Theoretical Approaches to the Black Sea Region:

'Is the Wider Black Sea Area a Region?'

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Abstract:

The paper aims to shed light on how a region may be built out of the Black Sea area. Therefore, the paper asks, first, whether the Black Sea area is a region or a region-to-be. If neither, then how to transform the Black Sea area into a region through the context of 'new regionalism' and the relevant theories. First, it delves into defining what it means to be a 'region' in the context of 'new regionalism'. Then, three different theories, i.e. neo-functionalism, neo-liberal institutionalism and constructivism, are unravelled to lay the foundation for the main query of the paper – 'is the Wider Black Sea area a region'. Constructivism provides fertile ground for the most appropriate premises for constructing a region around the Black Sea in relation to new regionalism. Accordingly, the paper discovers the perils and opportunities lying ahead of any initiative to construct a region out of the Black Sea area. The paper offers that the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) acts as an anchor of the Wider Black Sea area and a catalyst for a new understanding of

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regionalism which is capable of taking root and thriving in the Black Sea area.

Keywords: Neo-functionalism, Neo-liberal institutionalism, Constructivism, BSEC, WBSA

Introduction[1]

Human life has thrived and flourished in the Black Sea area for thousands of years. By building villages, cities, kingdoms and nation states, most of the times, people have learnt to cohabit and coexist over time. While the limit for humankind has always been the sky, academics ground this brand-new way of cohabitation for human society in 'new regionalism'. Regions are ontologically not out there in the world. On the contrary, 'region' is an idea to which ascribed meaning by humankind. It is a socially constructed phenomenon. People defined it in a certain manner, and it represents a particular meaning in our minds. 'New regionalism' derives from this definition of 'region'. It emphasises 'interaction' and 'cooperation' over 'institution'. This nascent definition of regionalism serves as one of the two means to answer the paper's research question which is whether the Black Sea is a region or a region-to-be; if neither, how to build a region in the Black Sea area through the context of 'new regionalism' and the relevant theories. By using theories, namely neo-functionalism, neo-liberal institutionalism and constructivism, the other means is achieved. The motivation for utilising these three theories is based on their compatibility to regionalism and regional interdependence. Whereas they are theoretically competent to question 'new regionalism' initiatives, some of the theories are practically incompetent to question the new regionalism in the Black Sea area. The combination of 'new regionalism' and one of the theories, i.e. constructivism, depicts how to construct a region out of the Black Sea area.

The Black Sea area is of particular interest because of its location and components. For instance, it is comprised of a great power, Russia; EU member states, Bulgaria and Romania; NATO member states, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey and the post-Soviet states, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. With a variety of interests and actors involved, the Black Sea area provides a dynamic opportunity to analyse the theoretical process of building a region. Further, the Black Sea is also a nexus of several regions

such as the Caucasus, Europe, the Balkans and Eurasia. Therefore, the area is of particular interest because, stability and prosperity in the Black Sea area may serve as a peace multiplier in its vicinity.

Literature Review

The essay scrutinises the extant literature through the perspective of new regionalism, while applying the unique theories of neo-functionalism, neo-liberal institutionalism and constructivism. The paper can be divided into two main parts even though it is comprised of five distinctive components. These two main body parts are separated into a philosophical thinking section and a material thinking section.

In the philosophical section, the theoretical knowledge combined with several academics' works on regionalism is supported by Fawn's[2] insights on what makes a region regarding geography, identity, actors etc. Also, Väyrynen's[3] article is a valuable contribution for making a comparison between 'old' and 'new' regionalism. Ethier[4] and Mittelman[5] provide further elaboration on characteristics of new regionalism. Furthermore, two of Hettne's extensive and pioneering works, namely "Beyond the 'New' Regionalism"[6] and "The New Regionalism Revisited,"[7] thoroughly affected the author's comprehension of regionalism. Besides, Söderbaum's[8] introduction to his edited book 'Introduction: Theories of Regionalism' paved the way for this paper to provide a better expression

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[2] Rick Fawn, "'Regions' and Their Study: Wherefrom, What for and Whereto?" *Review of International Studies*, vol. 35, no. S1 (2009): 5. doi:10.1017/s0260210509008419.

[3] Raimo Vayrynen, "Regionalism: Old and New," *International Studies Review*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2003): 25–51. doi:10.1111/1521-9488.501002.

