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To cite this article: Felix Ciută (2008) Region? Why Region? Security, Hermeneutics, and the Making of the Black Sea Region, *Geopolitics*, 13:1, 120-147, DOI: [10.1080/14650040701783367](https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040701783367)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040701783367>



Published online: 05 May 2008.



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Region? Why Region? Security, Hermeneutics, and the Making of the Black Sea Region

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In the context of post–Cold War European integration, ‘making’ regions has become commonplace. Far from reducing the significance of regional initiatives, inflationary regional labelling draws attention to the significant role played by ‘regions’ as legitimating political vectors. Why are political projects formulated in regional terms? Critically examining the Black Sea region project, this article suggests that region-making transcends the boundary between theoretical and political praxis. Regional entrepreneurs frequently use different conceptual categories in the formulation and justification of their initiatives. In order to understand why regional forms are preferred politically, it is necessary to scrutinise closely this contextual interaction between political praxis and conceptual logic. The article maps the various concepts of region which coexist in the Black Sea region project, and discusses their relationship with four political and hermeneutical strategies that link the regional project with its context, profoundly marked by the logic of European security integration. The ‘double hermeneutics’ of the Black Sea region highlights the contradictory security logics that structure European security in general and this regional project in particular. In the conclusion, the article draws attention to the significant epistemological and normative consequences of the double hermeneutics of the Black Sea region.

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INTRODUCTION

Every time a political and/or conceptual comment is made about ‘the [X] region’, the question usually asked first is ‘What is the [X] region?’ A worthy question, without doubt – or at least it used to be. Increasingly often, answering this question proves if not an impossible task, then at least one that is bound to produce multiple answers, once again, both politically and conceptually. Labelling regions has ceased to be – assuming that it ever was – a descriptive exercise in which observers held their mirrors – geographical, cultural and so on – to the(ir) world: what a region is always reflects ‘the biases, intellectual and political, of their originators’.¹ Instead, labelling regions has become – assuming that it ever was anything else – a political exercise which, aside from being widely acknowledged by analysts, is now openly embraced by political entrepreneurs who, to use an inspired formulation, take ‘on board the postmodern understanding of the constructed nature of social reality as a liberating moment to reconstitute their own regional environment’.²

There are few contexts that display a more imaginative, diverse, and politically dynamic region labelling than the contested region par excellence, ‘Europe’. As a regional context in and of itself, ‘Europe’ has incited constant and vigorous debate concerning its nature, scope and limits,³ to the degree that this very contestation, embodied in the process of European integration and captured especially in the yet-to-be-solved dilemmas of enlargement, has become one of the essential characteristics of ‘Europe’, and thus, of European security. Given the overwhelming importance that EU and NATO enlargements have for the member and applicant states, it is therefore not surprising that the politics of ‘being European’ have contaminated European sub-regional dynamics, for which ‘mainstream’ integration (in NATO and the EU) acts as an umbrella in security, political, economic, social and cultural terms.⁴ Association with and dissociation from a particular sub-regional construct – ‘Mitteleuropa’, the ‘Balkans’, or ‘South-East Europe’, to name only a few⁵ – is for European states not only an identity-defining enterprise, but often also a part of their general integration strategy, a political fast track towards ‘Europe’, or a key to security guarantees or financial packages. One of the most interesting aspects of regional security initiatives is therefore that, while they attempt to inscribe a set of established security practices onto the regions’ pattern of interaction, these security practices are not expressions of regional specificity, but tools of region-making.

It is this contamination – by which I mean the process through which Europe’s regions are shaped by, and in turn contribute themselves to shaping the idea of ‘Europe’ and the process of European integration – that suggests a politically significant and theoretically intriguing mutation of the initial question, ‘What is this region?’ If indeed region builders embrace openly the idea that regions are ‘historically contingent processes, related in different

ways to political, governmental, economic and cultural practices and discourses',⁶ then, as the significant and growing literature on region-building argues,⁷ answering the question 'What region?' inevitably stumbles over some form of region-labelling. As a result, a different question acquires significance: 'Why region?' In other words, it is worth interrogating the political use of regional framing just as much it is worth debating the analytical contribution of regionalism as a theoretical lens. The latter is already an established position in the cross-disciplinary landscape of international relations theory, security theory and European integration theory which, long dominated by state-centric and systemic perspectives, has turned to regions as an intermediate level of analysis which allows the study of regional security dynamics that are simultaneously a) integrative – regions are coherent contexts that transcend state boundaries; b) increasingly autonomous from global-systemic determinants; and c) qualitatively different from international systems writ small.⁸ A different and equally incisive literature explores the politics of region-making in Europe, suggesting that while there is a case to be made for regionalism in the study of European security and integration, it is equally important to focus on the actors, logic, and intended or unintended consequences of region-making.⁹

Interrogating the political use of regional forms is always and inevitably a matter of context, and – as this article seeks to demonstrate – always and inevitably an exercise that constantly transcends the (imaginary) boundary between theory and practice, conceptual logic and political praxis. While revelling in the contingency of regionness, the 'postmodern' impulse to make regions can neither take form in an ideational vacuum, nor can it be reduced to a dextrous implementation of whatever interests its actors may pursue. Regional entrepreneurs always use concepts of 'region' which are in constitutive relationship to political interests as well as to the context in which they are deployed, context which gives meaning to the concept and to the purpose of 'region' alike. In order to obtain a theoretical understanding of region-making we must therefore note both the conceptual proficiency of political actors, and the political logics that circumscribe the effects of, and need for the regional form.

Operating in this theoretical and empirical vein, this article aims to answer the question 'Why the Black Sea region?' Empirically, the focus is on the Black Sea region, which showcases the interplay between concept and practice in context. In this case, the context for region-making is European security integration, which, as argued above, has as one of its defining characteristics the interaction between security politics and regional framing. Making the Black Sea region is at the same time a security project – it is deliberately set up to address a number of security issues – and a regional project which attempts to draw the contour of the region as a key to resolving these security issues. Answering the question 'Why the Black Sea region?' is not, it must be emphasised, with the objective of demonstrating

the value – or lack thereof – of the political enterprise of making the Black Sea region; the problems that vex this project are discussed somewhere else.¹⁰ My purpose is primarily hermeneutic. Taking my cue from Charles Taylor's argument that one of the key tasks of any hermeneutics is to 'confront one's language of explanation with that of one's subjects' self-understanding',¹¹ I seek to examine the distinctive fusion between conceptual logic and political praxis in a contemporary context where regionness and security actively intersect. The focus will be on the incontestable transfer between concepts of regions/security and politics of regions/security, which suggests a veritable 'double hermeneutic' – defined as 'the mutual interpretive interplay between social science and those whose activities compose its subject matter'¹² – of the Black Sea region. This analytical and epistemological venture thus parallels the concern of critical geopolitics with the relationship between practical, popular and formal geopolitical reasoning, as well as with the role of security/defence elites in the formulation of state strategies and geopolitical grand narratives.¹³

The article answers the question 'Why the Black Sea region?' in three steps. First, it outlines briefly the actors, problems and solutions that together constitute the 'Black Sea region project'. This section also draws attention to an essential contradiction that lies at the heart of the project, which is built on two different logics of security, geopolitical and institutional. As will be argued below, this contradiction reflects the inscription of the Black Sea region project in the context of European security integration, and is reflected in the deployment of different concepts of region at different – or even the same – junctures of the project. Second, it is necessary to map out these concepts and examine their interaction with the logics of security that drive region-building. Like all regional security initiatives, the Black Sea region project is situated at the crossing point of two central categories: region and security. My argument is that the 'making of the Black Sea region' relies on four different understandings of the region, which involve in different measures the two distinct security logics mentioned above. Once again, the simultaneous use of these contradictory concepts of region is not accidental, and it can be understood only by situating Black Sea region-making in the context of European integration – which as already mentioned constitutes the background and overlaying logic for most, if not all sub-regional initiatives. This is the argument of the third section, which argues that the emphasis on the regional form of the project is produced by a combination of four mechanisms – institutional reflex, border country syndrome, mimesis, and the transfer of strategic identity – each containing a different mix of region/security and requiring different notions of regionness in order to maintain the political synergy between the region-making initiative and the wider process of European security integration.

It is not only the empirical occurrence of the double hermeneutics of the Black Sea region that is of interest. The interaction between contradictory

categories of region and security in the formulation of the Black Sea region project has a critical political and epistemological impact. Epistemologically, the double hermeneutic of the Black Sea region highlights the considerable difficulty of applying one or another theoretical category to any empirical setting, or more generally of using empirical referents in order to validate conceptual categories such as region or security, since the empirical contexts investigated prove already suffused with conceptual categories. Politically, overlapping and clashing notions of regionness affect decisively the nature of the security practices that actually can be inscribed on the Black Sea region. From this perspective, the article draws attention to the problems generated by the relationship between mainstream and sub-regional integration, and to the impediments to the replication of previous region-making initiatives in different contexts.

