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An Emerging Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Dimension? Contributing to the Black Sea Synergy

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Abstract

This Policy Brief looks into the prospects of a parliamentary dimension that would complement the Black Sea Synergy which is a newly formed policy of the European Union (EU) targeting the so-called wider Black Sea region. Though several expressions of Europe's Eastern parliamentary dimension are presented, the paper examines in particular ways and means of a closer interaction between the European Parliament (EP) on the one hand, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) on the other hand, the latter being the only institutionalised parliamentary body in the wider Black Sea region.

Keywords: parliamentary cooperation, Black Sea Synergy, regionalism, European Parliament, PABSEC.

Introduction: Conceptualising Parliamentary Diplomacy

In recent years, transnational parliamentary bodies of all types have proliferated in the world. Historically, parliamentary diplomacy has developed mainly in the post-1945 period, contributing primarily to the legitimisation of international relations in general, and of diplomacy in particular, due to its link to popular sovereignty.¹ There are three main reasons for the proliferation of parliamentary diplomacy in the post-1945

The views expressed in this Policy Brief are personal and do not necessarily represent those of the ICBSS.

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¹ Gabriel Elorriaga, *La diplomacia parlamentaria* (Madrid: Imagine Ediciones, 2004), 35. On the conceptualisation of parliamentary diplomacy, see also Stelios Stavridis, "Parliamentary Diplomacy": *Some Preliminary Findings* (Jean Monnet Working Paper in Comparative & International Politics no.48, Università di Catania, November 2002), www.fscpo.unict.it/euomed/



international system:

- i) intensification of international relations;
- ii) democratisation throughout the world;
- iii) technological advances and other similar innovations such as flying (planes) or “surfing” (the net). This process gained further impetus during the last decade of the 20th century following the end of the Cold war and the emergence of economic and political globalisation.

Actually, one might distinguish between three kinds of parliamentary cooperation at the international level:² i) parliamentary diplomacy, ii) (inter)parliamentary cooperation, and iii) technical parliamentary cooperation. Thus, parliamentary diplomacy is considered to be more than just parliamentary cooperation. However, parliamentary diplomacy and cooperation are used interchangeably in this paper.

How does one define parliamentary diplomacy? Elorriaga offers a comprehensive, though not exhaustive list of what parliamentary diplomacy entails:³

- i) the activities of multilateral, international parliamentary organisations;
- ii) bilateral parliamentary groups and in particular the so-called “friendship groups”;
- iii) international agreements between parliaments;
- iv) the activities of parliamentary foreign affairs committees;
- v) plenary sessions dealing with foreign policy questions;
- vi) parliamentary participation in elections monitoring processes.

Technical parliamentary cooperation is considered an important element in international relations, especially when the parties involved are emerging or consolidating democratic states or systems of governance, therefore requiring technical expertise on democratic governance. There are many types of technical (inter)parliamentary cooperation. Most have to do with the consolidation of “the constitutional state, enhancing the well functioning of democratic institutions through the improvement of the parliamentary work”.⁴ In that case, the objectives that are sought include bringing financial and technical aid, facilitating the creation of a market economy, and stabilising new democracies by helping modernise the state.

In Europe, parliamentary cooperation has been serving as a supportive instrument for integration into the European Union as well as a democracy building tool throughout the continent. The wide scope of (inter)parliamentary cooperation is well indicated by its objectives in Southeastern Europe [as targeted by the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe and its successor, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)]:⁵

cjmhome.htm; Stelios Stavridis and Panagiota Manoli, “Comparing Experiences in Regional Parliamentarisation in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea Regions,” *Agora Without Frontiers* 13, no. 4 (2008): 262-291.

² David Beetham, *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-first Century: A Guide to Good Practice* (Geneva: Interparliamentary Union, 2006), www.ipu.org (accessed 6 June 2006).

³ Elorriaga, *La diplomacia parlamentaria*, 81.

⁴ French Senate, “Programme for EU Candidate States Parliaments: Technical Parliamentary Cooperation,” <http://www.senat.fr/international/english/coop.html>. At the United Nations (UN) level technical parliamentary cooperation is also made available. See UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Technical Cooperation, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/tech_coop/tech_coop.htm.

⁵ <http://www.stabilitypact.org/wt1/020601-outlook.doc> (accessed 19 February 2008).



- i) strengthening the democratic efficiency and effectiveness of the parliaments in Southeastern Europe;
- ii) promoting bilateral and multilateral cooperation among parliaments in Southeastern Europe.

The case of Southeastern Europe is also indicative as to the variety of actors that may be one way or another engaged in or benefit from (inter)parliamentary cooperation. Thus parliamentary cooperation within the framework of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe involved initially three international parliamentary bodies (the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and of the OSCE) with each one of them taking the lead on a six-month rotating basis. In addition to the Southeast European national parliaments, their respective civil societies (through non-governmental organisations) were the targets of that exercise.

