

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE BLACK SEA AND THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS

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Situated at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, the Black Sea has been a site of contention and confrontation for centuries. In the context of the Cold War, it was the scene of East-West strategic competition. In the post-Cold War era, it has become more complicated and difficult to manage. Throughout the Cold War, the decisive political and military presence of the superpowers provided stability, albeit strained, in the region for forty years. The demise of the Soviet Union, has on the one hand, liberated ancient sources of tension and grievances that the Cold War suppressed and masked, but on the other, allowed for the first time an emergence of truly cooperative environment around the Black Sea.

After the expansions of NATO and the EU, the Black Sea has become the eastern frontier of Europe and as such forms an increasingly integral part of it, as well as representing an important strategic region by its own accord. Clearly, the Black Sea is no longer a region to be discovered, exploited, enclosed or dominated. Although the region's long and complex history still generates complex problems for cooperation, it also provides the region with both the incentive and tools for participating actively in global economic and international political community.

Regionalization of the Black Sea

In an ever-interdependent world, regionalization is as an instrument of regional and global security and stability. Regional groupings, with their localized confidence building measures, can contribute to geopolitical

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stability, by facilitating collaborative action against the contemporary problems (such as organized crime, terrorism, and illicit drug and arms trafficking) that threaten regional and thus global security and stability.¹ It is argued that regionalization can “counteract the establishment of new dividing lines by creating a multi-layered, trans-boundary, co-operative networks”,² emphasizing the concept of indivisibility of security. Moreover, by dealing with non-military security issues in political, economic and environmental fields, as well as the social and cultural topics, regional organizations build a sense of common interest and, to a certain extent, a shared identity.

Their existence simply induces their members to develop non-coercive attitudes and “reduces the tendency to resort to non-peaceful means in pursuit of national interests”.³ By providing forums in which the state, sub-state and non-state actors can interact on a range of issues, they contribute to the development of regional security. They can easily create localized confidence building measures in a region and speedily tackle soft security issues. In short, they can enhance security simply by fostering dialogue, personal contacts and mutual understanding.

Regional organizations can also play a complementary role to broader arrangements like the EU and NATO by preparing their members for future accession in the larger organization through stronger economic and social foundations for integration and pre-adoption of certain norms and standards of these organizations.⁴ In this context, the EU, for example, since the end of the Cold War, has strongly encouraged its neighbors to develop regional cooperative efforts. Thus, with the EU encouragement, various Baltic Sea and Barents Sea organizations were grouped under the Northern Dimension, Mediterranean countries were brought together around the Barcelona Process, and the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe tidied up the

1. For alternative views on regionalization and security in the post-Cold War world, see, David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

2. Ercan Ozer, “The Black Sea Economic Cooperation and Regional Security,” *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (September-November 1997), p. 78.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Balkans. Missing part in this picture has been the region around the Black Sea, where regional countries have been busy since the end of the Cold War in establishing all sorts of multinational regional cooperation schemes.

In order to benefit from at least some of the positive aspects of regionalization, there should emerge some sort of common recognition among the countries within a geographical area that they form a region; that is a political entity, distinct from a mere geographical area, with enough internal cohesion to bind them together and external difference from “others” outside the region to set them apart.

Some analysts question whether the Black Sea area is a region at all, arguing that it is not seen as such from the outside (by the international community), nor from inside (by the Black Sea countries themselves). The Black Sea area is also called an “intellectually constructed region”, typified with a weak regional identity. There is some merit in this argument as for most countries in the area, the “Black Sea identity” has been of secondary importance to their wider international agendas, and more or less all the countries in the region look beyond regional structures to affiliate with. Moreover, there are wide discrepancies among the Black Sea countries in economic, political, social and cultural aspects. From this perspective, the Black Sea area has neither internal nor external potential for region building. Also what is happening in the Black Sea area with BSEC for example can be considered a “side-effect of European integration”, rather than a region building in itself. In this context, the diversity (of people, cultures, economies, political systems, and indeed geography) within the region stands out as one of the important reasons why the regional countries have, so far, failed to develop a sense of common identity among them.

On the other hand, all the regions, in a sense, first and foremost are construction of region-wide intellectual endeavors. Initially, all regions are made in the minds of people (intellectual, political, and governmental elites and business communities). Therefore, whether or not “the region” exists geographically in the first place is not a question. It is the political will of the

interested countries and the constant intellectual engagement with the idea that turn a geographical area into a (geo) political region. From this perspective, Black Sea certainly constitutes a region as the will of the governments to develop the region was demonstrated by the creation of the BSEC in 1992. However, this does not mean that the area has always been a region; it is a new creation much as the willingness to cooperate in the region.

The “Black Sea”, as a region, differs from other regions in that a region is being created in a place, which was not considered as such and did not have extensive interaction among its constituent parts for a long time; and that the attempt to define region comes from within, whereas in other cases it has been usually from outside. This, of course, is both a source of strength and a weakness. It is strength because it is not enforced by the outsiders, thus do not create resentment among the local people but shows the will of the local people to interact with each other, recognize each other as sharing same geography and interests, and to be recognized by others as such. However, it is weakness at the same time, because it craves for recognition from outsiders, who were not involved in or sanctioned its creation.

The usage of the term “Black Sea Region/Area” in this paper transcends the simple political-geographic delimitations, and refers to a vast region stretching from southeastern Europe into western shores of Caspian Sea. There are geo-strategic, economic, and socio-political reasons to link the “Black Sea” area (in the strict geographical sense, consisting only of six littoral states) with the wider geographic areas of the Caucasus, the Caspian, and the Balkans. The area remains of profound interest and vital concern for Russia. For years, the immediate environs of the region were controlled by Moscow. Today, as a result of the geopolitical realignments since the end of the Cold War, the number of political, economic and military actors who can influence the region's future has multiplied, while Russia's influence around the Sea diminished. The area is also of increased relevance to the US and the EU for various reasons. In terms of regional geopolitics, control of the

region, or freedom of movement upon it, represents a prize of considerable value, elevating the region into a unique geopolitical interest harboring various threats to regional and wider international peace and stability.

