



A Synergy for Black Sea Regional Cooperation: Guidelines for an EU Initiative

Fabrizio Tassinari

Abstract

This study advocates that the EU support a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder initiative to achieve synergy from regional cooperation in the wider Black Sea area. The background for this initiative is first provided through an overview of the challenges, recent developments and EU interests in this region. Different models of regionalism have been promoted by the EU in the European periphery, and these are schematised with a focus on their respective advantages and disadvantages. Finally guidelines for an EU initiative are set out under: 1) objectives and sector-specific actions, 2) its scope in terms of variable geographic geometries of desirable cooperation in the region and 3) a Framework of institutional and financial arrangements to support the process. An overarching mechanism is required to give political cohesion, ownership, visibility and strategic purpose to the process, and this could well be based on an annual, high-level meeting, drawing on the model of the Black Sea Forum Summit in Bucharest on 5 June 2006.

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1. The Puzzle

The Black Sea Region is emerging as a decisive crossroads for the future of the Wider Europe. Given the prominent list of regional players, the Black Sea crossroads is primarily of a geo-strategic nature. In this area converge Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, the Eastern Balkans, and the Caucasus. The region brings together some of the most important challenges that shape the security of today and tomorrow's Europe: from illegal migration to environmental degradation; from the security of energy supplies to illicit trafficking of drugs and weapons, to 'frozen conflicts'. Of no less importance is that the Black Sea is a civilisational crossroads, at the confluence of Orthodox, Muslim and, increasingly so, Western political and societal cultures.

Regional cooperation has emerged but not thrived. Black Sea actors have been preoccupied by tangible issues challenging vital national interests – from the open conflicts in Russia's volatile North Caucasus to the 'frozen conflicts' of the South Caucasus and Moldova – more than by the fuzzy prospects of an elusive regional cooperation model. Outstanding bilateral issues – between Turkey and Armenia or Greece, and between Russia and other former Soviet states – have also prevented Black Sea countries from elaborating bold regional plans.

As a result, the limited pan-Black Sea cooperation has focused mainly on 'soft', non-military activities. This is exemplified by the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation (BSEC), established in 1992. BSEC has proved to be a confidence-building forum for discussion of common interests. Over the years, however, the deficiencies of this institution have become increasingly patent, with over-bureaucratisation and some tense bilateral relationships among the causes behind BSEC poor performance.

Black Sea regional interdependence is nevertheless in flux and is emerging as a major focal point in Europe's ongoing transformation. The paramount reason for this is the gradual geographic (and ideational) advancement of the Euro-Atlantic community in the region, which is resisted by Russia's efforts to retain its traditional influence. After fifteen years of transition culminating in the EU and NATO's enlargements into Central and Eastern Europe, this evolution reached another remarkable peak with the 2003-2005 'colour revolutions', which brought to power democratic, reform-minded and western-leaning administrations in Georgia and Ukraine. Moreover, the EU has also opened accession negotiations with Turkey in 2005 and Bulgaria and Romania are set to accede to the Union in 2008 at the latest.

Four more recent developments bring further evidence of the rising importance of the Black Sea region. First, in August 2005, Ukraine and Georgia signed the so-called 'Borjomi Declaration'. This resulted in the creation of the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC) in December of the same year, which aims at ending "remaining divisions in the [Baltic-Black Sea] region, human rights violations, and any type of confrontation, or frozen conflict".¹ In the CDC, the two countries are joined by Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Moldova, Slovenia and Macedonia, which met most recently in Vilnius in May 2006.

¹ "Ukraine: Regional Leaders Set Up Community of Democratic Choice" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 2 December 2005.

Second, the year 2006 was opened by the infamous energy-related crisis between Russia and Ukraine, and also Russia's trade sanctions against Georgia and Moldova. These were not isolated incidents, and are to be inscribed in a more complex geopolitical context, which includes the pro-European stance of a number of former-Soviet states, Russia's increasingly assertive posture towards them and Europe's increasing energy dependence on Russia.

Third is the revival of the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) initiative. In the 1990s, this semi-dormant US-backed organisation seemed unlikely to overcome Russian opposition. However, following the Rose and Orange revolutions, and pro-European shift in the foreign policy orientation of Moldova, GUAM was restyled as the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (ODED-GUAM) at a Kyiv summit on 23 May 2006. The ODED-GUAM espouses multiple objectives, with priority for energy security across the Caspian-Caucasus-Black Sea axis, and a free trade area among the member states, as well as democracy promotion.

Fourth, Romania has long been advocating the need for a more coordinated and high-profile regional initiative in the Black Sea. Under President Traian Basescu, this idea has taken a more concrete shape, with the launching of a Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership at a Summit in Bucharest in June 2006.

Against this background, how may one assess the EU's engagement in the Black Sea? In this region there are as many as three EU policies: the enlargement process towards South-Eastern Europe and Turkey, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which embraces Ukraine, Moldova, and the three South Caucasus states, and the EU-Russia relationship which aims now at a 'strategic partnership'.²

These initiatives, however, offer only a partial picture. When dealing with threats and challenges of a *transnational* nature in fields such as migration, crime prevention, infrastructures or pollution, *bilateral* mechanisms are effective only to a limited extent. Admittedly, each of these three processes incorporate broader regional considerations, to the extent that the European Commission encourages partners to engage in existing regional formats or to comply with the obligations imposed by the various multilateral arrangements in the UN, Council of Europe, or OSCE. Moreover, the EU has sponsored some Black Sea regional programmes in a few fields such as environment, transport and energy, as will be more thoroughly discussed below.

Yet, what this impressive range of instruments lacks is a strategic or holistic approach. There may be several reasons for this, such as the widespread feeling of 'overstretch' which followed the 2004 enlargement, a deferential approach to Russia by some member states in a region that Moscow calls its 'near abroad', and – unlike the Baltic or Mediterranean Seas – the absence of a 'Brussels lobby' pushing for the Black Sea.

