

Civil Society in South-Eastern Europe and the Role of Greece in the Stability Pact

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RÉSUMÉ

Le Pacte pour la stabilité dans l'Europe du sud-est, signé à Cologne le 10 juin 1999, a eu différents effets sur les Balkans. La question posée dans cet article est de savoir comment une région, qui n'a pas une grande expérience d'une société civile, peut parvenir à se développer, en particulier grâce à la place des organisations non gouvernementales. L'auteur examine la possibilité pour la Grèce de jouer avec ses ONGs un rôle majeur.

ABSTRACT

Signed on June 10, 1999, in Cologne as a European Union initiative, the Stability Pact for S/E Europe has had various effects on the Balkans. What remains to be seen is how a region with little experience in civil society will manage. Especially interesting will be the role of the NGO. In fact, the author discusses how Greece and Greek NGOs could play an important role in the Balkans.

Introduction

Regional initiatives have always been a challenge for the countries of South-Eastern Europe. Since the inner-war period (Balkan Pact-1934) and during the Cold War (Balkan Pact-1954), Balkan countries have tried to enforce regional cooperation, promoting initiatives either on specific issues, or generally at the level of low politics. Regional cooperation has flourished through the Inter-Balkan Cooperation, especially during the “golden period of 1987-1991”.¹ During that limited period, when perestroika had made the Iron Curtain thinner, the countries of the region found the space to develop more flexible and cooperative foreign policies.²

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On the other hand, all regional initiatives were depended on the policies of super or great powers in the region. Regional multilateral models were in fact dictated and promoted by interests far away from the region. The post-Cold War period proved to be a painful and bloody experience for the Balkans. The war in former Yugoslavia extinguished any cooperative policy until 1995. It is worth noting that all treaties of friendship and cooperation signed during the above-mentioned period were in fact more an indication of the existence of competitive alliances and axes in the region, rather than genuine efforts towards strengthening cooperation and development.

The importance of the Stability Pact

The Stability Pact for S/E Europe was signed on June 10, 1999, in Cologne as a European Union initiative, under the auspices of the OSCE. If we consider the Stability Pact members, it is noticeable that multi-collectivism is one of the basic characteristics of this Pact. Beyond its core, which is the recipient countries of South/Eastern Europe,³ there is an amalgam of states, international organisations and regional inter-state initiatives with significant differences.⁴

Obviously the main differentiation within the Stability Pact structure is that of donor countries and international organisations, on one hand, and recipient South-East European countries on the other. Whatever the final results and the sometimes justifiable criticism regarding the effectiveness, delays and transparency of the Stability Pact structure, no one can deny that the Stability Pact is a unique and unprecedented example of multilateral cooperation model, and this may be said for the following reasons:

- The International Community has a determined “regional approach” to the reconstruction issues in S/E Europe.
- Both International Organisations with significant political gravity and International Financial Institutions with the appropriate financial mechanisms participate actively in the SP structure and activities.

- The existence of the three Working Tables (WTs) is an effort to combine economic reconstruction and the introduction of stable democratic institutions in a secure social and international environment, while creating the necessary preconditions for a sustainable development in the region.
- The priorities of development policy are defined by both the donor and the recipient countries, and through the creation of the necessary mechanisms and a combined structure for the selection, there are control and evaluation processes for the proposed projects.
- The significance not only of International Organisations and member-states of the SP, but also of the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and all forms of the Civil Society is emphasized.⁵

More than ten years after the end of the Cold War, development and eventual integration of transition countries into the European structures need a balanced economic and social development in a secure environment.

The Role of Civil Society in South-Eastern Europe

After 45 years of communism, the Civil Society sector in S/E Europe is lacking experience, economic funds, know-how, and the appropriate mechanisms. The meaning of Civil Society plus the need, role and function of truly independent NGOs are difficult to define.

