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Emergent regional co-operation in South East Europe: towards ‘open regionalism’?

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Regional cooperation in South East Europe is at a crossroads. Until now, it has been largely ascribed by outside forces, perceived as a condition related to the EU integration process, and approached from a state-based viewpoint as an interstate construct. However, there are emergent trends which reframe regional cooperation as ‘open regionalism’, more achieved from within, and consisting of multi-actor, multilevel and multi-scalar processes forming a complex geometry of interlocking networks, with variable reach and multiple nodal points. This text critically explores these trends, addressing some of their cross-border, transnational and interregional dimensions, in the context of wider processes of regional integration.

Keywords: regionalism; South East Europe; co-operation; networks

Redefining regions, regionalism, and regionalization

Traditionally, regions have been viewed as a particular stratum or level in the architecture of international relations, with the concept applied typically to a limited number of nation states linked together by a geographical relationship and a degree of mutual interdependence (Nye 1968, vii). Reliant on an objectivist spatial ontology in which geographical relationships, nation-state forms and, indeed, measures of mutual interdependence are essentialized categories, the traditional view spawned a set of supposedly technical scientific exercises in which, on the basis of ever more complex typologies and models, classifications of which regions were ‘real’ and which were not could be developed and agreed. The concept of ‘regions’ is further complicated, of course, by the fact that it can also refer to sub-nation-state units and, indeed, to intrastate regions composed of parts of neighbouring nation-states. Similar issues of essentialism remain here. Both kinds of regions matter, of course, insofar as they are translated into specific practices resulting in recognized territorial boundaries, revealed in maps, and specific institutional structures with set competencies enshrined in laws, rule books, and codified procedures.

However, regions and ways of thinking about regions are changing rapidly, with much less emphasis on the ‘what’ in terms of their definition, and much more emphasis on the ‘how’ in terms of processes of region-making. It has become commonplace to assert that ‘there are no “natural” regions: definitions of a “region” vary according to the particular problem or question under investigation’ (Hettne 2005, 544). The ‘spatial turn’ in contemporary social science is underpinned by the axiom that regions

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are socially and politically constructed and subject to diverse and contested deconstructions and reconstructions. Regions are thus seen rather more as flexible constructs, contingent on social practices, and made up of more or less dense and interlocking social networks¹ of collaboration and interaction, as well as of conflict and contestation. Regions, like nation-states, then, are ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1991) consisting of complex, overlapping and, not unusually, competing identities, identifications and visions, both constituted by, and constitutive of, power relations. Regions are never merely arbitrarily invented: they do bear the traces of historical legacies, but are also continually being redefined and reconstituted by a wide range of diverse and various practices or ‘narratives’. These ‘rarely produce a coherent or even compatible story’ (Lagendijk 2005, 77).

The social scientific task becomes one of drawing out the agendas and interests that may invoke particular regional narratives and which seek to translate them ‘into actions of region-building’ (77). Louise Fawcett, seeking to grasp ‘the newer and expanding domains of regional action’ (Fawcett 2004, 432), distinguishes between ‘regionalism’ as a policy or project of cooperation and coordination, and ‘regionalization’ as a project and process involving ‘a concentration of activity at regional level’ (433) that may both ‘proceed and flow from regionalism’ (433). Working in the space between objectivist and constructivist accounts, Fawcett does not make clear when processes become sufficiently concentrated to become a regional project. In addition, the framework she provides is in danger of seeing the regional level as somehow prior to these processes. Nevertheless, Fawcett’s concepts are useful in directing attention to the active politics of region-making, in which ‘regions are invented by political actors as a political programme’ (Neumann 2001, 58). They thereby encourage the study of ‘the ideas, dynamics and means that contribute to ... a politically constructed community’ (Neumann 2003, 160).

Hettne (1999) has characterized ‘new regionalism’ as the more recent ‘wave’ or ‘generation’ of regionalisms emerging around the time of the first stirrings of the shift from a bipolar Cold War world to a multi-polar globalized world. One may also refer to ‘open regionalism’ to signify a shift from a ‘territorially bounded system of geo-economic blocs’ (Katzenstein 2002, 6) to more freely chosen, open-ended, and innovative forms of cooperation across boundaries. New regionalisms are thus characterized by their multidimensionality, complexity, and fluidity. They involve heterogeneous state and non-state actors coalescing in often transient, rather informal, multi-actor coalitions, and acting in multiple arenas (Hurrell 2005, 42). New regionalism is, in many ways, a regionalism of networks and network power, producing, reconfiguring, and contesting ‘particular differentiations, orderings and hierarchies among geographical scales’ (Brenner 2001, 600). At their simplest, networks are merely ‘interconnected nodes’ and ‘open structures’ in which ‘the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power’, capable of integrating new nodes ‘as long as they share the same ... performance goals’ (Castells 1996, 469–70).

