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THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE KARABAGH CONFLICT IN THE CONTEXT OF BSEC AS A REGIONALISM CASE

(BİR BÖLGESELCİLİK ÖRNEĞİ OLARAK KEİ BAĞLAMINDA KARABAĞ ÇATIŞMASININ YANSIMALARI)

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Abstract: *This paper inquires the impact and the implications of the Karabagh conflict in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) context through the conceptualization of regionalism. In the framework of the main argument that the Karabagh conflict stands as a major reason for the stagnation of the BSEC since its establishment, it first provides a brief account on the concepts of region and regionalism. Second, it provides information on the birth, the evolution, and the stagnation of the BSEC. Third, it investigates the reverberations of the Karabagh conflict on the basis of the data collected from the national and the international news archives. Fourth, it attempts to construe the data on the basis of the relevant sub-arguments in regionalism. In the final analysis, the high likelihood of the stagnation of the BSEC is affirmed, given the persistence of the Karabagh conflict.*

Keywords: *Regionalism, BSEC, Turkey, Armenia, Karabagh.*

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Öz: *Mevcut çalışma, bölgeselcilik kavramsallaştırması üzerinden Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği Örgütü (KEİ) bağlamında Karabağ çatışmasının etkisi ve yansımalarını araştırmaktadır. Karabağ çatışmasının, tesis edilmesinden itibaren KEİ'nin duraksamasının başat nedeni olduğu temel savı çerçevesinde, öncelikle bölge ve bölgeselcilik kavramlarına ilişkin özet bir açıklama sunmaktadır. İkinci olarak, KEİ'nin doğuşu, evrimi ve duraksamasına dair bilgi vermektedir. Üçüncü olarak, ulusal ve uluslararası haber arşivlerinden elde edilen veriler temelinde Karabağ çatışmasının yansımalarını incelemektedir. Dördüncü olarak, söz konusu verilerin, bölgeselcilik dahilindeki ilgili alt savlar temelinde yorumlanmasına çalışılmaktadır. Nihai tahlilde, Karabağ çatışmasının devamlılığı dikkate alındığında, KEİ'nin gelecekte yüksek durağanlık olasılığı teyit edilmektedir.*

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Bölgeselcilik, KEİ, Türkiye, Ermenistan, Karabağ.*

Introduction

It has become conventional wisdom since the 1990s that, as an idea and practice in international relations, regionalism can bring about new cooperation schemes in different issue areas, after the long years of Cold War which held the states captive with its bi-polar world imperatives. The 1990s witnessed a distinct rise in the number of regional formations in the economic and the political domains, among others. This decade was also proof that both the liberal and the former communist states could participate in the newly emerging regional organizations, despite the many differences they had. Although the ultimate objective was the provision of sustained momentum in development and cooperation in as many fields as possible, in reality, regionalism attempts turned out to be protracted and conflictual in practice.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is a regional organization that fits into this context both in terms of timing and substance. Being a regional attempt of the early 1990s, it was formed by the liberal and the post-communist states of the larger Black Sea basin, where overall pre-regional links were weak, with the aim of establishing trade and investment links and with the expectation that this would eventually evolve into political cooperation. Although all the members thought they would gain and therefore should join (the alternative being left out of such a regional initiative), it soon turned out that pre-existing problems between the members worked to hinder the aspired cooperation levels in the BSEC.

Contrary to the initial plans, the BSEC embarked into a stagnation phase after its establishment. Upon this backdrop and given the lack of relevant research in Turkish and English literature on the topic, this paper argues that the Karabagh conflict, imported into the BSEC when Armenia became a member, is a major issue that has plagued progress in the BSEC since its inception and one which still holds the organization captive.

As such, the present paper is an attempt to explain and understand the repercussions of the problem in the BSEC context. Accordingly, the first part of the paper provides a conceptual summary of the concepts of "region" and "regionalism" in the discipline of International Relations, with a number of relevant sub-arguments derived from the regionalism literature. The second part looks at the emergence, evolution, and stagnation of the BSEC. Part three attempts to manifest the reverberations of Armenia's membership and the Karabagh conflict (touching upon the genocide claims where necessary) in three periods, based on the national and the international news archives. In the fourth part, the empirical data provided in the third part is construed on the basis of the four explanatory sub-arguments in the regionalism literature which are of high relevance -stimulus of diffusion, identity factor, macro crises

and economic intentions. In the final analysis, it affirms the dim prospect for progress in the organization as long as the Karabagh conflict remains.

1. Region and Regionalism: Definition, Emergence, Evolution

Given the mostly elusive and multifaceted nature of the concepts of "region" and "regionalism", the need to provide a relevant descriptive account is obvious, as is the case with almost all the concepts in social sciences. The lexicological roots of the concept "region" lie in the Latin words "regio" and "rego", meaning "direction" and "to steer, to rule", respectively. Geographically speaking, a region may denote both a border that surrounds it and a defined space within those borders.[1] The exact geographical borders of a region may not always be fixed; it may be the case that naturally dividing landscape formations -such as rivers, mountains, seas- demarcate a given region. The exact opposite may well be the case wherein man-made, plain border arrangements are a matter of concern. Any other border demarcation conceptualization and practice would fall between these two, which has the potential to render the subject more convoluted than it is, as it brings in politics. The emergence and evolution of regions arguably reflect a conglomeration of drivers and impediments, which are, of course, open to argument. The same conglomeration offers the potential to aptly put into perspective our understanding of "region" in the discipline of International Relations. Marek Koter's[2] concise presentation can be referred to as a starting point, which is provided in Table 1.

1 Fredrik Söderbaum, "Exploring the Links between Micro-Regionalism and Macro-Regionalism," in *Global Politics of Regionalism*, eds. Mary Farrell, Björn Hettne and Luk Van Langenhove (London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005), 90.

2 Marek Koter, "The Geographical-Historical Region: Its Notion, Origin and Factors in its Development," in *Region and Regionalism: Social and Political Aspects*, ed. Marek Koter (Opole, Lodz: Silesian Institute in Opole, 1995), 24-25.

Factors in Regions' Birth, Development and Survival	
Geographical	Territory, frames, landscape, conditions
Historical	Name, symbols, tradition, heritage, organization
Ethnic	Language, dialect, feeling of separateness
Religious	Values, ideas, ceremonials, mentality
Other cultural	Customs, habits, folklore, music, art
Settlement	Housing, architecture, settlement patterns and networks
Communicational	Inner oriented supplying ties center-periphery
Focal center	Historic core, center of rule, power
Economic	Base of existence, productive bonds, social-professional structure, type of economic structure

Table 1: Factors in Regions' Birth, Development and Survival

Of importance is the fact that these factors are likely to have impact on regional formations with varying degrees, much as they were in the past. Of equal importance is another fact that regions are not objective entities but are constructed socially. More neatly explained, "regions are social constructions that make reference to territorial location and to geographical or normative continuity".[3] From this perspective, it is possible to maintain that regions are by no means homogeneous or unitary. They are likely to go through processes of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction, under the impact of internal and external factors, ranging from system to unit-level.[4]

"Regionalism", on the other hand, can be defined as a primarily state-led process of building and sustaining official regional organizations with the participation of at least three states, which includes the transfer of at least some degree of sovereignty to the organization.[5] A swift glance at the evolution of regionalism discloses that the first identifiable examples appeared in Europe, as "early regionalism", in ancient Greece, based on internal and external threat perceptions of the time. The regionalism attempts of former colonies and similar attempts between the colonial empires and colonies ensued in the subsequent eras, which would be followed by the post-war European regionalism, known as "old regionalism".[6] The third type of regionalism, referred to as "new regionalism", emerged roughly in the mid-1980s, reflecting a more multidimensional nature, which was not solely

3 Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6-7.

4 Söderbaum, "Exploring the Links," 91.

5 Börzel and Risse, "Introduction," 7-8.

6 Fredrik Söderbaum, "Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism: The History and Scholarly Development of the Field," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18-23.

focused on protecting economies, trade and security but previously not-so-often-included sectors as business, civil society and university collaboration, for instance. Proving that all regionalism attempts are products of the conjuncture in which they are born, the birth of new regionalism demonstrated the factors brought by the globalization process as of the mid-1980s: economic links, in/stability of the global trade system, the newly independent countries, and rising criticism of the neoliberal system, etc.[7]

The diffusion of regionalism is an aspect that is integral in the regionalism literature. It is posited that there must be a stimulus for the diffusion of regionalism, which is obviously the other regional formations in different regions. What is diffused will potentially cover the idea of regionalism, the internal organizational structure, and the policy areas to be handled. In addition, diffusion should be understood as both the outcome and process. Diffusion may occur by direct influence mechanisms, also labelled as "sender-driven", wherein an actor directly promotes its policies among a given group of actors. Also, actors in the existing regional organizations may emulate other regional organizations' policies and institutional functioning, which is labelled as "recipient-driven" diffusion.[8] That said, it would not be wrong to maintain that both approaches contain lesson-drawing for the benefit of the concerned actors in a given region, related to various policy areas. To give an example, from an international political economy viewpoint, preferential trade agreements and free trade agreements are said to be effective instruments that stimulate regional diffusion. Yet, one should also be reminded that the thorough adoption in recipient-driven diffusion cases is reportedly rare and, as such, lesson-drawing in these cases may result in selective adoption, arrangements, and local behavior in a regional formation.[9]

Identity is another key issue which is problematized in the relevant literature. Do regions lead to homogeneous/collective identities or vice versa? Whereas there is yet no uniform answer to this categorical question, certain observations do exist. The argument that regional organizations may have an indirect effect on the identity of its members merits mention. The main idea here is that a regional organization can produce a base on which the member states can communicate, and thus can lead to security and communication communities.[10] However, whether an identity formation will occur or not will

7 Söderbaum, "Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism," 26.

8 Thomas Risse, "The Diffusion of Regionalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 88-89.

9 Risse, "The Diffusion of Regionalism," 101-102.

10 Michael Bruter, *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) ; Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); cited in Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Regional Identities and Communities," *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 568.

be much dependent on the absence or presence of pre-existing collective identities among the members. Needless to say, a minimal level of pre-existing collective identity among a region's states can be expected to lead to a collective identity formation in a hypothetical regional organization, while the exact opposite will not leave much room to argue for a positive outcome.[11] As mentioned before, it is also important to be aware of the fact that no region can construct a clear-cut, neatly defined, single identity; rather all regional formations are bound to manifest multiple and evolving identities.[12] Overall, irrespective of other drivers, commonalities in identity are said to condition regional formation outcomes, the absence of which is likely to produce weak institutionalism.[13]

Additionally, the history of regionalism discloses that macro crises in the international system have led to the emergence of regional formations.[14] Both the end of World War II and the beginning of the post-Cold War era are cases in point. These two system-level shocks provided a critical juncture for institutionalization on a regional scale, giving birth to the European and other regional formations, such as the European Union (EU - 1958), League of Arab States (LAS - 1945), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS – 1983), North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA - 1994), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN - 1967), and Southern Common Market/Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR – 1991). Moreover, the existing domestic, regional and international milieus can act as drivers of regionalism. The democratic states are said to be more likely to aspire for regional integration compared to the authoritarian states and, as such, they would be willing to take part in regionalism efforts[15] -although this line of thinking obviously fails to notice the regionalism examples among authoritarian states such as the Arab League.

