

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 South 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 might solve the problem. This paper argues that, even if this happened, in the short-run regional cooperation would still be largely unsuccessful in Central and South 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. 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 South Eastern Europe is structural, institutional, as well as related to rhetoric, information 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.

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PREAMBLE

For the last two centuries, Central and South Eastern Europe has been depicted rather as a border-shifting place of complex conflicts and enduring political tensions. Even today, one can read news and books presenting views on the current situation of the region in a way that perpetuates the same uneasy imaginary, particularly about the Balkans.¹

In this cognitive context, it might be surprising to find out that during the 1930s there were several local initiatives of cooperation at regional level with a certain impact on the future development of international processes in this part of Europe.² Moreover, during communism, the USSR-led Comecon and the Warsaw Pact were not the only forums of regional interaction as it is commonly acknowledged, since foreign ministers of the satellite countries met independently of USSR, at regional conferences, especially in the second half of the 1980s.³ As for the post 1989 period, almost a dozen regional processes and organizations have been created in the first twelve years following the collapse of the communist regimes, a dynamic hardly equalled in any other part of the world.⁴

Yet, one of the most debated foreign policy problems related to contemporary Central and South 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

¹ Perhaps the most famous academic analysis of this tendency can be found in the introductory chapter of Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), which generated an entire study program for almost a decade.

² For a brief historical overview of these initiatives and their role in the Interwar period, see for instance Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

³ Useful information on this rather ignored aspect of communist history can be found in Duško Lopandić, *Regional Initiatives in South Eastern Europe* (Belgrade: European Movement in Serbia, 2001)

⁴ In South Asia, a classic case for regionalism studies, there are less than a dozen major initiatives and they have been created, re-created and developed in almost fifty years. In Latin America and South America, around the same amount of regional processes has been developed in thirty years.

implemented projects. The situation became so proverbial that, several years ago at a conference on democratic transformation, in a conversation with George Schöpflin I was told that a thesis on regional cooperation in Central and South Eastern Europe must be very short since there is not much cooperation. While much cooperation in terms of spectacular results is indeed difficult to discover, the importance of regional cooperation in most of the former communist countries' foreign policy programs is troublesome.

To explain the state of affairs, existing literature, which is concerned particularly with the study of regional organizations, describes the cooperative options of the states from the region and proposes governments' behaviour and institutional deficiencies (usually bureaucracy or financing) as the main factors behind the vulnerability.⁵ 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 South Eastern Europe. To understand why, it proposes to look at the incentives and obstacles a country has to cooperate regionally in the area. Instead of focusing exclusively on the governmental choices, it questions the motivations of the political and business environments, as well as the

⁵ The approach is supported by most major contributions to the study of regional cooperation in Central and South Eastern Europe, particularly by Milica Uvalić, "Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe," *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 1 (1/2001); Milica Uvalić, "Regional Cooperation and the Enlargement of the European Union: Lesson Learned?" *International Political Science Review* 23 (3/2003): 319-33; the contributors to Duško Lopandić, ed. *Regional Cooperation in South Eastern Europe: The Effects of Regional Initiatives. Conference Proceedings* (Belgrade: European Movement in Serbia, 2001); Dimitar Bechev, "Contested Borders, Contested Identity: The Case of Regionalism in Southeast Europe," *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 4 (1/2004): 77-95; András Inotai "Correlation between European Integration and Sub-regional Cooperation: Theoretical Background, Experience and Policy Impacts," *Russian and East European Finance and Trade* 34 (6/1998): 3-91; Valerie Bunce, "The Visegrád Group: Regional Cooperation and European Integration in Post-Communist Europe," in *Mittleuropa: Between Europe and Germany*, ed. Peter Katzenstein (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997); and the questionnaire research on "Balkan Regional Cooperation and European Integration" published in 2002 as a report at the Hellenic Observatory, The European Institute (London School of Economics and Political Science) by Otthon Anastasakis and Vesna Bojičić-Dželilović. Some authors extend this perspective to most of the region's problems not only to regional cooperation, see for instance the recent policy report of the International Commission on the Balkans, *The Balkans in Europe's Future* (Sofia: Centre for Liberal Strategies, 2005).

governmental feed-back, with respect to regional cooperation. In this way, one could follow several layers of a regional arrangement, from political agreement to project implementation, and not only the top of the iceberg. Such a smaller scale research is closer to the actual process than the theoretical explanatory models where states are indissoluble units of analysis, which makes the approach essential to understanding the vulnerability of the existing regional agreements.

