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**Sub-Regional Groupings
as Security Providers in
Central and Southeastern
Europe**

Sub-regionalism encompasses relations structured around neighbouring countries as a basis for both interstate and sub-state level of co-operation.¹ Not long ago, sub-regional frameworks of co-operation were

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perceived, due to their addressing mainly “soft” security issues and their rarely winning the front-page attention in the West, “the Cinderellas of European security.”² However, with the concept of security itself undergoing transformation, throughout the last couple of years, there has been a growing awareness, both politically and institutionally, of the value of these groupings and sub-regional arrangements have started to get their rightful place within the new evolving, institutionally comprehensive and complementary-driven all-European security architecture.³ Currently, there is a plethora of co-operative arrangements involving Central and South-Eastern European countries, including the Visegrad Group, the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEC), the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor (TRACECA), the Royaumont Process, the South-Eastern Europe Co-operation Process (SEECOP), the South-Eastern Europe Defence Ministerial (SEDM), the Southeast European Co-operative Initiative (SECI), the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, a number of trilateral arrangements (between Romania, Poland and Ukraine, Romania, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, and Romania, Hungary and Austria), euro-regions (the Carpathian, Upper Prut, and Lower Danube), and lots of multinational (multilateral, trilateral, and bilateral) military units.

Any acknowledgement of their tentative significant roles in the European security model for the 21st century should begin by recognising their in-built limits:

- They aren’t capable to provide “hard” security guarantees. Hence, they are unable to substitute for integration into collective defence alliances such as NATO.
- They can’t achieve or take the place of the wholly integrated single market attainable in the EU. Therefore, they are not alternatives to the European integration process.
- They can’t fully overcome squabbling around minority rights issues, national, ethnic, territorial or cultural cleavages, alignments and conflicts.
- The bulk of them are informal and poorly institutionalised.
- Their overall efficiency is often given by the less developed country-member.

By contrast, their assets are much more significant. One could enumerate the following ones:

- *By reason of their mere existence and their addressing “soft” and even “explicit” security issues, they convey a positive input to European security.*

Firstly, on account of the participating states' "speaking the same language" (that of dialogue, co-operation, and mutual understanding) and of their recognising themselves as sharing some sort of communal elements, thus, overcoming adversarial legacies of the past and current disputes, they are confidence-building and security-enhancing instruments ("existential security effect"). This is particularly valuable for cases in which in co-operative efforts are involved countries whose bilateral relationships are affected by "bad" legacies of the past and *ressentiment* (resentment) – arising, according to Liah Greenfeld, from the growing perception in one nation that it was "falling behind" others – is present.⁴ Secondly, the pragmatic issues on which usually these groupings are focused, i.e. investment promotion, trade liberalisation, private sector support, transportation, telecommunications, environmental protection, natural resources management, cultural and educational exchanges, tourism, border crossing facilitation, etc., have implicit confidence-building and stability outcomes ("soft security effect"). Thirdly, the sub-regional frameworks are likely well-suited to address "new threats" or security challenges such as terrorism, organised crime, drugs and arms illegal trafficking, natural and man-made accidents, unhindered migration, minority issues, co-operative frontier management, as well as "softer" arms control measures, chiefly in the area of transparency ("explicit security effect").⁵ Complementing the efforts of international organisations in dealing with these trans-national threats is a particular area where the value of these sub-regional structures lay.

- *There is a strong, yet not simple, interconnection between the sub-regional process and integration.* Not only enlargement did not necessarily conflict with sub-regional frameworks of co-operation, but the latter could actually help participating states prepare for NATO and EU integration processes "by laying stronger economic and social foundations for integration and pre-adopting certain norms and standards of these organisations." As instruments of liberalisation, they are particularly important for those countries which are currently in transition from plan to market. As far as the security domain is concerned, it is interesting to note that seven out of twelve subject areas on which Allies and Partners consult in the framework of the EAPC are, at the same time, security domains addressed by sub-regional frameworks. These include issues such as soft arms control, international terrorism, security impacts of economic developments, civil emergency and disaster preparedness, environmental security and scientific co-operation.⁶ Moreover, taking as an example the par-

ticular case of multinational units, one could say that they not only match the preventive defence concept, that is very much in place in the post-Cold War era, but are shaped to meet the requirements of NATO's adaptation process, are likely to advance interoperability with NATO structures and help contribute to the "denationalisation of defence," which has been one of NATO's central aspiration from its inception.

