1st International Neighbourhood Symposium

“Understanding the Common Neighbourhood – The Black Sea Region in Focus”

Heybeliada, Turkey
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REPORT
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- Center for Governance and Culture in Europe at the University of St. Gallen
Speakers at the 1st International Neighbourhood Symposium entitled “Understanding the Common Neighbourhood – The Black Sea Region in Focus” included: Sinem Açıkmese (Kadir Has University, Istanbul), Ino Afentouli (NATO Public Diplomacy Division), Mustafa Aydın (Kadir Has University, Istanbul), Benjamin Broome (Arizona State University), Felix Ciuta (University College of London), Mitat Çelikpala (Kadir Has University, Istanbul), Panayiotis Gavras (Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, Thessaloniki), Serhat Güvenç (Kadir Has University, Istanbul), Ivanka Klympush-Tsindadze (Yalta European Strategy, Kyiv), Kostas Ifantis (University of Athens), Kirill Koktysh (Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University), Moscow), Sergei Konoplyov (Director, Harvard Black Sea Security Program, Cambridge, MA), Bruce Lawlor (Center for Technology, Security, and Policy, Virginia Tech), Orysia Lutsevych (Europe House Georgia, Tbilisi), Panagiota Manoli (University of the Aegean, Rhodes), Ognyan Minchev (Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS), Sofia), Cyrus Reed (American University in Bulgaria), Dimitrios Triantaphyllou (CIES, Istanbul), Özlem Tür (Middle East Technical University, Ankara), Alexandros Yannis (European External Action Service (EEAS), European Union, Brussels).

Introduction

The wider Black Sea Region constantly finds itself at the top of the international agenda due to its geostrategic importance, its economic potential and the uneasy relationship between and among the stakeholders of the region. Issues such as energy security, environmental degradation, migration, Eurasian transport corridors, and combating organized and other forms of transnational crime are but a few of the pressing issues that require cooperation among both regional players and international stakeholders. As a result, NATO, the European Union, and the United States among others are increasingly focusing on the region linking Europe, Asia and the Middle East as well as three seas - the Black, Caspian and Mediterranean Seas. The region is also important due to its evolving relationship with a democracy promotion paradigm that has not quite taken hold as anticipated. In fact, the ongoing developments across the Arab world along the Mediterranean highlight the importance of this debate.

In light of this context, the International Neighbourhood Symposium (INS) project was conceived in order to help overcome these challenges and to ultimately advance transnational cooperation through ongoing dialogue. The Center for International and European Studies (CIES) at Kadir Has University organized an International Neighbourhood Symposium on “Understanding the Common Neighbourhood - The Black Sea Region in Focus”, geared towards young professionals to provide a forum for study, dialogue and networking in a multicultural and interdisciplinary environment. The Symposium was held from June 28 – July 3, 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey. Session topics focused on the most pressing issues facing the region, from Regional Cooperation/Regionalism to Regional Stakeholders and their Neighbourhood Policies. Sessions were complemented by a series of workshops on conflict resolution methodology guided by expert facilitator Professor Benjamin Broome of Arizona State University. Participants came from various countries in the region (Ukraine, Armenia, Greece, Albania, and Turkey among others). Speakers were equally as diverse and represented countries in the region and the United States. In addition, the project consortium included organizations with expertise on the Black Sea Region both from within and from outside its immediate geographic realm.
Overall, the 1st International Neighbourhood Symposium was structured around twelve sessions which addressed the following themes:

I. Introduction to the Symposium
II: Understanding the Black Sea Region/The State of Play
IV: Regional Cooperation/Regionalism
V: NATO and New Partnerships
VI: The Economic Context
VII: Democratic Institutions and Governance
VIII: The European Union and its Eastern Neighbourhood
IX: Regional Stakeholders and their Neighbourhood Policies
X: Towards a Dialogue of the Seas – Linking the Black, Caspian and Mediterranean Seas
XII: Closing Session

Apart from the sessions, five structured dialogue workshops, under the guidance of Professor Benjamin J. Broome, constituted a crucial part of the Symposium as they provided a forum for further thinking, discussions and mutual understanding among the participants.

Session I: Introduction to the Symposium
Panelists:
Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, Center for International and European Studies, Kadir Has University, Istanbul; Benjamin Broome, Arizona State University

The welcoming address of the Symposium was delivered by Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, Director of the Center for International and European Studies at Kadir Has University, who welcomed participants and speakers and briefly explained the structure, the context and the rationale of the 1st International Neighbourhood Symposium. In his address, Triantaphyllou pointed out that the composition of the group is both fascinating and challenging at the same time as it contains academics, analysts, and practitioners from all over the world who will have the opportunity to discuss thoroughly the key issues at stake. Lastly, the Director personally expressed his gratitude to the partners and sponsors – international, regional, national and local – for their strong support of the event.

