

Paulina Szelaĝ\*

# Regional cooperation formats and the issue of military security of post-conflict states. Case study of the South-East European Cooperation Process

**Regionalne formaty współpracy a problem bezpieczeństwa militarnego państw pokonfliktowych. Przypadek Procesu Współpracy w Południowo-Wschodniej Europie**

**Abstract:** The South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) was launched in 1996, however, its functioning is an ongoing research phenomenon. This regional cooperation format includes all 13 states of South-East Europe. It was established as a forum of political dialogue and consultation, where regional issues could be addressed at the highest level. One of the objectives of the SEECP was security cooperation.

The aim of this article is to analyse the role of the SEECP in maintaining security in the region of the Western Balkans. This article argues that since 1996, the SEECP has been evolving and is becoming an important format of regional cooperation in South East Europe, however, it plays a limited role in maintaining the military security of the post-conflict states of the Western Balkans. From the point of view of the members of the SEECP, military security and peace could be obtained through the integration of the participants of the SEECP, in particular those located in the Western Balkans, with the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The article also shows that establishing the SEECP did not eliminate tensions and riots based on ethnicity in some states of the Western Balkans and so, the SEECP still has a lot to do in the matters of reconciliation and good-neighbourliness.

The article is based on primary and secondary source analysis, case study method comparative analysis, and the historical method.

**Keywords:** The South-East European Cooperation Process, Western Balkans, post-conflict states, military security, the European Union, the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization

**Streszczenie:** Mimo że Proces Współpracy w Południowo-Wschodniej Europie (South-East European Cooperation Process, SEECP) został zapoczątkowany

\* Paulina Szelaĝ, PhD, University of the National Education Commission in Kraków, Poland, ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0662-4987>, e-mail: [paulina.szelaĝ@up.krakow.pl](mailto:paulina.szelaĝ@up.krakow.pl)

w 1996 r., tematyka dotycząca jego działalności jest stosunkowo rzadko analizowana. Ten regionalny format współpracy został ustanowiony jako forum dialogu politycznego i konsultacji na najwyższym szczeblu. Zrzesza obecnie 13 państw Europy Południowo-Wschodniej. Jednym z celów SEECP było utrzymanie bezpieczeństwa w regionie, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Bałkanów Zachodnich.

W artykule dowiedziono, że SEECP ewoluował od 1996 r. i stał się istotnym formatem współpracy. Równocześnie jednak format ten pełni ograniczoną rolę w utrzymaniu bezpieczeństwa militarnego państw pokonfliktowych, zlokalizowanych na Bałkanach Zachodnich. Państwa członkowskie SEECP upatrują w integracji z Unią Europejską i Organizacją Paktu Północnoatlantyckiego realną możliwość utrzymania pokoju i bezpieczeństwa militarnego. W artykule wskazano również, iż ustanowienie SEECP nie wyeliminowało napięć i zamieszek na tle etnicznym w niektórych państwach Bałkanów Zachodnich, a sam format ma jeszcze sporo kwestii do uregulowania w zakresie pojednania i relacji dobrosąsiedzkich.

W artykule wykorzystano metodę analizy źródeł pierwotnych i wtórnych, studium przypadku, analizę porównawczą oraz metodę historyczną.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Proces Współpracy w Południowo-Wschodniej Europie, Bałkany Zachodnie, państwa pokonfliktowe, bezpieczeństwo militarne, Unia Europejska, Organizacja Paktu Północnoatlantyckiego

