

It was after these various attempts to stabilize the region in the 1990s that the European Union launched the Stability Pact project. However, this pact is more ambitious than the earlier processes, which used various means of fostering regional cooperation and different formulas for participation. The SPSEE is intended to be as inclusive as possible and thus represents a bigger political effort, at least in terms of participation, as it encompasses all of the SEE states, even, since fall 2000, Yugoslavia.

The general principle of this pact is to generate stability by strengthening economic cooperation among states. Restored stability should lead to economic growth and EU membership for SEE states, the ultimate aim of the process. Other objectives include peace, democracy, entrenching the market economy, strengthening civil society and consolidating multicultural societies.

Until 1999, the reactions of Western countries to the various Balkan conflicts had spawned a plethora of bilateral agreements and various initiatives. Despite their various rationales, these projects were poorly coordinated and competitive. Major resources were wasted in duplication and loss of time due to all the meetings of the various commissions and all manner of research conducted by the agencies. This lack of coordination is precisely what the SPSEE wants to reduce through its regional focus.²⁸

The SPSEE defines an original and ambitious cooperation framework distinguished by a determination to effectively coordinate the activities of various players whose resources and skills are to be optimally employed. By implementing this pact, the international community was actually attempting to devise a long-term action strategy for the region. This approach is based on the conclusion of bilateral and multilateral good-neighbour agreements among regional states that commit themselves to following OSCE rules and principles. The objectives of this new operating framework include crisis prevention and the introduction of democratic political processes founded on the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of national minorities and the right of access to free and independent media.

3.1.1 Division into tables

Although the final UE statement from the Sarajevo Summit emphasized the priority of regional cooperation, the SPSEE's operations and work program were left vague. The pact's numerous participants and lofty objectives prompted the organization to build a highly complex structure. In all, four tables were set up including a coordinating table, known as the South-East Europe Regional Table, and three Working Tables (see Table 3).

²⁸ See Daniela Heimerl, "Construire la paix; le Pacte de stabilité pour l'Europe du Sud-Est," *Les Balkans: paysage après la bataille*, Paris: La documentation française, no. 1008 (September 2000), p. 5.