In this conceptualization, the nation-state is neither prior nor primary; rather, it is itself a set of nested networks, such that ‘multiple power claims and regulatory regimes co-exist ... , and their interrelation is a matter of continuous negotiation’ (Stalder 2006, 127). The multiplication of sites of the generation of strategies (Bratsis 2002, 259) means that what have previously been seen as taken-for-granted ‘aspects of statehood’ within a Westphalian model, such as sovereignty and the monopoly of violence, become much more unstable and mediated in new regionalism, with patterns of diffusion and recombination operating at different speeds, with variable reach and taking diverse

forms (Deacon and Stubbs 2007, 6). Binary understandings of state sovereignty, in which a state either fully possesses sovereignty or has lost sovereignty, are replaced by notions of 'sovereign frontiers' (Harrison 2001) in which boundaries between what is supposedly 'internal' or domestic and what is 'external' or international become blurred. New hybrid forms based on complex linkages emerge, constituting a new 'intermestic sphere' of processes that 'disrupt and re-make the "inside" and "outside" of states' (Nash 2007, 419); not merely crossing borders, but transforming them.

New regionalism is marked by a 'crowded playground' (Arandarenko and Golitsin 2007, 182) in terms of a proliferation of actors both constituting and constituted by a regional scale. Clearly, one part of this is the rather dramatic expansion of what has been termed 'non-state actors' who may be not-for-profit, for profit or, indeed, blur the line between the two (Stubbs 2003). Diverse actors form regionalized networks, partnerships, alliances, and coalitions that can involve shifting and multiple agency, with the rise of what Wedel has termed 'transactorship' in 'flex nets' that have a 'chameleon-like, multipurpose character' explicitly playing at the edge of, and therefore blurring, distinctions between formal and informal, public and private, state and non-state, international and domestic and, indeed, legal and illegal (Wedel 2004, 167).

The importance of brokerage, mediation, and translation is intensified in such liminal encounters,² with new forms of regionalized authority formed in the spaces between traditional career employment patterns. Hence, for instance, the NGO activist who becomes a politician, and then an international civil servant, and subsequently or even simultaneously a freelance consultant or advisor, while maintaining an affiliation with a number of research institutes, is operating in precisely the spaces of network power in this way, rendering even supposedly clear distinctions between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' regionalization increasingly irrelevant. The social scientific task is to untangle, then, the ways in which diverse actors engage in practices of 'verticality and encompassment' (Ferguson and Gupta 2002, 981) in order to render specific forms of authority, regulation, and routines spatialized and territorialized without making 'unwarranted assumptions' about which actors have particular 'spatial reach' (981).

Processes of new regionalism construct and reconfigure subjectivities and identities while also, crucially, continually creating and re-creating policy and political domains and practices. This includes those that may be labelled, for example, creative and artistic, activist, civic, sporting, criminal,³ and trading and business relations, as well as in terms of multilateral political and technical initiatives. How these are mapped and framed in terms of political, economic, social, and cultural practices is also a more open question than might at first appear. Lendvai (2007) writes of the ways in which new regionalism involves the reconfiguring, reframing, and recoupling of domestic policy domains, creating assemblages of innovative policy fields in which 'meanings, discourses, ideas, policy tools and objectives' (Lendvai 2007, 32) are transformed, often subtly.

Constructivist theories can be in danger of downplaying power relations and, hence, becoming apologists for idealistic conceptions of consensual regionalisms in which cooperation evolves naturally from a growing, rational, realization of common interests. Emphasizing network power, however, suggests a need to be sensitive both to the network relations and to power relations which, though they differ from traditional hierarchical conceptions, are nevertheless all-pervading. In addition, historical patterns and legacies continue to play a role, sometimes ignored in the suggestion of a paradigm shift from old to new regionalisms. Continued division of the world into

‘core’, ‘intermediate’, and ‘peripheral’ regions in terms of the degree of economic dynamism or stagnation, political stability or turbulence, and degree of proneness to war (Hettne 2001, xv), and in terms of a social Darwinist conception of their ‘ability to cope with global transformation’, though a profoundly ahistorical construction, does at least point to the centrality of power relations. Many theorists of the new regionalism approach tend to suggest that hegemonic regionalisms, in which (so-called ‘great’) powers, near or far, offer protection – albeit often at a price – to members of regional alliances, are a thing of the past and that power and hegemony is far more dispersed nowadays. At the same time, however, more radical and post-colonialist critics, themselves in danger of overstating the case, would disagree.

Using a lens of empire and coloniality based on an understanding of ‘prior imaginings of world space’ (Larner and Walters 2004) shatters the ‘presentist realism’ of much contemporary globalization thinking (Lendvai and Stubbs forthcoming). Böröcz’s focus on ‘the specific histories of colonialism and empire, with their deeply coded ... patterns of inequality, hierarchy, exclusion and power’ (Böröcz 2001, 14), which he sees as reflected in the nature of new modes of governance in the European Union, alerts us to the important, albeit rather more complex and fragmented, nature of relations of interdependency and of exclusion of supposedly dissimilar ‘others’ – termed ‘othering’ in the post-structuralist literature – that may be present in processes of regionalization. Seeing new regionalisms as replete with paradoxes of power, and tensions between solidarity and exclusion (Clarke 2004, 94), between securitization and mobility, and between managing and enabling citizens is, perhaps, a more tenable position than Böröcz’s – always dependent, of course, on context and conjuncture.