From the dozen of states involved in such initiatives,⁶ Romania emerges as an interesting study case, mainly due to its constantly active support for almost anything related to regional cooperation.⁷ Moreover, Romania's regional identity rhetoric interestingly oscillates between the desire of being recognised as a Central European country and the fact that it is more frequently associated with the Balkans, a factor shaping much of its foreign policy possibilities and choices.

For these reasons, it would be useful to focus particularly on problematic regional programs in which Romania has participated in the last decade, trying to identify what explains their weakness. Of course, this should not be interpreted in the sense that successful projects are negligible or inexistent but simply as a method to discover the problems of the process. In order to pursue this objective the paper first discusses the elusive concept of regional cooperation and proposes several categories that will be used throughout the research. Then, it introduces Romania's profile of regional cooperation and presents the reasons for involving in such processes. Finally, it addresses the issue of vulnerability of regional cooperation processes to which Romania participates and shows which are the factors behind it.

⁶ Although it is difficult to establish the exact boundaries of Central and South Eastern Europe, I propose to consider that all the former communist but non-soviet states form a researchable region that might be granted this label. In 1989, these states were seven in number but nowadays, after the processes of state fragmentation experienced by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia they are twelve. For a history and discussion of the concepts referring to different regions of Europe, see Luciana Ghica, "Imagining the Boundaries: In Search of the Political Correctness of European Identities," *Yearbook of the Romanian Academy Institute for Social Sciences Research "Gh. Șincai"*, vol. 7 (2005): 210-26.

⁷ After the collapse of the communist regime and particularly after 1996, all major public foreign policy documents, such as foreign policy programs and important declarations of the foreign ministers, emphasize the regional dimension of Romania's foreign policy. Some of these can be found on Romania's Foreign Affairs Ministry website, at <http://www.mae.ro>.

I. TOUCHING ELUSIVENESS

When treating regional cooperation academic literature frequently invokes either the concept of regionalism or the tradition of regional integration studies but almost never a theoretical framework dedicated exclusively to regional cooperation. In fact, there is no developed regional cooperation theory per se, although there is a huge scholarship on international cooperation. With so many different directions to look at, one would have much difficulty to decide which would be the most useful conceptual apparatus for meaningfully approaching the issue. For this reason a brief overview of each will be the first step in establishing the conceptual limits of the research.

Most often, literature related to regional cooperation in Europe is based on regional integration theory findings and hypotheses. Regional integration theory assumes that cooperation at regional level will eventually trigger regional integration. The purpose of this type of analysis is to discover which are the most efficient paths towards integration and how to avoid the possible obstacles.⁸ From this perspective, regional cooperation is only of secondary interest and, although in practice integration is rather infrequent with only very few cases of regional cooperation developing into more integrative structures,⁹ it is rarely studied as a separate phenomenon.

If one searches for a less normative approach, one could look into the international cooperation scholarship. Unfortunately, international cooperation is one of the two major preoccupations of IR theory (the other one being international conflict). In fact, one could think of IR theory as a discipline studying international cooperation (or

⁸ For a subtle analysis of the shortcomings and advantages of regional integration theory, see Ernst Haas, "The Study of Regional Integration: Reflections on the Joy and Anguish of Pretheorizing," *International Organization* 24 (4/1970): 607-46.

