



DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT



**THE EU'S BLACK SEA
SYNERGY:
RESULTS AND POSSIBLE
WAYS FORWARD**

AFET

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION

DIRECTORATE B

POLICY DEPARTMENT

STANDARD BRIEFING

**THE EU'S BLACK SEA SYNERGY:
RESULTS AND POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD**

Abstract

Enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania, as well as lukewarm assessments issued on EU engagement in security issues in its neighbourhood, prompted an enhanced EU involvement around the Black Sea, which had been kept until then in the background of EU foreign policy. The Black Sea Synergy was put forward by the European Commission in April 2007 to increase cooperation with and between the countries surrounding the Black Sea. It was designed as a flexible framework complementary to existing EU policies in the region.

Overall, the EU's engagement in the Black Sea region in general and the Black Sea Synergy's implementation in particular have been strongly constrained by conditions and factors both internal and external to the Union at the international, EU, and regional levels. However, as a result of its inclusive approach the Black Sea Synergy has the potential to play a useful role in facilitating good neighbourly relations and fostering multilateralism. To improve the Synergy's effectiveness, it is suggested to specify its operational methods (mainly funding and monitoring), to better integrate the Black Sea dimension in EU bilateral relations with partner countries, to further concentrate on a small number of priorities with a view to avoiding dispersion and to systematically promote a grassroots or project-based approach.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Its sixth enlargement shifted the European Union's attention to the Black Sea, a sea basin around which security challenges raised increasing concerns. Enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania thus prompted an enhanced EU involvement in a region where it had so far kept a low profile. It also coincided with the European Commission's lukewarm assessment of the European Neighbourhood Policy's (ENP) record, especially on conflict resolution - an issue of utmost importance around the Black Sea. In this context, the Black Sea Synergy (BSS) was put forward by the European Commission in April 2007 to increase cooperation with and between the countries surrounding the Black Sea. The Black Sea Synergy was designed as a flexible framework complementary to existing EU policies in the region, i.e. the ENP (relevant for five Eastern ENP countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), the strategic partnership with the Russian Federation and the pre-accession policy for Turkey. Although an EU-framed initiative, the BSS was conceived as a collective endeavour with the intention of engaging local as well as regional stakeholders.

The Commission's initial proposals were highly eclectic in that they mentioned a large number of priority objectives. The *Report on the first year of implementation of the Black Sea Synergy* adopted on 19 June 2008 indicates uneven progress across sectors, with very limited achievements in sectors such as democracy, trade and conflict resolution. This confirms the inadequacy of the initial eclectic approach, also criticised by other EU actors (European Parliament 2008) for leading to dispersion. Although the Report as such does not reflect a shift in the BSS's approach, it contains proposals likely to produce increased prioritization and concentration of BSS's activities over time. Since the Report was issued, limited progress has been achieved in the advancement of BSS tasks. One of the most important developments has been the establishment of sectoral partnerships in three key areas: environment, transport and energy.

Overall, the EU's engagement in the Black Sea region in general and the Black Sea Synergy's implementation in particular have been constrained by conditions and factors both internal and external to the Union at the international, EU, and regional levels. At the international level, the financial and economic crisis negatively affected the wider Black Sea region. At the EU level, owing to the slow ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty and to the economic crisis, the overall institutional and policy environments have not been favourable to a rapid development of the BSS. Moreover, the EU's Eastern policies have been primarily shaped within the Eastern Partnership (EaP). Launched in May 2009, the EaP is benefiting from stronger political support from EU Member States and has overshadowed the BSS. At the Black Sea level, endogenous regional cooperation has been undermined by persisting conflicts, bilateral disputes and ineffective institutions. The evolution of the regional context confronts the EU with a new situation characterised by three major factors: Russia's strong hold around the Black Sea and its resistance to increased EU influence in the region; Ukraine's rapprochement with Russia and its possible positioning as a regional actor; Turkey's assertiveness as a regional actor and its rapprochement with Russia. Thus, the Black Sea Synergy's meager record does reflect its low prioritisation within the EU, but it also reflects the difficult security and socio-economic circumstances in the region, the poor degree of regional cooperation around this sea basin and the often competing policies of regional stakeholders.

Is the Black Sea Synergy still relevant today? Overall, the BSS has the potential to play a useful role in facilitating good neighbourly relations and fostering multilateralism. Such potential stems primarily from its inclusive approach, i.e. from the involvement of all regional players. Although it currently seems to be an obstacle to effective policy implementation, inclusiveness is undoubtedly an added value over the long term. In the short term, concrete cooperation initiatives (e.g. sectoral partnerships) should be fostered in an attempt to bridge divisions.

Despite the Black Sea Synergy's continuing relevance and potential value, there are, nevertheless, major issues that the EU needs to address under the BSS. First, there is a need to clarify at all levels how the complementarity of the BSS with the Eastern Partnership is to be achieved; so far, the lack of clarification has resulted either in the EaP overshadowing the BSS or in overlaps between the two initiatives. Second, the Black Sea Synergy lacks a visible financial commitment: the initiative is currently financed from various instruments with little visibility on the overall funding.

Following from these conclusions, we believe that the EU should focus on:

- **Specifying the operational methods and means** (processes, projects, monitoring system and funding) for the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy, especially with a view to clarifying its complementarity with the Eastern Partnership and to enhancing its profile. As far as funding is concerned, specific resources dedicated to the BSS should be allocated, especially for financing small-scale development projects.
- **Better integrating the BSS in its bilateral relations** with partner countries. This entails in particular mentioning in all bilateral policy documents the interactions between bilateral relations and the BSS with a view to both enhancing the Synergy's visibility and its incorporation in the EU's bilateral policy framework.
- **Further concentrating on a small number of priorities to avoid dispersion.** Sectoral initiatives are an important step forward in this process, although environment and transport infrastructures seem more promising than energy, which has become increasingly politicised.
- **Systematically promoting a grassroots or project-based approach** with a view to de-politicising relations between neighbours and involving grassroots actors in the implementation of the Synergy. Such an approach has proved successful in the new Northern Dimension with the Russian Federation.
- Engaging regional partners in early stages of project design in order to generate interest and to foster joint ownership.
- Providing enhanced support to civil society, including supporting CSOs
- Strengthening supervision of BSS implementation.