South East Europe: from state-building to region-building

There is a complex relationship between state-building and region-building in South East Europe, overlain by contested historical claims in which contemporary understandings of a nation-state are superimposed on older territorial concepts. In some senses, the creation of nation-states in South East Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century and the establishment of perceived ‘ethnicized’ frontiers based on the principle of national self-determination was extremely difficult, as mobility over the new borders of peoples who lived for centuries in multinational empires had to be contained (Syrrri and Stubbs 2005). Seeing the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as one of the last empires in Europe is also relevant, since the reassertion of nationalisms, the bloody conflicts and the fragmentation into smaller states and mini-states in which competing claims continue to be asserted, coincided with the fall of the Berlin wall and the beginning of the transition paradigm. A large federal state, Yugoslavia, close to joining a Western European ‘core’ by the 1980s,⁴ was thus quickly consigned to peripheral status and the successor states are only now (provided they adopt desirable forms of regional cooperation) beginning to be treated as part of an emergent intermediate region or subregion.

The European Union was a somewhat low-key player in the region during the wars in which Yugoslavia was dissolved, a time in which supposedly non-political humanitarianism substituted for any kind of constructive political intervention. As integration for states judged capable of ‘rejoining Europe’ (including, of course, Slovenia and, later, Bulgaria and Romania) produced new contradictions and, indeed, divisions between a European inside and a not quite European outside, the European Union began, through the Stabilisation and Association process (SAP), to

adopt a political approach to the region, at least in narrative terms. In this process, the qualities of the new states in terms of their internally evolving political and economic structures were tied, in complex and sometimes contradictory ways, to emerging regional cooperation.

Beginning in the late 1990s, a new wave of regional cooperation emerged, largely engineered from outside and approached as a kind of peace-building project from a linear neofunctionalist viewpoint. According to this viewpoint, cooperation first had to be established through the promotion of cross-border activities such as transport, trade, production and tourism; second, this cooperation process was supposed to guarantee security and stability, and, thus, third, lead to political integration. Regional cooperation was, primarily, based on standards and norms set by outside actors such as the EU and NATO, and, to a lesser extent, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe. In the region's first post-war decade, the EU integration process and NATO membership, termed Euro-Atlantic integration, taken on a country-by-country basis, was the main incentive to reform. Hence, South East Europe was an emergent subregional space, largely ascribed by outside forces rather than achieved from within. Indeed, regional cooperation is frequently put forward by these forces, and often accepted by politicians in the region, as a conditionality making possible the ultimately supposedly more important goals of EU accession and NATO membership rather than as an end in itself.

The establishment of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe launched in Sarajevo in July 1999 is both a key moment in this phase and a turning-point in terms of the possibility of more open regionalism. Established as a coordinating body 'aimed at strengthening the efforts of the countries of South Eastern Europe in fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity',⁵ the Pact conceived, in part at least, as a mechanism for pressuring change in Serbia, excluded until the change in regime, can in retrospect be seen as a hybrid operating somewhere between a traditional interstate body and a new networked governance organization. In one sense, the Pact held to a very clear definition of interstate politics with its external supervisors, both nation-states and supranational bodies, its constituent nation-states, and its observers in the near neighbourhood. At the same time, the establishment of three working tables⁶ and numerous initiatives allowed for new forms of cooperation to develop between technocratic policy makers from nation-states in the region. In addition, some of its architects, particularly German greens and social democrats, were committed to a network politics in which policy entrepreneurs could work within a space that was deliberately conceived as a 'black box' and act as policy entrepreneurs, allowing for new ways of approaching emerging issues.

Indeed, it could be argued that the spaces between these three frames – interstate diplomacy, technocratic policymaking, and networked policy entrepreneurship – was filled by personalities whose precise role, as activists, advisors, political figures, or technocrats, was either ambiguous or fluid, and in any case, less their main claim to authority than their charisma and key contacts. To an extent, this was formalized in the increasing importance of a group of emerging 'intermestic' think-tanks⁷ explicitly operating in the spaces between formal politics, technocracy, and informal connections. In some ways, the fact that 'the process initiated with the Stability Pact ... raised great expectations for a new policy of the "international community" and especially the EU, in dealing with the political conflicts and the transformation process in SEE countries' (Fischer and Scotto 2000, 3) and, at the same time, South East European NGOs felt excluded from much of its workings (see Oberschmidt and Zellner 2002),

is a testament to the difficulties of reconciling these levels and approaches, as well as to the difficulty of promoting ‘open regionalism’ at that time.

