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A 2020 vision for the Black Sea region: the Commission on the Black Sea proposes

Mustafa Aydin and Dimitrios Triantaphyllou*

Department of International Relations, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey

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The Black Sea region is coming into its own although it is at times a contested and dangerous neighbourhood. Despite heightened interest in the region, its real priorities and needs are still being largely ignored by insiders and outsiders alike. What is needed are regional solutions for regional problems. The authors present the key findings and recommendations of the Commission on the Black Sea, a civil society initiative comprising a number of current and former policy-makers, scholars and practitioners both from within the region and from outside, with the purpose of contributing to a joint vision and a common strategy for the Black Sea region by developing new knowledge in areas of key concern.

Keywords: Black Sea; BSEC; European Union; regional cooperation; security; sustainable development

The Black Sea region is a contested neighbourhood and the subject of intense debate. This reflects the changing dynamics of the region, its complex realities, the interests of outsiders and the region's relations with the rest of the world. Its strategic position, linking north to south and east to west, as well as its oil, gas, transport and trade routes are all important reasons for its increasing relevance.

Despite heightened interest in the area however, the region's real priorities and needs are still being largely ignored. In part this can be attributed to the failure of the regional actors to produce an agreed vision for the future. The emergence of the Black Sea as a region-between-regions and the conflicting agendas of powerful local and external players distort the necessary regional focus and blur outcomes. Thus, a reassessment of the region, with all of its problems and priorities, is urgently needed. This will provide all actors involved with a better understanding of what can be done, as well as allowing them to develop innovative approaches to problems, thus enhancing the region's security, stability and welfare. The emergence of a peaceful and cooperative Black Sea region would be of benefit to all.

With this in mind and with its overarching approach, the Commission on the Black Sea has sought to promote an inclusive strategy taking into account the needs, priorities and interests of all stakeholders in four essential areas: peace and security, economic development and welfare, democratic institutions and good governance and, finally, regional cooperation. The Commission has come to an understanding that

*Corresponding author. Email: dimitriost@khas.edu.tr

the region's future lies in further democratization and economic integration with the wider world.

The rationale behind the preparation of this report has been the increased geopolitical volatility of the region which, in certain places, can ignite at any given moment into open warfare. The area's unresolved conflicts retard economic development and have the potential to flare up into wider conflagrations. They impact regional stability and security and, unless tackled, threaten far greater international ramifications. But it is the Commission's conviction that it is realistic to envisage a cohesive, developed, integrated and stable region. To do so:

- The regional actors must renounce the use of force in their political relations and respect each other's territorial integrity, the inviolability of their borders, international treaties and the rule of law in their dealings.
- Interested outsiders must support efforts to secure good governance, the creation of interdependencies and the regionalization of the Black Sea's politics and economy.
- The international community must encourage cooperative efforts and confidence-building measures as well as actions in favour of the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Black Sea politics works best if the approach is regional. The states in question should be encouraged to seek regional solutions for regional problems. The stakeholders must face up to the need to tackle tasks together and allow for non-state actors such as the business sector, NGOs and civil society to play a real role in shaping solutions.

Key findings: an assessment

The Black Sea region's state of play and its increased relevance to various stakeholders suggest that much needs to be done to ensure that it evolves peacefully and constructively and that it becomes a reliable community that poses no threat to itself or to its neighbours. This in turn implies an emphasis on security concerns, sustainable development, regional cooperation and good governance. What comes as a surprise perhaps is that the tools needed to address these challenges already exist. These include regional organizations, financial institutions geared towards the region and many already existing policies and initiatives.

A major drawback is an across-the-board lack of political support and understanding, within the region and internationally, of the already existing processes of regional cooperation. The analysis provided by this report finds that regional cooperation is fundamental if we are to achieve security, stability and economic and social development. Regional cooperation is not an end in and of itself but rather a gradual and multifaceted process which is long-term in scope. By its very nature, it brings state and non-state actors together in a way which takes us towards this goal. In the short term though, the focus should be on well defined problems, yielding visible results, which can be seen and felt by ordinary people.