Three years after the inception of the Black Sea Synergy, much has changed both within the EU and in the neighbourhood. Given its limited achievements so far, the BSS is specifically in need of a political impetus in order to effectively implement the concrete and targeted approach which has been developed by EC services on the basis of various actors' recommendations.

1 BLACK SEA SYNERGY: THE GENESIS OF A NEW POLICY¹

The Black Sea Synergy (BSS) was put forward by the European Commission (EC) in April 2007 (European Commission 2007). Three tightly interwoven factors were instrumental in the EU's decision to launch this new initiative for regional cooperation in the Black Sea area:

- A. **The accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU** on 1 January 2007 brought the Union closer to the Black Sea, a strategic area for both the EU's and the continent's stability (Tassinari 2006). The sixth enlargement shifted the Union's attention to a sea basin where security challenges raised increasing concerns. The area is a patchwork of political trajectories; with few democracies in the region, volatility is a major issue in many countries. It is also confronted with disparities in economic development and uneven levels of regional trade integration among coastal countries. Poor governance and pervasive corruption have a corrosive effect on a number of states around the Black Sea. Moreover, unresolved conflicts in the former Soviet Union threaten the stability of the whole region.
- B. Enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania, as well as growing EU concerns over energy security in the region in the wake of the 2006 Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute, prompted **enhanced EU involvement** in an area where it had so far kept a low profile. On the one hand, the Black Sea area had indeed been kept in the background of EU foreign policy, with the sum of bilateral policies implemented in the area resulting in the EU's having a 'partial picture' of the region and lacking a 'holistic approach' (Tassinari 2006: 2). On the other hand, the design of an EU initiative for the Black Sea region also answered long-standing calls from Black Sea countries and organizations. The Black Sea Synergy was [thus] meant to bridge 'an obvious gap in [the EU's] vision of the regions to its periphery' (Emerson 2008: 1).
- C. The Black Sea Synergy was also launched in **the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**. It stemmed from the need, noted by several EU actors, to give an impetus to the ENP. In December 2006 the European Commission issued a lukewarm assessment of the ENP's record on conflict resolution, an issue of utmost importance around the Black Sea (European Commission 2006). In this context, regional cooperation was deemed necessary to complement the bilateral dimension which had so far prevailed in the ENP. Most of the challenges faced by the EU in its Eastern neighbourhood, especially around the Black Sea, are indeed transnational (e.g. trafficking and organized crime, migration, environmental pollution). The initiative also coincided with Germany's (the then chairholder of the EU Council) plans to enhance relations with Eastern neighbours and to launch, in the words of Foreign Affairs Minister Steinmeier, a new Eastern policy ('*eine neue Ostpolitik*').

Through the BSS, the EU sought to increase cooperation with and between the countries surrounding the Black Sea. The Black Sea Synergy was designed as a flexible framework complementary to existing EU policies in the region, i.e. the ENP (relevant for five Eastern ENP countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), the strategic partnership with the Russian Federation and the pre-accession policy for Turkey. Although an EU-framed initiative, the BSS was conceived as a 'collective endeavour' (European Commission 2008: 2) which aimed at:

- Stimulating democratic and economic reforms;

1 The definition used in this note corresponds to the Wider Black Sea region which includes Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova in the west, Ukraine and Russia in the north, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the east and Turkey in the south; though Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Greece are not littoral states, history, proximity and close ties make them natural regional actors.

- Supporting stability and promoting development;
- Focusing on practical projects in areas of common concern;
- Responding to opportunities and challenges through coordinated action in a regional framework;
- Developing a climate more conducive to the solution of conflicts in the region.

The Black Sea Synergy was officially launched as a common endeavour at a Foreign Ministers' meeting in Kyiv on 14 February 2008 which involved all regional partners, EU Member States and EU institutions (Joint Statement 2008).

2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE BLACK SEA SYNERGY'S IMPLEMENTATION

The Commission's initial proposals were 'highly *eclectic*' (Emerson 2008: 8) in that the list of priorities and tasks mentioned in the Communication covers a large number of sectors. This broad approach made the implementation of the BSS complicated to manage and monitor, even more so under an initiative conceived as an umbrella policy and in which a number of stakeholders are involved.

In its *Report on the first year of implementation of the Black Sea Synergy* adopted on 19 June 2008, the European Commission assessed the progress achieved and indicated its views on the way forward for the implementation of the BSS. The Report mentioned uneven progress across sectors, with very limited achievements in sectors such as democracy, trade and unresolved conflicts. This confirmed the inadequacy of the initial eclectic approach, also criticised by other EU actors (European Parliament 2008²) for not concentrating on a limited set of priority objectives and leading to dispersion.

Although the Report as such did not reflect a shift in the BSS's approach, it contained proposals likely to bring in increased prioritization and concentration of BSS's activities over time. It put the emphasis on the following proposals to be explored for further action:

- *Long-term, measurable objectives* in fields like transport, environment, energy and/or maritime safety where a *lead country and/or organization* should be identified to ensure coordination of activities;
- *Sectoral partnerships* should be established to provide a framework for co-financing (including through the NIF) and a basis for the involvement of IFIs;
- The frequency of *ministers' meetings* should reflect concrete needs: In some cases they could take place in the existing sectoral frameworks (such as TRACECA or the Baku Initiative) or could follow the Kyiv model (back-to-back with Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization meetings, with full EU participation or involving an open troika).