Because of the historical reasons of division and fragmented nature of the region in modern times, regional cooperation and integration between Black Sea countries have in the past been difficult and tentative. However, since the end of the Cold War, they have shown willingness towards working together within various regional cooperative initiatives.

The region since the Antiquity had developed a tradition of being backyard of one state or the other; otherwise witnessed their competition to dominate it. It saw the Byzantines, then Ottomans and finally Russians who strove for domination and in fact closed it to the outside world. Similar situation existed during the Cold War, as except for Turkey, it was surrounded by the Soviet Union and its satellites; again closed to outside influence. The fundamental geopolitical changes since the end of the Cold War, however, led to a completely new geometry in the Black Sea region. On the one hand, the rising tide of territorial, nationalistic, ethnic and religious disputes set the scene for various flash points (Yugoslavia, Trans-Dniester, Crimea, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Chechnya and Nagorno-Karabakh from end to the other). The existing conflict resolution and peacekeeping instruments such as the UN, OSCE and NATO, as well as the security and confidence building agreements like the CFE treaty, have not been totally successful in dealing with these crises. On the other hand, a truly pluralist international existence has emerged around the Black Sea for the first time since Antiquity. This, together with emergence of regional organizations that can compensate for the inherent weaknesses of broader international collective security arrangements, raises hope for future stability in the region.

This paper will look briefly to the experiences of some of the institutions emerged or otherwise became active in the region since the end of the Cold War. Although there are many institutional cooperation schemes,

the policies of three potentially most influential of them (The BSEC, the EU, and NATO) will be looked at in detail.

Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) Organization

Established in June 1992, the BSEC is the most institutionalized homegrown organization in the region. It officially became a “regional economic organization” with an international legal identity in May 1, 1999 upon entry into force of its Charter. It is the only organization that includes all the six countries on the Black Sea (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine) as well as six neighboring countries (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova, and Serbia and Montenegro). Poland, Slovakia, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Egypt, Israel, Tunisia, BSEC Business Council and the International Black Sea Club have observer status.

Within the BSEC umbrella, three interrelated and mutually reinforcing goals are aimed; to achieve cooperation rather than conflict, to support regionalism as well as globalization, and to avoid new divisions in Europe. The results obtained at an institutional level, given region's history, are indeed impressive, clearly establishing a “presumption of cooperation”.⁵ The organization has so far preferred a project-based approach, mostly in the area of economic cooperation. BSEC Economic Agenda for the Future document, adopted by the Council of Ministers meeting in Moscow in March 2001, listed several sectors for future cooperation and emphasized the priority of joint projects, which would bring in tangible benefits and stimulate internal reforms and integration of national economies in the region.⁶ It also highlighted, for immediate attention, the adoption of macroeconomic reforms, establishment of strong and resilient financial systems, adaptation of existing economic institutions towards the market economy, encouraging support for national stabilization and development

5. See, *The Work Programme of Turkey during Its Chairmanship of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization*, 1 May-1 November 2001, available at <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/af/bsec10.htm>>.

6. See, *BSEC Economic Agenda for the Future: Towards a More Consolidated, Effective and Viable BSEC Partnership*, March 2001, BS/SOM/R(01)2, Annex III.

programs, deregulating of product and service markets, and improving capital markets, promoting the use of new technologies, and encouraging the exchange of economic experts among the member states. *The BSEC Charter* too foresees organization's priority areas as trade and economic development; banking and finance; communications; energy; transport; agriculture and agro-industry; health care and pharmaceuticals; environmental protection; tourism; science and technology; exchange of statistical data and economic information; collaboration between customs and other border authorities; human contacts; combating organized crime, illicit trafficking of drugs, weapons and radioactive materials, all acts of terrorism and illegal migration.⁷

The Organization has also from the beginning aimed at establishing peace and security in its region, though without directing itself towards this goal and developing clear-cut distinctive policies due to clear preference of some of its members not to cloud economic cooperation with political-security issues. However, the 1992 Summit Declaration announced that the promotion of economic cooperation between Black Sea countries was viewed as a contribution to regional peace and security.⁸ As most of the member countries came to realize that without a viable security dimension and solution of the region's many problems, the organization could not move ahead, the Decennial Summit of Istanbul called the Council of Ministers "to consider ways and means of enhancing contribution of the BSEC to strengthening security and stability in the region", thus the (hard) security cooperation in the BSEC area is on the agenda now.⁹

The intention to create a "free trade zone" among the BSEC members, mentioned strongly early on, proved difficult in practice as the existing commitments (such as towards the EU) of the BSEC members had

7. *Charter of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation*, <<http://www.bsec.gov.tr/charter.htm>>.

8. For the full text of the Summit Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Istanbul, June 25, 1992, see <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/af/Bsec7.htm>>.

9. *The Istanbul Decennial Summit Declaration*, June 25, 2002, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/af/bsec12htm>>. The BSEC has been active in the soft security area, providing member countries additional channels for multilateral dialogue and cooperation. See, Oleksandr Pavliuk, "The Black Sea Economic Cooperation: Will Hopes Become Reality?," in Andrew Cottey (ed.), *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe: Building Security and Solidarity from the Barents to the Black Sea* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

to be taken into account. Nevertheless, February 1997 summit of foreign and economy ministers in Istanbul released 'the Declaration of Intent' for the establishment of BSEC free trade area. The EU Commission expressed its readiness to act as a partner in the proposed free trade zone, but also emphasized that it should take place gradually in the long term, the existing agreements between the individual BSEC countries and the EU should be taken into account, and all the BSEC countries should be admitted to the WTO before free trade zone is created. As a result, *2001 BSEC Economic Agenda for the Future* adopted the long term step by step approach proposed by the EU Commission.

