

The EU's Black Sea Policies: Any Hopes for Success?

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Abstract

The 2004-2007 enlargements brought the EU onto the shores of the Black Sea region which is encircled with complex insecurities. Since then, the EU has been actively engaged in developing a vision for this problematic region through the various instruments of enlargement, CFSP/CSDP, European Neighborhood Policy, Black Sea Synergy as well as the Eastern Partnership. This paper aims at analysing the efficacy of EU's Black Sea policies in providing regional security, with a particular and a comparative focus on the impact of the Synergy as the only genuine regional Black Sea strategy.

The Black Sea became almost an internal sea of the European Union (EU) with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria. This new neighbourhood surrounded by the insecurities of peoples, societies and states, various forms of “violent conflict, weak states, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth” as reflected in the EU's Security Strategy poses serious challenges for the EU.¹ This security dynamic coupled with the opportunities provided by the strategic importance of the region as a bridge connecting the Caspian region, Central Asia and the Middle East with Europe and its potential as an energy hub fostered the regionalization efforts of the EU. Accordingly, instead of the ongoing compartmentalised strategies for the Black Sea, the EU has devised a holistic vision for the region as articulated in a Commission document titled “Black Sea Synergy-A New Regional Initiative” in April 2007.² In other

words, the Black Sea Synergy (BSS) was launched as a mechanism for recognising the whole region as strategic for the EU and consolidating the extant engagement mechanisms of the Union in the region. However, even before the ink was dry on this policy, the EU has failed to support the BSS, and thus the holistic perspective for the Black Sea. The EU has since reverted to its old inclination for bilateralism and micro-regionalism through the use of differentiated instruments of EU foreign policy instead of an all-encompassing regionalist approach. In other words, the EU's regionalisation attempt failed in the Black Sea, and instead the EU has been working through compartmentalised and interlinked strategies designed for different Black Sea countries such as accession, Eastern Partnership as a model for micro-regionalism operating under European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), strategic partnership, foreign economic instruments as well as CFSP/CSDP mechanisms.

In this general context, this paper, after evaluating the evolution of EU's policies towards the region, first argues how and why

includes Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey.

1 *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, 12 December 2003. Available at: <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

2 Commission of the European Communities, *Communication From The Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Black Sea Synergy - A New Regional Cooperation Initiative*, COM (2007) 160 final, 11 April 2007. This paper adopts the definition of the region by the Commission which

EU-constructed regionalism in the Black Sea region through the BSS has failed and asks whether and to what extent these multiple formal arrangements of the EU can succeed in the region. Put differently, notwithstanding the lack of a coherent and holistic vision for the Black Sea region, this paper questions whether the EU might be regarded as a successful foreign policy actor in the Black Sea with recourse to its diverse instruments of a compartmentalised strategy.³

THE EVOLUTION

The Black Sea region, which was “far away and messy for the EU in the 1990s”, had been subject to the EU’s bilateral approach and a target of the EU’s differentiated strategies until the 2004/2007 enlargement rounds.⁴ Immediately after the end of the Cold War, the EU began to approach the Black Sea region, albeit with baby-steps and mostly through bilateral relations. One of the first attempts was to conclude Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and Russia for supporting their transition to European models of polity and economy governance. Apart from PCA targets, the EU perceived the region including a number of different groups of states with different types of agreements

3 For a detailed account of this compartmentalised strategy, see M. Aydin and S. Acikmese, “EU Engagement in the Black Sea: The Views from The Region,” in A. Balcer (ed.), *The Eastern Partnership in the Black Sea Region: towards a New Synergy*, Warsaw: Demos, 2011.

4 D. Triantaphyllou and Y. Tsantoulis, “The EU’s Policies towards its New Eastern Neighbours: A New Ostpolitik in the Making or a Mélange of Different Concepts and Priorities,” *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen*, Vol. 5 (2009), p. 9.

which it signed with them. Greece as a member country, Bulgaria and Romania as associate states and later as potential members as well as Turkey as an applicant since 1987 meant different focuses and divergent policies for the EU. However, none of these initiatives of the Union was designed for the Black Sea region per se. In a similar vein, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which was initiated by a Commission Communication in March 2003, in the wake of the big bang enlargement round comprising countries from Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean South in its all-encompassing basket of various policies that were designed to operate through differentiated Action Plans on a bilateral basis.⁵ Moreover, Russia did not accept to be a part of the ENP, since in its claim as a regional power, it preferred to establish bilateral relations depending on a reciprocity clause. As a means to this end, the EU-Russia strategic partnership was formed in St. Petersburg in May 2003, thereby creating another instrument for the EU in dealing with the region.