⁹ Regional integration theory is closely related to a literature known as functionalism (and more recently neo-functionalism), which has been interested particularly in western European integration as it has been experienced by the European Communities, nowadays European Union. In fact, this is the only case known to have answered the expectations of regional integration theory but more recently even this perception has been challenged. For one of the most articulated such critiques, see especially Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization* 51 (4/1997): 513-53.

international conflict, depending on personal preferences), which makes the endeavour of referring to this whole literature pretty meaningless.

The third option is to rely on the concepts provided by regionalism. Unfortunately, the notion of regionalism is widely polysemantic and used across several disciplines and sub-disciplines.¹⁰ In the economic scholarship it refers mainly to economic agreements such as free trade areas, more or less in the context of international commerce.¹¹ In the IR scholarship, the concept of regionalism does not have a precise and widely accepted meaning but it is used by most IR traditions/schools for their own purposes.¹² Thus, there would be a neo-realist regionalism, a liberal regionalism,

¹⁰ Besides the meanings it acquired with respect to international economic and political relations, the concept of regionalism can be employed in totally different situations. For instance, it might indicate a certain intellectual and/or political bottom-up movement related to regional separatism (usually on ethnic bases) but is also sometimes used as a synonym for cross-border cooperation. See for instance, Michael Keating and Francisco Aldecoa, eds. *Paradiplomacy in Action: The Foreign Relations of Subnational Governments* (London: Frank Cass, 1999). Frequently, instead of regionalism are used interchangeably terms such as “subregional cooperation,” “regionalization” and “regional (intergovernmental) cooperation”. However, all these equivalents have also other meanings, with careers of their own. “Subregional cooperation” is a notion regularly employed by security studies or political economy scholarship and it refers to regional security or economic organizations such as NATO, Mercosur and NAFTA. “Regionalization” usually refers to a top-down process of gaining regional autonomy within a nation-state or within EU but it can also be understood as a process of informal, bottom-up integration or the process of transforming administratively the national territory into smaller parts. For more detailed discussions on these specific meanings, see Michael Keating, *The New regionalism in Western Europe: Territorial Restructuring and Political Change* (Cheltenham, UK: E.Elgar, 1998); Barry Jones and Michael Keating, ed., *The European Union and the Regions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Patrick le Galès and Christian Lequesne, ed. *Regions in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1998); and Christopher Harvie, *The Rise of Regional Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹¹ See for instance, Wilfred J. Ethier, “Regional regionalism,” in *Regionalism and Globalization*, ed. Sajal Lahiri, 3-15 (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); Jagdsih Bhagwati, “Regionalism and multilateralism: an overview,” in *New dimensions in regional integration*, eds. Jaime de Melo and Arvind Panagariya, 22-51 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Jan P. Pronk, “Globalisation and Regionalisation,” in *Regional Integration and Multilateral Cooperation in the Global Economy*, ed. Jan Joost Teunissen, 25-32 (Hague: Fondad, 1998).

¹² An idea put forward with great care and subtlety in Andrew Hurrell, “Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective,” in *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organisations and International Order*, ed. Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, 37-73 (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Hurrell also identifies five variants of regionalism - regionalization (soft regionalism/informal integration), regional awareness and identity, regional interstate cooperation, state-promoted regional

a neo-institutionalist regionalism and even a constructivist one. However, not all traditions are equally interested in regional cooperation. Neo-liberal institutionalism and regime theory seem to be most concerned with the concept but from a rather general, non-context specific perspective.¹³

Moreover, although only six decades old in the history of international relations, distinct forms of regionalism appeared in different places of the world and at different points in time.¹⁴ From the functionalist integration experiments in Western Europe to the various free trade agreements around the world in the 1960s and the Third World regional cooperation in the 1970s, regionalism has proven to be not only a widespread phenomenon¹⁵ but, at the same time, an extremely elusive concept. The situation did not change when, in the 1990s, a new wave of regional arrangements emerged all over the world and the so-called new regionalism has become one of the major buzzwords in any discipline concerned with the development of international actors at regional level.

integration and regional cohesion. The third type of regionalism is closer to the concept of regional (intergovernmental) cooperation used in the present research.