Current attempts at policy coordination in the Black Sea region, embodied in several regional institutions and multilateral forums, fail to deliver substantive results. A persuasive indicator of political commitment to constructive regionalism is the willingness of participating countries to allocate resources, commensurate with their possibilities, to regional projects and to build the required capacity for the joint

administration of those resources. However, failure or the endless delaying of cooperation bears with it costs for the people of the region. These include adverse economic effects and obstacles to free trade which in turn slow growth and welfare.

The composition of the Black Sea region is highly diversified in terms of the size and power of its countries, their systems of governance, the sophistication of their economic and financial structures and human development indicators. Considering such diversity, it is difficult to create comprehensive regional integration schemes in the conventional sense, at least in the short term. This should not however, be an obstacle to broad ranging cooperation but rather an incentive to creative thinking and pragmatic action. It is realistic for the Black Sea to become a model for new and imaginative types of positive relationships which bind rather than divide in a region that has been fragmented for far too long. The best way to achieve this is in a multilateral and regional format. Setting up or bolstering existing regional frameworks for policy coordination among stakeholders that would ultimately reduce instability does not have to entail immense political or financial costs. It would though, require a change in the mind-set of policy-makers to comprehend the value of regional approaches to policy-making.

Around the Black Sea, there are two opposing conditions that affect the potential of regionalism. On the one hand, economic difficulties and the need for managing regional public goods such as the environment, trade and financial stability have generated demands for regional cooperation, integration and policy coordination. These need to be strengthened and efficiently channelled into regional policy-making. On the other hand, important security issues such as the unresolved secessionist conflicts undermine the drive for regionalism and obstruct collective action and institutions. These adverse security conditions need to be eliminated or their impacts reduced.

The role of the European Union (EU) is key. Three of the states of the Black Sea, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania are EU member states while Turkey is negotiating its accession. The impact of the EU is extremely high as its power of attraction and policies, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership, target Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, while it has a strategic partnership with Russia. The EU has also become, for those states of the region which are not members, their most important economic partner. For most of them it is becoming a catalyst of social and political change too. There is thus a need to clarify the Union's status with regard to the formulation of regional policies and outputs.

It is the view of the Commission that the primary responsibility for articulating a clear and coherent vision of what the Black Sea region should look like in 10 years time rests with the regional actors themselves. If they prove to be unable or unwilling to do so, it is to be expected that the geopolitical forces now at play will continue to pursue their respective, and not necessarily convergent, agendas. This is not an attractive proposition for the stability, security and prosperity of the region. Where a regional initiative does not attract the interest of all participants, the wish of certain members or sub-groupings to coordinate and cooperate should be respected by others, insofar as such cooperation is not directed against the non-participants. Those who do not take part should not prevent others from going ahead, and in turn the participants should leave the door open for them to join at a later stage.

All the Commission's recommendations are meant to mobilise international and local interest in the Black Sea region. The current conjunction of developments

including the global financial crisis, the post-August 2008 setting and the discussion of a new European security architecture should be seen as a wakeup call that the region is in need of serious attention and concerted action. The focus here is on a select number of recommendations which the Commission feels should generate support in order to enhance the profile of the wider Black Sea region and to contribute to its regional appeal. This set of recommendations makes no claim to be exhaustive, but we hope it will serve as a point of departure for further discussion.

Policy recommendations

2020 Vision – a Black Sea dimension

The setting of consensus targets for the region is important. We should work towards proposing mid-term recommendations with 2020 in sight. We assume that by then, the countries of the Western Balkans will have become EU members, that there should be a clearer picture regarding Turkey's membership and debate on which, if any, of the other countries of the region will join, will have crystallized. This would entail the creation, by the countries and actors of the region, of a new overarching concept and policy: a Black Sea Dimension. The aim of this would be to promote regional cooperation while anticipating changes in the neighbourhood. The necessity of thinking about a new concept for the region is only underscored by the fact that most existing ideas and policies for and about the Black Sea were conceived before the August 2008 war. The Dimension should also take into consideration ongoing discussions regarding a new European security framework. The 2020 vision needs to be developed into a clear strategy which should mark the culmination of several linked initiatives.

