

REGIONAL BLACK SEA ARCHITECTURE AND CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REGIONAL COOPERATION FRAMEWORK

Alina Homorozean*

Abstract:** *Sometimes considered an asset, other times a liability, the Black Sea started recently to be regarded as a region. However, the Black Sea Region (BSR) lacks a common vision, often due to the complicated and often inefficient nexus of regional cooperation initiatives. Following the logic of finding regional solutions for regional problems, this paper aims to assess existing institutional and regional initiatives, reflecting on the implications for the success of Black Sea regionalism in creating patterns of sustained and sustainable development and a high degree of actors' involvement. This paper concentrates on two complementary research questions: What is the regional order in the BSR and what does it imply for its future? What is the current contribution of the most significant cooperation initiatives and what are the consequences for regional institutionalism? For the purpose of this paper, I draw on best-practices from other two regions: the Northern Dimension and South-East Asia. Through a comparative perspective, I suggest an analysis of the most important initiatives: BSEC, CDC, Black Sea Synergy, Eastern Partnership, Baku Initiative and the BSF. This paper argues that a possible strategic solution for successful policy development lies in the creation of an integrated regional cooperation package, functioning on the principles of multi-speed and multi-dimensional cooperation in several policy fields, in a context in which the BSR seems to be caught between two paradigms: a European and a Russian-oriented one.*

Keywords: *Black Sea Region (BSR), regional order, regional cooperation framework, Northern Dimension, South-East Asian regionalism.*

1. Introduction

At a conference, the German minister Erler (2009) commented that "before 1989, no one would have discussed power-sharing in the Black Sea. [...] The question today is: do we consider the Black Sea an asset or a liability?" Although it covers just 0.3% of EU's territory (European Commission, 2009a), the Black Sea has an important influence

on the wider Black Sea region (WBSR), both in environmental, security, energy and regional development terms. It is considered by scholars of international relations of increasing importance for geopolitical, military-strategic and geo-economic reasons. While being a region at the intersection of several major world arenas – Europe (EU), Russia, Central Asia and the Middle East –, it also constitutes the South-Eastern frontier of

*Alina Homorozean is a Master student at the Dresden University of Technology (TU Dresden), Zentrum für Internationale Studien, Master of Arts in International Relations, and the Master of International Business at the University of Applied Sciences in Dresden, Germany; Email: alinahomorozean@yahoo.com.

** The article won the 2nd prize at the section "Geopolitics and geostrategy at the Black Sea", within the conference on "Sustainable Development at the Black Sea", organised between August 22nd – 29th 2010, in Constanta, Romania.

the EU and NATO and is situated between two spheres of influence: Russian and Western. Moreover, the EU recently (2007) discovered the Black Sea as a geopolitical hub of particular strategic importance in order to foster sustained development and regional cooperation, and started regarding it as an integral part of the European project; the European Parliament increasingly puts the idea of “An EU strategy for the Black Sea” on its work agenda. However, at the moment there is a complete lack of common vision whether this region should be on a middle or long-term perspective. Among many other reasons, the underlying explanation for this situation lies in the insufficient understanding and acceptance of the regional order, the resulting complex security and cooperation architecture and the nexus of more or less inefficient regional cooperation initiatives/institutions which, paradoxically, seem more to undermine than reinforce each others’ activity in their current uncoordinated mechanisms.

Following the logic of finding regional solutions for regional problems, the *aim* of this paper is to briefly assess the various – and often competing – institutional and cooperation initiatives in the Black Sea Region (BSR) and examine their interaction and the level of their complementarities, reflecting thus on the potential implications for the success in terms of creating synergies and patterns of sustainable development. Starting from the special features of the Black Sea regionalism, I therefore suggest both a short analysis of the local players strategic interests, as well as of the current regional multilateralism initiatives (especially BSEC, Community of Democratic Choice, Baku Initiative, Black Sea Synergy (BSS), Eastern Partnership (EaP), Black Sea Forum), insisting on their role and prospects of future

institutional and policy development, in a context in which they seem to be caught between two development paradigms: an European (ENP, BSS and EaP) and a Russian-oriented one.

For the purpose of this paper, I also draw on best practices and some case-study analysis conducted on two other regions: the Northern Dimension (Baltic region mainly) and South-East Asia, with ASEAN as a regional leader and many other initiatives that coexist and offer this type of regionalism particular characteristics. Last, the conclusions summarize the findings on the main research questions and propose some suggestions for the region progressing in reaching its full potential in terms of economic, political and social development. In term of methodology, while deriving from the main research conducted on the Black Sea area in the last years, this paper conducts a small-scale constellation analysis, consisting of an interests’ analysis of the main actors, a perception analysis, as well as a behaviour analysis (within the cooperation initiatives), in order to underline the existing link between actors’ interests, perceptions and strategies and the actual cooperation framework, which has only rarely been underlined by existing research. Second, this paper surpasses the purely European approach, while looking, besides the Northern Dimension, at an apparently far and distinct regional order and institutionalism based rather on a security dimension in South-East Asia. Thus, this paper supports the theoretical view that the new world order is characterized by region-formation and different types of regionalism. Therefore, we speak of a world and a Europe of regions, in which the BSR is a small, but strategic part.

2. The regional architecture of the BSR: main players and geopolitical interests

The geostrategic value of the BSR made the region's development particularly interesting to both internal (from within the region) and external players. For practical purposes, this paper splits the main actors involved or with stakes in the BSR into three distinct categories, depending on their geopolitical status, regional interests and the instruments by which they pursue them. The first category comprises littoral states, such as Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine or Georgia. In a second category we include the regional powers, which claim historical and ideological roots over the Black Sea: Russia and Turkey. The third category is composed of global players, which express geopolitical interests in its development and which created themselves Black Sea-related policy areas: the USA and the EU. There is clear evidence of an overlap of both influence and interests of global actors in the wider region, of regional former and current powers, as well as increased regional integration and multilateral institutionalism.

