

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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

“Security Perceptions and Their Impact on Regional Cooperation in South East Europe”

48th RSSEE SG Workshop
15 – 18 May 2025
Reichenau/Rax, Austria

PfP Consortium of Defense
Academies and Security
Studies Institutes



Executive Summary of Recommendations

- **Regional Cooperation Council (RCC):** Supporting the construction of a multilateral security coordination hub involving all Western Balkan (WB) countries.
- **OSCE/RACVIAC:** Facilitating a dialogue in support of a possible adaptation of the Article IV Agreement on Sub-Regional Arms Control.
- **EU Commission/OSCE:** Creating forums for regional parliamentarians, civil society and youth to engage in regional peacebuilding.
- **EU/NATO:** Integrating the goals of the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (“Youth, Peace and Security”) into the security agenda for SEE.
- **EU/NATO:** Exploiting fully the mandates of EUFOR and KFOR when politically and security-wise indispensable.
- **EU countries/NATO countries:** Increasing the resilience of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo by expanding the bilateral security cooperation.
- **NATO:** Institutionalizing a WB Hybrid Resilience Task Force.
- **NATO:** Negotiating a political formula that would let Kosovo join the “Partnership for Peace” (PfP).
- **EU Commission:** Defining red lines and end state parameters for a comprehensive Kosovo-Serbia settlement.
- **EU Commission:** Addressing the political crisis in Serbia by supporting the conduct of free and fair parliamentary elections as well as by ending the policy of appeasement towards authoritarian practices.
- **Kosovo government:** Institutionalizing crisis communication channels with KFOR and Serbia.

Situation Analysis

For the region of SEE, in particular the WB, to move toward lasting stability and European integration, a robust, cooperative security framework is essential. There are common interests in many transnational security areas such as fighting organized crime, irregular migration and demographic challenges. Nevertheless, by mid-2025, we can only speak of a partially functioning system of cooperative security in SEE. This is due to differing security perceptions of neighboring countries,

which are exacerbated by increasing geopolitical antagonisms.

It is much easier for **Albania, Croatia, North Macedonia** and **Montenegro** to cooperate with each other on security policy within the framework of their NATO membership than it is for the non-NATO members **BiH, Kosovo** and **Serbia**. Bilateral tensions among NATO members in the WB are the exception. Those in the case of Croatia and Montene-



UNSER HEER

gro can be traced back to the growing political influence of Belgrade and Serbian nationalist parties on and within Montenegro. North Macedonia's further EU path is challenged by unresolved identity issues, which have been raised by neighboring NATO member Bulgaria.

The central challenges for and to regional security in the WB remain exceptional, however. Without consolidation of BiH as a functioning multi-ethnic state (with constructive relations between Croatia, Serbia and BiH) and normalization of the conflict-prone relations between Belgrade and Pristina, a state of cooperative security in the region cannot be fully established. The internal polarization between authoritarian and democratic currents in Serbia, an important WB actor, also blocks such a positive process.

In view of the ongoing regional risks, the continued presence of the peace support missions **EUFOR Althea** in BiH and **Kosovo Force** (KFOR) with a robust mandate remains necessary. Those mandates must not be diluted under any circumstances, as further separatist measures by the current political leadership of the BiH entity Republika Srpska can be assumed. In Kosovo, the security situation is particularly tense in the mainly Serbian inhabited north, where the Kosovar government is trying to assert state sovereignty with little political consideration for the local population. The latter was previously mainly under the political control of Belgrade and had no opportunities for autonomous political decisionmaking.



Regardless of existing conflicts, international organizations and regional initiatives are making substantial contributions to regional security cooperation in SEE. In addition to its responsibility for the KFOR mission, **NATO** supports security reforms in BiH and military cooperation with neighboring countries through its NATO Headquarters in Sarajevo. The NATO Liaison Office in Belgrade plays an important role in Serbia's participation in the PfP program. The **EU**, in turn, is in command of the EUFOR mission and continues to assist rule of law reforms in Kosovo through the EULEX mission. In many areas, the goals and measures

of international organizations to boost security cooperation in SEE overlap. In particular, there is a high degree of complementarity between the activities of the EU and the **OSCE** when it comes to supporting law enforcement agencies, democratic grassroots initiatives and the fight against transnational crime.

