

# Regional Dimension of Participation in Missions Abroad

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## Abstract

*The events in the 90s had serious implications on the peace and stability in Europe and beyond. The collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia; political instability and the initiation of democratic processes associated with transitional changes in post-socialist countries; the need to redefine national doctrines, including NATO's strategies; the intensifying effects of globalization associated with economic migration and refugee crises; increasing porosity of borders that allowed illegal crossings, trafficking of illicit goods and large influx of people to Europe considerably changed the security picture of the continent. In the areas that were recovering from the consequences of ethnic conflicts, the efforts of the international community to resolve the security issues between states turned out to be the appropriate solution for the acceleration of reforms in the security sector in the framework of fulfilling the requirements set for the Euro-Atlantic integration processes. In 2003 the Adriatic Charter was founded, following the pattern of the Vilnius group several years before in 2000. Thus, the region of Southeastern Europe, from users of services of foreign military missions, began contributing to world peace support missions. Although several years ago it was impossible, today the state representatives and army' officials think loudly about forming a military unit of the Western Balkans countries which will have the task to train the Afghan security forces, maybe as soon as year 2012.*

*Regional cooperation in the military missions is not an unknown practice in Europe. The Czech Republic and Slovakia, Scandinavian countries, Benelux and others regionally connected countries practiced sending their troops on joint missions decades ago. This paper, by analyzing the situation in the defence sphere, aims to explain the reasons that experts identify as the basis for the regional cooperation of the smaller countries in participation in international missions.*

**Key words:** NATO, Macedonia, Military Missions, Western Balkans, Democratisation

Participation in military missions is not an unknown word on the territory of the Western Balkans (WB): during the 90's the West military sent military contingents in former Yugoslavia in order to stop the conflicts and the bloodshed. Today, the same countries already have a history of their own of sending troops in military missions in the crisis areas of the world, as in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Chad and in UN missions in Cyprus, Lebanon, Liberia, Sudan, Western Sahara etc.

The inseparable security of the modern world nowadays poses a new challenge upon the WB countries: regional cooperation and participation into missions abroad. Although many of these countries had a common ground and even more than just mutual security cooperation since not long ago they were part of the same state, that particular fact can be more of a burden than a relief because of the nature of the events during and after the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Regional cooperation of participation in missions abroad sounds like something new, or something extraordinary, but in fact it is not. We cannot think of a conflict in modern history with just two warring parties. The 4<sup>th</sup> generation of warfare says that the wars today are stateless, the opponent itself is an integral part of the people and it is very difficult to separate it from the people<sup>1</sup>. Even if we look at a more classic approach towards warfare, we will again find more than two "participants" regardless of whether we are looking at a small conflict or a full scale, values or interests have made military alliances throughout the years. The recent past shows that even when a state superpower can accomplish a victory by itself, it engages into different kinds of coalitions<sup>2</sup> so it can obtain legitimacy for the intervention.

However, the question that floats is which missions should we analyze if we wish to take a look at the *regional* approach? The international law justifies interventions against any country that is a threat to world peace according to the Charter of the UN<sup>3</sup> and allows the use of force by the members of UN. Without going too deep into the question of mandate, we want to stress just one fact: all the states from the Balkans (except Serbia) want to become (or already are) a part of NATO. This one very particular regional characteristic has vital influence towards regional cooperation of the countries of Western

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<sup>1</sup> According to 4<sup>th</sup> generation of warfare, like in William S. Lind et al., "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette* (October 1989): 22-26.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Coalition of the willing, or Antiterrorist coalition.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 7 from the UN Charter (1945), article 48: "The action required to carry out the decisions of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security shall be taken by all the Members of the United Nations or by some of them, as the Security Council may determine".

Balkans in military missions. That is why in this paper when we talk about military missions we will refer mostly to NATO-led missions.