## Introduction

The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) became a turning point when it came to the establishment of new organizations and forums of regional cooperation. States of the former USSR as well as the former SFRY needed to rebuild core values such as democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights and freedoms. To do so, it was necessary to launch regional cooperation formats and organizations. As a result, in the early 90s, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe decided to enact the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Visegrad Group, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and the Baltic Assembly. At that time, military conflicts took place in South-Eastern Europe, the result of which was that the process of regional cooperation among these countries occurred later. Only in 1996 was the first regional format of cooperation launched. It was named the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP). According to Andrew G. Hyde, “regional cooperation serves the mutual interests of all participating countries. By facilitating the resolution of transnational issues, it is also a catalyst for reconciliation, good-neighbourliness and improved political rela-

tions (...). Regional cooperation is also an indispensable component of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration process (...)"<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of this article is to analyse the role of the SEECP in establishing cooperation among its member states. Special attention is paid to military security since most of the members of the SEECP are post-conflict states and parties to the wars in the Balkans in the 90s. This article argues that since 1996, the SEECP has been evolving to become an important format for regional cooperation in South East Europe, however, it plays a limited role in maintaining military security among the post-conflict states of the Western Balkans. In this regard, the SEECP stresses the role of international governmental organizations such as the European Union (EU), the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) and claims that integration of the members of the SEECP, in particular, located in the Western Balkans, with the EU and NATO, is a crucial step towards achieving military security in these post-conflict states. In addition, this article shows that indeed regional cooperation of the SEECP is a component of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration process, but it still has a lot to do in the matter of reconciliation and good-neighbourliness.

The article is based on primary and secondary source analysis, case study method, comparative analysis, and the historical method.

## **1. The history, goals, and structure of the SEECP**

The SEECP was launched in 1996 on the initiative of Bulgaria. The founding members; Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia (then the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, FYROM), Romania, Serbia (then Serbia and Montenegro), and Turkey gathered on 6 and 7 July 1996 at the Conference on Stability, Security, and Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe. In the meeting, representatives of various international organizations

<sup>1</sup> A. Hyde, *Seizing the initiative: The importance of regional cooperation in Southeast Europe and the prominent role of the Southeast European cooperation process*, "Southeast European and Black Sea Studies" 2004, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 4.

and states also took part<sup>2</sup>. Among them were, i.a., representatives of the United Nations and numerous states such as the United States of America, France, Germany, Russia, and representatives of the other regional co-operation formats such as, i.a., the CEI, the OSCE, and the Presidency of the EU.

In the presence of the above-mentioned representatives, the founding countries adopted *the Sofia Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in the Balkans (the Sofia Declaration)*. The main aim of *the Sofia Declaration* was to establish inter-state relations between the countries of the region and to develop comprehensive multilateral cooperation. It should be stressed that *the Sofia Declaration* was adopted after the Dayton Accords entered into force and the war in BiH had ended. As a result, the political leaders of the founding countries of the SEECP decided to develop democracy, the market economy as well as fundamental rights and freedoms and the rule of law. Therefore, the Southeast European countries also wanted to establish a forum of cooperation, which would enable them to bring back the above-mentioned values to the region, which was shattered by the bloody conflicts in 1991-1995. The ministers of foreign affairs of the founding countries, through the signing of *the Sofia Declaration*, committed their own countries to strive towards transforming the region into an area of stability, security, and cooperation in line with general developments throughout Europe. They also agreed to launch a comprehensive process of multilateral cooperation in four areas.

The first area of cooperation among member states of the SEECP covered good-neighbourly relations between the countries of the region, based on universally recognized principles of interstate relations. These principles included, i.a., sovereign equality, respect for rights inherent in sovereignty, refraining from the threat of the use of force, inviolability of frontiers, territorial integrity of states, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and cooperation among

2 *Sofia Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in the Balkans*, Sofia, 6-7 July 1996, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_019fff4792e14d71a3aa4dc420955315.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_019fff4792e14d71a3aa4dc420955315.pdf) [11.04.2023].

states<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the founding countries supported the process of full normalization of the relations between the countries of the SFRY, which was a key point in creating good-neighbourly relations. These relations in turn were necessary to enhance peace and stability in the Balkans, and especially the normalization of the situation in BiH was a priority to achieve this goal.