On the other hand, there are just as many reasons to argue why the EU should think more systematically about this region. With Romania and Bulgaria's accession, the EU will enlarge to the Black Sea shores and will need to provide itself with a long-term perspective in a region that is vital to its security and foreign policy ambitions. In addition, Russia's assertiveness vis-à-vis some countries in the region is bound to impact on some strategic interests of the enlarged Union.

More pragmatically, the very existence of many overlapping regional initiatives has produced the result of dispersing resources and blurring the image of the emerging Black Sea region. Especially in view of the launching of the ENP, the EU has now the opportunity to contribute to systematising and reinvigorating what has been built over the past decade. This study addresses how that could be done.

² See Marius Vahl, "The EU and Black Sea Regional Cooperation: Some Challenges for BSEC", *CEPS Commentary*, 15 April 2005.

2. Models of Euro-regionalism

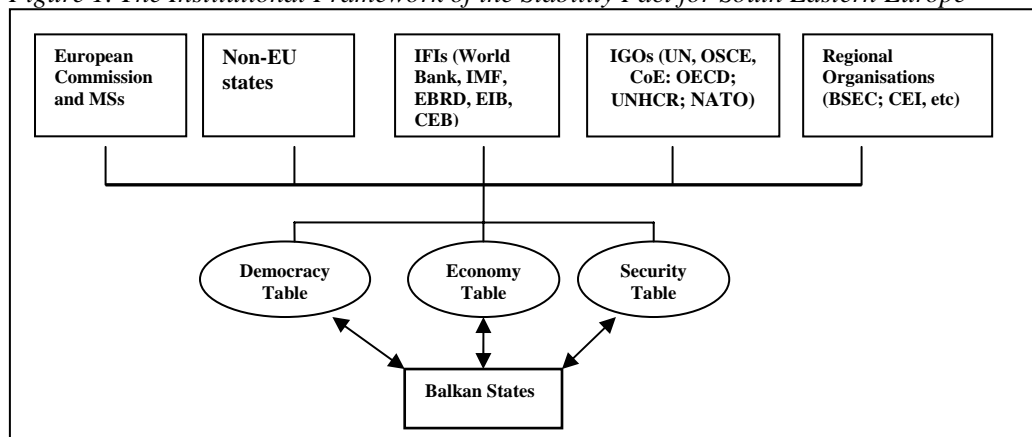
The EU is not new to launching or promoting regional initiatives in its periphery. The promotion of regional cooperation can be regarded as a logical extension of the European integration rationale of pooling resources, coordinating action, and building confidence through enhancing transnational cooperation.³

This notwithstanding, the way in which the EU has promoted regionalism has varied greatly depending on specific circumstances and on the typology of actors present in each region. Schematically, two regional models can be identified: an outside-in model and an inside-out one.

2.1 Outside-in Model

The first pattern is where the EU support has launched and managed regional initiatives. This has been the case for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. In these cases no regional mechanism pre-existed and the EU has carried out most of the strategic, conceptual and managerial bulk of the work.

Figure 1. The Institutional Framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe



As showed in Figure 1 above, the Stability Pact is shared with several other categories of actors: a number of non-EU states (Canada, Japan, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, Turkey and the US); the international financial institutions and other UN agencies, and various regional organisations (e.g. the BSEC, the South East European Cooperative Initiative, etc.). The Stability Pact is organised under three ‘tables’: democracy, economy and security, and functions alongside the EU’s bilateral Stability and Association Agreements with individual Western Balkan countries.⁴

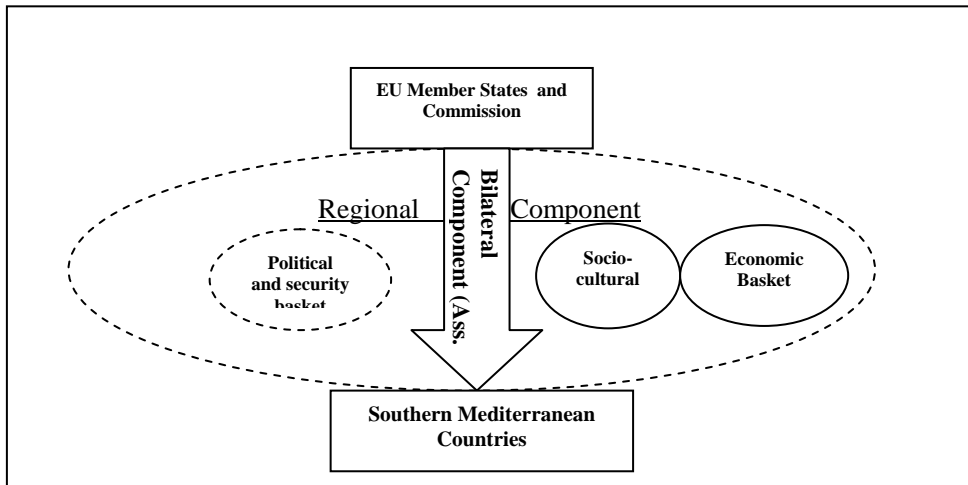
In the Barcelona process (figure 2), the outside-in dynamic is even more clear-cut. The regional dimension is characterised also by three sections (‘baskets’): one on politics and security; one on society and culture and a third one on the economy.⁵ The bilateral dimension is established in Association Agreements with the individual partner states.

³ See Karen Smith, *European Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, Cambridge: Polity, 2003, p. 83 ff.

⁴ An embryonic form of home-grown Balkan regionalism has also been emerging over the past few years: this is the case in the South-Eastern Europe Cooperation Process since 2001, grouping Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, FYR Macedonia, Romania, Serbia-Montenegro and Turkey.

⁵ Figures 2 and 3 are schematisations which aim to underline the overall outside-in rationale of more complex institutional mechanisms. The Stability Pact, for example, is also characterised by a plethora and expert groups and task forces, while both the bilateral and multilateral dimensions of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership are more articulated. For a more comprehensive description of these two frameworks see: www.stabilitypact.org and Eric Philippart “The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: Unique Features, First Results and Future Challenges” *CEPS Middle East Working Papers* n. 10, 2003.

