



# **BALKAN FORUM**

*„Regionale Kooperation und europäische Integration des  
Westbalkans“*

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## **Gutachten**

### ***Regional Initiatives in the Balkans – Autonomous Initiatives***

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This paper deals with the regional or subregional initiatives which are focused on South Eastern Europe co-operation (SEE) *and* which have *autonomous origin*, i.e. which have been established and led by the regional actors themselves. Out of eight fora on multilateral co-operation in which SEE states are involved, majority are either led by outside actors (cases of the Stability Pact for SEE, SECI, EU Process on Stabilization and Association/Zagreb process, Central European Initiative, Adriatic-Ionian Initiative) or are primarily originated or focused on the regions outside the Balkans (Black Sea Economic Co-operation CEFTA, or incoming Danube initiatives/conference). In fact, the only initiative, which would qualify for the above-mentioned definition is the *South East European Co-operation Process (SEECP)*. Thus, the primary focus of this paper will be the SEECP, its achievements and future. However, in the last, smaller section of the paper, we will consider some additional forms of autonomous multilateral or transborder co-operation in the Balkans, which could contribute further to the regional co-operation and the development of "regioness" of SEE (trilateral or quadrilateral State co-operation, cross-border co-operation schemes, Euroregions etc).

### **I.1. SEECP - Background and recent developments**

The "Conference on Stability, Security and Co-operation of Countries of South Eastern Europe," today called the "Southeast Europe Co-operation Process" (*SEECP*) is a continuation of the ministerial conferences of Balkan countries that took place at the end of eighties. It was not until the signing of the Dayton Agreements and the pacification of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina that the conditions were created for a renewal of an autochthonous regional co-operation in the Balkans - with some new states. Today, eight countries are participants in full capacity in the SEECP, while the ninth one has the observer status<sup>1</sup>.

In a relatively short period between several grave Balkan crises (Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia), meetings of Ministers of foreign affairs of South Eastern European countries were held on regular basis: Sofia (July 1996), Saloniki (June 1997), Istanbul (June 1998), Bucharest (December 1999), Skopje (June 2000), Tirana (May 2001). As a result, in this period, a tradition has been established of summit meetings of countries of South Eastern Europe (Crete, Antalya, Bucharest, Skopje, Tirana).

Looking at the recent period, a significant step for SEECP was made at the third summit meeting of Heads of state or government of SEE countries in Bucharest, in February 2000, where the *Charter on Good-Neighbourliness in South Eastern Europe* was adopted. The Charter is intended to constitute a basic document both for multilateral relations between SEE countries and for the further ways and means of the SEE Co-operation Process. More recently, at the fourth - *Skopje summit*, the *Action plan for regional economic co-operation* was enacted (February 2001). More important, on the same occasion, full membership to the initiative was returned to FRY<sup>2</sup>, while Bosnia and Herzegovina went over from the status of an observer to that of full participant.

Since 1999, presidencies' activities of the SEECP were impeded by several regional crises (Kosovo crisis during Romanian presidency in 1999/2000, Macedonian crisis in 2001/2002). Another problem for stronger SEECP development was the relative weakness of some of presidencies' and of their abilities to manage the co-operation process, despite the good will (Macedonia, Albania).

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<sup>1</sup> Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, FRY, Macedonia, Albania, B&H. Croatia is an observer.

<sup>2</sup> FRY participation was frozen in 1999.

Among concrete achievements of the last two presidencies', in addition to the summit meetings, it could be mentioned that Macedonia has organized: the "Economic forum" (i.e. meeting of Ministers of Economy, February, 22, 2001), Third conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (March 14, 2001) and two parliamentary meetings (Conference of Presidents and meeting of Chairmen of Committees for external affairs).

The last, Albanian Chair in Office has organized several meetings of Ministers of foreign affairs (Tirana May 16, 2001 and March, 27, 2002) and two sectoral meetings (Ministers for Energy and Ministers of Interior/Public Order). The Third conference of Presidents of Parliaments of SEECP countries was also organized in Tirana (March 5, 2002).