Regional platforms such as the **RCC**, based in Sarajevo, or the Center for Security Cooperation **RACVIAC** near Zagreb make a major contribution to advancing security cooperation through concrete projects. However, their important contributions to confidence-building in security policy are often not visible enough due to political antagonisms. Issues such as regional arms control dealt with by RACVIAC could, however, become more important again in the near future, as modern weapons such as drones are also being acquired in SEE, which were not yet addressed in the sub-regional arms control agreements resulting from the Dayton Peace Agreement from 1995. However, human security issues must not be neglected in the WB's only semi-consolidated societies either. In this context, regional experts particularly emphasize the **role of youth**, which is also at the heart of UN Resolution 2250 (Youth, Peace and Security).

Policy Recommendations

With Reference to the Entire Region

- **To SEE governments:** Resolve bilateral matters in a constructive and timely fashion and refrain from inappropriate interference in internal matters of neighboring countries, thus creating a supportive environment for EU-integration processes.
- **To EU Commission:** Bilateral issues between candidate countries and EU member states should be removed from the EU enlargement framework, especially when these disputes fall outside the scope of EU law and accession criteria. Instead, such issues should be addressed through international legal mechanisms. For example, territorial disputes could be resolved through international arbitration or the International Court of Justice. Disputes concerning minority rights should be addressed by the European Court of Human Rights or other appropriate international bodies.
- **To RCC:** Support the construction of a multilateral security coordination hub involving all Western Balkan countries. This center would facilitate real-time intelligence sharing, joint training exercises, and rapid response coordination to regional threats such as organized crime, terrorism, and cyberattacks. It would also help align national security strategies with EU and NATO standards.
- **To SEE governments:** In order to better leverage your membership in regional security initiatives take a more proactive

role in shaping the agendas and priorities of these organizations. Additionally, enhance intergovernmental cooperation and coordination to guide the strategic direction of these initiatives and improve national-level participation.

- **To OSCE and RACVIAC:** Against the backdrop of the introduction of modern weapon systems in SEE, facilitate a dialogue of the parties to the Article IV Agreement on Sub-Regional Arms Control, based in Annex 1-B of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH, in support of a possible adaptation of this Agreement.
- **To EU Commission and OSCE:** Enter into a structured co-operation that includes regular consultations and coordination, reinforcing each institution's added value. Such a structured co-operation should encompass a financial portfolio to support OSCE efforts in supporting the authorities in the region to meet OSCE commitments, often complementary to the values and the *acquis* of the EU.
- **To EU Commission and OSCE:** Promote political dialogue and confidence-building measures by creating forums for regional parliamentarians, civil society, and youth to engage in regional peacebuilding.
- **To EU and NATO:** Integrate the goals of the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 ("Youth, Peace and Security") into your security agenda for SEE by including youth representatives in all aspects of regional peace processes.
- **To NATO:** Institutionalize a Western Balkans Hybrid Resilience Task Force to counter cyber and disinformation threats. Host an annual tabletop exercise focusing on joint cyber incident response and strategic communications coordination among KFOR, allied cyber teams and Balkan countries teams.

With Reference to Peace Support Missions

- **To EU and NATO:** Strengthen your cooperation under the Berlin Plus Agreement, in support of an effective and full implementation of the EUFOR mandate in accordance with Annex 1-A of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Troop contributing nations should abstain from determining caveats, which limit the operational utilization of assets provided to EUFOR and KFOR.
- **To EU and NATO:** EUFOR and KFOR should be encouraged to exploit their mandates fully when politically and security wise indispensable.
- **To NATO:** Maintain the current force strength (> 4,000 troops) and over the horizon reserve able to surge quickly during possible crises such as the May 2023 Zvečan/Zvečan riots, or September 2023 Banjska terrorist attack.

With Reference to Albania

- **To the Albanian government:** For the purpose of a constructive regional approach, a paternalistic policy towards Kosovo should be avoided.



With Reference to BiH

- **To the BiH institutions and the High Representative:** Ensure the functional system of rule of law in BiH, capable of enforcing the verdicts of the courts, regardless of unprincipled threats of political instability.

