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PROCESS OF COOPERATION - THE EUROPEAN UNION AND WESTERN BALKANS

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Abstract: The most important achievement of cooperation between the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans is a viable and sustained political dialogue. The institutionalization of the dialogue with the European Union called for better communication between the countries in the region, candidate and potential candidate countries for membership of the disadvantaged in the process of integration. The processes of cooperation facilitated the development of the region through enhanced cross-border regional cooperation and contributed greatly to attracting international support by mediating between those who need help and those who are willing to provide help. Regional initiatives are addition to the European integration process and not a substitute for the inclusion of the Western Balkans into the European Union.

Key words: Cooperation, the European Union, the Western Balkans.

Introduction

After the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, were initiated restoration programs, which did not yield the expected results. The Western Balkan countries have been encouraged through specific strategies Stabilisation and Association process and the European support programs for regional, social, political, social, market and any other dealings, to only then fulfill the conditions for the gradual accession [Demetropoulou, 2002].

Process for South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECF)

It was not until the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995, and the establishment of peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, when conditions for renewed cooperation in the Western Balkans emerged. South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECF) was founded in 1996, on the initiative of the countries of the region to create security, stability and cooperation among the Balkan countries in the aftermath of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With the above process was similar attempts of regional cooperation such as the process of Royau-mont or Cooperation Initiative SECI for Southeast Europe, encouraged by the United States. Ultimate aim is to promote stability in Southeastern Europe, peace, stability, cooperation and democracy. It represented an innovative approach because on the one hand encouraging democratization by promoting dialogue among citizens and modernization of civil structures. Otherwise encouraged and influenced the spread of communication across national borders by creating a network of cooperation among non-governmental organizations. Cooperative Initiative (SECI) was launched by the U.S. in 1996., and was intended to establish better cooperation between countries in the region in terms of encouraging planning, and taking the necessary action to improve the conditions for the development and participation of the private sector in economic development.

The highest political forum process is the annual summit of Heads of State or Government of the participating countries and meetings of political directors which are organized when needed. During the period in 1998, up in 1999., meetings of foreign ministers of South-Eastern Europe were regularly held in Sofia, Thessaloniki, Istanbul and Bucharest. Certainly the most important meeting was in Thessaloniki because there was established platform on Balkan cooperation.

The process of co-operation in South East Europe is the oldest and the only authentic regional initiative in the Balkans, which is associated with processes running 70s of last century. Conference in this process are held to a very high political level of Heads of State or Government of the Balkan countries and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which was impossible before the creation process. This has opened up the possibility of improving the atmosphere in the region. Meetings are positively influenced the public opinion of participating countries. At major meetings and in the Charter of Cooperation envisages regional cooperation in the fields of politics, economy, culture, environment, and others [Lopandic, 2010].

The process of cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans can be divided into three phases based on the intensity and quality of regional cooperation:

Phase I - Initiating and institutional strengthening process (1996-2000),

This phase begins with the creation process of the Southeast European Cooperative in the meeting of foreign ministers in Sofia, 7 July in 1996. with the passage of the Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in the Balkans.

The first period was marked by regional cooperation through joint efforts to establish an institutional network and procedural framework, and the dominant issues were issues of peace, security, stability and political dialogue in the region.

Phase II - Regional Cooperation and Stability Pact (2000-2008),

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was officially adopted on 10 June in 1999. year. The objective of the Stability Pact was to promote democracy and economic cooperation in the region through the active participation of the European Union and other international actors.

Pact has placed emphasis on supporting regional efforts and regional cooperation initiative in South-east Europe. A number of regional networks established through coordination meetings, regional organizations and programs involved in the cooperation between Member States [Lopandic, 2007].

Phase III - the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Council (2008 - present).

Declaration of Sofia

Declaration of Sofia on good neighborly relations, stability, security and cooperation in the Balkans was adopted on 7 July in 1996. at a meeting of foreign ministers of South-East Europe. Achieved four important priorities for the future development of the region was the Declaration of Sophia:

- Regional cooperation: strengthening good neighborly relations and mutual trust;
- Economic growth: the development of economic cooperation by encouraging cross-border cooperation, improvement of transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructure and the general investment climate;
- Social and cultural development: promoting humanitarian cooperation and improvement of social and cultural communication between countries;
- Cooperation in legal affairs and the fight against crime: cooperation in justice, the fight against organized crime and illegal trafficking in weapons and drugs, as well as the fight against terrorism.