It is characteristic of the influence of the communist régime on the Civil Society sector, that the only country that has an active, experienced and well-structured NGO mechanism, except liberal Greece, is the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia-Montenegro), where the authoritarian regime for decades was not openly against civil activities.

Similarly, NGOs in the region still function in a transition society, with some remaining undemocratic structures and attitudes,⁶ such as

the violation of human rights, marginalisation of social groups, undemocratic state behaviour, etc. NGOs have the difficult task of instilling the values of civil rights into societies lacking real democratic education and practice.

Furthermore, NGOs in S/E Europe have to function in an environment full of uncertainty and interethnic conflicts. Nationalism, irredentism, ethnic hatred and lack of tolerance and understanding still devastate the region. Sound economic development is undermined by numerous illegal activities, corruption, trafficking in human beings, etc. The difficulties that the NGOs must overcome in trying to address all these problems are obvious. Moreover, in many cases NGO activists face discrimination and persecution from the state, extremist groups, or even 'mafias', whose interests can be jeopardized by a democratic and just society.

Given the unfriendly societal climate and many obstacles in accessing international funds, the ineffective mechanisms, and lack of experience, regional NGOs are looking for international partners and sponsors. As a result, regional cooperation within the civil society level remains limited, and local NGOs tend to be dependent upon powerful and well-organised international NGOs.

On the other hand, the international community has recognized the need to create regional networks and to promote regional and trans-boundary cooperation. One of the criteria for project funding is that the proposing programme must promote and include civil society actors from more than two S/E European countries, underlining the regional approach of the Stability Pact.

At the same time, we must point out that dependency and consequent control from international NGOs can create many problems in the sound development of the NGO sector within the region. On a long-term basis, the possible creation of a huge NGO international "industry" with regional branches could prove fatal for the significant role that civil society should play in the democratic development of this region.

Within the framework of the pact, local NGOs are very active in education and youth, media, and good governance task forces. In fact, in the Human Rights and Minorities Task Force, South-East European NGOs implement 11.28% of the project funds, while for Gender issues almost 10%.

Table: Participation of South-East European NGOs in the Working Table I on Democratization and Human Rights

COUNTRY OR PROVINCE OF IMPLEMENTING NGO	PROJECTS IN EUROS	%
ROUMANIA	868,642	15.7
SLOVENIA	842,600	15.3
MONTENEGRO	694,700	12.6
GREECE	680,000	12.3
KOSOVO	645,100	11.7
ALBANIA	511,250	9.3
FYROM	408,950	7.4
REGIONAL PROJ.	400,000	7.2
BULGARIA	231,000	4.2
CROATIA	131,500	2.4
SERBIA	111,100	2.0
TOTAL	5,524,842	100.00

Source: Office of the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact (OSCSP), Quick Start Package, Working Table I, Progress Report, March 2001

Typically, even on the regional level, NGOs from Greece and Slovenia, which in fact are donor countries within the Stability Pact, implement 27.6% (1.5 mil. euros) of the total project funds for the local NGOs. This statistic indicates that donor countries tend to fund their own NGOs.

Greek initiatives within the framework of the Working Table I (Democratisation and Human Rights) of Stability Pact focused mainly on issues of human rights and minorities, education, the institution of an Ombudsman, inter-religious cooperation, media, parliamentary cooperation and refugee issues. In addition, Greece funded projects of Working Table II (Economic Reconstruction, Development and Cooperation) mainly on investments, supported the Business Advisory Council and the Initiative for Social Cohesion. Regarding Working Table III (Security Issues and Home Affairs), Greece funded projects on anti-mining, anti-corruption initiatives and judicial reforms. Greece pledged a total of 10.8 million euros for Stability Pact projects on the above-mentioned issues in March 2000 during the Donors Conference in Brussels, within the framework of the “Quick Start Package”.

