

Monitoring Regional Cooperation in South East Europe: The Republic of Serbia

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1. Background Information

The watershed event in Serbia's recent history took place on 5 October 2000, when President Slobodan Milošević was toppled by mass demonstrations. Serbia has been undergoing a triple transition ever since: from authoritarian regime to democracy, from conflict to peace and from isolation to integration. The key external driving force behind this multifaceted transformation is the process of EU integration. The prospect of membership, followed by a strong EU conditionality policy, has provided Serbia with an important incentive for reforms, including regional cooperation. From the very beginning of the Stabilization and Association Process in 2000, regional cooperation was set by Brussels as one of the key conditions for progress in Western Balkan countries' EU integration, in addition to the well-known Copenhagen Criteria and cooperation with ICTY.

Serbia signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement in November 2007 and officially applied for EU membership in December 2009. In March 2012, Serbia was granted candidate status for EU membership. Consequently, the unresolved dispute over Kosovo emerged as the last major impediment both for Serbia's EU progress and for regional cooperation. Serbia does not recognize the unilateral declaration of independence issued by the Kosovan authorities on 17 February 2008 and treats it as an illegal act of secession. In contrast, all the other countries of the region,

except for Bosnia and Herzegovina, have recognized the independence of Kosovo and have established diplomatic relationships with it. In the latest Progress Report published in 2012, the European Commission took note of Serbia's active and constructive involvement in regional cooperation schemes. The key reason for such an encouraging message was the agreement between Belgrade and Pristina on the representation of Kosovo in regional forums, reached in February 2012. However, as the Commission report notes: »the agreement reached on regional cooperation and the representation of Kosovo in the framework of the Belgrade/Pristina dialogue did not immediately result in either smoother or fully inclusive regional cooperation« (European Commission 2012: 20).

The political system in Serbia is a semi-presidential parliamentary democracy. This entails the co-existence of two powerful executive branches, a directly elected president and a prime minister elected by the parliament (Pejić 2007). When a president of Serbia is a leader of a parliamentary majority, his effective powers increase significantly. In contrast, in case of co-habitation, when a president does not have the support of a parliamentary majority, his effective authority diminishes significantly (Pavlović and Stanojević 2010). Parliamentary elections have been held five times in Serbia since the democratic transition started, in 2000, 2003, 2007, 2008 and 2012. Throughout this period, one of the key trends was the gradual return of parties from

the Milošević era back into the government, a process that came to its full conclusion after the last elections in 2012. Although their political rhetoric at times threatened to undermine regional cooperation, so far this has not happened. Moreover, despite concerns that the return of parties of the old regime may affect Serbia's European orientation, its foreign policy has remained quite stable, for good or ill. In addition to seeking EU membership and protecting fictional sovereignty over Kosovo, the main priorities of Serbia's foreign policy remain regional cooperation, military neutrality, strategic partnership with the Russian Federation and good relations with the United States.

Serbia has important economic, political, security and cultural incentives to advance regional cooperation. Economically, South East European countries are very important commercial partners for Serbia, second only to the EU. Around one-third of Serbia's exports go to the region, being a rare case of a Serbian foreign trade surplus. Serbia benefited immensely from CEFTA, a regional free trade agreement signed by all Western Balkan states plus Moldova. Serbia also has very strong political incentives to strengthen regional cooperation. First and foremost, as already mentioned, Brussels made it part and parcel of the EU integration process. The Serbia 2012 Progress Report published by the European Commission stated this clearly: »Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations form an essential part of the process of Serbia's moving towards the European Union« (EC 2012: 20). Unsurprisingly, most regional cooperation schemes were initiated, supported and supervised by the EU and its member states. On Serbia's side, regional cooperation is part of the wider discourse on European integration. An institutional reflection of this is the fact that, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Regional Initiatives

Department belongs to the EU sector and not to the Multilateral Cooperation Sector. The Department coordinates Serbia's participation in all regional initiatives, most of which are taking place in South East Europe.