When it comes to the second area of multilateral cooperation of the SEECP, special attention was paid to the development of economic cooperation through cross-border relations of the countries of the region. Due to the fact that almost all of the founding countries had difficulties related to their economic transition, and some of them were undergoing post-conflict reconstruction, this area of cooperation was a real challenge. It should be noted that the founding states in *the Sofia Declaration* highlighted the need to introduce European norms and standards in the field of production, investment, transfer of technologies, financing, and trade with the objective of integrating most of the economies of their countries into the European economy. Also, cross-border cooperation should have been established on a bilateral and multilateral basis in the framework of the relevant EU programmes. This cooperation was designed to be developed on three different levels: State to State, region to region, and people to people<sup>4</sup>. The development of humanitarian, social, and cultural contacts was another area of multilateral relations among the SEECP. The promotion of social and cultural professional contacts among states of the region was seen as an essential element for lasting stability and a climate of confidence in the region. The Ministers stated their readiness for the promotion of social and cultural cooperation as well as the rights of national and ethnic minorities<sup>5</sup>. This area also applied to cooperation in the spheres of culture, science, and education between the countries in South-Eastern Europe.

The last area of cooperation of the SEECP concerned relations in the field of justice, the combating of organized crime, illicit drug and arms trafficking, and the elimination of terrorism. The minister for for-

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

eign affairs of founding countries agreed, i.a., to elaborate a regional programme to complement national efforts in this respect. The aim of this programme was to envisage, i.a., the accession of all countries of the region to the relevant international conventions and their effective implementation. The minister also called for actions against illegal and irregular migration<sup>6</sup>.

Since 1996, the number of member states of the SEECP has changed; more countries decided to join this regional format (Table 1).

**Table 1. The secondary members of the SEECP**

Item number	Name of country	Year of joining the SEECP
1.	Croatia	2005
2.	Moldova	2006
3.	Montenegro	2007
4.	Slovenia	2010
5.	Kosovo <sup>7</sup>	2014

Source: Own elaboration based on the *South-East European Cooperation Process. SEECP Participants*, <https://www.seecp.info/services> [12.04.2023].

As a result, since 2014, the SEECP has included 13 of the region's countries. The process of extending the SEECP has been accompanied by deepening the process of this regional non-institutionalized. Since 1996, it has been coordinated by the presiding participants. The SEECP presidency lasts for one year and is rotated among the participants (Table 2).

**Table 2. Presidency of the SEECP between 1996-2023**

Item number	Name of country	Years of presidency
1.	Bulgaria	1996-1997
2.	Greece	1997-1998
3.	Turkey	1998-1999
4.	Romania	1999-2000
5.	Republic of North Macedonia (former FYROM)	2000-2001
6.	Albania	2001-2002
7.	Serbia and Montenegro	2002-2003

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

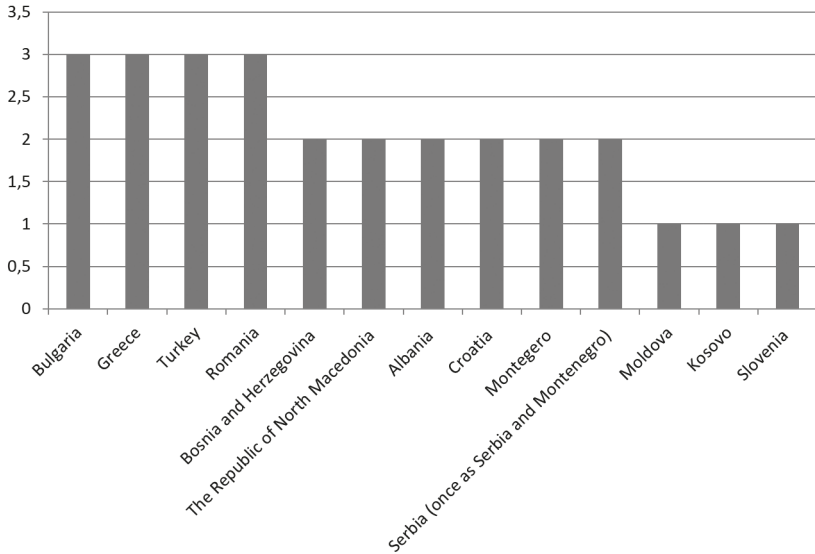
Item number	Name of country	Years of presidency
8.	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2003-2004
9.	Romania	2004-2005
10.	Greece	2005-2006
11.	Croatia	2006-2007
12.	Bulgaria	2007-2008
13.	Moldova	2008-2009
14.	Turkey	2009-2010
15.	Montenegro	2010-2011
16.	Serbia	2011-2012
17.	Republic of North Macedonia (former FYROM)	2012-2013
18.	Romania	2013-2014
19.	Albania	2014-2015
20.	Bulgaria	2015-2016
21.	Croatia	2016-2017
22.	Slovenia	2017-2018
23.	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2018-2019
24.	Kosovo	2019-2020
25.	Turkey	2020-2021
26.	Greece	2021-2022
27.	Montenegro	2022-2023