The Stability Pact was also something of a turning-point in terms of defining and naming the region, rendering the use of the term ‘South East Europe’ central to its operations, explicitly targeting Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, fYR Macedonia, Romania, rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro together), and subsequently Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, as well as Moldova and also Greece, Turkey and Slovenia, while implicitly referring to an inclusive regional approach. From 1998, onwards, the term ‘Western Balkans’ (WB) emerged as something of a Brussels neologism referring to the countries that once belonged to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (minus Slovenia, plus Albania) and which are included in the EU’s SAp. From an EU perspective, the WB countries are divided into candidate countries for EU membership (Croatia and fYR Macedonia) and potential candidate countries, further divided between those with an active SAp agreement and those not, with Kosovo having special status. In this way, the South East European region was divided into several distinctive groupings based on external judgements on the nature of the state-building process and level of compliance with the norms set by the EU. As Dimitar Bechev has argued, the EU ‘shaped through its institutional practices of controlled inclusion the collective politico-geographical identities of the states in South East Europe after the late 1990s’ (Bechev 2006a, 22).

The symbolic linkage between nation-building and state-building is illustrated by the International Commission on the Balkans’ 2005 report, *The Balkans in Europe’s Future*. The Commission, itself a clear example of the importance of reworking old conceptions of policy advice in a new context, suggests that the EU only has the capacity to absorb ‘reasonably functioning and legitimate states’, adding caustically that ‘after Croatia, there are no more of these left in the region’ (International Commission 2005, 8–9). Bechev has further suggested that the EU’s ‘carrot and stick’ conditionality would not have had the impact it has had without its ‘ideational power as a promoter of certain normative notions of appropriate state behaviour’ (Bechev 2006b, 28). In a sense, the argument points to the need for the message to be absorbed by political elites in each nation-state and the complexities as a result of the fact that political and institutional arrangements remain unsettled and, in the case of both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, still have a direct external supervisory presence in terms of the Office of the High Representative and the EU Rule of Law Mission. His concern that, at times, the Stability Pact and the SAp process have failed to deliver expected carrots on time is important. Indeed, Bechev is surely correct to point to the contradictory nature of the balancing act between bilateralism and regionalization (Bechev 2006b, 36). He is also right to point out how the downfall of Milošević in October 1999 and the post-Tudtrockman election defeat of the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ) in January 2000 were crucial in changing the equation. The key point, however, is that the main EU strategy at the time was predominantly state- and interstate-oriented.

In this period, there were many other parallel regionalization processes underway, not least in terms of the linkages between NGOs and civil society organizations, particularly around human rights, gender, peace, development, and ecology. A major catalyst for regional linkages was George Soros’ Open Society Institute (OSI). OSI was a key player at the interface of the complex linkages between civil society, states, and ‘emergent forms of transnational authority’ (Stone 2008, 1). Stone’s account understands OSI’s legitimacy as based on a ‘circular process between the knowledge

it produces and the audiences that help legitimize and institutionally consolidate that knowledge' (4). Noting its importance as an agent of 'norm advocacy and policy transfer' throughout post-communist Eastern Europe, Stone's essay prefigures an account of the specific role of OSI in South East Europe, helping to construct alternative personalities as legitimate figures at the time when formal politics was dominated by authoritarian nationalism, promoting regional networking and, hence, engaged in region-building, legitimating an explicitly anti-nationalist regional civil society as a 'driver of regionalization' (Stone 2008, 10).

Noting the 'elite' nature of associational life promoted by OSI is important, but the complexities of the relationship of these elites to state forms *per se* and to particular conjunctural state forms is also crucial, not least since it could be argued that in Serbia, at least, the Open Society grouping was a state elite in waiting. OSI helped to construct a region and, in a sense, prefigured the complex relationships between politicized, technical, expertised, and interest-based networking. Its construction of a regional agenda of cross-border projects in the areas of anti-corruption, education, public health, media, illegal labour migration, and minority issues (Stubbs 2005, 79), can be seen as a clear example of parallel intrastate civil society networking. While Stone is clearly correct in detecting a recent 'global turn' in OSI thinking and networking, the earlier 'regional turn', including explicit involvement with the Stability Pact and other regional instruments and mechanisms, is of immense importance.

It would be wrong to over-emphasize the OSI at the expense of other related networks – including, for example, the Helsinki Citizens Assembly (hCa), which had its lineages in the European Nuclear Disarmament movement and which forged links with independent intellectuals, many of whom had been founders of the Association for Yugoslav Democratic initiatives. Emerging anti-war networks and civilian parliaments were also important in this period alongside human rights initiatives. Many were linked to the OSI network – sometimes on principle but also, sometimes, on the basis of material interest. With a few notable exceptions traceable to particular personalities, such as the OSCE's democratization unit support for regional networking amongst local citizens' initiatives, neither the SAP nor the Stability Pact ever developed ways of promoting the advocacy of this kind of civic regionalism, at best working with a small number of elite networks which it could be stated that they had been instrumental in establishing. The complexities of these processes are beyond the scope of this article, other than in terms of the symbolic importance of civic regionalism⁸ and, at the same time, its relegation to a kind of inferior, parallel, status compared with interstate regionalism at the time.