The declaration stressed the importance of promoting regional political dialogue and cooperation at all levels and in all matters of common interest [Declaration of Sofia, 1996 & Delevic, 2007].

She contributes to lasting good-neighborly relations between countries of the region based on universally recognized principles of inter-state relations are a prerequisite for the promotion of inclusive regional cooperation. In this sense, the Declaration of the Ministers expressed their determination to respect the ten principles: sovereign equality, respect for the rights enshrined in sovereignty, refraining from the threat of force, inviolability of borders, territorial integrity of states, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-

interference in internal affairs, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, equal rights and self-determination of the people, cooperation between states and obligations under international law.

The Declaration has contributed to strengthening stability and security in the region as it emphasizes the importance of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the need for its full implementation by the parties. They also said countries to contribute to the consolidation of the peace process in all its aspects. It was concluded that regional cooperation in the Balkans effectively contribute to the success of the peace implementation process.

The importance of rapid reconstruction and economic recovery, with equal respect for the interests and needs of all parties, which are of primary importance for lasting peace and stability in the region. Meeting in Sofia They praised the signing of the Regional Arms Control in Florence 14 June in 1996., which are assessed as a contribution to the implementation of the Dayton Agreement. They stressed that countries in the region have the potential to contribute to the success of economic reconstruction in the appropriate arrangements. The importance of rapid development of regional economic cooperation lies in achieving lasting stability in the region.

To promote the development of cross-border co-operation on a bilateral and multilateral basis within the relevant community programs, according to the Declaration include the development of a regional development program, with the EU and other international organizations and institutions. This program focuses on the implementation of projects for the improvement of border infrastructure, including road and rail communications with the border crossing, the opening of new border checkpoints, the promotion of cross-border trade and tourism, and environmental protection. The Declaration emphasized that regional cooperation in the Western Balkans should be developed at three different levels: the state, between regions and between people. It is recommended that a meeting of the coordinators assist participating countries in order to analyze the state of implementation of existing programs, identify priority projects for trans-regional dimension, identifying national contributions to various countries and developed new joint projects for funding by the European Union. Declaration of Sofia is given to the importance of regional cooperation by encouraging the development of transport infrastructure in the region, the idea of the establishment of the Balkan Agency for Traffic Safety, which will be based on the European policy of integration and harmonization of the protection of human rights and the promotion of freedom, of personal and professional contacts as essential elements for lasting stability and a climate of trust in the region. She highlighted the role of the mass media to overcome negative stereotypes of the past with the free flow of information and better mutual knowledge of cultural diversity.

Declaration of Sofia in the Western Balkans encourage closer cooperation in justice, the fight against organized crime, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking and terrorism. Participating countries agreed to develop a regional program that will provide for, among other things, access to the entire region, the relevant international conventions and their effective implementation, exchange of information on legislation of countries and changes occurring in them and to create modalities between the competent institutions for rapid response to requests for legal aid. It was agreed that the next meeting of Foreign Ministers of South East Europe in 1997. will be held in Greece.

Declaration of Thessaloniki

The Thessaloniki Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in the Balkans was adopted at the meeting of foreign ministers of South-East Europe, held in Thessaloniki 9 and 10 June in 1997. The Declaration placed emphasis on trust, democracy, the European orientation of the

region, the situation in Albania, the implementation of the Dayton Accords, regional cooperation, promoting trade and investment, the development of cross-border cooperation, transport, regional development of telecommunications and energy infrastructure, and cooperation in the field of justice and the fight against organized crime. Ministers, taking into account the importance of strengthening peace and stability in the region, recommended that regular meetings and exchange of views on the implementation of the agreement on confidence and security [Declaration of Thessaloniki, 1998].

Declaration of Thessaloniki has enabled the intensification of democratic processes and the development of civil society as an essential element of peace, stability and reconciliation in the region. European orientation states in the region is an integral part of their political, economic and social development. Ministers at a meeting in Thessaloniki expressed the view that the Western Balkan countries have taken an active part in shaping the future development, both in the region and Europe as a whole through a joint statement that European integration can not be complete without regional cooperation of all countries based on the same principles helped to establish and develop today's European Union.