[4] Wilfred Ethier, "The New Regionalism," *The Economic Journal,* vol. 108, no. 449 (1998): 1149-1161.

[5] James H. Mittelman, "Rethinking The "New Regionalism" in the Context of Globalization," *Global Governance,* vol. 2, no. 2 (1996): 189-213.

[6] Björn Hettne, "Beyond the 'New' Regionalism," *New Political Economy*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2006): 543–571. doi:10.1080/13563460500344484.

[7] Björn Hettne, "The New Regionalism Revisited," in *Theories of New Regionalism*. eds. Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 22-42.

[8] Fredrik Söderbaum, "Introduction: Theories of New Regionalism," in *Theories of New Regionalism*. eds. Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1-20.

of regionalism. The works of Gochhayat,[9] Rumelili[10] and Söderbaum[11] have allowed for an expansion of theoretical understanding.

The second integral part of the paper analyses to what extent the Black Sea area is a region and where the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) stands in this equation. For instance, Stefan Troebst[12] makes use of the concept of "meso-region" to make sense of the Black Sea Region. First of all, it should be emphasised that the book edited by Hamilton and Mangott[13] provided a great inspiration to the creation process of this paper. Hajizada and Marciacq's[14] paper, together with Ciuta's "Parting the Black Sea (Region): Geopolitics, Institutionalisation and the Reconfiguration of European Security"[15] and "Region? Why Region? Security, Hermeneutics, and the Making of the Black Sea Region,"[16] present the issues of security, economic cooperation, political disputes and environmental degradation. Through a coherent perspective, the authors highlight the challenges lying ahead of the Black Sea area if the states in the Black Sea area are interested in building a region out of their neighbourhood, in addition to the BSEC, if it's intention is to be the epicentre of initiatives for regionalism. For further detailed information, the works of Secrieru[17], Manoli[18] and Celac[19] have been extremely helpful

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[9] Artatrana Gochhayat, "Regionalism and Sub-Regionalism: A Theoretical Framework with Special Reference to India," *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2014): 10–26. doi:10.5897/ajpsir2013.0611.

[10] Bahar Rumelili, "Bölgeselcilik ve İnşacılık: Kazanımlar ve Vaatler", *Uluslararası İlişkiler,* vol. 12, no. 46 (2015) 169-185.

[11] Fredrik Söderbaum, "Theories of Regionalism", in *Routledge Handbook of Asian Regionalism*. eds. Mark Beeson and Richard Stubbs (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge 2012), 11-21.

12 Stefan Troebst, "The Black Sea as Historical Meso-Region: Concepts in Cultural Studies and the Social Sciences," *Journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies*, no. 2 (2019): 11-29.

[13] Daniel S. Hamilton, and Gerhard Mangott, *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2008).

[14] Mukhtar Hajizada and Florent Marciacq, "New Regionalism in Europe's Black Sea Region: the EU, BSEC and Changing Practices of Regionalism," *East European Politics* vol. 29, no. 3 (2013): 305–327. doi:10.1080/21599165.2013.807800.

[15] Felix Ciuta, "Parting the Black Sea (Region): Geopolitics, Institutionalisation and the Reconfiguration of European Security," *European Security* vol. 16, no. 1 (2007): 51–78. doi:10.1080/09662830701442402.

[16] Felix Ciuta, "Region? Why Region? Security, Hermeneutics, and the Making of the Black Sea Region," *Geopolitics* vol. 13, no. 1 (2008): 120–147. doi:10.1080/14650040701783367.

[17] Stanislav Secrieru, "Protracted Conflicts in the Eastern Neighborhood: Between Averting Wars and Building Trust," *Centre for International and European Studies* vol. 6 (2013): 1-13.

[18] Panagiota Manoli, "Black Sea Regionalism in Perspective," *Centre for International and European Studies* vol. 2 (2011): 1-8.

[19] Sergiu Celac, "The Role and Potential of Tte Organization ff the BSEC," *Centre for International and European Studies* vol. 1 (2017): 1-7.

at understanding what the BSEC stands for in the Black Sea area, its capabilities, and what the member states may achieve if they commit themselves to the BSEC for constructing a cohesive region.

1. Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective

There has been an ongoing debate over the definition of 'region' and the sub-terms emanating from it since the 1960s and 1970s. However, these debates have not spawned a collectively revered definition of 'what a region is.' Yet, there is a consensus on 'how to define a region' which actually articulates no strict boundaries. Indeed, there is no blueprint for 'what a region is', but the widely accepted argument is that defining a region begs for varying degrees of queries which have no particular boundaries. What the paper places a high value on is regional harmony and similarities or cohesiveness – political, economic, social, military – of states located within the given territorial limits. In other words, the characteristics a region should have are (a) geography; (b) regularity and intensity of connections; (c) shared region-wide perceptions; (d) agency.[20]

There is no middle ground over 'what a region is'. Whether it implies a spatial proximity[21] or it is a non-spatial phenomenon implying interdependence[22] or cultural similarities etc. Several academics from various disciplines, e.g. geography, political science and international relations (hereafter, IR), have uttered assumptions over the query. Geographers focus on the geographical aspect of the term whereas political scientists regard regions as particular areas within states. Also, IR scholars are interested in supra-national regions and coherence in such territorial spaces. There are also cross-border regions and definitions of regionalism centred on economic relationships. Indeed, regions are one of the most significant foundations of scholarly works concerned with the world we live in and gaining insights into world politics. Yet, what this paper considers as a region is a territorial space comprised of economic, military, political and cultural linkages.

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[20] Rodrigo Tavares, "The State of the Art of Regionalism, the Past, Present and Future of a Discipline," UNU-CRIS Working Papers (United Nations University, October, 2004).

[21] Andrew Hurrell, "Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective," in *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order.* eds. Louise Fawcett (New York: Oxford UP, 1995a): 58-66.

[22] Joseph S. Nye, "Patterns and Catalysts in Regional Integration," *International Organization* vol. 19, no. 04 (1965): 870., doi:10.1017/s0020818300012649.

The efforts for defining a region refer to a land with people on that land. The width of this land and how many people are located there are irrelevant. The number of states on this land is also irrelevant. Therefore, any geographical place on earth is a potential region. However, such a definition does lack of scholarly perspective so that no scholarly definition would be built on this ambiguous definition. Frankly, what we are in knowledge of is that regions are not 'there' but in our imaginations and minds. It is a product of human intellect. It is a product of people talking and contemplating on such an entity.

Outdated interpretations of state-centric definitions of 'region' are questioned and replaced by a new understanding of 'region' taking into account economic linkages, cultural resemblances and transnational connections.[23] Regions frequently and partially overlap or they completely involve one another. For instance, Eastern Europe is full of post-Soviet states that are, an integral part of Europe, which is, simultaneously, a region and a continent. Describing the borders of any region, in accordance with new regionalism, is a challenge because, 'region' is a definition in flux.[24] New regionalism acknowledges that geography matters. However, it exceeds the limits of spatial reasoning and takes into account the socially constructed characteristics of a region which are fraught with abstract notions such as identity and culture.[25] It emphasises that the regional collaboration and coexistence which is in flux assume divergent meanings in time and in compliance with the ever-changing interests and identities of the relevant actors in a region.[26] Indeed, new regionalism pays close attention to the nascent perspective concerning transnational relations and scrutinises current trans-border mutual relations.[27]

There are five divergent definitions of 'regionness' which are geographic, sociological, and the ones based on institutionalisation, regionalisation and supranational identity.[28] The first one concerning geography delineates the terrestrial space and the limits of a particular land. The second one regarding the sociological definition of 'region' depicts the social features of the inhabitants residing in a certain region.

[23] Vayrynen, "Regionalism: Old and New"

[24] For a comprehensive analysis of regionalism: Björn Hettne, 'Beyond the 'New' Regionalism', *New Political Economy*, 10/4 (Aug. 2006).

[25] Zoleka, V. Ndayi, "Theorising the Rise of Regionness by Bjorn Hettne and Fredrik Soderbaum," *Politikon* vol. 33, no. 1 (2006): 113–124. doi:10.1080/02589340600618180.

[26] R. Guy Emerson, "An Art of the Region: Towards a Politics of Regionness," *New Political Economy* vol. 19, no. 4 (2013): 559–577. doi:10.1080/13563467.2013.829434.

[27] Mittelman, "Rethinking The "New Regionalism" in the Context of Globalization"

[28] Ndayi, "Theorising the Rise of Regionness by Bjorn Hettne and Fredrik Soderbaum"

The third level describes what makes a land a proper region is political, societal, economic and military collaboration level of the actors in an area whereas the fourth portrays the harmony and cohesion of a civil society pervading all the region. The fifth one pays attention to the unique identity and legitimacy of a region.