A thousand flowers bloom: open regionalism in South East Europe

Bechev's contrast between the grand themes of multilateralism, which have not met expectations, and what he terms 'more flexible schemes' operating at a 'less than regional level' (Bechev 2006b, 29) captures the shift towards a more open regionalism in the last few years. It is the recent proliferation and multifaceted nature of schemes and the ensuing possibilities of thickening network power through a multiplication of nodes and, above all, a more complex geometry – so that cooperation in a single region is not all or nothing – that marks the key elements of this shift towards more open regionalism. In addition, structures have emerged that offer the possibility, if not yet the reality, of regional ownership and the diminution, if not the eradication, of external power hegemony. The diversity of linkages holds the possibility of a clear

move away from exclusively intrastate regionalism towards more open, expansive, and flexible geometries focusing on interlocking zones where diverse actors can realize common interests.

Three key shifts are crucial in this regard. First, the fact that the renewed Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) 2006 – which originates from the initial CEFTA agreement signed in 1992 by the Visegrád Group (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) – no longer includes any country belonging to Central Europe, but only South East European countries, is symbolic of an escape from the Balkans and identification with Central Europe as a first step on the road to a wider European space. While the Energy Community can also be viewed in a similar way, here the linkage with EU interests and the *acquis* is more explicit (Boromisa 2006). While both relate to issues that are of everyday importance, of course, the workings of CEFTA and, even more so, the Energy Community, rarely impinge on any but a very select, technical, public. The continued examination of, and progress in, visa liberalization for South East Europe both in relation to the EU and within the regional space itself (see ESI 2008) may, on the other hand, have a wider resonance.

Second, the transition from the Stability Pact to the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), with its staffing from the region and its main offices located in Sarajevo, is an explicit attempt to work towards new institutional structures underpinned by real ‘regional ownership’. Though external donors remain involved, a more explicit attempt to root funding in the countries of the region, including Moldova, Bulgaria, and Romania, has emerged. The RCC seems prepared to take on some of the priorities of the Stability Pact and to continue to support some of the networks that have emerged.⁹ As the RCC only began work in May 2008, it is too early to judge its longer-term impact. Certainly, the linkage with the interstate South East European Cooperation Process may breathe life into the latter and also free the RCC to be more innovative. The danger, however, is that it will reinscribe a rather technical-bureaucratic approach, leaving little room for non-state actors, for policy entrepreneurship and, indeed, for networking. Its choice of initial areas to focus on also seems limited, playing down the important issues of social inclusion and social cohesion (Stubbs forthcoming).

Thirdly, and potentially most importantly, an array of cross-border, interregional, and transitional programmes, mainly but not only led by the European Union, while themselves having a longer history, hold out a real opportunity for tracing and consolidating a new trend towards open regionalism. They become more important, in a sense, in symbolizing a shift away from post-conflict reconstruction and state-building processes towards what might be termed fully-fledged EU integration and region-building strategies, with more mainstream EU instruments and mechanisms beginning to operate alongside, and perhaps even prevailing over, specific mechanisms that focus on conditionalities at the state level. A range of trans-European programmes involving the EU and the Council of Europe have the potential to embrace open regionalism, encompassing different scales, actors, and levels within a kind of multilevel polity. While the on the ground realities of any particular initiative may be problematic, it is their sheer number, variable geometry, and innovative structures that are important.

Council of Europe programmes in South East Europe have focused on decentralization, the development of innovative forms of local democracy, and increased citizen participation. They have also contributed to cross-border dialogue and cooperation, encouraging the setting-up of Euroregions and similar forms of subregional cooperation,

such as, for example, the Local Democracy agencies based on twinning – an initiative set-up in 1993 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. The strength of the various initiatives lies in the recognition that subregional cooperation involves not only states, but also territorial communities, local and regional authorities, and non-state actors. These so-called ‘Euroregions’, now numbering more than 70, exhibit a variety of forms, but their work is limited to the competences of the local and regional authorities that constitute them.

The Adriatic Euroregion, founded in Pula (Croatia) on 30 June 2006, has 23 members whose variety illustrates the multiplicity of involved levels: seven Italian regions (Abruzzo, Emilia–Romagna, Friuli–Venezia Giulia, Marche, Molise, Puglia, Veneto), three Slovenian municipalities (Izola, Koper, Piran), seven counties from Croatia (Dubrovnik–Neretva, Istria, Lika–Senj, Primorsko–Goranska, Šibenik–Knin, Split–Dalmatia, Zadar), one canton from Bosnia–Herzegovina (Herzegovina–Neretva), and two countries (Montenegro and Albania). Of course, with such a broad membership, the nature of decision-making is rendered complex by the divergent levels of competencies – between regions, municipalities, counties, canton, and countries – with potentially significant effects on the nature, themes, and effectiveness of cooperation (Popescu 2008). The relationship between substate bodies and their own nation-states and civil societies also matters, as does the ever-present danger that, just as in many Euroregions in Western Europe, the distance between technocratic actors and interested publics widens rather than narrows (Kramsch and Hooper 2004).

