

**PERCEPTIONS**  
**JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

September - November 1998

Volume III - Number 3

**THE REGIONAL COOPERATION INITIATIVES IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE AND THE  
TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to explore the major regional political and economic cooperation initiatives that appeared in the southeast corner of the European continent. It briefly examines the rationale behind each one and then looks into Turkish foreign policy about regional cooperation in the Balkans in three periods: the interwar period, the Cold War period and the post-Cold War period. Finally, this study attempts to offer an assessment of these regional initiatives.

The paper covers the period from the immediate aftermath of the World War I to today. The political, economic and social conditions prevailing in Europe at the time of each initiative are not touched upon in detail. Similarly, this study does not elaborate on the domestic developments of the countries concerned. Today, integration with the Euro-Atlantic security structures is also high on the agenda of most Balkan countries. There are cooperation efforts in the area of security, like the meetings of defence ministers and the establishment of a multinational Balkan Force. It goes without saying that these initiatives strengthen the idea of cooperation and help the overall atmosphere of confidence in the region. However, this aspect has been left outside the scope of this study for reason of brevity.

Although the regional countries alone are not responsible for it, the Balkans has a long-standing reputation as a region of turmoil and instability. The conflicts and enmity have caused enormous loss of life and, unfortunately, this is still the case today. As history teaches us, the problems had and still have serious global repercussions. Thus, the major powers of the international community have always been interested in developments in this region, though their interests have changed according to the time and nature of the developments.

On the other hand, despite the persistent problems of the region, the region's countries recognised the need for inter-state cooperation a long time ago. Even the ideological, economic and military divisions of the Cold War could not completely suppress this need. Yet, efforts for regional cooperation have an unsuccessful record. What are the reasons for this?

Recent developments suggest that there is an increased effort, both from within and outside the area, to foster genuine cooperation among the nations of the region. These are with a view to settling or eliminating differences, encouraging collective work for the area's future, and to paving the way for

sub-regional and, subsequently, continental integration. However, at the same time, radical changes in circumstances following the end of the Cold War did not result in an environment suitable for the development of cooperation with the participation of all the countries in the region.

At the brink of a new century can Balkan countries take their future into their own hands, put their differences aside and identify a common cause for which to work? To what extent do they need outside help? What should the parameters of this kind of cooperation be?

Before discussing such issues, it would be appropriate to go through previous initiatives in the region, on the assumption that it is possible to take lessons from the past events.

## INITIATIVES BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

### The Little Entente

The Little Entente is considered as the first alliance system in the Balkans and the Danube area following the World War I. One of the results of the War was the birth of a new state in the heart of Europe—Czechoslovakia. It had come to being as a direct result of the dissolution of the Austria-Hungarian Empire and, therefore, the main concern of the politicians of that country was the possible revisionist aspirations of the neighbouring countries, especially the ones who were dissatisfied with the territorial settlement of the War. Czechoslovakia particularly had Hungary in mind, a country that considered itself to be the biggest loser of the War and thus adopted a revisionist policy in the immediate aftermath of the War.

Naturally, the best way to ensure security and to keep the status quo unchanged would be to encircle Hungary. Hence, Czechoslovakia sought alliances with Romania and Yugoslavia. The first agreement came in August 1920, when Czechoslovakia allied with Yugoslavia against Hungary. Romania, who would later also sign bilateral agreement with Yugoslavia, joined the alliance in 1921.

What was interesting about the Little Entente was the involvement of one of the Great Powers of the time. The war had devastated and depopulated much of France. The French leaders were resolved never to give the Germans a chance of invading again. Therefore, France started to follow a policy of encouraging Eastern European countries to form alliances and sent aid to them. In the light of this policy, France became a party to the Little Entente through bilateral agreements signed with Czechoslovakia (1924), Romania (1926) and, although it was a political rather than military alliance, with Yugoslavia (1927).

The Entente, acquiring an indefinite nature in February 1933, could only live up to the 1938 Munich crisis. As a result of strong pressure from Hitler's Germany for so-called self-determination for Sudetenland Germans, and the appeasement policy of both Great Britain and France, Czechoslovakia's dissolution started, which also meant the end of the Little Entente.

What were the characteristics of this first alliance system, which emerged following the Great War and whose area stretched towards the Balkan Peninsula? First, geographically speaking it was not limited to the Balkans. The initiator, Czechoslovakia, came from the outside southeastern Europe. Second, as was briefly explained above, the main rationale behind the participants of the Entente joining forces was the idea of striking military alliances against revisionist countries. Lastly, there was the involvement of an outside big power, in this case France, whose sole objective was to

encircle Germany.

