

The Role of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in the Stability of the Region

Panagiota Manoli

Research Associate, Hellenic Foundation of European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP)

How can the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation contribute to the stability of the region? The establishment of BSEC in the early '90s signalled a new era for the region. It was the first time that eleven countries stretching from the Caspian to the Adriatic belonged to the same institutional framework. Diverse their motivations might have been; the main concern for joining the BSEC was their integration into the European and world structures. BSEC provided a forum which was opening communication links with the neighbouring - newly established - states and it was upgrading their international stand particularly vis-à-vis the EU. Overall, BSEC is founded on three motivations: a) cooperation rather than conflict, b) regionalism as a step to global integration and c) avoiding new divisions in Europe

The architects of BSEC have perceived economic development as the main pillar of regional security. The agenda of the Organisation has thus been restricted to mainly economic issues, placing 'hard' security matters out of its scope of activities. Reading, however, through the founding documents of BSEC, it becomes obvious that the search for security and stability in the region was the main goal and aspiration of the initiative. BSEC is based on the principles laid down in the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris and the OSCE.

Although the BSEC was established with the aim '*to ensure the Black Sea becomes a sea of peace, stability and prosperity, striving to promote friendly and good neighbouring relations*', the founding Declaration adopted on 25 June 1992 did not include specific references as to how this main goal should be reached. In fact more attention is devoted to promoting economic cooperation among the member states. The Bosphorous Statement deals with the settlement of disputes and emphasised '*the need for the peaceful settlement of all disputes by the means and in accordance with the principles set out in the CSCE documents*'. The signatories committed themselves to resisting aggression, violence, terrorism and respecting the law in order to restore peace and justice while they placed as a basis of their common understanding 'the general principles of the UN Charter and the CSCE documents'.

BSEC defines security in a comprehensive way, referring not only to its military dimension, but also to political, economic and social factors. In order to achieve the overall goal of stability, the Istanbul Declaration includes actions which constitute a framework for BSEC cooperation in the following fields: trade and investments, environment, agriculture, transport, communications, energy, tourism, information, health care and pharmaceuticals, science and technology.

The Role of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in the Stability of the Region

BSEC was not initially established with the aim to form a multilateral forum of cooperation on military, defence, peacekeeping or conflict management issues. This is also reflected in its institutionalisation, foreseeing regular meetings of the Heads of Governments and of the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, but not meetings of the Ministers of Defence or military staff. All Working Groups (WGs) have economics-related objectives: WG on Finance and Development, WG on Agriculture, WG on Transport etc. The only exception is the Working Group on Combating Crime, which has already produced a relevant multilateral agreement.

BSEC is trying to build confidence, familiarity and understanding of its member states' positions on different issues through a system of informal and formal meetings between the leaders, ministers and senior officials of the member states. BSEC's basic principle necessitates that actions taken in the name of the organisation must either contribute to or be neutral, but not detract from, the perceived interests of individual member states.

Particularly in the post Cold War era, economic and 'soft security' issues are widely accepted both by security experts and policy makers as the cornerstone in the conceptual frameworks of the international efforts for conflict prevention and conflict management. Although the subregional groups such as the BSEC that emerged during the '90s in Europe are of a mainly economic nature, they have security and conflict prevention dimensions by tightening the neighbouring countries around common principles, policy priorities and providing the ground for the relaxation of security concerns.

Through the function of its Working Groups, BSEC aims at undertaking projects and identifying issues upon which confidence can be built or which can prevent potential conflict. BSEC intervention is always in non-military issues. Improving the economic conditions of the participating countries, establishing an integrated infrastructure network, taking measures for the protection of the environment are the main areas where BSEC tries to make a difference.

A notable field where BSEC has in fact taken some action concerns non traditional (but explicit) security issues such as terrorism, drugs, organised crime, illegal migration. This is a significant field of measures for the stabilisation of relations among the BSEC members. Within this framework, specific initiatives on a Police Liaison Centre and a Task Force on money laundering have been discussed. The latest initiatives on cooperation in emergency situations, anticipating crisis management and soft security: crime, trafficking, terrorism, indicate BSEC's interest in entering the soft security domain.

At the Moscow Meeting of the Heads of States or Governments (1996), BSEC members agreed to develop cooperation between their law-enforcement, customs and migration services. Until today the BSEC Ministers of Interior have held three meetings which:

1. Marked the launching of interaction between law-enforcement agencies in combating organised crime, terrorism, trafficking of drugs, illicit trade and illegal migration
2. Agreed to establish a joint front and common institutions of cooperation in the sphere of combating crime
3. Signed an Agreement solidifying such a joint front.

What are the constraints of BSEC's security role? Indicating the difficulties in establishing a regional organisation in the Black Sea region, a Report of the European Commission argues that 'as regards BSEC's aspiration to play a role in the peaceful settlement of disputes in the region, the fact that BSEC brings together representatives of all Black Sea states can be considered an achievement, in itself'. The relationship between BSEC and security seems to be hard to trace and it is more prone to be described in negative terms. That is not however, the case. BSEC, like any other subregional group in Europe, has an implicit security function. Since BSEC's geographic delineation includes areas with inter-state and civil conflicts the only way for its survival is a 'de-securitisation' of relations within the group, by building cooperation around seemingly unrelated areas.