Nevertheless, in contrast to grand multilateralism, any ‘failures’ in a particular Euroregion rarely have wider and deeper implications, and any ‘successes’ will leave their mark in terms of innovative modes of governance. The fact that the legal status of Euroregions varies is also important in terms of promoting openness and flexibility. As the Council of Europe point out, Euroregions can involve a community of interest without legal personality, a European Economic Interest Grouping, a non-profit-making association, a working community without a legal personality or a public body. Most interestingly, while some Euroregions include similar levels of authority, such as regions and provinces, others have a mixed structure.¹⁰

Having a regional programme since 1957, the EU significantly enhanced its own approach to ‘regions in Europe’ in the early 1990s. Creating the Committee of the Regions in 1994 contributed to the recognition of regions as legitimate actors in the EU polity. In addition, the trans-European Territorial Cooperation Objective aimed to reduce economic disparities within the EU. In the later framework, the three strands of the Interreg programme – including 27 member states, Norway and Switzerland – deserve particular attention as they illustrate the prevailing role of the micro-regional level within a network framework for the different scales of regionalization. The EU’s regional cooperation schemes were developed as Interreg I between 1990 and 1993, as Interreg II between 1994 and 1999, as Interreg III between 2000 and 2006, and now as Interreg IV for the 2007–2013 period.

Strand A targets cross-border cooperation between adjacent regions and aims to develop cross-border social and economic centres through common development strategies. The overall objective is to strengthen the competitiveness of the border micro-regions. Strand B exemplifies the concept of a multilevel political structure as it focuses on transnational cooperation involving national, regional, and local authorities in order to improve integration within the EU through the formation of large groups of subregions, based on territorial coherence and geography. Strand C concentrates on interregional cooperation with the objective of improving the effectiveness

of regional development policies and instruments through large-scale information exchange and sharing of experience. In this framework, enhanced cooperation among Europe's subnational micro-regions is encouraged in four programme zones (North, East, South, and West) and promotes the participation of third countries as widely as possible – especially the EU candidate countries, Norway, Switzerland, and the Mediterranean countries. Unlike the other two programmes, Strand C allows micro-regions without joint borders to work together through common projects and to develop networks of cooperation focusing on eight thematic areas.¹¹

Figure 1 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 at least to a certain extent, some are more proactive, such as in Spain, Slovenia, Germany, and in the Baltic area. Interregional cooperation continues for the period 2007–2013 under the Interreg 4C programme, giving increased focus on innovation, competitiveness, the knowledge economy and sustainable development.

The Transnational Cooperation Programme South East Europe is one of 13 EU transnational cooperation programmes developed by the European Territorial Cooperation objective of the EU Regional Policy within Strand B. It has been created out of the former Interreg IIIB Central European, Adriatic, Danubian, South-Eastern European Space (CADSES) Programme. For the 2007–2013 period, the CADSES transnational cooperation area has been divided into two spaces: South East Europe and Central Europe. Some states, such as Austria, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, and the Ukraine, are included in both programmes.¹² Its overall objective is to improve the territorial, economic, and social integration process in South East Europe and contribute to the cohesion, stability, and competitiveness of the area through the development of transnational partnerships and joint action on matters of strategic importance. More specifically, it targets innovation and entrepreneurship, protection, and improvement of the environment, improvement of accessibility, and the development of transnational synergies for sustainable urban development. Its format illustrates the structural heterogeneity of South East Europe: out of the 16 participating countries, eight are EU member states, six are candidate and potential candidate countries, and two are countries participating in the European Neighbourhood Programme (ENP). It also illustrates the necessity to work at both state and substate levels: for 14 countries, the programme involves the whole territory of each country, and for two – Italy and Ukraine – only certain regions (see Figure 2).

The size and complexity of the architecture of this programme not only contributes to overcoming divisions within Europe along political, economic, and cultural lines, but also attests to the EU's emergence as a major promoter of and actor in trans-European regional cooperation. It also emphasizes the role of micro-regions, as well as the necessity to bring the different region-levels under the same roof: a multi-scalar political landscape. The multidimensionality, complexity and necessary fluidity of regional cooperation schemes are supplemented by the fact that most participating actors are simultaneously involved in the different strands and cooperation programmes.

