

The Balkan World is not Enough

Christophe Solioz

Ownership of Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans

Sarajevo, 11 December 2008

Check against delivery

I will approach my topic by referring to updated material presented in the framework of previous—in fact very recent—conferences and studies—as the book I co-edited this Summer with Wolfgang Petritsch: *Regional Cooperation in SEE and Beyond*.

I want to address a set of three issues that are—as it stands now—somehow problematic in SEE. Regional cooperation, until very recently: was largely ascribed by outside forces, only perceived as a condition related to the EU integration process, and Approached from a stated-based viewpoint as an interstate construct focusing predominantly on cross-border cooperation.

Today regional cooperation is moving beyond this partly rudimentary understanding of regional cooperation.

When it comes to successful regional cooperation processes: willingness (and this includes of course the necessity to take into account the constraints that sovereignty imposes), capacity and the role of hegemons (dominant actors) matters.

Regions that do better are better connected. Here—in my view—connectivity matters more than ownership.

A set of maps will illustrate my key arguments. First, let's face Europe from a pan-European viewpoint focusing on the landscape of regions. One effect of this map is that it tends to wipe away—or at least to reduce the importance of—the states borders. This also invites us to see Europe and regional cooperation in a completely different way: against the background of this map it is obvious, first, that regional cooperation in SE is in fact subregional and, second, that cooperation involves not only the state level.. Let us now zoom in SEE.

The Transnational Cooperation Programme South East Europe is one out of the 13 EU transnational cooperation programmes—referred to in the EU Interreg programme as Strand B (Interreg IVB). In the new Structural Funds Period (2007-2013), the former CADSES transnational cooperation area was divided into two spaces: the Central Europe Programme (CENTRAL) and the South East Europe Space (SEE).

This programme exemplifies the concept of a multilevel political structure as it focuses on transnational cooperation involving national, regional and local authorities. Thus, regionalism operates simultaneously at different scales: above, below and at the state-levels.

A number of relevant points can be made here.

Firstly, the Western Balkans are not a ‘natural’ or ‘objective’ subregion, but a constructed one with shifting boundaries; further, the Western Balkans are less a homogeneous subregion than a multifaceted network linked to other networks. (...)

Looking to the ‘wider South East Europe’, we realise that all Western Balkans countries—in varying degrees—also belong to other subregions as well: Central Europe, and the Mediterranean and Black Sea subregions.

Secondly, the added value of such a transnational programme is that it brings the different region levels under the same roof in a multilevel political landscape. Indeed, both state and substate levels are included:

- For 14 countries, the programme involves the whole territory of each country, and
- For two—Italy and Ukraine—only certain regions.

This illustrates the ‘new regionalism’ approach that focuses on regionalism as characterised by its multidimensionality and complexity.

Thirdly, the format of this programme also illustrates the structural heterogeneity of SEE. Out of the 16 participating countries:

- Eight are EU Member States,
- Six are EU candidate and potential candidate countries, and
- Two are countries participating in the ENP.

Paradoxically, due to the EU integration process, SEE—as well as the Black Sea subregion—is today more heterogeneous than before, as it encompasses EU members, would-be members and one country explicitly barred from EU accession (Ukraine). (...)

Another example of a transnational cooperation scheme involving a multiplicity of regional levels is the Council of Europe (CoE) Adriatic Euroregion programme that involves:

- Seven Italian regions
- Three Slovenian municipalities
- Seven Croatian counties
- One canton from Bosnia and Herzegovina and
- Two countries (Montenegro and Albania).

The trans-European programmes enhanced by the Council of Europe and the EU illustrate the necessity of encompassing the different levels of regionalism: and insert the state level and the various levels of region (macro-, sub- and micro-regions) into a multilevel political structure.

The shift away from geographically conceived and state-based regions towards more open, expansive and flexible understandings focusing on ‘zones’ whose actors share common interests implies that regional cooperation cannot be limited:

- On the one hand, to transnational cooperation schemes referred to in the EU Interreg programme as Strand B (Interreg IIIB) and,
- On the other hand, to cross-border cooperation—referred to in the EU Interreg programme as Strand A (Interreg IIIA).

