU accession process. Having on mind that experience, the European Union ever since the Copenhagen criteria (1993)<sup>10</sup> all the time persist to point out the necessity of developing similar forms of cooperation among Western Balkans countries as a key factor in achieving their European perspective. Similar attitudes were mentioned in the framework of the so called regional approach of the EU to South Eastern Europe (1996), then on occasion of making concept of the Process of Stabilization and Accession (2000), as well on the occasion of creation of the Enhanced Process of Stabilization and Accession in 2003 (after the Thessalonica summit EU-Western Balkans).<sup>11</sup> Each of these approaches was taking into account numerous political conditioning as a follow up of normalization of situation in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Financial support of the EU to the countries of the region was directly conditioned by fulfilling of those conditions. European Union created several programs for assistance: PHARE – Program of Assistance for Reforming Economies in Poland and Hungary, CARDS – Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stability in the Balkans and IPA – Pre Accession Assistance.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Duško Lopandić, Jasminka Kronja, „Regionalne inicijative i multilateralna saradnja na Balkanu“, Evropski pokret u Srbiji, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Beograd, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> This is the one of top priority activities of the Regional Council for Cooperation and the Central European Initiative.

<sup>10</sup> “Presidency Conclusions, Copenhagen European Council 1993“, 7.A.iii, Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993, Internet: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/ec/pdf/cop\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/ec/pdf/cop_en.pdf), 15/03/2010.

<sup>11</sup> See more in: Aleksić Ivona, „Zapadni Balkan i “evropsko partnerstvo”“, *Evropsko zakonodavstvo*, br. 5/03, IMPP, Beograd, 2003, pp. 77-78, and: Dragan Đukanović i Dejan Gajić, „Evropska unija i proširenje na Zapadni Balkan“, in: Dragan Đukanović i Sandro Knezović (eds.), *Srbija i regionalna saradnja*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd, 2010, pp. 49–62.

<sup>12</sup> Ivan Knežević (ur.), „Instrument za pretpristupnu pomoć – IPA (2007-2013)“, Evropski pokret u Srbiji, Beograd, 2009.

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## Western Balkans Countries and Regional Cooperation

Most of the Western Balkans countries are actively involved in the work of the Regional Council for Cooperation, Process of Cooperation of South European countries, Central European Initiative, Adriatic – Ionian Initiative and Energetic Community of the South Eastern Europe. Still, each time when any of these initiatives organize summit one problem emerges. It is a problem of representing of South Serbian Province Kosovo which unilaterally proclaimed independence on 17 February 2008. That problem disturbs work in multilateral foras in South Eastern Europe because divided opinion of member states. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Greece and Moldavia did not recognize the independence of Kosovo while the other regional countries did. By the 2008 Kosovo was represented under the Resolution 1244 of the Security Council.<sup>13</sup> Since the unilaterally proclaimed independence so called Kosovo institutions insist on full membership in regional initiatives. Of course, Republic of Serbia firmly objects and leads diplomatic action to protect its territorial integrity.

Political elites in Western Balkans countries insist on further deepening of the regional cooperation but their public opinion does not observe this question as one of the fundamental importance (this issues is not even set as a priority in pre election campaigns). Still, it seems that all forms of regional cooperation were intensified especially from the second part of 2005 and it is likely to expect that public opinion eventually gradually will be changed. Same period is characterized by certain competition among official Zagreb and Belgrade regarding the leading role in the regional cooperation forums. From the other hand, Bosnia and Herzegovina burden with numerous internal problems, treat regional cooperation as less important while Montenegro and Republic of Macedonia support numerous activities of the regional initiatives.

European perspective of South East European countries eventually will contribute to relaxation of regional relations through settling numerous bilateral and multilateral issues. At the same time accession of the most Western Balkans countries to NATO will additionally improve quality of relations and create more secure environment. Certain contribution is also given by the American-Adriatic Charter (2003) originally created by Republic of Croatia, Republic of Albania and Republic of Macedonia. Nowadays its members are Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro while Serbia has status of an observer. In area of defense there are two autochthon regional initiatives – Initiative of Ministry of Defense of South Eastern Europe (1996) and Southeast European Brigade (1999).<sup>14</sup> Republic of Serbia is member of the Initiative of Ministry of Defense of South Eastern Europe.

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<sup>13</sup> See more in: Ivona Lađevac, Svetlana Đurđević-Lukić, Ana Jović-Lazić, *Međunarodno prisustvo na Kosovu i Metohiji 1999–2009*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Dragan Đukanović, Dalibor Kekić, „Začeci regionalne saradnje država Jugoistočne Evrope u oblasti odbrane“, in: dr Nevenka Jeftić (ur.), *Aktuelna pitanja iz međunarodnih odnosa: bezbednost, pravo, privreda, politika, religija*“, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd, 2008, pp. 149–164.



It wouldn't be fair to consider future of the Western Balkans countries considered out of the frames of the European Union. All these countries are devoted to making true of so called European perspective. Evidently that goal can be realized only after fulfilling certain conditions set by the EU.

More or less, conditions are similar for all countries in the region. That leads us to a conclusion that key for success is in fostering and deepening multilateral cooperation under the roof of regional initiatives. In tradition of open and constructive dialogue it is not likely to expect that burning issues can not be solved.

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