Source: Own elaboration based on the *South-East European Cooperation Process. SEECP Chairmanship*, <https://www.seecp.info/membership-copy> [12.04.2023].

Since the presidency of Bulgaria, which took place from 1996-1997, several countries have performed this function. Some of them, more than once (Chart 1).

The presiding participant presents the SEECP at international meetings and hosts the annual meeting of heads of state and government (annual summit), foreign ministers meeting (at least one informal and one formal meeting), and a number of annual meetings of political directors. Depending on the situation, the presiding participant may call extraordinary meetings<sup>8</sup>. However, it should be emphasized that the SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office is carried out by willing participants, following consensus from all participants a year in advance. The

<sup>8</sup> *South-East European Cooperation Process. SEECP Chairmanship*, <https://www.seecp.info/membership-copy> [12.04.2023].

**Chart 1. Number of presidencies performed by the member states of the SEECP from 1996-2023**

Source: Own elaboration based on the *South-East European Cooperation Process. SEECP Chairmanship*, <https://www.seecp.info/membership-copy> [12.04.2023].

Troika of the SEECP, composed of the current, previous, and incoming SEECP Chairs-in-Office ensures the continuity of efforts. Decisions within the SEECP are taken by the consensus<sup>9</sup>.

Since 1996, the most important documents on cooperation within the SEECP have been adopted during summits and meetings of the ministers of foreign affairs of the member states.

On the basis of these documents, some changes in the structure of the SEECP were made. Although the SEECP is still a non-institutionalized format of regional cooperation, on 27 February 2008 at the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the SEECP in Sofia, the Regional Cooperation Council was established. It is based in Sarajevo and functions as the operational arm of the SEECP<sup>10</sup>. In addition, in 2014, the first meeting of inter-parliamentary cooperation between the SEECP participants was launched. The SEECP Parliamentary As-

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



sembly is chaired by the Speaker of Parliament of the SEECP Chairman-in-Office<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. Documents issued by the SEECP related to military security in the post-conflict states of the Western Balkans

*The Sofia Declaration* was the first document adopted by the members of the SEECP, that was, related to security matters. Since 1996, the states of the SEECP have enacted another 20 fundamental documents. Each of them was adopted in a specific political situation and included military security issues (Table 3).

**Table 3. The most important military security issues contained in the documents adopted during summits and meetings of ministers of foreign affairs of the SEECP since 1996**

Item number	Name of document and date of adoption	Selected security issues contained in the document
1.	Sofia Declaration, 1996	Supporting the ongoing process of full normalization of the relations between the countries of the former Yugoslavia <sup>12</sup> . Underlining the importance of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH <sup>13</sup> for enhancing stability and security in the region <sup>14</sup> .
2.	Crete Declaration, 1997	Working together to create conditions in the region for the prosperity of the nations in a framework of peace, security, good-neighbourliness and stability <sup>15</sup> .
3.	Antalya Declaration, 1998	Discussing the serious situation in Kosovo and supporting UN Security Council Resolutions 1160 and 1199 <sup>16</sup> . Discussing the need for post-conflict reconstruction of BiH <sup>17</sup> .

