

## **Filter through Region-Building in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions**

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### **RÉSUMÉ**

Avec la fin de la guerre froide le régionalisme ou la régionalisation est apparu comme le trait dominant des relations internationales. Dans ce qu'on appelle le voisinage de l'Union européenne, il existe au moins deux modèles de 'formation' ou de 'construction' de régions. Le premier des deux modèles serait l'EMP ou le partenariat euro-méditerranéen. Ceci serait le coup de génie de l'Union européenne qui cherchait à mettre de l'ordre dans le cadre socioéconomique et politique de l'espace géographique méditerranéen. L'autre modèle, l'organisation de la coopération économique de la mer noire (BSEC) serait plutôt un effort de faire collaborer des États littoraux et non -littoraux qui font partie de la grande région de la mer Noire. Le défi majeur auquel font face ces deux modèles ou organismes- cadres serait la cohésion et le niveau d'eupéanisation réalisable ou intégration dans les deux procédés.

### **ABSTRACT**

With the end of the Cold War, regionalism or regionalization has emerged as a prominent feature of international relations. In the European Union's neighbourhood, one can account for at least two region-building models. The first, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), was the brainchild of the European Union in an attempt to put into a political, economic, and social framework the geographic space of the Mediterranean Sea. The other, the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), constitutes an attempt at cooperation between littoral states and states belonging to the wider Black Sea region. The key challenge facing both frameworks is their cohesion and the extent to which certain degrees of Europeanization can be incorporated into both processes. The author presents some of the challenges facing both the EMP and the BSEC given the changing context of transatlantic and regional relations.

The issue of region-building has risen in prominence during the post Cold War era as the end of bipolarity has fundamentally affected the world order. A clear-cut definition of region-building is a matter of intense debate among scholars. For example, region-building may be defined "as the practice of

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actors constructing a region”<sup>1</sup>. Social constructivists argue that “regions are social constructions produced and reproduced through discourse and social practices”<sup>2</sup>. As early as 1968, Joseph Nye defined an international region as “a limited number of states linked together by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence”; hence for Nye regionalism may be defined as “the formation of interstate groupings on the basis of regions”<sup>3</sup>. In 1992, Ole Waever clearly defined the region-building dynamics when he wrote, “Does the Baltic Sea Region exist? Not yet. But it soon will”<sup>4</sup>.

The new regionalism may be attributed to a series of factors such as the end of the Cold War which has led to the developments of new attitudes towards international co-operation and a decentralization of the international system. Other relevant factors include the process of global economic change which has increased the relevance of economic cooperation in a regional basis as the model and development of the European Community (and to a lesser degree NAFTA) have shown; the end of a third pole consisting of the Third World countries or the non-aligned movement; and finally the spread of democratization to the former Comecon or Warsaw Pact countries and to Latin America<sup>5</sup>.

Attempting to enhance cooperative security has also become the order of the day. Though the term has ‘hard security’ connotations that in the post-9/11 world are linked to fighting terrorism, its key characteristics such as those featuring “mutual trust, mutual benefits, equality, and cooperation ... so that it yields greater benefits for all nations,” apply to both the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions<sup>6</sup>.

As stated above, the European Union continues to serve as a successful model of region-building or regionalism. The impact of the European project can be discerned in a number of groupings which have emerged with the objective of creating common markets within a certain time frame. The EU’s impact has also been political at least on the European continent as European values and norms helped consolidate democracy in Southern Europe in the 1980s with the accession and integration of Greece, Spain and Portugal, and since the end of the Cold War as former ideological rivals have gone (and continue to undergo) through the painful social, political and economic transformation by adopting the requisite *acquis*.

The EU has, in other words, managed through the process of integration

to allow Europeanization to seep through the entire multilayered and multidimensional web of relations at national and supranational levels. By way of definition, I apply Robert Ladrecht's terminology: "Europeanization means an incremental process re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making"<sup>7</sup>. One can also adopt Kevin Featherstone's short definition: 'Minimally, 'Europeanization' involves a response to the policies of the European Union'<sup>8</sup>. According to Roland Sturm and Jurgen Dieringer, one of the dimensions of Europeanization consists "of the formal and – also of great importance – informal pressures on prospective and current EU member states to rearrange their national and regional institutions and their social discourses. Social and institutional change is provoked, above all, by the need to secure efficient policy outputs"<sup>9</sup>.