¹³ From the vast amount of literature on the topic, see particularly Helen Milner, "International Theory of Cooperation among Nations: Strength and Weaknesses," *World Politics* 44 (1992); Edward D. Mansfield and Helen V. Milner, "The New Wave of Regionalism," *International Organization* 53 (3/1999): 589-627; Stephen Krasner, ed. *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Volker Rittberger, ed. *Regime Theory and International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Oran Young, *International Cooperation: Building Regimes for Natural Resources and the Environment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

¹⁴ For an interesting argumentation on the issue of regionalism's history, see Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, "Introduction," in *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organisations and International Order*, ed. Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, 1-6 (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). A similar view is supported by Fredrik Söderbaum, "Introduction: Theories of New Regionalism," in *Theories of New Regionalism: A Palgrave Reader*, ed. Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw, 1-21 (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). However, unlike Fawcett who places the beginning of regionalism in the aftermath of the Second World War, Söderbaum argues that regional agreements, in the contemporary sense of the expression, were in fact concluded as early as the 1930s.

¹⁵ For a brief overview of regionalism's development after the Second World War, see Louise Fawcett, "Regionalism in Historical Perspective," in *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organisations and International Order*, ed. Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, 9-36 (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

All these approaches have nevertheless something in common. Although frequently the initial meaning is pushed in a remote background by complex theoretical arguments, they all assume that regional cooperation in its most general sense refers to interstate (or to be more precise, intergovernmental) cooperation at regional level. Then, each perspective differentiates from the others when it explains what “regional” represents, which are the instruments for achieving regional cooperation, which are the most important actors involved in the process and what is the purpose of this type of interaction.

The present study accepts that regional cooperation refers to intergovernmental cooperation at regional level, where region is understood as “a [group of] limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence.”¹⁶ Since neither the degree nor the threshold of interdependence is specified beforehand, it is acceptable to assume that from a certain perspective any neighbouring countries that established minimal relations among them can be treated as a region. This approach has the advantage that it is less normative, widely applicable and, at the same time, more specific.

Yet, the concept as such still refers to different things. As one could easily notice, it covers two rather different logics of cooperation – one that is created in order to diminish possible security threats and one that seeks the enhancement of welfare of participant countries through common projects and resource sharing. For this reason, I will call the resulting processes *defensive cooperation* and *welfare-enhancing cooperation* respectively. It is true that to a certain extent all forms of cooperation are characterized by both these logics and this becomes even more obvious with the increasing integration. However, when it comes to existing regional cooperative initiatives, one type is commonly predominant. This research is concerned only with the welfare-enhancing regional cooperation instances.

Also, empirical data show that regional cooperation manifests in various forms. From an organizational perspective, it can range from loose talks and regional conferences

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye Jr., “Introduction,” in *International Regionalism: Readings*, ed. Joseph S. Nye Jr. (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1968), vii. This definition, labelled by some as functional, summarizes very well the arbitrariness of delimiting regions, particularly in international relations.

to more institutionalised structures such as free trade agreements and regional organisations. In fact, I identify six major types of regional cooperation that currently exist both throughout the world and in Central and South Eastern Europe.

The loosest variants of interstate cooperation at regional level are the meetings and conferences where heads of state and government and/or other high-ranking political actors discuss, periodically or not, certain issues important for the region. Sometimes, such meetings initiate more enduring processes of cooperation, such as regional organizations or cooperative frameworks but usually they are isolated events. During the last fifteen years, in Central and South Eastern Europe, took place around one hundred such meetings. At present, the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) is the only major periodic conference of heads of state or government from the area, which has not been institutionalized.