11 Ibid.

12 *Sofia Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations...*

13 R. Caplan, *Assessing the Dayton Accord: The structural weaknesses of the general framework agreement for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, "Diplomacy & Statecraft" 2000, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 213-232.

14 Ibid.

15 *Joint Statement by the Heads of State and Government of Countries of South Eastern Europe*, Heraklion, Crete, 4 November 1997, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_4780584f8cf3480ca25c338a5975c9c5.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_4780584f8cf3480ca25c338a5975c9c5.pdf) [14.04.2023].

16 *Summit Declaration of the Countries of South Eastern Europe*, Antalya, 12-13 October 1998, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_69d88f03d1564f3fb7e67ec3e940bf46.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_69d88f03d1564f3fb7e67ec3e940bf46.pdf) [14.04.2023]. See Republic of Albania Ministry of Defence, *The Multinational Peace Force Southeastern Europe (SEEBRIG)*, <https://www.mod.gov.al/eng/security-policies/relations-with/international-and-regional-organization/95-seebrig> [14.04.2023].

17 Ibid. See F. Bieber, *Post-war Bosnia: Ethnicity, inequality and public sector governance*, London 2006.

Item number	Name of document and date of adoption	Selected security issues contained in the document
4.	Charter on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security, and Cooperation in South-East Europe, 2000	Recognizing the responsibility of the countries to closely work with the international community to develop and implement a shared strategy for the stability and growth of the region <sup>18</sup> .
5.	Skopje Declaration, 2001	Supporting the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 <sup>19</sup> , ending the war in Kosovo <sup>20</sup> . Supporting the continuation of the process of NATO enlargement and supporting the Southeast Europe Initiative of NATO <sup>21</sup> . Welcoming the positive development of the Southeast Europe Defence Ministerial (SEDM) Process <sup>22</sup> .
6.	Sarajevo Declaration, 2004	Welcoming the recent enlargement of NATO and the EU <sup>23</sup> . Encouraging Northern Macedonia (former FYROM), Albania, and Croatia to cooperate strongly with NATO <sup>24</sup> . Welcoming the possibility of BiH, Serbia, and Montenegro to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Programme <sup>25</sup> . Condemning ethnically motivated violence in Kosovo and attacks on the troops of KFOR and UNMIK <sup>26</sup> . Stressing the need for full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Welcoming the presence of NATO and the EU in BiH and establishment of regular political dialogue between the EU and the South Eastern Europe Region <sup>27</sup> .
7.	Thessaloniki Declaration, 2006	Emphasising the need to achieve a negotiated settlement for the status of Kosovo, mutually acceptable to the parties concerned <sup>28</sup> .

18 *Charter on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe*, Bucharest, 12 February 2000, [https://www.rcc.int/files/user/docs/2013.10.03\\_CHARTER\\_SEECD.pdf](https://www.rcc.int/files/user/docs/2013.10.03_CHARTER_SEECD.pdf) [14.04.2023].

19 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), S/RES/1244 (1999), 10 June 1999.

20 *Summit Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of South-East European Countries*, Skopje, 23 February 2001, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_4ebf9e5a2a8345fbbf04a82237945f8c.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_4ebf9e5a2a8345fbbf04a82237945f8c.pdf) [14.04.2023].

21 Ibid.

22 See SEDM Process Portal, <https://www.sedmprocess.org/> [14.04.2023].

23 *South-East European Cooperation Process 7th Summit*, Sarajevo Declaration, Sarajevo, 21 April 2004, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_5db8b9adcb0443ebddfd66b1d57ca33.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_5db8b9adcb0443ebddfd66b1d57ca33.pdf) [14.04.2023].

