



**Judy Batt**

## **EU Presidency Conference on Security Sector Reform in the Western Balkans**

Conference held at the Vienna Hilton StadtPark  
Vienna, 13-14 February 2006

This conference was organised by the Austrian Federal Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs, in association with DCAF (Geneva) and the EU Institute for Security Studies (Paris). The conference was attended by nearly two hundred participants from EU member states, candidate states and potential candidates from the Western Balkans; the Council, Commission and European Parliament; the Stability Pact, UN, OSCE, NATO, OECD, RACVIAC and research institutes.

The key objective was to take forward work done under the British Presidency on a Security Sector Reform (SSR) strategy for the EU. The Austrian Presidency conference focussed attention on the specific SSR needs of the Western Balkans, and lessons learned in the region to date.

DCAF prepared a comprehensive background paper which was complemented by additional papers for each working group. The EU ISS recently published Chaillot Paper no. 80 *Promoting Security Sector Governance in the EU's Neighbourhood* by Heiner Hanggi and Fred Tanner; and EU ISS provided the rapporteur for this conference. The event opened with a welcoming address by Gunther Platter, Austrian Federal Minister of Defence, and keynote speeches by Pedro Serrana, Director DGE IX, Council Secretariat and Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, Permanent Representative of Austria to the UN in Geneva and former High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Four plenary sessions were followed up by parallel specialised Working Group sessions on: A - Conceptual Basis for EU SSR Activities; B – Lessons Learned in the Western Balkans and Future Perspectives; C – Parliamentary Dimension of SSR; D – Contribution of the Military to SSR within the ESDP Framework.

There was widespread consensus among participants that the EU should do more to 'mainstream' security concerns and build SSR into all its activities in the Western Balkans, a region still struggling to leave behind its troubled past. Although the threat of open conflict has now receded, effective SSR is needed as much as ever, insofar as unreformed security institutions can obstruct the progress of reform, and can in some cases be implicated in the 'new' security threats of organised crime, corruption and trafficking in drugs and human beings.

## *1) The Conceptual Basis for EU SSR Activities*

Although the European Security Strategy noted the importance of SSR for achieving the EU's strategic objectives, the EU at present lacks an explicit SSR concept. Yet the EU has the potential to be the most 'complete' of any of the international/multilateral actors in SSR. **The EU is already heavily engaged in a range of SSR-related activities –albeit under a different name - and is the most important single contributor of resources.** It needs to enhance the conceptual coherence of its activities. The Council has adopted a concept for ESDP support to SSR in November 2005. The Commission's draft Community concept is now awaited. There is general agreement that a holistic approach is needed, and that this requires much enhanced cross-pillar co-ordination in the EU. Conference participants were strongly of the view, therefore, that **the aim must be to work towards a single overarching SSR concept.** The two drafts should eventually be brought together. The challenge will be to link the more operational ESDP concept with the much broader EC concept; to harmonise the security and development perspectives; and to set SSR firmly within an overall agenda of improving human security, democratic governance and human rights.

The OECD/DAC guidelines on SSR are a suitable starting point for the definition of SSR, having been endorsed by EU member states (and adopted in the Council Secretariat's paper). An OSCE representative at the conference also drew attention to the relevance of the OSCE 1994 Code of Conduct as a point of reference for SSR. This was drawn up largely at the initiative of EU member states, but it has also won acceptance from the EU's 'eastern neighbours' and the Western Balkans – the EU's partners in SSR.

There was little debate at the conference over terminology (i.e. whether we should refer to 'security *sector* reform' or 'security *system* reform') – **the key is for all EU actors to 'sing to the same hymn-sheet'.**

## *2) Coherence and Coordination*

The formulation of a comprehensive EU SSR strategy should improve coherence and coordination by **clearly specifying the functional division of responsibilities** across the pillars. It should help **identify gaps** in the range of existing activities. It could be used as a prompt for '**stock-taking**' initiatives by the EU and its member states. This could be most usefully done through **exchange of information** on SSR initiatives 'on the ground', among EU member states' Heads of Missions, EUSRs and Head of the EC Delegations. But it would also be worthwhile to **encourage the governments of West Balkans partners themselves to gather information** on what is being done, and who is doing what: this would promote 'local ownership' and build governments' coordination capacities.