Although essentially an intergovernmental organization, BSEC over the years have given strong attention to develop non-governmental networks and representative bodies around the Black Sea. So much so that establishment of its parliamentary assembly predated the formation of its *Permanent Secretariat* (PERMIS) in 1994. *Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC* (PABSEC), established in 1993, meets twice a year and encompasses three committees: Economic, Commercial, Technological and Environmental Relations; Legal and Political Relations; and Educational, Cultural, and Social Relations. It has moved beyond its initial aim of harmonization of legislation required to implement BSEC projects, covering now initiatives to promote sub-national cooperation. In this context, for example, the *Association of Black Sea Capitals* (BSCA) was established following an initiative by the PABSEC, aiming to strengthen the pluralistic democratic structures and political stability in the region.

To involve private sector into the cooperation efforts around the Black Sea, the *Business Council* (BSEC BC) with the representatives of business councils from all the BSEC countries was established in 1992 to contribute to "the greater integration of the Black Sea to the world economy".¹⁰ The decision to create the *Black Sea Trade and Development Bank* (BSTDB) was taken in 1994, though it only became operational in June

10. <<http://www.bsec-business.org/content.asp?cat=43>>.

11. For details, see, BSTDB Web Site at <<http://www.bstdb.org/default1.htm>>.

1999. BSTDB, being established as an autonomous financial institution, represents the financial component of the BSEC and aims to play a key role in the region with its support for the implementation of project based regional cooperation initiatives.¹¹

Academic cooperation between universities of the Black Sea countries was started with the initiation of the *Black Sea Universities Network* in 1997 to identify and enhance intellectual resources needed for sustainable development. The *BSEC Standing Academic Committee* was established in 1998 to promote academic cooperation and support joint scientific projects. Finally, the *International Center for Black Sea Studies* (ICBSS) was opened in Athens in 1998 to carry out policy oriented and practical research for fulfillment of BSEC goals. Also, *Coordination Centre for the Exchange of Statistical Data and Economic Information* was established in October 1993 in Ankara to collect, coordinate, analyze and circulate statistics and economic information from the region.

Cooperation between local governments around the Black Sea also started in July 1992 with the establishment of the International Black Sea Club (IBSC) as a non-profit organization between the mayors of the towns from Black Sea region. The Club aims at stimulating direct contacts between companies and enterprises and the exchange of economic and commercial information. It is also involved in the implementation of environmental protection and supports cultural contacts in the region.¹²

In addition, the BSEC has all the usual intergovernmental bodies, mostly adopted from the EU institutions. Although its Summit Meetings of the Heads of State and Government have so far met irregularly (1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2002), the main regular decision-making body of the BSEC, the *Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs*, meets twice a year in April and October, chaired by the Foreign Minister of the country currently

12. For further info on sub-national cooperation in the area, see, Panagiota Manoli, "Micro-regionalism around the Black Sea," Shaun Breslin and Glenn Hook (eds.), *Micro-regionalism and World Order: Concepts, Approaches, Implications* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 198-208.

holding the six-monthly rotating *Chairmanship* of the BSEC. The BSEC Chairman is supported by a *Committee of Senior Officials*, organized as *Working Groups*. To further continuity within the BSEC, a *Troika* system with the participation of the past, the current and the future chairpersons was introduced in 1995. *The BSEC Permanent International Secretariat* (PERMIS) was established in Istanbul in March 1994 to coordinate BSEC activities under the guidance of *Chairperson-in-Office*. It coordinates the activities of the Working Groups.

Non-BSEC Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Region

In addition to the BSEC and related institutions, there exist various other regional bilateral and multilateral cooperation projects in the Black Sea region with or without the participation of other international organizations. Number of initiatives was started at the early days of the post-Cold War era, and cooperation in the environment, transport, energy infrastructure and soft security issues are thriving.

Environmental protection is the most developed area of cooperation within the Black Sea region. Apart from the EU support for the implementation of the *Black Sea Environment Program* (BSEP), the crucial role of the EU in Black Sea environmental protection was reflected in the EU Commission's Communication on *Environmental Cooperation in the Danube-Black Sea Region*,¹³ which clearly showed the direct cause-effect connection between the Black Sea and the regions at the very geographic centre of the EU, such as Germany and Austria.¹⁴

Bulgaria, Romania and the USSR had tried to cooperate during the Cold War by signing the *Varna Fisheries Agreement* in 1959, and Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey cooperated with the *General Fisheries Council for the Mediterranean*, but these were ephemeral attempts that did not have real

13. Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission on Environmental Cooperation in the Danube- Black Sea Region* (Brussels: COM (2001) 615 final, 30.10.2001).

14. Laurence David Mee, "Protecting the Black Sea Environment. A Challenge for Cooperation and Sustainable Development in Europe," in Terry Adams et.al. (eds.), *Europe's Black Sea Dimension* (Brussels: CEPS, 2002), p. 107.

effect on the ground. Another early attempt for environmental protection in the Black Sea was the *MARPOL Convention* of 1973, which designated the Black Sea as a “specially protected area”. Although all the Black Sea countries ratified the agreement, it has not so far had a chance of implementation because of lack of financial support and the need to delimit the national exclusive economic zones.¹⁵

After the end of the Cold War, six littoral states signed *Bucharest Convention for the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution* in 1992 that came into existence in 1994. *The Black Sea Commission* was established in 1995 to oversee its implementation, but its activation was delayed until 2000 when it opened a small secretariat in Istanbul. In the meantime, all the Black Sea countries came together in Odessa, Ukraine, in April 1993 to prepare a common policy framework for environmental protection and as a result *Black Sea Environment Program* (BSEP) was established in June 1993 with the support of the UN and the EU. It has conducted an analysis of environmental problems (*Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis*) in the region and prepared a *Strategic Action Plan* (SAP), signed by the six littorals in 1996, for the rehabilitation and protection of the Black Sea. A separate regional council of cooperation on environmental issues between Romania, Bulgaria, Greece Turkey and Macedonia was agreed upon in December 2000, and in November 2001, all the 19 countries in the Black Sea Basin came together and signed the *Declaration on Water and Water Related Ecosystems in the Wider Black Sea Region*.¹⁶

In the meantime, the EU has developed and supported number of multilateral infrastructure programmers for wider Eurasia that centers on the Black Sea. *The Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia* (TRACECA), launched in 1993 to link the eight post Soviet countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus with Europe, has been developing transport alternatives on the East-West axis across and around the Black Sea region. With its EU-funded technical assistance, TRACECA has helped to attract international investments for vast transport infrastructure projects in the region.¹⁷

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-90.