2.1 Local players and their strategies

Romania's regional importance is driven from its geo-strategic position as a new South-Eastern EU border, its market significance for regional trade and investments, the existence of the Danube and the Danube Delta, the relatively low cost of labour and existence of high qualified human resources, the potential of agricultural resources, fishery, tourism and transportation, but also from its cultural heritage and the fact that it constitutes a meeting point of several cultures: Orthodox, Islamic and Western. Since it became an EU member, but also in the decade before, **Romania** has been developing certain ambitions concerning its role in the BSR. Romania even created several

cooperation frameworks (Black Sea Forum) and it cooperates in all regional initiatives. However, in order to play a more significant role, Romania needs EU support and western cooperation. While increasing its participation in regional forums, the Romanian foreign policy did fail in one important area, that of pursuing stronger bilateral ties with other BS countries, especially Russia and Ukraine, which also aim at (sub)-regional leadership. While considering itself a Latin enclave in a "Slavic sea", Romania long ignored the rapprochement of its neighbourhood, and focused its foreign policy more towards the West, i.e. NATO (USA) and the EU. While this is normal for a country aiming at becoming a part of the Western world, Romania paradoxically ignored its geographical location, exactly the one that Romanian researchers and international scholars throw more attention about – the Black Sea axis. This suggests some sort of disagreement between the political class and researchers, which has to be solved in the years to come. **Bulgaria**, also a new EU member, has been concentrating more on building long-term agreements with Russia or Turkey and established itself as a possible transit country for several energy pipeline projects. Bulgaria has also taken an active part in most of the regional initiatives and even hosts a Black Sea Border Coordination and Information Center (BSBCIC) in Burgas in order to strengthen the efficiency of border management. However, Bulgaria still has a certain institutional weakness and problems concerning corruption, fight of organized crime, justice system (EU Final Monitoring Report, 2007). In summary, Romania and Bulgaria are EU's eyes and ears in the BSR and advocates of the Black Sea Synergy in Brussels (Tassinari, 2005). Especially Romanian MEPs and leaders manage to put Black Sea or Danube issues on EU's agenda and lobby for more concrete actions, while

Romania and Bulgaria will also take a leading role in the Environment, respectively the Energy BSS-Partnerships of the EU (2010). Concerning the other two riparian states, Ukraine and Georgia, they both managed to change the geopolitical balance of influence of the BSR, after the Rose and Orange revolutions and after the Georgian-Russian conflict in August 2008. Their regional role of Achilles' heel for regional stability has to be acknowledged. While playing the role of promoter of European orientation for the Post-Soviet countries of the BSR, **Ukraine** tries to assert itself as a regional hub and sub-regional leader. For Ukraine, the Black Sea is both economically and militarily vital, due to its fertile lands, navigable rivers (even in winter), and to its peacekeeping role. Ukrainian regional ambitions cover the prospects of NATO membership (which at the moment seem rather low), securitizing the Caucasus, demilitarizing the BSR and maintaining a balance of power that impedes military and political domination of the BSR (Perepelitsya, 2009), especially Russian one. However, due to the Western rapprochement of these countries (also in institutional terms, by creating the Community of Democratic Choice, which excludes Russia), Moscow reacted promptly. The Black Sea is similarly vital for **Georgia**, whose only access to Europe is via the sea, due to the rugged terrain of the Caucasus and because of Russian hostility (Stratfor, 2008). These tensions should be kept under control and these countries should try to balance Russian with Western interest, even more than the other regional players, due to their pivotal role in forging regional stability. Also, while putting some "soft security issues" on the cooperation agenda, regional actors should acknowledge the "hard security nature of energy" and act so as to balance the most important contradictory interests (Tassinari, 2005).

2.2 Regional powers and their strategies

While Turkey and Russia possess different strategic interests and geopolitical strategies, they follow the same goal, that of becoming a regional leader in the BSR. Their foreign policy agendas concerning the Black Sea partially overlap, both countries wishing to distance the United States from using of the Black Sea for military operations against the Middle East and prevent it from becoming a NATO preserve (Fotiou, 2009), but they also compete for "regional hegemony"-especially in the Caucasus and Caspian area. Because the BSR is a strategic corridor connecting Europe to the energy rich Caspian and Central Asian regions (Staiano, 2009), **Turkey's** foreign policy ambition is to become a major energy hub and a „buffer state“ for European security. Turkey takes its bridging role between supply and demand points very seriously and also aspires of becoming an EU member. Furthermore, Turkey is a classical US-partner and a regional observatory coveted by the West (Çelikkpala, 2010). Therefore, it is neither efficient nor reliable to establish any comprehensive regional organization in the region, without Turkey's participation. Turkey's self-awareness has increased during the last decade. As a result, issues and territories that had formerly been seen as lying beyond its geostrategic orbit currently fall within its strategic responsibility area. Particularly after the Georgian-Russian war, Ankara has been pursuing a *two-dimensional goal*: to stabilize its volatile strategic neighbourhood by reaching breakthrough in the settlement of regional conflicts (regional stability and cooperation) and to secure energy flows and alternative energy transportation routes (e.g. Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan). Turkey's interests are mostly geostrategic, economic (first financial and commercial Caspian hub), cultural and ethnic (pan-turkism). For all the reasons exposed above, Turkey is working hard to

improve the existing regional organizations and initiatives. Turkey was the first to take a proactive attitude and set-up BSEC and Blackseafor (Naval Task Force), in an attempt to fill in the strategic void after the USSR collapse (Karadeniz, 2007). Yet, every Turkish initiative on Caucasus was somehow hindered by Russia (Axis, 2005). Nowadays the two regional players have started cooperating or at least tolerate each others' projects, while competing for Europe's supply routes. Turkish-Russian relations now reached the level of "multidimensional strategic partnership", which is good for regional stability and security, yet much still has to be done for this rapprochement. One of the latest Turkish regional initiatives is the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (August 2008), which could set the basis of an enduring regional security regime (Çelikpala, 2010). The CSCP was established also in order to make a fresh proposal by securing Russia's involvement (Khelashvili, 2008). For the last two decades, Turkey has supported or initiated BSEC, Blackseafor, Black Sea Harmony in order to assist regional transition and support BSR's integration into the global economy (CBS, 2009a). Turkey also welcomed most EU initiatives, but the problem is that Turkey would -whenever possible- seek to engage partners on its own terms.