## The Balkan Pact

The second regional initiative to be considered here is the Balkan Pact. The Balkan Pact, signed in February 1934 by Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia, is perhaps the first truly Balkan initiative in the context of Balkan cooperation. While the origins of signing a type of Balkan agreement may go as far back as 1925, the Balkan Pact came to being in the mid-1930s. Several important developments both in the Balkan Peninsula and in Europe helped the original idea to materialise. In inter-Balkan relations, improvement in Turkish-Greek ties and the rapprochement between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia are worth mentioning. The following all directly or indirectly helped the overall picture in the Balkans: the failure of the League of Nations to offer a workable collective security plan vis-à-vis the Balkans; Italian aspirations towards the Peninsula; the establishment of the Little Entente; the institution of a new European order (the Four-Power Pact<sup>1</sup>), which excluded small states, in June 1933; and the positive atmosphere created between the USSR and the anti-revisionist Balkan states as a result of the 'Pacts on the Definition of the Aggressor' in 1933.

The suggestion for the creation of an 'Institute of Balkan Entente', in order to study all matters of common interest to the Balkan states, was tabled by the then president of the Council of Ministers of Greece at the 27th Universal Peace Congress held in Athens in October 1929. Subsequently, exactly a year later, the First Balkan Conference was held in Athens with the participation of Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia. It was in this meeting that the participants decided to prepare a draft of a Balkan Pact. Annual Balkan Conferences were held to work on the draft (1931- Istanbul, 1932-Bucharest, 1933-Salonika). The finalised text envisaged a system of friendship and security in the Balkans within the framework of the League of Nations and covered issues such as non-aggression, mutual assistance and the protection of minorities. However, during the course of this process of Balkan Conferences, two important developments occurred. First, the major pro-status quo countries in the region decided that Albania would be excluded from the Pact, mainly because of its revisionist policies and dependence both militarily and economically on Italy. Second, another revisionist state of the time, Bulgaria, strongly insisted on the settlement of the minority issues in the Balkans before the conclusion of such an initiative and, in the end, refused to join the Balkan Pact.

Therefore, Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia took steps to conclude the Pact without Bulgaria, hoping that the latter would soon join the Pact. Turkey played an important role in the realisation of the Balkan Pact by signing bilateral agreements with Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> The Pact, which officially came into being on 9 February 1934, was mainly a cooperation scheme for mutual defence. However, even from the beginning it had deficiencies.<sup>3</sup> The Balkan pact concluded its life span with the outbreak of the World War II.

The importance of the Balkan Pact was that it stemmed from an initiative in the region. All of the countries that fit the definition of being a Balkan state were successfully brought together around a table in the 1930s. However, as explained above, this all-inclusiveness could not be officially registered by the Pact itself. On the other hand, although the initially suggested idea was to study all matters of common interest to the Balkan states, the Balkan Pact was an arrangement to defend the territorial status quo against the aspirations of revisionist regional states and, in particular, a Great Power, Italy.

## INITIATIVES AFTER WORLD WAR II

### Up to the End of the Cold War

Perhaps the most dramatic result of World War II was the confrontation in Europe between the USA and the USSR. The wartime alliance between the two countries turned into rivalry soon after the War was over. Already by 1948, the wartime alliance had disintegrated and the continent was literally divided. The overall atmosphere had become distinctly chilly: the World was in the midst of a Cold War.

### The Second Balkan Pact

The Second Balkan Pact was developed on the basis of the 'Friendship and Cooperation Agreement' that Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia signed in Ankara in February 1953. It became effective with the signature of the Pact on 9 August 1954 in Bled, Yugoslavia. Its core function was collective defence against outside aggression and it was drafted for a duration of 20 years. Although this Pact was possible due to inter-Balkan developments, the initiator was an outsider and had another agenda. It is true that the thawing of relations between Turkey and Greece following their membership of the same alliance, ie. NATO, and Yugoslavia's breakaway from the Soviet Bloc in 1948 helped the materialisation of this pact. However, the signatory countries did not have common interests and aims strong enough for such an alliance. It was mainly a US initiative aimed at winning over Yugoslavia to the Western Block.