Following Dimitrios Triantaphyllou's welcoming address, Benjamin Broome, facilitator of the structured dialogue workshops, also welcomed participants and made a very brief introduction related to the work to be conducted in the workshops, explaining the methodology and the key objectives of the working groups.
In this session, the speaker presented a conceptual definition of the Black Sea Region by asking a number of questions such as: What are the issues at stake in the Black Sea Region? Why is the “region” preferred as a policy framework? What are the consequences of thinking regionally? In order to answer the aforementioned questions an analysis of the context, which includes the following trends: the institutionalization of European security; the enlargements of NATO and the European Union; and the focus of US foreign policy on the global war on terror where regions play a secondary role was undertaken.

In the case of the Black Sea Region, some of the factors contributing to its formation as a region include an institutional reflex (the organization of the region within a particular institutional framework – the creation of the BSEC in 1992 is a case in point based in part upon mimesis – if it works in other regions, it could be replicated in the Black Sea Region) and a ‘good pupil strategy’ (designed to demonstrate institutional credentials for those states aspiring to mainstream integration, and partly a commitment to the emerging logic of European security politics). The ‘border country syndrome’ is also important as the border countries (accounting for most in the Black Sea Region) copy regional forms that are seen to have successfully achieved the desired goal of integration. The role of geopolitics is also important as it plays a role in establishing the region’s political coherence and renewed significance as a key site where the US (or alternatively NATO and the EU) confront Russia’s dominance of the region.

While there is a need for external actors such as the United States to raise attention regarding the importance or relevance of the region, there is doubt as to whether they are interested in being more involved in the region. On the other hand, concepts such as ‘regional ownership’ are also dominant in the regional context. These conflicting political philosophies account for the fact that the region is a unit of analysis of some importance.
Some of the most important trends that impact the region’s security include the prevalence of poor governance across the region, the economic situation since the onset of the financial and economic crisis in 2008, and the evolution of the energy security dimension. In particular, the issue of energy security was presented as a challenge for the Ukraine and an opportunity for Russia. According to both speakers, the overarching challenge is the lack of a common vision to dealing with the region’s challenges, which makes it susceptible to further instability and potential conflict.

Session IV: Regional Cooperation/Regionalism
Speaker:
Panagiota Manoli, University of the Aegean

This session focused on the definition of Regionalism in the Black Sea Region and its attributes. Black Sea Regionalism refers to the conscious policy of states to coordinate their activities and arrangements in agreed fields of cooperation in the wider Black Sea Region. Black Sea Regionalism has been shaped by the EU integration process. Over time a number of regional schemes and initiatives have also emerged in the region. Despite these developments the region remains more fragmented compared to other areas of Europe. Furthermore, its geopolitical context is delineated by the power triangle between the EU, Russia and Turkey (and to some extent, Ukraine).

Although barriers to trade have been partly alleviated in the process of the economic transformation of the Black Sea States, regionalization (the process of forming regions) has been restrained either due to the persistence of trade obstacles or the preservation of diversified trade regimes.

Black Sea regionalism is defined by three levels of analysis: domestic (preference of local leadership, civil society, business interests, etc.); regional (protracted conflicts, interstate blockades, common vulnerabilities, power politics, etc.); international (accession to international organizations such as the WTO, the global recession, reset of US-Russia affairs, terrorism, etc). As a result, in terms of policy, regionalism in the Black Sea Region today suggests a means to dealing with the regional impact of global issues.

Session V: NATO and New Partnerships
Panelists:
Ino Afentouli, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels; Serhat Güvenç, Kadir Has University, Istanbul

NATO’s core mission - collective defense for its member states – was a strategic approach that was designed to address issues of the Cold War. Today, NATO, no longer pinned down by the Cold War, has transformed itself in order to manage contemporary global challenges. Since its establishment in 1949, NATO has enhanced peace and stability in the region. In 1991, NATO’s first unclassified Strategic Concept was introduced. While maintaining the security of its members as its fundamental purpose (with the focus on collective defense), it sought to improve and expand security for Europe as a whole through partnerships and cooperation with former adversaries. It also reduced the use of nuclear weapons to a minimum level, sufficient to preserve
peace and stability. In 1994, the Euro-Atlantic Council was established in 1999, NATO experienced its first post-Cold War enlargement, followed by a second enlargement in 2002, and in 2008 the latest two members joined the alliance. Today, NATO is a strong institution with 28 members.

