

Why go regional and how to get it wrong: Romania's problems with regional cooperation

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Abstract

For over a decade, one of the most debated foreign policy problems related to Central and Eastern Europe has been the disappointing development of regional cooperation in the area. Post-communist regional processes have lost very easily their initial impetus and some are renowned for wasting money on unnecessary or badly implemented projects. Existing literature, concerned particularly with the study of regional organizations, identifies governments' behaviour and institutional deficiencies (usually bureaucracy or financing) as the main factors behind the tendency. The policy corollary of these results is that changes in governments' behaviour and improvements of the institutional framework could solve the problem. This paper argues that, even if this happened, regional cooperation would still be largely unsuccessful in Central and Eastern Europe. To understand why, it proposes to look at the incentives and obstacles a country has to cooperate regionally in the area. From the dozen of states involved in such initiatives, Romania emerges as an interesting study case, particularly due to its constantly active support for almost anything related to regional cooperation. Yet, instead of merely analyzing the constraints and opportunities Romanian post-communist governments have faced, the study is particularly concerned with problematic regional programs in which Romania participated. In this way one can reveal factors that are closer to the actual process than those suggested by theoretical explanatory models where states are indissoluble units of analysis. The study finds that the vulnerability of regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe is structural, institutional, related to rhetoric, mobility and human capital. Beside identifying these factors, the research also suggests that the prospects for more effective cooperation at regional level are highly dependent both on democratic consolidation and the development of a more diverse business environment in each of the countries involved in the process.