What are the important dimensions of parliamentary diplomacy? A diplomat is an envoy of the executive branch and represents the positions of the state. Members of parliament, however, are politicians who hold political beliefs which may or may not coincide with their respective country's official position on any given issue. This allows parliamentarians a margin of flexibility that is denied to the diplomat. They tend to bring a moral dimension to international politics that transcends narrow definitions of the national interest, particularly in their principled support for democracy and human rights. Time and again we have seen that this flexibility allows parliamentarians to debate more openly with their counterparts from other countries and to advance innovative solutions to what may seem to be intractable problems.⁶

Another important dimension of parliamentary diplomacy is the claim that parliaments act as “moral tribunes” in international affairs. That is to say, parliamentarians can take the “high moral ground” and castigate both their own governments and third party regimes or governments. By adding a normative dimension to international relations (IR), parliaments (can) play an important role in moralising those same international affairs. This is not to take the view that international relations are amoral by nature (the realist school). Nor is it that morality should be the sole and exclusive guide (the utopian school). But a mixture of ethics and interests is in fact what the foreign policy of democratic states, entities and institutions should be all about. Otherwise what is the point of being democratic? And what best for democracy than parliamentary input?

We should also briefly mention the existence of “friendship groups” which are of high importance to parliamentary diplomacy. They are important because they mean that individual parliamentarians are involved in a collective effort because of a variety of interests. Their informal nature allows not only for more flexibility than structured relations but also helps to try and avoid crisis situations in the future. To put it in a different way, these groups often provide for a kind of “early warning system” at the parliamentary level.

Parliamentary diplomacy is often linked to addressing regional conflicts, thus, “[t]he

⁶ Beetham, *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-first Century*, 11.



cessation of regional conflict is the first imperative for regional parliamentary dialogue”.⁷ This is particularly important for parliamentary cooperation in the wider Black Sea area, as the neighbouring EU has been a very efficient conflict resolution mechanism within its own territorial borders over the past 50-60 years, and second, because in the Black Sea area there are plenty of so-called “frozen” or protracted conflicts which jeopardise Europe’s security as the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia reminded us.

The approach of linking parliamentary diplomacy with conflict resolution is adopted in many cases as “in difficult contexts, parliamentarians can play a role in lessening tense situations”.⁸ Beetham also lists several practical examples of parliamentary diplomacy that can be found in a 2005 IPU study entitled “Parliamentary Involvement in International Affairs”. They range from parliamentary meetings and initiatives to discuss conflicts as varied as the ones in Chechnya, Cyprus, Nagorno-Karabakh, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Guinea-Bissau, the Democratic Republic of Congo, or the 9/11 events in the USA. They involve as varied a participation as the speakers of the countries neighbouring Iraq, the Euro-Mediterranean states, the Parliaments of the Portuguese-speaking countries, the member countries of the Southern African Development Community, parliamentarians from Pakistan, India, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, or those from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Beetham also provides examples which are of particular interest to the Black Sea area such as a meeting of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the three South Caucasian States – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – upon the invitation of the President of the French Senate to discuss the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Though, there is an increased role of parliamentary diplomacy in addressing conflicts, the assessment of its actual success is a difficult task. Nevertheless, beyond the success/failure issue what is also important in parliamentary diplomacy is “atmospheric”. That is to say to create the necessary conditions for a diplomatic dialogue to engage or to re-start.⁹ It is not always the immediate impact that matters, it is rather the wider question of “socialisation” that needs to be acknowledged, which refers to a “learning process” and the growing attitude of behaving like a parliamentarian, even if not coming from a fully democratic context. The potential “bridge-making” role of parliamentary diplomacy, coupled with its overall socialisation effect, should not be under-estimated, though important issues remain as to whether a regional parliamentary dimension can work in the absence of real democratic institutions (as witnessed in some cases).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ French Senate, “La diplomatie parlementaire,” Actes du Colloque French Senate, <http://www.senat.fr/international/english/coop.html>. International conflicts of importance to parliamentary diplomacy include: Vietnam, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Sudan, North Korea (Parliamentary Center 2003, 13-14); Iran, the Middle East, Cuba and Burundi (respectively Sénat 2001, 43 and 51).

⁹ For instance, Alain Berset of Switzerland’s Council of States reminds us that “the first contact between the British and the Argentineans after the Falklands War took place within the Inter-Parliamentary Union ... [or] the meeting between North and South Korean parliamentary representatives within the framework of this same organisation, which also set up a meeting of Israeli and Palestinian parliamentary representatives [...]” in “Proceedings of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments”, Tallinn (Estonia), 30-31 May 2006, 48.



As a conclusion, parliamentary cooperation and diplomacy in world affairs is important because it covers important issues, and in particular ones that relate to conflict situations. In the case of the Black Sea region, there is little doubt that conflict resolution, conflict management, as well as other types of exercise that lessen and/or solve conflicts have to be endorsed. Therefore, the objective of what follows is not only to show how the Black Sea Synergy could be strengthened by a parliamentary dimension, though such a development could be important enough in our view on its own: parliamentary diplomacy is also an additional means to try and solve the numerous conflict situations in the region, be they “frozen” or not,¹⁰ especially relevant to the post-2008 Georgia war in the region.

The Current State of Parliamentary Dialogue in the Wider Black Sea Region

Besides Greece, two more countries of the wider Black Sea area,¹¹ namely Bulgaria and Romania became members of the European Union (as of 1 January 2007), thus they are directly represented in the European Parliament.

So far, parliamentary dialogue between the EU and the non-EU countries of the wider Black Sea area has been taking place primarily at the “bilateral” level through the Parliamentary Cooperation Committees (PCCs) which have been established between the European Parliament and those of respectively Russia, Moldova, Ukraine and that of the three South Caucasus countries. These Committees monitor from a parliamentary perspective the implementation of existing agreements and act as an open forum for debate on issues of common interest. The Members of the PCCs are kept informed of the outcome of the Cooperation Council and the Committee (executive) and can express their views in recommendations addressed to the Cooperation Committee, the authorities of the partner countries, the European Commission and the Council.