The Declaration expressed support for the efforts of the Albanian political stability and achieve restoration of internal security and economic development. The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina has eliminated an important factor of instability in the region. It was determined that the area of trade and investment promotion, the countries of the Western Balkans necessary instrument for the transformation of the region into an attractive and competitive field of economic activity. To achieve this goal it was necessary to fulfill several requirements:

- Promotion of the free flow of goods, capital and services, taking into account bilateral and multilateral international obligations and commitments of each country;
- Establishing links between official agencies, banks, chambers of commerce and business;
- Removal of existing obstacles to investment and activities in each country, further liberalization of trade policy and its compliance with World Trade Organization standards and practices;
- Harmonization of legislation in line with the EU's own standards, with the support of the European Union;
- Develop measures to facilitate commercial exchanges, including measures to create the conditions necessary for the establishment and effective functioning of free trade, taking into account the obligations and agreements stemming from the EU, the WTO and other international organizations.

The importance of the meeting in Thessaloniki for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans is in closer cooperation on justice, the fight against organized crime and the removal of terrorism and the fight against drug trafficking, weapons and people. The declaration expressed condemnation of all acts, methods and practices of terrorism, regardless of their motivation, in all its forms and manifestations and stressed the need to take all necessary and effective measures to combat these forms of crime in accordance with the relevant provisions of international law and international human rights standards.

Declaration of Istanbul

The Declaration of Istanbul, which was adopted on 9 June in 1998. at the final meeting of foreign ministers of South-Eastern Europe, confirmed the European orientation of the region. The disappearance of the ideological, economic and military division of Europe has created opportunities for the development of cooperation and support to the goals of security and stability. Ministers have determined that the political will is manifested at the highest levels and increasingly turning into action. Contacts and co-operation, which was carried out multilaterally and bilaterally, led to the decision and coordination of efforts to improve the conditions of stability and security because of the favorable political environment largely contrib-

utes to the elimination of obstacles to cooperation and conflict.

In Istanbul, once again emphasized his belief that Europe can not be complete without their countries and their people representing a social and historical tradition and are essential for a modern European identity. Participating NATO member countries at a meeting once again provided solid support to NATO enlargement process in Southeast Europe. The declaration gave encouragement for trade liberalization through bilateral agreements and other means compatible with international obligations, promote cross-border cooperation, especially cooperation in the implementation of major infrastructure projects, including the rapid construction of ten Pan-European corridors in the areas of transport, telecommunications and energy, which are of primary importance for the economic development and integration.

Ministers at the meeting expressed the belief that the continuation of the practice of regular meetings of the relevant ministries and agencies at different levels, aid more effective regional cooperation and provide intensifying efforts to promote further cooperation in all fields. A variety of ideas, projects and initiatives that have been proposed in previous meetings were an expression of the political will of the governments of the region of South East Europe regional cooperation.

Treaty of Bucharest

The Charter of Bucharest, which was adopted on 7 July in 1996. , the emphasis is to work together to create the conditions for prosperity, peace, security, good neighborly relations and stability in the region. Connecting South East Europe region free of violence and instability, and building security, prosperity and democratic civil society have been the basic objective of the Charter. The principles of regional cooperation contained in the Charter are:

- strengthening good-neighborly relations among all countries in the region, the transformation of the region in the area of peace, security, stability and cooperation;
- future of peace, democracy, economic prosperity and full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, and, to this end, it is recommended to democratic and economic reforms;
- responsibility of working closely with the international community in the development and implementation of a common strategy for stability and growth in the region;
- ability to respond to new security challenges and elimination of their roots, as well as strengthening international solidarity, including participation in conflict prevention, crisis management activities, peace support operations undertaken by the international community, especially the UN, NATO, OSCE and other Euro-Atlantic institutions;
- Charter is supported NATO's determination to actively contribute to the development of safer and more cooperative relations among the countries of the region; [Declaration of Thessaloniki, 1998]
- political cooperation, which includes issues of security and stability, economic development and environmental cooperation, promotion of humanitarian, social and cultural cooperation, cooperation in the field of justice, the fight against organized crime, terrorism, elimination of narcotics, weapons and human trafficking;
- cooperation between the countries of the region based on the principles of full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the region, the OSCE's principles and relevant documents of the Council of Europe, and particularly the Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Objectives and mechanisms of regional cooperation in the Charter of Bucharest were focused on creating a peaceful and good neighborly relations in the region through reconciliation, recognition of the inviolability of the existing international borders and peaceful resolution of disputes under international law.