The existing regional organizations may also be an impetus for the formation of similar structures elsewhere, due to being perceived as a model.[16] Of course, the success of the new regional organization will by no means be certain, given the observation that the regionalism examples which are outcomes of

11 Checkel, "Regional Identities and Communities," 562.

12 Nikki Slocum and Luk Van Langenhove, "Identity and Regional Integration," in *Global Politics of Regionalism*, eds. Mary Farrell, Björn Hettne and Luk Van Langenhove (London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005), 148, 151.

13 Louise Fawcett, "Drivers of Regional Integration: Historical and Comparative Perspectives," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 42.

14 Paul Gillespie, "Crises as Drivers of Integration in Europe and Asia: Crisis as Threat," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 85-101.

15 Fawcett, "Drivers of Regional Integration," 42-43.

16 Fawcett, "Drivers of Regional Integration," 43.

emulation can manifest a gap between discursive aspirations and practices, implying a partial or incremental emulation.[17] It is thus worthy to keep in mind that "while [regional] institutions are a crucial component of regional integration they are not always 'drivers' in a strict sense. They are not themselves responsible for the success or failure of regional integration projects."[18] Furthermore, the pre-existing international organizations may also act as drivers for regional organization attempts, as seen in the United Nations (UN) Charter, Chapter VIII, Articles 52-54,[19] which explicitly promote regional gathering efforts.[20] Then again, obvious core states or a hegemon in a region might pioneer in the formation of regional organizations, although this is not a rule; since not all core states may be willing, and not all regions may have core states. Yet, if and when they do pioneer an establishment of a regional organization, they mostly end up assuming key roles in the organization.[21]

By and large, regionalism with economic intentions would be shaped by economic considerations and, more precisely, by the logic of capital that can offer the states some incentives for uniting to benefit from the regional market

17 Laura Allison, "Exogenous Factors: Are Other Regions Drivers of Integration?," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 361.

18 Edward Moxon-Browne, "The Role of Institutions in Regional Integration: A Comparative Reflection," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 70.

19 ARTICLE 52: (1) Nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action, provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations. (2) The Members of the United Nations entering into such arrangements or constituting such agencies shall make every effort to achieve pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies before referring them to the Security Council. (3) The Security Council shall encourage the development of pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies either on the initiative of the states concerned or by reference from the Security Council. (4) This article in no way impairs the applications of Articles 34 – 35.

ARTICLE 53: (1) The Security Council shall, where appropriate, utilize such regional arrangements or agencies for enforcement action under its authority. But no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without authorization of the Security Council with the exception of measures against any enemy state, as defined in paragraph 2 of this Article, provided for pursuant to Article 107 or in regional arrangements directed against renewal of aggressive policy on the part of any such state, until such time as the Organization may, on request of the Governments concerned, be charged with the responsibility for preventing further aggression by such a state. (2) The term enemy state as used in paragraph 1 of this Article applies to any state which during the Second World War has been an enemy of any signatory of the present Charter.

ARTICLE 54: The Security Council shall at times be kept fully informed of activities undertaken or in contemplation under regional arrangements or by regional agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Charter of the United Nations and the Statute of the International Court of Justice, 1945, accessed on October 21, 2019, https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text/

20 Fawcett, "Drivers of Regional Integration," 44.

21 Fawcett, "Drivers of Regional Integration," 46-47.

and to boost trading and investment possibilities.[22] As can be expected, the historical record of regionalism is known to reflect trade and investment as important drivers of regional integration. While initial trade and investment links may be considered as factors that pave the way for and subsequently facilitate regional integration, the aftermath may be a different story altogether: it has recently been shown that the *entire* trade and investment links between countries in a regional organization might not guarantee a sustainable regional economic integration and might not stay unharmed if economic and political crises emerge. Likewise, it has been shown that the *most intensive* trade links in (a) given sector(s) between states in a regional organization may not always guarantee sustainable economic integration. What do these inferences entail? For a sustainable economic regional integration to develop, two prerequisites should be provided: balanced and converging current accounts in the member states and an established, satisfactory level of similarity in trade; in particular, export competitiveness between the member states.[23]

It must also be borne in mind that initially intense and unproblematic trade relations may not suffice to keep a regional organization firm due to the possibility of economic crises in the future. This implies that attention must be paid to other integration sectors in order to help the survival of the regional organization. Besides, the necessity of employing a gradual approach should be recognized as any regional organization naturally goes through a preliminary phase which involves adjustment and learning in economic and trade integration.[24] In other words, no regional formation should be expected to produce miraculous outcomes in a short time-frame.

Finally, from a trade and investment viewpoint, one other visible characteristic of regionalism is the commitment to open regional formations as opposed to occasional fears that regional gatherings might lean towards closed regional formations. Open regionalism denotes elimination of trade and investment hurdles within a given regional organization and most notably, the external

22 James Mittelman and Richard Falk, "Global Hegemony and Regionalism," in *Regionalism in the Post-Cold War World*, ed. Stephen C. Calleya (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), 5.

23 Bernadette Andreosso-O'Callaghan, "Trade and Investment Drivers: Qualifying The Type of Economic Integration in a Historical Perspective," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 228. See also: Imtiaz Hussain and Roberto Dominguez, *North American Regionalism and Global Spread* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-12. For a perspective emphasizing the importance of international business in regional integration, see: Louis Brennan, "International Business as a Driver of Regional Integration in Asia," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 199-214. For the role of preferential trade agreements in regional governance, see: Soo Yeon Kim, Edward D. Mansfield and Helen V. Milner, "Regional Trade Governance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 323-350.

24 For these factors, see: Sheila Page, *Regionalism Among Developing Countries* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 2000), 283-284.

tariffs.[25] However, despite this positive probability, there is always a pessimistic one that there is no evidence that regionalism in trade and investment sectors brings together all different parts of a certain region at all times.[26]

Without doubt, the literature on regionalism is much broader and richer than this volume of arguments. Notwithstanding, for the purposes of the present paper, the compact account above should suffice for inquiring the subject matter at hand, i.e. the implications of the Karabagh conflict and Armenia's membership since the early phases of the BSEC. That necessitates understanding the birth and evolution of the BSEC in the first place. A compact account on BSEC is thus in order here.

2. BSEC: Backdrop, Emergence, Evolution, Stagnation

The idea of a Black Sea cooperation framework was launched by Şükrü Elekdağ, former Turkish ambassador to the United States (US), in 1989. Elekdağ publicly pronounced his proposal at a panel titled "Global Changes and Turkey", arranged by the Turkish Henkel, attended by journalists Mehmet Barlas and Çetin Altan from Turkey, former Soviet ambassador Albert Chernishev, and Elekdağ himself as speakers, on January 9, 1990. The proposal was first met by silence in the audience, except for Chernishev who stated that he had found the idea positive and yet did not know how Moscow would react.[27] Elekdağ was of the opinion that amidst the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the weakening of the Soviet Union, a suitable climate had emerged for international economic cooperation, which had the potential to turn the Black Sea basin into a region of economic cooperation and to promote peace and stability, benefiting from the geographical proximity and the complementary nature of the regional states' economies. Elekdağ published a series of articles in newspaper columns on the idea, the first of which was published by the Turkish daily *Cumhuriyet* on February 20, 1990. The idea, as he notes, was not fully embraced by all the bureaucratic units and the business world in Turkey initially, but later was.[28]

25 Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne, "Conclusion: The New Regionalism," in *Regionalism and World Order*, eds. Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1996), 251.

26 Gamble and Payne, "Conclusion: The New Regionalism," 259.

27 Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), *Minutes of Plenary Session*, Term 22, Legislative Year 1, Session 31, February 2003, accessed September 30, 2019, https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/tutanak_g_sd.birlesim_baslangic?P4=8545&P5=B&page1=43&page2=43

28 TGNA, *Minutes of Plenary Session*, Term 22, Legislative Year 1, Session 31; Şükrü Elekdağ, "Cumhurbaşkanı Özal'a Açık Mektup," *Milliyet*, June 28, 1992, 13.