Yet, Yugoslavia could not accommodate itself into the Western camp. The USSR, reading US intentions correctly, immediately moved to mend fences with Yugoslavia and Turkish-Greek relations were souring rapidly due to the Greek intention of Enosis.<sup>4</sup> Therefore the second Balkan pact became almost immediately dormant.

We should summarise this initiative by noting that the rationale behind this Pact had little to do with the idea of cooperation in the Balkans. Most of the Balkan states were excluded and there was no hope, due to the eventual reaction of the USSR, of incorporating them into the Pact at a later stage. Finally, two of the three parties to the Pact had serious disagreements in the making.

It may be suggested that as the initiative for this Pact did not come from the regional powers it did not find the ground on which to materialise. This further suggests that a reasonable and feasible project should first and foremost take into account the vital common interests of the Southeast European states.

### The Balkan Multilateral Cooperation Process

The bipolar international political system and the division that it created did not permit meaningful and result-oriented multilateral cooperation in the Balkans during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Especially in the 1970s the two ideological blocs were preoccupied with their individual domestic problems, which in the 1980s began to exert sufficient pressure for a change of policy, particularly for the Soviet Union.

Although the Cold War had not officially ended, there were enough signs by the mid-1980s throughout Central and Eastern Europe of the forthcoming winds of change. The Balkan countries in

the second part of the decade had already started to test the ground for rapprochement.

The first successful attempt to bring all the Balkan countries together at a regional level following World War II was the meeting of ministers of foreign affairs of the Balkan Countries, held in Belgrade, 24-26 February 1988. Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) were all represented, although they all had different social, political and economic systems; and some of the bilateral relations in the region were not warm at all.<sup>5</sup>

The ministers at the Belgrade meeting initiated a process of regional cooperation in numerous fields, such as the economy, trade, industry, humanitarian issues, transportation, culture, environment, etc. Following this meeting, several others were held at ministerial, deputy ministerial, undersecretary and expert level. Also numerous cooperation projects were tabled. Thus, the process known today as Balkan Multilateral Cooperation gained impetus.

When the second foreign ministers' meeting was held in Tirana on 24-25 October 1990, the picture of Europe, and in fact of the whole World, was very different from that of the pre-Belgrade gathering. Already by the end of 1989, the Soviet bloc had dissolved, paving the way for non-communist regimes. Now the countries in the Balkans could genuinely address the cooperation theme, without underlining their political, social and economic differences. In other words, they all had more room to manoeuvre. It was at the Tirana meeting that the Balkan countries all declared their belief in democracy and stated that their future lay in Europe. The states also decided in Tirana to hold foreign ministerial meetings regularly, hence institutionalising Balkan Cooperation.

However, shortly after the Tirana meeting, the stability in the Balkans was shattered by the dissolution of the SFRY, which resulted in tragic wars. The next meeting of foreign ministers of the Balkan Countries was to be held in December 1991 in Sofia. However, the fighting between the Serb-dominated Yugoslav military and the breakaway republics of Croatia and Slovenia, which had declared their independence on 25 June, effectively suspended all-inclusive Balkan cooperation.

It was possible to revitalise the Balkan Multilateral Cooperation Process only in 1996, which will be discussed later in this paper.

The importance of this process was that, perhaps for the first time since World War I, all the Balkan states were joining forces to concentrate on issues like development, improving standards of living, democratic values and, of course, regional integration for eventual European integration. The focus of efforts was shifted away from defence and political pacts. The rationale behind the initiative was no longer the defence of the territorial status quo against one or more revisionist countries. This may be regarded as a radical change in the understanding and perception of international relations. Although the Cold War left a strong negative legacy in the minds of people, recent developments suggest that Cold War perceptions are being questioned, which is a step to be welcomed.

### The Post-Cold War Era

Although the idea of multilateral cooperation in the Balkans was kept as an important discussion topic between the regional countries during the war in Yugoslavia, it inevitably went into a suspension. In the meantime there were two significant initiatives which extended to the Balkans: the Central European Initiative (CEI) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).

The cessation of hostilities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord at the end of 1995 strengthened hopes for regional cooperation again. It is worth mentioning at this point another important development before examining the cooperation initiatives in the post-Cold War period. Having seen the scope of atrocities committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina and being convinced that the region needed outside encouragement and assistance to organise itself, the USA and the European Union (EU) made regional cooperation the linchpin of their policies toward the region following the Dayton Peace Accord.