Other proposals for further action included:

2 The European Parliament 'considers that the new regional approach should be targeted at a number of priority areas for which the Commission should provide a detailed action plan envisaging concrete objectives, benchmarks and follow-up and constituting a basis for enhancing the EU's involvement in the region as well as intra-regional cooperation; underlines that the EU must concentrate on a limited set of priority objectives and avoid dispersion and duplication of efforts' (EP, 2008, para7).

- the involvement of Belarus in some of the sectoral activities related to the Synergy;
- the creation of a Black Sea Civil Society Forum;
- the strengthening of academic and student networks;
- the establishment of an Institute of European Studies in the Black Sea Region.

Since the Report was issued, limited progress has been achieved in the advancement of the BSS tasks. A detailed reference to the progress on the envisaged tasks is provided in Table 2.

One of the most important developments has been the initiative to **establish sectoral partnerships in three key areas**: environment, transport and energy. Romania helps to organize the Environment Partnership, Greece the Transport Partnership and Bulgaria the Energy Partnership. The Black Sea Environment Partnership has been the only one officially launched so far (notably, at a conference in Brussels on 16 March 2010). A committee and a secretariat for the new partnership will be responsible for considering concrete projects to be implemented. The partnerships are open to all partner countries wishing to participate, as well as to institutions that are active in the region, like the BSEC, the Black Sea Commission, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Reaching consensus among such a variety of actors and interests over specific projects is expected to be a cumbersome process.

In terms of **cross border cooperation (CBC) and work with civil society**, the first calls for proposals under the Black Sea CBC Programme were launched in June 2009. A 'Joint Operational Programme' has been drawn up by the parties (representing the national and regional authorities of ten states) and has been allocated €17.5 million for the period 2007-2013.³ The indicative amount of ENPI funds allocated under the first calls totaled €3,311,369, to which Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) funds earmarked for Turkey and amounting to €1,339,401 should be added.⁴ The cross-border cooperation projects financed within this call cover three priorities: economic development, environmental protection and cultural and educational initiatives.⁵ However, as of August 2010 the project selection process had not been completed.

The Black Sea Synergy has attracted considerable **NGO interest**. An alliance of 29 environmental NGOs met in Odessa on 7 February 2008 and adopted a position paper on 'Greening the Black Sea Synergy' (June 2008). A Black Sea NGO Forum was launched in the framework of the Black Sea Synergy in 2008 by the Romanian Federation of Development NGOs and its partners throughout the region (with support from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation). The Forum meets regularly with a view to increasing the level of dialogue and cooperation among NGOs in the wider Black Sea region. The overall objective is to strengthen NGOs and their capacity to influence regional and national policies.

3 European Commission, EuropeAid, Cross-border cooperation ENPI programmes, *ENPI CBC Black Sea Programme*, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-cross-border/documents/enpi_cbc_black_sea_fact_sheet_en.pdf

4 Data provided in this paragraph correspond to the indicative amounts mentioned in the Joint Operational Programme Black Sea 2007-2013. The authors have not identified any additional data on financial commitments under the CBC Black Sea Programme.

5 Joint Operational Programme Black Sea 2007-2013, Newsletter, January 2010. Available at <http://www.blacksea-cbc.net/index.php/eng/News/News-Archive2/Black-Sea-Programme-second-newsletter-January>.

Cooperation with other partner countries as well as regional and international organizations is an important aspect of the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy. Immediately after the 2007 Communication, the Commission obtained observer status in the BSEC (June 2007). Relations between the EU and BSEC have advanced to the level of political interaction and dialogue. The extended BSEC troika has had regular meetings (normally, once a year since 2007) with the respective Council Working Party. Commission representatives attend all high level BSEC meetings and contribute to the activities of BSEC Working Groups, in particular to the ad hoc Group of Experts on BSEC-EU Interaction. Even though EU-BSEC links are meant to facilitate dialogue at the regional level, these links are not exclusive and under the BSS the EU is open to cooperation with other regional bodies. However, synergies with other regional partners which could have given the BSS more visibility have stagnated. The Commission's efforts to accede the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution were not successful (due to both legal issues and Russian objections). Another potential regional partnership with the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership has not taken off.⁶ The Forum functions as a civil society platform and as such it has an added value for sharing ideas and fostering dialogue among regional actors. However, though the Forum is highly complementary to BSS and could serve as a relevant platform to generate ideas to be implemented under the BSS, this potential has not been realized to date, in part due to the fact that the Forum itself has been adversely affected by regional tensions and disputes.

On a more positive note the BSS, since its inception in 2007, has succeeded in placing the Black Sea region on the radar screen of the EU and beyond as a single distinct policy area, a unit of analysis and not a vague geographic space (Tsantoulis: 2-3). It has also brought together for the first time all major political actors and other key stakeholders (national governments, international and regional organisations, business sectors, etc.) on a few occasions.

Despite the initially enthusiastic reception which greeted the BSS, the policy never took off, owing primarily to the weak commitment of partners and the lack of policy consistency. The inclusion of Russia (and Turkey), though welcomed as a sign of both inclusiveness and the novelty of the new policy, generated concerns over the actual potential of the Synergy. Russia's lack of support to the Synergy and its insistence that the Synergy develops on an equal basis with BSEC and under BSEC-EU partnership has undermined the potential of BSS since its inception. To a large extent, difficulties with BSS implementation mirror those of the EU-Russia partnership.