Viewed retrospectively at the actor level, on the one hand, the Black Sea initiative can be described as a product of the newly born regional orientation in Turkish foreign policy in the concerned period when arguments, claiming Turkey's role and importance in its region had waned, were in the air. The European Community (EC) had rejected Turkey's application for full membership in 1989 and even before that, it had declared that it would not accept any new members until 1993. The importance of Turkey's geostrategic location, and thus, its identity as a valued Western ally were also questioned by the West by the end of the Cold War. Therefore, Turkey sought alternative orientations in its foreign policy, one of which was the Black Sea basin (next to the Balkans and Central Asia), as observed in the statement of a former cabinet member, Kamran İnan: "For the first time in 400 years, Turkey is no longer under military threat from Moscow. The Turkish nation is now full of self-confidence and no longer must accept whatever we are offered. We can look all directions."[29] The emphasis that the Black Sea project was not an alternative and/or supplementary formation of the EC was also an integral part of Turkish foreign policy rhetoric in the given period, a view also shared by the other members partaking in the project.[30]

Viewed at the international level, on the other hand, chances for liberal economy to spread into the Soviet space had already become an issue often debated, including forecasts about the Black Sea region. This was because the regional cooperation attempts after the dissolution of the Soviet Union had by then emerged as a new trend based on flexible forms of trade arrangements which encouraged better market access in lieu of more official, binding preferential trade agreements and/or free trade zones, with a less pronounced necessity of political cooperation (despite the undeniable existence of the unresolved political problems/conflicts between Armenia and Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey and Greece, Moldova and Romania, and, at later stages, between Russia and Ukraine, and Russia and Georgia).[31]

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29 Jonathan C. Randal, "Turkey Woos Its Ex-Communist Neighbors," *The Washington Post*, February 4, 1992, A10, LexisNexis Academic ; "Turkey Hopes Its Ship is Coming in," *The Guardian*, February 3, 1992, 6, LexisNexis Academic.

30 Hugh Pope, "Black Sea States Lay Aside Rivalries in Pursuit of Unity," *The Independent*, February 4, 1992, 8, LexisNexis Academic ; Faruk Şen, "The Black Sea Economic Cooperation: A Supplement to the European Community," *Aussenpolitik* 44, no. 3 (1993): 281-287 ; John Palmer, "Turkey Offers EC Delay in Return for Regional Role," *The Guardian*, March 9, 1992, 8, LexisNexis Academic ; Hugh Pope, "Summit Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation Signed Today," *The Independent*, June 25, 1992, 14, LexisNexis Academic ; Hugh Pope, "Black Sea States in Search of a Joint Identity," *The Independent*, June 26, 1992, 12, LexisNexis Academic. In the subsequent phases when Turkey-EC/EU relations became tense, Ankara is also known to have stated that the BSEC objectives included removal of customs barriers (although this was contrary to the Customs Union arrangement with the EU and the establishment of a free trade zone, Turkey apparently used the BSEC card in relations with the EC/EU): "Tansu Çiller'den Avrupa'ya KEİ Kozu," *Milliyet*, February 2, 1997.

31 Gülnihal Mahmutoğlu, "Trade Creation and Trade Diversion in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Area: A Gravity Approach," Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Economics, Bilkent University, 1998, 8-10 ; "Black Sea Pact," *Journal of Commerce*, June 26, 1992, 6A, LexisNexis Academic.

Reflecting the *zeitgeist*, for instance, Gerald Robbins wrote that the Soviet Caucasus, made up of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, presented a promising market potential due to its entrepreneurship tradition and geographical proximity to Turkey, which was an emerging regional trade actor. These three Caucasus republics of the Black Sea region, wrote Robbins, had twice the population of the Baltic republics, which was an economic asset. Supporting the same view was Ronald Linden, former senior advisor at Political Risk Services, who stated that "the Caucasus character has an intuition for knowing what business wants" and wrote of the often-heard informal and out-of-the-record suitcase trade between the Black Sea regional states as the starter of future intense trade links.[32] Robbins thus reflected the forecast at the time that joint ventures with Turkey were an option which could minimize the investment risks in the Black Sea region because Turkey's cultural ties and geographic location could enable the Turkish firms to establish distribution links after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In fact, in a way to confirm this approach, former Turkish President Turgut Özal had already announced that the Black Sea initiative was not an attempt to create a Black Sea common market *per se* but rather an area where people, goods, services and capital could move freely.[33]

Although Özal's statement was no news to the concerned state and business communities, an interesting argument likening the ties between the US and Mexico to those between Turkey and the Caucasus emerged anew in 1992, which deserves mention. It was argued that the US paid insufficient attention to the Caucasus -as one of the hinterlands of the Black Sea basin- by merely providing agricultural credits, humanitarian airlifts and conferences at the time and yet a more robust approach was recommended by the former US President Richard Nixon. Nixon put forward the idea of establishing twinned "maquiladora" plants where the parts of products made in Turkey would be assembled across Turkey's border in the Caucasus; just as the US produced parts to be assembled in Mexico, which was cheaper in terms of labor cost, and also employment-generating in the US view. Nakichevan (Nakhchivan) was named as the ideal locus for this effort because it bordered Turkey, Armenia and Iran and, of course, because it was not a conflict-ridden area (yet). It was further argued that such a Black Sea pact-supported project could be sponsored by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), to be backed by US advisors.[34] Evidently, such an approach indicated that the Black Sea project was right

32 Gerald Robbins, "Turkey, Gateway to Soviet Trade," *Journal of Commerce*, September 27, 1991, 1A, LexisNexis Academic.

33 "For the Record," *The Washington Post*, July 24, 1991, A18, LexisNexis Academic.

34 Gerald Robbins, "Maquiladoras in the Caucasus," *Journal of Commerce*, March 23, 1992, 12A, LexisNexis Academic.

from the beginning a US-backed one, apparently with high economic expectations.[35]

It was upon such backdrop that the first negotiation for the establishment of the organization was held on December 19, 1990 in Ankara, made up of Turkish, Soviet (Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), Bulgarian and Romanian representatives which produced an initial consensus, to be followed by meetings in Bucharest, Sofia and Moscow in 1991 that resulted in a declaration to be signed in İstanbul. The declaration could not be signed as planned owing to the break-up of the Soviet Union but was eventually signed, after a short period of uncertainty, on February 3, 1992. It was declared that Greece and Yugoslavia could join the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region upon application and an invitation was extended also to Albania. Finally, the Summit Declaration on the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Bosporus Statement were issued on June 25, 1992, which highlighted the importance of free market economy, good-neighborliness, peaceful settlement of disputes in line with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) principles and documents.[36] Following the 1998 Yalta Summit, it acquired the status of an official regional organization.

The BSEC is an intergovernmental organization in which subsidiary bodies function in specific issue areas. States and NGOs are sometimes allowed to participate in the BSEC as observers. As the name of the organization implies, the main issue area of the BSEC is economic and trade cooperation, but the BSEC is not a free trade area. The BSEC has its own bank; the Black Sea Trade and Economic Development Bank, located in Thessaloniki. The members of the BSEC are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia (which joined in 2004), Turkey and Ukraine.[37]

The decision-making procedures of the BSEC are based on specific types of majority. The decision-making in the BSEC is, apart from the Summit, bestowed upon the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The cooperation areas of the organization are energy, transportation, communication, trade and development, banking and finance, institutional renewal and good governance, combatting organized crime, environmental protection, agriculture, healthcare,

35 "Black Sea Countries Plan Meeting in Tampa," *St. Petersburg Times*, July 24, 1993, 11A, LexisNexis Academic. The earliest concrete indicator of this support was the venue of one of the earliest BSEC meetings, Tampa Bay, the US on September 24-26, 1993, where the US businesspeople -and state officials- would be offered an overview of the trade and investment opportunities in Black Sea region.

36 Tunç Aybak, "Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and Turkey: Extending European Integration to the East?," in *Politics of the Black Sea: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict*, ed. Tunç Aybak (London, New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 31-32.

37 Aybak, "BSEC and Turkey: Extending European Integration…", 40 ; Marc Cogen, *An Introduction to European Intergovernmental Organizations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 93-98.

emergency, research and development, education, tourism, culture, exchange of statistical data and the promotion of small and medium entrepreneurs (SMEs).[38] Among the cooperation issue areas, science and technology cooperation is viewed as a success story compared to other areas in the BSEC history, which is implemented by a BSEC organ, the International Center for Black Sea Studies, on a project basis.[39]

Based on such an institutional setting, at the outset, three progressive stages for the BSEC were envisaged, the first of which was the transitional stage that began right after its establishment in 1992. The completion of the reestablishment of governmental institutions in the former communist states, the resolution of ethnic conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the start of free movement of people in the BSEC area, and the introduction of the liberal market economy in the former communist countries were the tasks that required urgent implementation. The second stage would require focusing on qualitatively augmenting the regional production capacity as well as improvement of regional infrastructure. Finally, in the third stage, the BSEC would aim at integration with the EC and Asian economies.[40]

Ambitious as it might be, viewed through the Turkish perspective, the aspired progress did not take place. This was because the domestic political confrontations, among other problems, in Turkey by 1997 pointed to a loss of government interest. Government interest had been lost to such an extent that the 1997 BSEC meeting in Turkey was organized with the contributions of the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) and efforts of the business world, who criticized the incumbent Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan -who backed economic cooperation with the Arab world but failed to back the BSEC.[41] It was observed that the BSEC was in a stagnation phase. Not surprisingly, Elekdağ, as the brainchild of the BSEC project, was the first to eloquently lay out the components of the stalemate in the BSEC by 1997: settling for merely preparing the common infrastructure projects awaiting financing, the failure of devising and implementation of even the most simple measures required for augmenting the intra-regional trade and investment that constitute the backbone of economic cooperation, the lack of the elimination of double taxation, the lack of mutual promotion of investments and the lack of visa exemption agreements for businesspeople.[42]

38 "Black Sea Economic Cooperation," RhodesMRC, accessed September 30, 2019, https://www.rhodesmrc.org/2010bsec.php ; Cogen, *An Introduction to European Intergovernmental Organizations*, 99-107.

39 Panagiota Manoli, *The Dynamics of Black Sea Subregionalism* (London: Routledge, 2012), 75.

40 Ayşenur Toptaş, "The Fundamentals of the European Economic Community and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation: A Renewed Institutional Architecture for the BSEC," Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Management, Bilkent University, 1993, 112-116.

41 Yavuz Kılıç, "İşbirliği Karadeniz'de Battı," *Milliyet*, May 1, 1997.

42 Şükrü Elekdağ, "KEİ'nin Zaafiyetleri," *Milliyet*, May 5, 1997.