Figure 2. The Institutional Framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership



While the comparison of the Stability Pact and the Barcelona has some obvious limits, both relate to conflicts. The Stability Pact emerged in the wake of the Kosovo war, Europe's most dramatic conflict since WW2, and had to confront serious problems of trust between various states of the region. The Mediterranean partnership has had to confront the challenges posed by the Middle East conflict and by the heterogeneity of the region spanning from Morocco to Jordan.

These differences notwithstanding, there are two distinctive features in common. On the one hand, in both cases the EU has been the motor of the regional cooperation, defining priorities and the scope of cooperation. By bringing the region into the centre of the European agenda, the EU has obliged its member states to address its challenges.

On the other hand, outside-in regionalism has limited the 'joint ownership' of the process. Instead of empowering Southern Mediterranean and Balkan partners, this centralisation has rendered these countries rather 'passive' actors, if not openly opposed to the regional process. In the Mediterranean, the EU has mixed an inclusive rhetoric of common values and interests, with policies that highlight the risks coming from Europe's southern flank - migration, trafficking, terrorism. In the Stability Pact, the countries that have performed better and more effectively in accomplishing their major foreign policy goals, like in the cases of Slovenia (a new EU Member State) and, more recently Croatia, are those for which the Stability Pact has meant least.⁶

2.2 Inside-out Model

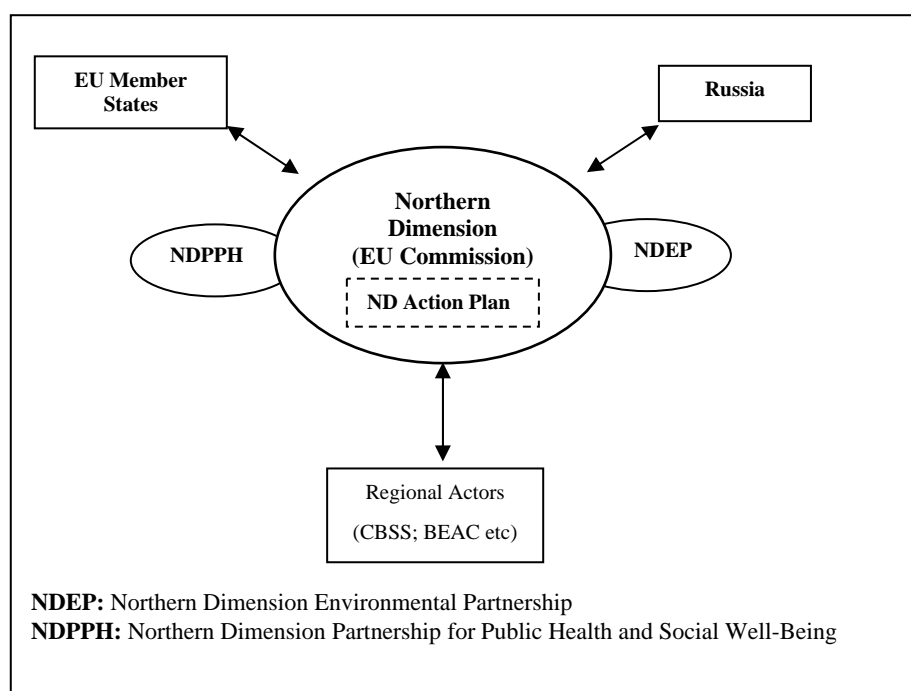
When the EU approached regions like the Baltic or Barents Sea, it found established practices of regional cooperation already up and running: at the non-governmental, business and sub-national levels (e.g. the Union of the Baltic Cities, the Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce etc.), and at the level of intergovernmental cooperation (e.g. the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation). The fact that these regional initiatives were formed by local actors has had advantages and disadvantages for the EU. On the one hand, inside-out regionalism has gives Brussels time and opportunity to calibrate its role in, and support for, the region. On the other hand, the existence of a caucus of regional actors acting through regional institutions has made the region not only a forum of cooperation, but also a counterpart, with its own agendas and goals that have in some instances complicated the EU goals in the region.

⁶ The current EU Commission's plan for a free trade zone in the Balkans is facing strenuous opposition from some countries in the Balkans, particularly Croatia (see "Barroso to Push for Regional Trade Pact" in *European Voice*, 23-29 March 2006).

A case in point is the Northern Dimension Initiative (NDI), which was launched by Finland and adopted by the EU in 2000. As schematised in figure 3 below, the NDI is an initiative now managed by the European Commission through an Action Plan (the second one is currently running and due to expire in 2006), in which EU member states and third countries are equal partners in the cooperation. The bulk of the NDI financing over the past 6 years has come from EU assistance programmes such as PHARE, INTERREG, and TACIS. Regional institutions such as the CBSS and the BEAC have also been included in the NDI process.

The NDI has been a breakthrough in the methods of EU foreign policy, given its inside-out model and equal partnership of EU member states, candidate states and Russia. This owes much to the pre-existing formats of regional cooperation involving all states and regions. However when Poland and the three Baltic states approached accession the NDI saw an increasing focus on Russia as the only third country in the region. Indeed there is now a feeling is that the policy is sandwiched geographically and conceptually between the EU-Russia strategic partnership and the ENP, and struggles to find a meaningful niche.

Figure 3. *the Northern Dimension Institutional Framework*



In addition the existence of Baltic and Barents regional institutions and of a 'generous' Scandinavian core has often made coordination of regional activities with the EU rather complicated, leading to calls for streamlining of the cooperation. However these calls have led to the creation of two mechanisms, the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership and the Northern Dimension Partnership for Public Health and Social Well-Being, in which regional actors, donors and IFIs have joined forces and pooled resources on an agreed set of priorities.

3. Guidelines for an EU Initiative

The strengths and weaknesses of these several regional experiences provide some guidance for a possible EU initiative in the Black Sea.