Obstacles to an enhanced role of the BSEC are:

High security concerns and diversity of national security policies. The existence of territorial and maritime jurisdiction disputes has been the main obstacle to formal multilateral security co-operation. BSEC as a result *lacks a sense of regional interest and a common perception of external threat.*

BSEC is both too 'small' and too 'large' to assume hard security roles. Small in terms that it does not engage western powers needed or credible 'hard' defence guarantees and large in the sense that its diverse membership hinders effective coordination in crisis management cases.

The BSEC countries belong to different political and security organisations, thus making the co-ordination of positions hard to achieve.

Low degree of commitment to cooperation within the BSEC. The weak political voice of BSEC results from the fact that all of the countries prefer other foreign-policy instruments and forums than BSEC for reaching their objectives.

The fear of being dominated by larger neighbours (such as Russia, Turkey). BSEC members are reluctant to establish a strong regional security framework in which large countries from within the region might prevail, as those countries are often seen as part of the region's security problems.

Lack of implementation mechanisms. There are no established mechanisms within the BSEC or its related bodies for security

There is no efficient interface between BSEC and other organisations with security and political functions like, OSCE, WEU, NATO/PfP. Where BSEC has failed is to cooperate with other organisation which are active in the region (WEU, NATO) either on political issues or on economic ones.

What more could BSEC do? Most authors seem to agree that BSEC has a political and security dimension, which stems from the fact that institutionalisation of economic relations has a 'political normative nature'. Evaluating BSEC's role, the Assembly of the WEU has supported the organisation with statements such as 'despite continuing major differences between some member states, such action contributes to promoting regional security and stability through political dialogue and shared economic development'.

Involvement of BSEC in high security issues such as de-militarisation or de-nuclearisation of the region can not be expected. The fields where subregional

The Role of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in the Stability of the Region

institutions (like BSEC) should have real comparative advantages are those of *crisis prevention, conflict containment* and *post-settlement reconstruction*. The main instruments of BSEC for conflict prevention are economic and diplomatic: it is part of the 'multi-dimensional' contribution to the regional security system.

Domains where a Black Sea dimension would have been useful are: i) cooperation in emergency situations, ii) soft security: crime, trafficking, terrorism. Coordination of activities with other organisations that are already active in these fields is essential.

Increasingly, a common understanding is being formed that common threats to security and stability come from within the region itself. What makes the region unstable is its poor economic and political performance. Let us briefly refer to the case of *migration*. Military conflicts as well as economic collapse and environmental disasters have led to a considerable migration both within and away from the region. And although migration within another framework would enhance regional integration, a more careful analysis shows that this is not the case with the BSEC region. Migration actually generates conflictual situations among the neighbouring countries as it is related to forced population movement and ethnic minorities issues. BSEC could - in cooperation with larger organisations - ease the effects of migration or address its roots.

Post-Conflict rehabilitation of conflict zones. The area covered by the BSEC states is still characterised by on-going or frozen conflicts. Where BSEC could have a positive action is not to resolve these conflicts (other institutions would be more effective for that) but to sponsor rehabilitation programmes for those regions at a later stage. When political settlement of the issues is achieved, then there will be great needs for assistance in re-constructing housing and economic infrastructures and re-establishing normal flows of trade and personal movement.

What place may BSEC have in the regional security architecture?

- BSEC can not be seen as an alternative to any larger European organisation
- It has the potential to contribute to security by bringing together diverse groups of states in cooperative frameworks and by tackling specific security problems ('soft' or non-military ones)
- Within the context of NATO and EU enlargement it sustains cooperation between NATO/EU members, those seeking NATO/EU membership and those states not involved in the enlargement processes.

What constructive forms of interaction may be developed between the BSEC and other larger organisations?

- BSEC could develop interaction with organisations such as the EU, NATO, OSCE and the UN Agencies, in assisting the formulation of clear economic objectives in conflict prevention/management and in implementing relevant projects
- To seek a 'BSEC' division of labour in the UN, OSCE and PfP for the purposes of the verification and monitoring of conflicts
- BSEC has already opened communication with EAPC/NATO/PfP regarding environmental issues. Other areas of possible interface are disaster relief and rescue efforts
- BSEC within the OSCE framework could assist in the democratic organisation of civil-military relations as a fundamental prerequisite for the social and economic

modernisation of the area in general and an indispensable stepping stone to other forms of security cooperation

- A BSEC-EU platform of cooperation. The long-term political aim of BSEC members is the institutionalisation of BSEC-EU relations. That shared political goal becomes very often the common ground of the discussions held within the BSEC framework, or even sometimes the only common denominator. The EU presence in the region, and particularly the development of modes of practical BSEC-EU interaction, acquire a strong security dimension as they have stabilizing effects.

The BSEC process has three indirect positive effects in the overall interstate relations in the region:

- change of attitudes
- keeping the channels of dialogue open
- bringing up issues of common interest, thus enhancing a sense of region identity.

Disclaimer

**The views expressed are those of the
Author and not necessarily those of the
UK Ministry of Defence**