

OHRID SUMMIT 2013 – WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MACEDONIAN DIPLOMACY?

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Achieving cooperation among states in world politics has always been a real challenge. It is proven that this happens mostly due to selfish reasons or circumstances that are imposed on the state actors and influence their behavior in international relations.

The region of South-East Europe is not an exception. It is facing poor cooperation regarding issues of common interest and this can be seen with the recently canceled summit of SEECP which was supposed to be held in Ohrid, Macedonia.

South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) firstly was launched on Bulgaria's initiative in 1996. The SEECP biggest charac-

teristic was the way it was founded, on the country's sole initiative and not under the pressure of any international organization or institution. Particularly because of this it was believed that SEECP represents very strong foundation for good neighborly relations within the Balkans, and that it would easily survive the challenges arising within the Balkans' policy making.

The primary goals of SEECP are to strengthen the good-neighborly relations among all states in this region, transforming the region into an area of peace, security, stability and cooperation.¹ But

1 Charter on good neighborly relations, stability, security and cooperation in Southeastern Europe <http://missions.gov.mk/getmedia/2b62b8fe-ad18-4feb-8e24-a2700a0460f1/>

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one must admit that the situation from 1996 until now has changed significantly. Now we have Croatia as the newest EU member state starting from the 1st July, Albania as a NATO member, Montenegro as an independent state, Kosovo recognized by most of the EU countries, USA and more than half of the states in the Balkans. On the other hand, we also have the ongoing negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo.

Macedonia's situation has also greatly changed, starting from its peak on EU integration by 2005 with the granted EU candidate status, till the past several years of stagnation on EU and NATO integration which are mainly due to still-unresolved name dispute with Greece.

The name dispute between Greece and Macedonia and the disputed independence of Kosovo by four Balkan countries (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania and Greece) brought division among the states which led to having states taking sides in the foreign policy they follow. The lack of political understanding about practical benefits that come out from regional cooperation is leading to an upsurge in nationalist agitation and change

[Charter-on-good-neighbourly-relations,-stability,-security-and-cooperation-in-Southeastern-Europe.pdf.aspx/](#)

in common interests and priorities of the states.

Even though the SEECP was launched on its own initiative without international pressure that does not mean that the nature of SEECP has remained the same throughout the years.

Considering that South-East Europe is into the process of Euro-Atlantic integration, the inter-regional cooperation remains one of the main conditions of the EU. In that direction, the process itself appears as pressure mechanism and driving force for cooperation of whatsoever in the region.

Upon cancellation of the Summit of the South-East Europe Cooperation Process and the Forum of the Dialogue among Civilizations in Ohrid, President Gjorgje Ivanov stated that Macedonia will not allow the revived old Balkan prejudices and interests to be settled on Macedonia's shoulders.²

Looking weeks earlier before the scheduled summit, there was an uncertain situation whether Kosovo would be invited or not, and the media were accusing Macedonia on acting on Serbia's behalf for not sending the invitation. It is important to note that according to

2 Statement of the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Dr. Gjorge Ivanov <http://www.president.gov.mk/en/media-centre/press-releases/2142-2013-05-29-14-33-35.html>

the SEECP's founding act, membership to new states can be granted only on full consent of the existing member countries.³

Macedonia in this case acted in compliance with the statute and regulations of the SEECP and legally was right, however it did not express any significant effort on inviting Kosovo and this was seen as an act outside the spirit of SEECP and its Charter on good neighborly relations. As a result the invitation was not sent to Kosovo, and this happened not due to Serbia's blockage, but because of BiH's and Romania's blockage.

What troubled the whole situation of the summit was the way Macedonia handled Kosovo's invitation and this triggered the boycotts of Albania, Croatia and Slovenia. It was clearly a protest message against new rivalries in the Balkans and against Kosovo's exclusion.

At this point Macedonia's failure can be

3 Charter on good neighbourly relations, stability, security and cooperation in South-eastern Europe <http://missions.gov.mk/getmedia/2b62b8fe-ad18-4feb-8e24-a2700a0460f1/Charter-on-good-neighbourly-relations,-stability,-security-and-cooperation-in-Southeastern-Europe.pdf.aspx/>

prescribed to its foreign policy which did not foresee the solidarity of the other states in the Balkans towards Kosovo, and by that chose not an active role on promoting inclusiveness, but rather on taking sides.

It is also worth mentioning that Greece on the other hand boycotted the summit since the beginning while Bulgaria warned that their representation would be of a low diplomatic profile which just contributed more to the failure of the summit.

Macedonia did not fulfill its host duties and responsibilities in organizing this very high profile event successfully but it was not her sole fault. It only indicated the faults of SEECP's nature and design and responsibility should be equally attributed to all the member states.

The cancelation of the summit is a public call to all member states to rethink their future position on regional cooperation. It is a call to SEECP members to consider changes in the SEECP regulations and a call for reshaping it in order to better adapt on the reality of South East Europe and their constant aspiration toward EU membership and its profound EU values.

Written by: Kaltrina Selimi,
Residential Intern at the Foreign and Security Policy Programme
kselimi@analyticamk.org