Since 2004, the EU has also been engaged in the region through its CFSP/CSDP instruments, mainly by the appointment of Special Representatives to the South Caucasus as well as the conflict zones (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and conducting civilian/military operations. Between 16 July 2004 and 14 July 2005, the EU conducted its first rule of law mission - EUJUST THEMIS - under the civilian crisis management instruments of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in Georgia with the aim of providing guidance

5 *Wider Europe Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with Our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, COM(2003) 104 final, Brussels, 11 March 2003, p. 4.

for the new criminal justice strategy and to support Georgian authorities in the field of judicial reform and anti-corruption.⁶ The EU also deployed a team of advisors in September 2005 under the Special Representative's guidance, charged with the tasks of reporting on the border situation between Russia and Georgia, facilitating confidence building between Moscow and Tbilisi, establishing relevant contacts in conflict regions as well as assisting the Georgian authorities in implementing a comprehensive border management plan.⁷ In 2005, the EU also launched the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) on the border between Ukraine and the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. After the August 2008 war, the EU initiated a monitoring mission (EUMM) in Georgia aimed at *stabilisation* through the monitoring of the implementation of the peace agreements between Russia and Georgia including troop withdrawals and violations of human rights; *normalisation* through monitoring the situation as regards to the rule of law, governance and the return of internally displaced people; *confidence-building* through the liaison and facilitation of contacts between parties; and finally providing *information* for European policy making.⁸

Even though the EU has operated through these

6 Council Joint Action 2004/523/CFSP of 28 June 2004 on the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Georgia, EUJUST THEMIS, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 228/21, 29 June 2004.

7 Council Joint Action 2005/582/CFSP of 28 July 2005 Amending and Extending the Mandate of the European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L199/92, 29 July 2005.

8 Council Joint Action 2008/736/CFSP of 15 September 2008 on the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, EUMM Georgia, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 248/26, 17 September 2008.

bilateral and differentiated policies in various contexts, it was the 2007 enlargement of the EU that triggered the regionalism tendencies that were already apparent in the south with the Barcelona Process and the Baltics in the form of the Northern Dimension. The Commission put forward Black Sea Synergy as a third regional cooperation initiative of the EU around the Union's regional seas in a communication to the Parliament and the Council in 2007. This new –but not novel– policy was formally launched in Kyiv in February 2008 by the Foreign Ministers of the Black Sea countries and of the EU.⁹ The Black Sea Synergy targets Russia as a strategic partner, Turkey as a negotiating country as well as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Russia's participation in the Kyiv ministerial meeting in a way confirmed the regionalist dimension of the BSS.

The Black Sea Synergy identified thirteen topics for regional cooperation ranging from democracy promotion to a more active role through increased political engagement in the protracted conflicts, from environmental protection to a free trade area. In a 15 March 2010 memo, the EU demonstrated the utmost importance attached to sectoral partnerships in the areas of the environment, energy and transport, through which regional actors would cooperate in projects, the seed-money

9 The EU did attempt to initiate a genuine regional approach just designed for the Black Sea in 1997 by adopting a Communication on regional cooperation in the Black Sea region. European Commission, *Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area: State of Play, Perspectives for EU Action Encouraging Its Development*, Communication from the Commission to the Council, Brussels, 14 November 1997, COM(97) 597 final. However, this was sidelined due to the EU's intense occupation with enlargement.

for which would be provided by the EU.¹⁰ Thus, rather than an EU-dictated policy, the BSS was devised as a regional cooperation initiative based on joint projects and joint ownerships, open to all the actors of the region (including regional initiatives such as the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation – BSEC and the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution). In this context, a Black Sea Environment Partnership was launched in March 2010 as a forum for cooperating in areas such as an integrated coastal zone, river basin management or tackling pollution.

THE FAILURE

One year after the official launch of the Black Sea Synergy, the EU initiated the Eastern Partnership with the six Eastern European and South Caucasus ENP partner countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus) in May 2009 at summit in Prague as a specific Eastern dimension to the ENP designed to strengthen the bilateral political and economic relations through association agreements, deep and comprehensive free trade areas, steps towards visa liberalisation, deeper cooperation to enhance the energy security of the partners and the EU as well as support for economic and social policies designed to reduce disparities.¹¹ While the EaP has been designed as a sub-regional project bringing six ENP countries together through four

thematic platforms (namely democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU policies, energy security. and contacts between people) and non-governmental initiatives (Civil Society Forum, Parliamentary Dimension-EURONEST, Local and Regional Assembly); the EU also deals with the specifications of each country bilaterally in order to align the partner countries to EU standards.