The established EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) functions on the basis of the 1963 Association Agreement (Ankara Agreement), the 1970 Additional Protocol (Customs Union Protocol) and several parliamentary decisions both by the European Parliament and the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA). Since the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey based on the European Council decision of December 2004, the JPC holds discussions on relations between the EU and Turkey, scrutinises the application of the Customs Union and follows in particular the progress of the accession negotiations.

(Inter)parliamentary relations of the European Parliament with Albania and Serbia take place within the framework of the Delegation for relations with Southeastern Europe (DSSE) which was constituted on 17 November 1994 and has been responsible for (inter)parliamentary relations with five countries in Southeastern Europe, i.e. Albania,

¹⁰ As from early 2008, following the Kosovo declaration of independence, there seemed to be plenty of future problems for the Black Sea region. See, inter alia, Pilar Bonet, “La caja de Pandora se abre en el Cáucaso”; Rodrigo Fernández, “El caso de Kosovo agita Georgia – Abjazia y Oseta del Sur exigen la independencia”; “Entrevista a Serguéi Bagapsh Presidente de Abjazia: ‘Si Kosovo puede ser independiente, Abjazia también’,” *El País*, respectively 19.02.08, 08.03.08, and 07.05.08. Predictions that were sadly confirmed in August 2008.

¹¹ The term wider Black Sea area refers to the following grouping of states which constitute the BSEC member states: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.



Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (then State Union of Serbia-Montenegro and now the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro), and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The present (inter)parliamentary relations with Albania and Serbia have an annual cycle and are based on voluntary decisions, awaiting the entry into force of the various Stabilisation and Association Agreements (signed and in the process of being ratified with Albania; and only initialised with Serbia).

At a regional level, the European Parliament (EP) has an observer status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC), whereas the EP rules do not provide for such a status to international parliamentary organisations.

The Parliamentary Assembly of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC)

Immediately after the establishment of the intergovernmental group of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), its Parliamentary Assembly also emerged. (Inter)parliamentary dialogue in the Black Sea area has thus been driven by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) which was established by a Declaration on 26 February 1993 by the Speakers of the Parliaments of nine states (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine). The Hellenic Parliament became a full member in 1995, the Assembly of Bulgaria in 1997 and that of Serbia became accepted in November 2004.

The basic functions of the PABSEC directly relate to meeting the BSEC goals and objectives and are laid down in its founding Declaration as follows:¹²

- i) to provide the legal ground for the realisation of the principles and the goals of respect for human rights, rule of law and democratic values as embodied in the Declaration signed on 25 June 1992 by the Heads of State and Government of the Participating States of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation, as well as the Bosphorus statement issued on the same date;
- ii) to assist and contribute to the realisation of these principles and goals;
- iii) to provide for the democratic participation and support of the peoples by communicating the principles of the BSEC to the people of participating states with the help of the parliaments considering the important role of the parliaments and the parliamentarians will play;
- iv) to develop friendly relations and co-operation between the parliamentarians and Parliaments of the BSEC Participating States, thus further promoting the atmosphere of confidence and good neighbourhood among peoples;
- iv) to help the BSEC Participating States to act in concert in the international organisations to which they are parties...

¹² PABSEC, *Declaration on the Establishment of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation*, Istanbul, 1994, 7.



The administrative work of PABSEC is carried out by a Permanent Secretariat and the Assembly's main bodies are the Presidency, the Bureau and the Standing Committee. Its President is appointed from among the speakers of the parliaments of the member countries in alphabetic rotation for six months. The Assembly consists of national delegations whose members are members of national parliaments. Population is the criterion for the size of each national delegation. At the present the Assembly consists of 76 members: Albania, Armenia, Moldova (4 seats each); Azerbaijan, Bulgaria Georgia (5 seats each); Greece, Serbia (6 seats each); Romania (7 seats); Turkey, Ukraine (9 seats each); and Russia (12 seats). Seating in the Assembly is arranged strictly along national lines and not political affiliation as in the European Parliament.

The People's Assembly of Egypt, the French Parliament, the German Bundestag, the Knesset of the State of Israel, the National Council of the Slovak Republic, and the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, have observer status with the PABSEC. This also applies to a number of (inter)parliamentary groups such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the (Inter)parliamentary Assembly of the CIS, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Belarus–Russia Union, and the (inter)parliamentary Assembly of the Eurasian Economic Community, and, as already noted, the EP.

The bulk of work of the Assembly is realised by its three Committees which meet on a regular basis to discuss relevant problems and submit their reports and recommendations to the General Assembly. The three Committees are: i) Economic, Commercial, Technological, and Environmental Affairs; ii) Legal and Political Affairs; and iii) Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs. Each Committee elects from among its members the Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen, each one from a different national delegation. Each Committee designates a Rapporteur on any given subject. Subjects are chosen from a list drawn up and periodically updated according to the main themes and projects on the BSEC agenda. After being approved by the General Assembly, their Recommendations are forwarded to the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs for consideration.

The decision-making process in the Assembly is on a majority basis. Reports and Recommendations after being debated within the Committees are adopted by the General Assembly by majority. However, all important decisions are taken by the Standing Committee¹³ and require consensus. The work of the Assembly shows that the negotiable documents reflect an effort to maintain consensus among the members, leaving aside controversial issues.

