

Open Regionalism In | South East | Europe: From State Building to Region Building And The Other Way Round

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I will approach my topic by referring to updated material presented in the framework of previous conferences and studies—as the book I co-edited last Summer with Wolfgang Petritsch: *Regional Cooperation in SEE and Beyond* and paper I wrote with Paul Stubbs and which is about to be published in the *Journal of SEE and Black Sea Studies*.

I want to address a set of three issues that are—as it stands now—somehow problematic in SEE. Regional cooperation, until very recently (slide 3): 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.

The necessity to view regional cooperation outside the box, to investigate the emergent regional cooperation trends, can only benefit from the new thinking about regions, more specifically from the recent new understanding of regionalization, referred to as ‘new regionalism’ or as ‘open regionalism’ (slide 4).

From this point of view—and here I will make a long story short, focusing on 2 key aspects:

- 1) Regionalism today may be best characterized as a ‘crowded playground’ involving more and more non-state actors. Thus, beyond (above and below) the state: regions, cantons, cities and various civic initiatives and NGOs.
- 2) This regionalism of networks, and of networks powers, produces new forms of cooperation—away from the previous, seen as taken-or-granted, Westphalian model. New practices do not only cross borders but also transform them.

Is this a new utopia? Not at all. I will try to illustrate that it’s already a reality (slide 5). First, let’s face Europe from a pan-European viewpoint focusing on the landscape of regions in Europe.

One effect of this map (slide 5) 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 in a completely different way (...). Let us now zoom in SEE.

First (slide 6), SEE as viewed from the EU integration process viewpoint.

As you see, state-borders matters and we have—note after the fall of the Berlin wall—new frontiers in Europe: between

- 1) The 27 EU member states,
- 2) the non-member states (Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the Caucasian State) and
- 3) The would-be member states: respectively candidate (Croatia, Macedonia, Turkey), and potential candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo).

As a matter of facts, the 5th EU enlargement induced new divisions and contradictions: Thus, today more than in the past, SEE and the Black Sea region are heterogeneous areas.

Depending on its status, each country is subject of specific EU programs: pre-accession process, ENP and strategic partnership. Of course, at the same time, one nevertheless relevant EU conditionality insists on cooperation—even if we may observe that the EU integration process focuses much more on state-building than on region-building.

Very interestingly, depending the colours you may use, you can increase these new divisions. Confront this map, to the next two ones (slides 7 and 8).

The Transnational Cooperation Programme South East Europe (slide 9) 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 CAD-SES 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 (slide 10), 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 (slide 11) 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.

(Slide 12) 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.

Slide 13 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.

(Slide 14) Let me introduce my conclusion summarizing the main characteristics of regional cooperation in SEE in the forthcoming period:

- A) Regional cooperation should not be perceived as a conditionality, but as a value per se:
⇒ Regions are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed from the outside and/or from within (as illustrated by the shift of the SP to the RCC).
- B) Regional cooperation is a multilevel and a multiscalar political structure:
⇒ **Levels** refer to various actors: state, region, counties, cantons and cities
⇒ **Scales** of regionalism refer to:
- Macro-regions: between the state and the global level,
- Subregions
- Micro-regions: between the national and the local level (they may or may not fall within the state borders)
- C) Regional cooperation was, is and will be characterized by a high density of programmes and networks.

As already mentioned, the multidimensionality, complexity and necessary fluidity of regional cooperation schemes are supplemented by the fact that most actors are simultaneously involved in the different 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 Transborder 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.

Let's not forget: Above all, it is an open and dynamic process (...).

(Slide 15) The scientific literature on regionalism views three key issues:

- Capacity
- Political will
- Role of hegemon – dominant actors (often states)

(Slide 16) Last but not least; regional cooperation should not be seen as an alternative to the EU. It is part of the EU integration process, but—and this is the added value of regionalism—it allows to be more inclusive and to network the EU, the enlargement, the ENP.

Referred to the Balkans, this explains why state building is a precondition to region building. But let me insist on the very fact that the relation between state building and region building must be conceived as an interaction. Region building also contributes to develop state building (as specific administrative capacities, but enforces also the state sovereignty; and this matters in Italy, as well as in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (...)).