16. <See http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/enlarg/pdf/danube_declaration.pdf>.

17. For further information on TRACECA activities around the Black Sea, see, Black Sea Pan-European Transport Area (BS-PETRA) Web Site, at <<http://www.bs-petra.org/6>>.

Moreover, at the third European Conference of Ministers of Transport in 1997, the Black Sea was chosen as one of the four *Pan-European Transport Areas* (PETrAS).

Later on, representatives from the eight participating countries (all BSEC members - six littorals plus Greece and Moldova) and the EU Commission established a *Steering Group* in 1999 to foresee the implementation of various transport projects with the EU support. Finally, four sectoral working groups and a technical secretariat (housed by the PERMIS) have been established and an annually revised *Action Plan* was drafted.

INOGATE (*Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe*), launched in 1995, is another EU-funded regional program concentrating technical assistance and some investment support for hydrocarbon infrastructure in wider Black Sea region. At its first summit meeting in 1999, an *Umbrella Agreement* was signed to facilitate the development of hydrocarbon transportation networks between Caspian Basin and Europe across Black Sea region. The agreement allows countries not covered by EU's TACIS program to join infrastructure projects, and has been signed so far by 21 countries, including all the BSEC members except Russia. A secretariat for INOGATE was set up in Kiev in November 2000.

The EU Commission, under its SYNERGY program, initiated the establishment of the *Black Sea Regional Energy Center* (BSREC) in February 1995. In addition to the Commission, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine joined immediately, Macedonia signed in January 1999 and Serbia and Montenegro in October 2001. Based in Sofia, the Center aims at developing cooperation between Black Sea region countries and the EU in the energy field, as well as among the countries themselves.¹⁸

18. See, <<http://www.bsrece.bg/newsbsrec/firstpage.html>>.

In June 2000, six Black Sea countries decided to establish a multinational navy force, the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (*BlackSeaFor*) to cooperate in search and rescue operations in case of maritime emergencies, mine clearing functions, humanitarian assistance, environmental protection, goodwill visits between Black Sea countries, and peace support operations in conjunction with the UN or the OSCE.¹⁹ The mission of the force was described by the cooperating countries as “to contribute to the further strengthening of friendship, good relations and mutual confidence among the Black Sea littoral states, as well as to improve peace and stability in the region”.²⁰ First proposed by Turkey in 1998, the agreement finally signed in April 2, 2001 and the force became operational in September 2001 with an initial Turkish commander, to be replaced in line with the six monthly rotating presidencies of the member countries. Although the force is intended for the Black Sea, it could be deployed to other seas if the participating states agree.

Apart from these multilateral cooperation initiatives, number of Black Sea countries has set up trilateral meetings, with Romania's initiative, for cooperation on regional issues (i.e. Romania-Moldova-Ukraine, Romania-Bulgaria-Turkey, Romania-Poland-Ukraine, Romania-Bulgaria-Greece, and Romania-Hungary-Austria). Moreover, most of the Black Sea countries have also joined other sub-regional organizations such as Royamount Process, SECI, SEECF, Stability Pact, CEI, CEFTA, and GUUAM. Also, Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Romania, and Turkey signed an agreement to set up a multinational peacekeeping force for south-eastern Europe (SEEBRIG) in September 1998, bringing together number of BSEC and NATO member countries together. The force was activated in August 1999.

Among others, GUUAM is the only organization that was established exclusively by the former Soviet states. Multilateral cooperation between

19. See Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group web page at, <<http://www.blackseafort.org/backgr.htm>>, p.2.

20. Joint press release issued after the Third Experts Meeting of the BSEC countries, Istanbul, February 26, 1999; <http://www.Photius.com/blakseafort/990226_mfa.html>.

four states (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) commenced in 1996 during the negotiations for the CFE Treaty revisions in Vienna, led to more institutionalized form of meetings (now Uzbekistan also joined) from 1999 onwards, aiming to strengthen all forms of cooperation at international organizations and forums, and greater interaction within EAPC and NATO's PfP.²¹ However, along the way, some differences in the interests of members of the Group were gradually manifested, and despite a number of positive results of collaboration, it is still premature to speak of successful achievements in multilateral cooperation within GUUAM.

Following a UNESCO initiative, the *Mediterranean and Black Sea Regional Tolerance Network* was established in September 1996 as a non-governmental peer group to fight against intolerance, discrimination and violence.²² In a similar vein, a *Black Sea NGO Network* (BSNN) was established in 1998 as a regional independent, non-political and non-profit association of NGOs from all the Black Sea littoral states to create and enhance public awareness for a healthy Black Sea and a sustainable future.

Finally, among various other regional cooperation attempts around the Black Sea, one may cite establishment of the *Regional Centre for Combating Trans-border Crime*, in connection with SECI, in May 1999 with the participation of six BSEC members and two applicants at the time (Macedonia and Serbia-Montenegro) as well as BSEC as an organization; Decision taken in mid-2000, at a conference organized by BSEC member states, to create a joint agricultural strategy to guarantee food in the region in case of famine; Cooperation of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Turkey and Ukraine in the *Federation of Euro-Asian Stock Exchanges* to encourage investments within their region and create joint investment guarantee schemes; and discussions for drafting a *Convention for Fisheries in the Black Sea* between the Black Sea littoral states.

