Regional Conference
NATO Integration in South Eastern Europe (SEE):
Developing a Common Transatlantic Vision and Future Perspectives

Co-Organized and Hosted by the Ministry of Defence (MK)
IRC-08-CF
30 May - 01 June 2010, Bitola, MK

Background

The Integration process has always been the main instrument for consolidating peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. In line with that, NATO integration has contributed to the enhancement of stability and security of all countries in the mentioned area by: firstly, encouraging and supporting democratic reforms, including the establishment of civilian and democratic control over military forces; secondly, fostering patterns and practices of cooperation, consultation and consensus-building among members of the Alliance; and finally, by promoting good-neighborly relations. In the region of South Eastern Europe, the NATO Integration process has not yet been fully completed. There are still substantial challenges on the path of the Western Balkan countries in completing their accession, which should be discussed, and built on principles of mutual respect, responsibility and reciprocity.

Aim

The aim of the Regional Conference was to contribute to the regional security cooperation in Southeast Europe (SEE), since it is an important tool for promoting its Euro-Atlantic integration efforts. The Regional Conference in Bitola offered the countries a common platform for exchange of views and experiences on the mutual priorities and the existing challenges.

Logo of the Regional Conference

The Logo of the Regional Conference demonstrates the variety of the paths, obstacles, enthusiasm and the pace of respective regional countries, each different and specific in its own way, but simultaneously directed towards common goals – Euro-Atlantic Integration, security and economic stability of the Region, as well as a stable and peaceful Europe, and overall global security and peace.

The Logo of the Regional Conference also reminds of the amphitheatre and the ancient Heraclea near Bitola, visited by all participants on 30 May 2010, and at the same time it resembles a fingerprint, serving to symbolize the importance of identity in the mosaic of unity.

Regional Conference Co-organizers

The Regional Conference was planned, organized and executed as a joint event by the Ministry of Defence (MK) and RACVIAC - Centre for Security Cooperation. The Ministry of Defence (MK) undertook the larger burden and fully provided operational support as the host of the Regional Conference, while the Agenda included all jointly defined objectives, arising from the common perspective and vision of the two co-organizers.

Venue, duration and participation

The Regional conference venue was the hotel Epinal in the beautiful town of Bitola, from 30 May to 01 June 2010. The Conference was organized as a three-day event, two of which were working days. It included a total of 107 participants: senior level officials nominated by the contributing countries from the Region, diplomatic/defence representatives from NATO HQ and NATO subordinated commands, and regional security organizations.
The Conference was attended by five Ministers of Defence, two Deputy Ministers of Defence, and one State Secretary of Ministry of Defence from the regional countries, namely: Mr Zoran Konjanovski - Minister of Defence (MK), Mr Arben Imami - Minister of Defence (AL), Mr Branko Vučelić - Minister of Defence (HR), Dr. Ljubica Jelušić - Minister of Defence (SI), Mr Vecdi Gönül - Minister of National Defence (TR), Mrs Marina Pendeš - Deputy Minister of Defence (BA), Mr Draško Jovanović - Deputy Minister of Defence (ME) and Mr Zoran Jeftić - State Secretary, MoD (RS)

Regional Conference Agenda

The Regional Conference agenda included speeches given by high-level representatives, as well as national presentations, exchanges of standing points and experiences on common priorities and challenges, followed by open discussions. The Conference started on 30 May with a Welcome reception and a visit to the amphitheatre and the ancient Heraclea Lyncestis.

The working part of the Conference opened the next day with a Welcome Address by Mr. Zoran Konjanovski, Minister of Defence (MK). The Minister Konjanovski conveyed exceptional honor that with this Conference, the Region confirms its readiness to utilize the regional and bilateral cooperation and professional and personal contacts for the future of regional countries on their path to Euro-Atlantic integrations. Mr. Konjanovski stressed that dedication to dialogue, cooperation and integrations are the biggest investments in the defence, in the national, regional and global stability and priorities. He depicted the Region as a mosaic structure that should be based on mutual understanding and respect as well as mutual responsibility and reciprocity. The Minister also confirmed his country’s determination to achieve NATO membership, because this is not just as a national issue, but also part of a much wider process to achieve world peace, security and shared future perspective.

Welcome address by Mr Zoran Konjanovski MoD (MK)

The next speaker, Mr Arben Imami, Minister of Defence (AL), emphasized that globalization is the cause of significant change in international security environment and that for achieving full national security, “state defense” is not sufficient. He stressed that regional threats should be removed through regional cooperation and that all countries in the region should complete their integration to NATO and support regional cooperation organizations. Mr Imami also mentioned other significant challenges to global security that include environmental issues, climate change, and drug trafficking.

The Minister of Defence (HR) Mr Branko Vučelić conveyed in his speech the message that Croatia supports the Euro-Atlantic perspective of South-East European countries, taking into consideration the strong impact of NATO and EU membership on the stabilization processes and security in the Region. The Croatian Minister stressed that the integration of all countries into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions is the best way for stabilization of the Region. He also underlined the importance of common and harmonized efforts of the countries in the region to contribute to the security dialogue and cooperation, as well as the need to further enhance the Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