Actual Chair in Office of the SEECP is the FRY, with the mandate until March 2003. The FRY has suggested as priorities of co-operation for the next period, areas of trade, energy, transport infrastructure and prevention of transborder crime.

## **I.2. Achievements and shortfalls of the SEECP**

The Process of Co-operation in SEE (SEECP) did achieve certain results. *Firstly*, the conferences were held on the highest political level of Heads of state or government or Ministers of foreign affairs, which had been virtually impossible in previous periods. Thus, it is a *unique forum for multilateral political dialogue* in the region on high and senior political levels. That has, in principle, opened up the possibility for improving the general atmosphere in the region, after the difficult period linked to the disintegration, wars, transition, as well as the general economic crisis. The Process, based on the Charter on Co-operation, foresees multilateral co-operation in all main domains of inter-state co-operation, upon lines that correspond to modern trends of European co-operation. It covers geographically all the Balkan countries, regardless of their international position or internal developments. The SEECP meetings have also had some positive effect on the *public opinion* in SEE countries.

On the other hand, the Process of (multilateral) co-operation is burdened by a series of *shortcomings*, which have not prevented the principled good intentions, put forward at the highest political level, from being transformed into concrete measures, projects, programmes and forms of co-operation. Particularly marked difference is between the high level of the meetings and the extremely wide range of subjects envisaged for co-operation, on one hand, and the very meagre concrete results and implementation of objectives in the five-year period of this co-operation, on the other. The basic reason for this lies in the fact that the Process of multilateral co-operation in SEE has not made a great deal of progress towards its own institutionalisation: it continues to function on the principle of an *ad hoc* inter-state conference, without detailed working rules, without a political and/or technical secretariat and without any kind of working/implementing bodies.

## **I.3. Impediments for SEECP**

There are a number of impediments, which have prevented stronger development of SEECP. To those already mentioned, we can add some other:

- Persistence of implicit or open rivalries between some countries - especially in the case of Greece and Turkey - existence of bilateral problems (Albania/Serbia, Macedonia/Greece etc)<sup>3</sup>; However, Greece and Turkey have avoided to misuse the SEECP fora for open confrontation;
- Albanian issue, as a crucial political problem in the Balkans today, including the status of Kosovo, crisis in Macedonia and in South Serbia and the relationship between Albania and its neighbours;
- Very different status with regard to the EU integration: EU members, official candidates for and countries included in "Stabilization and association process - *SAP*";
- Lack of serious interest for progress of SEECP for some countries oriented primarily or almost exclusively to "Euro-integration" or "Euro-Atlantic integration" (such as Bulgaria, Romania or Croatia). On the other hand, the SEECP has no "driving member country" with major stakes in the success of initiative, or hegemonic power behind it, as is often the case of other fora<sup>4</sup>;
- Weakness of political institutions, constitutional problems and/or lack administrative or foreign affairs capacities in some countries (B&H, Macedonia, Serbia-Montenegro);
- Poor state of regional economy including low level of bilateral exchanges;
- Participation of a number of SEECP members in similar, overlapping co-operative frameworks (SP, BSEC, CEI...).

On the other hand, all States of the region are aware of the need for an enhanced regional co-operation, especially in the fields of confidence building measures, economic co-operation, trans-border co-operation etc. Despite obvious deficiencies of the Process, its activities have attracted attention from the EU and Stability Pact representatives, anxious to find out some form of a genuine "partner" in the Balkans. Moreover, as no new country from the SEE region will be included in the next wave of EU enlargement, the issue of future regional co-operation in the Balkans and of its articulation with the process of EU integration is even more on the agenda<sup>5</sup>.

#### **I.4. SEECP in the galaxies of regional co-operation schemes**

There is an obvious overlapping of membership and activities between the SEECP and other similar or neighbouring initiatives. The most obvious is the link between the SEECP and the Stability Pact in SEE (including the SECI)<sup>6</sup>. Albania, B&H, Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia-Montenegro, Bulgaria and Romania are "beneficiaries" of the Stability Pact process while Greece and Turkey are also involved as "facilitating countries". All those countries are included in SECI, as well<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, the EU Process of Stabilization and Association" is focused on five Western Balkan countries, only<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, one of strange consequences of the dispute about the name of Macedonia is that the official declarations from the SEECP meetings never mention the name of the country of origin of participating presidents or ministers and that the name "Macedonia" is never mentioned, no matter the subject.