From the Northern Dimension, an EU initiative for the Black Sea should draw on the 'joint ownership' factor, and solicit the commitment of local players and other major stakeholders

operating in the region. On the other hand, an EU initiative should be warned by weaknesses of the NDI: its excessive focus on Russia, lack of financing, and an initial overlapping of activities and lack of coordination. The Stability Pact, on the other hand, has been more successful in pooling and coordinating the efforts of the international community and in ‘branding’ the region as a priority for Europe. As to the Barcelona process, while all its operational mechanisms can hardly serve as a model for the Black Sea, one should not underestimate the process of dialogue and confidence-building in the evolution of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Moreover, an EU initiative for the Black Sea should avoid incurring in the kind of alienation of regional actors and critique of ‘imposing’ a strategy from the outside, which has tainted both the Stability Pact and the Barcelona Process.

It is suggested that an EU initiative should focus on promoting a multi-stakeholder, comprehensive regional synergy⁷ in the Black Sea, as now set out in some detail.

3.1 Priority sectors

A Black Sea synergy should be confined to those sectors that have a truly regional character. Many Black Sea regional initiatives so far have been characterised by long and vague lists of ‘priorities’ for action, with none turning out to be an actual priority. It is proposed therefore to concentrate on five sectors: environment, transport, energy, internal security and democracy promotion. For each of these five sectors existing regional initiatives and priorities for a Black Sea synergy are now reviewed.

Environment

In this sector, Black Sea cooperation has already achieved a high degree of institutionalisation, which over the years has been enriched by various new programmes and mechanisms: a Commission for the Protection of the Black Sea (based on the Bucharest Convention) with a secretariat in Istanbul, in which all six Black Sea littoral states are represented; a Black Sea Environmental Programme financed by the UN Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the EU and several donor countries; and a Black Sea Strategic Action Plan (BS-SAP) adopted by the six coastal states.⁸ In 2001 European Commission launched in 2001 the DABLAS Taskforce, precisely to provide regional environmental cooperation of a more precise direction and effective coordination. DABLAS aims to coordinate the actions of the Black Sea and Danube Commissions, Black Sea and Danube countries, bilateral donors, and international financial institutions: EBRD, EIB, and World Bank.⁹

Black Sea environmental cooperation as a result, however, has numerous priorities reiterated in documents and declaration, but no unified and workable agenda for implementation.

So far, the work of DABLAS has been primarily directed to implementing some 30 projects related to the EU Commission Water Framework Directive. A sensible goal for a Black Sea synergy should now be to integrate the comprehensive inter-sectoral approach of the Black Sea Commission (and of the BS-SAP therein) with the more effective implementation method of DABLAS. In other words, one goal should be to work on *harmonising the DABLAS managerial model with the inter-sectoral BS-SAP approach* and to contribute in this way to translate the BS-SAP into actual projects.

⁷ The term ‘synergy’ was originally used in the only European Commission’s Communication on *Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea: State of the Play, Perspectives for EU Action Encouraging its Further Development*, Brussels, 1997, pp. 12-13.

⁸ For a comprehensive analysis of these mechanisms see Lawrence Mee: “Protecting the Black Sea Environment: a Challenge for Cooperation and Sustainable Development in Europe” in Michael Emerson et al. *Europe’s Black Sea Dimension*, CEPS, 2002.

⁹ See the DABLAS Task Force webpage at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/enlarg/dablas/index_en.htm

A second environmental priority regards the *fishery sector*, which poses a number of important environmental and economic challenges to which only a committed action of all the littoral states can provide answers. The state of the play in this field looks rather bleak. Romania and Bulgaria have accepted the Common Fisheries Policy *acquis*, which will apply from the day of their accession to the EU. Yet, there is at present no bilateral fishery agreement among Black Sea neighbours and no comprehensive assessment of the Black Sea fishery stocks. Moreover, a Black Sea Fishery Convention has been drafted for the six littoral countries but negotiations have not been progressing for some years now.

From a pragmatic perspective, rather than promoting this convention-in-the-making, it is preferable to support implementation of the existing General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean established under the aegis of the Food and Agriculture Organisation. This Commission has its responsibilities extended also to the Black Sea and interconnecting waters and its membership includes, besides the Mediterranean states, also Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and the EC. In view of the forthcoming EU enlargement towards Bulgaria and Romania, twinning and joint research activities already ongoing in the GFCM context should be gradually expanded to the Black Sea.

Transport

The effectiveness of the transport sector in the Black Sea area is hindered by a plethora of factors: from road safety to blockages and security of routes in conflict-ridden zones. A transport strategy for the region should be carved out of three initiatives and processes currently under way. The first, in chronological terms, is the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA), which was launched in 1993 and now covers 14 central Black Sea and Central Asian countries, all of which, except from Turkmenistan and Mongolia, signed a Multilateral Agreement.

Second, the European Commission initiated a process which is known as the *Baku Process*, from the location of a conference in November 2004, in which Black Sea and Caspian Sea representatives gathered to discuss transport issues in the region. The meeting produced a Concept Paper in which TRACECA is identified as the “co-ordination mechanism to develop and strengthen transport co-operation”¹⁰.

Third, there is the work undertaken by the High Level Group of Experts from the EU25 plus 27 neighbouring countries on the extension of the Trans-European Networks to the neighbours. The High Level Group addresses five major transnational axes in the entire European neighbourhood. The Black Sea is sandwiched between two of these: the ‘Central Axis’ including the Northern Black Sea (linking Central Europe to Ukraine) and the ‘South-Eastern Axis’ including the Southern Black Sea (linking the Balkans; Turkey; Caucasus and Caspian).¹¹

Drawing on these existing processes, three regional priorities for Black Sea strategy in the transport field can be identified:

- *Infrastructures*: future regional investments should be consistent with the projects identified by the High Level Group for the Central and South-Eastern Axes.
- *Interoperability*: this refers primarily to the approximation of standards and, more generally, to the lowering non-physical barrier to transports (customs controls and procedures; delays in ports; consignment notes for rail transport).
- *Intermodality*: this refers to the need to facilitate transfers from one mode of transport to another (road-rail-sea), and involves feasibility studies and investment in multimodal logistics.

