The jury is still out on the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

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Introduction

At a regional funding conference on 29 and 30 March 2000, international donors pledged 2.4 billion Euro for projects under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SEE). It was the most significant development since the Pact was officially launched in Sarajevo in July 1999 at a summit that assembled more than thirty heads of state and government. Some critics had disparaged the Sarajevo meeting as the most expensive photo opportunity ever held, and had warned that, in and of itself, the Pact was nothing more than an empty framework waiting to be filled with content. In the nine months since the approval of the Pact, the shell has been filled with Working Tables, Task Forces, and special initiatives. And the donors’ conference provided a substantial injection of cash. But views remain divided on whether the Pact will actually deliver on its promise to bring stability to the region.

Following the successful donors’ conference in March 2000, supporters of the Pact have claimed that it had finally started to live up to its promises — the much heralded modern-day Marshall Plan for the Balkans. If true, then there is indeed a real prospect of the vicious circle of violence being broken at last, and the beginning of an era of stability and even of prosperity that would draw the entire region back into the European mainstream.

But those with a more cynical perspective still charge that the Pact lacks the requisite leadership and vision. To them, even with the new funding, it remains nothing more than a loose association of governments and international organisations, an unlimited series of conferences and meetings, and a pile of projects allowing most funding associated with the Pact to disappear into Western pockets.

This article describes the Stability Pact’s creation and objectives, its organisational structure, and the long-term implications of the Regional Funding Conference. It also attempts to weigh up the achievements and the challenges that the Pact is facing at the time of writing. It is, however, neither possible nor fair to assess its overall results at this point in time. The Stability Pact is a long-term process and its early outcomes will only become visible once some concrete projects are being implemented.

Its creation and objectives

The Stability Pact was created in the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis. It was inspired by the recognition that, having intervened in Kosovo, the member states

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of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) had a responsibility to ensure lasting peace in the entire region. Or, to put it more bluntly, Western countries saw this as a mechanism to pay off the ‘moral and political debt’ owed to the countries in SEE for having supported — actively or tacitly — the NATO air-strikes against Serbia and for having opened their borders to huge numbers of Kosovar refugees.

The underlying concept was clear. The international community could no longer go on with its piecemeal approach of reacting to crises as they arose, applying the sticking plaster but failing to work for a long-term cure. Instead, a preventive approach was needed that tackled the problems in the round. In a clear break with the pattern of engagement on a country-by-country basis that has marked international involvement in the Balkans for years, this more comprehensive solution is based on stimulating regional stability and prosperity. The hope, of course, is to ensure a better future not just for the people of Kosovo but for the region as a whole.

The European Union (EU) — and in particular the German government which held the EU presidency at the time — devised the Stability Pact project in the spring of 1999. As the text, adopted at the inaugural meeting in Cologne on 10 June 1999, stated, the Pact is aimed ‘at strengthening countries in South Eastern Europe in their efforts to foster peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity, in order to achieve stability in the whole region’.2

Less than two months later, on 30 July 1999, the Sarajevo meeting was held at which numerous heads of state and government, as well as the principals of relevant international organisations and regional initiatives formally endorsed the Stability Pact effort. The summit’s final declaration stressed that regional cooperation would encourage the countries in SEE to integrate themselves into broader structures and, above all, draw them closer to the European mainstream. It also stated that ‘the countries of the region are the owners of the stabilisation process and their full effort in and commitment to this undertaking are critical to its success’.3 Finally, it was agreed that the process would concentrate on the areas of democracy and human rights, economic development and cooperation, as well as security.

In the meantime, the Council of the European Union had appointed former German minister Bodo Hombach — a close colleague of German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder — as the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact, thereby making him primarily responsible for promoting the achievement of the Pact’s objectives. A small secretariat was established in Brussels. By April 2000, some thirty international staff — mainly diplomats and civil servants seconded by national governments — were working at this Office of the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact.

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2 Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Cologne, 10 June 1999, article III.9.
3 Sarajevo Summit Declaration, Sarajevo, 30 July 1999, articles 5 and 6.