THE BLACK SEA REGION: A POLITICAL AND SECURITY PROJECT¹⁴

Debates about the Black Sea region have only recently reached the intensity that characterised those concerning the Mediterranean or especially the Baltic Sea Region, whose high profile on the post-Cold War security agenda was also matched by scholarly interest in their 'ontological status' as regions.¹⁵ Initial enthusiasm led to the creation in 1992 of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation initiative (BSEC), but after that – in a similar manner to other regional European initiatives – the trajectory of the Black Sea region has been firmly under the shadow of EU and NATO enlargement.

There are three main agents of the recent resurgence of the region. The first is Romania, which has made the Black Sea region one of its top foreign policy priorities and is the most active of the riparian states in linking security-building with region-building.¹⁶ The second is a consortium of institutional initiatives with interests in the region – BSEC,¹⁷ the Coalition for Democratic Choice (CDC),¹⁸ and most recently the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership (BSF).¹⁹ While these initiatives are quite dissimilar in certain aspects – in terms of their birth dates, membership, and specific goals – and put forward different visions of the Black Sea region, their existence and activity draws political attention to the region, which they establish as a potential framework for common economic and security policy. All three initiatives – BSEC, the CDC and BSF – see economic cooperation as a source of security, and operate broadly on the basis of a paradigm of security that is linked to democracy, respect for human rights and good governance. Finally, a third vector of the Black Sea region project is a multinational lobby group, which plays a significant agenda-setting role through materials released in high-exposure publications and high-exposure events – e.g., two landmark studies launched prior to the Istanbul and Riga NATO summits – and often provides a public platform for the other two

vectors mentioned above. A key characteristic of this third vector is thus the fact that it formulates and debates different – at times conflicting – regional strategies while raising the public and political profile of the Black Sea region.²⁰

These political vectors of what I will call the Black Sea region (BSR) ‘project’²¹ have radically increased the prominence of the region on the Euro-Atlantic security agenda, and have contributed to – indeed, they have ignited – the political and analytical debate concerning the very idea of a region around the Black Sea.²² Key to understanding the Black Sea region ‘project’ defined in this manner is therefore its dual nature as a wide-ranging agenda-setting exercise and as a broad region-building exercise.

Depicting its aim as morally imperative and strategically necessary,²³ the BSR project seeks to continue the transformation of European security through internationalisation, institutionalisation and democratisation, in order to avoid repeating in the Black Sea region the Balkan failures of the 1990s. In order to achieve this, the project calls for the presence in the region of three key actors – the EU, NATO, and the United States – with a concerted and multidimensional regional strategy.²⁴ The necessity of the project is derived from the location of the Black Sea in political as well as geographical terms. Situated at the point of convergence of the latest phase of European integration and the US-led ‘global war on terror’, the Black Sea region acquires significance both as a security problem and as a security asset. This dual framing constantly links the categories of ‘region’ and ‘security’ – as argued above, the constitutive ingredients of all regional security initiatives – but it also constantly fractures the project in terms of the meaning assigned to the Black Sea region as well as the security strategies that form the project itself.

On the one hand, the enduring need for access to sources of energy – which has acquired only an increased degree of visibility recently – and the global war on terror revalue the ‘military significance of the Black Sea’, which becomes a security asset as ‘a platform for power projection to the Middle East and Asia and as a buffer zone against asymmetric risks to European security’.²⁵ The need to project power from the region is a function of a security logic which is not specific to the region, reflecting instead a global, immanent structure of international politics that circumscribes Black Sea region politics, seen thus as embedded in traditional great-power competition and contemporary global dynamics of conflict.

Put differently, the Black Sea region is an asset only in security dynamics which are by definition competitive, military-centric and structured by inter-state rivalries. This formulation of the relationship between the geography and politics of the Black Sea requires a geopolitical vision of the region that draws almost of necessity from traditional geopolitical thinking.²⁶ Indeed, this vision of the Black Sea region sees it as an evolving ‘natural geopolitical centre’²⁷ or a new ‘geopolitical pivot’.²⁸ This geopolitical definition of the

region leads to an understanding of regional security politics as a form of 'geopolitical revisionism'.²⁹ As a consequence, the geopolitical understanding of the Black Sea region takes its existence and geographical coherence for granted,³⁰ and uses this to establish the region's political coherence, renewed significance – as the key site where the US (or alternatively NATO and the EU) confront Russia's dominance of the region³¹ – and utility as a platform for the global war on terror.

Paradoxically however, security strategies based on power projection from the Black Sea region are not designed to address problems specific to this region: 'the Black Sea region is at the epicentre in the grand strategic challenge of trying to project stability into a wider European space and beyond into the Greater Middle East', and as such it constitutes a front line 'in combating . . . many of the major new problems and threats Europeans today are concerned about'.³² Geopolitical revisionism may make the Black Sea an asset, but it is one not for the states of the region, but for actors involved in security dynamics external to (e.g., the Caucasus or the Middle East) or wider (e.g., the war on terror, drug trafficking, illegal migration), or even narrower (e.g., frozen conflicts) than the Black Sea region.

On the other hand, frozen conflicts, illegal arms trafficking and transnational crime are issues that make the Black Sea region a security problem: 'the Black Sea area has always been a source of uncertainty, insecurity, invasions, and migration'.³³ In this sense, issues that affect some or all the actors of the region must be addressed because their resolution is important in its own right, and also because the region can thus become an asset in the resolution of other, wider problems. The solution for regional problems is almost unanimously considered 'the spread of institutional liberalism'³⁴ – that is, a security strategy of institutionalisation that replicates in the region the blueprint of European integration.³⁵

Unlike the competitive logic of the geopolitical framing of the region, the institutional vision of the Black Sea region rests on a logic of cooperation and solidarity,³⁶ promoting a normative transfer of principles and rules of behaviour instead of great power rivalry. An institutional logic of security rests on the 'development and empowerment of the civil society [and on] strengthening civic participation and democratic governance,³⁷ achieved through effective multilateralism³⁸ and 'synergy among international and regional organisations . . . [in a] regional environment conducive to the promotion of democracy and fundamental rights and freedoms'.³⁹ By identifying the region as 'a civilisational black hole' situated beyond 'the frontiers of freedom'⁴⁰ the institutional vision rests on a strongly normative dimension which downplays geographical bounded-ness in order to create political space for the making of the region. In contrast to geopolitical logic, which builds from the territorial essence of the region, institutional logic regards the region as a political artifact born out of interaction rather than premised on it. In other words, the region is the product of institutionalisation, and not the reason for it.

As a consequence, the most significant impediment to the formulation of a coherent vision for the Black Sea region is precisely this contradiction between the security logics that underpin it: 'geopolitics' and 'institutionalisation' not only demand different strategies, but also assume incongruent notions of what a region is. The problem is circular: the two security logics generate different rationales for action; these different rationales require the deployment of disparate definitions of the Black Sea region (for example, one that assumes that it exists objectively, and one that assumes that it must, like all regions, be built); these definitions reinforce the different logics of security that generated them in the first instance. While not necessarily characteristic of every potential formula for cooperation and integration in the Black Sea region, this contradiction is deep enough to suggest that its resolution is most likely a precondition for any successful security-building effort in the region.

A central and distinctive characteristic of the BSR project is thus that, while acknowledging regional fragmentation in political, geographical and ideational terms,⁴¹ as well as likely obstructionism (from Russia and Turkey),⁴² it takes a strongly normative position concerning the political and regional coherence of the project. Linking political success to regional coherence has the not insignificant consequences of making region-building an explicitly political endeavour, and of pre-empting any potential criticism of the project. Thus any argument that the Black Sea region is not coherent prompts the answer 'not yet'. All claims that the region is an artificial construct will be met with the obvious answer that all regions are. As a consequence, when the potential impediments to regional security integration are noted, the answer usually not only points out the desirability of solving the problems addressed by the project as a whole – who can object to the resolution of frozen conflicts? – but also draws attention to the incomplete process of region building.

Since regional fragmentation is obvious even to the project's supporters, it then becomes imperative to question the role of the regional form. Why is it formulated in regional terms – rather than, for example, functional terms, i.e., as a response to specific security problems? What are the political mechanisms that prompt the architects of the project to use the regional vector, and what are the epistemological consequences of the explicit deployment of multiple conceptual categories of region or security in political practice?