The main forms of cooperation in political and security areas as defined meeting in Bucharest were related to the promotion of intensive political dialogue through regular meetings of heads of state and government, foreign ministers and political directors of the participating countries, as well as sectoral intergovernmental meetings on topics of mutual interest, promotion of inter-parliamentary dialogue, direct contacts between representatives of civil society, NGOs, cultural and scientific personalities; enhanced regional cooperation in the field of security, including the ministers of defense of South East Europe as a tool for building confidence and security in the region.

Chief agreed instruments, mechanisms and joint programs of regional cooperation are as follows: trade and investment promotion, including the removal of existing barriers, free flow of goods, capital and trade, facilitated business contacts; harmonization of legislation with EU standards, further liberalization and harmonization of trade and transport policies; the conclusion of agreements on trade liberalization and support for the establishment and effective functioning of free trade instruments.

Achieved mechanisms and programs of cooperation between the Charter include improved cross-border cooperation in order to promote business cooperation, enterprise development, financial cooperation and collaboration among institutions, representing the business sector, technology transfer and marketing for small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperation in tourism and health especially the sharing of resources and facilities to cross-border basis, promoting and facilitating information and communication flows between the border regions, including the media [Lopandic, 2007].

In Bucharest, established priorities necessary to promote comprehensive programs for the development of an integrated system of transport infrastructure that will contribute to regional cooperation: including projects for road, rail, air, sea and river transport, construction and development of bridges and cross-border infrastructure, transport system linking South-Eastern Europe Central and Western Europe and to develop appropriate pan-European corridors, rehabilitation and development of the Danube, the development of a regional network of oil and gas pipelines, high-voltage electrical connection lines in the western region of the system, further modernization of the telecommunications system, cooperation in all aspects of the tourism industry and the development of new financial instruments [Treaty of Bucharest, 2000].

After this meeting, conferences were held in Macedonia (2000), Albania (2001), Serbia (2002), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2003), Romania (2004), Greece (2005), Croatia (2006), Bulgaria (2007), Moldova (2008), Turkey (2009), Montenegro (2011), Serbia (2011-2012) and the next country to chair of the South Europe, Macedonia (2012-2013).

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, Joschka Fischer has launched, and the Council of Ministers of the European Union supported the post-conflict initiative of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, which had to be overcome to enable the ongoing instability and occasional conflicts in the Balkans. It is also important that the Council of Ministers of the European Union in the framework of this initiative emphasized the perspective of full integration of these countries into the EU structures, with a view to membership. The founding document was signed by more than 40 countries (the European Union and the world) it is stated that the pact established with the aim to assist countries in this part of Europe in their efforts to strengthen peace, democracy, human rights and economic development, in order to ensure stability.

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SPSEE)

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SPSEE) was promoted by the European Union 10 June in 1999. in Cologne with the intention that through specific regional initiatives and forums encourage cooperation in the volatile Balkans and pave the way for integration in the European Union.

Pact Summit was held in Sarajevo on 30 July in 1999. under the leadership of the Special Coordinator Erhard Busek, whose team of about 30 staff located in Brussels. The aim of the Covenant was the support of the European Union, the countries of Southeastern Europe in evolving peace, democracy, human rights and economic prosperity in order to achieve stability in the whole region. Regional cooperation is enhanced by the action of the Stability Pact. Cooperation related to preventing and ending the crisis as a precondition for lasting stability through the use of multilateral and bilateral agreements and the implementation of the democratic political process based on free and fair elections, the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms. From the end of 2002. , the Stability Pact focused on several key objectives: preventing crises as a precondition for lasting stability; run the democratic political process, based on free elections, rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the right of national minorities, the right to free and independent media; responsibility legislative and judicial branches citizens; fighting corruption and strengthening civil society.