<sup>4</sup> For example, this is the case of Turkey (and Russia) for BSEC, of Italy for CEI, of the EU for SP, of the USA for SECI.

<sup>5</sup> See W. van Meurs: *Stability Pact beyond EU Enlargement*, Conference on Regional Initiatives in SEE, *Conference Proceedings*, European Movement in Serbia, Belgrade, 14.12.2001.

<sup>6</sup> Since the election of the Coordinator for SECI E. Busek to the post of Special Coordinator for the SP, there is a kind of personal union between the two initiatives.

<sup>7</sup> Moldova is missing from the picture, although it is a participant both to the SP and SECI and has applied recently to the membership of SEECP. Slovenia and Hungary are also involved in SP and SECI, but they are not a part of SEECP.

<sup>8</sup> Albania, BH, Macedonia, Serbia-Montenegro and Croatia.

Those links and similarities have been recently recognized by the Stability Pact and the EU, through the setting up of an "*Informal Consultative Committee*". The Committee includes representatives of: the EU presidency, EU Commission, High Representative for FCSP-Secretary General of the EU Council, Special Co-ordinator for SP and a representative of the presidency of the SEECP. The Committee is supposed to provide better understanding and co-ordination between relevant EU initiatives (SAP, including CARDS program) with the SP and SEECP activities. Moreover, through the association of the SEECP, the Committee would be the way to ensure stronger "regional ownership" to the above-mentioned initiatives.

But the SP and SECI are not the unique fora where the majority of SEECP countries meet. Out of nine countries<sup>9</sup>, five of them are members of the Organization of Black Sea Economic Co-operation and two are official candidates for membership, while seven of them are included in the Central European Initiative<sup>10</sup>.

If we look at the projected fields of co-operation, we can also conclude to the similarities between activities of different initiatives. There is a question of specific *niche* of activities for the SEECP in present circumstances. In fact, there is no general or specific field of co-operation, which would be exclusive to the SEECP.

### **I.5. Reforming the SEECP - difficult dialogue**

The year of 2002 has been the year of readjustment for some of the co-operation schemes in South Eastern Europe. With the new Special Co-ordinator, the Stability Pact for SEE has undergone limited reforms towards its *downsizing and refocusing*<sup>11</sup>. As the EU SAP is concerned, the European Commission has recently proposed to strengthen its *multilateral dimension* with the follow up of multilateral political dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkan countries (the so called "Zagreb process").

In the wake of the Tirana summit, Albania has submitted the proposal for a "*Program for further development of the SEECP*"<sup>12</sup> which suggests more institutionalized approach for the future co-operation. The proposed "enhanced SEECP mechanism" would have a "small secretariat", together with three permanent "regional working groups" dealing with security, economic and civic issues. As it could be expected, the proposal did not obtain enthusiastic and immediate support of all member countries. Tirana summit merely asked Ministers of foreign affairs and the committee of political directors to review "the ways for increasing the effectiveness of the existing organizational arrangements, if necessary with concrete proposals for their improvement". As a matter of fact, even since the SEECP has been established, there is no consensus among its members about the utility to set up a permanent secretariat. While Greece is favoring the idea, proposing at the same time that the secretariat should have its seat in Saloniki, Bulgaria, Romania and even Turkey are opposed to that. The FRY, as a new Chair in Office, is not expected to insist too much on the issue. Instead, it has suggested to focus the co-operation more on economic and technical issues, with the idea to avoid a purely political approach, which had characterized the Process until now.

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<sup>9</sup> For the sake of this analysis, we include here Croatia although it is only an observer in SEECP.

<sup>10</sup> See the annex.

<sup>11</sup> See *Stability Pact Policy Outline 2002* presented to EU General Affairs Council by E. Busek, Brussels, 11, March 2002, SCSP, <http://www.stabilitypact.org/stabilitypactcgi/catalog/>. Busek underlined six priority activities for 2002: trade and investment, energy infrastructure, refugee issues, cross-border cooperation, small arms and organized crime.