Enhance the profile of Black Sea regionalism

The first chapter in the history of BSEC has ended but a new one has not yet been properly opened. It is in need of rejuvenation. Preparations should begin without delay for a summit in 2012 to mark the twentieth anniversary of the organization. This must not be a mere festive occasion. It should be an opportunity to renew the commitment of its members to regional cooperation and to inaugurate an overhauled BSEC in order to make it a more relevant regional organization with greater clout. Such steps, which should be in line with other international commitments undertaken by BSEC member states, could include:

- Setting specific targets and deadlines for the development of a system of legally binding commitments and implementation mechanisms. These should cover the main areas of BSEC concern where a regional approach provides value added compared to the individual efforts of member states.
- Agreeing on a substantial augmentation of the BSEC budget, based on proportional contributions, in order to enable BSEC to co-finance major projects of regional interest. This could also be done through the creation of specific funds, similar to the Hellenic Development Fund. The resources of the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank should be harnessed for this.
- Adding a specific security dimension to BSEC activities, relying mainly on confidence-building measures and increased transparency.

- Developing an inclusive mechanism for regular consultation and coordination between BSEC and all the other regional organizations and initiatives (governmental and non-governmental) as well as with ‘extra-regional’ partners.
- All members should undertake to actually devote, as opposed to just declaring that they will, at least one cabinet meeting a year to an examination of Black Sea regional cooperation matters and to report accordingly to their parliaments as well as to the BSEC parliamentary assembly.
- BSEC’s rebirth, expanded role and enhanced regional relevance should be symbolized by giving it a new name. A region-wide awareness raising competition could be opened for everyone in the region to suggest what it might be and also to design a new logo and flag for it.

Deal with the conflicts: start real security dialogue and confidence-building measures

As part of our 2020 vision we see an urgent need to tackle the protracted conflicts and other outstanding issues of the region. The Commission proposes to establish a high level consultative group in order to assess the issues and search for solutions. The group should eventually suggest ways to provide international guarantees for the implementation of any peace agreements. In the interim it should propose confidence-building measures in order to mitigate the corrosive impact of the conflicts on the goal and vision of putting the whole Black Sea region at a qualitative new level. The feasibility of an international gathering, preferably at a summit level, involving the Black Sea states and international stakeholders should be the end point for any or all of these processes.

There is a need for the region’s stakeholders to contribute to the ongoing debate about a new security architecture for Europe, as this discussion has immediate ramifications for the Black Sea which could be described as the shared neighbourhood of both the EU and Russia. As part of this discussion, a renewed assessment of already existing mechanisms, such as the OSCE or the CFE treaty, and agreed upon measures under such mechanisms, is needed. Within this context, the Commission proposes a number of confidence-building measures from hotlines between foreign ministers to regular meetings of senior officials of the foreign and defence ministries of the region in order to stress the need for regional solutions to regional problems. Establishing a structured security dialogue on relevant issues ranging from civil protection to coordination regarding man-made or natural disasters, migration and organized crime would be a valuable addition.

Focus on economic issues that meet common challenges and real needs

Promote the principles of sustainable development as the guiding philosophy of regional cooperation in the Black Sea area. In this way we should seek to restore and preserve a rational and enduring equilibrium between economic development and the integrity of the natural environment in ways that society can understand and accept. Rational responses to the consequences of climate change and the responsible use of natural, human and societal resources are essential components of such a development model, which should be translated into coherent policies at national and regional level. Human and knowledge capital should be considered an integral part of a sustainable development model.

Since the on-going global financial and economic crisis has severely affected most countries in the Black Sea region, it is essential to supplement the mitigation measures taken in each country with a concerted regional approach to post-crisis recovery programmes relying on the concept of sustainable development.

Since economies are increasingly interlinked, decisions or actions in one country often impact neighbouring states, thus creating common challenges which require cooperation and communication. The basis for such cooperation may entail undertaking new initiatives to create physical linkages, for example cross-country infrastructure and institutional linkages. These could include policy coordination and harmonization, cross-country regulation, enhanced information sharing in order to stimulate growth and overlapping activities. Alternatively, the basis of cooperation may be economic security oriented, in the sense of avoiding misunderstandings or undertaking policies which may have adverse 'beggar thy neighbour' impacts. Cooperation could also aim to mitigate the negative effects of economic downturns, to pool information or resources to create early warning systems or reciprocal assistance mechanisms or to reduce the vulnerability of countries to crises in the future and to devising forms of insurance. The key is for cooperation to meet real and identified needs which have tangible, achievable solutions and appropriate cost benefit ratios.