At the same time, Greece decided that issues of reconstruction and development (Working Table II) must be promoted on a bilateral basis within the framework of the Hellenic Plan for the Reconstruction of the Balkans. The latter is a half-million-euro five-year reconstruction and development plan, designed to promote investment and infrastructure projects in the neighbouring Balkan countries. It should be noted that Greek bilateral development assistance for the period 2000-2001 was 82 million euros.

Since then, Greece has focussed support on: local democracy and cross-border cooperation, reconciliation issues, small arms and light weapons, anti-corruption initiative, fight against organised crime, migration and asylum, trafficking in human beings. Greece will likely fund projects on the above topics and has already supported actions on disaster preparedness and prevention.

Problems and Limitations

Despite the high expectations the pact created, the latter has to overcome a significant number of structural problems and limitations regarding the current situation in South-Eastern Europe. First, the multi-collectivism regarding the membership of the Stability Pact provoked a complex bureaucratic structure, which is not only inflexible but also incapable of facing the region's fast political - economic changes and overcoming its own structural weaknesses. As a result, it is extremely difficult for the Secretariat to coordinate numerous members, Working Tables and Sub-Tables, and their respective chairmanships. Conflicting interests and visions regarding cooperation and development in South-Eastern Europe, different needs and priorities are functioning ineffectively.

In addition, the staffing and functional structure of the Secretariat, as well as the offices of the National Coordinators, remain problematic, with a considerable lack of coordination and long-term development strategy. This situation is typical; i.e., the lack of political will on the part of member states and organisations to staff and support departments and directorates, which are responsible for the Stability Pact.

Undeniably, at the outset the donor countries and a significant number of the recipient countries simply lacked the appropriate mechanisms to coordinate actions and initiatives to plan the whole structure for the selection, control and evaluation of the proposed programmes. The difficulty in defining specific priorities for each country on the basis of regional development is still obvious.

Moreover, in South-Eastern Europe, including Greece, the state attitude has frequently been negative to NGO involvement in the planning and implementation of a long-term development strategy. Because of the authoritarian régimes in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, the NGO sector was either underdeveloped or totally controlled. Similarly, on the west side of the Iron Curtain in the Balkans, countries like Greece and Turkey influenced by the Cold-

War climate, long used to authoritarian social structures, had a negative approach to Civil Society. Any NGO involvement and activity used to be the object of state scepticism.

In Greece, cooperation between State and Civil Society has improved significantly over the last five years, as financial support has increased dramatically, especially for projects in the Balkans. On the other hand, specific shortcomings persist. For example, the state development agencies and ministries of South-East European countries are inexperienced, have small budgets and ineffective mechanisms, thus they are unable to exploit the NGOs' activity and knowledge.

In addition, there is a lack of specific criteria for the approval and final funding of programs. Member states, including Greece and the SP itself, have failed to inform not only NGOs, but also the private sector, about the priorities, criteria, and process of an SP project. Since there is no defined process, it remains unclear who really is responsible for the approval and final evaluation of a proposed project. Is it the Secretariat, the donor country or the chair of the sub-table / task force?

Without a doubt, both the Secretariat and the National Coordinators have failed to inform in an appropriate way the private sector and Civil Society actors interested in playing an active role in the reconstruction and democratisation process. As a result, Stability Pact projects are approachable only by few private companies and NGOs, mainly with good connections, both in the donor and recipient countries. The exclusion of the majority of the Civil Society and Private Sector in some cases from Stability Pact projects, mainly because of lack of an information campaign, jeopardizes the whole philosophy of the Stability Pact and Civil Society.

As mentioned above, the multi-collectivism of the Stability Pact created a rough polyphony and imported the competition among states and organisations within its structure. As a sad consequence, competition and conflicting interests slowed down or completely

cancelled some development projects. This phenomenon has occurred both at the level of donor countries regarding their control and influence in areas and sectors of specific interest, and at the level of recipient countries, regarding their competition for a “slice” of international development aid.

