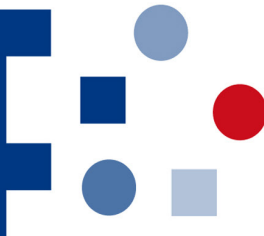




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**POLICY
BRIEF**

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THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE BSEC PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR CONFLICT-RESOLUTION IN THE WIDER BLACK SEA REGION

This Policy Brief proposes a new idea of fully democratizing the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). In order to bring about improved democracy, the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC (PABSEC) would have popular elections to its chamber (with European Union assistance). The parliamentarians would represent people via constituencies, as in the European Parliament, thereby allowing people of all areas, including the conflict regions, to have their voices heard. The PABSEC would develop into a platform for truly representative discussions of issues relevant to the people of the wider Black Sea region including conflict resolution.

This paper is timely as it is almost the 20th anniversary of the BSEC and the Heads of State and Government of the BSEC countries are expected to gather in June 2012. There is thus an opportunity before then for the governments of the region (and the European Union) to consider our recommendations to reinvigorate the BSEC and deepen its effectiveness and relevance.

Carol Weaver and Mukhtar Hajizada

Introduction

In this paper we argue that the democratization of regional institutions could 1) assist with improved democracy and 2) contribute to eventual conflict resolution in the wider Black Sea region. As a result of political changes in the late 1980s, there are various intergovernmental institutions around the Black Sea ostensibly promoting regionalism and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)¹ is the most inclusive one. The main, but not necessarily the only, tool for promoting regional democracy would be the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC.² Our hypothesis is that, in order to bring about improved national democracy as well as conflict resolution in the longer term, the democratization of regional institutions and interaction by the representatives of the people is required. The reason that the BSEC is suggested rather than a new organization or the European Union Neighbourhood East (EuroNest) parliamentary assembly is that the parliament is

long established and includes all countries in the wider Black Sea region not just the EU's six Eastern Partners. Russia's involvement is essential, especially with regard to conflict resolution in the wider Black Sea area. Turkey too is a regional actor of the utmost importance and has originated many ideas for regional cooperation including the BSEC itself, the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Pact, and the BlackSeaFor (the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group).

Currently, the national parliaments of the BSEC member states delegate representatives to the PABSEC sessions. What we propose is that the PABSEC parliamentarians would be elected directly by the people and represent constituencies rather than state parliaments, in the same way that MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) do within the European Parliament (EP). The majority of EU countries have only one constituency within the country (for EP elections) whilst others have multiple. For example, Scotland, Wales and Northern

Ireland each has its own constituency within the UK whilst England is divided into several constituencies. The people within each constituency each have one vote. In the UK, each constituency returns multiple representatives to the EP using a form of proportional representation.

If this method were adopted for the PABSEC elections, it could mean that there would be representatives of the multi-ethnic regions of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh as well as all regions of the BSEC member states. For example, a country such as Ukraine might decide to be regarded as one constituency with many representatives or to be divided into several constituencies with one or two representatives each, depending on size. The parliamentarians would be elected by the citizens of each region.

Given that the BSEC is currently an organization of consensus and has little if any power over the member states, this democratization of the PABSEC would be no ‘threat’ to the national security, sovereignty, or the leaders of member states who might be more willing to consider the proposal than they are to consider Western-style democracy at national level. The other BSEC institutions would remain intergovernmental.

This democratically elected BSEC parliamentary assembly would be a good ‘talking shop’ for truly representative discussions on conflict resolution as well as other issues relevant to the people of the wider Black Sea region including energy. It would represent the people, would enhance cooperation in the region and possibly help to encourage, in the longer-term, the establishment of a (non-military) security community where war between members can no longer be envisaged.³

The Black Sea region and the current state of its conflicts

Like many other regions with conflicts, the wider Black Sea area has a variety of peoples and much diverse history. It also has a variety of political systems. In the twenty-first century it is at the geographical point where the East meets the West and, in the south, the Middle East too. It is a strategic area for the world’s powers not only for traditional security reasons but for energy security as well. The European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) all have involvement in the wider Black Sea region and there have often been tensions between them. The BSEC is an organization that, by avoiding security issues such as regional conflicts, has managed to bring all countries in the wider region together as members despite longstanding tensions and even wars between

BSEC members, notably Russia and Georgia, or Azerbaijan and Armenia. In addition, Russia tends to be viewed as being very assertive within the organization and there are occasional accusations that the BSEC is Turkey’s bid for regional hegemony.

