

History

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EU Policy towards the Western Balkans:

The Role of the Royaumont Process in Shaping Regional Security

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***Abstract.** This article analyzes the Royaumont Process as the initial stage of the European Union's policy of stabilization and conflict prevention in Southeast Europe in the period 1995–1999. The study focuses on the origins, objectives, institutional frameworks, and implementation dynamics of this initiative, emphasizing its significance as a soft security mechanism in the EU's external action. The research identifies the Royaumont Process as the first EU effort to apply a multilevel inclusive model of post-conflict engagement, involving governments, parliaments, civil society, media, and international organizations.*

The paper examines the evolution of the process from political declarations to concrete cooperation in education, NGO legislation, media policy, and promotion of democratic values and regional dialogue. It is noted that the process brought together more than 30 participants, including 12 countries of Southeast Europe

(Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, Hungary, Turkey, Greece, and Moldova), all EU Member States, the United States, the OSCE, NATO, and the Council of Europe.

The article demonstrates that the formal institutionalization of the Royaumont Process through the EU Council's Common Position in November 1998 integrated it into the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and secured funding mechanisms. Although not conceived as a long-term strategy, the process served as a transitional instrument between crisis management and the EU's enlargement strategy. Its interconnection with the European Commission's 1997 Regional Approach is also analyzed, revealing the RP's role in laying the groundwork for the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (1999) and the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The scientific novelty of this research lies in the first comprehensive analysis in Ukrainian historiography of the Royaumont Process as an institutionalized EU soft power initiative that bridged the post-conflict settlement phase and the long-term integration of the Western Balkans into the European political and security space.

Keywords: *Royaumont Process, Western Balkans, European Union, CFSP, security policy, stabilization, EU enlargement, soft security, Stability Pact, Stabilization and Association Process.*

**Політика ЄС щодо Західних Балкан:
роль Роямонтського процесу у формуванні регіональної безпеки**

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***Анотація.** У статті проаналізовано Роямонтський процес як початковий етап формування політики стабілізації та запобігання конфліктам Європейського Союзу в Південно-Східній Європі в період 1995–1999 років. Дослідження зосереджене на витоках, цілях, інституційних засадах і динаміці реалізації цієї ініціативи, з акцентом на її значенні як інструменту «м'якої безпеки» у зовнішній політиці ЄС. У роботі показано, що Роямонтський процес став першим прикладом застосування ЄС багаторівневої інклюзивної моделі післяконфліктної взаємодії з регіоном, яка поєднувала урядові, міжпарламентські, громадські, медійні й міжнародні ініціативи.*

У статті простежено еволюцію процесу від політичних декларацій до практичної співпраці в галузях освіти, правового статусу неурядових організацій, медійної політики та просування демократичних цінностей і регіонального діалогу. Зазначено, що в процесі взяли участь понад 30 суб'єктів, серед яких 12 країн Південно-Східної Європи (Албанія, Боснія і Герцеговина, Болгарія, Хорватія, Союзна Республіка Югославія, Північна Македонія, Румунія, Словенія, Угорщина, Туреччина, Греція та Молдова), усі держави-члени ЄС, а також США, ОБСЄ, НАТО і Рада Європи.

У роботі доведено, що інституціоналізація процесу через ухвалення Спільної позиції Ради ЄС у листопаді 1998 року інтегрувала його в рамки Спільної зовнішньої та безпекової політики (CFSP) та забезпечила фінансування. Хоча процес не передбачався як довготривала стратегія, він виконував функцію перехідного механізму між реагуванням на кризу та стратегією розширення ЄС. У статті також розглядається його зв'язок із Регіональним підходом Європейської Комісії (1997), що заклало основу для Пакту стабільності для Південно-Східної Європи (1999) і започаткування Процесу стабілізації та асоціації.

Наукова новизна дослідження полягає в першому комплексному аналізі в українській історіографії Роямонтського процесу як інституціоналізованої ініціативи «м'якої сили» ЄС, що поєднала етап післяконфліктного врегулювання з довгостроковою політикою інтеграції Західних Балкан до європейського політичного та безпекового простору.

***Ключові слова:** Роямонтський процес, Західні Балкани, Європейський Союз, СЗБП, безпекова політика, стабілізація, розширення ЄС, м'яка безпека, Пакт стабільності, Процес стабілізації та асоціації.*

Introduction. Following the Bosnian War (1992–1995), the European Union recognized the urgent need for deeper engagement in post-conflict stabilization in Southeast Europe (SEE). The violent breakup of Yugoslavia, marked by ethnic cleansing and mass displacement, exposed the inadequacy of existing international security mechanisms and highlighted the necessity of preventive diplomacy and structured regional cooperation [19, p. 396].