Regional cooperation also underpins the process of regional reconciliation and stabilization. Serbia can more easily manage its challenges of democratic transition and regional peace building through participation in the 40 or so regional initiatives that cover a vast array of sectors. As the biggest state in the region, having major political stakes in both Bosnia and Kosovo, Serbia is highly sensitive to any potential instability in South East Europe. In addition, soft security threats undermining Serbia's political stability, such as organized crime, usually have a regional outlook and can be tackled only through regionally coordinated policies. Finally, Serbia has a cultural incentive to maintain and advance regional cooperation, not least because a sizeable Serb diaspora lives in neighbouring countries. Unlike some other Western Balkan states, stronger ties with the neighbourhood are not perceived by Serbian citizens in a negative fashion, as a revamp of Yugoslavia or anything like that. In sum, it is clear that Serbia has strong external and internal incentives to advance regional cooperation.

2. Analysis of the Initiatives

The aim of this section is to analyse how regional cooperation schemes in the fields of justice and home affairs and social development work in practice at national level in the Republic of Serbia. In the field of justice and home affairs, Serbia participates in all three analysed initiatives: SELEC, MARRI and RAI. It was among the 12 countries that founded SECI by signing the Agreement on Cooperation to Prevent and Combat Cross-Border

Crime in May 1999. When SECI was transformed into SELEC, Serbia was again among the 13 founding members who signed the Convention of the Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre (SELEC) on 9 December 2009 in Bucharest. Moreover, Serbia signed the Protocol on Privileges and Immunities in November 2010 and is represented in the SELEC Centre in Bucharest by two liaison officers, one from the Customs Authority and the other from the Serbian Police. Moreover, Serbia has also been a member of the Migration, Asylum, and Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) since it was established in 2003. At the meeting held in Herceg Novi on 5 April 2004, member states, including Serbia, signed the Joint Statement which established the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje. In addition to the Regional Centre, MARRI has a Regional Forum which is a political body providing strategic guidance to the organization. The Chairmanship of the Regional Forum rotates once a year. Serbia held the Chairmanship from April 2011 to April 2012. Priorities during Serbia's chairmanship were the fight against human trafficking and legal and illegal migration. The chairmanship, generally considered successful, concluded with the adoption of the Belgrade Declaration on 3 April 2012 in a meeting held in the capital of Serbia.

Moreover, Serbia participates in regional cooperation schemes in the fight against corruption. When the Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative (SPAI) was established in February 2000, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) did not participate due to international sanctions imposed on the regime of Slobodan Milošević. The FRY joined the Stability Pact on 26 October 2000, weeks after Milošević was ousted from power. Ever since, Serbia has participated in SPAI, which changed its name to the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) on 9 October 2007. Officially, Serbia

joined RAI on 18 May 2010 when the MOU was signed and subsequently ratified.

Serbia has been equally active in the three analysed initiatives in the field of social development. First, it took part in the Regional Programme on Social Security Coordination and Social Security Reforms in South East Europe (RP-SSCSSR), which was a joint programme of the European Commission and the Council of Europe. The programme started as a follow up of the Social Institution Support Programme (SISP), which was implemented between 2004 and 2008. RP-SSCSSR started in March 2008 and lasted until August 2011. Second, Serbia has been an active member within the Centre of Public Employment Services of South East Europe (CPESSEC) since its inception when the Partnership Protocol was signed in Sofia in 2006. Its second key document, the Guidelines for Operation, was signed at the conference held in Belgrade in 2007. Serbia presided over the CPESSEC in 2007 and 2008, a period which was crucial for the development of this initiative. Serbia's National Employment Service (NES) maintains the initiative's website.

Third, Serbia has been actively involved in the South-eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN), which is considered to be one of the most successful regional initiatives in South East Europe. Serbia has been taking part in it ever since health was added to the agenda of the Social Cohesion Initiative within the Working Table 2 (Economic Reconstruction, Cooperation, and Development) of the Stability Pact. The FRY was among seven states that signed the Dubrovnik Pledge on 2 September 2001, thus establishing the SEEHN. The FRY, and then Serbia as its successor state, was a signatory of all further documents, including the Skopje Pledge (2005), the MOU on the Future of the South-Eastern Europe Health Network within the Framework of the South East European Cooperation Process (2008) and the Banja Luka Pledge (2011).

What follows is the analysis of how these six regional initiatives work in practice at the national level in the Republic of Serbia, in terms of three dimensions: *implementation*, *local ownership* and *gender*. In addition to the analysis of primary and secondary sources related to Serbia's involvement in the aforementioned six regional cooperation schemes, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted with state representatives and independent experts in the fall and winter of 2012. The interviewees included representatives of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the National Employment Service (NES), the European Movement in Serbia and the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy.