In an effort to launch a "Black Sea Police Organization",[43] certain attempts in the BSEC ensued following the change of government in Turkey by July 1997,[44] although the members of Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) could not attend the BSEC meetings due to the more urgent sessions of votes of confidence at the TGNA at the time. Moreover, the composition of the Turkish parliamentary delegation to be sent to the Yalta meeting was still uncertain by January 1998.[45] After the tenth anniversary of the BSEC, a self-criticism from the business community that political instability, low budgets, inadequate capital savings, absence of institutions and instruments required by the market economy in the member states, including Turkey, continued to plague the BSEC process as far as low trade volumes and GDP levels were concerned, was not surprising. Occasional arguments among the business community were heard that the BSEC did not receive much attention after Özal's death and that it was not given the attention it deserved out of the official apprehension that Turkey's EU bid might recede into the background.[46]

By 2007, Turkey participated in the bi-annually held BSEC Foreign Ministers meeting in İstanbul, for the first time at the ministerial level since the former Foreign Minister Tansu Çiller's term of office. The meeting was considered as different in comparison to the former ones in respect of the possibility it offered for a new focus on the acceleration of the BSEC, specifically in terms of turning the Black Sea Ring Road project into a reality and prospects for energy cooperation, also in terms of the participation of the EU and the US representatives among the observers,[47] who were inclined to closely monitor the Russian and Turkish positions regarding the Black Sea in the then existing conjuncture.[48] The need for a new orientation and vision was stressed, by both Turkish and other members, as would be in the ensuing meetings.[49]

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43 "Teröre Karşı Büyük İşbirliği," *Türkiye*, October 22, 1997.

44 "Gözler KEİ Pastasında," *Milliyet*, July 4, 1997; "Demirel: İpekyolu Bu Kez Batı'dan Doğu'ya Uzanacak," *Milliyet*, September 16, 1997.

45 Ferai Tınç, "Dış Politikanın da Hesabı Sorulmalı," *Hürriyet*, January 11, 1998.

46 "KEİ Fırsatını İyi Kullanamadık," *Yeni Şafak*, April 7, 2003.

47 "Türkiye'nin Karadeniz Atağı," *Milliyet*, October 30, 2006 ; "Karadeniz Yükseliyor, KEİ de Beraberinde," *Hürriyet*, February 14, 2007 ; "Minister Says Black Sea Organization to be Reformed Under Turkish Presidency," *BBC Monitoring Europe*, April 20, 2007, LexisNexis Academic ; "Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği veya Barış Mantığı," *Radikal*, June 5, 2007 ; "Asrın Projesi," *Star*, June 17, 2007; "Artık Karadeniz'e Yelken Açma Zamanı!" *Cumhuriyet*, June 19, 2007 ; "Kaybedilen Karadeniz," *Sabah*, June 24, 2007 ; "KEİ'ye Yeni Vizyon Gerek," *Hürriyet*, June 25, 2007 ; "KEİ Doruğuna Enerji Gölgesi," *Cumhuriyet*, June 26, 2007 ; "Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği!" *Cumhuriyet*, June 26, 2007 ; "Karadeniz'de Enerji Savaşları ve Rusya-Türkiye İlişkileri," *Yeni Şafak*, June 26, 2007; "Rusya Ne Yapmaya Çalışıyor?" *Hürriyet*, June 27, 2007 ; "Black Sea Countries Sign Declaration on Transport Cooperation," *BBC Monitoring Kiev Unit*, April 11, 2008.

48 The US aimed at a strong existence in the Black Sea while Russia -already stronger in economic and military terms by then- did not want an elevated role for the US in the Black Sea. The rivalry was most evidently observed in respect of the US-backed Nabucco and Russia-backed South Stream gas pipeline projects and the ongoing fuss on the military presence in the Black Sea at the time.

49 "Turkish President Says Black Sea Organization Needs New Dynamism," *BBC Monitoring Europe - Political*, June 25, 2008, LexisNexis Academic.

Keeping in mind the account on regionalism narrative in the first section, one feels compelled to infer upon the short descriptive account in the present section that although it started out as a quite ambitious regionalism endeavor, the Black Sea project did not live up to the expectations in the later phases, and thus has not been a game changer so far. The BSEC is now at a point where it can neither be given up as an idea and practice, nor is it observed to produce any grassroots change that can remarkably boost its efficiency due to the chronic problems it has come to endure. Significantly, the challenges bound with the Karabagh conflict as an issue that is linked to Armenia's membership and their implications, as the subject matter of the paper, constitute a case in point, which the following section explores.

3. Armenia's Membership, the Karabagh Dispute, and the Genocide Claims in the BSEC: Litmus Test for Cooperation or Conflict?

In hindsight, the acceptance of Armenia as a member in the BSEC looks quite puzzling indeed, given mainly the chronic issues of the Karabagh conflict and the genocide claims of Armenia, which necessitates inquiring the state-of-affairs back then. The relevant timeline since 1990 demonstrates three interrelated periods which disclose observable mindsets and attitudes in accordance with the leadership changes in Armenia in the course of BSEC membership. A chronological unfolding of developments is provided below, based on the available news archival data.

Phase 1: 1990-1997

This initial period in the BSEC context is characterized by the preliminary attempts of Armenia's first President Levon Ter Petrossian's leadership to establish Armenia's relations with the outside world within the limits of possibilities. Cognizant of the fact that Armenia was a territorially and economically isolated and landlocked country in want, Ter Petrossian took efforts for a new Armenia and one possible opening for Armenia in this respect seemed to be the burgeoning Black Sea project engineered by Turkey. From the Armenian official viewpoint, membership in the Black Sea Cooperation Region could help reduce the trade barriers Armenia faced, increase the number of partner countries in its neighborhood, diversify its market, induce trade creation, settle the Karabagh conflict and, perhaps, finally establish diplomatic relations with Turkey.[50]

50 Gerard J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 242-250; Manoli, *The Dynamics of Black Sea Subregionalism*, 97.

Upon such background, already in 1990, the first encounter between Özal and Ter Petrossian had taken place in Ankara. Özal did include Armenia in the opening discussions of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone. Murat Sungar, the former spokesman of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that "in principle, we are open to economic cooperation with Armenia", stressing that this must be conditional on mutual respect, including that for shared borders.[51] By February 1992, at the meeting on the Black Sea project, the former Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Hüseyin Sadıkov and the former Armenian acting Foreign Minister Armand Navassardyan accepted an offer by the former Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev at a side-meeting for discussing the Karabagh conflict, viewed by the former Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin as a first step, which could develop if regional cooperation in the Black Sea gained a real momentum.[52]

On February 26, 1992, Çetin gave a speech at the TGNA in which he explained that the Azerbaijani and the Armenian representatives got together in Moscow (with Russian and Turkish initiatives) on February 20, 1992 and declared their consensus on a ceasefire in Karabagh. He also clarified that the contacts between the Turkish and Armenian officials did not mean in any way the establishment of diplomatic relations.[53] This was followed by a talk over a proposal that Turkey open its Black Sea port in Trabzon to Armenian access in return for Armenia opening its highways to Turkish commercial trucks heading for Azerbaijan and further east. Armenia went so far as to request a facilitator role -for the proximation of the trade communities of two states- from a prominent Turkish businessperson, which did not materialize. The Armenian massacre of Azerbaijani Turks in Karabagh at the time had arguably been the factor behind the result.[54]

Such pre-BSEC practices remained in the following stages of this period. Even during the signing of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation agreement on June 25, 1992, although they acknowledged that the Karabagh conflict would cloud cooperation efforts in the Black Sea region, the former Azerbaijani leader Ebulfez Elçibey and his Armenian counterpart Ter Petrossian avoided mention of the Karabagh war in the speeches they delivered[55] and also refrained from

51 Hugh Pope, "Turkey in Tentative Talks with Armenia," *The Independent*, December 29, 1990, LexisNexis Academic.

52 "Azeris, Armenians Accept Peace Invitation," *The Globe and Mail*, February 4, 1992, LexisNexis Academic.

53 Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), *Journal of Minutes*, Term 19, Volume 4, Legislative Year 1, Session 41, February 26, 1992, 405-406.

54 Blaine Harden, "Brief Turkish-Armenian Thaw is Chilled: Unforgiving Memories, Region's New Hostilities Derail Attempt to Erase an Old Antagonism," *The Washington Post*, March 30, 1992.

55 "11 Sign Economic Accord … Pledge Includes Six Old Soviet Republics," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 26, 1992, LexisNexis Academic ; "Summit Silence Reflects Hopes for CIS Solution," *Courier-Mail*, June 26, 1992, LexisNexis Academic ; Robert Haupt, "Black Sea Pact Aims at Peace and Prosperity," *Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia), June 26, 1992, LexisNexis Academic.

speaking with each other at the Summit meeting, indicating a silent awareness or consensus that there was no need for the statement of the obvious. Thus, the war remained unaddressed at the meeting.

By 1993, hopes for a reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia as well as Azerbaijan and Armenia in and outside of the Black Sea context became dimmer due to mounting attacks on the Turkish territories by the terrorist organization PKK, which was proven to have received assistance from Armenia, and among, allegedly, other neighbors.[56] The former head of Democratic Left Party (DSP) Bülent Ecevit stated that it was necessary to prevent foreign assistance to the PKK and, later, to stage military operations against Armenia and the north of Iraq, if necessary, under Article 51 of the UN Charter.[57] Likewise, ambassador İnal Batu, Turkey's former Permanent Representative at the UN, almost simultaneously criticized the Armenian invasions of Zengilan and Horidis and called for the immediate withdrawal of Armenian fighting groups. Batu openly stated that the UN supported Armenia.[58] Increased atrocities in Karabagh perpetrated by Armenia only attenuated the already fragile cooperation prospects within the Black Sea context. Concurrently, Özal's death in April the same year heralded a slower Black Sea integration process. By May 1994, the Bişkek Protocol provided a ceasefire in Karabagh, which ended up being violated,[59] giving hints that the conflict had not yet run its course.