Subregional cooperation in South East Europe nowadays must be understood in a new geopolitical environment: anticipating forthcoming strategic changes. It should indeed be acknowledged that the EU has started to focus in a new way on what happens beyond its borders. Three main changes may reframe the EU's neighbourhood policy (ENP) and its regional policy. First, there is a new strategic partnership with the Russian Federation in sight – the negotiations, which have been delayed by almost 18 months, started in Brussels on 4 July 2008. A far-reaching pact would

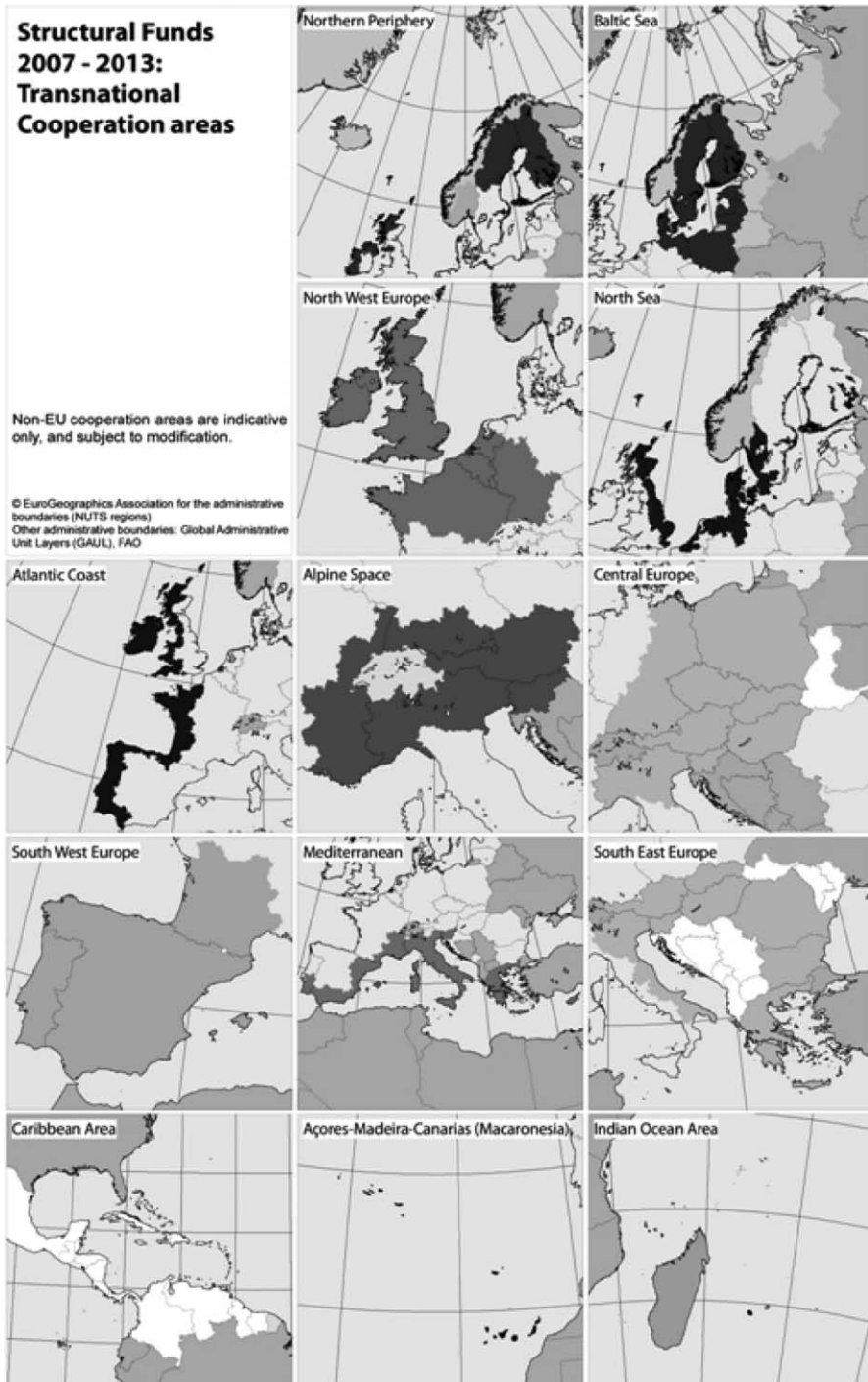


Figure 1. Transnational cooperation in the framework of Interreg IVB (2007–2013).
 Reproduced with permission of INTERREG IVC.
 Source: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/graph/cartes_en.htm.

Downloaded By: [Solioz, Christophe] At: 03:54 13 May 2009



Figure 2. SEE transnational cooperation in the framework of Interreg IVB. Reproduced with permission of INTERREG IVC. Source: <http://www.southeast-europe.net>.

undoubtedly help to ease tension and confrontation with Moscow and shape Russian Federation–EU relations in the twenty-first century. The fact that all the EU members adopted the mandate for talks in May 2008 illustrates the – often missing – unity of the EU. As Mikhail Gorbachev notes: the time seems ripe for a ‘comprehensive dialogue aimed at constructing an advanced partnership between the European Union and Russia’ (Gorbachev 2008, 4). In a sense, the tensions as a result of the Georgia crisis in August 2008 merely highlight the importance of this.