2.1 Implementation

This section will assess the implementation or the existence of structures and capacities within Serbia to sustain the regional initiatives under examination. This dimension will be analysed through four indicators: *legislation*, *administrative structures*, *technical infrastructure* and *practices/procedures*.

(i) With regard to *legislation*, a variety of normative documents have been adopted for the purpose of the six initiatives analysed. In the field of justice and home affairs, according to the interviewees, the normative framework for regional cooperation in the three initiatives (SELEC, MARRI and RAI) has by and large been put in place. The Serbian Parliament adopted the Law on Confirmation of the Convention of Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre on 18 October 2011. Up until recently, the status of police attachés was underregulated and they had to be detached by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and accredited through the host embassies. This

problem was solved when the Law on the Police was amended in October 2011 in order to regulate international police cooperation, including SELEC (Đorđević 2011). According to the interviewees from CSOs, the procedure of selecting liaison officers is still not properly regulated and is subject to voluntarism and political influence. Serbia has also adopted all the laws necessary for regional cooperation in the field of asylum, refugees and migration, most importantly the Law on Protection of State Border (2008) and the Law on Asylum (2008). The latter meets the standards set by international documents regarding the right of asylum, such as the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), as well as the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) and its protocols. Moreover, Serbia signed the MOU in the area of consular assistance and consular protection in June 2010, which was negotiated within the framework of MARRI. Based on this document, bilateral agreements were signed with Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, Serbia proposed an MOU on data exchange concerning asylum seekers at the Regional Forum held in Montenegro in May 2010. Unfortunately, the conditions were not met for signing to take place during Serbia's presidency because other member states are still considering its implications for their private data protection regimes. The interviewees from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior expressed the hope that the document will be adopted during the current Bosnian chairmanship. Finally, Serbia's normative framework for the implementation of RAI is complete. Currently, consultations about the changes to the current MOU are under way and the new document was expected to be signed in January 2013.

In addition to the aforementioned laws, Serbia has also adopted a number of strategic documents, which envisage regional coopera-

tion in the field of justice and home affairs. On the most general level, first and foremost comes the Ministry of the Interior Development Strategy 2011–2016, adopted in December 2010. The strategy stipulates the following: »It is necessary to create indispensable legal, institutional, financial and human resources that will enable the most efficient development of regional police cooperation« (MUP 2010: 19–20). Additionally, the Republic of Serbia has adopted a number of sector-specific strategies tackling SELEC, MARRI or RAI indirectly. This is the case, for example, with the National Strategy for the Fight against Organized Crime (2009), the Strategy for Migration Management (2009) and the National Strategy for the Fight against Corruption (2005). All these documents stress the importance of regional cooperation, although they do not explicitly mention the three initiatives.

The normative framework needed for implementation of the three initiatives in the field of social development is also mostly in place. In the field of public employment bilateral agreements between Serbia and neighbouring countries have been signed and protocols and models for data exchange – for example, on length of service – as well as necessary procedures for the employment of foreign workers were adopted. With regard to SEEHN, Serbia signed the Host Agreement for the new Secretariat to be established in Skopje but has yet to ratify it. In addition, Serbia has adopted all the necessary regulations for the establishment of the Regional Health Development Centre on Accreditation and Continuous Quality Improvement of Health Care.

In the wake of the Third Ministerial Conference on Social Security Coordination in the South East European Region, held in Budva on 12 October 2010, the government of Serbia adopted Decision 5, No: 037-7439/2010 on

11 October 2011. The decision determined the negotiating platform of the Serbian delegation at the ministerial conference (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2011: 6). It was decided that due to the plan for Kosovo to sign the final declaration, Serbia's delegation would be represented at the expert level. The platform specifically insisted that the Kosovo's participation at the Ministerial Conference needed to be in line with UNSCR 1244 and it defined the substance of the letter which Minister of Labour and Social Policy Rasim Ljajić sent to Alexander Vladychenko, Director General of Social Cohesion (DG3) of the Council of Europe. The letter by which Serbia accepted the terms of the Budva Declaration was attached as an annex to it.

The Republic of Serbia has also adopted a number of sector-specific strategies in the field of social development, such as the National Employment Strategy 2011–2020 (2011), the National Strategy of Social Protection (2005) and a set of health policy strategies. All these strategies emphasize the importance of regional cooperation, but do not mention the three analysed initiatives explicitly.