Within the Black Sea cooperation context, the unresolved conflict with the ongoing ceasefire violations found expression for the first time in the speeches of former President of Azerbaijan Haydar Aliyev and his Armenian counterpart Ter Petrossian at the 1997 Black Sea Economic Cooperation meeting in İstanbul, upon which former Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze called for refraining from politicization of the trade meeting.[60] An unofficial 45-minute pull-aside meeting was held between the two leaders upon the initiatives of the former Turkish President Süleyman Demirel, and yet the meeting did not amount to anything.[61]

Such unofficial pull-aside meetings and/or mediation/facilitation attempts by Ankara in the BSEC context would continue, with unsatisfactory outcomes. It is also worthwhile to take note of the fact that the 1997 meeting served as

56 "Hain Füzelerin Parasını, Rum Kilisesi Vermiş," *Hürriyet*, June 8, 1997 ; "Komşular Terör Suçu İşliyor," *Milliyet*, June 8, 1997.

57 "DSP Genel Başkanı Bülent Ecevit, Güneydoğu'daki Terörü Önlemek İçin Dış Desteği Kesmek Gerektiğini Söyledi," *Hürriyet*, October 27, 1993.

58 "İnal Batu'dan BM'ye Ermeni İşgalleri Hakkında Eleştiri," *Türkiye*, November 14, 1993.

59 "Azeriler Ağlıyor," *Türkiye*, April 23, 1997.

60 "Demirel: KEİ Hayal Olmaktan Çıktı," *Hürriyet*, April 29, 1997.

61 "Baba, Süper Arabulucu," *Hürriyet*, April 29, 1997.

an occasion to question the balance sheet of the words and deeds of the Black Sea project in a wider sense. The outweighing answer as to why the BSEC could not gain real momentum broadly implied the domestic political and economic turmoil in Turkey (as the owner of the project) that absorbed Turkey's political and economic agenda since the early 1990s. Equally importantly, the initial hopes that the Karabagh conflict could be ended quickly due to the BSEC's possible impact of cooperation were dashed as Armenia continued to intensify its attacks and invasions in Karabagh border lines and no meaningful economic integration ensued. In sum, this first phase stands as a period during which the initial mutual willingness for dispute settlement did not materialize both in and out of the BSEC context.

Phase 2: 1998-2008

A new period began in the political history of Armenia in March 1998 when radical hardliner Robert Kocharian, of Karabagh origin, became the new president of the country. Kocharian pressed for a non-compromising stance in relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, unlike his predecessor, and this attitude had its own ramifications in the BSEC context. Kocharian wanted the Karabagh conflict to be settled in a way that only Armenia would prefer, as he insisted that it was Armenia that won the war on the battleground and therefore it had the right to dictate its own terms on Azerbaijan at the negotiating table, although it was plain and clear that legally and according to international norms Karabagh was still Azerbaijani territory. This uncompromising approach would unfold in expected ways in the years to come.

Already as prime minister after February 1997, Kocharian was known to have stated that the ceasefire process had lasted longer than it should and therefore the Karabagh problem had to be solved in line with Armenia's demands. Similarly, he declared that he "will not beg that Turkey open its border and start trade cooperation."[62] The previously witnessed war of words was once again seen at the June 1998 Yalta Summit at which the BSEC acquired a legal status. After Aliyev explained the Azerbaijani stance on Karabagh and demanded that Armenia bring an end to invasion, Kocharian blamed Azerbaijan as the starter of the problem. This time, it was the former Ukranian President Leonid Kuchma who interrupted by stating that the Summit was intended to be a forum to discuss regional issues, and not bilateral problems.[63] The second event of importance at the Summit was Kocharian's pull-aside meeting request from Demirel. In reply to Kocharian's emphasis on the

62 Ardan Zentürk, "Ermenistan Sorunu," *Dünya*, February 7, 1998.

63 "Karadeniz'e KEİ Mühürü," *Radikal*, June 5, 1998.

"weight of history" in relations, Demirel stated that as a state with a long past, Turkey did not take decisions with sentiments and that it did not have problem with a state that is only six-years old.[64] Perhaps the most striking statement from Kocharian was when he said that Armenia would not recognize the functions of the OSCE Minsk Group (tasked with overseeing the resolution process of the Karabakh conflict) and would not act in parallel with its negotiation method.[65] Apparently, Kuchma's mediation had failed at the Yalta Summit.

The beginning of the 21st century was a period when Armenia stepped up its activities concerning genocide claims against Turkey at the global level and yet this problem was not one that was as frequently mentioned as the Karabagh issue at the BSEC gatherings. In face of augmenting anti-Turkish global pressure and accusations related to genocide claims in this period, it was occasionally heard that the early 1990s were a period of opportunities in bilateral relations with Armenia under Ter Petrossian, that it was Turkey that accepted Armenia in the BSEC despite the latter not being a Black Sea littoral state, and that it did not cut relations with Armenia in the BSEC -which it could.[66] Amidst the high tension, the very day the European Parliament (of the EU) criticized Turkey on the genocide claims, Turkey hosted the opening ceremony of Armenia's diplomatic mission at the BSEC headquarters in İstanbul. While this could be interpreted as a softening in relations, the participation of the Swedish parliamentarian Per Gahrton at the event seems to be open to debate as Gahrton was the politician who signed and submitted the alleged genocide-related report (the Caucasus Report) to the European Parliament which accepted it.[67] In a "business as usual" climate, the 2002 Summit of the BSEC did not witness the participation of Armenia at the presidential level. Former Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian and Turkey's mediation efforts continued whereas no meeting took place between Haydar Aliyev and Oskanian.[68]

By 2004, as Arsen Avagian, the representative of Armenia at the BSEC in İstanbul, concurred, a softening in bilateral relations was observed in the contacts between the two states' foreign ministers at the June 2004 NATO summit, whose reflections were vaguely seen in the BSEC. Avagian

64 Yalçın Erdoğan, "Demirel – Koçaryan Restleşmesi," *Milliyet*, June 6, 1998; Tufan Türenç, "Koçaryan Kafası İşte…," *Hürriyet*, June 6, 1998 ; Cüneyt Arcayürek, "Her Şey – Hiçbir Şey," *Cumhuriyet*, June 6, 1998.

65 İsmet Berkan, "Ermenistan'la Sil Baştan," *Radikal*, June 6, 1998 ; Hulusi Turgut, "Çankaya'da En Sıcak Yıl 12B: Ermeniler, Tarihten Husumet Çıkarıyor," *Sabah*, June 10, 1999.

66 Şahin Alpay, "Hakemliğe Gidelim," *Milliyet*, November 4, 2000.

67 "Medeniyet Dersi: İstanbul'da Ermeni Bayrağı," *Hürriyet*, March 2, 2002.

68 "Dorukta Gündem Enerji," *Cumhuriyet*, June 25, 2002; Özgen Acar, "Karadeniz Ekonomi Kuşağının 10. Yılı," *Cumhuriyet*, June 25, 2002 ; "Karadeniz'in Kalbi İstanbul'da Atıyor," *Yeni Şafak*, June 25, 2002; "KEİ'nin 10'uncu Yaşı," *Radikal*, June 25, 2002.

apparently supported the view that the intense economic and trade links eventually would lead to political dialogue and considered the indirect trade between Turkey and Armenia via Georgia and Iran raised hopes in this respect, by confirming that the Armenian domestic market was full of Turkish products, as well as the existence of direct flights by the companies Tower Travel, Fly Air (Turkey) and Armavia (Armenia). The establishment of diplomatic relations without any pre-conditions was considered of utmost concern by Avagian.[69]

Diplomatic exchange of words ensued at the June 2006 Bucharest meeting of the BSEC which constituted a platform for the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents İlham Aliyev (who had assumed presidency in October 2003) and Kocharian to resume dialogue concerning Karabagh and yet no positive result was obtained. The former Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht as mediator concluded that the two presidents continued to see more risks than opportunities.[70] The news in 2007 that Turkey would participate at the ministerial level at the foreign ministers summit for the first time since Çiller's term of office in the 1990s and the establishment of a working group on cultural exchange programs were topics in the BSEC agenda, enough to raise hopes in terms of rejuvenation of the BSEC and the progress in the two states' relations in the BSEC context. The officials, as it seemed, resorted to the traditional preference of starting out with low political issues such as culture, as an accustomed practice in handling chronic political problems.[71] The subsequent June 2007 BSEC Summit again witnessed a Karabagh-related tension between Azerbaijani and Armenian representatives Aliyev and Oskanian.[72] Seemingly, as a result of the "zero problems with the neighbors" policy being tested at time, Turkey proposed the establishment of history committees to investigate the genocide claims. However, this was tied by Armenia to the pre-condition of the opening of common borders, as Avagian declared at the press conference at the summit, who also described this proposal as just a "tactic" by Turkey.[73] In sum, the Kocharian period was characterized by intensified adversarial positions of Turkey and Armenia as well as Azerbaijan and Armenia in the BSEC context.

69 "Bölgesel İşbirliğine Doğru," *Cumhuriyet*, October 4, 2004.

70 "Romania: Black Sea Forum Discusses "Frozen Conflicts" in Armenia, Moldova," *BBC Monitoring Europe – Political*, June 5, 2006, LexisNexis Academic ; "Armenian, Azeri Presidents Fail to Agree on Conflict – Belgian Report," *BBC Monitoring Europe – Political*, June 6, 2006.

71 "Türkiye'nin Karadeniz Atağı," *Milliyet*, October 31, 2006.

72 "KEİ Doruğuna Enerji Gölgesi," *Cumhuriyet*, June 26, 2007.

73 "Hepimiz Karadenizliyiz," *Hürriyet*, June 26, 2007; Hilal Köylü, "Karadeniz Ülkeleri Zirvesine Enerjide Rus-Türk Çekişmesi Damgasını Vurdu," *Radikal*, June 26, 2007 ; Yalçın Erdoğan, "Israra Rağmen Putin Terk Etti," *Hürriyet*, June 26, 2007.

Phase 3: 2008-2019

This period roughly started with the presidential take-over in April 2008, by Serzh Sargsyan, another political figure who also belonged to the so-called hardliner Karabagh clan. This period would be characterized by the trials and tribulations of the above-mentioned zero problems policy of Turkey, yet this time for a longer period, leading to mixed results.