A HERMENEUTICS OF THE BLACK SEA REGION

However tempting analytically, trying to apply different concepts of region in order to answer the question 'In what sense is the Black Sea region a region?' proves unproductive once we observe that this context is, entirely predictably, already contaminated conceptually. The rich and diverse literature on regionalism and regionalisation provides multiple conceptualisations of regions – as theoretical constructs, objective empirical entities, products

of social interaction, or results of cultural processes of identification⁴³ – but the appropriation of these conceptual categories by the political agents of region-making makes it at once difficult and futile to demonstrate that the Black Sea confirms one or another conceptualisation of regions.

A close reading of the BSR project attests that it is an unstable hybrid combining at least four different conceptualisations of the region as (1) a security complex, (2) a geopolitical entity, (3) the product of a historically and geographically grounded common identity and (4) a discursive construction. The hermeneutical and political implications of this conceptual ‘spillover’ are of maximum significance. The fusion of different concepts of region into the BSR project is not necessarily detrimental politically, although, as will be shown in the next section, it does induce a sense of confusion and exacerbates the perception of fragmentation. However, the fusion of multiple concepts of region with different security logics has much more significant political implications, because each of these four different regional ‘vessels’ presupposes a different logic of security or contains a different cocktail of contradictory security logics – institutional and geopolitical – which it tries to reconcile in its own way. Before examining the political mechanisms that prompt this fusion, it is necessary to briefly map the presence of these different categories of region in the BSR project.

1. In its initial formulation, a regional security complex (RSC) was defined as ‘a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another’.⁴⁴ This objectivist view sees the region as an analytical construct, a tool that structured the observation of ‘empirical [phenomena] with historical and geopolitical roots . . . whose reality [does not lie] in the notion of a self-aware subsystem’.⁴⁵ A later formulation added the perspective of securitisation theory, and defined the RSC as ‘a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another’.⁴⁶ In contrast to a different understanding of the region also present in the project – discussed below – RSCs are not thought to exist ‘in terms of the discursive “construction of regions”’,⁴⁷ since they are organisational categories used by external observers.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the understanding of the Black Sea region as an RSC transpires from numerous formulations of the project, which underscore the region’s security linkages, which are taken as the starting point for the articulation of common policies. It is interesting to observe, from the point of view of the effects of the conceptual spillover noted above, that Black Sea region-builders use formulations almost identical in structure with the RSC concept. While a representative of the Romanian government observes that the region is ‘not yet consolidated as a distinct self-aware entity’, he builds the argument for a regional approach on the ‘commonality

of mind on sub-regional security matters',⁴⁸ a point reiterated in the Black Sea Forum's Joint Declaration, which emphasises that 'the evolving security challenges in the region . . . require correlated and cooperative responses of the countries in the region'.⁴⁹ Similarly, Asmus and Jackson see the 'convergence of regional interests' as the basis for 'the concept of a unitary Black Sea region',⁵⁰ while Maior and Matei not only describe the region in terms of 'common concerns and challenges', but also make direct reference to the definition of a RSC.⁵¹

As also noted above, the diffusion of regional concepts into policy discourse is a reflection of the different purposes different visions of regions can serve. It could be argued that the BSR project is prompted towards this definition of region by 1) its emphasis on security threats as a key regional coagulant and 2) its understanding of the region as an organising category rather than an ontological one. Both manoeuvres are politically useful in attracting interest to the project, as well as in deflecting potential critiques that point out the multiple fragmentation and lack of identification that characterise the region. 'Region' and 'security' are thus combined in a manner that creates the former by emphasising the latter. If it is understood as an RSC, the Black Sea region does not need to be a region in the sense of common identification or geographical coherence, yet its significance and coherence security-wise remain, and are constituted by deploying the RSC as an organising category which thus becomes a political category. In addition, an RSC understanding of the Black Sea region is not hampered by perceived regional fragmentation, which becomes a security challenge in itself – one that adds to, rather than detracts from the need for a regional perspective, and one perfectly compatible with the broad understanding of security inherent in the formula of the RSC generated by securitisation theory.⁵² In other words, the more significant the security problems – including fragmentation – the stronger the need for a region(al security complex).

2. As already suggested by the presence of the geopolitical logic of security, the BSR project also contains an understanding of regions as geopolitical entities.⁵³ The effect of a geopolitical take on the Black Sea region is nevertheless ambiguous, because the meaning of the region oscillates with the meaning assigned to geopolitics.

When geopolitics is understood as a set of perennial laws, the region's existence as well as its meaning are independent, objective and geographically bound. By using the vocabulary of traditional geopolitics, the political visions of the Black Sea not only establish its location in the grand scheme of global politics, but also determine its enduring significance among the 'natural seats of power'.⁵⁴ Geopolitical vocabulary permeates many of the descriptions of the Black Sea as 'bridge or buffer zone',⁵⁵ a 'pivot'⁵⁶ that lies 'at the centre of a Mackinder-type "geopolitical heartland"',⁵⁷ or 'on the frontier between the Heartland and the Rimlands'.⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, this vocabulary

has significant political effects. The first is the sublimation of doubt. Location matters; a sense of common identification does not; commonalities of interests derive from the place itself. The region simply is. Then, the use of these signifiers produces a legitimacy of sorts, inherent in the mix between the air of inevitability that transpires from this understanding of politics, and the grandiose temporal and spatial scale suggested by the 'geopolitical' framing. There is little room for manoeuvre in this reading of the Black Sea: what is required is the wisdom to obey the 'geopolitical imperatives'⁵⁹ in order to take advantage of the value of the region as 'one of the cornerstones of Euro-Asian stability and security, . . . [the control of which] determines control of Euro-Asia both today and in the future.'⁶⁰ We can see therefore that its definition ceases to be a simple empirical or analytical referent, becoming instead instrumental in portraying the Black Sea region as a security asset.

In contrast, those formulations of the BSR project which are aware of the geographical ambiguity of the region – indeed, consider this a key catalyst of the project – take their cue from Joseph Nye's argument that 'regions are what politicians and people want them to be'.⁶¹ By adhering to an understanding of geopolitics as an eminently political exercise, these formulations effectively drag the Black Sea region into the global security context, whose structure of incentives and imperatives demands action – now. This is the right moment, the argument goes, to 'change the historic order of things and to create a new and modern geopolitical system in the region'.⁶² The rationale for such geopolitical revisionism is that confrontation (between Russia and the West) is inevitable: 'a "soft war" over influence, alignment, and values'.⁶³

Thus, the region is not just a playing field for this conflict: the conflict itself defines the region, which becomes the subject of geopolitical engineering via the logic of security that in its turn defines the conflict. Unavoidably, this reading clashes with other visions of the region that populate the BSR project, as well as with – as already noted – the parallel logic of security institutionalisation, which, paradoxically, is seen as the end-point of confrontation. Re-making the region in geopolitical terms – and in the terms of geopolitics – is thus necessary in order to make institutionalisation possible. However, neither the organisational framework, nor the broad understanding of security inherent in the logic of institutionalisation operates across the Black Sea. Truly creative, this 'geopolitical' exertion ends up with a Black Sea region that excludes the largest riparian state, Russia. In effect, this geopolitical formulation of region/security – by definition competitive, state- and military-centric – ends up making the region by splitting it in two rival factions.

Despite such contradictions, the geopolitical visions of the region fulfil an important political function. Like in many other instances, 'geopolitics' can be understood as a discursive instrument which serves to legitimate the

inscription of the project in the logic of international security.⁶⁴ In a context where 'geopolitics' is still the name of the game, failure to list geopolitical worth among the attributes of the region risks reducing the value and credibility of the BSR project. Yet we must also note that the geopolitical understanding of the Black Sea region is politically re-validated and re-legitimated through the use of an understanding of region-making which started as a rejection of the reified and objectivist geopolitical perspectives on regions that circumscribed an equally objectionable vision of security politics.⁶⁵ By emphasising the creative dimension of 'geopolitics' – the very dimension that brings the Black Sea on the transatlantic agenda – the project eventually reinforces a rigid and transhistorical logic of security in which the changing status of the region is a mere function of the latest conflict, rather than a reflection of some profound mutation in the security logic that produced the region itself.

