

## Aspects of Cooperation in the Black Sea Area after the fall of USSR

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**Abstract** Starting from the new geopolitical context created after the fall of USSR we try to identify the options that the countries from the Black Sea Area had and have chosen in order to manage the inherent tensions, the inherited “frozen conflicts” and to create new forms of cooperation among them and with the neighbouring areas or with other international actors. We focus on the profile of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and analyse the Romanian efforts and contributions in this direction.

**Keywords:** Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC); Cold War; regionalism; The Wider Black Sea Area; European

### Introduction

Upon the end of the cold war and the disappearance of the bipolar order, the ensuing period, marked by the rearrangement of the international system, posed the problem of the new world “architecture”, the international actors that were going to take on the attributes of the “architect” in making the rules and direction of evolution, the new sources of power in international relations. In the new context created by profound and fast changes in Central and Eastern Europe, and then in USSR, Turkey was launching at the end of 1990, the project of cooperation in the Black Sea Region<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>See Michael Emerson, Marius Vahl, *Europe and The Black Sea-model regionalism, prêt-a-porter*, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, 2002, p. 5, Website: <https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/book/28.pdf>. For the international context and association see also (Popa, 2001).

### **1.1. Objective and Hypotheses**

The present approach, on the basis of studying the fundamental documents of the Organization for Economic Cooperation of the Black Sea, and the already extensive historiographical literature and the actual historical context, aims at identifying the profile of this organization in the various stages covered, its efforts and ability to respond to the region's needs, maintaining stability in the area, and favouring progress and connection to international economy.

The chosen perspective is able to allow appreciations on the ability and efficiency of such an asymmetrical organization, containing members with a widely different power potential.

### **1.2. Context**

The equation globalization, integration, regionalism, national interest was also undergoing changes in the "grey area" created by the fall of USSR, imposing certain options (Malița, 3-4/1998, pg. 161-175).

In the new context, the value of regional arrangements at an international level constituted a topic of reflection for theorists, as well as politicians, and the idea that "regional organizations may be key actors of the new international order" is frequently encountered in both registers (Ionescu, 1993, p. 110). Mihail E Ionescu identified as a "somehow general feature of regional groups, so far tried (mainly in Central and South-Eastern Europe) by the western impulse that presided the process of their formation" and put up the case of the "Pentagonal" initiated by Italy, the "Trilateral" constituted in 1991 at the request of the former councillor for national security in the US, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the "Black Sea Economic Cooperation" created at the initiative of Turkey, the intended cooperation area Baltic Sea- Black Sea, suggested by Z. Brzezinski. Showing that the states in Eastern Europe are urged towards cooperation, practically forming economic "mini blocks" as an intermediary step towards being admitted in the European Union, the analyst, starting from Z. Brzezinski's assertion, focused on the roles that might be assigned to the cooperation's "area-formation", i.e. avoiding Russia's apprehension towards a new sanitary barrier, and including it in Europe for a change, and at the same time being a "supervision group" that might prevent "falling back" into imperialism and thus increasing "the chances of evolution as a post-imperialistic, democratic and increasingly European state" (Ionescu, 1993, pg. 123-124).

Also, other analysts underlined the “almost natural tendency” of integration into areas and regions, and “favouring” the development of cooperation under various forms in this part of Europe, and identified as causes of this option the fact that the western world did not have a pot cold war strategy, the diversity of conditions in each country in the region which made it necessary to pass through a transition period to market economy, the existence of problems in the EU countries themselves, engaged in the reform imposed by the Maastricht Treaty, as well as the presence in this area of the powers involved in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia (Tudor, 2/1998, pp. 147-157).

In Europe at that time important roles were being played in the integration process by the European Council, OSCE, WEO, NATO and especially EU.

The geometry of South-Eastern Europe was materialized into a network of organizations promoting governmental cooperation or non-governmental initiatives like: The Central European Initiative- ICI, the South-Eastern European Cooperation - SECI, launched at the initiative of the American administration in 1996, the Black Sea European cooperation, The Balkan Cooperation, the Central Free-Trade Agreement, The Danube Commission, the Euro-Mediterranean Conference, Euro regions , etc.