¹⁰ Experts’ Working Group Baku Ministerial Conference *Concept Paper on Transport Co-operation between the EU, the Black Sea /Caspian Littoral States and their Neighbouring Countries*, 2004.

¹¹ The Black Sea is also included in the ‘Motorways of the Seas’ concept, a transnational axis linking the Baltic, Barents, Atlantic Mediterranean, Black and the Caspian Sea areas. See European Commission: *Networks for Peace and Development: Report High Level Group Chaired by Loyola de Palacio*, Brussels, November 2005.

Energy

Energy is the sector in the Black Sea Region where the geo-strategic implications for the EU are most visible and urgent. The EU is notoriously dependent on oil and gas imports from Russia, the Middle East and North Africa, up to an estimated 70% of its total supply by the year 2030. The Black Sea is a crucial transit area since about half of Europe's energy imports are expected to cross the region in coming the years.¹²

Most Black Sea states have major stakes in the energy sector, from Russia's huge production and transit interests, to Turkey's ambition to become Europe's fourth energy supply 'artery', to Georgia, Romania and Ukraine's roles in oil and gas transits.

Although EU energy relations with its neighbours have primarily a bilateral nature, a regional approach has been timidly fostered over the past decade. The Interstate Oil and gas to Europe (INOGATE) has provided an institutional umbrella agreement for 21 countries which has been operational, although not very effectively, since 2001. Like in the transport sector, the Baku process initiated by the Commission groups Black Sea and Caspian Sea countries (with the participation of EBRD as an observer) and acknowledges the role of INOGATE as the coordination mechanism for supporting enhanced cooperation in the field of energy.

Unfortunately, as some analyst has been quick to point out,¹³ the long-awaited Commission's Green Paper on energy of March 2006¹⁴ adds very little on the role of the Black Sea Region in the EU energy strategy. The political sensitivity of energy questions may have made the Commission somewhat reluctant from taking a bolder stand at this stage. On the other hand, a more pronounced assertiveness towards Moscow seems to have emerged after the energy-related incidents of early 2006, as confirmed by the current discussion in the G8 context on Russia's ratification of the Energy Charter and of its Transit Protocol.

This assertiveness should now be translated into deeds also at the regional level. A Black Sea synergy in the energy sector should logically be driven by the need to *diversify gas and oil transit* from Russia-dominated routes. At the Black Sea regional level, the Commission should muster both the diplomatic and technical support to finance and implement transit projects strengthening diversification.¹⁵

In the case of oil transit, there are the currently underexploited routes leading to Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. One of the most attractive projects is the extension of the Odessa-Brody pipeline through Poland to the West and by sea and pipeline through to Kazakhstan to the East. Another project deserving support is the proposed Constanta-Adriatic pipeline, for which an implementation agreement was signed in February 2006.¹⁶

As far as gas transit is concerned, the EU supports the Nabucco pipeline project, which would transport gas from the Caspian Sea through Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania, to reach Austria and, possibly, other Central European countries. However there are a number of uncertainties surrounding this project, including the adequacy of supplies and even the level of energy demand in South-

¹² See Marius Vahl and Sergiu Celac "Elements for an EU Strategy towards the Black Sea Region", paper unpublished, p. 16

¹³ Vladimir Socor: "European Union's Energy Paper: a Muffled Call to a Slow Wake up" in *Euroasia Daily Monitor*, 27 March 2006.

¹⁴ European Commission: "A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive, and Secure Energy, Green Paper, Brussels, march 2006.

¹⁵ Here environmental considerations adds up to geo-politics, in consideration of the strains which oil-tankers put on the overcrowded Bosphorous straits.

¹⁶ See Romanian National News Agency "Constanta-Trieste Oil Pipeline is approved" at Romanian MFA Webpage <http://crib.mae.ro/index.php?lang=en&id=31&s=5851&arhiva=true>

Eastern Europe given long-term agreements signed by several countries with Russia.¹⁷ The Nabucco project would depend on additional gas diversification options, such as the expansion of the Shah Deniz (Azerbaijan)-Tbilisi-Erzurum (Turkey) pipeline.

Internal Security

The sector here broadly defined as ‘internal security’ includes a range of issues, including migration, trafficking, border management etc.¹⁸ The EU does not so far have major regional initiatives focusing on this field. However by way of bilateral initiatives the ENP Action Plans for Moldova and Ukraine have both a significant section on Justice and Home Affairs. In the Ukrainian case, a very advanced EU JHA Action Plan is in place already since 2001. Similar content may be expected in the forthcoming ENP Action Plans for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. When these five Action Plans are completed it would be opportune to consider the scope for an enhanced regional aspect. The Action Plans do make frequent references to existing multilateral mechanisms, such as the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings or the Council of Europe Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), both of which include many Black Sea countries.

As to regional government-driven initiatives, two relevant BSEC agreements on organised crime (since 1998) and on emergency assistance and emergency response to natural and man-made disasters (since 2003) have been signed. Romania has played a leading role in other regional endeavours in this field, such as the South Eastern Cooperative Initiative (SECI) on prevention and combating trans-border crime.

In view of these initiatives, a broadly defined *crime prevention* focus looks like a feasible priority for a Black Sea regional cooperative initiative. This could concentrate on:

- *Exchange of information* among relevant agencies in the littoral states and in the EU (border guards, police, migration departments; tax authorities);
- *Strategic assessments* on organised crime networks in the region;
- Establishment of *region-wide standard* for storing, sharing and communicating data and intelligence.¹⁹

Democracy

Questions pertaining to human rights protection, rule of law, media freedom and transparent economic governance rank high in the ENP action plan not to mention, of course, the enlargement negotiations with Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. BSEC has made of good governance and ‘institutional renewal’ a feature in its ministerial declarations and long-term planning. Over the past few years, moreover, the organisation has even convened brainstorming sessions on these matters with the participation of European Commission and Member States. Yet, the degree of regional cooperation at the BSEC level has so far been lukewarm, even with the existence of the Black Sea Parliamentary Assembly. At this level a fundamental problem is Russia’s regress towards a less democratic state under the present Putin administration.