21. "GUUAM: Prospects and Realities," *National Security and Defence*, Vol. 7, No. 19 (2001), pp. 3-5.

22. For further information see, <<http://www.unesco.org/tolerance/medmet.htm>>.

Enlarged European Union and the Wider Black Sea

The region has become an important region for the European Union as many Black Sea countries have established various forms and of cooperation on different levels with the EU. The latest round of enlargement brought the EU closer to the region, raising doubts and questions for both the EU and the regional countries about how to proceed with their relations. Recognition of different challenges that the enlargement creates for the countries that are left out, led to the publication of the Commission's *Wider Europe-Neighborhood* Communication in 2003,²³ which was later adopted by the Thessaloniki European Council on June 16, 2003.²⁴

Although Commission's Communication and later Secretary General/High Representative Javier Solana's strategy paper, presented to Thessaloniki Council meeting, indicated new avenues for EU in its external relations, it also lumped number of unlikely countries together in EU's new "neighborhood". Ukraine and Moldova in the Black Sea region have expressed their displeasure to be cited together in the same basket with the Mediterranean countries that do not have membership prospects. Similarly, Russia's position is rather ambiguous: On the one hand the EU-Russia strategic partnership is considered separately from other countries as an already existed policy to be reinforced; on the other hand the proposed way to reinforce the EU-Russia strategic partnership is to implement the new neighborhood policies.²⁵

23. Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours* (Brussels: COM(2003) 104 final, 11.03.2003). In the Communication, the Commission offered "enhanced relations" to its neighbours based on shared values. The aim is closer integration between the EU and its neighbours. To achieve this, the Commission, in return for adaptation of EU norms and standards, offers closer economic integration and prospect of achieving the so-called "four freedoms" without decision-making powers to the countries in the "wider Europe". For further evaluation of the Wider Europe-New Neighbourhood policy see Judy Batt et.al., *Partners and Neighbours: A CFSP for a Wider Europe* (Paris: EU-ISS Chaillot Papers No 64, 2003).

24. See *Council Conclusions on Wider Europe - New Neighbourhood*, June 16, 2003, <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/we/doc/cc06_03.pdf>.

25. Presentation by Antonio de Castro Carpeno, Principal Administrator, General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union to the Conference on *The New European Architecture in the 21st Century; Promoting Regional Cooperation in the Wider Black Sea Area*, September, 3-7, 2002, Milos Island, Greece.

The Commission's new policy proposal was criticized not only from the perspective of the countries it covered, but also for the countries it left out. Most importantly, southern Caucasian countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), already members of the Council of Europe and will be within the immediate “neighborhood” of the EU once the current negotiating countries (Bulgaria, Romania) become members, were left out.²⁶ The Thessaloniki Council recognized the problem,²⁷ which was rectified by the Luxembourg council meeting of June 2004 with the inclusion of the South Caucasian countries into the newly renamed European Neighborhood Policy.²⁸ Once that revision took place, all the wider Black Sea countries became in connection with the EU in one form or another.

A key external relations priority for the EU has been to promote prosperity, democracy, peace, stability and security in its immediate environs.²⁹ These aspirations are urgent for the wider Black Sea region not only because of the political, economic, administrative, ecological and social challenges the basin is faced with, but also in view of the recurrent conflicts/instability in the EU's eastern flank. The fact that two of the EU's three common strategies so far in external relations were formulated towards two Black Sea countries (Ukraine and Russia) attests regions importance in the EU eyes.³⁰

The EU clearly wishes to extend and deepen its relations with regional countries, especially with Russia and Ukraine without giving membership perspectives. However, it is important to show especially to Russia that the EU is not coming to the Black Sea with zero-sum intentions. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was overly jealous about guarding

26. All the Commission was prepared to say about the Southern Caucasus was summarized in the footnote 4 of the *Wider Europe-Neighbourhood* Communication: “Given their location, the Southern Caucasus therefore also fall outside the geographical scope of this initiative for the time being”.

27. *Council Conclusions on Wider Europe - New Neighbourhood*, June 16, 2003, paragraph 3; <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/we/doc/cc06_03.pdf>.

28. See Press release from the Council of the European Union, 2590th Council Meeting, Luxembourg, June 14, 2004, 10189/04 (Presse 195), available at <[http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/040614_GAERC_Conclusion_on_ENP_\(provisional_version\).pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/040614_GAERC_Conclusion_on_ENP_(provisional_version).pdf)>.

29. See, *Wider Europe-Neighbourhood*. Also *Euro-Med Partnership, Regional Strategy Paper 2002-2006*, p.4; and *CARDS Assistance Programme to the Western Balkans, Regional Strategy Paper 2002-2006*, p.4.

30. See, the European Council, *Common Strategy of the European Union of June 4, 1999 on Russia*, 1999/414/CFSP; and *European Council Common Strategy of 11 December 1999 on Ukraine*, 1999/877/CFSP.

its rights in and around the Black Sea. Non-threatening approach of the other Black Sea littorals since the end of the Cold War have eased its successor's fears in the region. It is important not to replenish those concerns with the arrival of another “great power” to the Black Sea.

Apart from enlargement-related issues, number of regional concerns links the Black Sea politics to the EU. First, they are connected with energy issues. As European dependency on the Middle Eastern oil and Russian natural gas continues together with declining North Sea production, the safe and uninterrupted supply of new sources, coming out of the Caspian Basin through and around the Black Sea assumes utmost importance. This aspect of the security of European energy supply inevitable brings number of related Caspian issues to Europe's doorstep.