Regarding tensions in general, when the Soviet Union collapsed, at the end of the Cold War, there was much fear that wars could erupt within the new states around the Black Sea in a similar way to those which were formerly part of Yugoslavia. Outbreaks did occur in the early 1990s, especially a civil war in Moldova over Transnistria, war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh area, and battles over the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The situation within the newly created Russian Federation was also severely disputed, especially in Chechnya. Later, Kosovo’s declaration of independence (2008) seemed to set a precedent for autonomous regions that wanted to break away from their current state and after the war in South Ossetia (also in 2008) Russia recognized both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. These disputes concerning territorial integrity versus self-determination are at the root of most regional conflicts.

Currently the Transnistrian conflict is the one nearest to resolution, with Russia, Ukraine and the EU working with the Moldovan government and Transnistria. The Georgian conflicts seem to be frozen again after the war in 2008, whilst the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would seem to be the one most likely to turn back into war.

Academics and practitioners are calling for creative thinking without the creation of yet more institutions.⁴ They have also suggested ideas for rethinking conflict resolution,⁵ such as:

- (1) Improving governance models.
- (2) Opening up public discussion.
- (3) Targeting the younger generation.

We agree with that assessment and believe that our proposals would assist with all three of these points. There would be a start to a change of governance model via a fully democratic PABSEC which would allow the citizens’ voices to be heard, including those of the younger generation. Also, the people from the conflict regions of the wider Black Sea area would have the representatives that they so desire in regional organizations without any acknowledgement of them as nation states.

The Organization of the BSEC and its Parliamentary Assembly

When the BSEC was initiated by Turkey around the end of the Cold War, in the early 1990s, one objective was to improve regional security as articulated in two important documents of BSEC: 'The Bosphorus Statement' and 'The Summit Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation' signed in Istanbul on 25 June 1992. Despite this, security is now rarely discussed. In a similar way to the evolution of the EU which also began in its earlier guises as a security concept, its main focus is cooperation on economic issues, as well as transport and environmental issues. Eleven countries signed the BSEC declaration in 1992 in Istanbul (while Serbia joined in 2004).⁶ Now there are fourteen observer states (including the European Union) in addition to these twelve states as well as eight countries that are sectoral dialogue partners which have the same legal status as observers.

The BSEC documents list all the reasons why states joined the organization but the main one was the need for integration into European and global economies (Preamble, BSEC Charter). The main objectives were to promote cooperation rather than conflict; to promote regionalism as a step towards global integration of the region; and to avoid new divisions in Europe.⁷ These goals are all compatible with the European Union's values and aims.

As well as the Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS), there are also various other 'related bodies' or affiliated institutions of the BSEC, including the BSEC Business Council, the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS). There is a rotating chair, with the current (July – December 2011) 'Chairman-in-office' of the BSEC being Russia. This country is often regarded as being obstructive within the BSEC or wanting to dominate proceedings. Nevertheless, President Medvedev's foreign policy includes a desire for preserving the identity of BSEC as one of the regional priorities of the Russian Federation, settling regional conflicts without force, avoiding new dividing lines in Europe and strengthening confidence building.⁸ A democratically elected PABSEC could help with all of these points, in our view.

The Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC convenes twice a year but also has committees such as the Economic Committee and the Legal and Political Affairs Committee with a rapporteur on each subject. It is one of the aforementioned related bodies of the BSEC and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future, so it is unlikely to enjoy a similar status to that of the European

Parliament. One reason for this is that the BSEC Charter states that the PABSEC, as one of the 'related bodies' of the BSEC, will only perform its functions and provide consistent support to other sections of the organization 'on a consultative basis' (Article 20, BSEC Charter).

On 27 February 2008, a joint meeting of the PABSEC Enlarged Bureau and the BSEC Committee of Senior Officials was held.⁹ This appeared to be an important step in trying to advance the assembly's status, although it was not welcomed by all. The PABSEC representatives have been calling for more power and more say within the BSEC and have therefore been working on the enhancement of their interaction with other BSEC institutions. Thus, PABSEC has suggested advancing the format of their relationship at the level of the Committee of Senior Officials of BSEC and the Standing Committee (extended Bureau) of PABSEC. However, Russian diplomats were seen to be rather satisfied with the existing status and with keeping the format of interaction at the secretariat level of the BSEC and the PABSEC.

In summary, although the countries participating in the BSEC cooperation involve a common parliamentary body, this body is not popularly elected and can only make 'consultative' recommendations. It has no real say on the political and economic issues of its member states.