In 2008, a project to stimulate investments and trade in BSEC was presented at a meeting organized by the BSEC, UNDP and the Armenian Development Agency (ADD), which was the first project funded by both Turkey and Armenia. The main aim of the project was to develop foreign trade and exports of Armenian products.[74] Shortly after, a Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC meeting on terrorism was held in Yerevan, attended by the Turkish delegation as well. Despite the apprehension that such a delicate issue area might lead to tension given the ASALA and Justice Commandos terrorism of the past that targeted Turkey and the often-heard news that the PKK was aided and abetted by Armenia, no war of words was recorded.[75] Another conciliatory step had already been noticed the same month when the BSEC members signed a declaration on the topical transport cooperation.[76] The former foreign ministers of the two states held a side-meeting in İstanbul in November 2008 in the BSEC context at a time when the repercussions of the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war were quite visible: Ali Babacan and Edvard Nalbandian exchanged views on the proposed Caucasus Security and Cooperation Platform in addition to the possibility of the normalization of relations.[77] As another proximation effort, the football match between the two states' teams had already been played in Yerevan by then.[78]

The will to negotiate did not go beyond words as the April 2009 BSEC meeting in Yerevan demonstrated. At this meeting, former President Abdullah Gül's proposal for the resolution of Karabagh conflict was rejected by Armenia on the grounds that the Karabagh negotiations continued in the Minsk Group, between Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Armenian administration in Karabagh and there was no other negotiation context.[79] The contacts whose

74 "New Project for Black Sea Countries Presented in Armenia," *BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit*, April 3, 2008.

75 "Tarihi Konuları Tarihçiler Çözmeli," *Yeni Asya*, April 27, 2008.

76 "Black Sea Countries Sign Declaration on Transport Cooperation," *BBC Monitoring Kiev Unit*, April 11, 2008, LexisNexis Academic.

77 "Armenian, Turkish Foreign Ministers Discuss Ties in İstanbul," *BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit*, November 25, 2008, LexisNexis Academic.

78 "Nalbandyan: Sınır Koşulsuz Açılsın," *Cumhuriyet*, November 25, 2008.

79 "Türkiye Arabulucu Değil," *Cumhuriyet*, April 17, 2009. It is worthwhile here to note that in the official Azerbaijani stance, Armenia has direct control over Karabagh and as such, there is no separate, recognized, and official "Karabagh administration" in Karabagh that can be a party to the Karabagh resolution process.

way was paved by the BSEC eventually gave way to the signing of protocols in Switzerland between Turkey and Armenia, through the end of 2009. However, the political climate by 2012 permitted the observation that the opening in relations was left in words and the affairs turned to the default level. The striking development in this regard was Armenia's refusal to participate in the BSEC meeting in Baku,[80] not to mention the former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's attendance in the BSEC meeting in 2013 which did not last long and took place in a cold political environment, although news reflecting mixed observations were served in the respective media regarding the meeting.[81] It may be argued that the timing of the meeting was perhaps not well-planned, since it took place only four months after Davutoğlu had warned Armenia over its renewed land claims from Turkey, stating that "Armenia should know the limits of its capacity".[82]

The April 2016 War (the "Four Day War") in Karabagh between Armenia and Azerbaijan had a visible impact on the aggravation of the constant war of words at the BSEC meetings, which implied a higher tension with a different rhetoric, this time including the recent war. Mutual accusations over Karabagh of Azerbaijani and Armenian representatives at Belgrade (December 2016) and İstanbul (May 2017) meetings were cases in point.[83] Specifically, one curious development at the 2016 Sochi meeting of the BSEC -shortly after the war- was the continuation of Armenian representatives' constant calls against the politicization of the BSEC around the Karabagh problem, after which the Armenian Foreign Minister Nalbandian added the following statement, in which the foreign minister himself practiced the same politicization:

> "In regard to the NK conflict, I would like to remind that the [OSCE] Vienna and St. Petersburg summits first and foremost were aimed to stabilize the situation in the conflict zone… It is necessary to implement what was... emphasized and agreed upon in the framework of the Summits... to create conditions for the continuation of the negotiation process, i.e. the exclusively peaceful settlement of the conflict, the unconditional adherence to the 1994-1995 ceasefire agreements which

80 "Armenia Cannot Explain Refusal to Participate at BSEC Meeting," *Trend News Agency*, November 28, 2012.

81 "Armenia Will meet Davutoğlu with Exclamations 'Renegade Has No Place in Armenia'," *ArmenPress*, December 9, 2013, LexisNexis Academic; "Davutoğlu Gives Interview to Turkish Journalists in Yerevan," *ArmenPress*, December 12, 2013, LexisNexis Academic, "No Meeting to be Held between Armenia's President and Ahmet Davutoğlu," *ArmenPress*, December 13, 2013, LexisNexis Academic; "Davutoğlu: Erivan'da Psikolojik Eşik Aşıldı," *Milliyet*, December 13, 2013; "Davutoğlu's Visit Won't Give Anything: Giro Manoyan," *ArmenPress*, December 11, 2013, LexisNexis Academic.

82 "Turkish Foreign Minister Warns Armenia over Land Claims," *BBC Monitoring Europe – Political* (from the text of report in English by *Hürriyet*), July 18, 2013.

83 "Turkish President Agrees with Armenian Deputy FM – BSEC is Not Platform for Discussing NK Conflict," *ArmenPress*, May 22, 2017, LexisNexis Academic.

> have no time limitations, the creation of mechanism for the investigation of ceasefire violations, the expansion of the team of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office."[84]

While the customary battle of words of this kind had been known, an extraordinary development followed in 2017, which also had to do with the Karabagh issue. According to the Armenian allegations, the BSEC Parliamentary Assembly adopted a pro-Azerbaijani amendment to its Declaration of Regional Conflicts, in the absence of the Armenian delegation at the Kiev meeting. Allegedly, before the start of the session, the heads of all delegations and the BSEC secretary-general conducted a private meeting, during which the Armenian delegation was outside the meeting hall and were not informed that a meeting was being held. The Armenian delegation stated that this was a breach of code of ethics in BSEC, something that was never recorded before, claiming that an amendment regarding the conflicts in the region was made, which in the Armenian viewpoint, contradicted with the principles of international law such as "non-enforcement of the force and force threat, territorial integrity and the law of the peoples' free self-determination".[85] The amendment was "on the need to promote the restoration of the territorial integrity of the BSEC states."[86]

Shortly after, the former dissident journalist Nikol Pashinian seized power in Armenia through a popular protest-fueled "Velvet Revolution" in the spring of 2018, giving way to arguments full of high expectations for a change in Armenian foreign policy, in addition to changes in domestic politics of the country. After the initial and short-lived contacts between Aliyev and Pashinian on the Karabagh conflict, it soon became clear that the latter was no reformer when it came to Karabagh, hinting at an unchanging approach in the ensuing years of his administration. To give but an example, the expected ramifications of the Kiev episode were easily observed at the 2018 BSEC meeting in Yerevan, only a month after Pashinian's rise to power, when the Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Karen Nazarian accused Azerbaijan of trying to get the BSEC to adopt pro-Azerbaijani amendments and statements regarding the Karabagh dispute, just as they allegedly had done in the 2017

84 "Armenian FM Participates in OBSEC FMs' 34th Session," July 1, 2016, https://armenpress.am/eng/news/852996/armenian-fm-participates-in-obsec-fmsE28099-34th-session.html.

85 "During BSEC Assembly Armenian Delegation Left Room as Protest," *112.international*, November 29, 2017, http://112.international/politics/during-bsec-assembly-armenian-delegation-left-room-as-protest-23152-print.html ; "BSEC Declaration on Regional Conflicts Amended 'Without Armenia's Consent'," *Gagrule.net*, November 29, 2017, http://gagrule.net/bsec-declaration-regional-conflicts-amended-without-armenias-consent/

86 Abdul Kerimhkanov, "Armenia's Hopes for BSEC are Meaningless," *AzerNews*, November 8, 2018, https://www.azernews.az/region/140546.html.

Kiev meeting.[87] A similar accusation towards Turkey regarding the closed borders had been heard at the Tirana meeting only a week before.[88] In sum, the ongoing last period implies the existence of the accustomed discord over the Karabagh dispute and the genocide claims. Ultimately, politics seems to have taken over the economic agenda in the BSEC, as opposed to the initial plans.

While the above account *per se* is informative in terms of revealing the substance and impact of the major conflict in the BSEC, re-reading it in conjunction with the previously mentioned factors that shape regionalism will help the reader grasp a better understanding, which the ensuing section attempts to do.

4. The BSEC in a Quadro-Dimensional Perspective: More Impediments Than Drivers?

Stimulus of Diffusion. The emergence of the BSEC as an idea in the late 1980s reflects visible inspiration from the EC as a successful regionalism attempt, at a time when the appropriate scope of conditions for creating a similar institution in the Black Sea basin were thought to exist. In the circumstances of the time, the outweighing idea was that the Black Sea basin that was freed from the Soviet threat could now be turned into one of economic cooperation based on particular policy areas limited to economics and technical issues and this clearly emulated the line of thinking that created the European Economic Community (EEC). The diffusion in the case of the BSEC took place via a sender-driven mechanism, wherein Turkey -as the pivot- directly put forward and promoted the idea and sent the invitation to the littoral states and to certain others. However, although the process reflected an ambitious start, the supposed lesson-drawing for the benefit of all did not follow; in fact, the BSEC case turned out to reflect selective adoption and local behavior, affirming Risse's arguments.[89]

How does the subject matter fit into this argument? To a great extent, the answer to this question has to do with the two most ignored and sidelined facts concerning the Karabagh dispute and the genocide claims:

87 Artak Hambardzumian, "Azeri, Turkish Diplomats Attend Regional Meeting in Armenia," *Azatutyun*, June 27, 2018, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29323580.html ; "BSEC Ministerial Meeting Kicks Off in Armenia's Capital," *HyeTert*, June 28, 2019, https://hyetert.org/2018/06/28/bsec-ministerial-meeting-kicks-off-in-armenia-capital.

88 "Azerbaijan's and Turkey's Blockade of Armenia Contradicts Fundamental Principles of PABSEC, Sharmazanov Says in Tirana Sitting," June 21, 2018, *ArmenPress*, LexisNexis Academic.