Monitoring the actual progress of the BSS is not a straightforward task as the Synergy lacks a working programme upon which assessment can be made. As a result, even though progress has been achieved in EU activities around the Black Sea (e.g. in the framework of TRACECA or of the Baku initiative), it is difficult to attribute such progress to the BSS *per se*.

Finally, more than two years after the Kiev meeting (14 February 2008), no other high level political meeting has taken place. This contributes to the lack of both visibility and policy guidance under the BSS.

6 The last activity mentioned on the the Black Sea Forum website traces back to October 2007.

3 THE CONTEXT OF THE EU'S ENGAGEMENT IN BLACK SEA COOPERATION

High expectations *vis-à-vis* the BSS and promises of an active engagement were expressed both by EU Black Sea countries (initially Greece, followed by Bulgaria and Romania) and by other regional partners (existing regional organizations and fora such as BSEC and the Black Sea Forum). However, the EU's engagement in the Black Sea region and the Black Sea Synergy's implementation both have been constrained by conditions and factors both internal and external to the Union, at the international, EU, and regional levels.

At the international level, there have been significant negative externalities such as the present international financial and economic crisis that need to be taken into account. Due to the crisis, not only has the Black Sea region been the worst performer in the year 2009 (marking an average decline of more than 8 per cent in terms of regional GDP), but most EU countries have been facing a 'debt' problem, which has drained their resources and minimized their capacities to expedite regional synergies. Though it is conceivable that economic hardships could have triggered cooperation, the persistent high security dilemma among the countries has undermined that potential. However, the previous eight-year period of steady growth in all Black Sea economies (2000-2008) provides grounds for anticipating a relatively quick return to economic development.

In addition to international economic conditions, the EU's ability to engage further in the Black Sea region has been conditioned over the last few years by the deterioration of Russian-Transatlantic relations over both the expansion of NATO to Ukraine and Georgia and the issue of the deployment of ballistic anti-missiles systems in Central Europe. The present conclusion of discussions on further NATO enlargement to the East and the overall 'reset' of US-Russian relations since January 2009 are changing the geopolitical context and might allow for more room for collaborative undertakings in the wider Black Sea region. Moreover, priorities with regard to international security have shifted further east to Central Asia and the Middle East, relaxing power competition over the Black Sea.

At the EU level, over the past two years European institutions, Presidencies and Member States have primarily been concerned with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and with the effects of the economic and financial crisis. Following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, the EU's decision-making system has been undergoing an experimentation phase, especially when it comes to the provisions on external action; the European External Action Service, for example, is still in the making. In other words, the overall institutional and policy environment has not been favourable to a rapid development of the new initiatives.

At the same time, the EU's eastern policies have been shaped primarily within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) framework, launched in May 2009 just one year after the BSS. While the Black Sea Synergy focuses on regional cooperation in which states having no EU aspirations (e.g. Russia) may be engaged, the EaP's emphasis on neighbours' approximation with EU standards and *acquis*, especially under the bilateral track, makes it a different framework of interaction. The EaP also developed its own multilateral track (four platforms on democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU policies; energy security; and contacts between people), thus bringing a degree of policy confusion as to BSS's role. To a large extent, the BSS has been overshadowed by the EaP, the latter benefiting from stronger political support from EU Member States, additional funding, an operational structure, clearer tasks in the form of flagship initiatives, and a more coherent target group of states. Thus, while the *raison d'être* of the Black Sea Synergy relates primarily to its novel multilateralism and inclusiveness (i.e. development of

cooperation within the Black Sea region and also between the region as a whole and the European Union), the EaP's thematic platforms have offered an alternative and more visible framework for multilateral cooperation. It is expected that this situation is unlikely to change in the forthcoming months in light of the forthcoming Hungarian and Polish Presidencies of the EU Council, given the fact that Poland is the initiator of the EaP and its strongest supporter within the EU.

Another policy puzzle that the Synergy was called upon to handle was its role as a framework 'to improve **coordination** between relevant EU and regional policies as well as wide-ranging programmes ...' (Joint Statement, 2008). The number of existing and — in several cases—well institutionalized organizations (e.g. BSEC) and sectoral programmes, including those initiated by the EU (e.g. TRACECA), has made the above an almost impossible task.

At the Black Sea level, one of the chief problems has been the low level of regional cooperation and integration existing in the area, coupled with a lack of historical experience in regional cooperation and the absence of genuine Black Sea multilateralism in the largest coastal states' foreign policies. Reversing this trend **has been an actual goal of the Synergy itself**. Russia has been adamant in its bilateral approach (driven by security concerns) with regard to its southern neighbors; Turkey has been accommodating Russia's policies while developing its own regional initiatives outside the Synergy framework (e.g. the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Force or the proposal for a South Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform), while Ukraine, since the Orange revolution, has been reluctant to strongly embrace any regional framework that would include a potentially dominant Russia. As a consequence, the new partnership between Russia and Turkey has built a strong North-South cooperative axis over the last decade without any spillover effects on regional cooperation.

Endogenous regional cooperation has been undermined by persistent conflicts, bilateral disputes and ineffective institutions. The Black Sea region continues to be affected by a number of conflicts that first flared up in the early 1990s in the aftermath of the USSR's collapse (i.e. Transdnistria/Moldova, South Ossetia/Georgia, Abkhazia/Georgia and Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh/Azerbaijan), insurgencies in Russia (Chechnya) and Turkey (involving the Kurdish minority) as well as serious disputes between neighbours (Georgia-Russia or Armenia-Turkey). In August 2008, the Black Sea region became the focal point of international attention once more as a result of the military confrontation between Georgia and Russia. The August War considerably altered the geopolitical realities in the region (especially so after the recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence by Russia) and put region-wide cooperation further on hold despite the 'business as usual' policy promoted by Russia (e.g. Georgia declined the BSEC Chairmanship in 2009 and Turkey's proposal for a South Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform did not materialize).