#### The Central European Initiative (CEI)

The CEI, which is based on the cooperation initiative of 1989 called Quadronale, has grown at a rapid pace. In only seven years, membership grew from the original four to sixteen. Quadronale was intended to ease the transition of Hungary and the SFRY into the European economic and political fold. The method involved a rather interesting experiment. It brought together Austria (traditionally neutral and an EFTA member), Hungary (a member of the Warsaw Pact and COMECON), Italy (one of the founding members of the EEC and NATO) and the SFRY (the leader of non-aligned movement and with an interesting economic structure). The project attracted more members rapidly, becoming known in 1992 as the Central European Initiative (CEI). Today from the Balkan region, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania and Slovenia are members of CEI.

The CEI aims at European integration and supports its non-EU member countries in their approach to the EU. The CEI also supports the development of parliamentary democracy and upholds human rights. Its work mostly complements and reinforces strategic programmes being pursued by other international organisations, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the EU, by providing political and operational support through its regional membership and expertise. In fact the collaboration is so close to the EBRD that a joint CEI-EBRD secretariat was established in London in 1991.

From the point of view of Balkan cooperation, the CEI cannot be considered as a strictly Balkan initiative. It does not include two of the important countries of the region, namely Greece and Turkey. And as the nature of its existence is mainly based on support and assistance extended to those countries aspiring to European integration, the CEI does not attach priority to the cooperation among the Balkan states at regional level.

#### The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

The disintegration of both the Soviet Union and the Yugoslav Federation at the end of the Cold War has changed the entire political climate, altering the needs and the perceptions of states, re-shaping their relations between themselves and their immediate neighbours. Economics has come to the forefront, pushing the political endeavours of countries. Meanwhile, Turkey, which belongs to the Mediterranean basin, Black Sea basin, the Balkans and the Caucasus sub-regions, due to its unique geographical position, was actively encouraging regional cooperation schemes, in some cases spearheading their creation.

In this context, Turkey proposed the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) project. It is an instrument for the development and diversification of existing economic relations among the countries around the Black Sea, by making efficient use of the advantages arising from their geographical proximity, traditional ties, the complementary nature of their economies and the large

economic space and market.<sup>6</sup>

The BSEC was founded as a regional structure for multilateral cooperation, with the signature of the Summit Declaration on 25 June 1992, in Istanbul. It is composed of eleven states: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine. Recently, at the Yalta Summit, held on 4-5 June 1998, the participating countries decided to convert the BSEC project into a regional organisation and signed the BSEC Charter to that end.

A brief study of this economic cooperation initiative reveals interesting points. First, one of the basic objectives of the BSEC, as proclaimed in the Summit Declaration, is to ensure that the Black Sea becomes a sea of peace, stability and prosperity, encouraging friendly and good-neighbourly relations. However, as mentioned above, there are participating countries like Albania and Greece, which are not Black Sea littoral states. The BSEC is also open to other interested states. In this context, it is worth mentioning that countries like Egypt, Israel, Poland and the Slovak Republic have been granted observer status to the BSEC. Second, the BSEC has introduced a new concept of multilateralism in economic relations among its members and in the region wherein economic activities were hitherto bilateral and state-induced. The BSEC principally relies on the inner dynamics of the private sector for its development and diversification. Third, the BSEC does not preclude or prevent EU membership or the establishment of any other relationship for that matter.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, for the regional countries, it is a preparation ground for integration with a larger Europe. Finally, although the BSEC may be portrayed in strictly economic terms, it is also based on the principles laid down in the Helsinki Final Act, the OSCE documents and on shared international values such as democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Speaking about the cooperation initiatives in the southeastern part of Europe, one should also note that the BSEC not only includes new actors, like Moldova, Ukraine and the Caucasian Republics into the region concerned, but also constitutes a perfect link between the integration aspirations of different regions.

As far as regional participation is concerned, we should draw the attention of the reader to the fact that currently none of the Former Yugoslav Republics is taking part in the BSEC. However, we can safely assume that as conditions change in the region these countries will also join the BSEC as full participants.