For **Russia**, the key strategic value of the Black Sea consists in the possibility of controlling the energy resources of the Caspian Sea (Regnum, 2008). Consolidating its position of regional power, Russia follows a strategy of reassertion of its influence in the „near abroad“, focused mainly on two goals: keeping control first over its former traditional sphere of influence (many of the WBSR-states) and –second - of energy production and transit infrastructure and export and of the key energy resources, for continuing rehearsing regional pressure,

while dampening the strategic influence of other big players. Other interests include: preventing anti-Russian (military) coalitions (also Ukraine and Georgia's NATO-membership) and fighting separatist incentives and terrorism. Since Putin's era, the Caspian region became a key strategic issue of Russian foreign policy (Foreign Policy Concept, 2000), while the BSR was somehow neglected (Russia still lacks a BS-strategy), even though, historically has considered the BSR to be a crucial component of its national security. Recently, the BSR has become important to Russia, especially regarding Ukraine's and Georgia's political trajectories, transit of European gas through the BSR or North-Caucasus secessionism. A reason for the Russian participation in regional initiatives is that it fears encirclement by the West and thus works to counteract NATO and EU influence (Black Sea Commission, 2009a). For the very same reasons, adding that of prestige, Russia keeps significant regional military presence (Sevastopol, Ukraine, Transnistria). Analysts claim, however, that the Black Sea fleet is more a symbolic presence, than a real military concern. The extent of naval and military power lies much more in its ability to project power, as witnessed in Georgia, and its domination by virtue of land-power and contiguous territory (Marketos, 2009). Currently, relations between Russia and the West entered a period of active cooperation (Radvanyi, 2006, p. 9). Moscow is weaving a complicated new web of regional alliances, drawing deeply into Russia's collective historical memory as a regional power (Cornell *et al*, 2007, p. 10). Russia is seeking to provide new infrastructure for energy transit to Europe from the Caspian region, which is aimed at reducing the rationale for projects such as Nabucco, which would connect the region's resources to the European market through

Trans-Caspian pipeline and Turkey. This shows that, due to security of energy supply reasons, Russia still balances cooperation with competition-based behaviour towards other BS-states: although it reinforced its presence in the BSR, it is quite unwilling to actively participate in regional initiatives. Furthermore, currently, a possible “threat” for the BSR is represented more by Russia’s participation in the Northern Dimension. Therefore, a main challenge to the regional institutionalism’s success is to overcome Russia’s regional isolation and transform its well-developed network of bilateral relations into multilateral ones.

2.3 Global actors and their interests

In fact, in the first decade of the post-Cold War era, the **United States** kept a rather low profile when it came to Black Sea issues, the main priority being how to deal with post-Soviet Russia (Commission of the Black Sea, 2009a). Starting from the mid-1990s, Washington has prioritized the enhancement of US power projection so as to guarantee the continued flow of energy to major US commercial partners (Ruseckas, 2007, p. 7). As in South-East Asia, US foreign policy aims at securing its regional influence on one hand (a reason for supporting Ukraine and Georgia’s NATO accession) and the energy supply from the BSR and Caspian region, on the other. Washington thus made energy security a priority of its trade and foreign policy (Marketos, 2009). Its *main strategy* is that of indirect power projection. During the Bush era the strategy became: securing more oil/gas from foreign sources for supporting US economic growth and using the new strategic relationships to enhance transportation capabilities for its arenas of military operation (Iraq, Afghanistan) (Sypko, 2007). After the end of 1990s, the US strategy towards the BSR was based on the promotion of democracy and market

economy, energy security and soft-security (fighting terrorism, organized crime, and the smuggling of weapons of mass destruction). The US supports several security and trans-border cooperation initiatives, such as the Black Sea Border Security Initiative (Bulgaria) and the Black Sea Civil Emergency Response Planning funded by the US Defense Department. Also, in order to improve its regional position, the US keeps close bilateral security ties with regional actors such as Romania, Georgia, Ukraine and Bulgaria. Furthermore, successive US administrations have supported NATO’s security role in the region. On the other hand, exactly this strengthened NATO presence in the BSR both through its Partnership-for-Peace Program or Membership Action Plans contributed indirectly to Russia’s perception of insecurity and therefore created certain tensions in the relation between the two countries (CBS, 2009b). Similar to the US, the **European Union** also only recently discovered the BSR as a bordering region with a development agenda and geopolitical, security, environment and economic challenges. The main EU positions and initiatives towards the Black Sea are summarized in the next chapter of this paper.

Currently, the BSR is one of the most multi-polar regions of the world, yet, due to actors such as Turkey and Russia, which claim regional control, the regional balance of power is often changing. However, Turkey and Russia are different in their strategies: Turkey is more similar to China in Asia, in the sense that it acts more peacefully and tries to become a benevolent leader, while Russia is similar to Japan in SE-Asia, i.e. a country feared for what it did in the past and for what it could do in the future – a leadership based on fear and pressure. A solution for better understanding the implications of these aspects is to look at South-East Asia, which has been dealing for centuries with the same

fear and ultimately decided to engage all actors, even the ones she feared.