Among the EU's earliest responses was the launch of the Royaumont Process (RP) in December 1995. Designed as a soft-power initiative to complement the Dayton Peace Agreement, the RP promoted interstate and interethnic dialogue. It became the initial step toward a broader stabilization strategy, later

institutionalized through the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (1999) and the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), now central to the EU's approach to the Western Balkans.

The RP remains highly relevant today amid renewed geopolitical instability following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, rising tensions in northern Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and intensified global competition for influence in the region. These developments have revived debates about the EU's strategic autonomy and underscored the lasting significance of its early peacebuilding efforts.

While the evolution of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has been widely studied, the Royaumont Process itself remains understudied – particularly in Ukrainian historical and international research. This article addresses this gap by examining the RP's origins, objectives, and institutional features as a distinctive model of post-conflict diplomacy.

The research also sheds light on the early stages of the EU's enlargement policy, which continues to shape the Western Balkans' trajectory¹. As of 2024, Montenegro, Serbia, and Albania are in accession negotiations; North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina hold candidate status, while Kosovo remains a potential candidate. The region's integration remains a long-term response to the security and democratic challenges that the RP began addressing nearly 30 years ago.

Analysis of Previous Studies and Publications. Although the EU's engagement in the Western Balkans has attracted scholarly attention since the 1990s, the Royaumont Process (RP) – launched in 1995 as the EU's first coordinated initiative for conflict prevention – remains underexamined. Most

¹ The term “Western Balkans” was first officially used by the EU in the Conclusions of the EU General Affairs Council on 29 April 1997, to designate a group of countries of SEE – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the FYR (now Serbia and Montenegro), and FYROM (now North Macedonia) – in the context of post-conflict stabilization and future European integration

references appear in works from the late 1990s and early 2000s; few recent studies reassess its impact on regional security. In Ukrainian historiography, the RP is virtually absent. Myronova (2010) is among the few to recognize it as a turning point in the EU's shift toward proactive soft-security policy and multilateral dialogue [21]; Kravchenko (2023) analyzes the evolution of terminology used to define the Balkan region in international relations, highlighting the conceptual shift from "South-Eastern Europe" to "Western Balkans" in the context of EU integration and regional transformation [20].

This literature review examines existing scholarship on the Royaumont Process (RP) by highlighting several key perspectives. Ehrhart (1998) provides the most comprehensive overview, describing the RP as an "open framework" for cooperative security that relies on dialogue, multilateralism, and civil society engagement, while noting its weak institutionalization [7]. Similarly, Çeviköz (1997) and Bilman (1998) emphasize the EU's role more as a mediator than a power broker, focusing on the trust-building aspects of the RP, though they also point out its lack of enforcement capacity [3, 2]. In the context of EU strategy, Jano (2008) views the RP as a critical shift from fragmented crisis responses toward more structured engagement, setting the stage for the Stability Pact and tools within the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) [9]. Turan and Akçay (2019), however, interpret the RP as part of a realist containment strategy [19], while Soussana et al. (2021) consider it an early model of non-military engagement that remains relevant today [10].

Regarding institutionalization and legal legacy, Smrkolj (2007) critiques the RP's weak legal foundation and its informal status within EU law, which limited its policy continuity [15]. Kotios et al. (2014) link the RP to subsequent EU cooperation programs but note a lack of institutional memory [11]. Özdemir (2006) situates the RP within the broader context of enlargement policy, criticizing its limited operational mechanisms [13]. Despite its foundational role in shaping the

EU's regional approach, the RP is frequently overlooked or treated as merely a transitional phase. There is a scarcity of comparative studies exploring its interaction with OSCE or NATO efforts, which hampers a full understanding of its contribution to soft security governance. This study seeks to address this gap by re-evaluating the RP as a significant precursor to later EU security frameworks in Southeast Europe.

This study relies on a diverse set of primary legal documents, official communications, conference records, and expert reports, providing a solid foundation for analyzing the RP and related European security efforts in Southeast Europe. Key sources include the Common Position 98/633/CFSP (1998) by the EU Council, which sets the institutional framework for the RP within the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy [1], and the 1999 European Commission Communication outlining the Stabilisation and Association Process for South-Eastern European countries [4].

Multilateral agreements such as the Lancaster House Peace Implementation Conference conclusions (1995) contextualize international efforts to stabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighting EU cooperation with NATO, OSCE, and the UN [5]. Foundational political documents include the 1995 speech by French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, introducing the Stability Pact concept [6], and the 1993 French proposal for a Pact on Stability in Europe, which initiated the idea [8].