89 See footnote 9.

i) The fact that the Karabagh dispute was still a low intensity conflict by 1990[90], one that had not yet reached the level of an outright war, which implied that a perception of a room for a cooperative maneuver existed on the part of warring states and, also by Turkey at the time concerned. Also, officially, the conflict was taking place on the Soviet territories which meant there was a low probability for the conflict to escalate while still under Soviet rule.

ii) In addition, the genocide claims were relatively a dormant issue in the initial Turkish-Armenian contacts by 1990, compared to the later phases in the relations, in and outside of the BSEC context. This boils down to the argument that Turkey's initiative to invite and include Armenia in the BSEC project at the outset was arguably compatible with the hopes that a war that was still in its early phases could be ended if parties in the conflict participated in this cooperative structure. However, the escalation of the conflict by Armenia as of 1992 resulted in the importation of the conflict into the BSEC. As the claims and accusations by Armenia in the previous section reveal, aspired regional cooperation was marred due to Armenia's diametrically opposing views with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Therefore, one can only speak of a selective -and not a thorough- adoption to the BSEC structure and of a local behavior -and not harmonious regional one-, which make the institution go around in circles at the end of the day. Hypothetically thinking, what kind of a diffusion process would develop if it had been Armenia that had applied to be included in the BSEC project upon its own initiative and if the two problematic issues had already been at their highest? This question deserves another research endeavor in its own right.

Identity Factor. To reiterate the previously stated identity-related arguments, hypothetically, there is always the possibility that a regional organization can develop a collective identity which can produce a common ground on which to communicate and cooperate.[91] Also, whether an identity formation will occur or not will largely depend on the absence or presence of any pre-existing identities among the states of a region.[92] In practice, the BSEC is a regionalism case which attests to the fact that no collective identity developed in it, as opposed to the initial hopes. This is because no pre-existing and large-spanning collective identity existed among the members of the organization. The organization is a platform where states with different abstract and concrete identity traits -such as cultural, political, structural, economic and several others- got together. All the other dyads (Turkey-Greece, Moldova-Romania, Russia-Ukraine, Russia-Georgia) aside (since they fall out of the

90 The conflict turned into an outright war when the Soviet Union disintegrated and Karabagh Armenians declared unilateral independence on January 6, 1992. Subsequently, Armenians got hold of the weapons and ammunition left by the Soviet Army and escalated the war.

91 See footnote 10.

92 See footnote 11.

scope of the present paper), Turkey-Armenia and Azerbaijan-Armenia have come to manifest constant conflictual identity perceptions and practices and so, no visible identity reconstruction took place because of the most chronic problems of Karabagh and alleged genocide issues between Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, as laid out in the preceding sections. As things stand, the only collective identity among the BSEC members seems to be geographical proximity. Likewise, as things stand, the solution for the said two problems can be a change of mind on the part of Armenia which needs this organization more than any other member, as a landlocked small state with unpromising macro- and micro-economic indicators.[93] And yet, remembering that even the relatively more cooperative Armenian leadership in the early phases of the state in the 1990s could not make it happen, the prospects seem to be dim for an identity evolution.

Macro Crises. The previously stated argument[94] that macro crises in the world have led to regional formations also seems to be related in that it helps understand Armenia's foreign policy decision-making concerning the pre-BSEC and post-BSEC periods. When the Cold War came to an end and a tumultuous new era began, Armenia began to attach great importance to the Black Sea region which it considered as a strategic bridge for reconnecting and restoring Armenia's ancient ties with Europe, as well as for reestablishing communication with the brethren of forefathers.[95] This new era also prompted Armenia to try to reinforce its sovereignty just as the other former communist states of the region, by establishing links among each other and with Europe. Likewise, it forced Armenia to take steps with a view to establishing friendly ties with the Black Sea states, which was particularly the case, given the Karabagh conflict,[96] since with its eastern and western borders closed, cooperation seemed to be a must with the Black Sea basin in the Armenian viewpoint.

Thus, the macro crisis of the time, i.e. the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, prompted Armenia to make preferences which would eventually approximate it to the emerging Black Sea project. It prompted Armenia to reciprocate the initiative of Turkey -as the core state-, a development which would have been unthinkable a few years before 1990. Overall, the BSEC example attests to the fact that a regional integration attempt induced by a macro crisis may lead to regional organizations and yet their aftermath may not be as promising. The main reason for this is again,

93 F. Didem Ekinci, "Küçük Devlet Dış Politikasında Zafiyet ve Dirençlilik: Ermenistan Örneği," *Ermeni Araştırmaları* no. 61 (2018): 71-106.

94 See footnote 14.

95 Styopa Safaryan, "Armenia and the Black Sea Region: 16-Year-Old Variable Geometry with Remaining Local Constants," *Xenophon Paper*, no. 2 (2007): 11-12.

96 Safaryan, "Armenia and the Black Sea Region," 13.

the Karabagh conflict. The conflict has a life of its own, in and outside of the BSEC context. Therefore, it seems quite difficult to be settled within the BSEC - with or without the stimulus of any macro crises.

Economic Intentions. The economic considerations, more precisely, the logic of neoliberal trade and global capital constitute significant drivers for regional formations.[97] However, as stated previously,[98] neither the entire trade and investment nor the most intense trade relations within a regional formation can guarantee a successful regional integration. Rather, it has been shown that the major determinants of a sound regional economic integration are balanced and converging current accounts of regional states as well as the similarity in trade or, more precisely, the export capacities of the regional states.[99]

The relevant World Bank data on current account balance since 1989 concerning the BSEC members reveal ambivalent figures until 2019. Some quick observations can be made here. There are no available data in the case of some states, which are post-communist. Only three states currently display no current account deficit: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, and Russia. There is no constant upward or downward trend as a pattern among the members, the yearly figures are quite volatile. The same is true for the individual yearly record of the members, taken separately. Russia leads the head in terms of current account balance, with surpluses, after suffering a quite problematic period in the 1990s. The current account figures of even the EU members are not similar, as data on Greece, Romania and Bulgaria disclose. Table 2, which reflects these and potentially other observations, can be taken to be in line with the argument that converging current account balance figures will be a major determinant for a successful regional economic integration. In this context, the BSEC figures clearly imply discord rather than convergence. The relevant data (in Table 3) on exports of goods and services by the BSEC members in the same period point to more or less similar assessments, also implying non-convergence. By and large, the relevant data are likely to remain so long as a free trade area is not established and, that again, will most probably be obstructed due to the chronic Karabagh conflict. The annual intra-BSEC trade volume which is around 187 billion US$[100] is far from being satisfactory in the current state-of-affairs.

97 See footnote 22.

98 See footnote 23.

99 See footnote 23.

100 "BSEC at a glance," *Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)*, accessed November 8, 2019, www.bsec-organization.org/bsec-at-glance

Country Name	Albania	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Bulgaria	Georgia	Greece	Moldova	Romania	Russian Federation	Serbia	Turkey	Ukraine
1989	-39300000			-769000000		-2561000000		2514000000			938000000	
1990	-118300000			-1710000000		-3537000000		-3254000000			-2625000000	
1991	-168000000			-76900000		-1573700000		-1012000000			250000000	
1992	-50700000			-359900000		-2140000000		-1506000000			-974000000	
1993	14900000	-67730000		-1098800000		-747000000		-1174000000			-6433000000	
1994	-157300000	-103780000		-31800000		-146000000	-82026000	-428000000	8941890000		2631000000	-1163000000
1995	-11500000	-220677007	-400650000	-25800000		-2864000000	-84610000	-1774000000	7437910000		-2338000000	-1152000000
1996	-107300000	-322209053	-931182000	15700000		-4554000000	-191830000	-2571000000	10102520000		-2437000000	-1184000000
1997	-272232500	-335738765	-915755000	426900000	-514200000	-4860000000	-274890000	-2104000000	-835240000		-2638000000	-1335000000
1998	-65070000	-416148343.9	-1364521000	-61912460.85	-275700000		-334710000	-2917000000	71060000		2000000000	-1296000000
1999	-155400000	-312542932.9	-599703000	-652131909.3	-198400000	-7294252083	-67880000	-1297000000	22855420000		-925000000	1658000000
2000	-156300000	-301667882.5	-167773000	-703685705.9	-175899687.6	-9817441651	-98190000	-1355000000	45382380000		-9920000000	1342000000
2001	-217400000	-221164164.3	-51755000	-804648255.4	-197094537.6	-9403099988	-26780000	-2229000000	32053820000		3760000000	1324000000
2002	-407520000	-147810525.6	-768373000	-319039031.1	-216912821.5	-9595594261	-19800000	-1525000000	27472950000		-626000000	3180000000
2003	-406814698.3	-173510013.1	-2020854000	-1022155147	-382208826.1	-12812812180	-130130000	-3311000000	33128110000		-7554000000	2901000000
2004	-357925427.3	-78841446.25	-2589213000	-1671124320	-356204277.4	-13492562448	-46130000	-6382000000	58559840000		-14198000000	6911000000
2005	-571475353.7	-123899753.9	167315000	-3346998840	-695658032.2	-18218753984	-225810000	-8540555217	84388750000		-20980000000	2534000000
2006	-670904254.7	-152931434.5	3707605000	-5863231595	-1191302771	-29576385911	-386420000	-12909857014	92315570000		-31168000000	-1619000000
2007	-1150813004	-677270882.4	9018885000	-11437006354	-1992056361	-44579249236	-671100000	-23924307027	72193020000	-7524009950	-36949000000	-5251000000
2008	-2013166061	-1658884234	16452805000	-11875334885	-2811210944	-51297053502	-975570000	-24986071301	1.03935E+11	-10537199511	-39425000000	-12781000000
2009	-1852457562	-1425501011	10174876000	-4256328503	-1141145836	-35945594306	-485190000	-8234134436	50383640000	-2799441099	-11358000000	-1736000000
2010	-1355598479	-1261431338	15040436000	-964620000	-1198803819	-30262611052	-481468750.4	-8478450857	67452200000	-2692243536	-44616000000	-3016000000
2011	-1667175109	-1058869760	17144935000	272490000	-1843079774	-28599315729	-851953937.8	-9276545444	97273940000	-5088222385	-74402000000	-10233000000
2012	-1256644800	-1057931945	14975987000	-528620000	-1882741234	-6172097059	-643620000	-8200067936	71282190000	-4726567861	-47963000000	-14335000000
2013	-1184891052	-813035673.3	12231737000	678640000	-955224423	-4949141209	-490310000	-2076328542	33428200000	-2794170204	-63642000000	-16518000000
2014	-1425385680	-901811470.9	10208803000	747230000	-1784162188	-3734712057	-568300000	-1382752070	57512760000	-2634686972	-43610000000	-4596000000
2015	-979825099.4	-287060199.6	-222495000	-19070000	-1767038407	-1611391808	-462840000	-2155841637	67777180000	-1370173586	-32145000000	1616000000
2016	-900363040.5	-217365563.9	-1363404000	1412720000	-1890075885	-3261057770	-284690000	-3960512150	24468810000	-1190023037	-33139000000	-1340000000
2017	-982237928.3	-344442864.5	1684559000	1847290000	-1331512551	-3327132229	-562070000	-6754854305	32429590000	-2322731263	-47347000000	-2442000000
2018	-1008356472	-1165303576	6051077000	2958850000	-1246192742	-6372398341	-1186710000	-10756662845	1.13455E+11	-2630427634	-27252000000	-4287000000