3. In contrast to the first two perspectives in which the region is constitutively associated with security dynamics of some kind, the next two draw upon non-security factors. The third take on the Black Sea region evokes its common regional identity, historically and geographically grounded.⁶⁶ As King argues, 'regions are not about essential identities but rather concern a set of essential connections that bind together the lives of peoples and polities'.⁶⁷ Given this interpretation, the revival of the Black Sea region is not seen as the mere effect of geopolitical circumstance, but the product of 'the rediscovery of a web of connections that did in fact exist in the past and that may yet exist again.'⁶⁸ 'Region' still functions as a normative category, which at the same time establishes a 'commonality, arising from the past, [which] still exists: the hospitality of the countries around the Black Sea',⁶⁹ envisions almost nostalgically a future that returns to this past, and – by necessity – sees the present as a hiatus in the historical continuum of regional identity. Most often, this understanding of regions colours the BSR project through its negative presence, a significant number of contributors starting from an acknowledgement of the lack of a common regional identity, which they see as at best incipient and at worst non-existent: 'ethnic and cultural diversity [makes] it difficult at the present moment to speak of a Black Sea region identity'.⁷⁰

Why then, does the BSR project not renounce its reference to the region's identity, which stands in such stark contrast with the geopolitical imperatives that structure its contemporary outlook? As already hinted, this vision of the region uses the past – the defining element of the very category of 'region' here – to rectify the present and formulate a design for the future. Significantly, the past which constitutes the proto-identity of the region is very much embedded in the principles and categories of the present: 'geographically and historically, the Black Sea region . . . has been part of Europe. It is a cradle of civilizations at the gates of Europe, with links going back to the ancient Greek and Roman cultures'.⁷¹ Even though

reliant on an apparently fixed historical given, the makers of the Black Sea region clearly deploy here an idea of 'Europe' which is essentially contemporary. In this manner, the BSR project is firmly inscribed in the context of European integration, whose one key constitutive dimension has perhaps been the constant invention and re-invention of European identity and thus of 'Europe' itself. Establishing the historicity of the Black Sea region's identity is at the same time the product of trying to demonstrate the 'European-ness' of the region and its states, and an effect of previous contestations of and claims to undisputable European identity in other regional initiatives.

Yet this symbolic core of the Black Sea region, built on the idea of 'Europe' embodied in the logic of security that has driven the enlargements of NATO and the EU, is contradictory on a number of levels. The powerful symbolism of 'Europe' is first contradicted by the definition of the region as the product of common security linkages. Should a common history and identity be present, the Black Sea region would simply not need security dangers to come and stay together. Furthermore, to establish this 'Europe' as the ancient basis for the coherence of the Black Sea region is to succumb to blatant ahistoricism. Not only this, but this particular vision clashes with the geopolitical perennality of the region, which is sourced in confrontation, not 'hospitality'. Geopolitical competition is likely to constantly obstruct the common process of remembering forgotten shared memories, histories, and civilisational roots, process which is essential for the 'rediscovery' of the Black Sea region's past identity.

4. Finally, inherent in the very understanding of the Black Sea region as a project is a presupposition of political entrepreneurship⁷² and a definition of regions as results of historically contingent discursive/constructive practices which produce regional identity.⁷³ Three related strands of the project converge in this particular formulation. (a) The agentic inflections of the geopolitical vision are rehearsed in the construction of regional identity, and through it, of regional boundaries. (b) In this light, the project wrestles hardest at this point to connect its two starting premises: the virtually unanimous political and analytical agreement that there is little sense of regionness in the Black Sea region,⁷⁴ and the equally unanimous feeling that a Black Sea regional identity is, can be, and should be constructed because it is the key ingredient of the solutions to the region's security problems. (c) As a consequence, it is also here that the project sees 'region' and 'security' in co-constitutive terms, the achievement of each constantly requiring the building of the other.

The transfer of categories between analytical and political praxis in this logical triptych is once again evident. In a manner similar to the geopolitical reading of the region, some recent analyses of Black Sea politics start from the argument that 'whether or not "the region" exists geographically in the first place is not a priority [because] it is the political will of the interested countries and their intellectual engagement that turn a geographical area

into a region.⁷⁵ Unsurprisingly, an identical vocabulary and logic is used to outline the philosophy and purpose of the BSR project, which ‘should start from . . . building regional identity in the Black Sea’,⁷⁶ ‘[assist] in the construction of a Black Sea identity’,⁷⁷ and ‘[promote] a Black Sea identity and community’.⁷⁸ Moreover, the ‘careful cultivation of a sense of regional solidarity around the notions of regional identity and joint ownership of the Black Sea project’⁷⁹ is directly related to security as a means as well as end: the project seeks to ‘[negotiate] security in view of consolidating a Black Sea/Caucasus acquis and identity’.⁸⁰

As was the case previously, it is obvious that this framing of the Black Sea region must be situated in the context of European integration and its associated identity-defining processes. Here the inflation of regional labels signalled at the beginning of the paper acquires its fullest significance. The re-construction and re-imagining of the Black Sea region as a continuation and even an ancestor of ‘Europe’ shows both the pull of the idea of Europe, and the practical competence acquired by the actors involved in manipulating its symbols. Prior to the launch of the BSR project, the security and institutional strategies of the states involved have also been circumscribed by identity politics – the same European identity – which however pulled them away from the Black Sea region. This was mainly because they were engaged in a constant effort to define or redefine their identities in opposition to an ‘other’ symbolised in turn by Russia – the imperial, barbaric neighbour – and often in opposition to the region itself, as a site of insecurity and un-European-ness. The dissociation of ‘Europe’ and ‘Black Sea region’ was a political imperative sourced in the very attempt to reconcile the identity of the region’s actors with ‘Europe’ – or at least, with that ‘Europe’, then. Once Europe had arrived on the Black Sea shores, this dissociation was no longer viable, and the label no longer expedient. Yet having spent so much time trying to be different, it has become extremely difficult for these states to refashion their identities in tune with a new or rediscovered Black Sea regional identity.

Nonetheless, the problem inherent in this inflationary politics is not – it cannot be – that the Black Sea is one region too many, and even less that the Black Sea region is not ‘truly’ European. What stands out particularly in the case of the Black Sea region is the way it switches between the institutional and geopolitical logics of security, the latter contradicting the very normative essence of ‘Europe’. By mixing in variable doses the understanding of the region as a geopolitical artifact with that of an emancipatory reconstruction of social reality, the project envisions two incompatible regional identities, and thus produces incompatible policy options.

In conclusion, while the ‘spillover’ of conceptual categories in political discourse is neither new nor surprising, the double hermeneutics of the Black Sea region suggests that this is not simply an accidental transfer of vocabulary. While this section has argued that the BSR project clearly relies

on ‘interpretations of “regions” and regional identities [that] are deeply political categories’,⁸¹ the following will explore the manner in which these interpretations are politically signified through interaction with the project’s symbolic and institutional context.

WHY THE BLACK SEA REGION? REGION-MAKING IN CONTEXT

Situated at the intersection of ‘region’ and ‘security’, the BSR project navigates between different understandings of these essential categories driven not only by the instrumental need to pre-empt or circumvent potential critiques, but also by the permanent and constitutive relationship it has with the process of European integration, whose product it at least partially is, and whose logic it at least partially continues. In this sense, this section continues the attempt to answer the question ‘Why a Black Sea region’ and argues that the making of the Black Sea region can be understood as the product of four political and hermeneutical strategies: institutional reflex, border country syndrome, mimesis, and transfer of strategic identity. While not directly correlated with the different understandings of region analysed above, these strategies are clearly located at different intersections of ‘security’ and ‘region’, some explicit (for example mimesis), some less so (for example institutional reflex). In all four strategies, the contradiction between geopolitics and institutionalisation plays a significant role, as does the constant interplay between regional identity and the identity of the actors involved.

Institutional Reflex

The ‘reflex’ of institutionalisation refers to the manner in which the actors which instigated the project have been caught in the logic of European security integration. In this sense, the institutional logic deployed by the BSR project reiterates in this regional context the philosophy of security underpinning the enlargements of NATO and the EU. This philosophy has made national and European security a function of successful democratisation and liberalisation at the national level, and continuing institutionalisation at the European level.

While Black Sea regional institutionalisation was initiated before membership of either NATO or the EU had become a realistic prospect for most of the region’s states, its progress has been a function of the evolution in the background of mainstream integration. Initially, regional institutionalisation in the Black Sea region (expressed through the creation of BSEC) was partly a good pupil strategy designed to demonstrate institutional credentials for those states aspiring to mainstream integration, and partly a reflection of a commitment to the emerging logic of European security politics. However,

this strategy could not be pushed too hard lest it created political alternatives to mainstream integration, something that certain of the region's states have been keen to avoid. This balancing act between showing enough commitment to regional institutionalisation and not over-committing to a provisory institutional format accounts for the political reticence, lack of dedicated resources and lack of 'deepening' in the regional initiative – all of which coincided with the increased momentum of EU and NATO enlargement. As a consequence, before NATO or the EU reached the shores of the Black Sea, regional integration often played the role of antechamber to or classroom for these organisations.⁸²

If the prospect of membership of these institutions actually decelerated regional integration, it did not come as surprise that the Black Sea region made a forceful return once the eastern enlargement of either or both organisations was more or less in sight. By this time, the institutional ethos of European security integration was entrenched in the political strategies of the soon-to-be member states, and was at least partially shaping the terms of the security dialogue between all the potential participants to the project of regional integration. The achievement of NATO/EU membership confirmed the political utility of the regional form for those states of the region which now participated in mainstream integration – and therefore had access not only to its principles, but also to political instruments and sources of funding. For these states, the reflex to institutionalise almost immediately mutated into the separate and synchronous reflex of the 'border country syndrome'. At the same time, the enthusiasm for regional institutionalisation continues to fragment the region between those states who do, and those who do not seek membership of mainstream European organisations.