Environmental concerns emanating from the Black Sea region or Europe also links the two regions, which are recognized by the Commission's *Danube-Black Sea Basin Communication*.³¹ With the membership of Romania and Bulgaria, the EU norms regarding environmental protection will have to apply to the Black Sea, “protection of (which) and its coastal environment will become an inescapable responsibility of the enlarged Community but one that will require cooperation beyond its frontiers”.³² This will not only increase EU investment on environmental projects, but also will have an effect on the tanker transportation in the Black Sea, where the current safety requirements for them are lower than the EU standards. Without creating a region-based multilateral approach, it is not clear how the EU would convince the regional oil producers (mainly Russia and Azerbaijan, as well as US-based oil majors) to cooperate with the EU on tanker safety standards; or how the EU could ensure that its heavy environmental investment in Danube Basins is not wasted without taking into account the Dnieper and Don River basins in the wider Black Sea.

31. Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission on Environmental Cooperation in the Danube-Black Sea Region* (Brussels: COM(2001) 615 final, 30.10.2001). It concludes that “the environmental degradation of the Danube and Black Sea region requires urgent attention and can only be tackled through a joint effort of environmental rehabilitation, conducted at regional level. This much-required effort will become a prime tool to promote and then secure the sustainable development of the region”.

32. Mee, “Protecting the Black Sea Environment,” p. 81.

Moreover, additional threats created by the increased risks of tanker collision, particularly within the Turkish Straits, depleting water resources and outdated nuclear stations are challenges that may threaten the wider Europe.³³

At the moment, the Black Sea is not even mentioned in the existing European Water Framework Directive, though two EU members (Germany and Austria) account for a significant area of the Black Sea Basin.³⁴ The percentage has increased even more after Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Slovak Republic became members in May 2004 and will yet increase when Bulgaria and Romania join. Although the Commission has been active in providing technical assistance to number of Black Sea countries through its TACIS and PHARE programs, it has been very “careful to avoid any statement that may be constructed as a legal obligation to protect the Black Sea ecosystem”.³⁵ However, recognizing that this would be inevitable once Bulgaria and Romania become full members, the Commission has already become observer in the Black Sea Commission, and established a Danube-Black Sea Region (DABLAS) Task Force in March 2002 under its chairmanship “to provide a platform for co-operation for the protection of water and water related ecosystems of the wider Black Sea Region”.³⁶ Finally, in the spring of 2003, the EU, responding to the new reality of the soon-to-enlarged Union, launched the IASON initiative to set up a multi-disciplinary transnational cooperation network to treat and protect the Mediterranean as well as the Black Sea.³⁷

From the financial perspective, there are already number of European companies operating in the wider Black Sea, thus affecting European states with instabilities and structural problems of the region. Integration of the

33. For example, Chernobyl-type nuclear station owned by Armenia has already been described as a threat to the EU countries. Personal interviews with EU officials, Brussels, 10 October 2003.

34. Commission of the European Communities, “Directive 2000/60/EC Of The European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 Establishing a Framework for Community Action in the Field of Water Policy”, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 327, 2000.

35. Mee, “Protecting the Black Sea Environment,” p.120.

36. See, *Terms of Reference of the DABLAS Task Force for Co-operation on Water Protection in the Wider Black Sea Region* (DABLAS Task Force), Brussels, 26.11.2001, DABLAS/2001/01rev1 available at <http://europa.eu.int>.

37. For more information on IASON initiative, see, *RTD Info; Magazine on European Research*, No. 38 (July 2003), pp. 3-7.

Black Sea markets with Europe would be a significant addition from merely economic perspective. But beyond that, threats to stability of the region, an obvious gateway between energy reach Central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe without much alternative, would eventually affect European economies. Therefore, the EU is interested in the resolution of the several conflicts of the region and changing the code of conduct between regional countries. The multilateral cooperation schemes in the Black Sea are already creating possibilities for such a change: Countries that do not have bilateral relations (for example Turkey and Armenia, and Armenia and Azerbaijan) are talking to each other and cooperating within the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) umbrella. The EU needs to give more support to such formats to help transforming the region from a conflict-prone area on the European borders to a peaceful and stable neighborhood.

The EU has already declared that it is interested in 'consolidating state sovereignty and strengthening regional stability throughout Eurasia'. It has also increasingly underlined that adherence to democratic principles and respect for human rights is the fundamental objective of the EU in the region and thus conditions its contributions towards the region. In fact, the EU has been critical in the creation of civil society and independent media in the newly independent states of the region with its political conditions and human rights clauses inserted into the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreements* signed with the regional countries.³⁸ All this could be tackled more easily within multilateral environments with non-threatening programs and approaches than direct bilateral pressures. For example, the EU has failed so far founding ways to affect the political reforms positively in Belarus, ethnically problematic Georgia, or territorially threatened Azerbaijan. Especially conflicts in the South Caucasus affect trade, security, and regional cooperation. Instability in the north Caucasus only adds to the problems. In a wider perspective, all these relate to economic benefits, obtainable from cooperation among the regional states, in a sense that the

38. For individual *Partnership and Cooperation Agreements*, see, EU Commission's External Relations web page at http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/ceeca/pca. Currently, TACIS is the main financial instrument supporting the implementation of PCAs, assisting the Caucasian countries to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, the consolidation of market economies, and strengthening their administrative capacities.

states that are distracted by domestic or regional instabilities would find it more difficult to concentrate on political and economic transformation, thus losing out from more trade and cooperation.

Finally, illegal immigration, drug trafficking and growing criminal activities in general cause concern in Europe. With the independence of the former Soviet republics, there emerged international borders that were not well guarded. The border control agencies in the newly independent countries have been often inefficient and open to corruption. Low incomes, decreasing social security and erosion of public institutions have created conditions conducive for crime and corruption. As a result, organized crime networks in the region have become well established, highly violent and increasingly international. What is more, the region acts as a staging post for much of the heroin seized in EU. Recognizing these potential destabilizing effects, the EU member states agreed in September 2002 on an *Action Plan* aimed at combating drug trafficking between Central Asia and the EU passing through the Caucasus and the BSEC area.³⁹

None of the separatist conflicts in Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transdnistria, or Chechnya have yet been solved satisfactorily, and prospects for solution are rather unpromising. The continuing instability due to frozen conflicts continues to feed profitable criminal activities (drug trafficking, illegal arms trade), terrorism, and further migration. It is clear that the migration and population displacements emerging as a result of conflicts, decreasing standards of living conditions or environmental catastrophes can create insecurity, heighten ethnic tensions, undermine regional social order and consequently affect the nearby EU countries.