Table 2 (author's compilation): Current Account Balance - BSEC members (US Dollars), World Bank data compiled from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BN.CAB.XOKA.CD?end=2018&locations=AZ-AM-AL-BG-GE-GR-MD-RO-RU-RS-TR-UA&start=1971&type=points&view=chart

Country Name	Albania	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Bulgaria	Georgia	Greece	Moldova	Romania	Russian Federation	Serbia	Turkey	Ukraine
1989	418924987.5			10207166667		12624099454			1.10935E+11		17360346518	26529048348
1990	312500000	789960888.4	3885196372	6833181818	3101400747	14466921969		6522727273	93864126142		20138041278	22517259875
1991	82300000	842829165.1	4014478402	4758064516	1754966887	14929959806		5103947368	68740740741		20765547619	20230191965
1992	81519209.68	506749951.3	4302724069	4876288660	1315854563	17292882374		6981666667	2.86864E+11		22805811594	17732031955
1993	189399541.5	567247790.5	2281805933	4137681159	1266549923	15285243460		6067763158	1.66222E+11		24636054545	16988495839
1994	225407481	517226119.4	819242649.7	4368450185	1452315945	16843840590		7488942598	1.09667E+11		27918206081	18596682378
1995	302465325.4	351337813	991644243.4	6138392857	686952691.1	19745092367	1053997132	9594687654	1.15849E+11	1357994350	33713478166	22695834207
1996	371808985.5	371135631.4	791908858.4	5962338392	412437375.3	20839186297	937881521.7	9772624067	1.02134E+11	3145121043	39094658477	20341623020
1997	230303544.6	332378715.8	1150564617	5610024377	548000077.1	23223405591	1026805411	10031110491	1.00138E+11	3782199821	46664617512	20356661718
1998	291949986.8	359865213.1	1009305139	6304078618	594736066.9	23536857604	764754748.6	9596101848	84595569294	3868604698	56721036300	17543987601
1999	540977914.6	383089748.7	1281380203	5825651630	533561622.9	27447755167	612534634.5	9585664906	84670999188	2159833641	47537823331	16959999991
2000	700083398.1	446832960	2118054168	4797485047	703050128.5	30865641238	639062444.7	8042562992	1.14429E+11	644428402	53091138041	19521221885
2001	836717875.5	539539869.6	2368624503	4947406967	787530921.4	31036299329	741151801.5	8929665187	1.13116E+11	2753174611	53222799558	19941549859
2002	910729685	697610534.6	2666940959	5519114107	992546704.9	30939794466	871854564.2	11061866586	1.21649E+11	3327354915	58321176142	22091578117
2003	1169850311	902545052.4	3056403991	7277486005	1270728946	37446013995	1056084948	13996536145	1.51698E+11	4653563230	69359206198	27388564892
2004	1596261929	1063499859	4235066653	10713415021	1617346672	49807418301	1330145600	19300916138	2.03415E+11	6021306443	92090931046	39057153600
2005	1853022971	1411788277	8337000212	12703259005	2163550063	52808084318	1528946395	24155609706	2.68957E+11	7741608183	1.05387E+11	41949382403
2006	2242665086	1491343148	13954555630	16150901045	2545570153	57872321666	1542446634	30226593094	3.33908E+11	9563351691	1.19616E+11	47525544554
2007	3016116154	1766287388	22516839529	23262841148	3174516791	71726594580	2006082999	43141451011	3.92044E+11	11781287690	1.434E+11	60543960396
2008	3259293924	1754799663	32133276534	28588393658	3661938154	82807605390	2471513953	56054468220	5.20004E+11	14845675523	1.74469E+11	79896529465
2009	3040048285	1338222814	22870241354	21963744935	3201993714	62641263962	2005630356	45308070705	3.41584E+11	11899419360	1.45519E+11	51428149707
2010	3337095378	1928927462	28728665753	25395559767	4067800483	66165509707	1941104509	53854746845	4.45513E+11	13489123093	1.57845E+11	63998815464
2011	3769487586	2409446528	37214511840	33916530395	5231456092	73490370905	2738071405	67931903169	5.73992E+11	16256082494	1.8534E+11	81280184748
2012	3565036151	2927398423	36914842159	32774047306	6045512869	70468159317	2711411398	64042731100	5.94193E+11	15524118113	2.06849E+11	83884244775
2013	3694429571	3153950546	35907329509	36049470684	7212863112	72806344159	3047734293	76137353887	5.92497E+11	19285832720	2.11715E+11	78744026023
2014	3732085757	3316273474	32560882315	36882851716	7089693096	76733682179	2964401451	82174728293	5.58283E+11	19802613644	2.22003E+11	64873261713
2015	3104919070	3137295852	20059340230	32181251417	6260426872	62031002052	2470376597	72968370073	3.91451E+11	17941275455	2.00728E+11	47880172307
2016	3437170828	3495833404	17580998935	34062839367	6269425402	58691179424	2607823959	77632415254	3.30136E+11	19752651695	1.89717E+11	46023216040
2017	4110273661	4303143626	19839356263	39222875252	7580731381	66998728401	3007175631	87790277606	4.11264E+11	22298811513	2.1122E+11	53867411624
2018	4776973438	4663968198	25484470588	42007181654	8927350578	78773229216	3440576854	99754135376	5.09551E+11	25715543084	2.26982E+11	59149280344

Table 3 (author's compilation): Exports of Goods and Services – BSEC members (US Dollars), Worl Bank data compiled from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.CD?locations=AZ-AM-AL-BG-GE-GR-MD-RO-RU-RS-TR-UA&type=points

In Lieu of Conclusion

Regionalism is an old idea and practice in international relations, with the potential to end up a success, a failure or somewhere in between the two, depending on the particularities of the given regional attempt. There seems to be consensus that regions are not homogeneous entities. The drivers and impediments in the course of regional formations are said to be shaped by the stimulus of diffusion, evolving identities, macro crises, and economic intentions, among other factors. The BSEC, as a regionalism case, emerged in the late 1980s as an idea put forward by Turkey upon an amalgam of considerations at the national, regional and global levels, with high expectations. The main objective was to initiate economic cooperation by establishing intense trade and investment links between the Black Sea states and then turn the Black Sea into a sea of peace. The initiative was backed by the US.

However, the members came to realize soon that the BSEC entered a stagnation phase, although it had started out as an ambitious regionalism endeavor. The major underlying factor was the Karabagh conflict, which plagued progress in the BSEC. The conflict, already having assumed a chronic character, unfolded in the three periods displaying more or less distinct attitudes and mindsets on the part of the Armenian leadership. The first (1990-1997) period, the second (1998-2008) period, and the third (2008-2019) period clearly expose how the conflict was imported into the BSEC, and how even the allegedly relatively more conciliatory Armenian leadership, not to mention the hardliners, ended up being unable to make a change.

The assessment of the conflict against the background of the four above-mentioned factors that are at work in regionalism processes, as well as in the BSEC context, showcases four inferences.

First, the stimulus of diffusion turned out to be prevalent only in the formation phases of the BSEC because the Karabagh conflict was still a low intensity conflict -and not an outright war- and the propaganda related to the genocide claims had not yet been such an inflated issue unlike the case today. Yet, the escalation of the conflict by Armenia as of 1992 brought about selective adoption to the BSEC structure and more local behavior than a regional one, increasing discord.

Second, the regional states did not have a pre-existing collective identity. This implied that no positive identity reconstruction was to take place; which was the case, indeed. In the absence of a collective identity, chances for the Karabagh conflict to end remained quite low.

Third, as a macro crisis, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union had its own share of impact in the creation of the BSEC. At a time when Armenia was inclined to establish as many international links as possible, it became a member of the BSEC. However, the aftermath did not prove to be promising; the major reason was, again, the Karabagh conflict, which has a life of its own in and outside of the BSEC context.

Fourth, the regional trade concerns are another factor that encourage regionalism. However, rather than the entire trade volume or investment and the most intense trade links in a regional formation, balanced and converging current accounts as well as similarity in trade, more specifically, the export capacity of the members, will make all the difference. The relevant data for the BSEC members does not allow arguing for a positive forecast since the compiled data manifest diverging figures. As long as there is no free trade area in the BSEC, the unsatisfactory figures are likely to remain. Since the Karabagh conflict will most likely obstruct the creation of a free area, no quick solution seems to be in sight.

In the final analysis, the initial intention that economic cooperation would lead to political cooperation in and around the Black Sea basin was left unfulfilled. The Karabagh conflict, as presented based on the news archives within the limits of the paper, still stands as a litmus test for understanding the roots of the internal imbroglio in the BSEC, on the basis of the four fundamental factors taken as *explanans*. On a final note, hypothetically, a BSEC without a Karabagh conflict right from the start would also contain problems of different sorts. The difference would be that cooperation in various issue areas would proceed without a major, constant obstacle, at different paces.

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