Under the new Strategic Concept that was adopted in Lisbon in November 2010, NATO can more easily address new and emerging security threats, especially those that have become more prominent since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. It is more widely accepted that NATO is working in a transformed security environment and a transformed Alliance therefore; NATO’s experience with crisis management in the Balkans and Afghanistan has underlined the value and importance of working with partners from across the globe.

Contrary to the way the EU functions, NATO is more flexible about taking into consideration the concerns and ideas of non-member states. NATO has specific mechanisms to involve non-members states in its operations. The EU, however, only allows member states to be a part of the decision making process. The degree of partners’ rights in the decision making process is the main difference between NATO and the EU. Both institutions are similar in that they have a policy of socialization.

One of the principal conclusions of this session has to do with the widespread misconceptions regarding NATO’s role and its objectives. Therefore, there is a need for a campaign among younger generations that affirms the Alliance’s relevance and mission.

**Session VI: The Economic Context**

**Speaker:**
Panayotis Gavras, Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, Thessaloniki

The main focus of this session was to understand the economic context of the Black Sea Region and the impact the global financial crisis has had on the region. The period between 2000 and 2008 saw an increase in economic development among many Black Sea countries. Many states experienced real GDP growth, a rise in living standards, and a decline in poverty.

In September 2008, the global markets froze and a liquidity crunch ensued, which prevented government and private enterprises from accessing funds. Furthermore, trade flows dropped, export rates decreased, commodity prices declined, poverty rates increased, and unemployment and fiscal deficits rose. As a result, the regional financial system faced a loss of confidence however; compared to other regions, the negative effects of the financial crisis were limited in the region except for the Ukraine.

2009 saw a decline in growth, making it a bleak year for nearly all Black Sea countries. Initiatives such as IMF rescue programs and the Vienna Initiative helped states refinance and recover from the negative effects of the global crisis. In 2010, real growth and credit flows started to become more apparent however; persistent high unemployment rates remained a reminder of the negative effects of the financial crisis.
In 2011, economic growth is expected to continue. Yet, countries need to invest in social and physical infrastructure to ensure sustainable growth. Furthermore, sustaining economic growth, maintaining and improving stability and increasing productivity are important for the region’s future success and development. It is equally important for governments to strategize how to invest in their citizens. Additionally, the impact of environmental degradation on the quality of life is an increasingly dire issue the region needs to address.

The state of relations with the EU (the biggest economic partner and major market for exports and imports in the Black Sea Region) was also discussed during the session. The EU is the standard with regards to rules and regulations for the region. Although the EU was blamed for not managing the effects of the crisis well enough, it did push for IMF funds, ECB and EIB operations and other safety net type initiatives.

Even though political institutions started to empower societies to engage in the political process, the legacies of totalitarian regimes remain strong. The transition to democracy can be difficult and problematic in traditional societies whose only experience is with authoritarian rule. Overall, the debate over whether a democratic or oligarchic government is the best option remains ongoing.

The values of a democratic transition were also highlighted. Without the active participation of civil society, societies will be vulnerable to instability, governance problems and corruption. Therefore, the level of participation of the people/citizens is one of the main indicators of democratic transition. Democracy does not only equate to carrying out elections, but also includes the active engagement of civil society as part of the decision making process.
Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Furthermore, the session addressed the challenges facing the Eastern periphery and the Conclusions of the 21 June European Council meeting.

The financial crisis in Europe, the Arab Spring, power shifts in the world, the Lisbon Treaty and enlargement fatigue were mentioned as key points in the context in which this revision of the ENP was deemed necessary. Moreover, less asymmetry, deeper democracy, inclusive social and economic development, more financial resources, person-to-person contacts, preparedness to strengthen the instruments for settling conflicts and political-security issues were discussed as main divergent points of this revised strategy.

The audience was mostly interested in the financial resources devoted to the Eastern neighbourhood by the EU, the use of conditionality as a mechanism for democracy promotion, the EU’s role in the resolution of regional conflicts and visa-facilitation issues. The most interesting argument in this session was the conclusion that the Black Sea Synergy has lost the wind behind it, and the EU is now moving towards revised formulas embedded in its ENP and its off-shoot, the Eastern Partnership.

In this session, the speakers focused on the main actors of the Black Sea Region and their relations with each other. Due to its strategic location, Turkey is considered one of the most crucial actors in the region. Turkey defines itself as a stable actor in an unstable Black Sea Region. Turkey’s membership in NATO, its EU candidate status, and its western-oriented outlook have given Turkey an opportunity to engage more deeply in the region. Through bilateral relations, Turkey offers high level cooperation and visa free regimes with a focus on security and trade. Energy dialogue in the Black Sea Region is another issue which was touched upon during the session.

