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POTENTIAL AND LIMITS OF THE PACT OF STABILITY FOR SOUTH EAST EUROPE: PRIORITISING OBJECTIVES

Introduction

The Pact of Stability for South East Europe was “born” after the end of the Kosovo crisis in 1999 as a **concept** of dealing radically with the Balkan instabilities, but also as a geopolitical **compromise** of the great power centres, involved in the treatment of the post-Yugoslav conflicts. The **ripeness** of launching this concept and policy had several dimensions:

Most of the countries from South East Europe, especially those in transition to democracy and market economy, had a definite strategy of integrating in both the European Union and in NATO;

A certain level of regional cooperation had already been reached in the years that preceded the Kosovo crisis in 1999;

Influential external powers had already realised that the Balkans need to be treated in the long-term only in a benign way to overcome historical deficiencies and belated modernisation of the economy, society, politics, technology and infrastructure;

The disgusting consequences of four post-Yugoslav wars – a development that did not happen to two other former federal structures in Central and Eastern Europe (the Czechoslovak and the Soviet) necessitated a comprehensive and encompassing approach to deal with the plethora of issues in the Balkans, and the EU gradually evolved to the understanding that an additional strategic instrument needs to be launched to cope with the risks and instabilities in the region of South

East Europe on the way of its own expansion and of turning the Balkan Peninsula into an integral part of the Union¹.

The launchers of the Stability Pact for South East Europe viewed it, according to Nicholas Whyte, as “*a temporary expedient, awaiting the maturing of events, in particular the passing of the Tadjman and Milosevic regimes, and thence the confirmation of EU integration perspectives for the whole of the region. It was ambiguously conceived from the beginning, however, as to what its real role might be, and has had insufficient substance in practice to become credible.*”² With time and in the process of implementing the provisions of the Pact, however, two fundamental roles proved themselves:

First, to stitch together the web of regional cooperation without which the Stability and Association process will fail, and,

Second, to help ensure the wider international effort actively supports the integration of South East Europe in the Euro-Atlantic structures.

In order to understand better the potential and limits of the Pact of Stability and, on this basis, to draw the priority objectives, however, we need to know what is the regulative nature of this international act and to further explain the catalytic role it plays in the region of South East Europe.

¹ Chris Patten, A European Vision for the Balkans, *NATO review*, Summer/Autumn 2000, p. 14; Plamen Pantev, The Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, in Anne Aldis (Ed), “Security in the Black Sea Region: Perspectives & Priorities”, CSRC/RMA Sandhurst, G93, March 2001, p. 28-33; Plamen Pantev, Security Risks and Instabilities in Southeastern Europe, in Wim van Meurs (ed.), “Beyond EU Enlargement”, Volume 2: The Agenda of Stabilisation for Southeastern Europe, Bertelsman Foundation Publishers, Gütersloh 2001, p. 118-138.

² Nicholas Whyte, *Europa South-East Monitor*, CEPS, Issue 23, May 2001, p. 1.

The Pact of Stability for South East Europe As a Component of a Complex Regional Regime

The drafting and adoption of the Stability Pact marked the turning point in the process of developing the Southeast European security community regional regime³. The increased number and quality of contacts among the Balkan states have led to such a level of cooperation that the eruption of an armed conflict between the countries of South East Europe is almost a theoretic possibility. Stephen Krasner writes that “*regimes can be defined as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations*”⁴.

The meaning of regimes is to make international cooperation rational. The Pact of Stability introduced a significant logical contribution to the existing bilateral, multilateral and regional agreements in the Balkans and in the relations of external national and institutional powers with the countries from the region. The rationalisation by the Stability Pact is in terms of describing the situation in a document with more than forty participants – states and international organisations, in terms of principles and norms that will drive the relations of the various players in and about the Balkans, in terms of a common objective, of a mechanism of the Pact, of defined roles of cooperation among participants.

The major contribution of this new element of the evolving regional security community regime is that it engages major external to the Balkans powers with long-term behaviour towards stabilising the regional security situation – both hard-security stabilisation and soft-security stabilisation, and towards integrating in a differentiated way the countries of South East Europe in the EU and in NATO. The Pact of Stability itself overlaps with other similar regional regimes at the

³ Plamen Pantev, Building a Security Community in the Balkans: The Negotiations’ Agenda, Romanian Journal of International Affairs, Volume IV, Special Issue Three, 1998, p. 240-259.

⁴ Stephen Krasner, Structural Causes and Regime Consequences, International Organization, Vol. XXXVI, Spring 1982, p. 186.

borderlands of the EU – at the Barents and Baltic Seas, the Arctic, the Northern Dimension, the Mediterranean, Central European Initiative, etc. The periphery of the Union is now covered by regional regimes that include EU member states, applicants and non-candidates. Each of these sub-sets of regional activities critically involves conflict resolution and conflict prevention. The Pact of Stability for South East Europe is no exception.

Further on we shall try to deal in more detail with the “role” and “objectives” aspects of the developing security regime in the Balkans with the support of the Stability Pact.

Catalytic Role of the Pact of Stability: What are the objectives?

Almost three years after the launch of the Pact of Stability one may say that the objectives of the document and the roles of the participants provided by it continue to be valid and applicable. What actually remains contentious is the general conception of the role the Pact itself plays amongst the multitude of documents, forums, initiatives, programmes and actors. Another contentious issue is how to structure the priority and the timing of the objectives to be reached through the Pact of Stability. Both of these issues serve the practical definition of the real potential and limits of the Pact.

What are the purposes of the catalytic role of the Pact of Stability?