- *They have a proven ability to act as a bridge between more or less false fault lines* related to religious, cultural, and political traditions and orientations, as well as dissimilar levels of economic development and military strength. Focusing on practical, goal-oriented projects, defying such dividing lines among the participating states as integrated and non-integrated countries, developed and undergoing development, militarily powerful and less powerful, unitary and split apart, Christian and Islamic, Catholic/Protestant and Orthodox, European and non-European/not-so-European, they can cross geopolitical boundaries, bridge multifarious divides, overcome friction and misunderstanding between adjoining cultures and ethnic groups, and heal historical wounds.⁷ What is more, this capacity is of a paramount importance in connection with the current integration process. It allows NATO and EU members, aspirants, "neutrals" and non-candidates to continue meeting and talking to each other.
- *Presumably, they are apt to decrease centre-periphery tensions and the sense of relative deprivation.* This applies only to trans-frontier co-operative arrangements and it is particularly relevant in the case of the euro-regions. In accordance with Ted Robert Gurr's theory of relative deprivation, the expectations of citizens in countries undergoing modernisation grow faster than the government can satisfy them, creating a sense of relative deprivation. Later on, in his attempt of explaining why secessionist movements occur and multiply in the post-Cold War environment, Mark N. Katz has extended Gurr's basically economic-oriented theory to the political realm arguing that secessionism results from a sense of political relative deprivation.⁸ The contention here is that trans-frontier co-operative arrangements could diminish tensions arising out of a sense of relative economic and political deprivation provided that adjoining regions belonging to neighbouring states with dissimilar levels of economic and political development are involved, and minorities, which are majorities in other states involved in co-operation, reside in them.
- *They cover all levels of possible co-operation -not only state to state, but also region to region, and people to people co-operation.* By virtue of their frequently involving "bottom-up" participation (local authorities, social and

professional groups, managers, academics, etc.), they are able to complement the “top-down” approach realized through formal contacts between states, and to fill the gap between the international, state-level and sub-state layers of contemporary international relations.⁹

Having said all that, one should add at least five caveats:

- First, *there is an undoubted difference between NATO/EU members, NATO/EU aspirants, and “neutrals” as far as their interest in and commitment to these groupings are concerned.* Broadly speaking, countries which are full NATO and/or EU members or closer than others to the Euro-Atlantic integration tend to ascribe less importance to these arrangements. On the contrary, “neutrals” and countries that have no immediate prospects or no intention to join European and Euro-Atlantic organisations tend to take these arrangements more seriously.
- Second, *different sub-regional arrangements have dissimilar impacts upon the security environment.* As a rule, predominantly non-military-oriented groupings such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) have only an indirect impact on security. By contrast, the multinational military units, including multilateral ones such as the Multinational Peace Force South-Eastern Europe/South-Eastern Europe Brigade (MPFSEE/SEEBRIG) – in which contributors are Albania, Bulgaria, FYROM, Greece, Italy, Romania, and Turkey, plus Slovenia and USA, as observers – the Black Sea Force (BSFor) – uniting the six riparian Black Sea countries, i.e. Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Turkey, Russian Federation, and Ukraine, and the Central European Nations Co-operation (CENCOOP) – bringing together Austria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Hungary as participating states, and the Czech Republic as an observer – trilateral ones such as the Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT), the Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON), the Italian-Slovenian-Hungarian Land Force, the Romanian-Hungarian-Ukrainian Engineering Unit, and the Romanian-Moldavian-Ukrainian Unit, as well as bilateral ones such as the Polish-Ukrainian Battalion, the Romanian-Hungarian Battalion, and the Romanian-Ukrainian Battalion, have – in actual fact or as a potential – a direct impact on it. A leading case in point is the Multinational Peace Force South-Eastern Europe (MPFSEE). MPFSEE is an initiative in military co-operation of NATO and South-Eastern European partner countries – Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, FYROM, Italy, Romania, and Turkey – for materialising the UN “STAND BY” arrangements as to support the international security organisations. Established at brigade level (SEEBRIG) as

an “ON-CALL” Land Force supported by elements from other services, as and if necessary, the Force will be available, in UN or OSCE-mandated, NATO-led missions, for employment in conflict prevention and other peace support operations including peacekeeping, peace-making, peace-building and humanitarian operations.