2.4 Lessons from South-East Asian regionalism

The South-East Asian regional order includes three great powers (China, Japan, USA) and a fourth power (India) aspiring to rise to this status, four nuclear powers (China, India, Pakistan, North Korea) and three nuclear-threshold-states (Japan, Korea, Taiwan), described as Asian tigers and dragons, and several states which claim a profound ideological and cultural influence. With few exceptions, most Southeast-Asian countries have had a colonial experience and therefore know how important hierarchical relations are and have a long experience in resisting Chinese or Japanese potential threat (Buzan, 2003, p. 12). Eastern Asia is currently witnessing the emergence of a regional order with a multilateral institutional architecture based on a series of increasingly shared norms about interstate relationships and security as forms of “cooperative security”. Although local leaders consider East-Asian order multipolar (i.e. US external dominance moderated and balanced by other regional powers), in many aspects, the SEA regional order is rather hierarchical, a term implemented in Asian historical and social traditions. The unspoken *regional strategy* is that of balancing against both USA and China, through unfolding these in international institutions and multilateral agreements. Two tactics are applied here: on one hand, the enmeshment of actors in complex agreements and norms of international institutions; on the other, creating a balance of influence that comprises indirect military balancing policies undertaken unilaterally or bilaterally, aimed at deterring a range of potential threats (many of which also apply to the BSR), and regional “complex balancing” policies (multiple

balancing targets, with the wider aim of economic and security cooperation). From a theoretical perspective, the reason for the increased regionalism is offered foremost by realist theories which claim that regional multilateral institutions become more firmly rooted in SE-Asia as a way to rebalance the regional power distribution, which created fear and instability. This last argument applies for the BSR as well; however, the BSR did not yet completely acknowledge the major security threats in case of non-cooperation. Also, SEA institutionalism differs from the European in three ways: the latter is generally more “formal and political” and relies more on “state bargains and legal norms”, while Asia’s is “informal and economic” (based on “market transactions and ethnic or national capitalism”) (Buzan & Waever, 2007). Also, their attitudes toward sovereignty differ: “Europe’s regionalism is more transparent and intrusive than Asia’s”; while “absent in Asia are the pooling of sovereignty and far-reaching multilateral arrangements. However, these observations only apply for the European integration process itself and less for the BSR. Furthermore, another common characteristic of SEA and BSR is the lack of a very powerful and influential regional leader. While Indonesia is unable to act as SEA leader, even though it is the biggest in terms of territory and population, since it lacks stability and power (in a realist sense), while Russia is unable and -to a certain extent- unwilling to become the regional BSR leader (but wants control), due to its lost of “privileged sphere of influence” and to its unclear strategic roadmap towards the BSR. Most SEA countries have had a colonial experience and therefore know how important hierarchical relations are and have a long experience in resisting Chinese/Japanese (Russian in the BSR case) threat. However, none of the BS-states enjoys much soft-power and acceptance, except maybe

Turkey and Romania, which try to become (sub)-regional soft-power-based leaders. Summarizing the main features by theoretical inputs, we can characterize the new security order in SEA as institution-building, balancing behaviour against the USA and China and modified hegemony (Goh, 2007). The same attributes could also apply for the BSR: the institutional approaches in the last two decades show a clear tendency towards regional institution-building with the indirect goal of balancing behaviour against Russia (from USA, Turkey). Concerning actors' roles, Turkey could take up China's role in the BSR, namely to be perceived as a constructive partner and a good neighbour, following a proactive strategy of "engaging the periphery". Up to the political will, Romania's role in the BSR could become similar to both Japan and Indonesia's in SEA, although, from a constructivist perspective, Romania lacks the perceived sub-regional leadership role, legitimacy (due to economic and infrastructure problems) and power of influence over the BSR. As shown in this chapter, the Black Sea and Central Asia are two geostrategic regions, in which security and foreign policy interests of Russia, the US, Turkey, Iran and even China collide. Therefore, the EU is confronted in her instable wide neighbourhood not only with strategic questions of energy supply and security, but also with several global and regional actors.

3. Cooperation initiatives in the Black Sea region

The purpose of regional cooperation in the Black Sea area is to foster sustained development (Manoli, 2010). As underlined by Mr. Adrian Pop (2004), the BSR currently suffers from an "inflation" and supra-saturation of cooperation incentives with often overlapping agendas, but also with

different memberships and a very low degree of inter-institutional coordination (see *Table 1- Annex*). While the Western world hardly paid any attention to the East, starting with the early 1990s, the East-European countries have been rapidly engaging in both political and economic transitions with important consequences also for the civil society and the business community, as well as in regional cooperation schemes meant to solve regional problems and allow inter-state information exchange. Despite of the lack of a regional identity (Isic *et al*, 2008) and often conflicting interests, the necessity for governments, regional and international organizations to involve civil society in regional dialogue increased (Zongur, 2009). Apart from peace-keeping and conflict resolution efforts, numerous other ongoing regional cooperation initiatives aim at fostering regional peace, stability and prosperity (Erlor, 2009), yet they are quite ineffective in comparison with their objectives. As Manoli argues, the problem with regional cooperation is that it is often considered just from a policy perspective (2009a) and thus only rarely accompanied by proper instruments and – I would add – SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-related) objectives. This chapter provides an overview of the most important regional cooperation initiatives, their impact and prospects for development, against the background of similar cooperation initiatives in the Baltic Sea region (Northern Dimension) and in South-East Asia.