The Madrid European Council Presidency Conclusions (1995) reflect EU consensus on Balkan stability [12], complemented by the 1997 Commission report on Regional Cooperation in Europe, illustrating evolving EU regional strategies [14]. The 1999 Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe document details implementation mechanisms following the RP [16].

Key peace agreements such as the Dayton Agreement (1995), providing the legal and political framework within which the RP operated, are also referenced

[17]. Lastly, expert analysis, including Dr. Panaghiotis Roumeliotis' report on the RP, offers in-depth insights into the initiative's design and challenges [18].

Together, these sources provide a comprehensive documentary basis for understanding the RP's origins, development, and role within the wider European security architecture and its cooperation with other international actors in the post-Cold War stabilization of Southeast Europe.

Results and Discussion. The Bosnian War (1992–1995), one of Europe's most violent post-WWII conflicts, revealed the international community's inability to respond effectively to large-scale human rights violations and humanitarian crises [20, p. 31]. In its aftermath, the EU reassessed its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), adopting a more proactive role in Southeast Europe (SEE) focused on conflict prevention, civil society development, and democratic reconstruction.

This new approach relied on “soft power” tools such as interethnic dialogue, cultural exchange, and multilateral cooperation. Central to this shift was the launch of the Royaumont Process (RP) in December 1995 – a forum aimed at promoting stabilization, reconciliation, and regional engagement through inclusive diplomacy.

The RP's roots lie in the 1993 Stability Pact for Europe, proposed by French Prime Minister Édouard Balladur [8]. Although initially focused on Central and Eastern Europe, the growing violence in the Balkans prompted the EU to extend its stabilizing initiatives [6]. The Peace Implementation Conference in London (8–9 December 1995) reaffirmed EU support for post-war recovery in Bosnia and Herzegovina [4], paving the way for the formal establishment of the RP with the “Declaration on the Process of Stabilization and Good Neighborliness” signed at Royaumont Abbey on 13 December 1995 [17].

Designed as a multilateral dialogue platform, the RP engaged EU member states, Western Balkan countries, and international actors such as the United States, Russia, the OSCE, NATO, the Council of Europe, and UNESCO. Importantly, it

also involved civil society actors – NGOs, media, scholars, and cultural institutions –making it an early model of multilevel governance in EU external relations.

The RP thus represented more than a diplomatic gesture. It embodied a shift toward preventive diplomacy and soft-security tools, anticipating later CFSP instruments [18]. Though short-lived, the RP bridged the gap between post-conflict stabilization and the EU’s long-term integration strategy.

The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, launched on 10 June 1999 [15], became a natural extension of RP principles. It institutionalized the EU’s leadership in regional democratization, reconstruction, and cooperation. Building on RP foundations, it introduced robust legal and financial mechanisms and laid the policy groundwork for the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) – now the EU’s main tool for Western Balkan integration [15].

To understand the roots of the Royaumont Process, it is necessary to revisit the Stability Pact for Europe, proposed in 1993 by French Prime Minister Édouard Balladur. This was one of the EU’s first comprehensive post-Cold War security initiatives, aimed at consolidating democracy, protecting minority rights, and promoting regional cooperation amid the upheaval of the USSR’s collapse and the Yugoslav wars [6].

Though initially focused on Central and Eastern Europe, the Pact reflected the EU’s growing commitment to preventive diplomacy. In 1994, it became the first “joint action” under the evolving Common Foreign and Security Policy, marking the EU’s emergence as a security actor beyond the economic sphere [7, p. 330].

The Balkan wars exposed the limited flexibility of traditional security institutions like NATO and the OSCE. In response, the EU adopted a more assertive stance in conflict resolution and reconstruction. Balladur’s initiative emphasized long-term stability via democratization, border dispute resolution, and multilateral agreements, particularly targeting countries lacking EU treaties. This policy logic laid the foundation for future enlargement strategy [6].

The Pact was launched at the 1994 Paris Conference with the participation of major international actors, and in 1995 it came under the OSCE's aegis for enhanced legitimacy and coordination [13]. While it failed to prevent the Bosnian War, it provided the conceptual and institutional groundwork for more focused Balkan instruments like the Royaumont Process and the 1999 Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe [17].

Balladur's plan deliberately excluded active war zones, focusing instead on preventive diplomacy among unaffected states [8]. However, the scale of violence in Bosnia demanded a more robust post-conflict strategy. This necessity repositioned the Balkans at the center of EU diplomacy. At the December 1995 Peace Implementation Conference in London – shortly after the Dayton Agreement – the EU committed to supporting democratization and recovery in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in coordination with the OSCE and the World Bank [4].