SSR should be **integrated into EU instruments for external policy.** Sections on SSR could be included in Country Strategy Papers, Action Plans etc, signalling the priority the EU attaches to this issue. SSR should be much more comprehensively covered in the Commission's annual 'Progress Reports' on candidate and potential candidate countries in the Western Balkans. Such a regular review process would allow for better identification of remaining gaps and thus help to clarify where additional efforts are necessary. SSR should be included as **an item on the agenda of political dialogue** with these partners, and should be clearly flagged as **an essential element of the EU accession** process.

A relevant proposal discussed at the conference was to set up a cross-pillar **SSR Task Force**, in order to coordinate and fine-tune respective activities. The EU will also need to develop a **generic recruitment pool** for all areas of SSR activities. Conference participants agreed that member states should establish and further develop resources and structures for this.

**Coordination with other international and bilateral actors and NGOs is clearly vital**, but remains poor in practice. Given its potential for a comprehensive approach to SSR, the EU could aspire to a leading role in the coordination process. Some speakers defended the merits of the **Stability Pact** as a proven ‘clearing house’ for the international community and donors active in the Western Balkans. It had a track record in reform of the judiciary and police in particular. **NATO** has established itself as the lead actor in defence sector reform. **EU/NATO coordination must be strengthened**: one speaker advocated project-oriented cooperation in SSR, others argued for a clear division of labour. It was argued that the **EU should be the lead actor in developing border management capacities**, consistent with the prime objective of ‘civilianisation’. This is a key area of interest for the EU and member states on the external border, and one in which the EU has unique competences. **The OSCE will remain a key partner for the EU in SSR**. The OSCE framework has the advantage of inclusiveness and equality between its members in the common objective of SSR.

Improving coherence and coordination, both within the EU and among international actors on the ground, is important not just for avoiding wasteful duplication of efforts, but also from the point of view of the Western Balkans recipients. **Lack of coordination, and even more so competition, between international donors poses unwelcome and unnecessary strains on weak states with limited capacities and human resources.**

### ***3) Western Balkans’ Needs in SSR and Lessons Learned***

#### ***a) Old Wine in a New Bottle is still worth drinking!***

Several participants from Western Balkans countries expressed anxieties that SSR could become an additional new condition for their EU integration. But in fact much of what the EU is already asking of candidates and potential candidates is SSR by another name. ‘Repackaging’ a wide variety of activities under the overarching SSR label is not merely a cosmetic exercise, nor is it designed to impose new burdens, but is rather a genuine attempt to enable prioritisation and bring focus to the EU’s somewhat dispersed efforts. **This should bring benefits to partners by improving the consistency and coherence of the messages the EU seeks to convey.**

The EU had a right to be stringent in its demands and rigorous in monitoring performance in the SSR field, precisely because, in the Western Balkans, it is engaging not just with ‘third countries’ but states to whom it is holding out the prospect of EU membership. SSR does not constitute an additional condition of accession, but a pivotal contribution to stabilising the region. In return, **Western Balkans partners had a right to expect the EU to sustain the credibility of the enlargement promise** throughout the years to come. In the meanwhile, one speaker recommended that the EU ‘promise less, but deliver more.’ To this end the new funding mechanisms, such as the Instrument for Pre-Accession or the Stability Instrument, should be examined as potential vehicles for the support of SSR programmes.