### **Cooperation between NATO countries and partner countries in military missions**

Cooperation of NATO countries in military missions is a logical thing because the Alliance itself is composed of countries with similar ideological matrix - liberal democracies<sup>4</sup>. NATO was created as a military alliance in 1949 so it can deter the threat from the Soviet Union posed to Western Europe. Besides political will for military cooperation amongst the member states, robust and very real military forces were needed for that reason. The military component was a very significant part from the Alliance. Along with that, military command structures were needed for presenting the solidarity and unity of the Alliance, and even more for the capability of command and control of those forces. In those different command structures<sup>5</sup> each member country was represented with officers and non-commissioned officers.

The dramatic change of the security environment of Europe in the nineties (mostly because of the disappearance of the Soviet threat) brought series of transformations in NATO. Until the dissolution of the former Soviet Union the area of operations of NATO was geographically restricted to the territory of the member states. The war in the Balkans helped NATO to redefine its role and to start operations outside the territory of NATO, and soon after that outside the territory of Europe, i.e. in Afghanistan. NATO's strategies started to change according to the new threats. A part of the transformation was that NATO built different programs and mechanisms for cooperation with the countries from the former Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union, former Yugoslavia and also countries from the Mediterranean, Near East, even states like Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan<sup>6</sup>. A Partnership for Peace was created (PfP) with primary role of preparation of future NATO members for the duties and tasks of the membership itself. PfP in most of the cases served the countries for transformation of the armed forces so they can equally contribute in combat alongside the armed forces of the NATO members. Part of those countries already had experience in peace keeping missions in the Balkan area<sup>7</sup>, but just as soon

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<sup>4</sup> We will not go too deep in this premise for the question of liberality of Turkey.

<sup>5</sup> The International Military Staff and different Components Commands (land, sea and air) dispersed all over Europe.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and Contact Countries.

<sup>7</sup> A lot of countries from PfP and different arrangements took part in IFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Sweden, Pakistan etc.

as 1999 they presented their readiness to take part in combat in Kosovo's air campaign after joining NATO.

Another fact that influences the countries' regional cooperation is that from the beginning of its functioning NATO does not have its own forces but generates forces for each mission from its members. This means that each of the countries that want to take part in certain missions contribute with their own forces. Therefore, cooperation is not a question of choice or desire, but a question of necessity. This does not apply only for NATO members: its partners are an important part of NATO-led missions as well. In the "Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of NATO" from 2010 a lot of the attention is given to relations with partner states. Even in the preface it is said that the Strategic Concept will guide the next phase in NATO's evolution, so that it continues to be effective in a changing world, against new threats, with new capabilities and new partners. It offers the partners around the globe more political engagement with the Alliance, and a substantial role in shaping the NATO-led operations to which they contribute. And as for the relations and cooperation with Partner states in military missions, the strategic concept in Article 30 states "We will enhance our partnerships through flexible formats that bring NATO and partners together – across and beyond existing frameworks...We will give our operational partners a structural role in shaping strategy and decisions on NATO-led missions to which they contribute."

The scope of the cooperation between NATO and partners in international missions across the world is best depicted with this single fact: 48 countries are part of ISAF mission in Afghanistan, both NATO members and NATO partners<sup>8</sup>.

### **Conditions that predetermine the regional approach of the Western Balkan countries into missions abroad**

The transformation of the armed forces of the WB countries (together with societies and political systems in general) after the events in the nineties resulted in changing the principle role of the armed forces: a shift from defence against outside attack from the neighbours into contribution for regional peace and stability and support of the state's foreign policy.<sup>9</sup> Redefining the security strategies meant

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<sup>8</sup>NATO, "International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures" (Data from March 4, 2011), SHAPE HQ of NATO, Mons, Belgium, <http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/PLACEMAT.MARCH%2004..pdf>

<sup>9</sup> The mission of the Army of the Republic of Macedonia is "to prepare, organize itself and train for combat and other actions in order to accomplish its constitutional role and function for defence of the Republic of Macedonia, and to take part

changing beliefs and opinions that have dominated the previous system with new ones compatible with the modern concepts of security. The armed forces had to expand the area of operations and start accomplishing their tasks outside their respective territory, in conjunction with other states in different frameworks, in order to respond to terrorism and other threats.