First, and most of all, it has to develop habits and patterns of cooperation by bringing countries and institutions together. There still persist cases of countries in the Balkans that may not otherwise be in contact. For the rest it is an opportunity to confirm already registered positive results.

Second, the Stability Pact has the mission to build coalitions of donors around certain ideas and projects. Maintaining the necessary level of donor support and focusing it on the critical issues in South East Europe until these problems fade away is the core task of this mission.

Third, the Pact of Stability continues to facilitate the work of the countries, implementing the reforms they have promised and for which they have asked support.

Fourth, the Pact of Stability is a catalyst of the gradual shift of the leadership role of the initiative from external influential and powerful factors to local actors. This would require an even higher regional cooperation, especially on issues of common concern. The catalytic function of the Pact is to raise the self-confidence of the South East European countries and improve their capacity to formulate and implement their own common priorities. Psychologically, that would mean a different point of view to the Pact by the countries of South East Europe – as an initiative that is ‘owned’ by the region itself. Of course, this new ‘regional ownership’ of the Pact of Stability for South East Europe would require a clearer priority of the objectives it is after, both in more general settings and in greater details. The purposes of this paper are to outline the more general objectives the Pact is in capacity to lead to.

First, the Pact of Stability for South East Europe aims at nearing the time and conditions for integrating the Balkans into the European Union. The objective that is stated in the Pact itself is more modest and general: *“creating the conditions, for countries of South East Europe, for full integration into political, economic and security structures of their choice”*⁵. The attainment of a free and peaceful Europe will be quite impossible without bringing the Balkans in the European Union, of course, by following standards and procedures that will guarantee reaching this goal. The region of South East Europe proved it is moving in a way to the membership in the Union differentiated from country to country. The incremental evolution of the concept, the policy and agreement to stabilise South East Europe has already led to turning the Pact of Stability for South East Europe into an indispensable “docking module” to the EU for some of the countries, mainly from the Western Balkans, and into a vital format of interacting with the neighbouring

⁵ Pact of Stability for South East Europe, III/10.

countries in a “European” manner that accelerates other local countries’ integration in the Union.

Second, the Pact of Stability additionally focused the policy and strategic approaches of the EU to South East Europe. In terms of the longer-term tendency of the expansion of the EU and the simultaneous adaptation to it of the different countries from the region by acceding in a differentiated way, the Pact of Stability has the unique capability of combining the so called “top-down” with the “bottom-up” approaches and initiatives of settling the conflict issues and modernising the Balkans. On one side, it bears the potential to avoid the duplication of efforts of the various “top-down” initiatives. On the other side, it can get closer to the locally born initiatives, mainly the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), and provide a practical solution to the question of the regional ownership and leadership of the constructive and peaceful processes in the Balkans.

In April 2002 the SEECP marked a significant step to further interaction and coordination with the Pact of Stability for South East Europe at the summit meeting in Tirana. Strong and influential voices from the region insisted on closer ties between the two formats. A more difficult issue is how to reach higher synergy between the Pact and the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA). Which one of the two EU strategic tools should take precedence and become the focus of the attention? Should the SAA be the individual countries’ mechanism of reaching the standards of starting accession negotiations, and the Pact of Stability – a separate one? Maybe it would be possible for the Pact of Stability to adopt 2-3 year-long programmes, whose implementation could be sanctioned by the EU and the individual countries as obligatory elements of the SAAs for the respective periods. In other words, the bilateral and multilateral strategic EU instruments should start more closely to “inter-lock” with each other.

Third, the Pact of Stability for South East Europe aims at hastening the day that peace is self-sustained in the Balkans and the international peacekeepers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia could leave the region. If carried out successfully, the Pact of Stability could

help NATO withdraw its forces and concentrate its efforts on other significant issues. This is carried out through conflict prevention activities, by raising the level of confidence and trust, by creating new patterns of cooperation. This is already practically achieved by programmes of reintegrating military officers affected by the cuts of the national armed forces. The Pact of Stability has also undertaken measures in supporting the Security Sector Reform in the individual countries, for example in combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Upon the suggestion of the SEEGROUP, the Pact of Stability has supported a comparative study of the national security strategies in South East Europe. The author of this paper is happy to note that this idea was also presented by him in a paper at the Halki Seminar in 1994 and at other occasions since then. The projects on Transparency in Military Budgeting and Planning and on Disaster Preparedness and Prevention are other highlights of the Stability Pact's efforts in this direction.

Finally, fourth, the Pact of Stability should contribute to ensure the region of South East Europe does not become a safe haven for global terrorism. All priorities of the Pact: trade, investment, infrastructure, energy, refugee returns, fighting organised crime, reducing levels of small arms and light weapons, improved relationships of Kosovo with its immediate neighbours on concrete practical issues as well as contributing to the professionalisation and enhanced training of key members of the judiciary have a direct positive impact on the fight against terrorism. The expected results of these activities are strengthening the states of the region, of their key institutions, of demotivating the broader societies from extremist activities – in other words, preventing the region from becoming a 'black hole' that could easily be used by terrorists for their plans.

Conclusions

The Pact of Stability is NOT an encompassing strategy of region-building and integration in the EU and in NATO. Nevertheless, the Pact of Stability has catalytic roles and far-reaching general objectives that substantially facilitate the integration of the region in the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. The Pact has the unique multilateral focus on the security sector reform of the individual countries from South East Europe, the unique institutionalised engagement of donors, the established mechanism of the three working tables and the far-sighted insistence on regional ownership of the initiatives that drive the positive changes of South East Europe. While knowing better where the limits of the Pact of Stability for South East Europe are, its potential should and can be exploited in the best possible way.

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