Regional frameworks require closer cooperation at several levels as they involve many layers of the political apparatus, frequently allow the participation of the business environment and sometimes finance major civil society projects. In the region, such cooperation is possible through the externally supported Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI). Regional trade agreements (RTAs) represent a special type of framework cooperation, as they are limited to the economic sector and to commercial exchanges. The most important existing RTA in Central and South Eastern Europe is the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), which has been regarded by many as an anti-chamber for EU integration and for this reason frequently dismissed as an imperfect form of regional integration.¹⁷

The most institutionalized forms of regional cooperation are regional organizations. Unlike regional frameworks, which are rather decentralized in structure, regional organizations have a general secretariat usually permanently hosted by one of the participant countries, as well as more or less complex bodies with various procedures of decision-making. In Central and South Eastern Europe, the Central European

¹⁷ For a lengthy discussion of this issue, see Martin Dangerfield, *Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe: The Political Economy of CEFTA* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2000), particularly the introductory chapters.

Initiative (CEI) is the oldest and the largest post-communist organization, while the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), with its own bank and structures covering most sectors of activity, is currently the most developed institutionally.

One could further differentiate between such organizations taking into account their complexity both in terms of bureaucratic structure and fields of activity. Thus, there are organizations with a loose institutional structure and very few levels of cooperation and organizations that increasingly cover almost all possible domains of cooperation and develop a complex bureaucratic apparatus. I will call these types *soft regional organizations* and *widening regional organizations* respectively.¹⁸ CEI is an illustration of the first type, though it increasingly develops into the second one, while BSEC is an example of a widening regional organization, which even in its first years covered a large range of sectors of activity and had a multi-levelled bureaucratic structure.

Table 1 on the next page summarizes all these characteristics of regional cooperation. If one follows the logic of institutionalization present in it, one might easily add a last row, which would represent even higher forms of regional cooperation, namely regional integration instances. However, such an addition would suggest that regional cooperation is a yet unaccomplished integration at regional level and that the various forms are chronological periods of integration. This perspective would be nevertheless misleading, especially because, in practice, each of these variants emerges in a particular way and does not usually develop from another form of regional cooperation that in the table would be the less institutionalized neighbour. In this study regional cooperation is treated as a phenomenon in itself and not as a stage in the process of regional integration.¹⁹

¹⁸ From this perspective, EU might be regarded as the most integrated existing case of widening regional cooperation. According to this logic, regional integration is a particular case of regional cooperation, which is a less normative and closer to reality approach than that assumed by the integration theory tradition, which commonly considers all regional cooperation as leading to integration.

¹⁹ Rather integration is perceived as a particular case of regional cooperation, which happens rather infrequently and in many decades.

Table 1. Variants of regional intergovernmental cooperation

Degree of institutionalisation	Degree of political involvement	Type of regional intergovernmental cooperation	Characteristics
LOW	High	Regional meetings	Irregular meetings / talks / forums convened to discuss a specific topic, usually an international or regional event or proposals to initiate more institutionalised regional cooperation. Such meetings frequently but not always produce a common declaration of variable political weight.
	High	Regional conferences / processes	Regular meetings promoting political dialogue in the region on specific issues of common interest. Such meetings sometimes yield documents and common declarations with high symbolic value.
MEDIUM	Medium / High	Cooperative frameworks	Political meetings that establish the framework of cooperation for regional programs or smaller regional structures responsible for specific fields of activity.
	Medium / High	Regional trade agreements (RTAs)	Framework of regional economic liberalisation
HIGH	High / Medium	Soft regional organisations	Regional organisations with a minimal organisational structure (at least a secretariat and a charter which establishes the objectives and rules of procedure)
	Medium / High	Widening regional organisations	Regional organisation with a more developed institutional structure, which usually implies at least three dimensions (governmental meetings, parliamentarian forums and business councils)

Another way of looking at regional cooperation is its political or policy orientation. Although it is very difficult to clearly differentiate between them (mainly because all regional processes are politically driven and, at the same time, might be concerned with certain policy areas), this dimension can be useful for further analysis. Politically oriented initiatives are those whose main objective is to deal with political situations²⁰ and usually they are forums of discussions. Policy oriented initiatives are created in order to answer some specific developmental problems in the region, such as infrastructure. In this line of argumentation, strictly economic (*i.e.* RTAs) and security cooperation represent special cases, which require different research tools and will not be included in the present study. The following figure proposes a visual representation of these complex relations.