All the states in the region are still coping with the problems that have derived from the shift in their economy and political life accompanied with the effects of the global economic crises. The security in the countries is best described with the following facts:

- Condition of the region in general are stable unlike 10-15 years ago;
- There is a consensus about the Euro-Atlantic integration and future of the region that promises long term security, economic stability and sustained economic growth;
- Strategic reforms are conducted in the security sector; and
- The use of international security assistance is lowered to a minimum. From a consumer, the region became an exporter of security services<sup>10</sup>.

The Balkan area was rebuilt after the conflicts and wars, and the multi-ethnic society had to revive once again, now in a transition democracy. A lot of new models were exclusively used and “tried out.” The visible involvement of the international community in the region has highly contributed to the reform pace of the countries in many areas: reform of the security sector, training for and conducting military missions, conflict preventions, dealing with refugees etc. At the same time, the international community never lost interest or sight of the democratic processes in the Balkan area and continued with investments in regional cooperation. It is a continuing process towards accomplishing regional and

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in peace support missions, defensive and counterterrorist missions home and abroad, in conjunction with, or as a part of other collective defence systems (NATO, EU, PfP). Source: Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Macedonia, “Misija na Armijata na Republika Makedonija,” Skopje, Macedonia, <http://www.morm.gov.mk/morm/mk/ARM.html>.

The mission of the armed forces of Albania says that they are “actively engaged in the accomplishment of the constitutional mission: **protection of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, protection and support of the people in times of peace, crisis and war, as well as contributing to peace and security in the region and beyond**”. Source: Albanian Armed Forces, “Mission of the Albanian Armed Forces” Tirana, Albania, <http://www.aaf.mil.al/mat.php?idr=61&idm=430&lang=EN>.

In Croatia, the development of the key capabilities is “focused on planning processes and joint operations, as well as multinational crisis response operations, including Croatian Armed Forces deployment beyond national territory but within Allied Forces (NATO, UN, EU or other Coalition forces) and in keeping with Croatian national interests and resources”. [http://www.osrh.hr/data/about\\_en.asp](http://www.osrh.hr/data/about_en.asp).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the first task of the Armed Forces is “participation in collective security operations, in operations to support peace and self-defence, including the fight against terrorism”. Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia, “Mission of the Croatian Armed Forces,” Zagreb, Croatia, <http://www.mod.gov.ba/en/text.asp?id=75>.

<sup>10</sup>Right now only two EU missions are conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, and one NATO mission in Kosovo.

common interest of each of the countries and, in a way, overcoming short-sighted national populist movements. The NATO membership, without any doubt, is a factor that will attract foreign direct investments in the area, bring the region economically closer towards developed Europe and expand the regionalism in the security area.

### **Dilemmas in the region for participation in joint missions abroad**

Sending troops in mission abroad is more of a political than a security issue. The use of military forces is in the narrow competence of the state itself, and in this case even more because the soldiers are sent thousands kilometres away from the state territory. The following things influence that decision: public opinion, expenditures of the Ministries of Defence the state as a whole. The biggest factor- what are the gains in term of the interests of the state.

Public opinion is analysed from the aspect of the support that the people give to the countries' defence politics. Unlike Western Europe where the orientation of the government (left or right orientated) can influence the decisions for sending troops on missions and where the (not) participation in missions can be very influential for winning elections, in the WB countries seems like those things do not matter at all. Maybe it is because of the impression that these states "owe" it to NATO the end of the bloodshed and the return of the security. The population in this region seems to be immune to the pacific movements in the world and it is not interested at all (or at least proactive) in limiting the military missions abroad. It is general impression that the people see NATO, EU and the membership in both organizations as an economic and social prosperity, a desired state, so the participation in military missions is seen as a prerequisite and a way towards the goals of Euro-Atlantic integration. Finally, this is not a characteristic exclusive for this region: the newer members of NATO, or "New Europe" in terms of former secretary Donald Rumsfeld, are more eager to send combat units in missions than the older member states<sup>11</sup>.