(ii) Concerning *administrative structures*, almost no new bodies have been created for the purpose of the six analysed regional initiatives. The only exception is the establishment of the Regional Health Development Centre (RHDC) in Belgrade as part of the Agency for Accreditation of Health Care Institutions in Serbia, in October 2012. Various cross-sector expert groups in MARRI or task forces within SELEC were formed in order to support the implementation of the initiatives, especially during the periods when Serbia held the presidency. However, in the past decade or so, a number of new bodies have been created for the purpose of regional integration more generally. Thus, for instance, several bodies were created or modified within the Ministry of the

Interior to serve the purpose of regional police cooperation, such as the Bureau for International Cooperation and European Integration (2003) and the Directorate for International Operational Police Cooperation (2010). The latter has four bureaus dealing with EUROPOL, INTERPOL, information management and other forms of international cooperation (including SELEC and MARRI). Finally, Serbia has not established any new bodies at the national level for the purpose of implementation of RAI. According to Lopandić and Kronja, Serbia's participation in SPAI led to the adoption of national anti-corruption strategies and the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Council in 2001 (Lopandić and Kronja 2010: 92).

No new staff has been employed to be in charge of the analysed regional initiatives. Instead, staff engaged in the implementation of the initiatives was recruited from existing employees. Most people involved in regional cooperation spend only a fraction of their working hours on the analysed regional initiatives. Within the Ministry of the Interior, there are posts related to international cooperation but not specifically for particular regional initiatives. Approximately 60 people work on regional police cooperation, of whom 20 work within the Bureau for International Cooperation and European Integration and around 40 in the Directorate for International Operative Police Cooperation. In both organizational units, SELEC and MARRI are relatively marginal. The Bureau handles practically the entire fundraising for the Ministry of the Interior, as well as cooperation with international organisations and civil society organisations. Similarly, the Directorate pays much more attention to the cooperation with INTERPOL and EUROPOL than with SELEC. This is because the number of requests coming through the former is much higher. The Ministry of the Interior currently has five police attachés, in Skopje (MARRI) and Bucharest (SELEC), Mos-

cow, Ljubljana (DCAF) and Washington. Both the National Coordinator for MARRI and the Focal Point for SELEC are high-ranking functionaries within the Ministry of the Interior: the former is the Deputy Head of the Border Police Directorate and the latter is the Head of the Directorate for International Operative Police Cooperation. For the purpose of RAI implementation, the Special Advisor at the Ministry of Justice is currently serving as Senior Representative at the Steering Committee. His deputy has not yet been appointed.

The NES, too, has not employed new staff for the purpose of regional initiatives. Its Centre for International Cooperation, which is responsible for the CPESSEC, employs only three people who at the same time deal with all other forms of international cooperation. Equally, no new people were hired in the health sector for the purpose of SEEHN. »Focal points« for regional cooperation are appointed within different health institutes on a merit basis and among already employed personnel. The National Health Coordinator to SEEHN is usually a State Secretary appointed by the Minister of Health. Finally, no new staff have been hired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the purpose of the six regional initiatives. The European Union Sector employs around 30 diplomats, eight of them working in the Regional Initiatives Department. The problem within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the fact that diplomats remain in one position for only eighteen months, on average. The quick turnover prevents specialization, which is very important in the field of regional cooperation, which can be very technical and complex.

There has been no specific training for either of the initiatives and, according to the interviewees, there is no need for it. Police officers are trained in regional cooperation either at the Serbia's Police Academy, the Marshall Centre (Germany), the Regional School of

Public Administration (Montenegro) or the International Law Enforcement Academy (Hungary). At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the staff dealing with regional cooperation did not have specific training for the analysed initiatives. They acquired the necessary knowledge from their senior colleagues, through »learning by doing«, at the Diplomatic Academy or from numerous EU integration seminars organized by various educational institutions by default encompassing a regional cooperation component.

Representatives from the Ministry of Health complained that there is practically no in-house training at all in the field of health diplomacy and little awareness that such a thing even exists within other institutions of higher education. Finally, there has been no specific training for the purpose of RAI, except periodic summer schools attended – so far – by a handful of bureaucrats from various institutions. The sole exception in this regard was the RP-SSCSSR that has devoted a great deal of effort to training employees dealing with social security. During the project, 102 participants from Serbia took part in different educational activities organized under the auspices of the initiative (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2011: 3).