<sup>12</sup> Tirana, 26 March 2002. Non-published.

## I.6. Possible ways to enhance the effectiveness of the SEECP

The SEECP is a unique forum in the region, which promotes dialogue on the highest state and political levels (summit, presidents of the Parliaments, Ministers of foreign affairs). This function of the forum should be preserved, together with additional efforts in order to bring the political dialogue *down to earth*, with project-oriented activities. Even without deep reform, the SEECP Chair in Office could, for example, in the next period work on the following:

- *Apply what has been already agreed* - *The SEECP Charter* and the *Agenda* already contain a number of tasks and objectives which have not yet been fulfilled, such as: activating the Troika mechanism; improving the Method of work of the Chair (i.e. appointment of a "co-ordinator", regular working papers and reports issued on important subjects etc); establishing regular practice of meetings of some line ministries (trade, transport, home affairs, environment).

- *Using the already existing frameworks and opportunities* - SEECP basic documents contain a number of references to the already existing institutions and bodies, which could be used for the promotion of SEECP activities in an organized and coherent manner. SEECP Documents contain, among other: the Balkan Center for Trade Promotion, Association of Balkan Chambers of Commerce (ABC), Balkan Center for the transfer of technology, Balkan Center for development of SMEs, OECD Private Sector Development Center, Regional center for combating illicit trafficking, SECI Center for combating organized crime, Joint SEECP-EU-UN WG on environment monitoring etc;

- *Use the synergies with the similar initiatives* - SEECP documents already contain references to the similar working bodies of other initiatives whose achievements could be combined and enhanced with the proper participation of all SEECP countries. This is particularly true for the working groups established by the SP or the SECI, but it could be also the case of the BSEC or CEI (i.e. WG on trade liberalization, WG EC/WB on Balkan infrastructure etc). The *Informal Consultative Committee* would be the best instrument to progress in this direction, especially with regard to the co-operation with the *CARDS regional program* for SEE countries.

**In addition**, and without going to the proper establishment of permanent institutional mechanisms, the SEECP could also improve its activities in the following ways:

- *Improving co-operation between ministries of foreign affairs and diplomatic missions* - MFAs are at the core of the co-operation in SEECP. Their improved and enhanced co-operation would additionally help mutual understanding and functions of the SEECP (i.e. specialized co-ordinators-correspondents, specific mechanism of direct communications between MFAs, common declarations or positions in some specific cases, meetings of diplomatic missions, etc)<sup>13</sup>;

- *Set up an embryo of the permanent secretariat* - Without any formal institutionalization, the first step could be done through the practice of *detachment* of a few diplomats from different SEECP countries, which would be appointed to help the co-ordinator of the Ministry of foreign affairs of the Chair in Office.

- *Establish ad hoc expert groups* - More project oriented approach of the SEECP will inevitably imply establishment of a limited number of *ad hoc* expert groups or expert networks which would prepare sectoral ministerial meetings and/or give the regionally agreed impute to the activities of other fora (SP, SECI, EU);

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<sup>13</sup> It would be advisable to dissociate inside the MFA organization the services in charge of SEECP activities from MFA services which are in charge of purely bilateral relations with SEE countries.

- *Make the use of other specialized organizations* - Not only the EU Commission, but a number of specialized agencies could be included in SEECF activities, with given tasks, included in *ad hoc* working groups of SEECF (i.e. OECD, UNDP, ECE/UN, WTO, WB, WCO etc).

## **II Plurilateral dialogue between SEE countries as a way to enhance regional dialogue**

In addition to regional co-operation, SEE countries have established a number of trilateral and plurilateral frameworks. In our view, this approach may also help in the establishment of the culture of regional co-operation in the Balkans. However, all countries do not evenly apply plurilateral schemes. Some of SEE states have already established several trilateral networks, while the others are only at the beginning. For example, Romania participates in five trilateral frameworks. They include Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey<sup>14</sup>, as well as Moldova, Ukraine, Hungary and Austria. Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey have also organized such gatherings on the level of Ministers of foreign affairs, Trilateral meetings are organized also on the level of the Heads of state/government (Gr-Bul-Rom; Tur-Bul-Rom) and, sometimes, at the level of sectoral ministries.