This process is also applicable to varying degrees in terms of the EU's relations with its neighbourhood or 'near abroad'. Here the process oscillates between security and integration. The integration end of the spectrum needs no explanation here as it pertains to the European states willing to join provided they meet accession criteria. The security dimension is not new either for the EU's non-European neighbourhood though it has gained urgency since September 11, 2001. This applies in particular to the Mediterranean, where membership has only applied to the two island nations of Cyprus and Malta. Membership could become a reality for Turkey if it manages to fulfil, meet, and apply its accession criteria and obligations. There is now cooperation at the parliamentary level, limited intra-regional trade through the Agadir Process, and institutionalized cooperation in the domains of culture through the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures<sup>10</sup>.

For the other countries along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, the focus has been on the security and stability of the EU's periphery through the three-pronged framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). Launched in 1995, the EMP, otherwise known as the Barcelona Process focuses on the definition of a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogue; the construction of a zone of shared prosperity through an economic and financial partnership and the gradual establishment of a free-trade area; and

the rapprochement between peoples through a social, cultural and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies. In other words, the EMP does not limit itself to an economic and financial partnership but extends to the political and cultural spheres. It also promotes a regional dimension which helps shape the region even further.

Beyond the Mediterranean, the EU also plays a key role in the region-building projects of its neighbourhood. It has in place a web of contractual relations which include Europe Agreements, Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs)<sup>11</sup>, the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), the Four Common Spaces with Russia, and the European Neighbourhood Policy among others. Each is distinct, defined by a particular framework and including to different degrees some variation on the notion of Europeanization.

Within the scope of this article, the ENP is especially interesting because it was implemented in the wake of 911 and the 2004 enlargement of the Union. As relations with neighbours have become the EU's main external priorities after enlargement, the ENP aims to avoid new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours to the East and on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean. The EU offers its neighbours a privileged relationship, building upon a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development). In other words, the ENP goes beyond existing relationships to offer a deeper political relationship and economic integration. The ENP has proved interesting because it seeks to address the strategic objectives of the December 2003 European Security Strategy which was drafted in the context of the post-911 world order.

The European Security Strategy states that “[i]t is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed. Neighbours who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organised crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe. The integration of acceding states increases our security but also brings the EU closer to troubled areas. Our task is to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations”<sup>12</sup>.

While for the Mediterranean, there is a renewed emphasis on security and stability, the ENP recipients to the East (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus) stretch the imagined political and geographical limits of the European Union. Many questions arise. They range from whether there are “concrete alternatives to enlargement”<sup>13</sup>? to “Can/should the EU embark into further enlargement processes? and include Can/should it keep its neighbours indefinitely outside? And most importantly: Is there no other way to approach this dilemma”<sup>14</sup>?

The Black Sea region provides an interesting case study as the EU is currently mulling over a dimension for this region as the EU is about to become a Black Sea entity due to the imminent entry into its ranks of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007/2008. The pull of EU “interest” from the region (for it can only be described as such given the limits of further EU integration) is threatening to destroy the regional cohesion in place since 1992 as a group of 11 (now 12) littoral states and states belonging in the wider Black Sea region have been cooperating in a fairly institutional manner within the framework of a regional organization called the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)<sup>15</sup>.

### **What are the merits of the BSEC as a regional partner?**

- BSEC’s legal status. The Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation is a legal entity based on a binding agreement under international law, and it represents the most advanced form of regional cooperation in the Black Sea area.
- The relevance of the BSEC’s agenda to the EU’s policies in the Black Sea area. The BSEC was established in 1992 as a regional initiative with the mission to promote a lasting and closer cooperation among its member states. It envisaged building peace and stability through prosperity by focussing on issues such as energy, transport, telecommunications, education, good governance, finance, and trade among others. It goes without saying that the aforementioned issues are part and parcel of the EU’s policies in its neighbourhood.
- The BSEC’s institutional strengths. The BSEC possesses today a broad and comprehensive institutional basis with a Council of Ministers of

Foreign Affairs, a Committee of Senior Officials, a Permanent International Secretariat based in Istanbul (BSEC PERMIS), working groups, a parliamentary assembly (PABSEC) based in Istanbul, a business council (BSECBC) also located in Istanbul, a bank - the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) – based in Thessaloniki, and a research centre – the International Center for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) - situated in Athens.