(iii) *Technical infrastructure* obtained for the purpose of the six analysed regional initiatives encompassed mostly computers. No new building or vehicles were purchased. The RHDC was established within the Agency for Accreditation. The latter institution did not purchase any new equipment or hire any new staff for the purpose of the initiative. However, the establishment of the RHDC increased the relevance of the Agency and helped to ensure its survival in the face of the new government's plans to shut down all »irrelevant agencies«. For the purpose of the CPESSEC, a website was developed as an in-kind contri-

bution of the NES. The only cost that the NES incurred regarding the website was to pay for the domain and hosting. Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, computers were donated by the European Commission to the EU Sector but only because it dealt with the EU, not because of the Regional Initiatives Department, let alone the six analysed initiatives.

(iv) *Practices and procedures* for implementation vary across initiatives. Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is an umbrella institution for all regional cooperation, only ad hoc cross-sector meetings take place, usually once or twice a month. During periods when Serbia holds a presidency, the meetings are held on a more regular basis. Otherwise, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is involved in the six analysed regional cooperation schemes only when it is asked to do so. This is usually the case if a political issue is on their agenda, such as the following: participation of Kosovo's representative in initiatives; election of high functionaries within the Secretariat; appointment of national representatives to secretariats; and adoption or amendment of important documents. One of the reasons why this horizontal coordination is weak is, as one interviewee put it, the »feudalization« of the government.

The Deputy Minister in charge of the European Union usually initiates the meetings. Civil society organisations are rarely invited to such meetings, however, only when Serbia holds presidency over some of the initiatives and when the frequency of activities is higher. Within the Ministry of the Interior, there are day-to-day meetings within either the Bureau for International Cooperation and European Integration or the Directorate for International Operational Police Cooperation. In addition, the Bureau organizes a annual conference, often dealing with regional police cooperation. For example in 2011, the annual conference

was about MARRI. Civil society organisations are sometimes consulted on an ad hoc basis when issues of human trafficking, asylum or migration are on the agenda.

As far as RP-SSCCCR is concerned, the only meetings that have taken place at the national level were ones at which the local programme officer alone or in concert with the international management of the programme informed other national institutions about the activities undertaken or planned within the initiative. In addition, the key activities of the initiative were seminars, trainings, and conferences, summer schools and »speaking days«. The last one is an arranged meeting between delegations of Serbia and Croatia represented by experts and officials from the health and pension insurance area, on one side, and registered clients who have pending cases concerning social security rights, on the other. Although the RP-SSCSSR officially ended in August 2011, the »Speaking Days« meetings between Serbia and Croatia, which are considered to be of high value, continue unabated. These »Speaking Days« meetings take place twice a year, once in Belgrade and once in Zagreb, at the cost of the host country. Although RP-SSCSSR was an initiative directed at state institutions only, its local programme officer attempted to involve civil society organisations, too. However, only media representatives responded positively. Universities and trade unions showed little or no interest in taking part. The CPESSEC also has had very limited consultation with civil society organisations in Serbia and only on ad hoc basis. More specifically, CSO experts were invited as lecturers when the issue of migration was on the agenda. Finally, practices and procedures in SEEHN do not involve any official or regular meetings at the national level. Focal points at different health institutions cooperate directly with their opposite numbers in the region. Only periodically do they send

their reports to the local secretary of the national coordinator. As with all other initiatives, consultations with civil society organisations are very rare.

2.2 Local Ownership

Local ownership is defined in terms of the capacities and performance of Serbia's institutions within regional initiatives. It will be analysed through three indicators: *resources*, *agenda setting* and the *eagerness* of the Serbian state.