3.1 Analysis of the main cooperation initiatives

3.1.1 Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) (Turkish initiative)

On the ground of close historical, cultural and social ties, the BSR includes Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania,

Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and covers 20 mil. km² and a population of 350 mil. Babaoglu (2005) argued that the Black Sea security and stability architecture relies on two main pillars: BSEC and Blackseafor (on-call naval task force), both of which are Turkish initiatives and are based on the idea of constructing regional peace through regional cooperation. Initiated in 1992 as an informal intergovernmental meeting and transformed into an regional economic organisation on 1 May 1999, BSEC is the most important institution in the BSR, similar to ASEAN in South-East Asia or CBSS¹ in the Baltic area, using its soft power to strengthen regional economic interdependence and embed all relevant actors (12) in chains of interdependencies through a multilateral framework of about 33 distinct initiatives and action plans: Those are aimed at political and economic cooperation between member states in order to ensure peace, stability, prosperity and good-neighbourly relations in the BSR (BSEC, 2010). However, throughout the years, BSEC (headquarters: Istanbul) has failed to move beyond an exchange between the heterogeneous interests of the members and is as a result considered inefficient (Isic *et al*, 2008). During its almost two decades of existence, BSEC has undergone several transformations: after several years of existence, the organization had to redefine its objectives, and during the 10th Summit (2002) the Council of Foreign Ministers officially included the hard security field on the organization's agenda. However, this step did not lead to the much-desired change, because the BSEC members belong to different political and security organizations and have not always convergent security interests; so this led to a weak political engagement and a weak willingness to

create a proper and concrete framework for regional security in which Russia or Turkey would play an essential role (Garnet, 2007). On the other hand, as compared to other regional initiatives (NATO, OSCE), BSEC has not yet developed the instruments and mechanisms to act in the field of hard security. However, BSEC's structure is quite professional and includes the Parliamentary Assembly, a Council of Foreign Ministers, a Permanent Secretariat, an International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS, Athens) and a Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB, Thessaloniki), which should receive more political and financial support in its role as the only regionally owned development bank and be complemented by other IFI funds or funds from the ENPI and NIF. While its working structure is quite flexible (which is in fact good if it is do be adapted so as to support the BSS), its decision-making is based on numerous procedural rules, yet countries try to take decisions unanimously. However, one major problem concerning BSEC structure and mechanisms refers to the top-down view: the organization functions based on intergovernmental meetings, with few prospects for decision-making coming from other actors. On the other hand, this intergovernmental cooperation tries to encompass all strategic spheres of cooperation: energy, transport, communications, trade and economic development, banking and finance, institutional renewal and good governance, combating organised crime, environmental protection, agriculture, cooperation in healthcare issues, emergency assistance, research and development, education, tourism, culture, facilitation of transit and customs procedures, exchange of statistical data and the promotion of SMEs. On the negative side, BSEC could so far

¹ Council of the Baltic Sea States, political forum for regional inter-governmental cooperation in the Baltic area

only marginally address several of these issues (mainly transportation, environment, healthcare and culture issues) and – contrary to its nature, of economic organization – it has been so far less successful in promoting regional trade and economic convergence and setting-up a free trade area, although it covers an area with a population of 330 million, with rich natural and human resources, but also an attractive investment area (resources, transportation and shipment routes). Furthermore, it is actually impossible for the BSEC to have a free trade area, because the EU has a common trade policy and some BSEC member states are either accession candidates or actually EU MS. The major setback is that BSEC so far received less financial support from its members in general and Russia, in particular. Also, its second initial goal (create a cooperation process based on business interests) failed, especially because the private sector remained to a large extent outside the decision-making process (the above mentioned top-down view). Established in November 1992, the BSEC Working Group on Trade and Economic Development has considered a wide range of issues relating to the trade exchanges and economic cooperation, but its last meeting was held in February 2008 and rejected the idea of creating a preferential trade regime in the region (BSEC, 2010). This demonstrates that there is a clear need to further strengthen BSEC's business voice, with a view to promote a more result-oriented approach. On the other hand, paradoxically, by the creation of a working group to combat organized crime and deal with natural disasters (1998), one to deal with border controls and counterterrorism (2002) and a network of liaison-officers between the interior ministers (2004), BSEC de facto already exceeded its official status as a regional economic organization, undertaking tasks in the security field.

The main factors that so far impeded BSEC from reaching its objectives are: (1) the lack of a benevolent leader state, which can take upon itself a good part of its costs (Greece and Turkey play partially this role); (2) the existence of some unresolved hard security problems; (3) the avoidance of sensitive economic issues; (4) bureaucratization; (5) the consensual decision-making mechanism and (6) the lack of regional coordination with other initiatives and duplication of objectives. Summarizing, we could say that “thinking regionally has not become the highest priority for any Black Sea state” (Pavliuk & Klympush-Tsintsadze, 2004). Also, the attitudes of the BSR-states towards the region differ: while Russia and Turkey used it to keep regional power and retaining control (through the decision-making mechanism), for Romania, Bulgaria and even Ukraine it provided a tool for European integration and gaining some soft power. However, BSR countries will have to acknowledge that it is too early to formulate a coherent and cohesive strategy towards the BSR, yet it is possible to start a coordinated cooperation on “low-policy areas” such as environment, transportation and infrastructure, that bring less political stakes and where the benefits overcome the cooperation costs, as well as formulate short and medium-term action plans for their priority cooperation areas. Another suggestion would be that BSEC gets rid of its cooperation areas that did not bring much relevance and efficiency in the last decade and whose activities overlap with those of other, more credible, active and goal-efficient institutions and initiatives. The alternative will be that BSEC becomes a true “umbrella-organization” with different branches coordinated by the BSEC Secretariat and practically supported by other regional initiatives (CDC, BSF, etc.). Furthermore, BSEC should increasingly use the Black Sea Forum as a dialogue

platform for regional information and best-practice exchange, in order to increase transparency of regional incentives. The ministerial meeting from 2008 approved the introduction of the fast-track process, which effectively enables some members to opt out of BSEC policies. Several authors (Manoli, 2009 and Isic *et al*, 2008) suggested that BSEC should become the right-hand of the EU in BSR and that no other institution should be created for implementing the BSS objectives. The exact content of integration and institutional cooperation between the EU and BSEC recently began to be contoured, yet much must be done yet. For the Black Sea regionalism it is vital that BSEC develops a constructive and structured relationship with all regional and international actors, especially with EU and Russia.