A key development was the appointment of Carl Bildt as the first High Representative for the civilian implementation of the Dayton Agreement, under a UN Security Council mandate. This appointment signaled the EU's growing role in post-war stabilization [4].

On 13 December 1995, just before the Dayton Agreement's formal signing, a diplomatic meeting at Royaumont Abbey gathered foreign ministers from EU states, successor Yugoslav republics, and regional neighbors, alongside representatives from the U.S., Russia, OSCE, and Council of Europe [1]. This meeting laid the political foundation for the Declaration on the Process of Stabilization and Good Neighborliness, officially launching the Royaumont Process [11].

Unlike the broader Stability Pact for Europe, the Royaumont Process (RP) was directly tied to implementing the Dayton Peace Agreement. It aimed to bridge short-term post-conflict assistance with long-term regional integration, reflecting a

pragmatic EU strategy focused on democratic consolidation, stability, and good neighborliness.

On 26 February 1996, the EU Council officially endorsed the platform for the development of the Royaumont Process, signaling a firm political commitment to support not only diplomatic engagement but also structured multilateral cooperation [15, p.5]. Initially, the process focused on the territories defined by the Dayton Accords – namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. At that stage, the EU's immediate task and emerging challenge was to help transform the proverbially chaotic, bloody, and unpredictable Balkans of the past into a stable, peaceful, and dependable Southeastern Europe of the future.

On the same day, 26 February 1996, the EU adopted a Regional Approach to the countries of South-Eastern Europe. This was reflected in the Conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 26 February 1996. In response to ongoing regional political developments, the EU was compelled to adopt this approach [9, p. 144], aiming at fostering political and economic cooperation among all the Balkan countries, including Bulgaria and Romania. The initiatives inspired and launched by the EU during this period were consistently oriented toward promoting a regional dimension of cooperation.

The first official meeting of the Royaumont Process took place on 24 April 1996 in Vienna [7, p. 332]. Participants emphasized that the RP was not a military or security initiative and did not foresee reconstruction programs. Instead, it aimed to promote a comprehensive stabilization process that included political, civil, cultural, and informational aspects of fostering good-neighbourly relations and subregional cooperation. The process particularly emphasized restoring trust among post-conflict societies and creating conditions for sustainable dialogue.

Although the first four meetings yielded few formal agreements, the RP's early success lay in establishing a neutral platform for dialogue and information

exchange on bilateral and multilateral initiatives in the region. It enabled the joint consideration of stability-oriented projects, with all stakeholders – including the FRY – participating on an equal footing. This inclusive approach helped break FRY’s diplomatic isolation and contributed to normalizing regional relations.

In addition to its political symbolism, the RP served as a coordination hub, linking various regional and subregional efforts, including OSCE missions, donor programs, and emerging civil society platforms. While modest in tangible outcomes, the RP reinforced the EU’s image as a neutral soft-power actor and laid important groundwork for its deeper engagement in Southeast Europe.

A major shift occurred with the fifth meeting on 27 October 1997 in Istanbul [7, p. 333], which introduced the role of Royaumont Process Coordinator. On 28 November 1997, Greek diplomat Panagiotis Roumeliotis – an expert in regional development – was appointed to this position [18], marking the transition from declarations to implementation and institutional leadership.

On 26 January 1998, the “Action Plan for the Royaumont Process Coordinator” was adopted, defining the Coordinator’s responsibilities [17]. These included organizing cross-border projects in education, media, science, and culture; mobilizing donor support; promoting civil society involvement, especially in conflict-prone areas; and coordinating with initiatives like the OSCE and the Stability Pact.

The Coordinator also collaborated with the OSCE, particularly under Article V of Annex I-B to the Dayton Agreement [18], illustrating the EU’s aim to align with international security actors and enhance synergies in regional stabilization.

At the Istanbul meeting, the European Commission presented for the first time its financial vision for democratic transformation in the post-Yugoslav space. This move confirmed the EU’s institutional readiness to transition from ad hoc diplomacy to structured programming under CFSP [13, p. 39].

A key development followed at the sixth Royaumont conference in Athens (31 March – 1 April 1998), where journalists from 18 countries adopted the Media Action Plan for Peace, Understanding, and Tolerance [7, p. 334]. It called for regional media platforms, training, codes of ethics, and measures against hate speech – establishing media as a core tool in the EU’s soft security strategy [2, p. 8].