On the other hand, the Rose and Orange Revolutions of Georgia and Ukraine have led to the emergence of a serious ‘democracy club’ within the region, as confirmed by the formation of the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC) and of the new ODED-GUAM.

¹⁷ See for instance: Agata Loskot Strachota ‘Russia’s Response to the Nabucco Pipeline Project’ 16 March 2006 available at <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1603076/posts>.

¹⁸ Interview with the author at the European Commission.

¹⁹ These points were developed by Liviu Muresan at a NATO workshop in Bansko, Bulgaria in April 2006.

A Black Sea synergy in democratic institutions and good governance should take stock of those experiences where high-level political commitment is emerging and contribute to give it substance. There has been one proposal for a *CDC democracy review process*²⁰. This would be based on annual sessions in which the state of democratic governance in each CDC state would be reviewed on the basis of an independent review document by its partner countries, independent scholars, NGOs, and observers from the European Commission, interested EU Member States, the Council of Europe and the US.

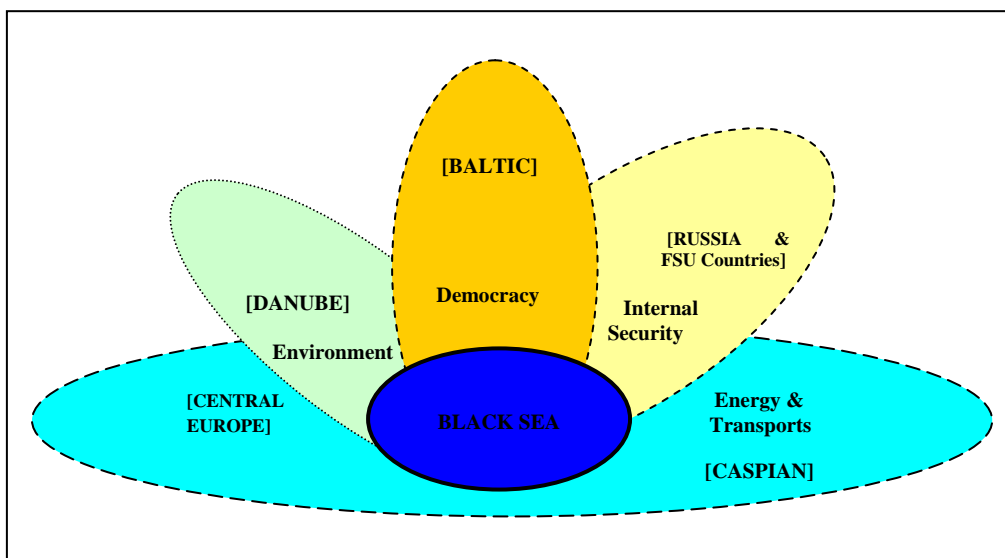
The selection of real priorities means being clear on what are the non-priorities for cooperative work at the Black Sea regional level. Three examples are suggested, all of which are of the highest importance in their own right, but for which the Black Sea regional format is not best locus for fresh efforts:

- *Conflict resolution and hard security issues.* There are of course important so-called frozen conflicts whose resolution would help the whole region progress economically and politically, but it is not plausible to suggest that some regional forum might take on mediation functions that might do other than ongoing efforts of OSCE, UN and the major powers.
- *Trade policy.* Important initiatives such as regional free trade have been discussed, for example in BSEC, but where Black Sea states are a mix of EU member states and non-members regional free trade is not possible, unless all non-EU states agree together to free trade with the EU
- *Education and culture.* The regional specificity is not evident.

3.2 Variable Geometries

Variable geometry means having different geographic maps for different sectoral initiatives, but with a core group nonetheless consisting of Black Sea littoral states. However, as evident for the discussion above of priority sectors, there are clear functional needs in some cases to extend the map wider. This is schematised in Figure 4 below, where each sectors is indeed characterised by a specific map of geographic interdependence.

Figure 4. *The Variable Geometries of the Wider Black Sea Region (*)*



(*) Thanks are due to Michael Emerson for suggesting this figure.

²⁰ Emerson, Michael: "What Should the Community of Democratic Choice do?" *CEPS Policy Brief* No. 99, 2006.

In the *environmental* case, Black Sea cooperation is defined by the broader catchment area, which includes the tributaries to the Sea, primarily the Danube, but also the Dniepr and the Don. These are Europe's second, third and fourth longest rivers and major sources of land-based pollution in the Black Sea. Any form of coordinated work on the Black Sea environment has to be concerned with the impact on these rivers on the Sea's ecosystem. This is currently done in the DABLAS initiative, which includes the Danube, and could be a model mechanism to lead a Black Sea environmental programme.

In the *transport* and, most importantly, the *energy* sectors, the mapping of Black Sea regionalism has to account for geopolitical considerations. In both cases, the Black Sea is an East-West corridor connecting Central Asia and the Caspian with Continental Europe, and any proposal for strengthening cooperation should be inscribed within this broader scope. But the Black Sea is also a North-South corridor, as illustrated by the undersea Blue Stream gas pipeline that links Russia with Turkey. There is manifest competition between these two axes, which has geo-political as well as technical aspects. An optimal solution would see multiple routes that can compete under ordered economic rules, such as provided by the Energy Charter Treaty. If on the other hand Russia insists on trying to maximise its monopolistic position, then the EU and other energy importing or transit states will naturally want to work together to develop alternatives.

Russia's reserves over cooperating with schemes that it does not lead are illustrated by its absence from the *TRACECA* nor *INOGATE* programmes and its observer status (and a rather critical one) in the *Baku processes*.