Fig. 1 Orientation of regional intergovernmental cooperation

O R I E N T A T I O N			
	POLITICAL	POLICY	
CHARACTERISTICS		Security	
	The main purpose of such cooperation is to establish, maintain and develop political dialogue in the region.	The main purpose of such cooperation is to create structures and instruments allowing each of the participant countries to feel more secure at regional level.	The main purpose of such cooperation is to develop regional projects in different areas of common interest.
		Economic	
	For this reason, it might seem loose, without significant achievements.	The main purpose of such cooperation is to promote the development of smoother economic exchanges at regional level.	For this reason, it is usually more focused on certain sectors and yields more visible / measurable results

²⁰ From a certain viewpoint, all situations are political. In this context, political situation refers to a complex and possibly problematic international interaction triggered by particular events or by a longer historical process. The isolation of Serbia and Montenegro in the aftermath of the recent wars in the former Yugoslavia represents such a political situation.

Finally, regional cooperation can be concluded in one main sector, for instance energy, or extended to more domains of activity. Usually those arrangements covering more than one sector are politically oriented but they can be regarded also as policy oriented when the sectors are very much related (Table 2, next page). This is the case, for instance, of a regional agreement concerned with the fields of energy, transports and environment. One-dimensional regional cooperation is frequently initiated by specific ministries or governmental agencies and sometimes it hardly relates to a foreign policy strategy. As this study is concerned with the vulnerability of regional cooperation from a government's point of view, it focuses particularly on multidimensional cooperation

Table 2. Scope and diversity of regional intergovernmental cooperation

Type	Scope	Characteristics
One-dimensional regional cooperation		Cooperation in only one field of activity, usually policy oriented <i>Frequently economic or security oriented</i>
	Medium	Cooperation in several, commonly related fields of activity <i>Usually policy oriented</i>
Multidimensional regional cooperation		Cooperation in many, commonly unrelated domains / sectors / fields of activity <i>Usually politically oriented</i>
	Large	

To sum up, according to the existing literature, regional intergovernmental cooperation is a concept that may describe any process of international interaction at regional level. For this reason, research on this topic requires separating the possible levels of analysis. In this section, I identified four such levels (dimensions of analysis) – objective of cooperation, degree of institutionalization, orientation and scope (Fig. 2, next page). These will be the reference points for the further investigation of Romania's motivations and obstacles to participate to such arrangements, an enquiry which will rely on empirical evidence pertaining to welfare-enhancing and rather multi-dimensional regional cooperation of various degrees of institutionalization and orientations.

Fig. 2. Synopsis of regional intergovernmental cooperation categories

DIMENSION OF ANALYSIS	TYPE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION
OBJECTIVE	Welfare-enhancing
	Defensive
INSTITUTIONALIZATION	Regional meetings
	Regional conferences / processes
	Cooperative frameworks
	Regional trade agreements (RTAs)
	Soft regional organisations
ORIENTATION	Widening regional organisations
	Political
SCOPE	Policy
	One-dimensional
	Medium
	Wide

II. ROMANIA'S REGIONAL COOPERATION PROFILE

When it comes to Romania's involvement and support for regional agreements in Central and South Eastern Europe, one can distinguish two main periods – before and after 1996. The first half of the 1990s might be best described as a period when there was a rather general confusion with respect to Romania's foreign policy strategies. As in other countries in the region, uncertainty about the implications of the close vicinity to USSR and later Russian Federation demanded caution. Consequently, the most important direction pursued by those responsible for Romania's foreign policy at that time was that of security. To this, one should add a reluctance to involve in regional welfare-enhancement agreements, mainly because they reminded the soviet-led COMECON. Moreover, with governments dominated by former apparatchiks, Romania had few chances to be invited as a partner at the new initiatives created by its neighbours from Central Europe. As a result, during that period, at regional level,