The Need for Direct Action

The above-mentioned limitations and problems in the operation and efficiency of the Stability Pact do not reduce its significance. It provides an unprecedented and important multilateral cooperation model for development and security in South-Eastern Europe. Moreover, most of the problems have been created by all the members involved. In the end, what is required now is the definition and materialization of the direct actions, plus the political will to take full advantage of the many positive sides of the Stability Pact. We should remember that both donor and recipient countries have nonetheless improved their mechanisms in order to carry out the proposed and funded projects. Since the establishment of the Stability Pact, all parties involved have gained considerable experience in coordinating their respective mechanisms and structures.

However, for greater effectiveness and for more active involvement on the part of Greece, direct action is needed, as follows:

The Secretariat and the Greek National Coordinator must launch an educational campaign in order to inform the public and all parties involved regarding the structure, mechanisms and goals of the Stability Pact. People must be informed about how long it takes for a program to be funded and implemented in order to avoid misunderstandings and unjustified high expectations. In addition, recipient countries must be made aware that they are responsible for the creation of the necessary mechanisms to set the priorities and to implement the projects within their borders.

Furthermore, improved communication between the Greek State and NGOs will strengthen the transparency of the administrative and legislative process, thus increasing citizens' confidence in the activities of public institutions and eliminating bureaucratic sources of corruption and access to funds limited to only a few groups and NGOs.

In addition, Greece must encourage and support the creation of regional networks and enforce regional cooperation within the private sector.

Furthermore, a State-Civil Society partnership should definitely be promoted, and an engagement and consultation mechanism must be institutionalised on a sustained and systematic basis in areas where NGOs have the experience. Such mechanisms will respect the diversity of opinions on both sides, ensure open communication, and follow agreed ground rules of engagement. In a developed democratic country, like Greece, the State itself has to facilitate and promote NGO activities and ensure that the Civil Society's involvement remains unrestricted, creating a receptive environment for NGOs.⁷

In addition, the funding process must be accelerated. As it stands, both recipient and donor countries and NGOs do not have the appropriate mechanisms and sometimes the legislation for the quick funding of projects. In fact, Greek projects are usually postponed or face considerable delays, since the whole process is very slow starting from the approval of a project until the moment that the recipient party gets the money. All parties have acquired some experience in this area, but the mechanisms must be improved, while always in line with the relative national legislation.

We have noticed, however, that many sectors and problems can not be handled only by specific working tables or task forces. A horizontal approach plus some flexibility regarding cross-table projects is needed involving different working tables and task forces. Cases such as the anti-corruption initiative, gender issues, education, new technologies, some of the Greek priority areas, need cooperation and coordination among the chairpersons and relative mechanisms of the various

sectors. NGOs and the private sector can help since they have the necessary understanding of complex social and economic issues and the flexibility to move and act on different social levels. The SP Secretariat has to supervise and to prevent duplication and potential competitive tendencies.

Beyond its very structure, the Secretariat must define and present a specific list of regional criteria. This will be very helpful to task force leaders and national coordinators in their cooperation both with the Secretariat and the actors either from the private sector or the Civil Society. As a result, specific directions and principles based on a long-term development strategy will define the priorities and the projects needed in the near future.

NGOs must line up with principles and propose projects which meet those specific criteria, such as the “regional dimension”. Actually, this regional dimension characterizes the whole philosophy of the Stability Pact, involving civil society actors from as many countries as possible in the region. In addition, the criterion of “added value” is set, meaning that a project, even after the end of the initial funding, must find a way of creating its follow-up process, a productive action either in economic or social terms. The continuation of the program, possibly with an alternative funding and partners even in similar or different sectors, proves its viability and must become a basic selection criterion for SP programmes. Similar to the above-mentioned criterion of “added value” is the criterion of “regional transferability”. A project must have “regional inclusiveness”; i.e., the ability to transform itself from local or inter-boundary to regional, thus creating a network in all South-East European countries. This last ability would make any project coherent with the fundamental logic of the Stability Pact.