#### Process of Stability and Good-Neighbourliness in South East Europe (the Royaumont Process)

As was noted at the beginning of this section, following the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the European Union and the USA directed their efforts to promoting regional activities in the Balkans. The initiative, which is known as the Royaumont Process, came from an EU member, France. The idea was to inquire about the possibilities to extend the Pact on Stability in Europe (PSE)<sup>8</sup> to the southeast corner of the continent. France, which was the godfather of the PSE, organised the meeting of the Process of Stability and Good Neighbourliness in the French town of Royaumont on 13 December 1995, one day before the Peace Conference on Bosnia-Herzegovina was held in Paris. At the end of the meeting participants issued a declaration and decided to establish a mechanism—a round table—for southeast Europe within the PSE. At the meeting of the EU foreign ministers in February 1996, the Royaumont Process was converted into an EU initiative.

The Process encourages regional projects aimed at close cooperation and confidence building among

the participating countries and, therefore, in a sense, constitutes an exercise in preventive diplomacy. The member countries consider the Royaumont Process to be an important instrument for their integration into the EU.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the Process is regarded as a joint contribution of the EU and the regional countries to the creation of a favourable environment for the establishment and the consolidation of good neighbourly relations.

Projects include areas like media, exchanges of academicians, customs cooperation, interaction between local authorities, etc. Six follow-up meetings have been organised so far, the latest in Athens, 31 March-1 April 1998. What is interesting about the Royaumont Process is that it involves Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the confidence building process. The projects within the Process are prepared by the NGOs.

The Process of Stability and Good Neighbourliness in Southeast Europe works not only in close cooperation with the OSCE<sup>10</sup> and the Council of Europe, but also with other regional initiatives.<sup>11</sup>

A final note regarding the Royaumont Process should be on the level of participation of the countries of the region. Croatia and Slovenia prefer to take part in this Process as 'observers', rather than full participants.<sup>12</sup> This is due to the fact that these two countries regard themselves as Central European, and fear that their active involvement in Balkan affairs would delay their integration into the European economic and security architecture.

#### Revival of the Balkan Multilateral Cooperation Process

As noted earlier, all-inclusive Balkan multilateral cooperation was suspended due to developments that took place in the territories of the former Yugoslavia. With the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord, a new atmosphere of constructive cooperation began to settle in the region. The new situation, as we discussed above, led to the introduction of new cooperation initiatives. In the mean time, there was another development that had positive effects on intra-Balkan relations. The bilateral relations between the majority of the Balkan countries were improving. There were even trilateral cooperation initiatives, like the meetings among Bulgaria, Greece and Romania.<sup>13</sup>

The overall positive atmosphere prevailing in the region encouraged the countries to revitalise their multilateral cooperation in the Balkans, and Bulgaria, which was to host the would-be third meeting of foreign ministers of the Balkan countries, issued invitations for a meeting in Sofia. The meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of countries of southeastern Europe was held in July 1996 with the participation of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Although it actively took part in the preparatory meetings preceding the ministerial session, Macedonia did not participate in the Sofia meeting, due to the disagreement with Greece over its constitutional name.<sup>14</sup> The ministers agreed to launch a comprehensive process of multilateral cooperation in areas like enhancing good neighbourly relations, cross-border economic cooperation, development of humanitarian, social and cultural contacts and combating organised crime.<sup>15</sup> It thus revived Balkan multilateral cooperation.

When the foreign ministers came together for their next gathering, which was held in Salonika, 9-10 June 1997, they enlarged the scope of cooperation among the countries concerned and paid particular attention to cooperation with other regional initiatives. "To promote mutual understanding, reinforce a climate of trust and enhance cooperation" they also agreed to submit to their heads of state or government a proposal that informal summits of heads of state or government be held.<sup>16</sup> The first of



these summits took place in Crete on 4 November 1997. The next meeting of foreign ministers and summit of heads of state or government will be held in 1998 in Turkey.

It is important to note here that although all-inclusive Balkan cooperation has been revived, Croatia and Slovenia insist on taking part in this process as observers, due to their understanding explained above.

The summit in Crete was the first of its kind in the history of southeast European cooperation: the participating countries were able to identify a common goal, which was integration with the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.<sup>17</sup>

### Southeast Cooperative Initiative (SECI)

The USA, which became a major player in the Balkans in the mid-1990's due to the developments in former Yugoslavia, took an initiative in April 1996 with a view to bringing southeastern European countries together to address mainly economic and environmental issues. The US acted on the understanding that the majority of all the existing initiatives regarding southeastern Europe concentrated on the region's pressing political and ethnic problems and that the ability to solve regional economic and environmental problems was a prerequisite to peace and stability.