Objectives, fields of co-operation, mechanisms, legal frameworks, institutionalization differ, depending on the interest and practices of states concerned. Those meetings have an important role in the promotion of dialogue on regional issues (transport, infrastructure, tourism, transborder crime...). They promote the conclusion of multilateral agreements (fighting trans-border and organized crime, economic co-operation in some sectors etc). They are a flexible form of multilateral dialogue, which is *additional* to the activities of regional initiatives, as some countries may have particular interest for co-operation on specific issues (for example corridor 10 for Serbia, Macedonia and Greece, corridor 8 for Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria etc).

Trilateral meetings are less frequent in the Western Balkans, although some attempts have been made in this direction. Thus, the idea to organize a summit between Croatia, the FRY and Bosnia-Herzegovina has not yet been realized. The recently proposed meeting between the FRY, Greece and Albania was postponed. On the other hand Croatia has been participating since the year 2000 to "*The Quadrilateral Initiative*"<sup>15</sup> with Slovenia, Hungary and Italy, which can be compared to the origins of CEI co-operation<sup>16</sup>.

## **III Cross-border, subregional co-operation as a *bottom-up* approach to regional co-operation in SEE**

Another additional way to contribute to the development of the spirit of regional co-operation is the promotion of trans-border co-operation between local and regional authorities. There is a need and, very often, genuine will at local level to develop ways and means of transborder co-operation, which would constitute the *bottom-up approach* for regional co-operation in the SEE. There are some encouraging attempts of development of "*Euroregions*", like the trilateral co-operation around the Lake Prespa (Albania, Macedonia, Greece). Local authorities from three border cities (Bitola, Korce, Kozani) have established a

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<sup>14</sup> Romania-Bulgaria-Greece; Romania-Bulgaria-Turkey etc.

<sup>15</sup> The Quadrilateral has started in 1996 as a trilateral cooperation between Slovenia, Hungary and Italy.

<sup>16</sup> CEI started as an Italian initiative, including Austria, Hungary and former Yugoslavia.

regular working forum (co-operation agreement between the three mayors and three commercial chambers). There is a number of initiatives to develop bilateral or triangular transborder frameworks (between regional authorities or between border cities) between Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria; Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia (Nis-Sofia-Skopje); Croatia-Serbia-BH (Osijek-Tuzla-Novı Sad); Croatia-Montenegro-B&H (Dubrovnik-Herceg Novi-Trebinje) etc. Thus, there is a Protocol on Euroregion "Danube-Moris-Tisa" (Serbia, Hungary and Romania) signed in 1997 - 20 co-operation projects are proposed in the last 2 years, worth some 160.000 USD. Such frameworks are very often suggested and initiated by local NGOs or city authorities and supported by outside organizations<sup>17</sup>. It is particularly important that co-operation develops in an *integral way*, comprising the co-operation of all three "sectors" of state and local authorities, economic agents and civil society (including cultural activities, youth exchanges etc).

Although some progress in transborder co-operation is perceived, here again, the Balkans is lagging behind the situation in other European regions. In some cases of former Yugoslavia, stronger transborder co-operation is opposed by local authorities themselves, as they are often issued by nationalistic parties. However, there is still a large potential for the development of this form of co-operation, which should be *corollary* to the top-down, state's initiatives in the South Eastern Europe.

## CONCLUSION

Regional autonomous initiatives are indispensable, but not sufficient complement to the Process of regional co-operation and European integration of South Eastern Europe. Real breakthrough in the regional co-operation in the SEE cannot be expected from the region itself, but only *as a supplement* to efforts to bring the region closer to the European integration (as, for example, it was well attested in the case of successful realization of a *free trade area* in the SEE)<sup>18</sup>.