Contentious theory-based interpretations regarding regionalism have been made for a long time. Regions inherently ever-changing notions as a change of mind is a fundamental feature of humans. People keep learning through their lives by experiences, and their reasoning behind their understanding of 'what a region is' changes shape over time. Therefore, what we considered as a region decades ago may become something else in upcoming years because of the fact that people who ascribe meaning to such notions are in a constant philosophical progress. A region is a living organism because people in it are in a constant state of philosophical flux. The peculiarity of a region depends on its characteristics such as geographical and economic. Hence, the ambiguous contemporary definition of 'what a region is' is a challenge for the students of IR who are on a quest for defining a particular territorial space as a region.

2. Theories for the Wider Black Sea Area

Many theories were spawned within IR in order to comprehend and articulate regionalism. Some authors have even endeavoured to sort out these theories. One of these ventures belongs to Hurrell[29] who divided these theories into three components, namely systemic approaches, regional and interdependence theories and domestic level theories. The regionalism and interdependence theories, which is the second cluster of theories of Hurrell, is considered as appropriate since its primary focal point is the linkages among the states in the region. Then, the regionalism and interdependence theories are categorised into three sections which are Neo-functionalism, Neo-liberal institutionalism and Constructivism.

Neo-functionalism

Neo-functionalists posit that intense interdependence has the capacity for bringing about region-wide political integration. In this context, supranational institutions occupy a considerable place. Such institutions are regarded as the remedy of common issues due to the 'spill-

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[29] Hurrell, "Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective"

over effect.[30] The very presence of such institutions alters the meaning of collective identity in a region.

There are two spill-over effects, namely functional and political spill-over.[31] The former implies that cooperation in an area should compel these states to extend the area of cooperation. The latter refers to a self-propelled process being initiated by the advent of supranational institutions.

According to Hurrell,[32] neo-functionalism has little to say about regionalism, especially new regionalism due to three reasons which are **(**a) its focus is more on institutions than the dynamics that make regionalism possible (b) new regionalism is not interested in anything except for the mutual interaction among states whereas neo-functionalism has high expectations for the weakening importance of states and (c) new regionalism does not imply strong institutional structure whereas neo-functionalism regards institutions as essential for a stable and deep-rooted regional coherence.

Neo-liberal Institutionalism

Neo-liberal institutionalism primarily focuses on international cooperation, and the latest resurrection of regionalism is plausibly explained by neo-liberal institutionalism.[33][34] Neo-liberal Institutionalists believe high levels of interdependence cause international cooperation. Institutionalists argue that low transaction costs increase cooperation and interaction on a regional basis. Moreover, neo-liberal institutionalism considers 'state' as a rational actor which may be encouraged to cooperate. So, 'absolute gain' is a must for the neo-liberal institutionalist perspective. It is also posited that regional institutions thwart 'cheating' and deliver 'transparency.'[35] Therefore, the neo-liberal institutionalist logic, like neo-functionalists, assumes that the advent of regional institutions is spawned

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[30] Andrew Hurrell, "Explaining the Resurgence of Regionalism in World Politics," *Review of International Studies* vol. 21, no. 04 (1995b) 331. doi:10.1017/s0260210500117954.

[31] Hurrell, "Explaining the Resurgence of Regionalism in World Politics"

[32] Hurrell, "Explaining the Resurgence of Regionalism in World Politics"

[33] For further readings: Robert O. Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1989); Keohane, *Power and Interdependence* (Boston: Longman, 2012); Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984).

[34] Gochhayat, "Regionalism and Sub-Regionalism: A Theoretical Framework with Special Reference to India"

[35] Hurrell, "Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective"

by the benefits of collaboration.[36] Neo-liberal institutionalists understand the importance of local interest groups over the substitution of regional institutions to the state. Hence, these institutions manage to survive to the extent that they keep to settle disputes and solve problems.

All in all, institutionalists assume that a monolithic region would be probable if there was a bottom-up collaboration leading a myriad of low-level cooperation to form an intense network so that grand cooperation becomes reality.

Constructivism

Constructivism is not a theory of regionalism, old or new. Yet, its content is promising for understanding regions and regionalism. Constructivism is interested in identities and interests of actors. Constructivism posits that not only material forces but also ideas and cognitive forces are imperative to make sense of world order.[37] Cognitive elements ascribe meaning to material forces which, only then, acquire causality. Also, actors attribute meaning to material objects through the medium of shared knowledge.[38] Therefore, constructivism bids fair for shedding light on new regionalism perspective.