3.1.2 The Black Sea Synergy (BSS) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) (EU initiatives)

The BSS from 2007 represents an intermediate step leading to a strategic EU vision for the BSR, by adding a multilateral view to the Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the strategic partnership with Russia and Turkey's accession negotiations. Despite its drawbacks, BSS has two main benefits: (1) it suggests key areas for regional cooperation and (2) stimulates reform in the regional countries in order to support stability and growth. Thus, the BSS is – to a certain extent – an initiative providing alignment with the EU *acquis* and thus engages the WBSR into an “Europeanisation process” (CBS, 2010b). Furthermore, by developing the BSS, the EU signalizes its will in order to become an important player in the region, without having control ambitions (soft-power approach). On the negative side, the BSS has been so far less successful in promoting concrete projects.

As compared to the BSS, the Eastern Partnership follows a more bi- and multilateral approach, characterized by flexibility, increased funding, differentiation, as well as concrete political backing from several countries, mainly Poland and Sweden (Tsantoulis, 2009). The EaP has set out to identify regionally owned priority projects right from the beginning, as for example concerning SME development. Through the development of three Sector Partnerships (environment, transport, energy), the BSS also tries to fill in the void of concrete shared fundable projects starting from 2010. The lack of success so far is a consequence of: (1) insufficient leadership capacities, (2) lack of administrative and financial resources (only 126 mil. euro allocated in 2007); meanwhile, the main EaP problem areas are the confusion about its bilateral and multilateral components, but also the fact that countries start from a different basis. Also, the two EU policies are badly coordinated: there is an overlap, especially in energy and visa issues. Both the EU and the US try to promote basic Western values such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights as problem-solving receipt; yet, some actors have a tendency to use political and military pressure (authoritarian practices) in their international relations (CBS, 2010c). Therefore, the BSS must be further supported and reinforced. The leading role in this matter will be held by Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, which are the coordinators (as ‘steering body’) of the Partnerships starting from 2010. Since BSEC is highly active in the area of environment protection, the recently launched Environment Partnership is a starting point for concrete meaningful cooperation between the two organizations. Some more Partnerships will probably follow, but this will be more a matter of

time and correct implementation of the Environment Partnership, in which Romania plays a leading and coordinating function.

3.1.3 Community of Democratic Choice (CDC) (Ukrainian and Georgian initiative)

Launched by Ukraine and Georgia in 2005, the CDC is an international organization and one of the most active regional initiatives in the field of democracy and human rights. Unfortunately, all Black Sea states suffer from high corruption rates, a weak civil society and a certain lack of political stability (Isic *et al*, 2008, p. 6). Looking at these challenges, certain policy objectives become clear, such as: strengthening state institutions, involving civil society, promoting the rule of law and ensuring dialogue between all Black Sea states in this policy area. Comprising nine states, the CDC membership goes beyond the WBSR, but it excludes Russia, which views this institution as an initiative aimed to undermine Moscow's influence, due mainly to its inception after the Orange and Rose revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia. However, the CDC's prerogatives are very similar to those of GUAM²: to provide cooperation, democratization and solutions for the regions' frozen conflicts. Unfortunately, this may weaken the effectiveness of both organizations. The first cooperation area proposed by BSS in 2007 was the promotion of "Democracy, respect for human rights and good governance", according to OSCE and Council of Europe standards; yet, the EU has so far been reluctant at politically supporting the CDC as the single most important democracy promoting instrument. This situation also needs to be addressed by the Black Sea policy in the very near future. On the other hand, on the

short term, Russia's lack of participation may provide more opportunities for the EU in promoting its European 'democratic' values. Giorgi Arveladze³ defined it as "an axis of democratic countries that do not wish to remain in Russia's orbit". A major setback for the CDC is however the fact that the so called "post-Soviet space" has never been geopolitically homogeneous, but also the lack of a clear organizational shape, even though at the CDC Vilnius conference (2006), member states signaled their wish to create a NGO, Intellectuals and Youth Forum, from which only the last took ultimate shape. The last CDC annual conference took place in May 2006.

3.1.4 The Baku Initiative and the Energy Community (EU-led initiatives)

Energy is mentioned in the BSS Paper as a fourth area of cooperation. In EU's opinion, the BSR is "an important component of the EU's external energy strategy" (European Commission, 2007, p. 4), with the main objective to provide a clear, transparent and non-discriminatory framework, in line with the *acquis*, for energy production, transport and transit. The Baku-Initiative is an EU policy aimed to promote energy transport infrastructure, launched in 2004, soon after the EU started paying more attention to energy not just in technical terms, but also in geopolitical and economic perspective. It promotes cooperation and legal harmonization in the field of energy and should provide an integration of all Caspian and Black Sea states in energy-related matters (Garnet, 2009). This way the EU tries to secure its share in the "energy-game". According to the BSS paper (2007), the Baku Initiative is a framework for enhancing cooperation in both the energy and transport fields and to

² Georgia, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Republic of Moldova.

³ Giorgi Arveladze is former Head of the presidential administration of Georgia.

stimulate progressive convergence towards EC principles. In the same time, another EU initiative, the Energy Community, provides a framework for SEE to cooperate on rebuilding its energy networks and support the integration into the internal EU energy market. It offers significant advantages both in terms of improved utilisation of existing supply and production capacities as well as optimising future investments, while extending the membership also to Ukraine and Moldova, countries that do not have EU accession prospects yet (Erlor, 2007). Therefore, the Baku Initiative and the Energy Community should work in a coordinated manner in order to assure the existence of identical market structures after the completion of the energy markets, and also create a legal framework covering producer, transit and consumer countries (Oettinger, 2010). Meanwhile, BSEC is also working since February 2010 towards steps that will eventually lead to the establishment of an integrated BS energy market. For the moment, a study will be conducted on the national legislations of the BS country in the energy sector, as well as supporting projects for sustainable energy development in the region. Attention should be therefore paid that these programs do not overlap and that BSEC concentrates more of funding smaller-scale projects, while the Energy Community and Baku Initiative provide more technical assistance. Together with other EU assistance instruments such as INOGATE, TRACECA, but also with collaboration with the BSEC Energy Working Group, the Baku Initiative could become the leading BSR instrument in addressing energy-related challenges that could fall into the category of energy cooperation.