(i) The amount of financial *resources* that Serbia contributes to the six studied regional initiatives varies. Some initiatives do not cost anything, such as RP-SSCSSR, in relation to which the European Commission and the Council of Europe covered all costs. In other initiatives, such as CPESSEC, membership involved a financial cost only when Serbia held the presidency. According to interviewees, the annual amount contributed to CPESSEC during the presidency was roughly 30,000 euros paid from the budget of the Ministry of the Economy and Regional Development. This covered the organization of two expert conferences (approximately 5,000 euros each) and two directors' conferences (about 10,000 euros each). The only cost that Serbia incurs in this initiative, beyond the Presidency period, is 300 euros needed for annual maintenance of the website. Serbia also pays around 50,000 euros from the Budget of the Ministry of Health for its participation in SEEHN. This covers the contribution for the SEEHN Secretariat, which is set at 20,000 euros for Serbia, in accordance with its GDP, under the MOU. In addition, Serbia annually contributes an additional 20,000 euros for the maintenance of the RHDC and 10,000 euros for travel expenses earmarked for activities within the network. Serbia's financial contribution to MARRI is 20,000 euros. The

Secretariat pays travel and accommodation costs for the national coordinator to attend regional meetings. Travel costs of other state representatives are paid by the Ministry of the Interior and do not exceed 3,000 euros per year. Serbia's annual contribution to SELEC is 45,000 euros. The fixed fee that all members of RAI, including Serbia, are supposed to pay is 24,000 euros. However, Serbia has not paid its fee since it joined the initiative in 2010. According to the Senior Representative, the reason for this is the implementation of austerity measures, but also the failure of the Ministry of Justice to communicate the need to the Ministry of Finance. All travel expenses of the Senior Representative are paid by RAI.

(ii) *Agenda setting* depends largely on the nature of the issue at hand. According to most interviewees, ministers, their advisors or state secretaries decide what political issues will be discussed at national meetings. If an issue is of a high-political nature, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or even the government puts it on the agenda. More technical issues are left to focal points and national coordinators, however. Within initiatives in which high-ranking decision-makers – for example, SELEC, MARRI – act as focal points and national coordinators they often participate in political decision making as well. For instance, national coordinators in MARRI participated only in the work of the Regional Forum until 2011. They have recently been included in the work of the Regional Committee, which was previously reserved for representatives of their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs. A similar division of labour exists when it comes to regional meetings.

In-house meetings devoted specifically to any of the initiatives are extremely rare. Horizontal meetings are organized on an ad hoc basis because most day-to-day coordination can be arranged via telephone or e-mail.

Both in-house and horizontal meetings are much more regular when Serbia holds the presidency of an initiative. Most interviewees complained that stronger, more regular and institutionalized coordination between various ministries is desirable. Civil society organisations are also left out of the agenda-setting process in the analysed initiatives. The interviewees usually explain this by referring to the »nature of the field«. The sole exception is human trafficking, illegal migration and asylum seekers where civil society organisations such as ASTRA or Group 484 are sometimes consulted.

(iii) *Eagerness of the state* to implement obligations derived from regional cooperation schemes to a large extent depends on the area of cooperation. Whereas the highest-ranking state officials show a strong determination to take regional cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs seriously, this is not so much the case with regard to social development. Interlocutors dealing with MARRI and SELEC did not complain about the lack of eagerness of the highest-level decision-makers to get involved in the process. For example, Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Ivica Dačić takes part in practically all meetings of the Regional Forum of MARRI. However, the state does not seem to have much eagerness to be involved in RAI and its failure to pay the fee is a clear illustration of this. The reason is the perceived marginality and passivity of the initiative. On a more general level, one interviewee talked about the lack of eagerness among the highest political authorities within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the past to accept bottom-up ideas from the staff dealing with regional initiatives. In contrast, all interlocutors involved in the implementation of social development initiatives (RP SSCSSR, CPESSEC, SEEHN) noticed a lack of sustained and informed interest at

the highest levels of government for regional cooperation schemes.

At the national level, staff dealing closely with the initiatives have daily communication. Official meetings are usually initiated by the head of a sector or national coordinator but not on a regular basis; only when a specific need arises. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Minister for EU Integration initiates meetings on a wider topic of regional cooperation every two weeks or at least once a month. Within the Ministry of the Interior, meetings are usually not initiated specifically with regard to SELEC or MARRI on a regular basis. Meetings regarding the three social development initiatives are rare, too, since most day-to-day issues can be arranged via telephone or e-mail.

(iv) *Decision-making procedures* depend on the nature of the issue. If the decision is purely technical and operational, it is made by the focal point, national coordinator or anyone else who is operationally involved. The more political an issue is, the more involved the minister's office or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs becomes. On rare occasions, usually with regard to the issue of Kosovo participation or adoption of new documents, even the government or the Office of the Prime Minister is involved.