The *internal security* activity would include all littoral countries, together with those former Soviet Union countries that are sources or transit countries of trafficking of weapons, drugs and human beings and other illegal activities (Azerbaijan and Central Asian states). However this internal security sphere would have to comprehend coordination of law enforcement and intelligence agencies between Black Sea countries and the EU and Western bodies (e.g. Interpol, Europol). *BSEC* could be favoured to lead the operational activities in this sector because of its comprehensive membership and several agreements already being signed on these matters among the member states.

In the *democratic institutions* field, the most active Black Sea states are Ukraine and Georgia, but their initiatives have stretched North-West to include the Baltic states in order to anchor democratic transformation on the wider Euro-Atlantic institutional system. In this context, the experience of countries that underwent a similar transition, such as the new EU and NATO member states, is a fundamental component for the regional cooperation. The *CDC* meets these requirements, and could occupy a clear operational niche, attracting financial and political support from its participants.

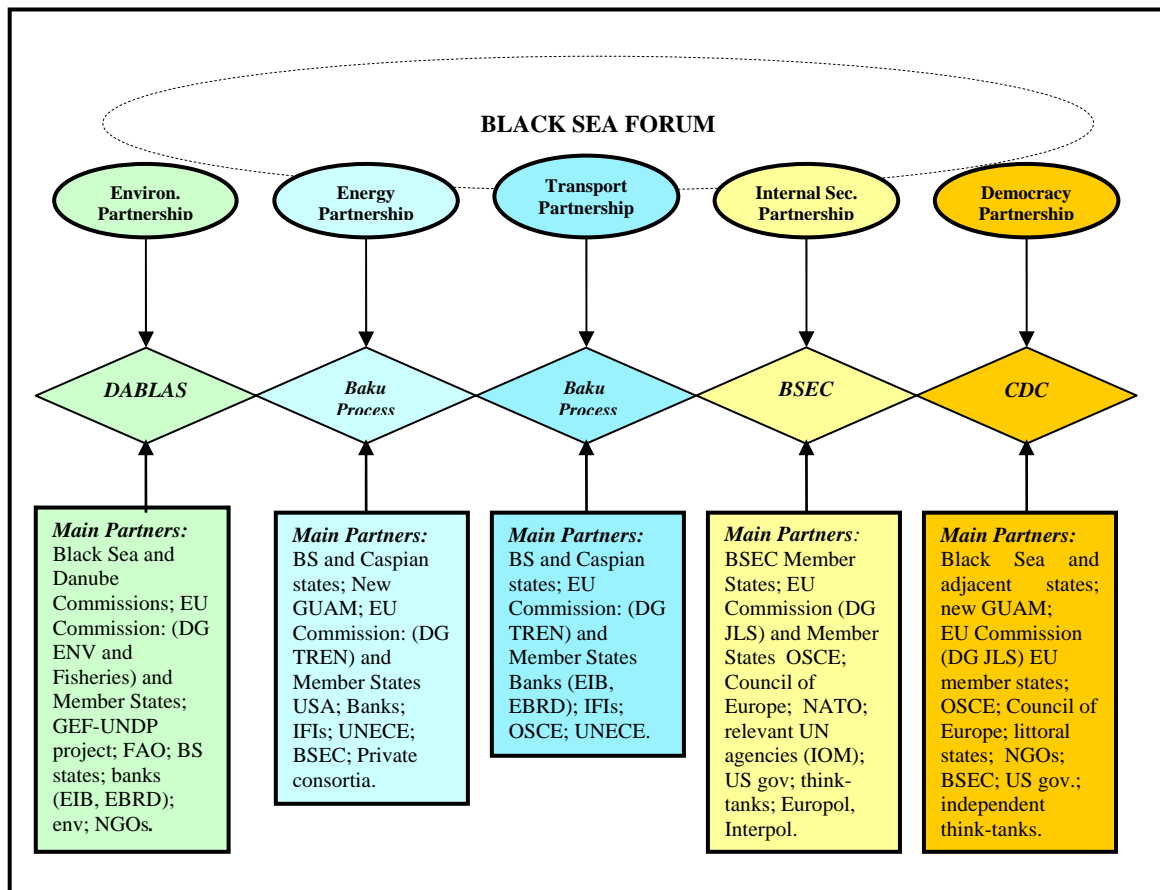
These variable constellations of interdependence in the five sectors reveal one further challenge connected with the scope of the proposed Black Sea synergy, the hazard of *organisational proliferation*. The Black Sea region is already a jungle of agreements, alliances, and acronyms. Existing organisations often have overlapping activities, and their composition reveals a number of soft-spoken rivalries and competitions within the region.. Variable geometries are crucial to make cooperation effective and to tailor activities to the most suitable geographical scope. At the same time, variable geometries should not encourage (nor ignore) this organizational proliferation, as well as the ensuing antagonisms and inefficiencies. In order to do this, a rationalisation of the activities of each organisation and an identification of a 'core business' within each of them should be encouraged. This is intrinsic to the very idea of promoting a synergetic framework for Black Sea cooperation, which is at the heart of the next sub-section.

3.3 Framework

What could be the design of an overarching system of institutional and financial arrangements that should organise a Black Sea synergy? In order to pursue the multiple goals with multi-stakeholder leadership and flexible geographical scope, the institutional arrangement would be based on coordination mechanisms called *Partnerships* for each of the five sectors of regional relevance.

Each Partnership would be composed of senior officials representing actors that already operate in the region (a tentative list is proposed inside the squares in Figure 5): countries of the wider Black Sea area and those non-Black Sea states with a stake in specific Black Sea areas, the EU institutions, and international organisations and financial institutions operating in each sector (e.g. UN agencies, World Bank, EIB, EBRD). Non-governmental and business actors would be invited as observers in relevant partnerships (e.g. in environment, internal security and democratic institutions).²¹

Figure 5. Framework of a Black Sea synergy



Each partnership would have one *driving actor or mechanism* entrusted with the bulk of the coordinating work among all partners (in Figure 5, these are represented in the line of rhombuses in the middle). The European Commission would play a leading role in the more technical sectors (environment, transport and energy) by integrating existing initiatives (DABLAS, the Baku Process, TRACECA and INOGATE) more effectively with the activities of other actors. In the more political sectors (internal security and democratic institutions), the leadership role would have to come from the region itself.