With Reference to BiH and Kosovo

- **To EU and NATO countries:** In order to increase the resilience of BiH and Kosovo, which are blocked internally and/or externally with regard to their NATO accession aspirations, bilateral security cooperation in the areas of training and the establishment of sophisticated security and defense systems should be expanded.

With Reference to Kosovo

- **To NATO:** Negotiate a formula that would let Kosovo join the "Partnership for Peace", similarly with the one that enabled Kosovo to sign the "Stabilization and Association Agreement" with the EU.
- **To EU:** Agree on a single political narrative on Kosovo's EU future. The position of the five non-recognizing members on Kosovo's status dilute the Union's mediation leverage. Brussels should find a solution with those states to remove objections for Kosovo's candidate status, aiming for a coordinated stance by the 2027 enlargement review.
- **To the Kosovo government:** Expand outreach to non-recognizers through diplomatic campaigns, emphasizing the importance of a consolidated Kosovo for regional security.
- **To the Kosovo government:** Deliver commitments and operationalize the "Association of Serb Majority Municipali-

ties” (ASMM). To this end, send immediately the EU Draft Statute of the ASMM to the Constitutional Court for review.

- **To the Kosovo government:** Institutionalize crisis communication channels with KFOR and Serbia. Establish liaison teams, joint patrols and joint incident prevention protocols along the border with Serbia.

With Reference to Kosovo and Serbia

- **To EU Commission:** Disburse resources from the “EU Growth Plan” funds to Kosovo and Serbia, grant candidate status to Kosovo and open accession clusters in parallel with the verified fulfilment of key steps from the Brussels/Ohrid Agreement (2023) on the normalization of bilateral relations.
- **To EU Commission:** Adopt a concise set of EU “Guiding Principles” for a comprehensive Kosovo–Serbia settlement. Define red lines and end state parameters (e.g., no return to pre-2008 arrangements, mutual recognition of sovereignty, no partition or territorial exchange, and non-majority community protections), including EU Verification and Dispute Resolution Mechanisms.

With Reference to Montenegro

- **To the Montenegrin government:** Encourage the intensification of bilateral talks on pending issues with Croatia to maintain the pace of accession and avoid blockades in the process.
- **To the Croatian government:** Continue supporting Montenegro’s EU accession process by sharing experiences and knowledge, as well as engaging in bilateral talks that should help resolving existing bilateral disputes and prevent delays in the process.

With Reference to North Macedonia

- **To the government of North Macedonia:** Stick to the requirements of the European Commission on the introduction of Bulgarians in the country’s constitution as a constituent people alongside with Roma, Croats, Serbs, Vlachs and others.
- **To the EU Commission and facilitating countries of the 2022 French Proposal:** Provide firm guarantees that the constitutional inclusion of Bulgarians will be the final resolution of bilateral disputes with Bulgaria.
- **To the government of North Macedonia:** With regard to the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, practice a comprehensive approach that balances internal political unity, regional diplomacy, and ethnic equality.

By addressing both internal and external challenges, North Macedonia should create a more inclusive society, overcome the effects of external interference, and ensure the long-term stability of the country.

With Reference to Serbia

- **To EU Commission:** End the appeasement policy towards authoritarian practices of the current political leadership in Serbia – otherwise the loss of credibility of the EU within the region and beyond will irretrievably damage the other WB-5 and the EU as the flagship organization within Europe.
- **To EU Commission:** Constructively address the political crisis in Serbia by supporting the conduct of free and fair parliamentary elections.
- **To EU Commission:** Call upon the government of Serbia to immediately cease all measures that undermine university autonomy and target university employees who have expressed solidarity with Serbian students.
- **To EU Commission:** Adopt a more principled and conditional approach to Serbia’s accession path. Non-alignment with the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy, particularly on major geopolitical issues, should trigger a formal pause in accession negotiations until progress is made.
- **To EU Commission:** Assess rule of law reforms according to tangible outcomes (judicial independence, the prosecution of high-level corruption etc.) and not only according to the introduction of technical or legislative steps.



These policy recommendations reflect the findings of the 48th RSSEE workshop on “Security Perceptions and Their Impact on Regional Cooperation in South East Europe”, convened by the PfP Consortium Study Group “Regional Stability in South East Europe” in Reichenau/Rax, Austria, 15 – 18 May 2025. They were prepared by Predrag Jureković (Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna) on the basis of the proposals submitted by the participants.