When speaking about the defence expenditures and sending troops in mission, there is one basic principle in NATO on this topic: The cost lay where it falls. What this means in simple words is that each country that wants to participate in a mission must pay for all of its expenses. Alongside all the expenses for training of forces, the country must pay for all the maintenance of force and equipment. It

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<sup>11</sup> Donald H. Rumsfeld, Briefing at the Foreign Press Centre by Secretary of Defence, January 22, 2003, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=1330> (accessed May 20, 2011).

is a lengthy and demanding process from organizational and financial aspect especially for the smaller countries, in which a lot of contractors, subcontractors, companies and local labour are employed from the area of the mission country. Therefore the smaller countries when sending troops in theatre are logistically attached to the bigger states by signing mutual arrangements and their contingents are a part (under operational command/control) of the bigger states' contingents. The WB countries so far have sent smaller contingents in different crisis area around the world. The biggest unit sent by Republic of Macedonia on a mission is a company sized element in ISAF in Afghanistan (around 150 people). The same goes for Republic of Albania, their biggest unit is also a company sized element, and the total number of personnel deployed in Afghanistan is 250. So, it is not a surprise that Republic of Croatia's biggest unit sent on a mission is again a company sized element, and again in Afghanistan where the total number of soldiers is around 300. Bosnia and Herzegovina just finished the first rotation of an infantry unit in Afghanistan in April 2011 – platoon sized element.

When talking about the gains from the missions for the country as a whole in a matter of achieving the interests of a state, it is very difficult to say that there is reciprocity between achieving the interests of the state and the expenditures for the mission itself. Unlike the expenditures which can be easily calculated in Euros and Dollars, achieving the state interests cannot be easily measured. The membership in international organizations brings array of obligations and a spectrum of activities in the area of security policy in order to deal with risks and threats towards state interests and values. Some of the WB states, even when they were not members of NATO, were part of its missions and took their fair share of the security obligations. Their goal was ultimately to become part of NATO and EU, i.e. to become a part of the western world of liberal democracies. Their obligations to have 8% of the armed forces deployable and to have 2.5% of the armed forces deployed, lead in that direction. Ultimately, the general interest of the WB countries for taking part in international missions is to be part of the “international team” and not left aside.

The success of the contingents, their influence upon the reputation of the state in international politics, is also an immeasurable category. Thus, it is often said that the soldiers participating in missions are the country's best ambassadors. So far, the price of human life was not part of the calculation. That variable can significantly change the price of the mission, it can change the public opinion and support

for the on-going mission, and it can even influence and change the country's politics.<sup>12</sup> This debate is not yet actualized in the countries of Western Balkans.

The aspiration for regional military cooperation in the Balkans was first manifested with the SEEBRIG initiative (1998) - Southeast European Brigade, a multinational military force that can be used for peacekeeping or aid operations in the Balkans and elsewhere. According to the constitution Agreement<sup>13</sup>, the purpose of SEEBRIG is to contribute to the regional security and stability and to foster good neighbourly relationships among the countries in Southeastern Europe, in the context of SEDM (Southeast Europe Defence Ministerial) process, under the auspices of Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and in the spirit of Partnership for Peace (PfP). Also, this multinational brigade represents an instrument in crisis solving by its participation in peace-keeping operations and humanitarian assistance. As Adam T. Joseph Lopez, former commander in chief of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe and NATO commander of allied forces, southern region, has remarked, "SEEBRIG will not be a remedy for existing bilateral disputes, but it can help dispel the negative perceptions some countries have of others by broadening the dialogue among the member countries."<sup>14</sup> The regional approach in military missions abroad was proven in practice in August 2005 when medical personnel was sent to Afghanistan as part of the Combined Medical Team in the A-3 format (Macedonia, Albania, Croatia).<sup>15</sup> These countries continue with the mission to date.

If we look at the challenges the joint mission of the countries of Western Balkans faces, some questions emerge:

1. *What are the consequences the state faces if it does not participate in a joint mission?*

Not all Balkan states are part of NATO, but as previously seen, that fact does not influence their decision to (not) send troops as part of NATO-led missions. We do not think that there will

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Spain stopped the mission in Iraq in 2004 as an aftereffect of the Madrid terrorist attacks and the 11 victims in the mission previously.