Actual achievements and efficiency of SEECP and other autonomous initiatives are poor, which gives space to possible further improvements, concerning both *top-down* and of *bottom-up* initiatives. The *SEE Co-operation Process* is expected to become a kind of regional complement to the Stability Pact (plus SECI) and the Process of Stabilization and Association. It could achieve this aim only if overcoming its present limitations and its *de facto* narrow focus on political co-operation. The Process can be improved in a *step-by-step approach* and in close co-operation and co-ordination with other initiatives in *Informal Co-ordination Committee* and other similar frameworks.

On the other side, there is a particularly large space for progress of *bottom-up initiatives*, i.e. different schemes of transborder co-operation involving local authorities, border cities, border administration, civic societies and business communities. In an area where thousands of new borders have been recently established, the main local and outside efforts should be focused on issues that would make borders transparent.

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<sup>17</sup> Such as Council of Europe, Stability Pact-Szeged Process, EWI etc.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, despite a number of declarations adopted by SEECP and BSEC, the *Memorandum of Understanding on trade liberalization and facilitation* in SEE was adopted only after both the EU and other Western powers have exercised strong pressure on local participants to the process, inside the Stability Pact in the SEE framework.



***Annex 1 SOUTH EAST EUROPE COOPERATION PROCESS (1996-2002)***

**PARTICIPANTS:**

*Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the FRY, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Turkey, (Observer: Croatia)*

**SUMMITS (Meetings of the Heads of state or government):**

- Crete, Greece (2/4 November 1997)
- Antalya, Turkey (12/13 October 1998)
- Bucharest, Romania (12 February 2000)
- Skopje (extraordinary) (25 October 2000)
- Skopje (23 February 2001)
  - Tirana (28 March 2002)

**MEETINGS of Ministers of foreign affairs:**

- Sofia (6/7 July 1996) – without the participation of Macedonia
- Salonika (5/6 June 1997)
- Istanbul (8/9 June 1998)
- Bucharest (extraordinary) (19 March 1999)
- Bucharest (2 December 1999)
- Ohrid (14 July 2000)
- Tirana (16 May 2001)
- Beograd (4 June 2002)

**Annexe 2: SEE COUNTRIES - PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL INITIATIVES**

+ member  
 - no participation  
 o observer

Country	CEI	CEFTA	BSEC	SEECF	SECI	SP	AII	Total participation in RIs	EU status
Bulgaria	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	6	Acc. Pr.
Rumania	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	6	Acc. Pr.
B&H	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	5	SAP
FRY	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	5	SAP
Macedonia	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	4	SAP
Croatia	+	-	-	0	+	+	+	4 + o	SAP
Albania	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	6	SAP
Greece	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	5	Member
Turkey	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	4	Candid.

CEI - Central European Initiative  
 CEFTA- Central European Free Trade Area  
 BSEC - Organization for Black Sea Economic Co-operation  
 SEECF - Co-operation process in South Eastern Europe  
 SAP - Stabilization and Association Process  
 SECI - South East Europe Co-operative Initiative  
 SP - Stability Pact in South Eastern Europe  
 AII - Adriatic-Ionian Initiative

**Annex 3 FIELDS OF ACTIVITY OF REGIONAL INITIATIVES IN SEE**

<b>Field</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>SECI</b>	<b>BSEC</b>	<b>CEI</b>	<b>SEECF</b>	<b>CEFTA</b>	<b>AII</b>
Human rights/Minorities	*			*	*		
Good governance/local government	*						
Media	*						
Parliamentary co-operation	*		*	*	*		
Migration/Asylum/Refugees	*						
Trade	*	*	*		*	*	
Infrastructures	*	*	*	*	*		
Business/MSE/Private sector	*	*	*	*	*		*
FDI	*	*	*				
Telecommunications		*	*	*			
Environment	*	*	*	*	*		*
Education/Culture	*		*	*			*
Human resources/Youth							
Science/Technology			*	*			*
Energy	*	*	*		*		
Agriculture			*	*		*	
Banking sector/Finances	*	*	*				
Transport		*		*	*		
Tourism			*	*			
Social development	*						
Military reform/co-operation	*						
Justice and Home affairs	*		*	*	*		
Fight against organized crime							
Anticorruption	*	*	*	*			
Civil protection	*		*				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>

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