Contrary to what its name suggests, the 'reflex' of institutionalisation does not completely evade a geopolitical framing of the region. As discussed above, defining the region as an institutional and geopolitical artifact can subordinate the security logic of institutionalisation to that of geopolitics, either by reducing institutionalisation to an instrument of geopolitical competition, or by representing it as the end-point of geopolitical conflict.

Border Country Syndrome

It has often been observed that post-Cold War EU and NATO enlargements have been partially driven by what could be called the 'border country syndrome'. Given the special burdens and responsibilities incurred by the frontier states of the EU or NATO, the last states to join almost always support enlargement, which would move the institutional border and its burdens. The production of regional labels and the proliferation of different and incompatible notions of region can be understood from this point of

view as a direct function of the need to replicate the institutional pattern and regional form that had generated the syndrome itself (through the achievement of membership). In this sense, the border country syndrome can be seen as the combined product of the institutional and the mimetic (discussed below) reflexes: the border country ‘mimes’ regional forms that are seen to have successfully achieved the desired goal of integration.

Yet it could be argued that the existence of the border country syndrome is at the same time an effect and a negation of the reflex towards (regional) institutionalisation. Naturally, this tension is not specific to the Black Sea region, being instead a longstanding characteristic of European integration. On the one hand, the syndrome is an effect of the success of institutionalisation and the use of regional form because it continues – indeed, seeks to expand – its logic. Thus the Black Sea region becomes, *mutatis mutandis*, the ‘new’ Central Europe, a mimetic strategy that is, as will be argued below, deliberately deployed by the actors of the BSR project. On the other hand, however, the syndrome negates the reflex to institutionalise because – as shown by the geopolitical drive of the project – the desire to move organisational borders does not always reflect a belief in the benefits of institutionalisation, but merely a belief in the benefits of not being a border state. In this case, the regional form is emptied of its initial institutional content, becoming instead a geopolitical container for strategies incompatible with institutionalisation. As confirmed by the vision of a Black Sea region situated ‘beyond the frontiers of freedom’,⁸³ the syndrome of the border country risks drawing a frontier that eventually becomes impossible to traverse.

Rather than being dampened, the syndrome is exacerbated by the fact that the further enlargement of NATO and the EU faces serious difficulties and is unlikely in the short term even for those states actively pursuing membership. The less likely enlargement is, the stronger the call for the involvement of the mainstream institutions in the region will be.

Mimesis

Unsurprisingly, one can draw many parallels between the Black Sea project and other regional developments in post-Cold War Europe. These similarities are not accidental, but rather the product of a shared context and of deliberate attempts by the project’s main actors to mimic what are perceived as region-making success stories. A key example in this sense is the Black Sea Forum’s Joint Declaration, which ‘[recalls] the experience acquired from regional cooperation in South Eastern and Central Europe, the Baltic Sea and Northern Europe, which generated enhanced confidence among participating countries’.⁸⁴

Having as primary catalyst the recent memory of the mainstream European organisations’ reach out to their neighbouring regions, mimesis operates simultaneously at the level of policy- and region-making. Not only

have the three key actors – the US, NATO and the EU – been actively involved in strategies focused on the Mediterranean or Baltic regions, for example, but some of the most fervent supporters of the project have participated in region-building projects in these areas too.⁸⁵ A brief discussion of a few examples – the Mediterranean, Baltic and Nordic regions – will hopefully demonstrate both the existence of mimesis, and the problems that characterise it.

At the level of policy framework, the supporters of the BSR project seek to at least replicate the Mediterranean set-up. NATO has had limited success with the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, and the BSR project supports the expansion of NATO's Mediterranean Sea Operation Active Endeavour into the Black Sea. Similarly, the EU is present in the region through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process) created in 1995 and followed by the EU Common Strategy for the Mediterranean in 2000, as well as through the ENP. These processes and initiatives show however that institutional presence is insufficient for the resolution of significant structural problems, and also that the combination of regional ownership and external influence is more uncomfortable than usually assumed. In terms of the regional framework of the Mediterranean, the BSR project assumes either an uncontested and 'natural' Mediterranean identity, or an uncontested process of regional construction, both ideas which are met with scepticism in recent analyses of the Mediterranean.⁸⁶

This interplay between regional and policy frameworks is most visible in the mimesis of the Nordic and Baltic regions, which serve as the main referents for the BSR project. Mimesis is in this case a deliberate strategy deployed by the different vectors of the 'project' in support of the regional form and institutional solutions they pursue. Starting from perceived similar characteristics – the Black Sea region is seen 'as broad and variegated a region as . . . the Baltic/Nordic zone'⁸⁷ – the 'creation of the common identity within the Black Sea region' is seen to parallel the experience of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS),⁸⁸ as illustrated by the invitation of a representative of the CBSS to share regional experiences and expertise in one of the Black Sea Forum's workshops.⁸⁹

The significant literature dedicated to the study of these regions cannot be surveyed here, but it is worth drawing attention to the similarities and differences between these and the Black Sea region in order to demonstrate the difficulties inherent in mimesis. In terms of similarities, the rationale for the Nordic/Baltic projects has been similarly ambivalent, part security-oriented, part driven by regional identification. Prior to achieving membership of NATO, the Baltic States were simultaneously reluctant to pursue regional integration at the expense of NATO and the EU, and keen to attract the involvement into the region of NATO, the EU and the US – the latter establishing the Northern European Initiative (NEI), replaced in 2003 by the

Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE).⁹⁰ In addition, not only the rationale but also the effects of making the Black Sea region tend to mime the Baltic region. Christopher Browning notes that ‘the very structure of [Baltic] regional co-operation . . . tends to emplot Russia . . . as the problem to be solved’.⁹¹ As a consequence, ‘rather than opening Europe to a new plurality, region-building projects in the European north are in fact unwittingly reconstituting Europe in terms of a civilisational empire pushing against Russia’,⁹² an effect likely to be replicated in the Black Sea region.

The differences between the Black Sea and Nordic/Baltic regions are mostly derived from the different operational categories of region, the different sources of regional identification, and the different evolution of the structuring security logics. While the assumption of a process of region-making has constantly been in the background,⁹³ Norden and the Baltic region also presume a level of grass-root identification and a cultural kernel⁹⁴ which are entirely absent in the Black Sea. While the Nordic project was initiated in the academic and cultural milieus,⁹⁵ the Black Sea project is a political initiative created and sustained by the different political actors discussed at the beginning of this paper. If, as Wæver notes, ‘Nordic identity is about being better than Europe’,⁹⁶ in contrast, the very essence of the Black Sea project is to make the region identical to ‘Europe’.

One final contrast lies in the different relationships between security and region in the two contexts. Browning and Joenniemi argue that in the Baltic region ‘questions of security have simply been forgotten, rather than continuing to provide a constitutive rationale for further cooperation’,⁹⁷ and as a result, ‘a certain “manufacturing” of new security issues appears apparent as a way to retain interest and motivation in Baltic Sea regional cooperation.’⁹⁸ The contrast with the Black Sea region could not be stronger, and points again to the different categories of region deployed by the two projects at different times, from RSC to geographically bounded cultural identity. If in the Baltic ‘there is a desire to perpetuate regional cooperation by manufacturing new security issues’,⁹⁹ in the Black Sea we can witness a desire to manufacture a region in order to address perceived security issues; one project manufactures security for the sake of regional coherence, the other manufactures regional coherence for the sake of security.

The space available in this paper does not allow a deeper examination of each of these regional projects, which would further clarify their contextual specificity in terms of a) the dynamics of common identification, b) the relationship between regional and national identity and c) the specific interplay between the logics of geopolitics and institutionalisation. This brief discussion shows nevertheless two key aspects of the intersection between the regional and European contexts. First, regional/institutional mimesis is to some degree inherent in the dynamic of European security integration, which provides common political instruments and a common normative framework. Second, mimetic exercises in region-building are almost by

default flawed, due to the very fact that they inevitably deploy different (mixes of) categories of 'region' against the background of different local conditions, which inevitably affect the development of institutional instruments in support of regional construction.