The Assembly is institutionally linked to the intergovernmental organisation of the BSEC and its decision-making mechanisms, being recognised as one of the Related Bodies with consultative role in the BSEC Charter of 1998 (Chapter VII). The (inter)parliamentary body has the right to obtain information, the right to be consulted

¹³ The Standing Committee consists of the President of the Assembly, the Vice-Presidents, the Chairmen of the three Committees and the Heads of National Delegations. The Speakers of the national parliaments who are not members of their national delegations have the status of special guest at the Standing Committee meetings. The Standing Committee supervises the implementation of the Assembly decisions within the powers vested with it by the latter, draws up the agenda, calendar and venue of the Assembly meetings, coordinates the activities of three Committees, endorses the budget of the Assembly, ensures coordination between the BSEC and the PABSEC and cooperation between the PABSEC and other international organisations.



on all matters relevant to the BSEC agenda, and the right to submit recommendations. PABSEC representatives participate in all BSEC organs and have the right to speak while they address the Council and all other BSEC decision-making bodies. Special coordination meetings between the Organisation and the Assembly (along with the other Related Bodies)¹⁴ are also conducted twice per year. Parliamentary control is aimed at making intergovernmental political action publicly visible.

The PABSEC has tried to insert itself more effectively into the decision-making process but its powers are limited as the BSEC Charter states that the Assembly "...provides consistent support to the Black Sea cooperation process on a consultative basis".¹⁵ The Council bears no other obligation apart from simply taking into consideration the PABSEC Recommendations. In practice, the Assembly has developed its own agenda parallel to the work of the BSEC, having played a role in expanding the agenda of the Organisation. It has thus been engaged with social, cultural and soft security matters¹⁶ much before the BSEC itself placed similar issues on its agenda. PABSEC Recommendations have been forwarded to the Council on issues of combating organised crime and trafficking in people while its Cultural Affairs Committee was the only subregional forum until 2007 (which marked the establishment of a relevant BSEC Working Group) where cultural and social matters were addressed (such as protection of cultural heritage, social reintegration of jobless people, etc.).

The Assembly made also an effort to mobilise sub-state actors and the civil society. Thus, it launched in 1998 the Black Sea Capitals' Association, initiated the institutionalisation of the meetings of the Presidents of the Public Television Broadcasters, and the Forum of the Presidents of the Constitutional Courts. With reference to the Black Sea Capitals' Association, the PABSEC "proceeded from the conviction that local authorities, rendering direct service to the public and addressing everyday problems encountered by citizens, could make a major valuable contribution to attaining the aims of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation".¹⁷

¹⁴ The BSEC Business Council, the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, the International Centre for Black Sea Studies.

¹⁵ BSEC, *Charter of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation*, Yalta, 5 June 1998, art. 20

¹⁶ Recommendations have been forwarded to the Council among others on: "Cooperation among the PABSEC Member Countries in Combating Organized Crime" (Recommendation 15/1996); "Social Guarantees during the Transition Period in the PABSEC Member Countries" (Recommendation 14/1996); "Guidelines of the Program of the Protection of the Cultural Heritage in the Black Sea Region" (Recommendation 18/1996); "Rights and Social Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Black Sea Region" (Recommendation 21/1997) etc., available at www.pabsec.org.

¹⁷ PABSEC, "The Black Sea Capitals' Association", Recommendation 28/1998, Istanbul, 1998, para.1; The Association started with an ambitious programme including the: i) promotion of systematic exchange of information and experience, ii) support and encouragement of cooperation among companies, firms, investor institutions, chambers of commerce and industry, legal institutions, universities, iii) facilitation of multilateral projects elaborated by BSEC, iv) encouragement of twin-city relationships between the member cities, v) development of human contacts and cultural cooperation, vi) protection of the environment, historical and cultural monuments and, vii) close collaboration with other bodies of the BSEC process. Despite the original intentions, the Association was transformed into mainly a discussion forum, with limited



Just like in the case of the BSEC, the Assembly has displayed interest in engaging the European Parliament in its activities. Nevertheless, the involvement of the European Parliament in the work of the Assembly has not been possible due to the lack of a defined political framework for interaction of both bodies. Despite several meetings (e.g. starting with the meeting of the President of the Assembly and the President of the EP in 2002) and the unilateral offer to the EP of an observer status in the Assembly, relations between the two parliamentary bodies have not substantially advanced. Representatives of the European Parliament, as well as members of Parliaments of several EU countries (e.g. the French Assembly, the German Bundestag, etc.) participate as observers in the debates held within the framework of the General Assembly. The informal contacts between the two Parliamentary bodies (i.e. the EP and the PABSEC) were acknowledged by the European Commission which envisaged a role for the PABSEC in the implementation of the “Black Sea Synergy” strategy. The document thus suggests that the “Black Sea Synergy would also take advantage of the useful contacts already existing between the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC”.¹⁸

On their side, the Black Sea states have strongly encouraged an enhanced role of the parliamentary diplomacy in regional affairs; especially the BSEC has been supportive to a parliamentary pillar of its dialogue with the EU. In this respect, the document “BSEC Economic Agenda for the Future” (Moscow, April 2001) which represents the first attempt of the BSEC to formulate a comprehensive strategy for the future, also for its partnership with the EU, includes a clause that “the cooperation between the PABSEC and the European Parliament will contribute to the promotion of such a partnership”.¹⁹ Furthermore, the “Declaration on the Enhancement of Cooperation with the European Union” (13th Meeting of the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States, Chisinau, 28 October 2005) welcomed “the steps taken by the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC to further strengthen its cooperation with European parliamentary bodies, and first and foremost with the European Parliament, aimed at developing a higher degree of integration of the Black Sea region into the common European space.”