Athens also expanded the RP’s institutional base, with the involvement of the South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECF) and the European Parliament. The review of 45 submitted projects led to the endorsement of 36 initiatives aligned with cross-border cooperation and good neighborly relations. NGOs from Greece, Yugoslavia, and North Macedonia played a central role, highlighting civil society’s influence.

Financial backing from Greece, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands marked a turning point from declarations to real funding, reinforcing the RP as a practical CFSP tool.

The process advanced further with a regional NGO forum in Thessaloniki (10–11 July 1998), attended by over 100 organizations [7, p. 334]. It prioritized civic education, heritage preservation, ICT exchange, and intercultural dialogue. The forum confirmed the RP’s shift toward bottom-up regionalism and multi-sectoral collaboration.

This direction continued at the May 1999 NGO meeting in Tirana, which reaffirmed the RP’s civil society strategy and deepened participatory mechanisms for regional development.

In parallel, the RP’s parliamentary pillar was launched on 21 September 1998 in Brussels. It brought together European Parliament representatives and foreign affairs committee chairs from the region to establish interparliamentary dialogue as a tool for democratic reform and oversight. A permanent forum and action plan were endorsed to strengthen legislative cooperation and promote European legal

standards [18]. This marked a shift toward inclusive governance beyond executive-level diplomacy.

In October 1998, the Council of Europe convened a multilateral conference in Budapest to address the legal environment for NGOs in post-conflict contexts. Discussions focused on recognition, registration, and access to funding – key to enhancing civil society’s role in democratic transformation.

Soon after, on 17 November, a Royaumont conference in Graz, Austria, emphasized education’s peacebuilding potential, particularly through curriculum reform, teacher training, and cross-border cooperation. It highlighted the need for intercultural understanding and tolerance among youth.

Just days earlier, on 9 November 1998, the Council of the European Union adopted Common Position 1999/235/CFSP, formally integrating the Royaumont Process into the EU’s CFSP framework. This legal act enabled EU financial support – including through PHARE² – and marked the RP’s transition from soft initiative to an institutionalized policy tool [7, p. 334]. In 1999, the European Parliament approved the RP’s financial framework, solidifying its legitimacy within EU external action.

The Kosovo crisis (1998–1999) revealed the inadequacy of existing mechanisms and triggered strategic reassessment. In response, the European Council adopted the Common Strategy on the Western Balkans in December 1998, and in May 1999, the Commission proposed the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) [4]. The SAP introduced Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs) as contractual paths toward EU membership and institutionalized prior efforts, especially those rooted in the RP and the Regional Approach [19].

Simultaneously, the RP laid the foundation for a broader initiative– the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, proposed jointly by the EU and the United

² PHARE is an EU financial instrument established in 1989 to assist Central and Eastern European candidate countries in preparing for EU accession

States. It was signed on 10 June 1999 in Cologne and launched at the Sarajevo Summit on 30 July 1999 [16]. This marked the RP's culmination as a political and institutional “bridge” between immediate stabilization and long-term regional integration. The RP became the EU's first comprehensive soft security initiative – subsequently complemented and partially superseded by more advanced frameworks under EU neighbourhood, enlargement, and CFSP policies. Its significance lies in the EU's effort to provide a multilateral framework for redefining political and diplomatic relations both within the Western Balkans and in the broader SEE [11, p. 32].

Conclusions. This article has examined the Royaumont Process (RP) as a foundational element of the EU's stabilization policy in Southeast Europe. The analysis focused on its contribution to regional dialogue, civil society engagement, and the EU's strategic framework in the Western Balkans. Key findings include:

1. The RP introduced a multilevel, inclusive model of post-conflict diplomacy, engaging not only governments but also civil society, parliaments, media, and international organizations. It promoted good neighborliness, reconciliation, and preventive diplomacy.

2. It laid institutional groundwork for future EU-led initiatives, including the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the Stabilisation and Association Process. The RP marked the EU's shift from crisis response to structured foreign policy within the CFSP framework.

3. Strategically, the RP enhanced the EU's credibility as a soft-power actor, testing tools that became central to its external action – such as support for media freedom, NGO development, and education.

4. As a forerunner of EU peacebuilding practice, the RP remains relevant in contemporary missions and partnerships in fragile regions.

Future research could explore comparisons between the RP and Berlin Process, assess its long-term impact on Stabilisation and Association Agreements,

examine evolving EU soft power strategies in the Western Balkans, and apply its lessons to the Eastern Partnership and other regions.

In sum, the Royaumont Process warrants greater attention in both EU studies and Ukrainian historiography as a pivotal step in shaping the EU's foreign and security identity in the Balkans.

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