Take policy measures to improve the business environment and to facilitate greater economic activity across borders. These should include concrete steps to facilitate business activity by removing various non-tariff barriers that hinder trade, investment or financing. This may be done by agreements relating to specific activities, for example customs procedures and visas or in the form of a comprehensive trade facilitation deal.

Conduct regular policy dialogues between relevant officials concerned with important sectors of the economy that would benefit from cooperation such as finance, transport, energy, environment, fisheries and so on.

Promote and coordinate regional cooperation schemes at all levels

Any examination of work done on the region shows that numerous schemes, programmes and initiatives, whether governmental or non-governmental, not-for-profit, EU-led or with a thematic focus, have been actively promoting regional cooperation for years. However, the need to make this work more visible and coordinated is necessary if the potential of the Black Sea, as a region, is to be fully unleashed.

There is also a need to move beyond the top-down approach promoted by organizations such as BSEC and others, to assure that civil society plays a role in the development of the region. If we are to assume that civil society refers to uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values, there is much to be gained from the greater involvement of the business sector at national and regional levels, NGOs, women's groups and youth in Black Sea regional activities.

Identifying issues which could be better addressed regionally rather than nationally is a priority. Doing this would serve as a good tool for coordination between institutions and programmes with a regional cooperation dimension. Working on this could also help to draw in all relevant actors in the fields of their concern. The selection of key subjects which need addressing would also assist donors, governments and investors in deciding on their funding priorities. Lessons should be drawn from the experiences of other areas which have faced or are dealing with similar issues, such as the Baltic, the Balkans, the Danube region and so on.

Promote intercultural dialogue

A clear encouragement and sponsorship of intercultural dialogue among the people of the Black Sea would support regional cooperation. A useful example that could serve as an inspiration and model is the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures which is based in Alexandria in Egypt and operates within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Another reference is the Alliance of Civilizations which was established in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. Similar models should be encouraged at the sub-regional level. Intercultural dialogue should be promoted hand in hand with interfaith dialogue, aimed at bringing together the religious leaders of the region's confessions. Cooperation between universities should be enhanced as should student exchange programmes in order to create linkages and networks between young people of the Black Sea. A joint Black Sea Studies graduate programme needs to be established between the region's universities in order to create academic linkages for the future. In terms of the media there are few foreign correspondents from Black Sea countries reporting on events in one another's countries. This means that what news there is often comes from external sources not well attuned to the interests of their readers or viewers. Funds should be found to address this problem.

Promote the targeted training of professional groups

There is a need for the targeted training of public servants, diplomats, young leaders, parliamentarians and business leaders throughout the region. This should aim to improve the number of well-trained individuals at the service of their countries. However, above and beyond that, training people together is a way to promote the cooperation of local public officials and others on issues of common concerns, such as the environment, which contribute to regional development. The creation of a Black Sea Training Academy for example, would help streamline such a process.

Promote good governance, civil society and social dialogue

The involvement of civil society in policy-making is linked to good governance and solid institution building, which all countries in the region have signed up to through their membership in the Council of Europe. Programmes should be implemented such that a focus on civil society is enhanced. Efforts should be made to encourage cooperation between civil society organizations in Black Sea countries including the conflict regions. More funds should be devoted to programmes and projects encouraging active and professional involvement of civil society in policy-making throughout the region. Countries should take practical steps in developing e-government services both on national and regional levels. Business organizations such as chambers of commerce and employers' organizations and trade unions should also be encouraged to talk to one another in order to find and propose regional solutions for regional problems. One idea could be the creation of a cooperation council for business organizations and chambers of commerce under the aegis of the renewed BSEC enhancing the scope of the already existing BSEC Business Council.

Notes on contributors

Mustafa Aydin, a Professor of international relations, is rector of Kadir Has University, Istanbul.

Dimitrios Triantaphyllou is an Assistant Professor of international relations at Kadir Has University, Istanbul. Both are the co-conveners and co-rapporteurs of the Commission on the Black Sea.