The BSEC policy paper “BSEC–EU Interaction: The BSEC Approach” adopted in 2007 lists also a number of suggestions on the modalities of interaction between the PABSEC and the European Parliament. It thus recognises the potential impact of (inter)parliamentary cooperation, especially in fields such as legislative reform and good governance, and encourages a structured and regular relationship between the EP and the PABSEC and their respective specialised Committees as a strong parliamentary pillar to meaningful BSEC–EU interaction. Proposed modalities include the establishment of compact delegations for parliamentary dialogue; and formal acceptance by the European

power either to mobilise the private sector or to influence decision making at a national or regional level.

¹⁸ Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Black Sea Synergy - A New Regional Cooperation Initiative*, Brussels, 11 April 2007, 9.

¹⁹ The document titled “BSEC Economic Agenda for the Future: Towards a more consolidated, effective and viable BSEC partnership” (Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States, Moscow, 27 April 2001) is available at the website <http://icbss.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=123>.



Parliament of the standing invitation of the PABSEC to participate in its meetings as an Observer.

PABSEC and the European Parliament: A Rather Limited Interaction

Existing cooperation between the PABSEC and the European Parliament is rather limited and develops around the “exchange of information” between the two structures, and participation in each other’s meetings. The first official mission by the PABSEC to the European Parliament took place on 5-6 March 2002²⁰ with several similar visits following since (e.g. in May 2003, May 2004, February 2007). During these meetings, besides holding meetings with officials and MEPs, the PABSEC representatives were given the opportunity to attend Committee meetings of the European Parliament (e.g. the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport).

The European Parliament making use of the observer status offered by the PABSEC has the right to participate and express opinion in working meetings of the Assembly. A representative of the European Parliament regularly participates in the General Assembly of the PABSEC and takes part in the General Debate. Members of the European Parliament have not only participated in the Assembly’s Meeting but have also visited the PABSEC International Secretariat in an effort to advance working relations.²¹

During these meetings, the basic issue under consideration, though with no concrete final outcome yet, has been the way for a structured and programmed PABSEC-EP cooperation, which could include information exchange, sharing of experience in elections monitoring, participation in each other’s meetings, study visits for parliamentarians to the European Parliament, and special projects reflecting requirements of the PABSEC member states in various fields of legislation.

Despite the lack of any concrete joint action between the two Parliamentary bodies, the work of the PABSEC presenting its opinion on the issue of EU’s neighbourhood policy is indicative and is a good example of how interaction between the two bodies may practically develop. Thus, upon the – informal at that time – request of the European Parliament, the Communication from the European Commission to the European Council and the European Parliament (“Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours”) was discussed by the three PABSEC Committees in autumn 2003 and following its final consideration at the 22nd Plenary Session of the General Assembly (Bucharest, December 2003) the document entitled “The Conclusions of the Debates” was forwarded to the European Parliament. This PABSEC document stressed that the EU enlargement should not lead to

²⁰ The first delegation (5-6 March 2002) to the European Parliament was led by Mrs. Nino Burjanadze, PABSEC Term President and Chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia. The PABSEC delegation had meetings with Mr. Patrick Cox, President of the European Parliament, during which the parties discussed ways of establishing a relationship with the European Parliament, taking into account its growing role in the new European architecture, the accession by some BSEC member states into the European structures, the economic potential and the growing strategic role of the Black Sea region.

²¹ Mr. Miroslav Ouzky, Vice-President of the European Parliament paid a working visit to the PABSEC International Secretariat in February 2006. Mr. Ouzky had meetings with Mr. Mustafa Bas, PABSEC Vice-President, Head of the Turkish PABSEC Delegation, and Mr. Alexey Kudriavtsev, PABSEC Secretary General.



the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe. At the same time, it was recognised that the EU may wish to consider developing “the Black Sea dimension” in its policies towards the region.

On its side, the PABSEC has devoted a large part of its agenda on issues of European integration and on the potential interaction with the European Parliament in particular. In this respect, at its 23rd Plenary Session, the PABSEC General Assembly (Saint-Petersburg, June 2004) adopted the Recommendation 76/2004 on a “Framework of Cooperation between PABSEC and European Parliament”. EP-PABSEC interaction has been a recurring issue on the overall agenda and the General Discussion of the Assembly²² as well as a priority of the Presidencies.²³

Calls for a Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Dimension

In searching for ways to strengthen Black Sea Synergy, innovative approaches that move beyond the strict intergovernmental level (i.e. state-to-state bargaining) and include different segments of the civil society, need to be considered. There is no escape from the challenge that the deepening of Black Sea Synergy presents to parliamentary accountability, control and diplomacy.

Both the EU and the Black Sea countries have referred to the need for an enhanced role for parliamentary diplomacy and cooperation on several occasions. The “Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Countries of the European Union and of the Wider Black Sea Area” (Kyiv, 14 February 2008) launching the Black Sea Synergy acknowledges the “importance of parliamentary activities in promoting regional cooperation” (para.10).

