MPFSEE – MILITARY-POLITICAL INITATIVE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION*

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In the context of global security environment transformations, the existence of a structure or force capable to assure the conflicts prevention through international, governmental of nongovernmental organism or organisations' coordination, is a priority in the international foreign policy. The responsibility of peace and security achievement is already on the security agenda of numerous states. The regional peace and cooperation initiatives could be and really are considered efficient ways of improvement of the security environment and especially of assurance of that organized and institutional frame, necessary for achieving the projects and programs through states could think to economical, political or military stability. South-Eastern Europe Defence Ministerial is also considered such of initiative; its activity and, especially, its results have been recognized by UN and NATO.

Keywords: MFPSEE, SEEBRIG.

The way to the Euro-Atlantic integration was not quite easy for Romania. The integration criteria fulfilment in NATO and EU structures required sacrifices, adaptation efforts and undertaking some important engagement and large responsibilities. From January, 2007, the Northern and Eastern border of Romania has become the external border of EU, our country contributing to the Union's liberty, security and justice area through those borders' administration. From Romania's side are required the participation in the program of good vicinity, launched on 2004, the making up a security and prosperity area in Black Sea area, as well as the contribution brought by „*Global Civil 2010"* Objective.

Besides the important participation in Alliance's operations and efforts, Romania is an active factor of ESDP implementation through human and logistical resources that it already engaged separately or in the frame of two European Tactical Battle Groups especially meant for fulfilling the Petersberg missions, our country having to dispose of separate military troops both for EU and NATO.

Together with these engagements and responsibilities, by joining these two organisations, Romania has become an important regional player, integrated in the decision-taking process at European and Euro-Atlantic level, a member of a strong confederation from the international relations' perspective, both a security beneficiary and supplier and part of the most performing politico-economic system known in the history.

Romania's wish of self-assuring the security and prosperity through integration was justified and legitimate, approaches for this integration having a role of catalyst of internal reforms, necessary for the country modernization and prosperity. As results from Romania's National Security Strategy, from The White Charter or The Transformation Strategy, Romania was permanently required the adaptation to these two organizational systems, being itself in a process of development and transformation, but the communion of values, interests and objectives was the element which conferred stability and coherence to the multidimensional development process.

SEEBRIG was founded on the base of initiative of many states from South-East of Europe, including Romania, its status, role and missions being stipulated in the Agreement regarding the Peace Task Force from South-East of Europe, signed at Skopje, in 1998.

The foundation proposal of Peace Multinational Force, as a brigade (SEEBRIG), was launched on the occasion of SEDM Meeting (Sofia, the 3rd of October, 1997). The project is developing under the auspicious of SEDM Meeting Process.

To this date, the following states are members with full rights in this initiative: Albania - Nation 1, Bulgaria – Nation 2, Greece-Nation 3, Italy-

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Nation 4, FYROM-Nation 5, Romania-Nation 6, Turkey-Nation 7. The participating countries are identified with numbers from 1 to 7, in alphabetical order. Croatia, Slovenia and USA are observers in SEEBRIG's framework.

The reference documents which represent the founding base and which stipulate the activity of SEEBRIG are following:

- Agreement of Establishing the Multinational Peace Force from South-Eastern Europe (Skopje, 26.09.1998);
- First Additional Protocol to MPFSEE Agreement, regarding rotation principle in force's framework;
- Second Additional Protocol to MPFSEE Agreement, regarding Engineering Task Force (ETF) and the Crisis Informational Network (Bucharest, 30.11.1999);
- Third Additional Protocol to MPFSEE Agreement, regarding Headquarters Status (Athens, 21.06.2000);
- The Fourth Additional Protocol to MPFSEE Agreement, regarding augmentation of interoperability degree and reaching NATO standards (Constanța, 04.09.2002).

According to the Agreement of Establishing the Multinational Peace Force from the South-Eastern Europe, SEEBRIG can participate in peacekeeping operations, under UN or OSCE mandate, agreed by their resolutions. The decisions to participate to military operations and to forces' process will be subject of political and military debates between parties at PMSC proposal and will be approved by them, abiding the legal procedures from the above mentioned countries. Consensus is the main principle for the decisions taken at the level of this initiative.

The Political-Military Staff Committee (PMSC) is the politico-military body coordinating the activities within MPFSEE. Its Presidency is administered by the Member States, on a rotation bases, for two years. The Political-Military Staff Committee organizes annually two reunions in the country holding the presidency.