- Third, *more often than not, groupings meant primarily as political consultation mechanisms, develop from the beginning a modest security dimension, too.* In the case of the Visegrad Group – Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia (and, after, the split of the latter, the Czech Republic and Slovakia), the security dimension, despite of a promising start (working together in dismantling old structures of the Warsaw Pact, political and military consultations during the August 1991 coup in Moscow, defence co-operation, etc), has been kept rather at a low profile, by fear that its development could hinder the member countries’ bid for Euro-Atlantic integration. By contrast, the five trilateral initiatives in the area (namely the co-operation between Romania-Republic of Moldova-Ukraine, Romania-Poland-Ukraine, Greece-Bulgaria-Romania, Bulgaria-Turkey-Romania and Romania-Hungary-Austria), by making clear where the member countries’ foreign policy priorities lay, and stating that these structures are meant only to complement efforts of international organisations in dealing with transnational threats, were able to assume tasks with “explicit security effect” such as fighting organised crime, agreements to this end being reached under the aegis of all of them. Moreover, within Romania-Hungary-Austria trilateral framework, other security-relevant projects have been assumed in the areas of Danube co-operation, the prohibition of anti-personnel mines, and improved border control.
- Fourth, *although occasionally, predominantly economic and infrastructure-oriented groupings develop in time a more traditional security dimension.* A prime example is the Centre for Counteracting Trans-border Crime in Bucharest autonomously developed initially within the Southeast European Co-operative Initiative (SECI) and adopted later on as a project within the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. One of its distinctive features is its membership, comprising eleven countries not only from the Balkans, but Central Europe as well -Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, FYROM, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Romania, Moldova, and Hungary. The fact that Central European-oriented countries such as Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia are members of the initiative is proof to the fact that the international community favours a more balanced and extensive understanding of the security dimension of the concept of So-

uth-Eastern Europe.¹⁰ Moreover, the project should be viewed also as a step forward on the way of legislative adaptation process of the UE-aspiring countries to the UE standards. Using primarily economic means (coordination of regional development plans, know-how transfer, investments in the private sector, especially in the energy preservation field, etc.), the U.S.-sponsored SECI aims at promoting a long-term security and stability climate in South-Eastern Europe.¹¹ Interested in limiting the illicit trafficking of drugs, armaments, ammunitions, and strategic products through her territory, Romania has established a joint program with the U.S. within SECI, for assistance with border controls and the modernisation of border crossings. But even more significant was the setting up of the Centre for Counteracting Trans-border Crime in Bucharest. In early autumn 1999, a proper location was ascribed to it in Romanian Parliament's building, and one year later it became officially operational. The Centre is going to utilise the standard procedures and technical systems of OIPC-INTERPOL for searching, transmitting, retrieval and analysis of across the border criminality data. Another good example of a sub-regional security arrangement developed within an already existing sub-regional grouping is the South-Eastern European Defence Ministerial (SEDM), which sprang, as an autonomous sub-regional military arrangement, from the South-Eastern Europe Co-operation Process (SEECP). Throughout the war in Kosovo, Romania, as acting chair of the SEECP, as well as the chair of the SEEDM, took action for instituting an efficient and flexible system of monitoring and evaluating the evolution and the consequences of the refugee crisis upon the economic and social situation in the area. Moreover, together with partner-country members of the SEECP, Romania signed in Bucharest the Charter on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Co-operation. The signatory states are determined to turn South-Eastern Europe into a region free from violence and instability focusing on three main mechanisms of efficient long-term regional co-operation: enhancement of political and security co-operation, fostering economic co-operation and enlargement of co-operation in the fields of human dimension, democracy, justice and combating illegal activities, topics which are strongly related to the goals of the Stability Pact. Starting from the premise that only close co-operation with other beneficiary countries, facilitating countries, organisations and institutions can make the system envisaged by the Stability Pact work, in the margin of the same SEECP summit which adopted the SEECP Charter, the Prime Ministers of Romania and Bulgaria signed also in Bucharest a Joint Statement

on Security and Defence Co-operation.¹² Furthermore, with the new Yugoslav president's election and his participation at the SEECP summit in Skopje (October 2000), a new window of opportunity for fulfilling the SEECP security objectives has been opened up. Last but not least, one could refer to the agreements on fighting organised crime and on collaboration on emergency situations, respectively, reached under the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEC) aegis, a regional economic organisation which reunites eleven countries (Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) and which has been invited to contribute to the Stability Pact.

- Fifth, frameworks of co-operation which are not only comprehensive but also enjoy backing from major international organisations such as the Stability Pact have better chances to fulfil their security objectives. The purpose of the Pact of Stability for South-Eastern Europe (signed by all countries in the region, with the notable exception of the Republic of Yugoslavia, on June 10, 1999) is to secure peace and stability in the area through a systematic and coherent approach to the region encompassing a combination of political, economic, and security arrangements. It involves major organisations such as the EU, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the UN, NATO, the OECD, as well as a plethora of regional initiatives. As far as the security agenda is concerned, in Sarajevo, in one of the mechanisms related to the Stability Pact, Romania came with the proposal of drafting a Common Document on Security Risk Assessment. The proposal is connected to NATO's South-Eastern European Initiative, the global perspective on the security of the region being, thus, highlighted. Lately, with the dramatic political changes in Yugoslavia, and its joining of the Stability Pact, a prospective new start for this comprehensive initiative in the area of security is in the air.