On its side, the BSEC has often referred to a stronger parliamentary dimension both of regional cooperation within the wider Black Sea area and with regard to its interaction with the EU. The document “BSEC-EU Interaction: The BSEC Approach” (Istanbul, 17 January 2007) refers to the parliamentary level of cooperation as follows.

²² The General Debate of the 25th Plenary Session of the General Assembly in Kyiv on 8 June 2005 was dedicated to the issue of the “Enlargement of the European Union and the Black Sea Region: New Models of Cooperation”. The 26th Plenary Session in Tirana on 24 November 2005 discussed the issue of “Cultural, Educational and Social Aspects of EU Enlargement: Consequences for the Black Sea region” and adopted Recommendation 86/2005 on the subject. The main topic of the General Debate at the Varna General Assembly in June 2007 was “The Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the European Union: New Euro – Black Sea Partnership”.

²³ The Parliamentary Colloquium on “The Parliamentary Perspective for Wider Europe”, which was organised by the ICBSS in Athens, on 11 November 2002, under the aegis of the Hellenic Presidency of the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC; the Parliamentary Conference on “The Wider Black Sea Region in the New European Architecture” co-organised by the ICBSS and the Hellenic Parliament in Athens on 8 April 2005; a joint PABSEC-ICBSS Seminar on “The Role of the Parliaments in Shaping New Relations between the European Union and the Black Sea Region” held in Athens on 8 November 2007.



Given the potential impact of (inter)parliamentary cooperation, especially in fields such as legislative reform and good governance, a structured and regular relationship between the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) and their respective specialised Committees would add a strong parliamentary pillar to meaningful BSEC–EU interaction. Proposed modalities include the establishment of compact delegations for parliamentary dialogue, extending Observer status with the European Parliament to the PABSEC, and acceptance by the European Parliament of the standing invitation of the PABSEC to participate in its meetings as an Observer (para.61).

On this basis, the BSEC ad hoc Group of Experts on BSEC-EU Interaction at its first meeting (Athens, 4 April 2008) placed the issue of the parliamentary dimension of BSEC-EU interaction as an issue on its agenda.

Of relevance to the Black Sea Synergy and its parliamentary aspects are also the policy proposals of the EU for the strengthening of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which refer to the need for a stronger parliamentary role. Thus, the EU has stressed that in order

to provide specific leverage for our partners' reforms in the fields of democratisation and institution-building, the ENP's parliamentary dimension should equally be strengthened. To this end, the Presidency has been holding exploratory talks with MEPs on the European Parliament's possible contribution, e.g. an increased focus of (inter)parliamentary delegations on ENP-issues and "parliamentary twinning" to transfer democratic know-how.²⁴

The Commission has also welcomed the initiative by the European Parliament to develop the "EuroNest" parliamentary cooperation and integrate it in the Eastern Partnership. Joseph Daul MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament, and Jacek Saryusz-Wolski MEP, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, have advocated the creation of a Parliamentary Assembly bringing together Members of the European Parliament and Members of national parliaments and forming part of the Eastern European Neighbourhood Policy.

A EuroNest Assembly, modelled on the success of the EuroMed, Eurolat and ACP Parliamentary Assemblies, will be an institution for multilateral parliamentary dialogue and exchange, aiming at strengthening existing neighbourly relations between the Member States of the European Union and its eastern partners, as well as encouraging relations between the partners themselves. The Parliamentary Assembly would be made up of 120 Members on the basis of parity, with an equal number of MEPs and Members of Parliament of partner countries such as the Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia,

²⁴ General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC), "Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy Presidency Progress Report," 18-19 June 2007.



Moldova and representatives of democratic forces in Belarus. There would be 60 Members, which would enable each of the above states to be represented by ten Members of Parliament.²⁵

Though significant for the strengthening of the ENP, EuroNest excludes important countries in the wider Black Sea area such as Turkey and Russia while it totally ignores the role or potential contribution of existing inter-parliamentary bodies in the region.

In its Resolution on “A Black Sea Regional Policy Approach” (17 January 2008) the European Parliament adopts a broader scope and welcomes the fact that the Commission has recently obtained observer status in the BSEC and takes note of the existing relations between the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC and “considers it important to further encourage the parliamentary dimension of the cooperation between the European Parliament and the parliaments of the Black Sea countries” (para. 35).

In a most recent development in 2008, the PABSEC decided to establish a “Permanent Delegation for Cooperation between the PABSEC and the European Parliament” which will maintain contact between the two bodies and ensure coordination of their interaction with the framework of relations between the BSEC and the EU. In parallel, the Hellenic Parliament proposed the establishment of a Euro – Black Sea Parliament Assembly (EBSPA) at the 31st Plenary Session of the General Assembly of the PABSEC (Athens, 10-11 June 2008). This proposal was in more details discussed at the Legal and

Political Affairs Committee of the Assembly (Belgrade, 8 October 2008) and though positively assessed no further agreement was reached.²⁶

Policy Proposals for Inter-parliamentary Cooperation

The European Parliament’s relations with other regional assemblies and parliaments indicate a variety of models of (inter)parliamentary cooperation and dialogue. In the case of the Black Sea, the regional policy of the EU is expected to be set by the Black Sea Synergy, and though new parliamentary structures may emerge, it is worth exploring the possibility of engaging further with the PABSEC, the most inclusive and institutionally mature parliamentary structure in the region.

PABSEC might be the most appropriate partner of the EP in the wider Black Sea area, given its wide geographical scope that coincides largely with that of the Black Sea Synergy, as well as its agenda. However a Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Dimension would need to be launched on a new basis and framed along commonly agreed objectives, specific fields of cooperation, and a framework of interaction.