The persistence of trade and economic blockades between several pairs of Black Sea states (Russia-Georgia, Turkey-Armenia, Armenia-Azerbaijan) has fragmented the regional economy and generated distortions undermining any substantial effort toward economic cooperation. Energy disputes between Russia and Ukraine in the winter of 2006 and 2009 raised concerns about Europe's energy security and elicited calls for a more efficient EU energy policy towards the Black Sea. At the same time, protracted conflicts and lack of trust make it difficult to address any issue on the regional agenda without raising security concerns among some of the regional stakeholders (primarily Russia), thus further impeding the emergence of partnerships. Positive developments such as the 'Colour' revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), the rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia (the signing, in October 2009, of two protocols on re-opening the shared border, establishing diplomatic relations and developing relations in various fields) and the

unprecedented rates of economic growth in the 2000s throughout the whole region did not foster multilateral synergies, in part because these developments have been affected by major shifts (e.g. the election as Ukrainian President of Viktor Yanukovich in 2010) or setbacks (e.g. stagnation in the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement process).

Such local or bilateral shifts do have, or will have, a regional impact. For instance, following President Yanukovich's accession to power, Ukrainian foreign policy has moved closer to Russia, as shown by recent Ukrainian decisions on energy and security issues. As Ukraine proclaims its neutrality and 'bridge' function between the East and West, however, the country may become more active in Black Sea cooperation projects in an effort to strengthen its regional influence.

The evolution of the regional context thus confronts the EU with a new situation characterised by three major changes:

- Ukraine's rapprochement with Russia and its possible positioning as a regional actor,
- Turkey's assertiveness and activism as a regional and global (G-20) actor (Davutoglu, 2010),
- Russia's perception of the Black Sea area as being strategic important for its security interests, its strengthening hold on the region and its resistance to an increased EU influence around the Black Sea.

At the same time, the EU has emerged as an important regional player in recent years. It has become a centre of gravity for the region's economic activities. Since 2004, the EU has become the main trade partner of each country in the Black Sea region. In 2009, trade with the EU amounted to 30% of overall trade for Armenia, 43 % for Azerbaijan and 29% for Georgia. The EU is also by far Russia's main trading partner, accounting for 48 % of its overall trade turnover in 2009. It is also the most important investor in Russia. Moreover, the EU is also an important political player in the Black Sea region, as shown by its mediation role in the August 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia. Nevertheless, both the EU's assertion as fully-fledged actor in the region and its initiatives to invigorate regional cooperation are strongly constrained by fragmentation dynamics around the Black Sea.

A major assumption underlying the BSS was that regional cooperation could successfully address local disparities and interstate tensions.

The regional context and the evolution of relations between countries in the Black Sea area are critical in that much of the BSS implementation relies **on the willingness and ability of the regional partners to cooperate**. Yet, no significant initiatives or projects have been tabled by these actors, including organizations such as BSEC, which is considered a key partner in BSS. BSEC, though rather bureaucratic and less visible, has to a certain extent developed the channels and structures to foster sectoral cooperation among Black Sea countries. Arguments in favour of an upgraded role for the BSEC include its affinity with the scope and rationale of the BSS and its inclusive membership, which broadly coincides with that of the BSS. Nevertheless, BSEC's weak capacities, coupled with difficulties in reaching consensus, have undermined its role as a regional partner.

Other organizations display significant weaknesses too. The GUAM has become irrelevant in the contemporary constellation of regional powers (especially after the 2010 elections in Ukraine) while the Black Sea Forum has lost momentum, as shown by the absence of significant cooperation initiatives and policy meetings in the last couple of years. Moreover, Russia, a major partner in the Black Sea, has been reluctant to acknowledge or accommodate the EU's growing involvement in a region which Russia holds as its 'backyard'. Consequently, a strong articulation with BSEC has been

pushed forward by the two regional powers, Turkey and principally Russia, as a means to retain their influence in the region (Alexandrova-Arbatova 2008: 36). In other words, Russia has advocated a development of the BSS in close linkage with BSEC, as BSEC's consensus decision-making rule would have enabled her to control BSS's activities and to limit the EU's influence around the Black Sea (Emerson 2008). At the Kyiv meeting in 2008, Russia thus refused to sign the statement prepared by the ministers of the EU and the Wider Black Sea area, which provided for the possibility of EU activities outside BSEC.

The evolution of Black Sea Synergy thus reflects **the difficult security and socio-economic circumstances in the region as well as the often competing policies of regional stakeholders**. BSS's limited progress does not come as a surprise as regional cooperation, not to mention integration, around the Black Sea has not taken off in any forms (trade-economic, security or social) despite the plurality of institutions and formats. However, the BSS's meager achievements so far also stem from its low prioritisation within the EU. Overall, BSS has lacked political support and strong commitment from EU actors, especially EU Black Sea Member States.

This resulted in:

- lack of concrete policy mechanisms,
- lack of financial resources,
- lack of flagship initiatives,
- slowness in identifying, assessing and implementing regional projects.

Moreover, EU Black Sea countries have attempted to act as core states in the EU's Black Sea policy (e.g. Romania led the recent launch of the Environmental partnership), yet these countries have also pursued their own Black Sea policies in parallel to the BSS, thus adding confusion and leading to duplication. Romania, one of the most active partners, has thus put forward the framework of the Black Sea Forum while it also acted as a pioneer in the creation of the Black Sea Euroregion. In a similar vein, Greece has recently established a 2 million Euro Hellenic Fund within the framework of the BSEC for regional projects.