As to financial mechanisms, specific *Support Funds* would be created for each Partnership, with each partner pledging funds in it (the model here could be the one of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership). Moreover, each Partnership would create a *Project Investment Facility*, similar to the one that is currently in place for DABLAS. These Facilities, in which actors financing and implementing projects are represented, would be entrusted with identifying projects and carrying out pre-feasibility studies for the projects that will converge in a three-year *Black Sea Action Plan*. Both the Project Investment Facilities and the EU contribution to the Support Funds could be

²¹ This inclusive format is already being implemented in DABLAS.

financed under the forthcoming European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI).²² Notably, the ENPI will finance actions both inside and outside of the Union, which would be an important facilitating factor for such a multilateral mechanism involving EU member states, candidate and third countries.

The EU initiative for the creation of a Black Sea synergy would be launched by means of a new *Communication on the Black Sea* and be formally included in the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EU should give the process a kick-start by putting on the table an allocation from the ENPI for Black Sea regional projects, inviting a competition for these funds from project promoters.

Finally there should be an overarching political mechanism for setting discussing strategic proposals and priorities. Here the forthcoming *Black Sea Forum*, organised by Romania, and to be held in Bucharest on 5 June is maybe pointing the way. All actors operating in the region have been invited, and according to the Romania hosts this summit meeting aims at “evaluating existing instruments at regional and extra-regional level, establishing some regional and Euro-Atlantic priorities and initiating co-operation projects, by using the existing tools (especially BSEC), but also proposing new formats (more flexible, in formulas with variable geometries)”.²³

The *Black Sea Forum* could, if given a regular yet non-institutionalised format, serve the needs of the overarching coordination mechanism at the political level. The home-grown leadership of this Forum, from a Black Sea littoral state is highly appropriate. For the future one could envisage that the individual Black Sea states take turns in hosting and organising an *annual Black Sea Forum Summit*, or meeting at least at foreign minister level.

Without something like this *Black Sea Forum* the five sectoral partnerships risk remaining unconnected between each other and with little or no strategic purpose. Moreover the strategic purpose should not be provided solely by the EU, but should reflect the joint ownership and political commitment of the countries in the wider Black Sea, of governmental and non-governmental actors participating in the activities of the synergetic framework. In a statement introducing the June 5th Summit, it is noted for instance that “promotional activities, such as seminars, press conferences, essays contests are also envisaged”. This would prevent a Black Sea synergy from turning into a loose top-down format like the Stability Pact, and would prevent the often unproductive overlap between regional and EU initiatives characterising cooperation in Northern Europe. In this way, rather than representing fully-fledged unilateral strategy of the EU in the region, the proposed Black Sea synergy should constitute the EU’s substantial contribution to enhance comprehensive initiatives emerging from the region, such as the Black Sea Forum.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

For over a decade, the Black Sea area has been characterised by various attempts to systematise and upgrade its regional cooperation. Several factors, such as the low level of interest of Black Sea countries for regional affairs, prickly bilateral relations between some of them, and Russia’s policies in the region, have prevented this from happening.

However, more recent developments such as the ‘coloured revolutions’ in Ukraine and Georgia, the 2004 enlargement of the EU and NATO and the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy have made the need for increased cooperation more difficult to ignore. This is especially the case for the EU, whose geo-strategic interests in the region have grown and will continue to grow in view of the forthcoming accession of Bulgaria and Romania.

²² European Commission: *Proposals for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Laying down General Provisions Establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument*, Brussels 29 September 2004. The strategy proposed here would be covered primarily by Articles 6 and 17 on multi-country programmes and co-financing proposed in this document.

²³ This and the following quotation are extracted from the Romanian statement “Black Sea Forum: Charting Bright Ideas” distributed in anticipation of the Summit.

On the basis of experiences acquired by the EU in other peripheral regions (the Mediterranean, the Balkan Stability Pact and the Northern Dimension), *this study advocates an EU initiative for a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder regional synergy in the Black Sea area.*

This Black Sea synergy would be built around ‘Partnerships’ in five priority areas: Environment, Energy, Transport, Internal Security, and Democracy. Each partnership would be composed of Black Sea states, other neighbouring states where operationally relevant, the EU, and relevant international organisations, IFIs and non-governmental actors. Financing pledged by members of each partnership would be collected in five *Support Funds*, to which the EU’s new European Neighbourhood Financial Instrument (ENPI) would make a notable contribution, and which will provide the means to implement a three-year *Black Sea Action Plan*.

Each *Partnership* would be led by the most plausible actor or mechanism. These are DABLAS for environment, the Baku Process for transport and energy, BSEC for internal security, and the Community of Democratic Choice for democratic institutions.

Overarching political coordination and the setting of priorities should be facilitated by annual *Black Sea Forum* summit meetings, hosted in rotating turns by individual Black Sea states. The 5 June summit in Bucharest hosted by Romania might be viewed as pointing the way.

To conclude, six qualities could be aimed at for the proposed Black Sea synergy:

- *Coordination*: the rationale should be that of streamlining and integrating already existing regional activities, institutions and mechanisms.
- *Pragmatism*: there should not be a long list of nominal priorities, but focus on feasible projects within each of five sectoral partnership.
- *Ownership*: the idea is to support credible initiatives emerging from the region and to encourage existing regional organisations, such as the BSEC, to specify and narrow down the core business of their activities.
- *Flexibility*: the geographical scope should vary according to the nature of the challenges.
- *Consistency*: this Black Sea regionalism should support the broader dynamics ongoing at continental and global levels: EU and NATO enlargements, ENP, energy security etc.
- *Visibility*: a synergetic framework organising Black Sea cooperation, coupled here with the Black Sea Forum, should send a signal about the importance that the EU attaches to the region.

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