Conclusions

To sum up, one could conclude that sub-regionalism is a relatively new phenomenon in the international relations pertaining to Central and South-Eastern Europe. Despite evolving in a late Cold War environment, it has started to bring to fruition its potential basically only in the post-Cold War era. Having as their foundations pragmatic, goal-oriented projects in a number of crucial fields, sub-regional frameworks of co-operation are challenging actual and virtual multiple fault lines. They have a complementary sig-

nificant security role to play and that should be largely recognised and encouraged by larger Euro-Atlantic institutions. However, their overlapping in terms of membership, domains of co-operation and projects has not only a positive side, but a negative one, too, which has to be properly addressed and dealt with in future.

Notes:

1. For reason of simplicity, some of the authors referring to the groupings based on these relations are labeling them regional not sub-regional structures. Still, here and subsequently we use the term sub-regional arrangements for better distinguishing these groupings from other organized on a continental level.
2. Adrian Pop, *At the Crossroads of Interlocking Subregional Arrangements: Romania's Pivotal Role in East Central Europe* (NDC Security Studies, Rome: NATO Defense College, Fall 1999), pp. 32-36; see also Alyson J. K. Bailes, "Sub-regional organizations: The Cinderellas of European security," in *NATO Review*, Vol. 45, No.2, March 1997, p. 27.
3. On the institutional level, this tendency is documented, inter alia, by the OSCE Lisbon summit-proposed "Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the Twenty First Century," and the OSCE Istanbul summit-agreed "European Security Charter."
4. In accordance with Greenfeld, resentment (resentment) is a particularly significant feature in the development of ethnic nationalism. See Liab Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 15-16.
5. Cf. Dr. Ercan Ozer, "The Black Sea Economic Cooperation and Regional Security," in *Perceptions*, Vol. 2, No. 3, September-November 1997, pp. 80-82. See also *Multi-Layered Integration: The Sub-Regional Dimension. Summary of an Inter-Governmental Conference*, Bucharest, 7-8 October 1996. Prepared by Andrew Cottey, Project Manager, European Security Programme, with support from other IEWS Staff and research assistance from Thomas Chojnecki, IEWS Warsaw Center, December 1996, pp. 16 and 32.
6. See "Action Plan of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council for 1998-2000," Brussels, 17 December 1997, in *NATO Review*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Spring 1998 (Documentation. Special Supplement, D 7).
7. See Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott's "Remarks at the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Ministerial," Lulea, Sweden, January 20, 1998 at http://www.state.gov/www/policy_remarks/1998/980120_talbott_barents.html.
8. Mark N. Katz, *Reflections on Revolutions* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 75-99.
9. Ian Bremmer & Alyson Bailes, "Sub-regionalism in the Newly Independent States," in *International Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 1, January 1998, pp. 132-133.
10. Adrian Pop, "Frameworks of Sub-regional Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe," in *Euro-Atlantic Studies* (Bucharest: The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, 1998), p. 106.
11. See SECI Activity Report at Error! Bookmark not defined..
12. See Address by State Secretary Mibai-Razvan Ungureanu at the International Seminar on "Romanian Security in the 21st Century – European and Euro-Atlantic Dimensions," Bucharest, 25 February 2000.

Resumé :

Adrian Pop: *Subregionálne zoskupenia ako garant bezpečnosti v strednej a juhovýchodnej Európe*

Subregionalizmus stelesňuje vzťahy štruktúrované okolo susediacich krajín ako základne tak pre medzištátnu, ako aj subštátnu úroveň spolupráce. Nie je to tak dávno, čo subregionálne rámce spolupráce boli považované, vďaka svojej orientácii prevažne na „mäkké“ bezpečnostné otázky a malú pozornosť, ktorá im bola venovaná na Západe, za „popolušky európskej bezpečnosti“. Tak ako samotný koncept bezpečnosti prechádza transformáciou, v posledných niekoľkých rokoch rastie aj politické a inštitucionálne uvedomovanie si hodnoty týchto zoskupení. Subregionálne usporiadania teda začali získavať svoje oprávnené miesto v rámci novo sa rozvíjajúcej, inštitucionálne jednotnej a komplementárnej celoeurópskej bezpečnostnej architektúry. V súčasnosti existuje množstvo kooperačných usporiadaní zahŕňajúcich krajiny strednej a juhovýchodnej Európy vrátane Visegrádskej skupiny, CEFTA, Stredoeurópskej iniciatívy (SEI), Európsko-kaukazsko-ázijského koridoru (TRACECA) alebo Iniciatívy spolupráce krajín juhovýchodnej Európy (SECI). Okrem toho existuje množstvo trojstranných usporiadaní, euroregiónov, ako aj množstvo multinacionálnych vojenských jednotiek.