Regional cooperation provides general framework within which innovative solutions to these problems could be more easily found. As the regional cooperation in the Black Sea has been essentially an extension of the EU's philosophy that deeper cooperation with neighboring countries can provide national as well as regional stability and growth, serving mutual

39. Council of the EU, *Action Plan on Drugs between the EU and Central Asian Republics*, Brussels, September 25 2002, 12353/02 CORDROGUE 78 CODRO 1 NIS 107.

interests of all countries concerned, the regional approach in the Black Sea might even be more successful than the other regions that has already been tied to the EU. Since none (with the exemption of Russia) of the member states of the BSEC for example miss an opportunity to reiterate that regional cooperation in the Black Sea is complementary to their ultimate goal of EU membership,⁴⁰ the EU has a unique chance and willing collaborators in the region to become influential and effective.

Even most of the BSEC institutions are designed along the lines of the EU institutions, and the BSEC members try to strengthen their institutional relationship with the EU, as exemplified by the *Platform for Cooperation between the BSEC and the EU* document in April 1999, which listed opportunities for cooperation that the BSEC might offer and invited the EU “to consider the possibility for the European Commission to obtain observer status (in the organization) that will lay ground for a future structured relationship between the BSEC and the EU”.⁴¹ Further, during the BSEC 10th Anniversary Summit in Istanbul in June 2002, member countries declared their determination to encourage regional cooperation and to take concrete steps to increase cooperation with the EU.⁴² Thus, for regional countries “the BSEC is a preparation ground for integration with a larger Europe. (It could) promote suitable means for the dissemination to and adoption by its members of certain norms, standards and practices as well as principles and policies of the EU”.⁴³

In turn, the EU clearly prefers individual country approach to institutional arrangements in the region. At present, EU's relations with the countries of the wider Black Sea region are guided by number of different arrangements and there is no multilateral framework for coordination and establishing a comprehensive partnership, similar to Barcelona Process or

40. See for example, statements from Romanian President Ion Iliescu to the BSEC Bucharest Summit Conference (June 30, 1995), Bulgarian Foreign Minister Nadejda Mihailova (*RFE/RL Newslines*, October 23, 1998), former Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller (*OMRI Daily Digest*, February 11, 1997), and Moldavian Foreign Minister Tabacaru (*FBIS-EEU*, April 27, 2000).

41. *Platform for Cooperation between the BSEC and the EU*, Attachment 3 to Annex V to BS/FM/R(99)1, Tbilisi, April 30, 1999.

42. *The Istanbul Decennial Summit Declaration*, June 25, 2002, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/af/bsec12htm>>.

43. Ercan Ozer, “The Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the EU,” *Romanian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1997), p. 109.

the Northern Dimension. As far as the EU is concerned, the Black Sea region includes number of different group of states with different form of agreements signed with them. The different types of status in relations with the EU “mean different operating policies and programs, legal bases and financial instruments. To cut across these different types raises considerable administrative and legal complications”.⁴⁴ Moreover, the individual Black Sea countries are tend to carefully guard their relative advantages vis-à-vis each other in their relations with the EU. Not only the countries differ in per capita aid they receive from the EU, but also in types and cycles of the support programs, leading to different administrative processes and difficulties of coordination on issues of multilateral importance. In short, “on issues that require multinational cooperation among countries with different relationships with the EU, the EU approach poses problems for such regional cooperation”.⁴⁵

It was clearly the EU Commission's intention back in 1997 to develop a “Black Sea connection” with the regional countries when it adopted its Communication on regional cooperation in the Black Sea region, which was defined as “Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova in the west; Ukraine and Russia in the north; Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the east and Turkey in the south”. Acknowledging the “growing strategic importance to the EU of the Black Sea region”, the Commission expressed “its intention to develop *a new regional cooperation strategy*”. It further listed the areas the cooperation could be promoted as transport, energy and telecommunications networks, trade, ecologically sustainable development, and justice and home affairs.⁴⁶ Further, in its report titled *Agenda 2000: For a Stronger and Wider Union*, the Commission listed the BSEC among the regional initiatives it “welcomed and supported” in the northern, central and south-eastern Europe.⁴⁷ Also the idea of becoming observer in the BSEC was floated briefly.

44. Emerson and Vahl, “Europe's Black Sea Dimension,” pp. 19-20.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

46. Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council: Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area: State of Play, Perspectives for EU Action Encouraging its Development*, (Brussels: COM(97) 597 final, 14.11.1997).

47. Commission of the European Communities, *Commission Communication to the Council: Agenda 2000: For a stronger and Wider Union* (Brussels: COM(97) 659 final, December 1997).

However, while the other initiatives found advocates within the EU and was actively supported in connection with its enlargement process, regional approach towards the Black Sea was in time relegated into lower priorities level. While the EU Commission has become member of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and is one of the founding partners of the Barents Euro-Artic Council (two organizations that were launched almost simultaneously with the BSEC), attempts to get the EU involved in the same way in the BSEC have been unsuccessful.

Greater Black Sea Region: A Role for NATO?

The enlargement of NATO and the accompanying new security challenges has brought the greater Black Sea region closer to allies' attention. However, discouraged by persistent conflicts in the region, ill-suited to help resolve these conflicts and focused on its political and operational commitments in the Balkans and Afghanistan, NATO has yet to develop a comprehensive regional strategy for its engagement. Nonetheless, it today either includes or has institutionalized relations with all of the countries in the "greater Black Sea" region. Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Turkey are members of the alliance; Russia and Ukraine are its strategic partners; and all of them along with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova are members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP). Furthermore, Georgia is a declared aspirant since 2000, Ukraine since May 2002, and Azerbaijan since April 2003. The last three and recent members Bulgaria and Romania have provided transit passage, staging areas, and troops in the field for NATO and the US-led operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq.

