Chapter 9

The South-East European Cooperation Process and Its New Parliamentary Assembly: Regional Dialogue in Action

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Introduction

The institutional development of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Parliamentary Dimension and the establishment of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly (SEECP PA) have affected inter-parliamentary relations among the participating countries, some of which have a long history of protracted conflicts. The SEECP PA engages in the type of parliamentary diplomacy that is aimed at reconciliation as a component of security policy, by seeking to maintain regional peace and stability.

The SEECP emerged from the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe,1 which was created in 1999 as an answer to the wars related to the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, with a view to strengthening cooperation and a European perspective for the entire region of South-East Europe.

To understand the role of the SEECP Parliamentary Dimension, there is a need for a clear analytical framework that captures inter-parliamentary cooperation. Based on recent academic research on the nature of international parliamentary institutions (IPIS),2 one can analyse IPIS, including the Parliamentary Dimension of the SEECP, according to three dimensions: constitutional status; institutionalisation; and institutional authority.3  

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1 For more about the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, see online at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/stability-pact_en.htm.
The first dimension – *constitutional status* – refers to the nature of the relationship between an IPI and an intergovernmental international organisation. This relationship can be structured in different ways: the IPI can be entirely independent; committed to and/or recognised by the international organisation; or formally a part of the international organisation. Examples are the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which is independent from any intergovernmental international organisation; the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) PA, which maintains a close relationship with NATO; the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), which is an official organ of the Council of Europe; and the European Parliament, which is an institution of the European Union. Defining the IPI’s constitutional status includes enquiring whether the establishment of the IPI was an initiative of the executives, parliaments, or both. One also needs to examine the stated objectives of the IPI, which can include cooperation among the participating parliaments from the same region, contributing to the participating countries’ EU integration process, and political dialogue on contentious issues.

The second dimension – the *institutionalisation* of IPIs – refers to the extent to which an IPI is capable of effective operation. A first indicator of institutionalisation is the structure of its membership. It needs to be enquired here whether the IPI distinguishes among full members, observers, affiliated members and guests, and what type of seat distribution it follows. A second indicator of institutionalisation concerns the internal governing structures. Questions examined here include whether the IPI is capable of electing its own president freely, or whether it is obliged to accept its president as the

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4 For instance, the Parliamentary Dimension of the Adriatic–Ionian Initiative (AII).
5 For instance, COSAP – Conference of the European Integration/Affairs Committees of States Participating in the Stabilization and Association Process of South-East Europe.
6 For instance, the Conference of Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committees of the so-called Dayton countries (that is, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia).
9 Seat distribution can be according to: proportionality; degressive proportionality, which over-represents smaller parliaments and under-represents larger parliaments; or equality in the number of seats for all participating parliaments.