As 'regional awareness' and 'regional identity' imply constructivist roots, Constructivism scrutinises 'what a region is' by coining terms such as 'cognitive regionalism' and 'cognitive interdependence.'[39] Various terms referring to shared regional features, such as collective identity, reciprocal commitment and a sense of community, emanate from the very same source as Constructivism. Additionally, the emergence of such a community depends on common societal values.

Constructivism takes into account reasoning, ideas and normative elements rather than overemphasising material factors. Constructivism

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[36] Gochhayat, "Regionalism and Sub-Regionalism: A Theoretical Framework with Special Reference to India"

[37] For further information: Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999); Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *Making Sense, Making Worlds: Constructivism in Social Theory and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2012); Friedrich Kratochwil, *The Puzzles of Politics: Inquiries into the Genesis and Transformation of International Relations* (Miltonpark, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010).

[38] Claduia M. Fabbri, "The Constructive Promise and Regional Integration: An Answer to 'Old' and 'New' Puzzles. The South American Case," CSGR Working Paper (University of Warwick, November, 2005).

[39] Hurrell, "Explaining the Resurgence of Regionalism in World Politics"

urges the students of IR to comprehend that identities and interests are socially constructed. Indeed, states are not given but constructed by ever-changing interactions.

3. From a Sea to Conquer to a Region to Construct

The Black Sea which is surrounded by littoral states, namely Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Georgia, constitutes an area with densely inhabited coastal cities, ample natural resources and two straits, Bosphorus and Dardanelles, tying it to the rest of the world.[40]

In the context of geopolitical position of the Black Sea area, the Black Sea is an open sea with rivers, Don, Volga, Danube, connecting it to adjacent territorial spaces. It also resides at the locus of Europe, Asia and Mediterranean. Therefore, the Black Sea area has been at the centre of military campaigns and commerce since the first Greek colonies in the Black Sea area.[41] This long history of the Black Sea area which is fraught with wars and commerce refers to various cultures and cosmopolitan entities. The Black Sea area has been a place, for a number of countries, either waging war or for using diplomacy with other countries for a long time.

During the Cold War era the 'iron curtain' separated the Western countries and their 'partners' from Soviet Russia and its allies. Historically a deep interaction existed among the countries or kingdoms in the Wider Black Sea area (WBSA). The WBSA is comprised of multiple countries including Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine. However, cultural, linguistic, religious sectarian or ideological differences created rifts started with the Cold War division.[42][43]

An area, comprised of two countries – Tzarist Russia and Ottomans – fought with each other more than for one hundred years and other components which were either 'orbits' of one of their neighbours or a part of their neighbour's territories, is not proper for building a full-fledged

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[40] For further information: https://www.britannica.com/place/Black-Sea.

[41] Also see: https://www.ancient.eu/ionia/.

[42] Mukhtar and Marciacq, "New Regionalism in Europe's Black Sea Region: the EU, BSEC and Changing Practices of Regionalism"

[43] Even though Albania and Armenia may be thought as 'long shot' for being integral parts of the area, their presence does not hurt the aim of this paper.

region out of it. Also, an area full of countries with diverse levels of democracy and economic strength does not provide a proper zone for region-wide cooperation and coexistence. In addition to these, the harmony of the countries in a region in terms of foreign policy is a must if there is a region to be established. For example, there is a reconciliation between Russia and Turkey stemming from an aversion to the US, and it is in contradiction with Ukrainian and Georgian sentiments regarding the US.

There are incentives, which encourage the countries of an area on to construct a region, for region-wide collaboration. Some of these incentives are conservation of natural resources, region-wide commerce, regional infrastructure investments and tourism.[44] Yet, the WBSA hosts ongoing and frozen conflicts which consist of, at least, a country located in the WBSA.[45] Moreover, there are other impediments to regional coexistence such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Black Sea Synergy (BSS) as the embodiment of EU's interest in the WBSA together with any NATO involvement in any official event.

There are incentives for and hindrances to a region to be built in the WBSA. Even though countries located in the WBSA are far away from being ready to commit themselves to a region-building process, these countries concede that cooperation on various topics such as commerce and environment is in their own interest.