Furthermore, both task forces and sub-working tables, and donor countries like Greece, must focus on specific sectors and projects, while gaining visibility and increasing program efficiency, if not control of the whole process.

Conclusions

The civil society and private sector, in a receptive environment, encouraged by the State, and armed with a long-term strategy, must be prepared to propose specific projects, receive funds, implement programs, and finally accept the control and evaluation of their action by their sponsors, in this case the Stability Pact mechanisms, but most of all by the people who can directly judge the effectiveness, usefulness and durability of the implemented project.

Unfortunately, neither the civil society in South-Eastern Europe and Greece, nor the Stability Pact as a multilateral cooperative model are adequately experienced and effective to achieve this ideal scenario. Greek NGOs, with some exceptions, remain rather embryonic. Without know-how, funding, professional mechanisms and long-term strategy, they struggle to find their way in a region characterized by ethnic conflicts and competing national interests, where the culture of civil society is still underdeveloped. Furthermore, the Balkan states still understand the role of civil society as a tool to promote their own policy, not as something genuine which develops the society in a multi-level way, freeing productive and independent powers.

The Stability Pact came to promote economic development based on democratic structures in a secure environment, to coordinate actions and to strengthen regional cooperation. Bureaucratic mechanisms, lack of specific priorities and long-term development strategy, competition among the members created an inappropriate cooperative developmental model for fruitful participation of local NGOs and private sector. Civil Society in South-Eastern Europe participates in Stability Pact in a spasmodic and dependent way: dependent on both state policies and strong multinational / international NGOs.

Despite all this, the Stability Pact offers an unprecedented model of regional cooperation history. Fortunately, its shortcomings have been understood by all those involved. It remains to be seen if the political will from the International Community exists so that these problems

may be overcome and a balanced regional development process may be promoted.

In sum, Greece has to be active in all regional initiatives, such as the Stability Pact, the S/E European Cooperation Process (SEECPP), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), activating not only the State structure, but also non-governmental factors, such as the civil society and the private sector. Despite certain limitations in multilateral cooperation, Greece has to maximize its relative regional advantages: an active and sound private sector, more experienced civil society and a State with stable and long-lasting democratic institutions.⁸

NOTES

1. The term was used for the first time by the author in a research study on Regional Cooperation at the University of Athens, in 1994.
2. More for regional cooperation in S/E Europe, see C. Jelavich-B. Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States 1904-1920*, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1977; T. I. Geshkoff, *Balkan Union: A Road to Peace in S/E Europe between the Wars*, New York, 1940; C. Svolopoulos, *Le Problème de la sécurité dans le Sud-Est Européen entre les deux Guerres*, *Balkan Studies*, No. 14, 1973, pp. 247-292, Z. Avramovski, *Balkanska Antanta 1934-1940*, Beograd, 1986; V. Jelavic, "Continuing Balkan Cooperation", *Review of International Affairs*, No 922, 1988; J. O. Iatrides, *Balkan Triangle*, The Hague: Mouton, 1968; H. Kondonis, "Prospects for Balkan Cooperation after the Disintegration of Yugoslavia", *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 32(3), 1998, pp. 377-394.
3. The recipient countries of this Stability Pact are: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and Moldova.

4. It is not within the scope of this article to describe the structure of the Stability Pact. For a detailed view, visit on the internet the following site: www.stabilitypact.org
5. Stability Pact for S/E Europe, *Official Text*, Article III.10.
6. For the international principles of freedom of association, see: Article 11 of the *European Convention on Human Rights*, Article 22 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Article 20 of the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, and similar UN and OSCE Declarations.
7. Based on the *Stability Pact Declaration on NGO-Government Partnership in S/E Europe*, Bucharest, 27 October 2000.
8. Many thanks to Mrs. Despina Syrri for her valuable comments on this article.