How the EU could help with democratization and the formation of a security community

Precisely due to the lack of power of the Parliamentary Assembly within the BSEC and of the BSEC over its member states, a democratization process might seem to have a good chance. The BSEC parliament already exists and each member state sends its delegates. Democratization could therefore take place in all member states at the same time or on an incremental basis. The former would be preferable but not necessarily essential.

According to Manoli, the BSEC's main long-term political aim is to bring together the BSEC and the EU institutionally.¹⁰ She writes that this is often the only common ground in discussions. Also, the BSEC wants collaboration with other organizations especially the UN, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe. We believe that our proposals could help with EU-Russia cooperation in the region and that if the EU assists the inclusive BSEC rather than over-concentrating on rival organizations which are exclusive, it could find the 'carrot' it is searching for given that enlargement cannot be offered to the whole region in the immediate future. Also, the BSEC's current agenda is not ambitious enough to include conflict resolution, although the

signatories expressed ‘their determination to achieve through joint efforts the constant improvement of the well-being of their peoples’ (Preamble, BSEC Charter). We suggest that by having regional representatives in the parliament that discussions on conflict resolution could no longer be avoided.

Weaver has asserted that the main foundation for a security community to begin to arise in the Black Sea region is ‘balanced multipolarity’ and that this is the current condition within the region.¹¹ A ‘security community’, according to Deutsch *et al* consists of a community of sovereign entities, within a particular region, that do not expect war with each other.¹² ‘Top-down’ institutions are a necessary requirement along with ‘bottom-up’ processes.¹³ The PABSEC could be the most appropriate institution if democratization can take place with EU assistance. The bottom-up processes involve civil society. Adler and Barnett add that shared identities, values and meanings as well as direct interactions and shared long-term interests are of great importance.¹⁴ Some of this is more difficult and would take time but the BSEC and the EU, with its Eastern Partnership and Black Sea Synergy policies, are already working on these issues. Bringing together all regions into the Parliamentary Assembly could assist with conflict resolution and enhanced regional cooperation due to the involvement of all parties.

Difficulties envisaged

We do not underestimate the various difficulties in effecting such a mammoth task as the one we propose. Difficulties that can be pinpointed easily at this stage include:

1) The current parliamentarians are part of the national parliaments and only meet twice a year en bloc. Popularly elected parliamentarians would require far more resources. The elections would also require some additional funding.

2) Fully democratic elections would mean the encouragement of pluralism and an open press. These exist already in some member states, especially those within the EU, but could take time to develop in others.

3) Some parliamentarians might refuse to take part if all regions were represented.

4) With regard to the conflict regions of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, refugees and internationally displaced persons might wish to place their vote within their constituency of origin (or their parents’ constituency of origin) rather than where they currently live.

We feel that these difficulties could eventually be resolved by

discussions between the PABSEC and the EP, and ultimately between the BSEC and the EU. Nevertheless why would any of these actors go to so much trouble?

Benefits for all non-EU countries would include EU help with ‘free and fair’ democratization processes without there being any immediate threat to current national leaders. In some countries this could be a ‘trial run’ for the people. The main benefit for all BSEC member states is that there would be an improved and enlarged PABSEC which could help with improved regional cooperation and security. This would also be a benefit for the EU.

Our proposals

1) In order to bring about improved democracy and prepare both citizens and leaders of non-EU BSEC member states for free and fair democratic elections in the future, BSEC would have fully democratic elections to its parliament (with European Union assistance).

2) The parliamentarians would represent the people of each constituency (as in the European Parliament), which would mean that the PABSEC would transform into a comprehensive forum for all regions of the Black Sea area including the multiethnic communities of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

3) This directly elected parliament could be a good ‘talking shop’ for truly representative discussions on conflict resolution as well as other issues relevant to the people of the wider Black Sea region.

4) Given that the BSEC is currently an organization of consensus and has little if any power over the member states, these changes would be no ‘threat’ to the national security, sovereignty or leaders of the member states.

5) The democratically elected parliament representing the people would enhance cooperation in the region on issues such as energy, transport and the environment as well as helping to encourage the establishment of a (non-military) security community where (eventually) war between members could no longer be envisaged.

The BSEC is a most remarkable organization in that it brought together all the countries of the Black Sea region so soon after the end of the Soviet era, despite the many disputes, and even wars, between its members. We are of the opinion that an agreement to our proposals would greatly enhance this remarkable organization as its 20th year anniversary in June 2012 approaches.

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Endnotes

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