### ***b) Local ownership***

Almost all speakers and participants emphasised the importance of the principle of **local ownership**. Cooperation in SSR really has to mean cooperation – international donors can only support programmes that are genuinely wanted by recipients. Candidates' and potential candidates' governments have to have a real stake in the pushing forward SSR, which requires concrete commitments and clearly set priorities. This is particularly true in the specific conditions of the Western Balkans, where some elements of SSR could appear especially politically risky for governments. **Political commitment has to be generated across the board** – it could happen that ministries of defence, foreign affairs and the top level of the defence staff have that commitment, but unless they receive full backing from the offices of the President and Prime Minister and the ministry of finance, the momentum of reform will not be sustained. **Assuring local ownership means setting priorities and also capacity-building** in government: the pace of development of general administrative and managerial skills within state institutions has a fundamental bearing on the speed and effectiveness of SSR. A number of for a and clearing-houses, such as RACVIAC or the South-East European Cooperation Process, have been established to facilitate and promote this process.

### ***c) SSR must be set within the Democratic Governance Agenda***

SSR has to be firmly set within the 'democratic governance' agenda. Here is one area where many participants pointed to important gaps in the EU's SSR efforts in the Western Balkans. Reform of security forces that focuses only or mainly on capacity building and efficiency is likely to fail unless backed by programmes to enhance transparency and accountability. This calls for **much more EU support for training programmes for a wide range of civilian and non-governmental actors**.

Much more needs to be done to stimulate the **parliamentary dimension of SSR**. Strengthening legislative scrutiny and the oversight function is first of all needed in the field of the armed forces and security services, but the SSR agenda extends also into the remit of committees on foreign affairs, interior, justice, human rights, social and, last but not least, economic policy. **There is an enormous need for training of parliamentarians, committee staffers, and political party advisers in the ramified fields comprising SSR**.

The **European Parliament** is not engaged at all with the parliamentary committees for defence and security in the Western Balkans (although the WEU Parliamentary Assembly is). The production of a comprehensive, specifically *EU* concept of SSR should prompt the EP to play a full role. Member states' defence and security committees could be very helpful in explaining how they work, especially in issues such as security clearance.

A further area crying out for more substantial EU support is **training of civil society actors and journalists in SSR issues**. Strengthening parliamentary capacities depends on the formation of a wider non-governmental 'security community' – a pool of well-informed civilian expertise that so far has hardly begun to develop. One particular area that calls specifically for EU involvement is training on ESDP, about which there is vast ignorance in the region.

**The European Commission's Communication** (of 27 January 2006) *The Western Balkans on the Road to the EU* highlighted the objective of promoting **civil society dialogue**, with a particular focus on dialogue between Western Balkans societies. Such dialogue has an obvious connection with the EU's SSR agenda for the region, **so civil society activists in this field should be able to look forward to more substantial support from the EU**.

*d) The regional dimension*

'Regional cooperation' is a mantra whose rationale seems self-evident to the EU, but often appears far from self-evident in the Western Balkans, where **lingering mutual mistrust and unreconciled ethnic tensions continue to generate instinctive resistance to being designated as a 'region' at all**. Regional neighbours top the list of perceived threats in public and elite opinion in every country.

Too often, the EU's demands for improved regional cooperation are seen as a diversionary tactic, or a covert effort to revive Yugoslavia. The EU's demands lack consistency and credibility when the **EU enlargement process itself has the effect of erecting new barriers among countries**. And many structures erected for the purposes of fostering regional cooperation are currently seen as delivering few results, and should be filled with more substance.

**Thus the case for regional cooperation has to be convincingly argued**. Such a case can indeed be made for SSR. The failure of SSR in one Western Balkans country has direct implications for security in the others. Integrated border management presupposes the cooperation of forces on each side of the border. The fight against organised crime requires a level of cooperation between the police forces of the region that matches the efficiency of cooperation among transnational gangs.

Enhanced EU support for confidence-building measures in the region, backed by sustained investment of resources, are essential to reinforce the EU's political messages and its credibility.