All interlocutors pointed out that the most important political decisions are decided at the ministerial level. More precisely, the decisions are made at the level of ministerial offices, often by minister's chiefs of staff or advisors. If a decision has anything to do with Kosovo, candidacies for secretariat functionaries, voting at important regional meetings (for example, the Regional Committee of MARRI) or adoption of new regional documents, the key decision-making authority is the cabinet of the Foreign Minister or even the government. During Vuk Jeremić's time as Minister of For-

eign Affairs (2007–2012) Serbia's foreign policy priority was the struggle against Kosovo's secession. As most interviewees confirmed, this was heavily reflected in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs's approach to regional cooperation. If decisions are political but fall outside the purview of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the highest authorities within other ministries or institutions responsible for the initiative make them (for example, the Director of NES for CPESSEC). Finally, if the decision is purely technical and operational, without any political strings attached, it is decided by the focal points of the regional cooperation schemes or anyone who is operationally involved.

2.3 Gender

For most interviewees gender representation is a non-issue. In practice, there is a reasonable amount of gender balance at the level of focal points for the analysed regional initiatives. Out of six focal points and national coordinators, women occupy three of them (SEEHN, CEEPSEC and MARRI). The Senior Representative of Serbia in RAI is a man, but his deputy has been a female in the past and will remain so in the future. According to one interviewee's estimates, within the Ministry of the Interior's Bureau for International Cooperation and European Integration around 70 per cent of staff are women. The gender ratio within the Directorate for International Operational Police Cooperation is approximately 60/40 in favour of women. The National Coordinator for MARRI is one of the highest ranking women in the Serbian police and currently serves as vice-president of Women Police Officers Network in South East Europe (WPON). Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interlocutors agreed that the balance has started to tip in favour of women. Some interviewees explain this increasing prevalence of women in regional initiatives by referring to the women's (assumed) superiority in terms of linguis-

tic capabilities; a second view is that salaries in regional cooperation are not very attractive for the most capable men; others argue that working on regional cooperation involves a lot of »office« work and men are said to be traditionally interested in »operational« work, especially in police and diplomacy.

According to interlocutors, there are no existing plans to involve more women in the implementation of regional initiatives at the national level. In any way, all those regional initiatives involve very small group of people at the national level and most interviewees assess that there is no need to pay too much attention to gender mainstreaming.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The normative framework for regional cooperation in the six analysed initiatives is, by and large, in place. Legislation is comprehensive and complete and there are no significant gaps. Very few novel structures or bodies have been established for the purpose of regional cooperation. The only exception is the RHDC in Belgrade. Although there is no specific training on the subject, staff knowledge and competence concerning regional cooperation seems to be sufficient. Public administration in Serbia is exposed to a large number of more general training opportunities in the field of European integration, which by default encompasses a regional cooperation component. Instead of recruiting new staff or forming new bodies for the purpose of the six analysed regional initiatives, existing structures were put to use. Although these pragmatic approaches have worked well so far, overall human resources devoted to regional cooperation schemes seem to be insufficient. As a result, there is very little capacity for horizontal coordination, while institutional memory is sparse. This could be ameliorated if more staff were assigned to work on regional

cooperation on a more permanent basis. Horizontal cooperation can be improved under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provided there existed clearer foreign policy priorities for regional cooperation that go well beyond occasional chairmanship periods.

The eagerness of political decision-makers is stronger in justice and home affairs than in social development. In particular, more political capital could be invested in fostering regional cooperation in social security or public employment. A positive collateral effect of the lack of eagerness of political decision-makers could be seen in the field of health cooperation, where expert communities are more or less left to their own devices. Country specialization, which exists in SEEHN, for example, is an indicator of functional differentiation between countries of the region, increased mutual trust and a higher level of regional integration.

Civil society is rarely involved in agenda-setting or decision-making processes within the analysed regional initiatives at the national level. The only exception to this is migration and human trafficking, where civil society organisations are sometimes included. However, this does not necessarily imply that the state is closed to the CSO community, which is eager but unable to get on board. Very often, as the RP-SSCSSR case demonstrates, civil society organisations do not have the capacities or simply sufficient interest to get involved in regional policy issues that are often highly technical. Finally, in Serbia there is no particular gender mainstreaming policy in regional initiatives. Despite that, the gender composition of national staff dealing with the six initiatives is slightly in favour of women. Women are included at all levels of authority, including the highest positions.

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