

INTERVENTION

by

Mr. Fuad Šabeta

Secretary

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina

THE 2003 MEDITERRANEAN SEMINAR

**“The comprehensive approach to security: The OSCE
experience and its relevance for the Mediterranean region”,
Aqaba, Jordan, 20 to 21 October 2003**

Session 1: The Security Dimension

– Conflict prevention and confidence-building

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this important event on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country that is currently chairing the South-East European Cooperation Process - SEECP. It is a pleasure and honor for me to be here and to share the floor today with other distinguished persons on the topic that deserves our undivided attention.

Two significant, as well as contrasting characteristics of the past century are on one side the economic prosperity based on open markets, and on the other misery caused by many regional and internal conflicts. We have all seen the results of conflicts: homes destroyed; men, women and children killed, wounded or driven from their homes; devastated economies and environmental tragedies – in other words destruction of everything that is associated with life of the human. The causes of crises and conflicts in their various manifestations are difficult to detect, to investigate and even more to prevent. Consequently, conflict prevention is easier said than done. It is a task involving wide spectrum of political, diplomatic, developmental and humanitarian efforts. In this context - among other aspects of this issue - regional cooperation can play extensively important role.

Allow me, therefore, to speak on the experience gained within the framework of the SEECP on the role of regional cooperation in enhancing stability and security in South Eastern Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The South-East Europe, or precisely the Balkans, has a long-standing reputation as a region of turmoil and insecurity. Tensions and crises erupted throughout the region on numerous occasions, leaving behind suffering and chronic instability. The most recent instability of the last decade has had devastating influence on the Balkans, resulting in successive crises and in some cases fierce armed conflicts. Moreover, state of transition towards liberal democracies and market oriented economies, characteristic for

majority of the countries of the region, added extra weight to the political and social tensions throughout the region.

South-East Europe region is not a homogenous one, if we consider it from political, as well social, economic and military aspects of the stability of the constituent countries. Internal dynamics and development phases differ from country to country. However, recognizing the need to overcome divisions and conflicts and reaffirming unreserved commitments to the principles and the norms enshrined in the UN Charter, as well as in the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE documents, the countries of the region have decided to work together to create conditions for regional prosperity in an environment of peace, security and stability. Being the only initiative originating from the region itself, the SEECP is essential framework for concerted efforts aimed at development of good neighborly relations and strengthening the ties and cooperation among the participating countries.

Thanks to continuous advancement of democratic processes, the picture of the region as a whole is different than the one that existed just a couple of years ago. A new spirit of understanding and friendly relations throughout SEE infuses better dialogue and coordination. This new atmosphere has contributed greatly to the improvement of bilateral relations between the regional countries. It has also created an awareness of a new destiny - of interdependence for regional prosperity and security. Above all, our European integration perspective dominates possible differences regarding political, economic and security views.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From its conception, the basic orientation of the South East European Cooperation Process was the development of political dialogue. Knowing that stability, democratisation, rule of law, economic development and respect for human rights, including rights of persons belonging to national minorities, are crucial objectives for the region, the countries of the region have expressed determination in finding out ways to further strengthen ties and joint efforts in leading South Eastern Europe towards greater prosperity. So, over the years, reflecting the shifts in interests and needs of our countries, the SEECP has expanded. The Charter on Good-Neighborly Relations (known also as Bucharest Charter) opened new chapter in SEECP life and provided us with excellent options for intensification and broadening of the scope of cooperation. In this context, commendable initial progress has been achieved in selected priority areas. Namely:

- Greater emphasis has been put on speeding up and promoting active economic and trade relations. The future development of the countries in the region depends to a large extent on internally-generated growth by the way of increased regional trade. This topic has become a crucial issue of the whole region since the countries of Southeast Europe have proceeded to implement the network of bilateral Free Trade Agreements, significantly enlarging the market to up to 60 million consumers. Full and efficient implementation of those agreements, combined with further trade liberalisation and facilitation measures, is critical to this end.
- The SEE countries' strategic interest lies also in reconnecting and enhancing transport infrastructure. The same should be applied to regional energy market, as essential for the sustainable economic development.

- Organized crime is considered as one of the most serious threats to stability in the region and even beyond. Given the nature of criminal activities, regional co-operation is essential to fighting organized crime. In SEECP we have noted successful steps which have been taken recently in a number of countries in fight against all forms of organized crime and illegal activities.
- Another important priority concerns the largest possible involvement of youth as a catalyst of peace, cooperation, stability and solidarity throughout the region. Exchange of experience and best practices in the process of the education reforms in line with European standards, and mutual recognition of the university diplomas is considered to be significant step forward in providing young people with more options and possibilities.
- Concrete activities also include consideration of intra-regional liberalization of the visa requirements, with the ultimate aim of establishing a free area of movement of people, in parallel with a free area of movement of goods.

In parallel with advancement of cooperation processes, SEECP's importance continues to grow as a consolidated regional voice when considered from the broader international and in particular European integration perspective.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Bucharest Charter I have mentioned earlier defines also that one of the scopes and principles of regional cooperation is "the response to new security challenges requires efforts in a wide range of areas, as well as strengthening international solidarity, including

SEECP countries participation in conflict prevention and crisis management activities”. Moreover, the Charter provides that one of the objectives of the SEECP is the enhancement of political and security cooperation through “preventing and putting an end to tensions and crises”.

The tools for conflict prevention have been put to extensive use in the Balkans over the last decade. From that experience we have gained much knowledge of the efficacy – or sometimes lack - of various means of conflict prevention. Living in a region that passed through the ordeals of serious conflicts and is still facing some uncertainties and need for an external assistance, we have learned that the prevention must be first and foremost a home-grown process which requires strong political will of the parties involved. Therefore, the partnership should be embraced and viewed as the only sound alternative opposed to competition, confrontation and lack of goodwill.

Thank you for your attention.