The consultations between members and all decisions regarding SEEBRIG are taken within the South-Eastern of Europe Defence Ministers Meeting (SEDM-CC) framework or at DCHODs.

PMSC and SEDM-CC presidency has been provided by nations as it follows:

- 1999-2001: Nation 1 – Greece;
- 2001-2003: Nation 6 – Romania;
- 2003-2005: Nation 7 – Turkey;
- 2005-2007: Nation 1 – Albania;
- 2007-2009: Nation 5 – FYROM.

Starting with 01.07.2009, the presidency will be taken over by Nation 2 (Bulgaria).

Permanent Staff Centre, as defined in the Agreement of Establishing the Peace Task Force from South-East Europe, known as SEEBRIG HQ, is built up of troops belonging to those seven full member States, in the framework of initiative and provides planning and conducting SEEBRIG activities in peacetime. In the eventuality of participating SEEBRIG in mission in theatre of operations, this general staff is augmented with forces from each nation. This force has become available starting with 01.05.2001.

According to the same document, each participating nation will host, according to the rotation principle, each four years, the SEEBRIG Headquarter. Between 2003 and 2005, Romania was the host of this headquarter, permanently located in Constanța.

Up to now, SEEBRIG HQ was also hosted by Nation 2 (Bulgaria) in Plovdiv, between 1999 and 2003. At present, SEEBRIG HQ is deployed in Nation 7 (Turkey), at Istanbul, for 2007-2011. The next location will be in Nation 3 (Greece), probably Larissa.

The commandership of brigade is provided on the same principle of rotation between nations and the brigade's staff position is occupied by Host Nation. The sequence of nations at command was as it follows:

- 1999-2001 – Nation 7 (Turkey), brigadier general Zourlu Hilmi Akin;
- 2001-2003 – Nation 3 (Greece), brigadier general Andrea Kouzelis;
- 2003-2005 – Nation 4 (Italy), brigadier general Giovanni Sulis;
- 2005-2007 – Nation 2 (Bulgaria), brigadier general Neyko Nenov;
- 2007-2009 – Nation 6 (Romania), brigadier general Virgil Bălăceanu, PhD;
- 2009-2011 – Nation 1.

In 2009, at 1st July, the command will be handed over by Nation 6 (Romania) to Nation 1 (Albania).

Colonel Gheorghe Simina, the actual commander of 1st Infantry Brigade, was the SEEBRIG chief of staff between 2003 and 2005,

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and between 2005 and 2007 the commander was colonel Ionel Tâmplaru.

Romania contributes at this force with staff personnel, units and subunits from the Land Forces, 578 soldiers, hereby:

- 9 soldiers in Permament Staff Centre;
- 1 infantry battalion in modular structures, 400 soldiers (341st Infantry Battalion from 34th Infantry Brigade – 1st Infantry Division);
- 1 reconnaissance platoon, 19 soldiers;
- 1 transport platoon, 40 soldiers.

Also, our country provides **an engineering company** (**119 soldiers -** 353rd Company from 34th Infantry Brigade – 1st Infantry Division) **in the framework of the Engineering Task Force (ETF)** which is managed by SEEBRIG HQ. Between 2007 and 2009, the Land Forces have provided the command of ETF (according to the principle mentioned in the Agreement – commander of ETF must be from the same country as brigade's commander).

Units and subunits attached to this initiative act in peace deployment garrison and participate at instruction activities organized by SEEBRIG HQ.

A special exercise is prepared each year, its type being established by headquarters, together with nations' representatives, under the generic designation of "SEVEN STARS". Moreover, representatives from SEEBRIG and other Member States participated to other exercises organized by other organizations or military structures such as: LIVEX "ADRIATIC PHIBLEX" - with Engineering Force; "COMBINED ENDEAVOUR" - signal exercise; "ALLIED ACTION" - NATO exercise with Partner countries for verifying the CJTF HQ Concept; "EURASIAN STAR"; "SEESIM" – training exercise through simulation. In 2006, this exercise was organized by Romania together with FYROM.

An important role in this initiative belongs to our country, which, during the time of tenure the presidency of PMSC, had evolved a sustained activity for popularization of initiative within Europe and outside its borders. Meantime, following to reaching a certain level of maturity and training (conceptually and actionally), at the Romanian president of PMSC's initiative there has been promoted an application for having the brigade certified by NATO and also its participation in a mission within a theatre of operation. In the fall of 2004, during exercise "SEVEN STARS 2004", deployed in Topraisar area, the brigade passed a very important exam, this structure being certified by a commission from JFC Napoli and so having the possibility to go to a mission. 2005 can be considered a preparing year for the mission, "SEVEN STARS 2005" exercise being an important training period for a real time mission participation.