Transfer of Strategic Identity

Against the backdrop of the mechanisms described above we can identify a fourth one, which is characteristic mostly for one of the key actors of the BSR project. Mimesis, border country syndrome and institutional reflex operate within and are bound by the wider dynamic of European security integration. 'Transfer of strategic identity' is a mechanism which allows us to understand the particular position of Romania in the formulation of this project – even though, of course, Romania also participates in the previous three mechanisms. As already anticipated in the brief description of the project in the first section of the paper, Romania is the most dedicated supporter of the BSR project, which it has made one of its top foreign and security priorities. Romania's interest in the Black Sea region is formulated in the context of its NATO and EU membership – which makes relevant the previous discussion of the institutional reflex and border country syndrome. At the same time, the BSR project is an integral part of Romanian President Traian Băsescu's vision of a 'Washington-London-Bucharest geopolitical axis',¹⁰⁰ a vision that forcefully highlights the contradiction between the different regional forms compatible with European security integration and global geopolitical conflict, respectively.

To put it briefly, Romania's formulation of the BSR project is almost identical to its argument for NATO membership, circa 1997 and post-9/11.¹⁰¹ The 'transfer' of strategic identity occurs along three lines: (1) the dual reading of Romania's (and the Black Sea's) geographical neighbourhood as simultaneously precious and dangerous security-wise, (2) the location of Romania (and the Black Sea) as a civilisational and strategic crossroads and (3) the relationship between the significance of Romania's (and the Black Sea's) geostrategic position and the necessity of integration as the solution to the security problems that affected Romania and its vicinity.¹⁰²

In its official formulation of the rationale for NATO membership, Romania played up its location as a key asset for the alliance: situated at 'the crossing point of geopolitical and strategic axes',¹⁰³ Romania's 'important geo-strategic position [offers] a necessary link between the North, Centre and South of Europe'.¹⁰⁴ These geopolitical attributes were transferred from Romania to the Black Sea almost immediately after Romania became a member of NATO. An almost identical formulation argues that the Black Sea's 'strategic importance . . . lay mostly in the role it played as a bridge and a frontier, a buffer and transit zone, between Europe and Asia at the crossroads between powers and empires'.¹⁰⁵ Similar formulations argue that 'situated at the crossroads of

three areas of vital importance – Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia – the Black Sea . . . is a link of cardinal importance between the Euro-Atlantic community . . . and the strategic belt Middle-East – Caspian Sea – Central Asia'.¹⁰⁶ As a consequence, the Black Sea's 'geo-strategic location makes [it] an indispensable part of Euro-Atlantic security and prosperity'.¹⁰⁷

These are only a few examples – drawn from the many that can be found in Romanian national security documents, policy papers and speeches – which suggest that Romania's involvement in the marketing campaign for the BSR project cannot be reduced to a simple effect of the border country syndrome. In obvious ways, the transfer of strategic identity is related to the other mechanisms of regional projection, involving to a degree both the reflex to institutionalise, and the mimetic impulse derived from the success of the campaign for mainstream integration. At a different level though, the transfer of strategic identity draws our attention to the continuing presence in the landscape of European security of the contradictory logics of institutionalisation and geopolitics, which profoundly shape the constitution of the Black Sea region as the mirror reflection of Romania's geopolitical self. The reassertion of Romania's geopolitical worth through the Black Sea region draws on an atemporal understanding of the 'region' and of 'geopolitics' alike. At the same time, the making of the Black Sea region on Romania's strategic image hints that the Black Sea region's 'geopolitical' identity is constructed in the same way that Romania's identity is. In this sense, the making of the Black Sea region continues the struggle to (re)define Romania's identity through the (re)definition of its geographical location – a struggle that involved several phases in the politics of regional labelling which saw Romania move in and out of the Balkans,¹⁰⁸ Central Europe,¹⁰⁹ South-East Europe and 'Centre-South Europe'.¹¹⁰

CONCLUSION

The political and hermeneutical strategies of regional construction outlined above suggest that the most interesting way to engage the Black Sea region project analytically is to examine the manner in which its actors use regionness as a legitimating framing device. Impossible politically, the critique of the BSR project is most productive in drawing our attention to: 1) the constant interplay between the security logics of institutionalisation and geopolitics, which is a fundamental aspect of contemporary European security; 2) the dynamic relationship between the categories of security and region in the formulation of any regional initiative, especially under the auspices of European security integration; and 3) the undisputable transfer of these conceptual categories from analytical to political takes on regional security. Not that the making of the Black Sea region comes as a surprise: both the study of regions and the study of contemporary European security offer significant

evidence of previous region-making initiatives. What is at least to some degree surprising is to see that this exercise in region-making draws from previous political and analytical experience, and speaks simultaneously to analysts¹¹¹ – whose support it tries to enlist, and whose criticism it tries to pre-empt – as well as policy makers.

‘Why (the Black Sea) region?’ is thus a question equally pertinent politically and epistemologically. Conceptually rich but politically contradictory, the BSR project suggests not only that there is an interplay between conceptual logic and political praxis, between the categories used by analysts and the actors analysed — i.e., a double hermeneutics — but also that these actors are fully aware of the double hermeneutics, and make full political use of it. There is, in other words, a double hermeneutics of the double hermeneutics, which means that the hermeneutics of the Black Sea region will not settle the debates about regions, regionality and regionalism in general. The temptation to read the BSR project as a successful validity test of region-making theories – as opposed to those which stress their objective existence – is twice prevented. On the one hand, the double hermeneutic of the Black Sea region is more likely another nail into the coffin of empirical validation-driven epistemologies, since the reality we are attempting to interpret not only turns out to be, but also tries to be imbued with theoretical constructs. On the other hand, the analysis of each empirical context suggests the simultaneous presence of various conceptual constructs which shape and at the same time subvert regional politics: the notion of a ‘made’ or ‘becoming’ region is equivalent politically to that of an objective or ‘eternal’ one.

However, the analysis of this empirical context did not intend to deliver a grand resolution of the regions debate. Rather, the relationship between concept and praxis – between the categories of region and the political and hermeneutical mechanisms that deploy them – suggested by the BSR project draws attention to the contextual making of ‘region-making’ itself. To put it differently, the study of the BSR project shows that region-making can only be understood in its political context. The question ‘Why a region?’ is therefore likely to produce different answers in different contexts. We can expect therefore the hermeneutical and political strategies that actually make different interpretations of regions politically meaningful not to be uniform and algorithmic according to some – no matter how many or few – categories of region. Key to understanding region-making contextually are therefore (1) reading the relationship between the categories of ‘region’ used and the logic of interaction that characterises a particular context and (2) understanding the constitutive effects of these categories of region, which are not only convenient descriptions, but also circumscribe political praxis and thus affect the ability of the region-making project to achieve its declared aims.

In the case of the Black Sea region, this context is obviously European security integration, and the moulding of the project into a regional form

points directly at the relationship between region and security, two categories which necessarily and continuously presuppose each other. This reading of the BSR project has pointed out its inherent contradictions, mapped the hermeneutical strategies that signified politically the visions of region at work, and drawn attention to the normative dimension of the spillover between analysis and praxis. Perhaps predictably, the strongest normative implication of this reading of the BSR project comes from the project's continued attachment – through the framing of the region as a 'new' pivot of history – to a geopolitical understanding of European and global security that feigns transhistoricity while continuously reinventing the conditions of its existence.¹¹² Not only does this geopolitical framing of the Black Sea region stand in acute contradiction with the general logic of European integration, but it also (re)claims the geopolitical significance of the region drawing on an essentially anti-geopolitical understanding of regions whose emancipatory impulse the project does not always follow. The 'conceptual and ideological plasticity'¹¹³ inherent in the making of the Black Sea region prompts therefore a constant re-evaluation of the deep logic of European security, of the role played in it by regional formats, and of the political and normative role played by the theories used to make sense of both.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their constructive comments on earlier versions of this article, I am indebted to Mark Bassin, Alan Ingram, Richard Mole, Karen Smith, Radu Ungureanu, and the two anonymous reviewers of *Geopolitics*.

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2. C. S. Browning, 'The Region-Building Approach Revisited: The Continued Othering of Russia in Discourses of Region-Building in the European North', *Geopolitics* 8/1 (Spring 2003) p. 48.

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16. See *The National Security Strategy of Romania* (Bucharest: Romanian Presidency 2006), available at <<http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/SSNR/SSNR.pdf>>; M. Geoană, 'Regional Security and Democratic Development in the Black Sea Region', *Nixon Centre Program Brief* 10/2 (3 Feb. 2003); M. Geoană, 'Romania's Black Sea Agenda – and America's Interests', *In the National Interest* 31/6 (11 Feb. 2004); M. Geoană, 'Speech at the Seminar on "Challenges and Opportunities in the Black Sea Region. Contribution of International Organizations to Enhancing Regional Stability"', 11 Dec. 2004; M. Geoană, 'Security Cooperation with Russia, Ukraine, and the Caucasus: Opportunities and Challenges for EUCOM in the Black and Caspian Sea Regions. Leveraging an Enlarged Euro-Atlantic Community in the Black Sea Region', Address at the Seminar of the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 23 July 2004; G. C. Maior and M. Matei, 'The Black Sea Region in an Enlarged Europe: Changing Patterns, Changing Politics', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 16/1 (Winter 2005) pp. 33–51; O. Dranga, 'Negotiating Security Cooperation in the Black Sea Region', Speech at Harvard University Black Sea Security Program's Regional Workshop, Batumi, Sept. 2004, available at <<http://www.harvard-bssp.org/publications/?id=162>>.