The main policy instrument of the Stability Pact's Regional Table was that gathered representatives in most countries of the region and the other Member States of the Covenant and the international organizations. Action Pact took place through the activities of three desks which ensures the coordination of activities in progress in the stabilization of the region, promotion of political dialogue and regional cooperation. Working Table I - democracy and human rights are dealt with issues of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, free and independent media, civil society building, and the rule of law, institution building, efficient administration, common rules on border issues, refugee issues and the return of refugees and IDPs.

Working Table II - Economic Reconstruction, Co-operation and Development, has allowed a stronger economic cooperation in the region, progress in sustainable economic development, trade and investment, social cohesion, modernization of energy and transport infrastructure, and through the process of trade liberalization. The largest contribution to the success of this table is to sign several important agreements: the Central European Free Trade Agreement CEFTA to 2006., The Energy Community Treaty between the countries of South Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans and Transport Network in South East Europe.

Working Table III - security issues (security and defense, legal affairs and internal affairs) dealt with issues of justice and home affairs, migration issues, the fight against organized crime, corruption and terrorism. It has made regular information and led to measures that led to the building of confidence and stability in the region.

In order to help regional cooperation Stability Pact has enabled the creation of several important regional initiatives: the Regional Center for Combating Transborder Crime (SECI), the Initiative for Combating Organized Crime (SPOC), Regional Centre for Combating Corruption (eSEEurope), the Regional verification of arms control (RACVIAC) Transport Network for Southeast Europe (SEETO) and others.

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe from the beginning was meant to be temporary. Its abolition was accompanied by a parallel creation of other regional initiatives, the Regional Cooperation Council. Pact existed for ten years and its duration can be divided into three phases:

- (1999-2001) period of construction,
- (2002-2005) period of re-adaptation and extension of the Covenant,
- (2006-2008) period of the preparation for the abolition of the Covenant in order to build a new regional initiative of the RCC.

Regional Cooperation Council

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Initiative inherited Regional Cooperation Council (Regional Cooperation Council - RCC). Launched in Sofia, 27 February 2008. with a focus on promoting and enhancing regional cooperation in South East Europe, as well as support for the European integration of the region. The Council's duties are to monitor regional activities, led by the Regional Cooperation, provides financial and technical assistance and coordinates development projects of a wider, regional character. Regional Cooperation Council comprises 46 countries, international organizations and financial institutions. Council has a secretariat based in Sarajevo, headed by the Secretary General.

The RCC has goals, methods and priority areas defined by the Constitution and other laws adopted at the annual meetings. The Council has a key role in supporting economic and social development and promote the European integration of the region in which regional cooperation is crucial for the integration. Linking the region with donor countries in the areas of the regional dimension is another important aspect of his work. The strategy of the Council for the period 2011-2013. defines a continuous activity.

Council has enabled the region connection and operation of the regional transportation system that are necessary in ensuring sustainable and competitive mobility in Southeast Europe, in order to achieve the smooth functioning of international transport and trade. The main structures of regional cooperation covered markets, policies and infrastructure in this area and promote regional integration and the European Union, as well as the legal, institutional and regulatory reforms, creating a solid foundation for compliance with the requirements of the Union.

Structures established regional cooperation include energy community, the European Common Aviation Area and Regional Environmental Network for Accession. In the area of transport, the current priority is signing and entry into force of the Treaty establishing a Transport Community, as well as the effectiveness and application of the ECAA (European Common Aviation Area) Agreement on Common Aviation Area. The possible contribution in this area includes air services and traffic safety. In the area of environment, setting up of the Regional Environmental Network for Accession (RENA). Through its wide range of activities, it will cover most of the area of interest to the region (Pinder, 2003).