The Minister of Defence (SI) Dr. Ljubica Jelušić stressed that Western Balkans and regional responsibilities remain on the top of Slovenia’s list of foreign and security policy priorities. The Minister underlined that this year Slovenian regional commitments and priorities are in the process of their reaffirmation, with national strategic documents being approved at parliamentary and governmental level. Thus Slovenia remains a reliable ally, and promoter and strong supporter of the Euro-Atlantic aspirations for the countries of the region. Dr. Jelušić added that regional cooperation is one of the most useful frames for sharing lessons learned, knowledge and experience from the processes of Euro-Atlantic integration and defence reforms. She also mentioned that this kind of events contribute to the regional security cooperation in Southeast Europe (SEE) as an important tool for promoting its Euro-Atlantic integration efforts.
Due to an unexpected and urgent matter, the Minister of National Defence (TR) Mr Vecdi Göñül had to leave the Conference earlier. On his behalf, Ambassador of TR to the MK, Mr Hakan Okcal delivered Mr Göñül’s address. The address conveyed the message that Turkey has the desire to contribute to the creation of a new environment in the region, based on common security environment, economic interdependency, high-level political dialogue and multi-cultural coexistence. Turkey pays special attention to the completion of integration of Southeast European countries to the Euro-Atlantic structures. In this respect, Turkey welcomes the latest NATO membership of Albania and Croatia and in the near future, when the name issue will be resolved, NATO will be able to invite MK to the Alliance. Ambassador’s speech was concluded with the statement that the enlargement momentum should be preserved for the prosperity of the region and in this regard, Turkey will spare no effort. Cooperation, and the introduction of streamlined activities aimed at the consolidation of regional ownership over security initiatives. Mr Jefić underlined that such events as this regional conference represent a good framework for deepening political dialogue and developing mutual trust. In conclusion, he said that European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries in the region serve as additional guarantees of regional security, prosperity and development. He also said that cooperation means belonging to a common vision, both in the region itself and in the relations with other regions of the Euro-Atlantic area.

Following their addresses in the opening session, the Minister of Defence (MK), Minister of Defence (AL), Minister of Defence (HR), Minister of Defence (TR), Deputy Minister of Defence (BA), Deputy Minister of Defence (ME), State Secretary (RS), and RACVIAC Director participated at a press conference. The journalists asked the distinguished national representatives a variety of questions on the Conference topic, as well as on their national views and standpoints.

The Deputy Minister of Defence (BA), Mrs Marina Pendeš welcomed the idea of organizing this Conference, seeing it as a renewed opportunity for further support to the ongoing efforts of SEE countries in pursuing their Euro-Atlantic integration agendas, as well as the most substantial contribution to promote this part of Europe into the zone of stability and security. In her speech, Mrs Pendeš tried to reverse the perception that South East Europe is a place where peace is an exception and replace it with the proof that this is an area where cooperation is possible and common actions prevail over competing national interests.

The next speaker, Deputy Minister of Defence (ME) Mr Draško Jovanović apprised the audience that Montenegro has started the process of meeting the necessary conditions to access the MAP process and that it has already completed major reforms in defense after gaining its independence by following the NATO standards. He reiterated the views of previous speakers, on the particular responsibility of regional cooperation in the field of defense.

The State Secretary from the Ministry of Defence (RS) Mr Zoran Jefić was the next speaker to address the audience. Mr. Jefić pointed out that Serbia contributes to the democratic transformation of the region, insisting on strengthening the regional
Regional Conference in session

The second working day of the Regional Conference started with the second session which was dedicated to the role of NATO in promoting security environment and setting a common transatlantic vision, with the reference to NATO political and military policy in SEE Region. This session was moderated by Brig Gen Branko Drakalski, Military Representative of MK to NATO. Speeches were given by the following speakers: Brig Gen Adam Pavel, Deputy Assistant Director of Cooperation and Regional Division, NATO IMS (presentation about NATO Open Door Policy: Through Partnership to Membership); Dr. Willem Frederic van Eekeelen, Former Minister of Defence of the Netherlands; Col Nicholas Kotchine from Military Cooperation Division, JFC Naples (presentation on NATO Integration Procedures and Perspectives); Col Todd Brown, US Defence Attaché in MK; Prof. Dr. Peter Volten, Director of the Centre for European Security Studies, the Netherlands, (presentation on the most necessary reforms and challenges towards meeting the membership criteria); Mr Rohan Maxwell, Head of Politico-Military Div. in NATO HQ, Sarajevo; and Brigadier David Humar, SMR/COM NHQS&NAT Director.

The third Conference session was under the moderation of Ambassador Nikola Todorčevski, Director of RACVIAC - Centre for Security Cooperation. Its topic was “NATO in South Eastern Europe: National views, challenges and future perspectives”. This session was designed to provide the audience of the Regional Conference with a brief statement and presentation on respective national views, challenges and future perspectives by respective national representatives.

Regional Conference closing remarks

The Regional Conference provided a successful framework for exchanging of information and experiences on the common priorities and challenges on NATO Integration in South Eastern Europe. The Regional Conference was especially successful in bringing together in one room several Ministers of Defence, Deputy Ministers of Defence, MoD State Secretaries, Ambassadors, Defence Attaches, high-level senior officials and security experts to discuss NATO Integration issues from their national or expert points of view. This Regional conference also reaffirmed the support of RACVIAC to open dialogue among countries in SEE regarding security cooperation, and provided encouragement for the future activities of RACVIAC in that direction.

The Regional Conference was a confirmation that each country from the region is dedicated to dialogue and cooperation, and to integration and security of the entire region. In that regard, NATO Open Door Policy is an essential contributor to the security of the North Atlantic area, which undoubtedly includes the Western Balkan countries. While NATO and the EU are the main promoters and facilitators of regional cooperation, the role of regional initiatives is also crucial, and their work should be complementary and create opportunities for open dialogue, promotion of democratic development and stimulation of regional cooperation, including development of common capabilities and capacities.