NATO today, much like the EU, does not have a coherent strategy vis-à-vis the region as a whole. Instead, it deals with different parts of the region differently and through a varied set of bilateral relationship. It created, for example, the NATO-Ukraine Commission in the late 1990s to balance its similar NATO-Russia outreach effort, not with the Black Sea security *per se* in mind. While a regional approach has long been talked

within NATO circles in the context of partnership programs, there are currently no projects or cooperation programs that have focused exclusively on the Black Sea region. As a result, the Alliance's role and activities in the region has remained limited. The time has come now to update and integrate existing individual programs into a more comprehensive and coherent regional approach.

Since the very concept of a “Black Sea” region, distinct from the areas to its east and west, is new to NATO, the first step in creating required regional approach should be to solidify the understanding about the borders of the region. For that, the Allies first need to acknowledge the separate development of the South Caucasus from Central Asia in the post-Cold War period, and consider it as part of wider Black Sea. NATO still groups these countries, in its internal planning, with those of Central Asia. Thus, in terms of practical cooperation, NATO still tends to treat the wider Black Sea region as part of a broader region including the Caspian and Central Asia. This has been largely the result of its mission in Afghanistan and the fact that these countries have been an important transit route for NATO forces and supplies to the region. In this context, the Black Sea region has been seen more of a stepping stone to a specific operation theater rather than as a region in its own right. This view, too, has to change now, taking into account the openly declared intention of most of the regional countries to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures.

No doubt, NATO will be facing many challenges in the region. However, NATO's distinct outreach program and its “open door” policy allow it to design differential strategies to suit requirements of regional countries. The Alliance's open door policy, clearly more flexible than EU's enlargement policy, is conceptually open-ended and excludes no Euro-Atlantic country *a priori*. Moreover, it is easier in practical terms to qualify for NATO membership than for the EU membership. In addition, NATO's various outreach programs have blurred the divide between a country seeking eventual membership and one simply seeking closer ties. As the distinction between candidate countries and partners is less relevant in terms

of cooperation in NATO than the EU, the interested countries can more easily move from one category to the next.

Agreed to at the Prague Summit, the IPAP and PAP strategies enable NATO to provide both a bilateral as well as a regional forum for political dialogue; an instrument to help generate pressure for necessary domestic reforms; and a vehicle for advise and assistance on defense and security issues. While IPAP allows for expanded bilateral cooperation with interested countries individually, PAP allows a subset of NATO countries with a special interest in the wider Black Sea region to come together with non-NATO countries to cooperate in a regional context. IPAP especially allows partner countries to raise their political visibility within NATO, help place its problems and concerns on Alliance's, and help generate more coherent NATO understanding and response. In many ways, however, PAP is more suitable to create a regional sense. Within the context of the Black Sea, it would allow for example the US and Turkey to join forces with new NATO members Bulgaria and Romania, to work together with the southern Caucasian states of Georgia and Azerbaijan on defense reform programs, with or without Russian participation. Clearly, PAP needs to be utilized more actively if NATO wishes to develop a larger role for itself in the greater Black Sea region.

To date, the Alliance has launched the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T), which includes all 46 EAPC nations, and after Istanbul Summit, Partnership Action Plan on Defense Institution Building (PAP-DIB), which will complement IPAP and help organize multilateral cooperation among allies and partners in support of the fundamental elements of democratic defense reform. In addition to these, a new "Partnership Action Plan on the Black Sea" (PAP-BS) could be launched to bring together allies and partners from the region. If supported politically, this effort could help develop a Black Sea identity as part of NATO's strategic and political outlook and, in time, might lead to a viable and operational policy for integration for those who aspire to it, and to a system

of regional security cooperation in a NATO context, which could also offer an appropriate role for Russia.

Moreover, through its South Eastern Europe Initiative, NATO has for years facilitated efforts by nations in this region to harmonize security perceptions and develop related regional cooperation. A number of Black Sea countries have worked together in this context within the SEECAP and SEEGROUP. This experience, too, could be valuable for the Black Sea region, where similar efforts could be emulated with regional countries. In this context, BLACKSEAFOR, a purely regional initiative, should be supported and encouraged by the Alliance. If supported, these efforts might in time lead to a viable policy for integration in the Alliance structures for those who aspire to it, and to a system of regional security cooperation with the others. While full integration would remain a distant perspective, placing regional countries in a greater Black Sea context could naturally create a broader network of regional, political and security-related co-operation. This might also help overcome, or at least circumvent, “frozen conflicts” in the South Caucasus and Moldova, which have so far paralyzed most of regional cooperation efforts.

Although NATO's open door policy is helpful in encouraging regional countries towards further reforms in order to be able to comply with NATO standards, militarily as well as politically, if any Western strategy for the Black Sea were to aim at eventual integration of these states, a new set of measures would also be necessary to change the domestic realities there. A deficit of democracy and good governance will always be a hindrance to NATO's effort to bring these countries closer to Euro-Atlantic structures. With the enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe, NATO has clearly ceased to exist as a military bloc with a restricted mission to contain potential aggressors against the territory of its members. While retaining its collective defense *raison d'être*, it has evolved towards a political security system for the Euro-Atlantic space of democratic nations. A substantial part of this mission is to promote, secure and guarantee the institutional prerequisites for democracy, respect for human rights and freedom.

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Although NATO would, by itself, be unlikely and unsuitable organization to devise such a policy to engage the regional countries in reform process in these areas, its open door policy and individualized stick-and-carrot approaches could help to complement other organizations, such as the EU and the OSCE, in their effort to reshape regional socio-political and economic landscape. Attraction of NATO enlargement process, including the Membership Action Plan (MAP), has already demonstrated its power as an instrument of inducing domestic change for eastern European countries, whose experience could easily be replicated around the Black Sea.