<sup>13</sup> See the Agreement on the Multinational Peace Force South-Eastern Europe at [http://www.morm.gov.mk/morm/sedm-pmssc/doc/mainColumnParagraphs/0/content\\_files/file1/MPFSEE-Agreement-comp.pdf](http://www.morm.gov.mk/morm/sedm-pmssc/doc/mainColumnParagraphs/0/content_files/file1/MPFSEE-Agreement-comp.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Gary Dempsey and Spiros Rizopoulos, "Alternatives to a NATO-Dominated Balkans" in *NATO's empty victory: a post-mortem on the Balkan War*, ed. Ted Galen Carpenter (Washington: CATO Institute, 2000), 146.

<sup>15</sup> Two more countries approached towards the Adriatic Charter (A-3 group formed by Albania, Croatia, Macedonia and USA) in 2008 (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro) forming the A-5 group.



be some political consequences for the state however, that will not go in line with the countries present positions for regional defence cooperation and good regional relations. If there is an initiative for forming regional military forces that will take part in the ISAF mission, again, just like in all NATO-led missions, the need to be part of the “international team” will overcome the narrow national interests even more because of the fact that the countries have already sent troops in the same crisis area. Just like the A-3 group, the framework for military regional cooperation could be the A-5 group plus some other countries from the region, under the guidance and leadership of USA. Perhaps the group would be given another name so the cohesion and the co-operation would be stressed and recognized, like Balkan-7 or similar. It is known, however, that the WB countries have a tendency to better accomplish their interests while under the leadership of a greater power.

2. *Can the security forces (Armed Forces and the Police) cooperate better than the politicians? Can the “Balkan syndrome” hinder the regional military cooperation?*

Unlike the general impression that the military is an organization that is inert, conservative and resistant to changes, the armies of the WB countries so far have shown just the opposite: they have undergone thorough changes and transformations, and are open for cooperation with other armies, especially when part of a mission abroad. It is reasonable to believe that not all the ghosts from the past have settled down, so some members of the armed forces will not have complete confidence in their Balkan counterparts. However, obedience of orders and hierarchy as one of the basic tenets of military organizations will help in overcoming those challenges, especially because an additional factor of cohesion is the common enemy outside the gates. Finally, the cooperation with the Afghan security forces while conducting joint missions, after the completed training of the Afghan forces, will dictate that the Balkans regional forces will have to rely not only in their counterparts, but also on their Afghan colleges.

3. *Which authority will determine the number, structure and types of forces and the details of the Balkans regional forces?*

From experience, the greatest challenge is to obtain political agreement among the leaders of the WB countries. After that, the actions will be transferred from political to operative level, for the lower echelons to set up the details. So far (in missions in the A-3 group or SEEBRIG) the

command of the mission usually rotates between the members. The structure and the number of forces for the required mission is consistent with the capabilities of the WB states. The participation, even a symbolic one, is a great contribution to enhancing regional cooperation in the field of defence and security.

## **Conclusion**

The Western Balkans countries, in order to implement their security strategies, are continuously increasing the quantity and scope of the forces participating in international military missions, regardless whether they are being part of NATO or led by other international organization where they are members or have a partnership relations with. The contribution and the reputation of the WB armies are leading towards further de-stigmatization of the region from the past events. Even though the region needed an outside impulse to strengthen the will of political leaders for cooperation, they now have a history of their own in contributing to world peace and security.

The armed forces, when deployed on a mission abroad, have showed that they can communicate on the field far better than the politicians on the table and that their professional approach makes them immune to the challenges continually posed upon the Balkan area: political instability, economic uncertainty and tensed ethnical relations. The current regional cooperation gives the Western Balkans countries a fundament for establishment of regional military forces for a joint mission abroad alone or together with the armed forces of some of the greater powers. Either way, it will significantly broaden the regional cooperation and help in the integration of the region in the Euro-Atlantic sphere.

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