3.1.5 The Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership (Romanian initiative)

Romania launched the Black Sea Forum in 2007 in order to promote multiple objectives such as: creating synergy between regional initiatives, reinforcing mutual trust, supporting regional projects, sharing information and experience between civil society and other stakeholders. It represents a complementary instrument and a framework for multidimensional interaction in the BSR, meant to generate a common and coherent vision on the BSR's future. Besides BSEC, the BSF is the only regional cooperation initiative mentioned by the EU in its BSS from 2007, the EC considering that "it could be particularly useful at the non-governmental, civil society level" (European Commission, 2007). Given its focus on regional partnerships and networks, the BSF could provide a continuous platform for idea exchange and networking among all regional initiatives. This way duplicity could be avoided, and all relevant actors informed about what is going on the region, on strategic, tactical and implementation level. The Forum is not meant to create new regional institutions, but rather to turn into a regular consultative process among countries of the WBSR. This Forum has however been almost inactive during the last two years. The main reason for this situation is the lack of political support, as well as the emergence of twin-initiatives.

3.2 Lessons from the Northern Dimension

In 2009 the EU launched the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. It is considered the beginning of a new way of working and thinking about cooperation in the EU, especially with non-members Russia and Norway (Barosso, 2010). This strategy

reaches behind EU's borders and aims to remove obstacles to cooperation on economic development, safety, transport and energy. Ten years before (1999), the EU launched the *Northern Dimension policy* and updated it in 2006 in order to become more comprehensive and to enable the creation of a real multilateral cooperation framework, as well as providing best practices of engaging both EU MS and external actors such as Norway, Iceland (future EU member) and Russia; simultaneously, it engages organizations and other local and sub-regional actors (CBSS, BEAC, AC, NCM, IFIs and NGOs), by concentrating on northwest Russia, Kaliningrad, the Baltic and the Barents Seas, the Arctic and Sub-Arctic areas. According to EC President Barosso, the Northern Dimension is now the most dynamic framework for cooperation, showing that equal partnership works. In 2006, a Policy Framework Document replaced the old system of Action Plans, thus increasing the consistency and coherence of the policy, by adding a co-ownership of this policy field, which thus no longer stayed EU-related, but inter-governmental (legal status), linking the ND to the four spaces of cooperation of the EU-Russian Partnership and viewing it as a common project, as well as by introducing four sector partnerships in the areas, as an effective way to organise practical implementation of projects in the agreed priority sectors, set up for 5 years: *environment, public health and social wellbeing, culture and transport, and logistics*. This structure was complemented by the establishment of a small secretariat for the ND Transport Partnership in June 2010. The EU allocated 15 million EUR (2010) for the initiatives in the 3 SP and is currently discussing with the EP a 20 million EUR reserve for initiatives that promote cooperation reflecting external aspects of EU's Strategy for the Baltic.

The BSR could draw significant lessons both from the institutional structure, as well as the "enmeshment" areas of the ND, which recently also started to apply concerning the BSS Policy, which was added in June 2010 an Environment Partnership (European Commission, 2010). In terms of policy formulation, the BS could propose a regional strategy that clearly defines: actors, objectives, on an operational level: key priority sectors and descriptions of their areas of activity and their support for project implementation, as well as concrete information on funding. Apart from the Sectoral Partnerships, a realistic number of themes and concrete projects in the agreed priority sectors with detailed financial and operational parameters can be approved at a meeting of Foreign Ministers or Senior Officials. While keeping in mind that big "package deals" (in terms of set objectives) are difficult to handle and to be accepted by all actors, a common meeting with all relevant stakeholders should be held and agreed on only 4-5 top priorities, which could be later on complemented by less urgent aspects, such as cultural and educational exchanges, which could be dealt with by regional and local initiatives, administrations and NGOs. BSEC and the EU as most important partner (observer) could jointly chair this meeting. The ND itself, while acknowledging around 10-12 general objectives, only comprises 6 priority sectors: economic cooperation, freedom, security and justice, external security (civil protection), environment, nuclear safety and natural resources, research, education and culture, health care and social welfare. Similar to the situation of BSEC, many of the Strategy's objectives are similar to the priorities of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, whose work in several areas (e.g. sustainable development) is highly relevant for the success of the strategy. Since the decision-making in all SP is consensus-

based, this also requires strengthened cooperation between all parties and a high level of mutual trust. I claim that this trust can be first learnt by cooperating on rather low-policy areas, while leaving high-politics, sensitive issues (security agenda, energy security issues) for later cooperation stages, while keeping in mind that institutions already exist (NATO, OSCE) dealing with large security problems.

4. Conclusions

In view of recent developments in the Black Sea region, considering Black Sea's role of both bridge and buffer between Europe and Asia, this paper provided a short overview of the existing regional cooperation framework and its current implications. It is clear that it is of utmost importance to promote peace as well as social, human and economic development in the BSR, security for all countries and confidence between them, resulting in deeper cooperation. Regional structures are vital prerequisites to solve regional problem areas. As shown in chapter 2, the regional order is currently multipolar, yet this does not automatically promotes stronger regional cooperation. Due to historical and cultural reasons, but also because of the communist legacy, the region's countries do not have much experience in practicing mutual trust, building strong bi- and multilateral relations and effective regional efforts. While participating in regional initiatives, they mainly promote their own initiatives and often compete for sub-regional (Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria) or regional leadership (Turkey, Russia). The location at the convergence point of Russian and European/Western geopolitical tectonic plates still contributes to the geopolitical jockeying of all countries, which will have to balance their interests, so as to simultaneously meet