In this constellation of regional organizations the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization enjoys special standing.

## **2. Analysis and Results**

The negotiations at the meeting of the deputy ministers of foreign affairs in Moscow, in July 1991, led to drawing up the final declaration to be signed by the heads of states and governments as a basis for regional cooperation.

The geographic and historical connections, the intention to build democratic, prosperous societies and the common interests in the area stability led to conceiving a scheme of multilateral sub regional cooperation, warmly received from the very beginning. The aim was the promotion of shared interests, using the traditional connections between these countries, their geographic proximity and economic complementarities.

“*The High Level Declaration on the Black Sea Economic Cooperation*” signed in Istanbul on the 25 June 1992 by Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Turkey only created the general political framework for multilateral cooperation, stating the basic principles and a number of target domains.

The text of the *Declaration* provides two groups of actions, which are interconnected:

- Cooperation among governments, on the one hand, including widely varied domains such as communications and transport, energy, tourism, informatics and data exchange, agriculture and agro industry, science and technology, etc.;
- Non-governmental cooperation, on the other hand, including a series of bilateral negotiations and measures, creating a space where individuals, goods and services, capitals, may circulate as freely as possible (*The High-Level Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation*, 1992, RJIA, IV, 1998, pp.181-184).

Businessmen in the private sector thus had the possibility to directly participate in the cooperation process, which is a novelty in the cooperation in this area (RJIA, IV, 1998, p. 183).

The stress is laid on economic cooperation. Political issues that may create dissensions are left aside, according to the assumption that solving economic problems constitutes a basis and a condition for political balance and dialogue. Nevertheless, during the negotiations on the elaboration of the Black Sea Cooperation Convention, the heads of state of Romania, Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine took the opportunity to discuss issues regarding the conflict in Transnistria.

The conception of the member states regarding the new structure created in the Black Sea region has evolved over time.

At first there was an obvious concern for underlining the fact that the intention is to create a new structure, completely different from the old attempts of communist inspiration. Taking into account the continuity of evolution in the history of the Black Sea, and the problems in the formation period, the organizers took care to avoid the monopoly of a power over the region and thus the replication of the model of the former Council for Mutual Economic Assistance-Comecon. It was stated that the new organism was no longer based on the ideological criterion, but on the principles of market economy, on “bilateral and multilateral contacts among

members and with other interested countries, to the purpose of stimulating economic, technological and social progress, and to encourage free enterprise” (*Declaration...*, Istanbul, 1992, art. 6). The Article 10 of the founding *Declaration* stated that the member states “agree to promote economic cooperation *gradually*”, while art.17 highlighted that they “consider that at this stage of their cooperation, it is necessary to ensure *institutional flexibility*”.

*The gradualism of cooperation and the institutional flexibility, as well as flexibility in selecting the cooperation areas* were to ensure maximum openness towards the real issues in the area, opting for their settlement by adopting measures that might ensure the building a regional infrastructure, a space where individuals, goods, services, capitals may freely circulate, avoiding double taxation and promoting investment according to the western example (*Declaration...*, Istanbul, 1992, art. 14).

The open character of the new cooperation form, the equality among the members and the democratic principle at the foundation of organizing the area were the elements in favour of the novelty of the structure as compared to the former attempts.

The tendency to stress the dynamic, flexible and open aspect, and to reject fixed structures determined, on a terminological level, the preference for the name *Black Sea Economic Cooperation*, giving up the somewhat restrictive one, “*The Black Sea Area of Economic Cooperation*”. In any case, non-riparian states were among the founders of the international organization (Greece, Albania), other interested countries being later admitted as members or observers provided they agreed to observe the regulations in the fundamental document (Israel, Poland, Tunisia etc.).

The world and region evolutions made it possible for the member states to give up their phobia of the idea of belonging to a firmly structured organization including the main heir of the USSR, the Russian Federation, and, on 15 June 1998, in Yalta, the *Charter of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation*. Thus BSEC acquired the status of *regional economic organization* taking on an important role in the new European and global order. The questions and fears regarding the costs of engaging in this cooperation process disappeared from the perspective of European integration. It was understood that by the stress laid on economic aspects, the new organism, far from compromising the integration aspirations of some of the member states, could be a useful tool in leading to a

common market for the countries in the area of an economic level similar to the one of the western nations.