The security challenges for regional cooperation deserve special attention since they prevent the WBSA to become a full-fledged region. There are divergent security threats to the WBSA, which are the most drastic impediment to regionalism in the area. There are a number of conflicts, including Crimea, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria, which are protracted, frozen or ongoing. There are also closed borders, Turkey and Armenia, organized crime, migration, terrorism, etc. All these examples beg for a certain query which is "why is the WBSA fraught with enmity and antagonism?" Even though the incompetence of the political elites in the WBSA is an essential shortcoming, it alone would not have

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[44] For further information and more: Charles King, "The Wider Black Sea Region in the Twenty-First Century", *In the Wider Black Sea Region in the Twenty-First Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives* (NW, Massachusetts Ave.: Center for Transatlantic Relations SAIS, 2008).

[45] For further information: Anna Matveea, "Conflicts in the Wider Black Sea Area", *In the Wider Black Sea Region in the Twenty-First Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives* (NW, Massachusetts Ave.: Center for Transatlantic Relations SAIS, 2008).

such a regional and long-standing impact. To begin with, these newly-independent nation states have just discovered their ethnic and national roots, which affected regional consciousness negatively. Also, geopolitical importance of the WBSA for the great powers has converted the area into a hotspot for the great powers' competition, especially a zone suitable for power projection. Furthermore, the WBSA has not been recognised, treated and considered as a region since the last few years. As the most relevant and prominent actors, neither the EU nor NATO had any policy strengthening the coherence of the WBSA area. On the contrary, the EU and NATO policies were counterproductive in terms of supporting any regional initiative to enable regionalism to thrive in the WBSA. It is clearly observed, up to now, that contemporary WBSA is susceptible to Russian aggression. These revisionist policies of Russia are not only the reason but also an outcome of Russia's neighbouring countries' willingness to engage or maintain close ties with the EU. All in all, there will be no regional coherence or regionalism if the security challenges are not tackled.

4. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) – A Locus for a Region-to-be?

There are several cooperation attempts which do not comprise of all the Black Sea area within the WBSA. These cooperation initiatives, which have been inadequate until now, indicate that coexistence is an imperative for the survival of sovereign states and is a well-comprehended phenomenon in the WBSA. There were several attempts for collaboration such as the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) and trilateral cooperation, a sub regionalism attempt in the South Caucasus, among Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan. Yet, such ventures were insufficient to stimulate a collective consciousness among their members or participants. For instance, GUAM, consisting of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, does not have the resilience to stand against Russia, and these countries' collective capacity is not sufficient to nourish regionalism attempts among these states. Besides, the Turkish-Azerbaijani-Georgian trilateralism is fraught with examples of cooperation such as transportation networks, energy routes or joint military drills. Yet, their aim is not creating a cohesive habitat for their collaboration efforts. Georgia is a country longing for the EU's approval. The EU has already granted visa liberalisation for Georgia striking a decisive blow against sub regional cohesion among these states. Whereas Turkey's policies are at odds with the EU on many issues, Azerbaijan has never had close and warm relations with the EU. Indeed, all these countries have different political agendas. What brings together these actors is the Other, meaning

Russia. Indeed, all these initiatives are established to thwart Russia's incursions into her neighbourhood, in one way or another. The BSEC is a home-grown, inclusive, region-wide organisation comprising of all the countries in the WBSA including Russia. Therefore, these countries have an external impetus for having closer relations with each other, but indigenous driving force leads them to divergent paths. Additionally, both of these initiatives are sub regional attempts for cooperation and collaboration which does not imply a full-fledged region-wide cohesive initiative. Indeed, even though these attempts for cooperation among a few states reveal the stimulus to regionalism efforts, the quantity and quality of such ventures are not deemed sufficient for pondering over theoretical debates regarding regionalism.

The section focuses on the WBSA with its immense habitat for cooperation in terms of economy, politics, military, social and so on. The attempts for a cohesive WBSA are in stalemate for two distinctive reasons. Firstly, economic linkages among the states in the WBSA are underdeveloped. Even though the weak economic conditions of each of these countries beg for regional cooperation, there is neither integration nor policy coordination on a regional basis. Secondly, the security challenges these countries face undermine constructive and fruitful regionalist ventures. Such security issues should be addressed and found a proper solution as it is underlined above.