To the extent that it requires greater coordination, the proliferation of different formats and policies in the Black Sea region has undermined the possibility of developing synergies in the Black Sea region. The Black Sea Synergy initiative was launched to foster *coherence* among all these regional initiatives, but it has so far failed to design concrete mechanisms to reach this objective. Overlapping and lack of coordination with other regional policies and organizations has contributed to the lack of significant progress under the BSS and the Synergy is not viewed as the most efficient framework to promote joint regional projects.

Regional stakeholders have expressed much frustration over unmet expectations with regard to regionalism in the Black Sea area and the way in which regional institutions function. The problems identified include (Manoli 2010):

- sluggishness in identifying, assessing and implementing regional infrastructure projects;
- lack of flagship projects symbolizing progress toward regional cooperation;
- lack of research and information, especially in support of decision-making;
- insufficient resource mobilization;
- limited private sector and civil society participation;

- lack of coordination and too much duplication among regional initiatives;
- limited institutional efficiency of regional organizations.

4 THE WAY AHEAD

Is the Black Sea Synergy still relevant today? Both the overarching goal (fostering Black Sea cooperation) and the format (inclusiveness and flexibility) of BSS are of relevance in today's realities around the Black Sea. Under the current circumstances, the slow pace of BSS's implementation may not have affected the Synergy's development over the long term, as there are not any speedy solutions to the security problems harboured in the region. What the BSS needs so as to fulfil its role is more **consistency** rather than speed.

In the case of the Black Sea region, there are two opposing conditions on the ground which considerably affect the potential for regionalism. On the one hand, economic difficulties and the need for managing regional public goods (e. g., environment, trade, financial stability, and knowledge) have generated strong demands for regional cooperation and integration. These expectations for policy coordination and regional responses need to be strengthened and efficiently channeled into regional policy-making processes. On the other hand, persistent security dilemmas (e.g. border disputes, protracted conflicts, and crime) undermine incentives for regionalization and substantially obstruct regional institutions. These adverse security conditions need to be changed or their impact mitigated (Manoli, 2010).

Overall, the BSS has the potential to play a useful role in facilitating good neighbourly relations and fostering multilateralism, even though, due to current regional tensions, such potential is likely to materialize only over the long-term.

This potential stems primarily from its **inclusive approach**, i.e. from the involvement of all regional players. In the Eastern neighbourhood, the BSS is the only EU instrument based upon this approach. As such, it has the potential to better address challenges faced by countries which are otherwise placed in different EU policy frameworks. In other words, the BSS has the capacity to bridge gaps between EU policy frameworks and to involve to some degree various players concerned about a specific issue area through the notion of 'partnerships', e.g. Central Asia countries when it comes to energy security. Although it currently seems an obstacle to effective policy implementation, inclusiveness is undoubtedly an added value over the long term. In the short term, concrete cooperation initiatives (e.g. sectoral partnerships) should be fostered. This is considered as the best possible way to cope with a context which has so far negatively affected BSS's implementation and to contribute to gradually bridging divisions.

Recent international and regional developments may create a more favourable background for building confidence around the Black Sea, which was not the case when the BSS was launched.

First, there are **positive developments in the EU** upon which the BSS can build. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty paves the way for more coherent and effective EU external action, *inter alia* in its neighbourhood. Forthcoming discussions on the new EU financial perspectives (2013-2020) provide an opportunity for reconsidering the BSS's funding as well.

Second, the evolution of bilateral relations between the EU and Black Sea partner countries is also likely to create a positive environment for the BSS. Following Ukraine in 2007 and Moldova in January 2010, negotiations on Association Agreements were launched in July 2010 with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with a view to upgrading EU relations with all three countries. The 'modernization

partnership' put forward by Russia, combined with the improved climate in Polish-Russian relations, provides a constructive impetus to EU-Russia strategic partnership which may also have a positive effect on the Black Sea.

Nevertheless, there are still major issues that the EU needs to address under the BSS.

First of all, there is a need to clarify, at all levels, how the '**substantial complementarity**' (**European Commission 2008b: 10**) of the BSS with the EaP is to be achieved. So far, the lack of clarifications has resulted either in the EaP's overshadowing the BSS or in overlaps between the two initiatives. An examination of recent bilateral policy documents prepared by the EC (e.g. ENPI Indicative Programmes 2011-2013) highlights a number of references to the EaP, whereas the BSS is (by far) less mentioned. This indicates that the EaP has emerged as the main policy framework in EU-Eastern neighbours relations at the expenses of the Black Sea Synergy.

A similar discrepancy between the two initiatives can be noted on DG Relex's website, with EaP's page being much more developed than BSS's. As far as overlap between the two initiatives is concerned, support for civil society is a case in point: a Civil Society Forum was established in the framework of the EaP in May 2009 while a Black Sea NGO forum has been in place since 2008. Whereas the simultaneous development of two fora is a natural consequence of having two policy frameworks, they (especially the Black Sea NGO forum) would obviously gain from increased EU clarifications on the articulation between these two policy frameworks.

To take another example, the Indicative Programme prepared for Azerbaijan for the period 2011-2013 mentions that 'Azerbaijan participates in environment and climate cooperation under the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership'; however, no indication is provided as to the concrete articulation between the two initiatives. The latest memo available on DG Relex's website clarifies the specific logic underpinning the EaP (i.e. promoting partner countries' rapprochement to the EU) and the BSS (i.e. developing regional cooperation around the Black Sea), thus confirming that their approach is different;⁷ however, it still does not provide any guidance on the way in which specific activities implemented under each initiative interacts with other activities in the same sector under the other initiative.