Second, the EU will have to revise and progress links with its Mediterranean neighbours. If not a ‘Mediterranean Union’ – the project pioneered in October 2007 by the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy – then a reloaded ‘Barcelona process’ focusing on concrete and achievable objectives could be a viable, though less ambitious, alternative. This is precisely the sense of the EU Commission Communication presented on 20 May 2008, which targets such projects as the clean-up of the Mediterranean Sea, the establishment of new sea routes and highways, and the harnessing of solar energy.¹³ The ‘Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean’ launched on 13 July 2008 in Paris may eventually renew the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

Third, the joint Polish and Swedish initiative to launch an ‘Eastern Partnership’ envisages an innovative multinational forum between the EU-27 and the neighbouring states of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. This proposal for a

new Eastern Europe Policy, presented first at an EU foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels on 26 May 2008,¹⁴ could contribute to a new approach to regionalism and reinvigorate what remains a rather feeble pan-European architecture.

Against the backdrop of these three developments, subregional cooperation in SEE will have to be redesigned accordingly – a wider policy framework than the present one is an absolute necessity. In fact, all SEE countries in varying degrees also belong to other regions: Central Europe, and the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. As Vladimir Gligorov puts it, 'the Balkans are a region of overlapping regions' (Gligorov 1998, 2). Indeed, SEE is less a homogeneous region than a multifaceted network linked to other networks. It is now time to network these networks. Of course, proactive and forward-looking regional cooperation follows less the logic of sovereign states and more the notion of mutually assured connectivity.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to understand, theoretically, analytically and normatively, the importance of viewing South East Europe through a lens of 'open regionalism'. Such an approach prefigures a framework in which South East Europe, in its variable geometry, is seen as a key part of pan-European space. We have argued that the time is ripe for a move beyond regional cooperation as mere EU conditionality, and have also emphasized the need to move away from the dominance of interstate and donor-driven processes. In networked regionalization, tensions between political, technocratic, and civic claims and approaches to governance do not disappear but, rather, are reconfigured in interesting and innovative ways at various scales.

Though this text is sceptical of the 'leading role' played by the EU integration process, and concerned that the RCC may be too focused on constructing a transnational bureaucratic domain, it leaves open the possibility of their transformation into processes supportive of more open regionalism and empowering innovative policy actors to 'jump scale'. At its best, open regionalism may be part of a reinvigoration of the public sphere that allows for connections between political region-making, joint problem-solving, and a redefinition of citizenship. With a multiplication of nodes, an increasingly complex geometry of regionalization and, above all, a thickening of networks there is, clearly, a need for new kinds of multidisciplinary research utilizing diverse methodologies in order to capture this complexly evolving landscape.

Notes

1. 'A social network consists of a series of direct and indirect ties from one actor to a collection of others, whether the central actor is an individual person or an aggregation of individuals (e.g. a formal organization). A network tie is defined as a relation or social bond between two interacting actors' (Davern 1997).
2. 'Liminality' is used here as 'those times or places that are outside of or on the threshold of ordinary structures with which we organize our lives' (Urla 1977, 101).
3. It can be argued that some forms of illegality are not merely rational but also a means of reading dominant power relations and participating in and authenticating particular regulatory codes (see Roitman 2005, 432). In this sense, people-smugglers and drug traffickers, criminals in organized crime rings, and so on, may be networked region-builders every bit as much as their formally legal counterparts. Indeed, quasi-legal power networks (Solioz 2007), in situations of ambiguity over power relations, may be a rather privileged site of such practices, able to move flexibly between legality and illegality through connections with business and political elites.
4. On transition, see Carrothers 2004.

5. <http://www.stabilitypact.org/>.
6. There were three Working Tables, which operated under the Regional Table: Working Table I: Democratisation and Human Rights; Working Table II: Economic Reconstruction, Co-operation and Development; Working Table III: Security Issues (with two Sub-Tables: Security and Defence, and Justice and Home Affairs). See <http://www.stabilitypact.org>.
7. On think-tanks in general and, more specifically in transition contexts, see Stone 2001 and 2005. On their role in Central and South East Europe, see Krastev 2000.
8. Though primarily applied to subnational regionalism, 'civic regionalism' that is 'based on participatory, inclusive and partnership modes of governance' (Jonas and Pinsetl 2006, 482) can also be applied to transnational processes.
9. See the Strategic Work Programme of the RCC for 2008–2009: http://www.rcc.int/download.php?tip=docs&doc=Strategic+Work+Programme+of+the+RCC.pdf&doc_url=da613cb78b41a7342530fb8dbb8e0a25.
10. A list of Euroregions can be found at http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/areas_of_work/transfrontier_co%2Doperation/euroregions/List_of_Euroregions.asp.
11. The thematic areas are: Research, technology and innovation; SME development and entrepreneurship; Information society and e-government; Employment, social inclusion, human resources and education; Environment, risk prevention, energy and natural resources; Regional planning territorial regeneration and urban development; Tourism, heritage and culture; and Accessibility, mobility and transport.
12. See <http://www.southeast-europe.net> and <http://www.central2013.eu>.
13. See http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/docs/com08_319_en.pdf.
14. See http://www.euractiv.com/29/images/080523%20polish-swedish%20proposal_tcm29-172658.doc.

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