The SECI came to being officially at the inaugural meeting held in Geneva in December 1996, formally adopting the SECI Statement of Purpose. The SECI participants are Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey. An invitation was issued to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), but withdrawn later due to the events in that country. The FRY will be invited to participate once the reasons for its 'dis-invitation' no longer exist.

The SECI is not an assistance programme, but rather a self-help scheme. It intends to bring regional decision-makers together to discuss mutual economic and environmental concerns through joint projects, meetings, conferences, etc. It closely cooperates with the United Nations' Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). It is the SECI's intention to encourage European and American industries to take an active interest in SECI projects. One of the interesting parts of the SECI is that responsibility for projects developed within the process are given to individual countries as a host country.

The SECI too, like the other regional initiatives, as discussed above, will help countries of southeast Europe join the new economic and security architecture of Europe. It does not interfere with existing cooperation programmes launched by the EU, the Royaumont Process, the CEI or the BSEC—it complements them.<sup>18</sup>

It may be suggested that the SECI is designed to work as a product of the American business-like approach.

### AN ASSESSMENT OF THE MAJOR INITIATIVES

The examination, although not in detail, of the major cooperation initiatives in southeast Europe suggests that: first, initiatives before the World War II (the Little Entente and the Balkan Pact), mainly stemmed from the need to seek military alliances and were fed by fear of territorial aspirations of other countries. This fits with the understanding of international relations of the time

and reflects the deficiencies of these initiatives. Second, the Balkan Pact of 1954 was mainly a result of global politics and should be assessed together with other initiatives of that time, like the Baghdad Pact of 1955. Third, since the inception of the Balkan Multilateral Cooperation Process, the rationale behind regional initiatives changed radically. There were no more attempts to seek military alliances against another country or countries in or outside the region. New concepts, like democracy, integration with Europe, development through cooperation and assistance came to the forefront. Hence, such understanding should be consolidated. Fourth, the Balkan Multilateral Cooperation Process, which was a Balkan initiative, is proof that despite the differences among them, all of the Balkan countries can come together for the benefit of the region. Fifth, there are still initiators both from within and outside the region. The BSEC, the Balkan Multilateral Cooperation Process, the Royaumont Process and the SECI are examples to be mentioned in this context. The underlying feature of these initiatives is that they are complementary rather than alternative projects. Sixth, in addition to those big regional initiatives, there are still small-scale initiatives in the region, which helps the overall atmosphere positively. Trilateral cooperation between Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey is a good example. Seventh, following the end of the Cold War, the number of countries in the Balkan Peninsula has increased. However two of the newly born countries, Slovenia and Croatia, consider themselves belonging to Central Europe. Perhaps detachment from the Balkans could be possible for Slovenia but, due to its ties with the other Balkan countries, especially with Bosnia-Herzegovina and the FRY, Croatia's quest looks neither logical nor feasible. Eighth, with the increasing number of initiatives for cooperation in the Balkans, a new terminology entered into international political scene. The widely used name for the region is now 'Southeast Europe'.

#### TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS COOPERATION IN THE BALKANS

Before looking into the principles and objectives of Turkish foreign policy regarding cooperation efforts in Southeast Europe, it is both necessary and appropriate to make a few reminder points about the overall Turkish approach to the Balkans.

In general terms, Turkey has always been in favour of establishing and maintaining friendly and mutually beneficial relations with the Balkan countries. The region has a special place for Turkey due to geographical, historical, cultural and humanitarian reasons. It connects Turkey to Europe and the West. Any instability in the Balkans hampers Turkey's physical ties with Europe and raises concerns for the fate of brethren Turks living in the area. Therefore, it is only natural that Turkey seeks peace, stability and cooperation in the Balkans.

In the period from the proclamation of the Republic to the 1950s, Turkey's main foreign policy objective was shaped by security concerns. The vital issue for the then policy-makers was to protect the system that had been established by the Treaty of Lausanne, which in practice meant safeguarding the existence of the newly born Republic. To this end, Turkey sought the establishment of good relations with all countries, and especially neighbouring ones, based on principles like mutual respect for sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, and non-intervention in internal affairs.

The application of this policy to the Balkans produced favourable results in the first years of the Republic. Turkey signed treaties of friendship with Albania in 1923 and with both Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in 1925. Turkey also attended the first Balkan Conference, held in Athens in 1930. Turkish-Greek relations had already improved considerably by 1931.