But BSEC wanted to be regarded neither as an antechamber of the European Union, nor an alternative to it, as it claimed a special role in the new geopolitical context. Since its beginning up to the present moment, a series of new elements, such as the NATO extension, the conflicts in the Near East and the involvement manner of the US, the EU expansion tendency, and the attitude of the Russian Federation towards these processes and the distinct options of each of the member states, especially those with historical and strategic influence like Turkey, have influenced the evolution of the organization in the Black Sea region.

The gradualism of cooperation and the institutional flexibility, as well as the flexible choice of cooperation areas has proved to be the means to ensure the organization's cohesion and the maximum openness to the real problems of the area.

From the viewpoint of institutional dimension, the Charter of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation distinguishes between the intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary, banking and financial level of cooperation, and the academic level, instituting three cooperation centres: the International Centre for Black Sea Studies, the Centre for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, and the Centre for Statistical Data and Economic Information Exchange.

Economic cooperation considered as a priority in all stages of the evolution of BSEC was also facilitated by the political (parliamentary and governmental) cooperation which provided the legislative framework and the means to implement decisions and programs.

The analysis of the evolutions along the 25 years since the organization has been active allows for the observation of distinct stages that could not be missed by the analysts in the area. The documents adopted reflecting the view of the members on the area needs and the reactions to the attitude and policies of EU and NATO contain reference points that allow the identification of the main stages in the evolution of this organization.

Besides these, the cultural dimension of development became evident and acquired tremendous importance in this cooperation. Thus, shortly after the foundation of BSEC, on 6 March 1993, the culture ministers of the member states signed the *Cooperation Convention for Culture, Education, Science and Information*, which

was going to be the legal framework of the cultural cooperation in the area, the basis of the bilateral and multilateral agreements in this field. Culture, in a wide sense, is seen as a means and purpose of the social and individual development and the integration of cultural policies into the development strategies of the BSEC countries as a stage of the cultural cooperation in this area. The Convention provided the creation of a *Coordination Council* in charge with its implementation.

In the national cultural policies of the member states in transition, culture is considered as an “instrument able to help the democratic development of the countries and the reassertion of the cultural identities in the area, and as a part of the European cultural identity”, an important support to democratic processes. Cultural diversity, a treasure of humanity, is seen as an essential development factor, as traditional cultures promote values such as solidarity, creativity, etc., which are vital to this process.

The objectives of the cultural dimension of the cooperation promoted by BSEC coincide with the objectives supported by UNO (and the intergovernmental agency UNESCO, respectively) and EU, targeting the acknowledgement of the cultural dimension of development, the enrichment and assertion of cultural identities, promoting international cultural cooperation (R70/2003 of the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC).

Just like on an economic level, the Convention of cultural cooperation recommended the governments of the member states to create conditions for the cultural cooperation in the Black Sea region, together with the Culture Ministries and governmental agencies, for any category of nongovernmental organizations, associations of artists and writers, sporting organizations, children’s and youth organizations, private foundations, to extend and diversify the direct contacts among the inhabitants of the Black Sea region (Recommendation, 3/1994, II.2.c.).

Within the BSEC Organization, institutional tools were constituted to promote cultural cooperation, and the issues are integrated in the topics of daily debate at all levels. The working groups regarding cultural problems were followed by the creation of the *Committee for cultural, educational and social problems*, a specialized institution of the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC, together with the affiliated body called the *International Centre of Black Sea Studies*.

Within the cultural dimension of the regional cooperation in question, an important role is played by the activity of the Black Sea University, created at the initiative of institutions and scientific and cultural personalities in Romania, which functions as a BSEC observer. Since 1993 it has been organizing courses on many topics, from the aspects of European integration, to the geopolitics or seismology of the Black Sea region, with thousands of students in attendance.