- Rich experience in Regional Cooperation in spite of the heterogeneity of its member states accumulated over fourteen years of regional interaction.
- BSEC's inclusiveness. The BSEC is based on an inclusive concept of cooperation as demonstrated by its diverse membership, the number of states that have acquired an Observer status with the organisation, as well as the participation of non-governmental actors of the civil society in its work<sup>16</sup>.
- BSEC's strong sense local and regional ownership which as a cooperative initiative reflects the priorities of its member- states and the needs of the region on a collective basis.
- Achievements. Despite limited resources and a heterogenous membership, the BSEC boasts concrete achievements. First, it has built a permanent and extensive institutional framework of cooperation that covers all levels of governance (intergovernmental, parliamentary, and financial). Second, it has cultivated a spirit of cooperation among its member-states, providing a forum for constant dialogue, exchange of ideas and experiences. Third, it has successfully elaborated binding agreements and common action plans on key issues of regional cooperation. (some 33 to date).

### **What is the relevance of all of the above?**

- Unlike the Mediterranean region where the parameters of cooperation are relatively straightforward and the framework in place – the EMP – was initiated and led by the EU, the BSEC has managed to pursue regionalism independently of the European Union. The BSEC now finds its cohesion threatened because of the magnetic pull of the Union upon most of the Organisation's members that prefer bilateral contractual relations with the

EU. Now the question is whether the current institutional framework can survive in its present form with the EU playing a fundamental role in its future development or will it crumble and be reborn under a different shape, given the fact that regional cooperation is a key priority for the EU in its various peripheries (EMP region, Western Balkans) and despite the fact that the EU has put its enlargement project on hold.

- Another concern common to both regions is the future of EMP and BSEC in a changing context of transatlantic and regional relations. In other words, are EU and US strategic approaches and priorities to these regions the same? If not, what are the consequences on the region-building processes of both regions? Issues such as energy (in particular the security of the energy supplies) are relevant here as oil and natural gas producers may be found both in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. Also, given the fact that two-thirds of the world's oil trade moves by tanker and that the wider Mediterranean-Black Sea region hosts at least two “choke points” or narrow channels – the Bosphorus and the Suez Canal – as well a bevy of oil and natural gas pipelines feeding the West's energy needs, the nexus between energy and security becomes all the more relevant. Other issues of common concern include migration and organized crime.
- The inability to address security concerns within either framework, be it in terms of the Middle East Peace Process or the resolution of the various frozen conflicts of the Caucasus-Black Sea region, leaves much to be desired as well. This incapacity might stem from the fact that both frameworks are inclusive in that their membership includes states or entities which do not have diplomatic relations with each other (Israel/Palestinian Authority, Azerbaijan/Armenia, Turkey/Armenia) or states which are opposed to what they perceive to be outside intervention in their neighbourhoods (a powerful hegemon like the Russian Federation, for example).
- Finally, the trade dimension, not explored here needs to be highlighted. For the BSEC region, where the economic agenda dominates, the numbers for Intra-BSEC trade flows remain low. As a trade group, the BSEC accounts for only 2.8% of world trade. Its trade volume remains low relative to the size of its market. Trade flows are dominated by Russia due to that country's energy exports<sup>17</sup>. An emerging feature of the Organisation has been the redirection of trade to the EU market.

Similarly, the impact of the Barcelona Process on trade largely favoured the EU with only a few Mediterranean partners having increased their market share of world exports to the EU<sup>18</sup>. The various infrastructure problems and the economic heterogeneity of the countries of both regions could imply that their current region-building models or regionalisms need revamping.

By way of a conclusion, it would be fair to say that both regions face serious challenges in terms of addressing coherently the challenges of the post-911, post-enlargement, post-referenda, emerging post neo-conservatism context. The jury is definitely out as to whether their region-building experiments will succeed. This by no means implies that regionalism (in whatever shape or form) is not an appropriate model for enhancing the zone of security, stability and prosperity that the European Union and its neighbours seek. However, much needs to be done to assure that region-building experiments in both regions stabilize and that elements of Europeanization.