EU, NATO and Russian expectations and still follow their own path of development. An overlap of regional actors, which rely more on their EU and NATO belonging than on own capabilities (RO, BG), regional powers (RUS, TRK) which follow different strategies (fear vs. soft-power building through cooperation), and global actors with mainly security-energy (USA/NATO) or energy-economic (EU) regional stakes, characterizes the BSR. As a rather politically constructed region, bound by risk and strategic relevance rather than by identity, BSR thus needs maintaining a regional balance of power, which would make the military and political domination of one country impossible. The BSR could draw lessons in this sense from SEA, with ASEAN and regional states managing to entangle the "dragons" (China and Japan) in complex interdependencies (institutional framework), while keeping US-hegemony incentives under control. Chapter 3 summarized the main institutional and policy-based cooperation framework in the BSR. While BSEC established formal institutionalisation with permanent secretariats and other organs, more "politicized", but flexible cooperation structures, thus less ambitious, such as the CDC, Baku Initiative or the BSF bring issues of security, energy, democratisation and civil society on the Black Sea agenda. As this analysis shows, aiming at political dialogue, these are less effective in engaging all relevant actors and in accomplishing their goals, while their success resumes to lobbying for setting the BSR on the EU political agenda and strengthening dialogue. Romania could still play a relevant role through promoting the Black Sea Forum, but, more important, by creating synergies with all relevant actors through the Environment Partnership of the Black Sea Synergy and by trying the much-needed rapprochement of Russia. The implications of this would be

a more peaceful and stability-based region. Currently, BSR regional cooperation clearly lacks sufficient leadership. I claim that this political drive should be provided rather by an organization with strong political backup, such as BSEC, than from a country. Also, this paper argues that a possible strategic solution for successful regional cooperation initiatives lies in the creation of a single integrated regional cooperation package, functioning on the principles of multi-speed cooperation and multi-dimensional development in several policy fields, constructed along sectoral lines, with a particular focus on regional public goods, which do not affect sovereignty issues. Therefore, considering a view based on comparative advantages analysis, the Black Sea cooperation framework should concentrate on four main

pillars: economy (incl. energy and transport), environment, good governance and security. These could be supported by the existing institutional framework. The Northern Dimension could provide a particular model for structuring the sector partnerships policy.

Keeping in mind that the present paper sets the basis for a more comprehensive analysis within a master thesis, the author suggests that future research concentrates more on developing a framework (i.e. criteria) for qualitative assessment of the cooperation initiatives, and that provides possible scenarios on how the regional cooperation architecture could look on a medium to long-term perspective, and how it could be designed to engage all relevant actors.

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Appendix:

Table 1: The most significant regional cooperation initiatives in the Black Sea region

| Organization | Year | Objectives | Strategy | Members | Initiator | Funding |
|---|---------------------------|--|---|---|--------------------------|--|
| <p>Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)</p> <p>regional organization Inter-governmental</p> | 1992/ IO since 1999 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -cooperation based on business interests - improving the business environment and promoting individual and collective initiative of the enterprises and companies, develop economic collaborations - encompass all strategic spheres of cooperation: energy, transport | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unanimous decisions Flexible structure 33 issues No common strategy No clear vision | <p>12 states Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine. EC, USA as observers, among 10 other observers</p> | Turkey (HQ: Istanbul) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - financial contributions from the member states - Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), Thesaloniki - Limited resources -Distinction from EU: EU focuses more on cross border cooperation, while BSEC on intergovernmental |
| <p>Black Sea Commission (BSC)</p> <p>inter-governmental organization</p> | 1992 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -protection of the BS against pollution -sustainable marine management -sustainable human development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental protection Implementation of the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution | <p>Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine EU as direct partner</p> | Turkey | National funding organizations |
| <p>Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership</p> <p>Regional platform for dialogue</p> | 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Promote good governance, civil society, empower youth, involve the business community, best practice and experience exchange, crisis management, civil emergency planning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a platform for regional dialogue and experience sharing | <p>Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine, Russia EU as partner</p> | Romania | <p>Romanian funds Not very clear</p> |

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| | | | | | | |
|--|------|--|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Community of Democratic Choice (CDC)</p> <p>international organization</p> | 2005 | <p>-promote democracy and human rights in the region between the three sees (Baltic, Black and Caspian)</p> | | <p>Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovenia Ukraine EU, USA as observers</p> | <p>Georgia, Ukraine (Kiev)</p> | <p>Public and private sources, not very clear</p> |
| <p>Black Sea Synergy (BSS)</p> <p>EU regional policy</p> | 2007 | <p>- democratic and economic reforms -support stability and promote development - focus on practical projects in areas of common concern - coordinated action in a regional framework - solutions of conflicts in the region</p> | <p>concrete initiatives in 13 cooperation areas transport, energy, environment, maritime management, fisheries, migration, fight against organised crime, information society cultural cooperation.</p> | <p>EU members, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine</p> | <p>EU</p> | <p>- co-financing principle - financial support available under the national, regional and cross-border programmes - ENPI, other external assistance instruments and, -for EU MS EBRD, EIB, BSTDB</p> |
| <p>Baku Initiative</p> <p>Energy policy dialogue</p> | 2004 | <p>- progressive integration of the energy markets of BSR and CSR into the EU markets; - energy markets harmonization - transportation of energy resources to EU</p> | | <p>Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan</p> | <p>EU</p> | <p>Other existing financing instruments INOGATE Secretariat provides the coordination mechanism</p> |
| <p>Commission on the Black Sea</p> | | <p>-provide policy-oriented research on the challenges and opportunities of the Black Sea region - suggest ways to secure its peace and prosperity</p> | <p>- civil society initiative</p> | | <p>The International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) Black Sea Trust (BST) Bertelsmann Stiftung</p> | |

Source: own representation.