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid. See *NATO. The Partnership for Peace Programme*, <https://www.sto.nato.int/Pages/partnership-for-peace.aspx> [14.04.2023].

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 *Thessaloniki Declaration of the Ninth Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Together in Europe*, Thessaloniki, 4 May 2006, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_f2210f9008134425b8cec4dcd3d5f6d4.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_f2210f9008134425b8cec4dcd3d5f6d4.pdf) [14.04.2023].

Item number	Name of document and date of adoption	Selected security issues contained in the document
8.	Zagreb Declaration, 2007	Welcoming NATO's decision to invite three SEECP member states to join the PfP <sup>29</sup> . Paying attention to resolving Kosovo's status <sup>30</sup> .
9.	Pomorie Declaration, 2008	Welcoming the progress of the Western Balkan countries in the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) with the EU <sup>31</sup> . Welcoming the progress of the Western Balkan countries in the Visa Liberalization Process with the EU <sup>32</sup> .
10.	Chisinau Declaration, 2009	Emphasising progress related to the adoption of the Stability and Association Agreements (SAA) between particular members of the SEECP and the EU <sup>33</sup> . Stressing implementation of the visa facilitation and readmission Agreements between the EU and six member states of the SEECP <sup>34</sup> .
11.	Istanbul Declaration, 2010	Using culture and intercultural dialogue to promote stability and security in the region <sup>35</sup> .
12.	Budva Declaration, 2011	Stressing the progress in relations between the members of the SEECP, the EU, and NATO <sup>36</sup> . Expressing readiness to enhance and broaden cooperation in defence and security sectors, including among others, joint contribution to international peacekeeping missions <sup>37</sup> .
13.	Ohrid Declaration, 2013	Welcoming the continuation of the NATO open door policy <sup>38</sup> . Stressing the significance of the achievements within the EU facilitated dialogue and EU integration <sup>39</sup> .

29 *Zagreb Declaration of the 10th Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the South-East European Co-operation Process (SEECP) Europe's New South East*, Zagreb, 11 May 2007, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_fc126484c23046e6b8a6104fcb28d20f.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_fc126484c23046e6b8a6104fcb28d20f.pdf) [14.04.2023].

30 Ibid.

31 *Pomorie Declaration of the 11th Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP)*, Pomorie, 21 May 2008, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_75da4274dbd144a682f87b231115a2a8.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_75da4274dbd144a682f87b231115a2a8.pdf) [14.04.2023].

32 Ibid.

33 *Chisinau Declaration of the 12th Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP)*, Chisinau, 5 June 2009, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_53da4274dbd144a682f87b231115a2a8.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_53da4274dbd144a682f87b231115a2a8.pdf) [14.04.2023].

34 Ibid.

35 *Istanbul Declaration on Music as a Metaphor of Cultural Dialogue in South-East Europe*, Eight Summit of the Heads of State of South-East Europe, Istanbul, 23 June 2010, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_492091b369f54a3caf8b7a8831aeb2d2.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_492091b369f54a3caf8b7a8831aeb2d2.pdf) [15.04.2023].

36 *SEECP Budva Declaration of the 14th Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the South-East European Cooperation Process*, Budva, 30 June 2011, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_c3703def55844d51b07c41d14f40c85e.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_c3703def55844d51b07c41d14f40c85e.pdf) [15.04.2023].

37 Ibid.

38 *SEECP Ohrid Declaration of the Formal Meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs*, Ohrid, 31 May 2013, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_456acde395984314a65dc6d15cf222f5.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_456acde395984314a65dc6d15cf222f5.pdf) [15.04.2023].