Even though the Commission insistently stated the fact that the BSS and every other Black Sea initiative would be complementary,¹² the establishment and the evolution of the EaP has led to the informal demise of the BSS.¹³ The underlying dynamic behind this failure of the BSS is definitely the comprehensive character of the EaP, which incorporates both the bilateral and the regional tracks. On the bilateral side, it offers the partners association agreements, deep and comprehensive free trade areas and visa liberalization; and as argued in a FRIDE report “more advanced countries of the EaP may serve as a stimulus for those lagging behind”.¹⁴ In other words, countries that come closer to EU standards would benefit more from the EU, thereby making the EaP a tailor-made policy, taking into account the specifications of each partner. On the regional side, the EaP opens up regional venues for governmental and non-governmental contacts. Regional platforms are devised not only for intensified relations

10 Memo/10/78, 15 March 2010, available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/10/78&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

11 Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Eastern Partnership*, COM (2008) 823 final, 3 December 2008.

12 COM (2008), 23 final; *Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Eastern Partnership*, SEC (2008) 2974/3.

13 Personal interview with a high level official at the EEAS.

14 J. Boonstra and N. Shapovalova, *The EU's Eastern Partnership: One Year Backwards*, Madrid: FRIDE, 2010, p. 3.

between the EU and the countries of the Black Sea, but also among the countries of the region. For instance, on 7 May 2009, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia held a bilateral meeting in Prague on the sidelines of the Eastern Partnership Summit. Thus, the combination of bilateralism and micro-regionalism in the form of keeping some Black Sea countries engaged in this new policy has apparently sidelined the Black Sea Synergy, which is based on a solely region-centered policy requiring cooperation between diverse regional actors, such as Turkey as an accession country and Russia as a strategic partner and five ENP states, all of which have divergent interests in the region.

THE FUTURE

The failure of the BSS, stemming from the aforementioned dichotomy of regionalism and bilateralism, has also been reflected in the European Parliament's Report on an EU Strategy for the Black Sea of December 2010. This report stated that the "BSS results have so far been rather limited and no clear and comprehensive picture exists of the current implementation results of the BSS" ... "through concrete objectives, benchmarks, reporting, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up mechanisms".¹⁵ Even though the European Parliament has been trying to revitalise the initiative through recommendations, it is highly likely that the BSS will remain only as a paper initiative, as evidenced by the decreasing number of BSS reports and the increasing number of EaP papers by the Commission. In this context, the EU has given up its insistence on the primacy of regionalisation; and rather

15 European Parliament-Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report on an EU Strategy for the Black Sea*, A7-0378/2010, 16 December 2010.

decided to "involve a much higher level of differentiation allowing each partner country to develop its links with the EU as far as its own aspirations, needs and capacities allow" in its revised ENP of May 2011.¹⁶ In other words, the EU in the future will focus on its eastern neighbours primarily through a bilateral track, only seconded by regionalist dynamics, alongside its foreign policy instruments other than the ENP. Rather than creating a holistic vision for the Black Sea, the EU will deal with multi-faceted groupings of countries that require different types of EU engagement and that have differentiated expectations/capacities/capabilities for the EU's role in the region.

Thus, instead of the revival of the Black Sea Synergy, the EU will focus more on the bilateral dimension of the EaP. Since it is a well-known fact that money, market access and mobility are the main benefits for the EU's neighbours as a compensation for their exclusion from the Union's enlargement process, it is highly likely that the EU will focus more on the feasibility of the three 'Ms' for its Eastern partners. Accordingly, the success of the EU's future policies for the Black Sea will mainly depend on the record of the EU in providing these concrete benefits to the Eastern partners based on their differentiated performances.

Through the benefits of its policies towards the region including the advantages of financial assistance, market access and visa-free regimes, the EU has the potential on paper to use its "silent disciplining power",¹⁷ thereby

16 *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A review of European Neighbourhood Policy*, Joint Communication by the High Representative of The Union For Foreign Affairs And Security Policy and the European Commission, Brussels, 25 May 2011.

17 Ole Wæver, "EU as a Security Actor:

reducing the risks of regional insecurities of the Black Sea. By focusing on such and other tangible offers and applying them coherently and consistently throughout the whole region and linking those to a credible conditionality clause which necessitates democratic reforms from its Eastern partners in return, the EU might have the chance to be regarded as a security actor in the region. However, the EU's track record has almost been hampered in the eyes of eastern partners, first due to its inconsistent and even contradictory policies (such as supporting self-determination for Armenia and respect for the territorial integrity for Azerbaijan in respective action plans) and secondly by a capabilities-expectations gap (such as offering visa-liberalisation in the long-term, while it can only provide visa-facilitation if conditions are met). Through such non-exhaustive examples, one can easily argue that the EU's role as a security actor in the region is merely an illusion, even though it created a paper tiger with its hundreds of pages of Black Sea and/or Eastern neighbourhood strategies.

Reflections from a Pessimist Constructivist on Post-Sovereign Security Orders," in M. Kelstrup and M. C. Williams (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration: Power, Security and Community* (New York: Routledge, 2000): 260-261.

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