There are various countries with diverse political, economic and cultural roots in the WBSA.[46] Yet, these countries also have common ground, such as natural resources, to cooperate. Moreover, there are vulnerabilities of these countries which should lead these states to amity rather than enmity. The mere presence of BSEC should serve as a means to reach out such a regional cohesion among these states. However, there are still many things to do in order to achieve the aforementioned goal.

The establishment of BSEC is the first concrete initiative in terms of regionalism in the WBSA.[47] The BSEC is established as a centre for providing roundtable discussions and meetings to the states in the WBSA.

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[46] For further information and more: Panagotia Manoli, 'Black Sea Regionalism in Perspective', *Center for International and European Studies*, (Dec. 2011); Sergiu Celac, 'The Role and the Potential of the Organisation of the BSEC', *Center for International and European Studies*, (Nov. 2011).

[47] Mukhtar and Marciacq, "New Regionalism in Europe's Black Sea Region: the EU, BSEC and Changing Practices of Regionalism"

It rendered a top-down support for regional cohesion possible.[48] Thanks to the creation of BSEC, there is a solid start for regional interstate interaction in the WBSA.

The BSEC has succeeded in intensifying the regional web of interactions. While, the private sector's interaction is feeble, their commercial success may be the only way for building a region out of the WBSA. Therefore, the states of the WBSA should encourage private companies by giving incentives to strengthen their region-wide interstate commercial relations. Transcending borders by commerce and investing into other states in the region engender a proper environment for putting an end to frozen and ongoing conflicts throughout the WBSA. Such commercial relations put pressure on warring parties and force them to make peace for the sake of a cohesive region.

All the aforementioned necessary moves beg for an intergovernmental regional organisation to oversee such procedures. As such an organisation, the BSEC has proved itself by surviving in a chaotic environment which is fraught with conflicts, economic crises, disarray and revolutionary sentiment for twenty years. Yet, the BSEC is not an impeccable organisation and regionalism does not need an organisation to vigorously thrive and flourish. Still, it is tangible and evident that BSEC is an integral part of any attempt for a cohesive region in the WBSA.

Insights into the Regionalism Attempts in the WBSA

All the hindrances to regionalism in the WBSA are put aside, there are several means for realising regional cooperation.

There are several small size states, a few middle size states and a great power in the WBSA. They are not able to export high quality and expensive products to developed countries. So, the WBSA has the capacity to become a commerce hub if these states commit themselves to such a goal. There is also a whole sea providing these states with an opportunity for collaboration on environmental policies and transport networks. Besides, these states would collaborate on less contentious issues including disaster relief operations and marine life conservation in order to get a sense of upsides of collaboration on a regional basis.

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[48] For further information on BSEC's support for regional cohesion: BSEC, 'Declartion of the 25th Anniversary Summit of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation', (May, 2017).

The ongoing or frozen conflicts are the greatest impediment to regionalism. They prevent any attempts for communication and collaboration. A region cannot be constructed as long as the states cannot get along with each other or even statelets, for that matter, which are actually illegal secessionist entities and, still, recognised by a certain state in the very same region.[49] Territorial disputes are abundant in the WBSA, since they thwart the best hopes of the WBSA for warmer relations among the states of the area. Therefore, if these countries come to grip with how to construct a cohesive region, they have to get a solid grasp of how to solve the conflicts over territorial disagreements.[50]

There is an exogenous incentive for regionalism initiatives in the WBSA, which is the EU. The EU is a global power thanks to its capacity to exert influence on countries located in its neighbourhood. So, the EU has the capacity to lure the countries of the WBSA into committing themselves to a certain task. There would be a better chance of region-building in the WBSA if the EU has given incentives to stimulate regionalist sentiments such as information sharing –sweet-talk– and modernisation of regional institutions. However, the ongoing conflicts force EU into conducting particular policies which do not contribute to the peaceful resolution of these disputes. What they do is actually hindering the EU's possible contributions to the region-building process.