39 Ibid.

Item number	Name of document and date of adoption	Selected security issues contained in the document
14.	Bucharest Summit, 2014	Welcoming the decision of the General Affairs Council of the EU to grant Albania the status of candidate country <sup>40</sup> . Welcoming the progress in the conclusion of the SAA between the EU and Kosovo.
15.	Tirana Declaration, 2015	Calling on Belgrade and Pristina to continue dialogue <sup>41</sup> . Expressing support for NATO's open door policy for aspirants from South Eastern Europe <sup>42</sup> .
16.	Sofia Declaration, 2016	Welcoming the role of NATO and the OSCE in the region <sup>43</sup> .
17.	Dubrovnik Declaration, 2017	Reaffirming the importance of the EU membership perspective <sup>44</sup> .
18.	Brdo Declaration, 2018	Stressing the enlargement of the EU as a priority of the SEECP members <sup>45</sup> . Underlining the role of NATO and the OSCE in the security and stability of Southeast Europe <sup>46</sup> .
19.	Sarajevo-Jahorina Declaration, 2019	Working together and with the institution of the EU to strengthen stability, democracy, and prosperity in the region <sup>47</sup> .
20.	SEECP Antalya Summit Declaration, 2021	Confirming the need for the individual SEECP participants to become members of the EU and NATO <sup>48</sup> .
21.	SEECP Thessaloniki Summit Declaration, 2022	Agreeing to continue their cooperation on security issues and contribution to the EU CSDP missions <sup>49</sup> .

Source: Own elaboration based on the *South-East European Cooperation Process. Declarations*, <https://www.seecp.info/declarations> [17.04.2023].

Analysis of the fundamental documents established as a result of summits and meetings for ministers of foreign affairs of the SEECP members shows that since 1996, they have been paying attention to the role of international governmental organisations in the peace process in the region. Organizations such as NATO, the EU, and the

40 *SEECP Bucharest Summit Declaration*, Bucharest, 25 June 2014, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_383e3a6a21394351bf7fb2c24a7b6bab.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_383e3a6a21394351bf7fb2c24a7b6bab.pdf) [15.04.2023].

41 *Ibid.*

42 *SEECP Tirana Summit Declaration*, Tirana, 25 May 2015, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_ddae3552fd5e455b94706df3e6cd75c2.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_ddae3552fd5e455b94706df3e6cd75c2.pdf) [16.04.2023].

43 *SEECP Sofia Summit Declaration „20th Anniversary of the SEECP – Key to regional Cooperation*, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_cfb4cbc9079c43779a39f656a4c8c4d9.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_cfb4cbc9079c43779a39f656a4c8c4d9.pdf) [16.04.2023].

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46 *Ibid.*

47 *SEECP Sarajevo-Jahorina Summit Declaration*, 9 July 2017, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_9f4fbd70244748dbaf8513040b6f4f38.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_9f4fbd70244748dbaf8513040b6f4f38.pdf) [17.04.2023].

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49 *SEECP Thessaloniki Summit Declaration*, Thessaloniki, 10 June 2022, [https://www.seecp.info/\\_files/ugd/879876\\_4c61765071eb4556be9ad52b63c430f6.pdf](https://www.seecp.info/_files/ugd/879876_4c61765071eb4556be9ad52b63c430f6.pdf) [17.04.2023].

OSCE were crucial not only in the reconstruction and transformation of post-conflict states of the Western Balkans but also in peace-keeping and peace-building in various states such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. The members of the SEECP, most of whom were also members of the former Yugoslavia, based their military security on strengthening relations with the EU and NATO. Analysis of the declarations indicates that the SEECP states are convinced that regional stability and security in South Eastern Europe depend on cooperation between the members of the SEECP with the EU and NATO.

Since 1996, the members of the SEECP have been emphasizing the crucial role of European integration in the region. They noted with acceptance the fact that Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia became members of the EU. They also supported the political and economic cooperation of the Western Balkan countries such as Serbia, North Macedonia, BiH, Montenegro, Albania, and Kosovo through the SAP<sup>50</sup>. As a result, the SEECP noted with satisfaction that SAA entered into force with all the above-mentioned countries and most of them achieved candidate status to the EU. The SEECP have also been supporting the process of full normalization of the relations between the countries of the former Yugoslavia under the auspices of the EU. In addition, EU membership for the countries of the SEECP has remained the most powerful tool for encouraging the implementation of necessary reforms. This means that, in the view of the political leaders of the SEECP member states, the EU is perceived as the guarantor of long-term peace, stability, and security in the region.