Shall draw up its efforts in the period 2011-2013. focus on the following actions:

- Continue the implementation of regional initiatives for sustainable energy development (SEDRI) jointly launched with the Central European Initiative (CEI). The initiative aims to encourage sustainable construction of small power plants among interested countries from South East Europe and improve the legal, institutional and regulatory framework that will be suitable for the development of sustainable regional energy sector.
- Regional priorities in the area of justice and home affairs is the fight against organized crime, particularly against economic and financial crime, drug smuggling and human trafficking. Attention will be focused on the regional dimension of the fight against terrorism and combating the financing of terrorism. Existing initiatives, such as (SECI Selected participants Prague Initiative strategic airlift (PCC Prague Capability Commitment), and the Association of Southeast Europe Police Chiefs SEPCA (Southeast Europe Police Chiefs Association), play a crucial role in addressing these issues. Transformation SECI (Southeast European Center for Sombating Trans-border Crime) was founded in 1999. was to combat cross-border crime originated SELEC (Southeast European Law Enforcement Center) law enforcement agencies in Southeast Europe through improved regional cooperation in investigation and court proceedings against transnational organized crime, terrorism and human trafficking.

Bearing in mind that there are no regional structure in judicial cooperation, improvement can be achieved through the exchange of judges and the judicial creation of a regional network. The Council has a supporting role in strengthening and streamlining of judicial and prosecutorial cooperation, strengthening the links between the police, prosecution and judiciary. In the fight against corruption, regional priority is to promote the exchange of best practices within existing initiatives. Corruption must be solved simultaneously, from both perspectives, regional and national. In the field of migration, [Minic & Kronja, 2007] MARRI (Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative) is a regional initiative of the Migration, Asylum and Refugees aimed at building capacity to help Member States in assessing the circumstances in the countries and regions of origin for potential asylum seekers and refugees.

The changed situation in South East Europe and the progress of all the countries of the Western Balkans on the road to the European Union have imposed a need to change the concept of co-operation towards more active role and greater responsibility from the countries themselves. Was the fact that in the new phase of regional cooperation between the countries of the region should take the initiative and responsibility for their individual and collective future. International donors have expressed their willingness to continue to engage in the region, but with the assumption of a more active relations between countries of the region when it comes to programming, personnel, financial and other aspects of regional cooperation [Pinder, 2003].

The key role of the Council is to promote and coordinate development projects that will accelerate reforms in the countries of the region and its integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, as well as the creation and support of the political environment in the region and the wider international community to make it happen. The objectives of the Council are to contribute to strengthening stability and dialogue in the region operatively linked to the interests of the region and the EU through the development projects in the multi-beneficiary IPA; coordinate international political, technical and financial support; as a regional forum for dialogue among different countries and international organizations and other partners [Minic & Kronja, 2007] [Mintas, 2004].

Council achieves these goals in several ways: coordinates and provides coherence and continuity of activities and participants in regional cooperation, enabling easier access to political, financial and technical assistance and taking care to avoid duplication and overlap of activities, promote collaboration, technical assistance, networking in order to achieve concrete results, maintain various forms and directions of communication and promotion of the Council, prepares drafts of various documents, guidelines, protocols, cooperation, and others., monitor the situation and identify priority needs of the region, regional initiatives, international organizations and donors [Minic & Kronja, 2007].

The European Commission sees the Council as its main interlocutor and partner for regional cooperation in South East Europe. The basic document governing the rules of functioning of the Statute of the RCC. Statute defines the tasks of the Council, the priority areas of cooperation, the format of the meetings, the structure of the Council and its relationship with the individual working groups and initiatives. From June 2010., there are twelve participating countries of the South Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Turkey, Slovenia and Montenegro, UNMIK on behalf of Kosovo in accordance with UNSCR 1244, the European Union represented by the Troika (Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat) and the European Parliament and a number of countries and institutions that are actively supporting regional cooperation in South East Europe).

The Council's duties include: development of regional cooperation, the political orientation of the working groups and initiatives, improving the region's integration into European and Euro-Atlantic struc-

tures, directing the work of the Secretariat and the Secretary-General and the continued involvement of a large number of countries and international organizations in the region. Priorities for regional cooperation are economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and home affairs, cooperation in the field of security, the development of human resources and parliamentary cooperation.

CONCLUSION

Summing up the results of research on the processes of cooperation between the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans as part of the process of integration into the EU is clearly shown that the approach initiated by the Union in 1996, at a time when the term “Western Balkans” did not exist, was intended to connect the Balkan countries through a strong network of relationships, in order to stabilize and achieve peace in the region. A solid cooperation in the region is imperative to further integration into the European structures, which consequently affects the equalization of economic growth and development, establishment and strengthening of political and social ties and relations between the regions in the European Union.

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