Ich vlastnými limitmi je to, že:

- nie sú schopné poskytovať „tvrdé“ bezpečnostné garancie, a nie sú teda schopné nahradiť integráciu do kolektívnych obranných aliancií, akou je NATO;
- nemôžu dosiahnuť úplne integrovaný jednotný trh, tak ako v EÚ. Nie sú alternatívami pre európsky integračný proces;
- nemôžu prekonať handrkovanie sa o otázkach menších, národných, etnických, teritoriálnych alebo kultúrnych rozporov, zoskupení a konfliktov;
- veľké množstvo z nich je neformálnych a slabo inštitucionalizovaných;
- ich celková efektívnosť je často determinovaná menej rozvinutými členskými krajinami.

Naproti tomu sú ich aktíva oveľa významnejšie. Môžeme uviesť niektoré z nich. Už z dôvodu existencie a nastolovania „mäkkých“ a dokonca „explicitných“ bezpečnostných otázok prinášajú pozitívny vklad do európskej bezpečnosti. Ďalej je tu silné, aj keď nie jednoduché, prepojenie medzi subregionálnym procesom a integráciou. Majú takisto potvrdenú schopnosť správať sa ako most medzi viac-menej falošnými líniami vzťahujúcimi sa k religióznym, kultúrnym a politickým tradíciám a orientáciám, rovnako ako rozdielnym stupňom ekonomického rozvoja a vojenskej sily.

Dá sa predpokladať, že sú vhodné na znižovanie napätia medzi centrom a perifériou a pocitu relatívneho nedostatku. Pokrývajú všetky úrovne možnej spolupráce – nielen medzištátne, ale tiež medziregionálne a medziľudské.

Po uvedení týchto bodov je možné pridať prinajmenšom päť námietok:

Po prvé, nepochybne existuje rozdiel medzi členmi NATO/EÚ, ašpirantmi NATO/EÚ a „neutrálmi“, pokiaľ ide o ich záväzky k týmto zoskupeniam.

Po druhé, rozličné subregionálne usporiadania majú rozdielne dopady na bezpečnostné prostredie.

Po tretie, zoskupenia, predstavujúce primárne politické konzultačné mechanizmy, dosť často rozvíjali miernu bezpečnostnú dimenziu. V prípade Visegrádskej štvorky bola, po slubnom začiatku, bezpečnostná dimenzia držaná na nízkej úrovni z obavy, že by jej rozvoj mohol spomaliť zapojenie ich členov do euro-atlantickej integrácie.

Po štvrté, aj keď len priležitostne, prevažne ekonomicky a infraštruktúrne orientované zoskupenia rozvíjajú tradičnejšiu bezpečnostnú dimenziu. Dobrým príkladom je *Centrum pre boj s cezhraničným zločinom v Bukurešti*, ktorý sa autonómne rozvinul spočiatku v rámci *Iniciatívy pre spoluprácu juhovýchodnej Európy (SECD)*.

Po piate, rámce spolupráce, ktoré nie sú len úplné, ale takisto využívajú krytie od hlavných medzinárodných organizácií, ako napríklad Paktu stability, majú lepšie šance splniť svoje bezpečnostné ciele. Účelom Paktu stability pre juhovýchodnú Európu, podpísaného všetkými krajinami regiónu s výnimkou Juhoslávie 10. júna 1999, je zaistiť mier a stabilitu v tejto oblasti prostredníctvom systematického a premysleného prístupu k tomuto regiónu, ktorý stelesňuje kombináciu politických a bezpečnostných usporiadaní.

Na záver môžeme konštatovať, že subregionalizmus je relatívne nový fenomén v medzinárodných vzťahoch strednej a juhovýchodnej Európy. Bez ohľadu na to, že sa vyvíjal v prostredí konca studenej vojny, začal prinášať svoje ovocie až po jej ukončení. Keďže subregionálne rámce spolupráce majú svoj základ v pragmatických, cieľovo orientovaných projektoch, nastoluju veľa skutočných a virtuálnych problémov. Zohrávajú významnú doplnkovú bezpečnostnú úlohu, čo by mali euro-atlantické inštitúcie uznávať a podporovať.*

* *resumé: Daneš Brzica*