The SEECP have also been supporting the open-door policy of NATO and the continuation of the process of NATO enlargement. As a result, since 1996 the members of the SEECP have been stressing the importance of accession for the countries of the region to the PfP and NATO. In 2000, Croatia became a member of the PfP, whereas Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina joined in 2006. In turn, since 2004 the members of the SEECP have been joining NATO. From 2004-2020, the following countries of the SEECP obtained full membership in

50 See N. Wunsch, *EU enlargement and civil society in the Western Balkans. From mobilisation to empowerment*, Cham 2018.

this organization: Bulgaria (2004), Romania (2004), Slovenia (2004), Albania (2009), Croatia (2009), Montenegro (2017), and North Macedonia (2020)<sup>51</sup>.

It should be emphasised that whereas NATO guarantees military security to its member states and, therefore, attracts the members of the SEECP, especially located in the Western Balkan region, the EU, through post-conflict reconstruction, inter-community dialogue, and democratization creates economic and political stability that translates into military security. Analysis of the above-mentioned documents also reveals that member states of this regional format have been underlining the need for cooperation in the area of peace and security. However, in this regard, their actions have a mostly declarative character. Members of the SEECP have been considering the military security of the region through their historical past. The inter-ethnic tensions and wars in the Western Balkans mean that since 1996, the SEECP member states have been pointing out all the situations that might lead to international or internal conflict in this region of Europe. This was the reason why the SEECP supported the United Nations Security Council resolutions connected with resolving conflict in Kosovo, appealed to Kosovo and Serbia to establish a status settlement for Kosovo, or called leaders of Kosovo and Serbia to continue the EU-facilitated dialogue. The declarative character of the SEECP is particularly visible when it comes to the deterioration of the conflict in Kosovo in 1998. Then, the member states of this regional format only called for the parties to the conflict to pursue a settlement and abide by the resolutions of the UN Security Council. The SEECP has no specific tools for conflict settlement. Despite the fact that this regional format was enacted after the Dayton Accords had come into force, the SEECP was a witness to another war in the Western Balkans.

## Conclusions

The war in Kosovo, which ended in June 1999, in some way, became a turning point in the functioning of the SEECP. Since that time, this regional format has been gathering all the Western Balkan states, in-

51 NATO, *Member countries*, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_52044.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm) [20.04.2023].

cluding Kosovo, which is still unrecognized by Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Taking into account this fact, it is clear that the SEECP has been expanding and becoming the forum for exchanging views on various matters. In all the summits that have taken place so far, representatives of the various international organizations and non-member states took part. This makes the SEECP a forum for exchanging views not only between its member states but also between other international entities.

The analysis of the main documents issued by the SEECP shows that indeed, since 1996, the SEECP has been evolving and has become an important format for regional cooperation in South East Europe. On the other hand, during its functioning, the members of the SEECP have been coping with various issues that were threats to regional stability and security such as the war in Kosovo, the riots in Kosovo in 2004, and the tensions in north Kosovo in 2022. These facts prove that the SEECP still plays a limited role when it comes to reconciliation and good-neighbourliness in the states that are inhabited by divided societies.

In addition, the SEECP do not play a decisive role in maintaining the military security of the post-conflict states of the Western Balkans. The analysis of the fundamental documents adopted by the SEECP from 1996-2022 shows, however, that members of the SEECP have been stressing the threats to peace and security in the Western Balkans since 1996, but they had no tools to prevent or resolve the conflicts in that region. In that matter, they have been relying mostly on international governmental organizations such as NATO, the EU, and the OSCE, while at the same time calling on the members of the SEECP to integrate with NATO and the EU to strengthen their military capacity and make their states more secure and stable.

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