At the initiative of the “Ovidius” University of Constanta, in Mangalia in September 1997, *the first conference of the rectors of the universities in the Black Sea region* was organized in order to identify the necessary intellectual resources in supporting development in the area. 36 universities participated, but it is considered that it is possible to extend connections to 80-100 universities in the Black Sea region. The second Conference took place in Romania as well, in Constanta in July 1998 (*RJIA*, vol. IV, 1998, p. 107).

The provisions of the Yalta Charter referring to academic cooperation are very succinct but this field constituted the subject of the Conference of the Academic Community Representatives held in Athens on 9-11 December 1996, the ample Tirana Report (1-2 April 1998) which established the legal framework of the activity *RJIA*, vol. IV, 1998, art. 23, pp. 96-105). In this field the coordinating role falls to a *Permanent Academic Committee*. The first meeting of the Committee took place in Bucharest on 26-27 February 1998. An important role was played by the Black Sea University, seen as “International Centre of Ongoing Education”, and the AIMOS Network grouping together 30 universities in South-Eastern Europe. The issues considered are “harmonising the legislation on research, higher education, science and technology in BSEC countries, as well as acquiring the most valuable international and European legislative initiatives in the field, to the purpose of overcoming obstacles in the path of scientific and technological cooperation, and knowledge and technology transfer among the BSEC countries” (*RJIA*, 1998, vol. IV, p. 109).

Recommendation 4/1994 of the BSEC Parliamentary Assembly aimed at “promoting common projects in the field of research of the Black Sea history as a means to increase respect and tolerance, as well as mutual understanding among the peoples in this region” (Rec.4-1994 on the joint research programme of the Black Sea history). The History Institute “Nicolae Iorga” of the Romanian Academy was called upon to coordinate the application of the Programme, and



each participant state was to designate a cultural or academic institution to keep in touch with the “N. Iorga” Institute.

*An Association of the Black Sea Country Capitals*, having its own statute and a website designed by the Ankara municipality was created, and, also, the general assembly of the mayors, prefects or governors of the capital cities tackles urgent cultural and social topics.

In February 2001 the Cultural Alliance of the Black Sea was registered as a subcommittee of Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC, and then as a non-commercial organization based in Moscow, which initiated the Festival of Children and Young People in the BSEC member states.

Indeed, the considerable changes in the past few years have led to instituting a new model of cultural diplomacy which is still under development, and is gradually becoming a key element in the general development strategy of the Black Sea region and the larger European space (Popa, 2005).

The conflicts from the last years from Georgia and Ukraine having Russian Federation as a common actor involved and the problems from the summer of 2007 in Turkey showed one more time that the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) cannot assume a status of a true political organization. But it is still the most important framework for the economic and cultural dimension of cooperation in the Black Sea Area and the most important tool to link this area to the European and international economy, to interrelate it with the other important international actors as EU, UN etc.

### **3. Conclusions**

Process of cooperation, organization, “prêt-a-porter regionalism” or already, a weak organization, were the most important points of view in characterization of the cooperation in the Black Sea Area.

The lack of symmetry in point of power potential among the members of a regional organization is able to ensure the efficiency of the common efforts only to the extent they match the actor(s) with the greatest potential, and involving external actors may only slightly balance or, like in the case of Crimea, may prove

inefficient or even escalate the tensions among the member states of the organization.

The action of Romania within OCEMN refers to the reconsideration of the functions of the national territory about that the French political scientist Christian Daudel spoke of, and the desire to contribute to redesigning Europe and instituting and maintaining stability in the Black Sea Area.

Initiated in the context of „rapid and profound change” (Art. 1 of the *Declaration ...*, Istanbul, 1992) OCEMN is trying, through the characteristics given by the founders and the periodic readjustments of its strategies, to fulfil the needs to rearrange the area structures on the basis of the option for market economy and connecting the region to the world economic system, illustrating at the same time the importance and actuality of the “history lesson” referring to the monopoly of a great power.

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\*\*\* *Recommendation. 70/2003 of the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC* on the role of culture in developing the BSEC region. Doc GA21-CC20-REC70-03.