Speaking within the context of this paper, Turkish concern for the future of the Republic displayed itself in multilateral fora on the occasion of the establishment of the Balkan Pact. To a certain extent, it addressed the preoccupations of Turkey, which were mainly related to Italian aspirations of the time.<sup>19</sup> Although it had certain deficiencies,<sup>20</sup> Turkey attached utmost importance to the Balkan Pact and put effort into its survival.<sup>21</sup>

Following World War II, with membership in NATO, Turkey was able to eliminate its security concerns to a large extent. Turkey, although the Iron Curtain had fallen in between the two blocs, continued to seek good-neighbourly relations with its neighbours and was encouraged in this by the USA. Then came the Second Balkan Pact in 1954. Although there was a serious disagreement in the making with Greece over Cyprus, Turkey joined this Pact. The rationale behind the establishment of the second Balkan Pact was discussed earlier.

The 1960s witnessed significant tune-ups in Turkish foreign policy for many reasons: first, the rigidity of the two-bloc system was changing. Eastern European countries had started to develop economic and commercial ties with the Western bloc. Second, the Cyprus crisis became a dominant issue in Turkey's internal and external politics. The arrival of the 'Johnson letter' in June 1964 caused significant repercussions. From then on Turkey sought further diversification in its foreign relations. The improvement of relations with its super-power neighbour, the USSR, paved the way for the development of relations with Balkan countries. It was in 1966 that Turkey and Bulgaria upgraded their representations in each others' capitals to Ambassador-level. It was also in the same year that relations with Romania warmed up, and for the first time since World War II, a dialogue at presidential level was established. Albania voted during the 1965 UN meeting in favour of Turkey's views on Cyprus, and relations with Turkey had already been developing through bilateral visits. Turkey made further efforts to diversify and develop its relations with Balkan countries<sup>22</sup> again after 1974, when it intervened in Cyprus, in order to save Cypriot Turks from annihilation.

In the 1980s, Turkey's bilateral relations with Balkan countries were following a steady course, except that relations with Bulgaria rapidly deteriorated starting from 1984, when the Bulgarian communist regime introduced the forced assimilation policy for ethnic Turks living in Bulgaria. Relations with Greece were following a course of ups and downs too. However, at the same time, in a parallel development, ex-Soviet bloc countries in the region were all looking for possibilities to improve their bilateral and multilateral relations mainly with a view to overcoming their economic difficulties.

Thus, all the regional countries were represented at the meeting of ministers of foreign affairs gathered in Belgrade in 1988. Turkey participated in this conference although its relations with Bulgaria were strained. In doing so, Turkey displayed its strong adherence to the idea of multilateral cooperation in the region. At the same time, in order to raise its legitimate concerns, Turkey underlined the importance of solving bilateral problems among the countries of the region. These problems were stumbling blocks to genuine cooperation.

The idea of fostering cooperation and joining European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes as a sub-region has gained momentum following the end of the Cold War. In this context, Turkey has taken some steps aimed at facilitating this integration. Turkey's BSEC initiative should be viewed in this context. At the same time, it shows Turkey's ability to successfully spearhead such schemes.

Turkey advocates strong regional cooperation in the Balkans by not only actively taking part in the

initiatives discussed above, but also by developing new forums for cooperation, like the recent creation of the Multinational Balkan Peace Force. Turkish politicians' public statements give us an idea of the main principles that Turkey follows on cooperation in Southeast Europe: first, regardless of the area of the cooperation scheme, it should include all countries in the region. Second, all the participants should be on an equal footing within the process. Third, the possibility of creating duplications should be eliminated when producing specific cooperation projects. Turkey believes that the success of cooperation efforts in Southeast Europe is of utmost importance. It gives a strong signal to the international community that, at the brink of a new century, the countries in the region are both keen and capable of shaping their future according to the shared ideas and values of Europe.

## CONCLUSION

The Balkans has been and remains an important strategic and political factor in international affairs and especially in European politics. Obviously, peace and stability in this region would have far reaching effects. Needless to say, differences among the Balkan countries exist. However, a historical review of their economic links, as well as their recently acquired aspirations to be part of the European integration process, show that cooperation is logical for the benefit of all in the region.

Perhaps for the first time in history, the emergence of a common cause in the region, namely integration with Europe, is an opportunity not to be missed. The future of the Balkan countries lies in regional cooperation. But in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past, certain guidelines have to be developed and strictly adhered by all.