Second, the Black Sea Synergy lacks **visible funds**. The initiative has the potential to be financed from various instruments, e.g. the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA); yet there is no reference in any of the Synergy's documents to the overall BSS funding allotted from these various instruments. As Bulgaria and Romania are EU Member States, EU Regional Policy funding (through the European Regional Development Fund) is also available. As mentioned in the BSS Progress Report presented in 2008, in 2007 €837 million worth of Community assistance under the ENPI and IPA were available for the seven non-EU countries of the Black Sea region. In addition, other instruments need to be mobilised to fund the BSS. The creation of the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF) offers a vehicle for pooling grant resources from the Community and the Member States. These resources can also leverage additional loan financing from European public finance institutions for investments in neighbouring countries, including in the Black Sea region. The NIF makes it easier to mobilise additional funding for priority projects and can thus also sustain Black Sea regional cooperation efforts. Though, as a general principle, co-financing can be applied, this approach has not taken off. One dimension that needs to be re-examined is the role of existing development tools such as the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank that are currently not considered NIF partners.

7 Black Sea Synergy, MEMO/10/78, 15 March 2010.

Third, the economic crisis highlights the challenges faced by Black Sea countries to put their economies back on a sustainable growth trajectory. In this regard, the BSS needs to better address issues of **poverty and discrepancies** in the region. Those indeed contribute to regional fragmentation and divisions. Poverty and discrepancies have increasingly emerged as priorities under ENPI indicative programmes at a national level, e.g. for South Caucasus countries. While it is unrealistic in the current context to expect additional EU funds to tackle these issues, a regional monitoring performed under the BSS would prove useful. The ability of authorities in BSR countries to deliver on policy and to implement projects and reforms will be central in ensuring that the region's economic development will be sustainable. Thus, strengthening of institutions and capacity-building, the rule of law and the fight against corruption should be considered as issues of utmost importance under the BSS which require supervision at the regional level.

Three years after the inception of the Black Sea Synergy, much has changed both within the EU and in the neighbourhood. Taking into account the fact that the neighbourhood is and will remain for some time in a state of flux, EU policies need to be permanently reviewed and adjusted.

The BSS was launched based upon the assumption that regional cooperation may create a favourable ground for fostering stability, security and prosperity around the Black Sea. This assumption has not materialised so far, owing in particular to strong reticence among major regional actors. Since 2008, the context in which the BSS is implemented has considerably evolved. There are undoubtedly positive developments in Russia-US and Russia-EU relations; at the same time, its rapprochement with Turkey and its hold on the Georgian breakaway regions indicate that Russia is still not likely to accept an increased EU influence around the Black Sea basin.

In this context, the way forward for the BSS in order for regional cooperation to emerge would be to focus on a practical, focused and result-oriented approach. In other words, it should be acknowledged that the BSS is not a framework for political and security cooperation. Depoliticizing the BSS would accommodate Russia's sensitivity over security issues while linking BSS's activities to Russian concerns over modernisation and thus to the EU-Russia partnership. Russian authorities' increasing focus on modernisation indeed offers a window of opportunity for increased BSS engagement. As this approach may be interpreted by Russian authorities as an EU 'dismissal' or 'withdrawal' from the Black Sea political arena, it should also be made clear to Russia, possibly under bilateral meetings, that the EU promotes stability and security around the Black Sea based upon international law and that it pursues its own political interests in the region.

At the same time, developing the BSS as a project-based and focused initiative may both enhance its profile and usher in a greater clarification of its relation to the Eastern Partnership. Even though it is difficult to predict the development of both policies at this stage, the implementation of concrete projects under the BSS is likely to differentiate further the Synergy from the EaP over time, as far as it will enhance its profile as an initiative targeting region-wide problems. While the EaP may result in increased convergence among Eastern neighbours and with the EU, taking EU standards and acquis as the main reference, it will not foster regional cooperation *per se*, a fact which will become even more apparent as some major regional actors are left outside of the policy. For example, this means that EaP activities in the area of environment should aim at bringing eastern neighbours closer to EU standards (thus possibly also increasing the convergence among neighbours' regulatory frameworks) while the BSS should address region-wide issues such as biodiversity conservation, pollution sources and coastal zones management, primarily through small scale projects, CBC programmes and indicating short-term measurable goals.

Following from these conclusions, we believe that the BSS reform should focus on:

- D. Specifying the operational methods and means** (processes, projects, monitoring system and funding) for the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy. As far as **funding** is concerned, the overall funding dedicated to the BSS should be made more visible.
- E. Better integrating the BSS in its bilateral relations** with partner countries. This entails in particular mentioning in all bilateral policy documents the interactions between bilateral relations and the BSS with a view both to enhance the Synergy's visibility and its incorporation in the bilateral policy framework and also to allow monitoring at a regional level of the EU's bilateral relations with countries of the Black Sea area.
- F. Further concentrating on a small number of priorities to avoid dispersion.** Taking into account divisions around the Black Sea, it is suggested to focus on 'technical' issues of common interest with a view to fostering a 'shared feeling of responsibility' (European Parliament 2008) among Black Sea countries. Sectoral initiatives are an important step forward in this process, although environment and transport infrastructures seem more promising than energy, which has increasingly become politicised.
- G. Systematically promoting, in the framework of the BSS, a grassroots or project-based approach** with a view to involving grassroots actors in the implementation of the Synergy. Such an approach has proved successful in the new Northern Dimension with the Russian Federation. The need for a project-based approach was also emphasized by participants at the conference launching the Black Sea Environmental Partnership. It seems that it is now well incorporated in the European Commission's management of the BSS, as evidenced by the latest information available on DG Relex's BSS website.⁸
- H. Engaging regional partners** (primarily partner countries and their local authorities) **in early stages of project design** in order to generate interest and to **foster joint ownership**. Experience in other areas of Europe's neighbourhood (either in the Mediterranean or in the Baltic Sea) indicates that synergies and multilateralism needs the active engagement and commitment of local actors, among whom governments are only one set of players. Local authorities and business communities, along with civil society organizations, are equally important pillars of synergies. The BSS should further focus on fostering East-East cooperation and interaction among all these sets of actors with a view to enhancing their ownership of the policy.
- I. Providing enhanced support to civil society**, including supporting CSOs networks as recommended by the Economic and Social Committee (2008). The non-governmental sector is critical to ensure both the effective implementation of BSS projects and the success of confidence-building measures. It is a pivotal actor in those areas which are central to the BSS, e.g. poverty reduction or environment.
- J. Strengthening supervision of BSS implementation.** Monitoring is indeed crucial to enable policy adjustments and review. Monitoring indicators should be specified for each BSS activity and additional human resources should be dedicated to this task within the European Commission. This would also allow for further policy adjustments.