²⁵ EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament, “EPP-ED proposes the creation of a EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly. Joseph Daul MEP and Jacek Saryusz-Wolski MEP,” *EPP-ED Group: Press Releases*, 16 June 2008.

²⁶ “Proposal by the Hellenic Parliament to establish a Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Assembly (EBSPA)”, paper presented by the head of the delegation Elias Kallioras at the 31st Meeting of the Legal and Political Affairs Committee, Belgrade, 8 October 2008 (unpublished document).



Objectives

(Inter)parliamentary cooperation between the EU and the Black Sea states will strengthen regional cooperation in the Black Sea region, support the implementation of Black Sea synergies (and possibly expand institutional cooperation between the BSEC and the EU).

Specific goals that could be served from an (inter)parliamentary cooperation could include: i) strengthening parliamentary involvement in all areas of Black Sea cooperation; ii) ensuring the efficient exercise of parliamentary competencies in and control of EU-Black Sea matters; iii) promoting joint actions in areas of common interest, and iv) providing information and exchanging good practices and experience.

Fields of Cooperation

Priority Fields

Priority fields of (inter)parliamentary cooperation could reflect the priorities of the broader parliamentary agenda at the intergovernmental level in the implementation of Black Sea synergies. It could thus include cooperation on sectoral issues:

i) *Political affairs* could group issues and questions of relevance to governance, democracy, peace and human rights. Given the difficult security environment in the Black Sea area and the existence of protracted conflicts and persistent disputes, it might be useful for the Black Sea Synergy effort to consider the establishment of a Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Forum on Security. Such initiatives should be widened to include human security aspects, taking in fields such as on poverty reduction, etc. The perseverance of an informal nature of those efforts could be asset as they galvanise the individual input in parliamentary cooperation across borders.

ii) *Economic affairs* could group development, financial and commercial issues and promote principles of multilateral economic cooperation.

iii) *Social affairs* could group issues of employment, combating poverty, inequality and exclusion as well as social aspects of environmental disasters and degradation.

iv) *Cultural affairs* could address issues of inter-cultural dialogue and understanding.

Exchange of General Information and of “Best Practices”

This could entail the creation of a Desk and Research Unit in their Secretariats that would monitor the parliamentary dimension of the Black Sea Synergy effort.

Joint Actions

(Inter)parliamentary cooperation could envisage action in the form of training, parliamentary seminars, etc. to enhance the voice and role of parliamentarians, targeting in particular women parliamentarians and female members of parliaments' secretariats as well as young parliamentarians and young members of parliament secretariats. Particular importance should be given to the training of young leaders in the Black Sea area. Inter-parliamentary cooperation could also consider ways and means of diffusing knowledge on parliamentary issues with the promotion of relevant scholarly work.



The Framework

Inter-parliamentary cooperation should not duplicate existing efforts and generate unnecessary additional bureaucracy. To this end, existing mechanisms of parliamentary cooperation could be reconsidered, explored and used efficiently.

In terms of the most appropriate form of cooperation, there are many options from the “restricted” to the broader ones as presented hereafter. The first two frameworks envisage a particular role for the PABSEC as a partner of the EP in the Black Sea area in an effort to instigate elements of region building, inclusiveness and local ownership to the process and strengthening of regional institutions. The third option is broader and refers to an enhanced role of national parliaments from both sides, i.e. the EU and the Black Sea.

- The establishment of an **Inter-regional Parliamentary Committee** (e.g. EU – Black Sea Joint Committee) between the European Parliament and PABSEC could be considered along the lines of a compound Committee whose members would be appointed by the EP and the PABSEC to meet regularly (e.g. twice per year) and discuss their common agenda. This Inter-regional Parliamentary Committee would have no institutional basis and its agenda and work would be managed by the respective Secretariats of the EP and the PABSEC.
- Another form would be a **Regional Parliamentary Forum or Conference** (e.g. Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Forum) which would meet periodically and group individual members of the European Parliament and PABSEC according to **specific topics** such as conflicts, poverty reduction, etc. and include in its work meetings of (sectoral) Joint Parliamentary Round Tables (on political affairs, economic affairs, social affairs). Still however, the agenda and work of the Forum would be managed by the two Secretariats (i.e. of the EP and PABSEC) and would result to limited bureaucracy.
- A more ambitious and comprehensive option that would lead to a new institution would be to set up a **Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Assembly**, which would be established beyond the PABSEC structure, along the model of the already existing Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) of the Barcelona Process. Its role would be to offer an institutionalised set up for parliamentary cooperation between the EU and the BSEC and would bring together elected representatives of the European Union and the BSEC countries. Still, the **Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Assembly** could also include a European Parliament Delegation for the Black Sea and a PABSEC delegation for the EU. The EU and the EP have plenty of experience in that area with the ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly but more relevant here perhaps the EMPA and the EUROLAT.

A Role for the PABSEC?

The existing institutional links between the EP and the PABSEC, in particular the observer status of the EP within the PABSEC, could be practically used in moving ahead in discussions over the strategic aspects of an EP-PABSEC broader cooperation.

Inter-parliamentary cooperation could be shaped to meet the needs of parliamentary diplomacy and dialogue as well as technical needs. Worldwide and European experience of (inter)parliamentary cooperation is rich and it always reflects the needs and priorities of each particular region. The European Parliament and the PABSEC could thus use the



instruments that they have at their disposal, as they are laid down in their founding documents.