17. The members of BSEC are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine; Austria, Belarus, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Tunisia and the US have observer status.

18. The members of the Community of Democratic Choice are Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine, while Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, the US, the EU and the OSCE have observer status. See 'Declaration of the Countries of the Community of Democratic Choice', Kyiv, 2 Dec. 2005.

19. The BSF is an initiative of the Romanian government launched in June 2006; see 'Joint Declaration of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership', Bucharest, 5 June 2006, at <<http://www.blackseaforum.org/>>.

20. R. D. Asmus et al., *A New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region* (Washington: The German Marshall Fund 2004); R. D. Asmus (ed.), *Next Steps in Forging a Euroatlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea* (Washington: The German Marshall Fund 2006). See also R. D. Asmus, 'Westernize the Black Sea Region', Project Syndicate Commentary (2004), available at <<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/1680/1>>; R. D. Asmus, 'Anchor the Black Sea Region in the West', *The Nation* (8 Sept. 2004); R. D. Asmus, *Istanbul Paper No. 2: Developing a New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region* (Washington: The German Marshall Fund 2004); R. D. Asmus and B. P. Jackson, 'The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom', *Policy Review* 125 (June–July 2004) pp. 17–26; B. P. Jackson, 'The "Soft War" for Europe's East: Russia and the West Square Off', *Policy Review* 137 (June–July 2006) pp. 3–14; V. Socor, 'Advancing Euro-Atlantic Security and Democracy in the Black Sea Region', Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on European Affairs, 8 March 2005; B. P. Jackson, 'The Future of Democracy in the Black Sea Region', Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on European Affairs, 8 March 2005.

21. I will use the abbreviation 'BSR project' when referring to the Black Sea region *project*. I am aware of the problems generated by lumping together three different types of actors – a state, a lobby, and a network of international institutions and initiatives – but the 'BSR project' is a useful abbreviation which, while only an approximation of political reality, does not distort it. While some of the regional actors speak of 'the *project* of bringing peace and stability to the region' – see Geoană, 'Regional Security' (note 16) – the term is used in this article as a shorthand for the drive to raise the profile of the region in order to address different security problems, and at the same time to construct the very idea of the Black Sea region.

22. C. King, *The Black Sea: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004); O. Pavliuk and I. Klymush-Tsintsadze (eds.), *The Black Sea region. Cooperation and Security Building* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe and East-West Institute 2004); S. Blank, 'Security in and around the Black Sea: Is a Virtuous Circle Now Possible?', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 16/3 (Summer 2005) pp. 44–66; S. Blank, 'The Black Sea Region: Time for a Transatlantic Initiative', *New Europe Review* 2/3 (2005), available at <<http://neweuropereview.com/English/Blank-English.cfm>>; M. Emerson, 'The Black Sea as Epicentre of the Aftershocks of the EU's Earthquake', Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) *Policy Brief* 79 (2005).

23. Asmus and Jackson (note 20) p. 5.

24. H. Akinci, 'Developing a New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea region: Constraints and Prospects', in Asmus et al. (note 20) p. 62.

25. Maior and Matei (note 16) p. 50.

26. For example H. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *The Geographical Journal* 23/4 (April 1904) pp. 421–37; K. Haushofer, 'Why Geopolitik?', in G. Ó Tuathail et al. (eds.), *The Geopolitics Reader*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge 2006) pp. 40–42; N. J. Spykman and A. A. Robbins, 'Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy, II', *American Political Science Review* 33/4 (Aug. 1939) pp. 591–614; R. Strausz-Hupé, *Geopolitics: The Struggle for Space and Power* (New York: Putman 1942).

27. O. Pavliuk, 'Introduction', in Pavliuk and Klymush-Tsintsadze (note 22) p. 9.

28. See for example C. Ionescu, 'Marea Neagră – Un Pivotal Geopolitic în Dispută', *Geopolitica* 1/5 (2005) pp. 44–8; A. Goncharenko, 'The Wider Black Sea Area: New Geopolitical Realities, Regional Security Structures and Democratic Control: A Ukrainian View', *NATO Defense College Occasional Paper* 11/2 (2005) pp. 23–32; M. E. Ionescu, 'Wider Black Sea Region Cooperation: A Historical Survey', *NATO Defense College Occasional Paper* 11/1 (2005) pp. 19–27; M. Aydin, 'Europe's Next Shore: The Black Sea region after EU Enlargement', EU Institute for Security Studies *Occasional Paper* 53 (2004) p. 5; F. Bordonaro, 'Bulgaria, Romania and the Changing Structure of the Black Sea's Geopolitics', *Power and Interest News Report* (PINR) (20 May 2005), available at <<http://www.nato.int/romania/blackseageopolitics.pdf>>. V. Socor referred to the Black Sea region as the 'new pivot of history' (quoted

in *Ziua* (26 May 2006)). Cf. Mackinder (note 26); but see comments in M. Bassin and K. E. Aksenov, 'Mackinder and the Heartland Theory in Post-Soviet Geopolitical Discourse', *Geopolitics* 11/1 (Spring 2006) pp. 99–118, and P. Venier, 'The Geographical Pivot of History and Early Twentieth Century Geopolitical Culture', *The Geographical Journal* 170/4 (Dec. 2004) pp. 330–336.

29. Jackson, 'The "Soft War"' (note 20) p. 4.

30. Y. Kochubei, 'The Black Sea Orientation: Past and Present', *Politics and the Times* 1 (2003), available at <<http://www.pltimes.uct.kiev.ua/en20031/KOCHUBEI.HTM>>; R. Bruce Hitchner, 'The Sea Friendly to Strangers: History and the Making of a Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea', in Asmus et al. (note 20) pp. 27–32; Aydin, 'Europe's Next Shore' (note 28) p. 5.

31. Jackson, 'The "Soft War"' (note 20); Bruce P. Jackson, 'The Future of Democracy in the Black Sea Region', Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on European Affairs, 8 March 2005; Socor (note 20); Bordonaro (note 28); Goncharenko (note 28) p. 25; 'The Black Sea: Russian Lake', *Gândul* (17 Sept. 2005); 'The "Russian Lake" Reclaimed by Băsescu', available at <http://www.mediauno.ro/eng/articol.php?id_articol=7712>; For analyses, see F. S. Larrabee, 'The Russian Factor in Western Strategy toward the Black Sea Region', in Asmus et al. (note 20) pp. 147–56; Y. Valinakis, 'The Black Sea Region: Challenges and Opportunities for Europe', *Chaillott Papers* 36 (1999).

32. Asmus and Jackson (note 20) p. 4.

33. Maior and Matei (note 16) p. 40.

34. Maior and Matei (note 16) p. 49; see also R. D. Asmus, 'Next Steps in Forging a Euroatlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea', in Asmus, *Next Steps* (note 20) p. 16.

35. See Asmus, *Next Steps* (note 20) p. 16; Matthew J. Bryza, 'The Policy of the United States toward the Black Sea Region', in Asmus, *Next Steps* (note 20); Geoană, 'Security Cooperation' (note 16).

36. Asmus, *Istanbul Paper* (note 20) p. 5.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Asmus and Jackson (note 20) p. 5.

39. 'Joint Declaration of the Black Sea Forum' (note 19).

40. Asmus and Jackson (note 20) p. 2.

41. Pavliuk (note 27) p. 7; C. King, 'Is the Black Sea a Region?', in Pavliuk and Klympush-Tsintsadze (note 22) p. 17; Klympush-Tsintsadze, 'Cooperative Efforts in the Black Sea Region', in Pavliuk and Klympush-Tsintsadze (note 22) p. 34; Valinakis (note 31) p. 23; King, *The Black Sea* (note 22) p. 244; Moshes, 'Littoral States and Region Building', in Pavliuk and Klympush-Tsintsadze (note 22) p. 64.

42. M. E. Ionescu (note 28) pp. 24–26; Jackson, 'The "Soft War"' (note 20).

43. See note 7 above.

44. B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1991) p. 190.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 191–92.

46. B. Buzan et al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner 1998) p. 12, emphasis added.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 48, emphasis added.

48. Dranga, 'Negotiating Security Cooperation' (note 16).

49. 'Joint Declaration of the Black Sea Forum' (note 19).