⁸ 'Each sector partnership will be organised in a way that maximises its chances of leading to concrete projects.' Black Sea Synergy, MEMO/10/78, 15 March 2010.

5 ANNEXES

16 March 2010 Brussels	Launching of the Black Sea Environmental Partnership
14 February 2008 Kiev	The Black Sea Synergy was launched in Kyiv by the foreign Ministers of the Black Sea partner states and the EU. Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the countries of the European Union and of the wider Black Sea area
6-7 February 2008 Brussels	The Committee of the Regions completed an opinion on Black Sea Synergy- A new regional cooperation initiative.
19 June 2008 Brussels	Report on the first year of implementation of the Black Sea Synergy , European Commission, COM(2008) 391
9 July 2008 Brussels	Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Setting up civil society organisations networks in the Black Sea region (Exploratory Opinion), REX 245
17 January 2008 Strasbourg	European Parliament Resolution on a Black Sea Regional Policy Approach
11 April 2007 Brussels	European Commission Communication on Black Sea Synergy – A New Cooperation Initiative to the Parliament and the Council, COM(2007) 160 final

Table 2. Black Sea Synergy Related Tasks	
Field	Tasks
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first Environmental Partnership was launched in 2010. - One priority of the European Commission has been that the Bucharest Convention is amended to allow the European Community to accede (it has an observer status since 2001). - The Commission is working through the DABLAS Task Force with partner countries in a number of environment sectors. - The Commission is prepared to deepen dialogue and cooperation activities on climate change mitigation and adaptation. - Representatives of NGOs contributed to the study 'Greening the Black Sea Synergy' during the workshop organised in Odessa, February 5-7, 2008
Maritime policy and fisheries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In line with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2008/56/EC, Member States, in developing their marine strategies, are required to use where practical and appropriate, existing regional cooperation structures, including those under the regional sea conventions to coordinate among themselves and to make every effort to coordinate their actions with those of third countries in the same region or subregion. - The Commission has initiated a European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODNET) for all sea basins, including the Black Sea. - The Commission promotes bilateral cooperation in fisheries management with third countries bordering the Black Sea, as well as through the appropriate Regional Fisheries Organisation, namely the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, which also covers the Black Sea.
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Black Sea region has made progress in mobilising existing instruments and resources such as the Energy Community Treaty, which provides for the implementation of the Community <i>acquis</i> in the electricity and gas sectors (Moldova and Ukraine were accepted as members in 2010, the latter under conditions) - The EU and the Eastern partners continue implementing the 2006 strategy roadmap agreed by ministers under the 'Baku initiative' for EU-Black Sea Caspian energy cooperation. - In July 2009 a study on the Euro-Asian Oil Transportation Corridor Project was concluded.
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional cooperation with Black Sea partners proceeds through the TRACECA structures. Through a series of related projects the Commission has increased its focus on maritime safety and security. Furthermore, it has begun to implement the Motorways of the Sea concept in the Black Sea - Work has started to extend the Common Aviation Area to the Black Sea

	<p>countries, involving improvement of safety oversight and strengthening of the civil aviation authorities.</p>
<p>Managing movement and improving security</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Conclusions on the Global Approach to Migration adopted by the European Council in June 2007 endorsed a number of priority actions, including the establishment of a Black Sea Cooperation Platform on Migration. In April 2008 the EU decided to establish this platform, bringing together Member States, EU agencies, countries bordering the Black Sea and regional organisations.
<p>Research, science and education networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Commission has been supporting institutional cooperation and structural reforms in higher education via the Tempus programme. Higher education cooperation and academic mobility continues to be fostered via the Erasmus Mundus programme. - The Bologna Process continues to act as the main policy reference framework for the reform of the education in partner countries. - The Black Sea Interconnection (BSI) project was approved in 2007 to build a regional research and education network linking it to GÉANT2, the high bandwidth, pan-European research network. - The Commission also supports regional scientific cooperation, i. a. through the INCONet EECA project which started in January 2008.
<p>Employment and social affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities at regional level either address specific issues of the Black Sea region (such as a seminar on social dialogue in 2008) or, in a larger context, thematic subjects (such as the seminar on gender equality in 2007). - In 2009, the European Training Foundation completed the Black Sea Labour Market Review
<p>Trade</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The EU has continued to encourage Black Sea regional trade liberalisation, supporting in particular the partner countries' efforts to join the WTO.
<p>Democracy, respect for human rights and good governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Black Sea Synergy civil society seminars on human rights issues have taken place. with participation of government officials and members of civil society from the Black Sea countries. - The Black Sea NGO Forum was launched in 2008 by the Romanian Federation of Development NGOs and is organized in cooperation with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Commission and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation.

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