During DCHODs, at Skopje, the 11st of May 2005, it has been come up to a consensus regarding the deployment of SEEBRIG in Afghanistan, within ISAF mission for insuring KMNB command (Kabul Multinational Brigade) from February to August 2006. The final decision regarding such deployment in the theatre of operations has been taken at SEDM Reunion, held in December 2005, in Washington.

The required support for the Permanent Staff Centre activity (actually SEEBRIG HQ), during its station in a permanent location, is also provided by the Host Nation. In this matter, the Land Forces Staff, during 2003-2007, assured and provided a staff company and a signal company for the brigade's headquarter.

Having in view the participation in mission in the theatre of operations from Afghanistan, the Land Forces Staff have trained and equipped the two above mentioned companies, in conformity with NATO operational standards and SEEBRIG requirements.

Between the 6th February and 6th August 2006, SEEBRIG HQ, Staff Company and the Signal Company participated in ISAF mission in Afghanistan, assuring KMNB IX command.

The main activities fulfilled by the SEEBRIG HQ were the following: the security and stability operations conducted in Kabul's area of operation; the assistance of Afghan government in providing and maintaining an environment of safety and security in area; the participation on achieving some rebuilding projects of infrastructures and facilities in area for local people; the organization and the conduct of CIMIC operations according to NATO and UN rules;

The main missions developed by Staff Company during the deployment in the theatre of operations were the following:

- providing the required conditions for carrying out SEEBRIG HQ activity in the main and reserve command point;
- providing medical assistance;

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- providing security and guard in the locations being in SEEBRIG HQ responsibility;

- providing the transport for SEEBRIG HQ personnel;

- providing vehicles and equipment maintenance.

The main missions of Signal Company were:

- providing SEEBRIG HQ connections, necessary for a good activity development in the theatre of operations;

- providing the connections during transport in/ from theatre of operations;

- providing the connections between SEEBRIG HQ with defence ministries of initiative member states and SEDM-CC secretariat.

On 11th of August 2006, in Constanța, there was organized the return ceremony from mission of SEEBRIG HQ, Staff Company and Signal Company. The responsibility of organizing the ceremony was held by the Land Forces Staff. To a good evolution of such activity, structures subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence and General Staff also contributed.

Military and civil personalities from Ministry of National Defence, national delegations of SEDM member countries, the delegation of Albanese Presidency of SEDM-CC and PMSC, ambassadors and military attachés approved in Romania, representatives of local and districts authorities from Constanța participated at the ceremony. All the military personnel have been decorated with SEEBRIG medal and a part of them have been decorated with medals offered by Nation 1 (Albania), Nation 2 (Bulgaria) and Nation 6 (Romania).

2007 has been an accounting moment for our country, as a Host Nation, when SEEBRIG HQ has been deployed from Constanța garrison to Istanbul, a succession of activities being in responsibility of Land Forces Staff. Logistic, human and financial support was a significant one, both for organization and evolving of Departure Ceremony of SEEBRIG HQ and for preparing and displacement of equipments and techniques in common share of SEEBRIG property. Activities evolved in good conditions, superlative appreciations have been received both from Ministry of National Defence, General Staff and from this initiative's partners.

Host Nation status for SEEBRIG HQ and activities organized presumed major responsibilities and efforts which engaged financial costs and supplementary materials for Land Forces (for example, only for turning into operational and for consolidating these two companies have been assigned over five billion lei from the Land Forces Staff's budget, money which has never been initially planned for this activity).

We can appreciate this fact as a valuable accomplishment because it has been realized when SEEBIG HQ was deployed on our territory and especially for Land Forces, having in mind that this Staff controls the entire planning, organization and logistic sustaining process which lead to such a great success. The largest contribution to SEEBRIG Mission in Afghanistan devolved on our country with 233 soldiers.

Successes obtained made that other countries from the South-Eastern part of Europe to apply for acceptance in frame of this initiative as full members (Ukraine, for example) or as observers (such as Bosnia-Herzegovina).

Having in mind the brigade's accomplishments, the participation at the Afghanistan mission, the interest proved for a future participation to missions, we consider that this political-military initiative is a successful one.

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