50. Asmus and Jackson (note 20) p. 3.

51. Maior and Matei (note 16) p. 34.

52. See for example A. Sarcinschi and C. Băhneanu, *Redimensionări ale Mediului de Securitate Regional (Zona Mării Negre și Balcani)* (Bucharest: Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare 2005) pp. 26 and 35.

53. See notes 26–28.

54. Mackinder (note 26) p. 435.

55. Maior and Matei (note 16) p. 34.

56. C. Ionescu (note 28); V. Socor quoted in *Ziua* (26 May 2006).

57. Aydin, 'Europe's Next Shore' (note 28).

58. Goncharenko (note 28) p. 23.

59. M. E. Ionescu (note 28); Kochubei (note 30);

60. Goncharenko (note 28) p. 23.

61. J. S. Nye, *International Regionalism* (Boston: Little Brown 1968) p. 338.

62. Jackson, 'The Soft War' (note 20), p. 4, emphasis added.

63. Ibid., p. 2.
64. See the useful discussion in A. B. Murphy et al., 'Is There a Politics to Geopolitics?', *Progress in Human Geography* 28/5 (Oct. 2004) pp. 619–40; also V. Mamadouh and G. Dijkink, 'Geopolitics, International Relations and Political Geography: The Politics of Geopolitical Discourse', *Geopolitics* 11/3 (Autumn 2006) pp. 349–66.
65. Browning (note 2) pp. 63–66 makes a similar observation regarding region-building projects in the European North.
66. For a useful background discussion, see MacLeod and Jones (note 7) pp. 674–76.
67. King, 'Is the Black Sea a Region?' (note 41) p. 17.
68. C. King, 'Rediscovering the Black Sea: The Wider Southeast Europe in History, Politics, and Policy', Meeting Report 228, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (2001), available at <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1422&fuseaction=topics.publications&doc_id=8494&group_id=7427>.
69. Răzvan Ungureanu, 'Remarks on a Security Concept for the Wider Black Sea Area', *NATO Defense College Occasional Paper* 11/1 (2005) p. 15
70. Ungureanu, 'Remarks' (note 69) p. 15; see also King, *The Black Sea* (note 22) pp. 8 and 243; Hitchner (note 30) p. 27; Bryza (note 35) p. 38; Aydin, 'Europe's Next Shore' (note 28) pp. 20–21; I. Munteanu, 'The Black Sea Area: A Mix of Identities in Formation', in Asmus et al. (note 20) pp. 77–82; J. Simon, 'Black Sea Regional Security Cooperation: Building Bridges and Barriers', in Asmus, *Next Steps* (note 20) pp. 84, 86, 89; A. Tadevosian, 'Armenia – Between the Wider Black Sea Region and the Greater Middle East', in Asmus, *Next Steps* (note 20) p. 158; 'Regionalism, Sub-Regionalism and Security in the Black Sea Region', IREX Black and Caspian Sea Collaborative Research Program, Project Final Research Report (2004), available at <<http://harvard-bssp.org/publications/?id=146>>.
71. Geoană, 'Security Cooperation' (note 16) p. 2, emphasis added.
72. Neumann (note 9) pp. 58–59.
73. Paasi, 'Region and Place' (note 6) pp. 478, 481; Väyrynen (note 8) p. 27.
74. Asmus and Jackson (note 20) p. 3.
75. M. Aydin 'Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area and its Integration into Euro-Atlantic Structures', *NATO Defense College Occasional Paper* 11/1 (2005) p. 30.
76. V. Adamkus, 'Black Sea Vision', Speech of President of the Republic of Lithuania, 26 Oct. 2005, available at <<http://www.president.lt/en/news.full/6123>>, emphasis added.
77. Asmus, *Istanbul Paper* (note 20) p. 13.
78. Asmus, 'Anchor the Black Sea Region' (note 20) p. 2.
79. S. Celac, 'The Regional Ownership Conundrum: The Case of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation', in Asmus, *Next Steps* (note 20) p. 225.
80. Dranga, 'Negotiating Security Cooperation' (note 16) p. 6, emphasis added.
81. Paasi, 'Region and Place' (note 6) p. 480.
82. Moshes (note 41) p. 69.
83. Asmus and Jackson (note 20) p. 2.
84. 'Joint Declaration of the Black Sea Forum' (note 19).
85. R. D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press 2002) pp. 228–38; Emerson (note 22) p. 6.
86. A. Moulakis, 'The Mediterranean Region: Reality, Delusion, or Euro-Mediterranean Project?', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 16/2 (Spring 2005) pp. 11–38.
87. Asmus and Jackson (note 20) p. 3. While 'Nordic' and 'Baltic' are not equivalent, my reference below to the mimesis of the 'Nordic/Baltic project' reflects the terminology used by the supporters of the BSR project; I thank one of the anonymous referees for drawing my attention to this distinction.
88. 'Interview with Boris Tarasyuk', *Baltinfo Newsletter* No. 83 (Nov.–Dec. 2006) p. 9.
89. Ambassador Josef Witejacz, Chairman of the Council of Baltic Sea States Committee of Senior Officials, speaking in the workshop 'The Architecture of Cooperation: Shaping a Common Vision and Setting a Common Agenda for the Black Sea Region', The Black Sea Forum, 5 June 2006.
90. Browning and Joenniemi (note 9) p. 243.
91. Browning (note 2) p. 57. See the discussion in Ciută, 'Parting the Black Sea' (note 10).
92. Browning (note 2) p. 52.
93. Wæver (note 9) p. 102.
94. Browning and Joenniemi (note 9) p. 241; Wæver (note 9) p. 100.
95. Wæver (note 9) p. 99; Neumann (note 9) p. 70.

96. Wæver (note 9) p. 77.
97. Browning and Joenniemi (note 9) p. 241.
98. Ibid., p. 245.
99. Ibid., p. 245.
100. T. Băsescu, 'Inaugural Speech', Bucharest, 21 Dec. 2004; T. Băsescu, 'Speech delivered on the Occasion of the Conference "Black Sea Area and Euro-Atlantic Security: Strategic Opportunities"', Bucharest, 20 April 2005, p. 3; T. Băsescu, 'The Black Sea Region – Advancing Freedom, Democracy and Regional Stability', Speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington DC, 10 March 2005.
101. See S. Celac, 'Five Reasons Why the West Should Become More Involved in the Black Sea Region', in Asmus et al. (note 20) p. 138.
102. See F. Ciută, 'A Life Less Ordinary: Romania on the Road to NATO', in Dennis Deletant (ed.), *In and Out of Focus: Romania and Britain. Relations and Perspectives from 1930 to the Present* (Bucharest: British Council Romania and Cavallioti 2005).
103. E. Constantinescu, 'The Security of Central Europe', Address at the 14th NATO Workshop on Political-Military Decision-Making, Prague, 1997, available at <<http://www.csd.org/97Book>>.
104. *Romania's Membership to NATO: Key Elements of the National Strategy* (Bucharest: Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1999) p. 2.
105. Maior and Matei (note 16) p. 36.
106. *The National Security Strategy of Romania* (2006), p. 19, available at <<http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/SSNR/SSNR.pdf>>.
107. Băsescu, 'The Black Sea Region – Advancing Freedom' (note 100).
108. See A. Severin, 'The Strategic Outlook For South-East Europe', *RUSI Journal* 142/4 (1997) p. 8; E. Constantinescu, 'Message Regarding Romania's Security Strategy Addressed to the Chambers of the Romanian Parliament', 23 June 1999, p. 5; X. Gérard, 'La Roumanie dans la nouvelle Europe', *Défense Nationale* 55/8–9 (1999) pp. 131–32; A. Năstase, 'Speech at the International Conference "Facing the Future: Towards Social Democratic Solutions for South East Europe"', Bucharest, 11 Oct. 2004.
109. A. Pleșu, 'Future Security Challenges and NATO-Partner Cooperation in the Context of EAPC and PfP', Address to the EAPC Ministerial Meeting, Brussels, 8 Dec. 1998, p. 1; T. Meleşcanu, 'Security in Central Europe: A Positive Sum Game', *NATO Review* 41/5 (1993) p. 4 (online edition).
110. I. Iliescu, 'Speech at the SEECF Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs', Bucharest, 22 Oct. 2004; Geoană, 'Challenges and Opportunities in the Black Sea Region' (note 16).
111. For example, in his speech at the conference 'Black Sea Area and Euro-Atlantic Security: Strategic Opportunities' Bucharest, 20 April 2005, Romanian President Traian Băsescu urged the participants to create 'a new conceptual approach on regional security issues'; available at <<http://www.nato.int/romania/president2004.htm>>.
112. See Bassin and Aksenov (note 28) p. 115–16.
113. Ibid., p. 116.