Theoretical Remarks on the WBSA

Neo-functionalism is an approach to regionalism, because it focuses all of its attention toward regional institutions. These institutions are relatively insignificant in new regionalism, but new regionalism is imperative for cooperation efforts in the WBSA. The states of the WBSA are not interested in any interaction weakening their sovereignty. However, new regionalism paves the way for these states to engage in mutual interaction by emphasising coexistence and cohesion. Hence, the states see an opportunity rather than a threat in new regionalist efforts. Furthermore, neo-functionalism regards regional institutions as the remedy of all region-wide conflicts and disputes, which is a perspective that does not comply with the reality of the contemporary WBSA. The

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[49] Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, "The Complexities of Black Sea Regional Security," *The Centre for Governance and Culture in Europe*, (June 2012).
[50] For further analysis of security issues in the WBSA: Stanislav Secrieru, 'Protracted Conflicts in the Eastern Neighborhood: Between Averting Wars and Building Trust, *Centre for International and European Studies*, (Jan. 2013).

number of conflicts has been really high for a long time in the WBSA, and it prevents any cooperation-driven initiative springing from the WBSA. This vicious cycle thwarts any deep-rooted region-wide cooperation venture. Neo-functionalist assumptions enable areas, which have already overcome most of their problems spawning military disputes, to advance toward a region of coherent states. Yet, neo-functionalist presumptions of how to evolve into a cohesive region are insufficient and deficient for the WBSA.

Neo-liberal institutionalism underlines international cooperation as one of the foundations of the resurgence of regionalism and, practically, implies that interdependence and interaction bring about international cooperation. Cooperation is, frankly, the only possible way of delivering regional cohesion. Yet, how it should be achieved is the real impasse here. Neo-liberals take 'state' into account as a rational actor regarding cooperation as the most plausible alternative. Therefore, they presume that states seek 'absolute gains'. However, what has been observed in the last decades of the WBSA is not related to 'absolute gain' in any way. These states' foreign policies are driven by prudence and caution. Their policies could only be considered as relative-gains-driven at best. They try to maintain the balance between the two poles as long as there is no explicit threat to their own territories. The thorough understanding of neo-liberalism regarding regionalism deserves closer attention than any other assumptions analysed above. Neo-liberal institutionalists comprehend that commerce and the private sector's direct involvement in regional business networks are imperative to regionalism if it is going to flourish. Moreover, neo-liberal institutionalists appreciation of bottom-up collaboration is a must for new regionalism. However, neo-liberal institutionalism does not contemplate the ongoing and frozen conflicts in the WBSA either. These conflicts are what makes regional cooperation impossible, and it is not feasible to reach a region-wide consensus without addressing such issues.

Constructivism, although it is not a theory related to regionalism in any way, explains new regionalism's competence in the WBSA with its emphases on identities and interests. It argues that cognitive forces are as important as material factors in the world. Material objects and forces are ascribed meaning by people so that they have no meaning by themselves, therefore they have no importance, other than attributed to them by people. This reasoning alone solves multiple problems that the aforementioned two theories could not solve. Constructivism focuses on terms such as 'regional identity' and 'regional awareness' and bases its

assumptions on a solid argument about 'how to construct a region'. It underlines cooperation by taking advantage of cognitive forces which let us think out of the material world. Furthermore, it posits that the emergence of a region is explicitly related to common societal values. These values are the primary factors that people make use of when they ascribe meaning to certain material forces and factors. All in all, constructivism has the capacity to answer the queries that new regionalism compels students of IR to ask.

Conclusion

New regionalism raised hopes in the WBSA for constructing a region around the Black Sea. Moreover, new regionalism complies with the constructivist assumptions on how to build a region. This is important because constructivism relies on 'cognitive forces' to explain how a region should be built. This definition has the capacity to find a solution to the challenges to the regionalism efforts in the WBSA. The WBSA has challenges to and opportunities for 'new regionalism' ahead of its way. Most of the challenges are security-based whereas opportunities are economy-based. Yet, there is only one means to support or take the lead of the regionalism efforts in the Black Sea area which is the BSEC. The BSEC does not hold the key to success in making regionalism real for the Black Sea area. However, it is still the best hope of the states of the WBSA. If the BSEC succeeds at building bridges between these states by intensifying cooperation, collaboration and interaction, there will be a Black Sea region based on the definition of region of 'new regionalism'. Moreover, constructivism will serve as a perspective displaying that the WBSA is a region.

The paper scrutinises the nascent 'Black Sea Region' through the prism of 'new regionalism' and three pertinent theories. The area has the capacity to become a fully-fledged region called the 'Black Sea Region' even though the littoral states and the other components of the wider Black Sea area are regarded as parts of several other regions, such as the Balkans and the Caucasus. The BSEC is a good case as a starting point. It possesses the potential to construct a well-structured region. All in all, the WBSA should not be fathomed as a divided area comprised of various clusters – the Balkans, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe – but a monolithic 'Black Sea Region' anchored by the BSEC.

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