

Non-paper on potential EPF assistance measure in BIH to establish a WESTERN BALKAN DEFENCE COLLEGE

by

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Context

In light of the current geopolitical developments, the European Union's (EU) ambition of bringing our partners in the Western Balkans closer to the EU, as well as strengthening their resilience, is more pertinent than ever. As laid out in the Strategic Compass, endorsed by the European Council on 25 March 2022, the EU remains *"committed to improving the resilience of societies and democratic processes, political institutions and critical infrastructure in the Western Balkans, as well as boosting cybersecurity, countering disinformation and support counter-terrorism efforts in the region."*¹

In previous years, the efforts of the member states of the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC) to establish stronger ties and advance the Western Balkan countries on their way to EU accession have proven to be a great success. The CEDC therefore intends to continue the fruitful cooperation with the Western Balkans in the near future.

As a means to strengthen the resilience of our partners in the Western Balkans, the above mentioned CEDC countries propose the establishment of a Western Balkan Defence College in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH), bringing together the Western Balkan countries to enable standardised education based on European values.

After the realisation of the infrastructure itself, the CEDC countries declare readiness to support the operational run by contributing teaching personnel (lecturers and trainers) until the beneficiaries' accession to the EU is accomplished, in order to allow for a security and defence education based on European values and objectives. This would not only promote regional cooperation, but also strengthen national resilience, limit third party influences and enable a pro-European mind-set for their military elites and personnel. The proposed teaching language is English. BIH would provide the venue and infrastructure, funded through the EPF. The costs for the premises itself are estimated between eight and ten million EURO.

On the expert level, all of the beneficiaries already displayed great interest and willingness to contribute to the idea of a future regional cooperation in this field. This willingness can also be found on the political level.²

EPF framework

The ultimate aim of the EPF is to enhance the EU's ability to prevent conflict, preserve peace and strengthen international stability and security.

¹ A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence - For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security, 21 March 2022, p. 42.

² JHA 68545, EU Feasibility Study for a Security and Defence Education in the Western Balkans, March 2019, p. 4.

Through providing the Western Balkans with a Defence College, the EU would thus not only strengthen the region's resilience and capacity to act, but also support the establishment of standardized education and training with the potential to participate in CSDP missions as well as in all EU defence initiatives (e.g. EDA, PESCO, CARD).

Overall, through the proposed assistance measure, the EU would strengthen the Western Balkans ability to offer pro-European education and training, establish networks that will foster the regional cooperation, contribute to the region's resilience, and consequently enable the countries to more independency from external actors.³ It would also facilitate the EU institutions' efforts to promote regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkan region. Additionally, such an endeavour would support the capacity of the states in the Western Balkans to take part in CSDP missions and to support their accession to the EU.

Proposal

We propose the establishment of a Western Balkan Defence College for higher and basic military education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, similar to the Baltic Defence College, implemented as an assistance measure under the EPF framework, managed directly by the European Commission.

We propose that BiH authorities should be obliged to

- accept the project and express their general willingness to establish the project in line with the applicable regulations including the emphasis of local ownership (see attached letter of the minister of defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina)⁴;
- work in close cooperation with the EU-authorities in implementing the project;
- be prepared to operate the Western Balkan Defence College as a regional education institution with the support of certain CEDC member states and other EU Member States willing to be involved in the project;
- be prepared to accept the temporary and permanent presence of supporting administrative and teaching staff from the CEDC and other contributing EU member states at the expense of the respective country;
- be prepared to accept the participation of trainees from other Western Balkan countries.

³ JHA 68545, EU Feasibility Study for a Security and Defence Education in the Western Balkans, March 2019, p. 22.

⁴ Letter of intent, dated 15 July 2022, signed by the minister of defence of BiH