The discussion also focused on the Ukraine’s increasing stature in the region. Ukraine has politically and historically been considered one of the main actors in the region. Ukraine was a democracy promoter in the region specifically after the Orange Revolution in 2005. Currently, one of the Ukraine’s main priorities is to enhance cooperation with Turkey and Russia. Ukraine and Turkey recently initiated a visa free zone as a way to strengthen relations.

During the session, the US perspective of the Black Sea Region was also discussed and evaluated. US Black Sea policy is geared towards creating partnerships, ensuring stability and security, and promoting prosperity and democracy. In the Black Sea Region, there are serious divisions, competition and conflicts which make the region vulnerable. Therefore, NATO can bring stability and security to the region and will become more important and influential in the future given the increasing challenges facing the Black Sea Region.
In this session, the objective was to assess the links between the Mediterranean South and the Black Sea Region. The dominance of the Arab Spring in the international agenda seems to have highjacked the attention that the Black Sea Region with its myriad of challenges was receiving from the European Union. The timing of the ENP Strategic Review has exacerbated the situation for the region as more funds are being diverted to the South. As a result, an “us vs. them” atmosphere has emerged. In other words, EU states in favour of greater involvement of the European Union towards the Eastern neighbourhood versus those who want to give attention to the South because they believe it is detrimental to the progress of the region.

It was thus suggested that there is a need for the emergence of a new paradigm regarding the eastern and the southern neighbourhoods. The European Union needs to formulate a single policy framework (as opposed to the myriad of separate neighbourhood policies in place today – ENP, Eastern Partnership, Union for the Mediterranean, etc.). The focus should therefore be on developing cohesive policies around the themes of energy, transport, trade, communications, environment, good governance, combating transnational crime, illegal migration, etc. In other words, regionalism should be redefined and the links across regions need to be the focal point of the new approach. The objective should be to apply a balanced approach for both regions thereby linking the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas.

There was also a presentation on the current situation in the Middle East. Many of the challenges facing the region are similar to those found in the Black Sea Region including the emergence of non-state actors, the role of great powers, and the monopoly of the state over its citizens. This session demonstrated that there is a need to enhance and promote a transnational and transregional movement of ideas based upon a new paradigm of security across both the Black Sea Region and the Mediterranean South.

Over a span of two days the Symposium participants engaged in a series of working group sessions. The first day began with an introduction of the facilitation process by Professor Benjamin Broome, from Arizona State University. Participants then met in their respective working groups to address challenges facing the Black Sea Region. The facilitators presented the guiding question, “What can or could be done to address challenges to the Black Sea Region?” as a way to spark ideas. Participants quietly wrote their ideas on blank pieces of paper (1 idea per paper) and were then asked to
share their ideas with the rest of the working group. When needed, participants asked for further clarification on ideas from their peers.

Ideas could relate to all levels: high/policy, Track II, civil society, etc. and all sectors: education, media, policy, etc. Once the working groups finished sharing all of their ideas, they were then asked to select the most important ideas to promote constructive ways to address challenges facing the region. Participants were asked to review the ideas of their peers. Once participants chose their top ideas they discussed ways to implement them, what barriers might pose a challenge for implementation and who might implement the ideas.

After the completion of the working groups, participants shared their reports in the plenary session. A volunteer from each group reported on the following:

- How many ideas were generated by the group
- What ideas the group had for the implementation process
- What challenges the group might face during the implementation process
- What were the possible linkages between ideas

Participants then engaged in a mapping process of the top ideas to see where overlaps or areas of collaboration might arise. They also took into consideration any challenges they might face during the implementation process.

The two days of working group sessions allowed participants to discuss how they might contribute to overcoming some of the most pressing challenges in the region. This exercise offered participants an opportunity to feel empowered as young professionals from the Black Sea Region and beyond.

### Session XII: Closing Session

**Panelists:**

Benjamin Broome, Arizona State University; Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, Center for International and European Studies, Kadir Has University, Istanbul

In the closing session there was a brief presentation by Benjamin Broome on the objectives and the methodology of the workshops which were held in the evening sessions of the Symposium. Following this, brief presentations of selected project proposals that were sketched out during the workshops were made by the participants.

After the conclusion of the presentations, certificates of attendance were handed out to each of the Symposium participants by Dimitrios Triantaphyllou. The closing session ended with Dimitrios Triantaphyllou thanking the sponsors of the Symposium for their invaluable support in the realisation of this event, and last but not least the participants, speakers and CIES team that took part in the Symposium. Their energy and their desire to interact made the event a very fruitful experience.

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