A starting point in EP-PABSEC cooperation is the fact that the two parliamentary bodies represent different types of parliamentary institutions. On the one hand, the European Parliament is a unique international institution which has explicit powers in decision making and maintains control over the executive organs of the EU. As far as the external policies of the EU are concerned, within which the Black Sea Synergy concept falls, in conformity with the Treaty, the European Parliament shall be consulted on the main aspects and the basic choices of the CFSP and its views shall be duly taken into consideration. The European Parliament shall be kept regularly informed by the Presidency of the developments of the Union's foreign and security policy.

The PABSEC, on the other hand, is a less powerful parliamentary body which however performs along the lines of other similar regional parliamentary assemblies; it is linked on a consultative basis to a regional intergovernmental organisation (the BSEC).

The current institutional structure of the PABSEC (sectoral committees, specialised groups, permanent secretariat, etc.), regional agenda, institutional linkage to the BSEC and inclusiveness in terms of membership would render PABSEC an important partner in promoting (inter)parliamentary cooperation for the deepening of regionalism in the wider Black Sea area and the enhancement of interaction between the EU and the BSEC.

- In order to enhance visibility of parliamentary control and raise public concern on key issues related to the development of the wider Black Sea area, occasional Conferences of the Speakers of the national parliaments of the EU27 member states with those from the BSEC countries (a similar arrangement exists already in the Euro-Mediterranean context) could also be envisaged.
- Regular meetings of the Secretaries-General of the two Parliamentary Bodies would ensure coordination and maintain momentum while facilitate high level communication.
- The possibility of establishing within the EP and the PABSEC an EP-PABSEC Information Exchange Desk, to assign specific officers within both Secretariats who will deal exclusively with the issues at hand and maintain a record of developments (a “file,” i.e. an “institutional memory”) could be explored. This is not an uncommon practice in other existing international parliamentary bodies.
- Formal inter-parliamentary cooperation would ensure that elected representatives from the EU and the BSEC countries seat together regularly with the aim of promoting relations between the EU and the Black Sea states, in particular the implementation of Black Sea synergies. To this end, an annual debate on the implementation of Black Sea synergies could be envisaged.
- Recommendations and questions on topical issues formed by the Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Assembly or a similar structure could be addressed to the BSEC Council, the EU Council and the Commission. In addition, own-initiative reports would be drafted, where the parliamentarians can express their views on what is desirable for putting more flesh on the Black Sea synergies.
- (Inter)parliamentary cooperation could also lead to structural changes within the PABSEC. The current practice of PABSEC being structured along national groups could thus be re-considered. If it is of course too early to move to political groupings à-la



European Parliament, such a development could be encouraged on an informal basis: i.e. the setting up of friendship groups that would bring together PABSEC members with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) along political lines. Each political group in the EP possesses well-structured political secretariats. These should help in creating a political (i.e. ideological) atmosphere in any EP-PABSEC joint body.

Widening Parliamentary Dialogue

It is also important to mention here two different important levels of parliamentary cooperation and beyond. First, the parliamentary bodies of sub-state regions, such as local authorities, municipal authorities (especially those of big cities) with their respective (often elected) representatives should also be included in this effort. Second, the importance of civil society is consistently reiterated in various reports, official or not.²⁷ But the link between civil society actors (NGOs, associations, etc.) and governmental bodies is greatly facilitated if there is a strong parliamentary input.

In order to strengthen the sub-state and the civil society levels, parliamentarians should foster formal and informal links through the setting up of Associations – initially led by the parliamentarians themselves, and later to be expanded to other actors – along the lines of the COPA (Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas), the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. All of them share the characteristic of grouping not only national parliaments but also parliamentary bodies from provincial, state, and territorial entities. The COPA also includes (inter)parliamentary organisations. A similar approach is taken in the EMPA with observer and guest status for Arab-wide parliamentary bodies. Individual parliamentarians should be encouraged to develop this type of activities as without political will and personal commitment very little would be achieved with or without institutionalisation. In the PABSEC context, the existence of a Black Sea Capitals Associations could thus be exploited in a more innovative manner.

Conclusions

There is ample of room for new initiatives and innovative approaches at all levels of regional cooperation in Europe's wider Black Sea neighbourhood. As the EU's regional policies in this neighbourhood are still at the stage of formation, it is timely to consider wide frameworks of cooperation that tie together the EU and its neighbours (especially those for whom there is no prospect of accession in the foreseeable future) within mechanisms of joint action.

Though the EU's parliamentary cooperation with prospective members (pre-accession countries) is strong, the main challenge which the EU faces increasingly is how to maintain real dialogue with non-accession neighbouring countries and Russia in particular. The establishment of a Euro – Black Sea Parliamentary Dimension would not

²⁷ See for instance the 15 November 2007 EP Resolution on “Strengthening the ENP”, points 6-7-8. In that respect, one should also mention the Council of Europe and its Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities contribution to the setting up of Euro-Regions. For that concept as applied (possibly) to the Black Sea, see the Study made by the EP Directorate General External Policies (Policy Department External Policies), *Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area: Analysis and Opportunities to Foster Synergies in the Region*, December 2007, 17-18.



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only strengthen the core elements of the Black Sea Synergy and enhance the inclusive and proactive character of EU's external policies: it would also instigate elements of democratisation and confidence-building in one of the most troubled European regions.



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