## NOTES

1. Fabrizio Tassinari, "Security and Integration in the EU Neighbourhood: The Case for Regionalism", *CEPS Working Document* No. 226, July 2005, p. 10. The term "region-building" can be attributed to Iver Neumann. See Iver B. Neumann, "A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe", *Review of International Studies*, No. 20, 1994.
2. Hilde Dominique Engelen, "The Construction of a Region in the Baltic Sea Area", paper presented at the Fifth Pan-European Conference, The Hague, 11 September 2004.
3. Joseph Nye (ed.), *International Regionalism* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968), p. vii as cited in Louise Fawcett, "Regionalism in Historical Perspective," p. 11.
4. Ole Weaver (1992) cited in Engelen, "The Construction of a Region in the Baltic Sea Area".
5. See, for example, Louise Fawcett, "Regionalism in Historical Perspective," in Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell (eds.), *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 17-30.



6. See Gu Guoliang, "Redefine Cooperative Security, not Pre-emption," *The Washington Quarterly*, 26:2, Spring 2003, p. 140. (pp. 135-145).
7. R. Ladrecht, "Europeanization of Domestic Politics and Institutions: the case of France", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 32 (1), 1994.
8. K. Featherstone, "Introduction: In the Name of 'Europe'," in K. Featherstone and C.M. Radaelli (eds), *The Politics of Europeanization*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 3–26.
9. Roland Sturm and Jurgen Dieringer, "The Europeanization of Regions in Eastern and Western Europe: Theoretical Perspectives," *Regional and Federal Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, September 2005, pp. 279–294.
10. The Foundation is the first common institution jointly established and financed by all 35 members of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.
11. At the end of the 1990s, the European Union concluded nine similar partnership and cooperation agreements (PCAs) with the nine new independent states (NIS): the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the Republic of Uzbekistan. The aims of these partnerships are to provide a suitable framework for political dialogue, support the efforts made by the countries to strengthen their democracies and develop their economies, accompany their transition to a market economy and encourage trade and investment. The PCAs also aim to provide a basis for cooperation in the legislative, economic, social, financial, scientific, civil, technological and cultural fields. The PCA with Russia also provides for the creation of the necessary conditions for the future establishment of a free trade area. The general principles concern respect for democracy, principles of international law and human rights. The market economy is also an objective set out in all the PCAs. For more information, see <http://www.europa.eu.int>.
12. *European Security Strategy*, December 2003, pp. 7-8.
13. Eneko Landaburu, "From Neighbourhood Policy to Integration Policy: are there concrete alternatives to enlargement?" speech given at the CEPS Conference "Revitalising Europe", 23 January 2006, Brussels.
14. Tassinari, "Security and Integration in the EU Neighbourhood", p.1.
15. The BSEC's Member States include Greece, Turkey, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Albania, and Serbia and Montenegro.

16. BSEC Observer States include Belarus, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Tunisia, the United States, Austria, and Egypt. Fora which have Observer status include the International Black Sea Club, the Energy Charter Secretariat and the Black Sea Commission. The BSEC also holds sectorial dialogues with the following groupings: the Black Sea International Ship-owners Association (BINSAs); the Black & Azov Seas Ports Association (BASPA); the Union of Road Transport Association in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region (BSEC-URTA); the Black Sea Region Association of Shipbuilders and Ship repairers (BRASS); the Coordinating Transport Meeting of the MS of Commonwealth of Independent States (CTM CIS); and the Regional Commonwealth in the Field of Communications (RCC). For more information, see <http://www.bsec-organization.org>.

17. See Panagiota Manoli, "Limiting Integration: Transnational Exchanges and Demands in the BSEC Area", *Agora Without Frontiers*, Volume 10 (4), 2005, pp. 274-276.

18. See Arno Bäcker, "The impact of the Barcelona Process on Trade and Foreign Direct Investment", *Cuadernos de Integracion Europea* #3, December 2005, available at <http://www.cuardenosie.info>.