Here are a few for consideration: first of all, the borders, sovereignty and independence of all states should be respected. Establishing and preserving the supremacy of democracy, market economy and respect for human rights, as well as ensuring the existence of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies should be the second principle. Third, since economic integration seems to be the most promising area for now, efforts should be canalled into that area. However, economics cannot be the sole factor on which Balkan cooperation rests. There is a strong need to work on confidence building in the region. Therefore, fourth, efforts should also be directed toward this area. Fifth, non-governmental organisations, as well as the private sector should be increasingly involved in cooperation schemes. Although not detrimental to the future of initiatives, there is a leadership competition among the countries in the region. Hence, sixth, this should be prevented for it causes fragmentation in the region. The best way to overcome this possibility is the equal distribution of workload and the institutional rotation of the leadership. Last but not least, the projects of the existing regional initiatives generally overlap and cause duplications. There is also an inflation of proposals for cooperation. This could be a factor draining the energies and the resources of the participant countries and could cause 'cooperation-fatigue' in the future. Therefore, close cooperation among the countries, as well as the regional initiatives, in order to coordinate the projects, must be ensured.

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1 The Four Power Pact was an Italian initiative, intended to bring Italy, Germany, Britain and France together in order to keep Germany within the Western international system and as a result it created a new order in Europe.

2 Pact d'Entente Cordiale (Turkey-Greece, September 1933), Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression (Turkey-Romania, October 1933), and Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression (Turkey-Yugoslavia, November 1933).

3 While Turkey had attached a reservation to the Pact regarding the activities directed against the USSR, Greece ratified the Pact with a reservation concerning the hostilities involving the Great Powers. Both were against the spirit of collective defence.

4 Policy of annexation of Cyprus. From 1951 onward Greece publicly began to push Enosis on Cyprus.

5 Like the strained relations between Turkey and Bulgaria due to the latter's forced assimilation policy directed at the Turks in Bulgaria.

6 The BSEC covers a vast economic area from the Adriatic to the Pacific with a total population of over 300 million.

7 Summit Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation, June 1992.

8 The concept of Pact on Stability was originally devised by the French Prime Minister, E. Balladur. It was adopted as a Joint Action under the EU Common Foreign and Security policy. The principal aim of the Pact was to remove obstacles to the applications for membership from the countries of Central Europe.

9 This perception stems from the original idea of the pact for Stability in Europe, April 1993. It was conceived as an exercise to help resolve frontier and minority problems in central and eastern Europe and the Baltic region, which, in the short- or long-term, have the prospect of accession to the EU.

10 The OSCE acts as the repository of the Stability Pact in Europe.

11 The South East Cooperative Initiative and the CEI participated in the Royaumont Process meeting in Athens, in April 1998.

12 The Croatian foreign minister was quoted as saying to the visiting coordinator of the Royaumont Process, Mr Roumeliotis, that "Croatia considers itself as [sic.] Central European and Mediterranean country. It chairs the CEI in 1998 in confirmation of this fact."

13 The three countries had their first meeting in August 1995 in Yanya, and the second one in March 1996 in Varna. This type of trilateral meeting was later also possible between Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

14 Macedonia participated in the next meeting of foreign ministers.

15 Sofia Declaration, July 1996.

16 Chairman's Summary, Salonika meeting, 10 June 1997.

17 Joint statement by the heads of state and government of the countries of Southeastern Europe, 4 November 1997.

18 South East Cooperative Initiative statement of purpose, 6 December 1996

19 In the 1930s, Mussolini was talking about 'Mare Nostrum'. In addition, the Dodecanese islands were under the control of Italy, a factor strengthening Turkey's concerns about a possible Italian

invasion of Anatolia.

20 An important and revisionist neighbour of Turkey, Bulgaria had refused to join the Pact.

21 For example, when the Pact received a serious blow due to the friendship agreement Yugoslavia signed with Bulgaria in January 1937, the then Turkish Prime Minister İnönü and the Foreign Minister Aras visited the Balkan countries with a view to keeping the Pact intact. Similarly, when Germany invaded Poland, Turkey wanted the Pact be instrumental in the security of the Balkans, and advocated the idea of a common position of the Balkan countries during the Pact's meeting in February 1940. However, the other Balkan countries were cautious about provoking Germany.

22 This policy was not limited with Balkan countries. It was also directed toward Arab countries and, as a result, relations between Turkey and the Arab countries warmed up in the second half of the 1970s.

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