Contrary to the two abovementioned programmes (Strands A and B), interregional cooperation—referred in the EU Interreg programme as Strand C (Interreg IIIC)—allows micro-regions without joint borders to work together in a pan-European wide framework through common projects and to develop networks of cooperation focusing on the eight thematic areas—the overall objective being to reduce social and economic disparities.

This map shows the level of participation of the concerned regions in the 265 different Interreg 3C (2000–06) projects as of September 2005: while almost all regions are involved to a certain extent, some are more proactive, such as Spain, Slovenia, Germany and the Baltic area. A qualitative results analysis demonstrates that an exchange and dissemination experience is taking place (...). Let us be more specific with data from a research focusing on the same program.

This slide focuses on cooperation network of countries and shows the top 3 cooperation partners for each country. This slide reflects cooperation as established in the framework of above-mentioned the Interreg IIIC—referring to the “FAS.research” study which covers more than 90% of its cooperation projects (268 projects involving around 194 regions, 50 countries, more than 2650 partners across Europe: 494 from new members states and 154 from third countries).

- 1) Thickness and darkness of lines correspond to the number of common projects.
- 2) Arrows connecting countries in both directions indicate reciprocal relationships in which countries are equally important for each other in the network structure. Unidirectional arrows indicate relationships in which one country is a top cooperation partner for another one but not vice versa.
- 3) Sizes of nodes correspond to structural influence. Countries exhibiting strong structural influence are important for the flow of information through the network. They act as information brokers between other actors.

Note: cooperation between countries in less than five projects and non-EU member states are not shown. The ten new member states were eligible for co-financing by the EU only after 2004. Before that, their opportunities to participate to regional projects were limited.

Let us zoom in with the next slide that focuses on cooperation network of regions illustrating the cooperation profile of German regions.

While the major framework conditions to participate in this EU programme, namely national policies to match ERDF funds and eligibility for ERDF co-financing, are similar for regions of a given country, each European region creates its own specific and distinguishable cooperation profile with different cooperation intensities and preferences.

- Some German regions are very active in the programme, participating in many interregional cooperation projects. Others just participate in a few (sizes of nodes correspond to the number of projects).
- Different German regions prefer different cooperation partner regions (arrows from German regions to others indicate top 3 cooperation partners for German regions. Thickness and darkness of lines from German regions to others correspond to the number of common projects).
- Some German regions are top cooperation partners for other European regions (arrows from non-German to German regions indicate top importance of the German region as a cooperation partner).

The same study researched the Interreg IIIC regional networks’ qualitative dimensions focusing on:

- Attributes of actors: in terms of diversity (as colour—red stands for high diversity, blue for low diversity, and green for medium diversity— and height of a single node), and
- Attributes of relations: in terms of efficiency (on the y-axes) and stability (on the x-axes).

Note: Stability: measures expected robustness of links; efficiency measures the access of institutions to the social infrastructures in the scientific field; diversity takes into account the diversity of countries a region is connected with through common projects.

As you may well imagine, there are many open questions—related to the evaluation procedure and the methodology. I consider the FAS.research as an interesting approach inviting us to understand regional cooperation in its complexity.

Against the background of a set of questions, I hope that I—at least partly—provided some answers; I would like to present some concluding remarks.

The EU's wide range of cross-border, transnational and interregional programmes illustrate the new trend toward regionalism. The multidimensionality, complexity and necessary fluidity of regional cooperation schemes are supplemented by the fact that most EU Member States are simultaneously involved in the different strands and cooperation programmes.

Thus, subregional cooperation is increasingly complex due to the density of cooperation programmes such as the EU pre-accession process, the ENP, the EU strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, various regional initiatives—some of them linked to the Stability pact legacy (just to mention few ones: SECI Centre for Fighting Trans-border Crime; the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for SEE (DPPI-SEE); the Energy Community Treaty, CEFTA 2006 SEE)—and, not to be forgotten, numerous bilateral agreements.

Against this background one option could be of course to prioritise the most efficient regional initiatives and cooperation schemes focusing on key priorities—in the field of economic development and ecological sustainability, energy and transport infrastructure, justice, and home affairs. But it must not be forgotten that 'open regionalism' also refers to a comprehensive and multidimensional process targeting not only economic, political and security issues, but also environmental, social and cultural ones. Thus, a balance must be found between, on the one hand, the necessity to focus quite narrowly and, on the other hand, the need to follow a comprehensive approach.