Romania became member only of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), an organization whose main direction at that time was that of security.²¹

However, since 1996 the most important declaratory documents concerning Romania's foreign policy show that the Romanian government have manifested a relatively constant rhetoric with respect to the regional dimension of the country's international affairs. Although, at present, there is no content analysis study on this issue, a brief overview of the existing foreign policy programs, declarations of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, presidential statements on Romania's foreign policy and parliamentary reports on the country's external relations easily reveals that regional cooperation has been one of the top five priorities of Romania's foreign policy for the past decade.²²

In practice, this preoccupation has been translated into the most active involvement in the creation and development of regional processes in Central and South Eastern Europe (see Table 3, next page). Like Bulgaria and Croatia, Romania participates to seven out of the nine major regional welfare-enhancement initiatives in the area. Like Bulgaria, it is founding member of five of these, and, with Austria, it initiated the most recent of them – the Danube Cooperation Process. Romania also hosts some of the main regional institutions, such as the SECI Regional Center for Combating Trans-Border Crime, and initiated major regional conferences where key documents of some of these initiatives were adopted.²³

²¹ Although security still represents a major direction of the BSEC, during the last decade its scope broadened so that currently it is a complex organization with a strong economic component.

²² Some of these can be found on the official websites of the respective institutions (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mae.ro>, Romanian Presidency, <http://www.presidency.ro>, the Chamber of Deputies, <http://www.cdep.ro>). Unfortunately for a larger audience, few are translated into English. Moreover, when a legislature changes most of the former programs are no longer available to the general public. My own collection of such documents has been constantly enlarged with the help of experts, professionals and sometimes interviewees I met during the research. Interestingly, many times I was given genuinely public documents with the feeling that they were well-kept secrets to which I had access just by chance and benevolence of my providers.

²³ Perhaps the most important of these is the SEECP *Charter on Good Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in Southeastern Europe*, signed in Bucharest (12 February 2000). For a list of the major documents of the existing initiatives, see the appendix at the end of this paper.

Table 3. Central and South Eastern Europe participation to regional agreements²⁴

Country	CEI 1989 - 1992 ²⁵	V4 1990	CEFTA 1992	BSEC 1992	SEECF 1996	SECI 1996	SP 1999	AII 2000	DCP 2002
Albania	X			F	F	F	F	F	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	F				F	F	F	F	F
Bulgaria	X		X	F	F	F	F		F
Croatia	F		X		X	F	F	F	F
Czech Republic	F	F	(F)				F		F
FYROM/ Macedonia	F		[X]		F	F	F		
Hungary	F	F	(F)			F	F		F
Poland	F	F	(F)				F		
Romania	X		X	F	F	F	F		I
Serbia-Montenegro	F				F	X	F	F	F
Slovakia	X	F	(F)				F		F
Slovenia	X		(X)				F	F	F

Legend: CEI - Central European Initiative; V4 - Visegrád Group; CEFTA - Central European Free Trade Agreement; BSEC - Black Sea Economic Cooperation; SEECF - South East European Cooperation Process; SECI - Southeast European Cooperative Initiative; SP - Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe; AII - Adriatic-Ionian Initiative; DCP - Danube Cooperation Process. F - founding country, f - part of a founding country at the moment of the organization's creation; X - member country; (F) - founding country, now withdrawn; (X) - member country, now withdrawn; [X] – a country that signed the accession treaty that has not come into force yet; I – initiator.

Furthermore, unlike any other state in its neighbourhood, Romania followed a path of increasingly active membership (see Table 4, next page). Initially, in the first half of the 1990s it struggled to be accepted as member of newly formed initiatives, such as BSEC, CEI and the Visegrád Group. It succeeded to be a founding member of BSEC, it acquired membership status in CEI in 1996 but the Visegrád political cooperation remained a closed organization to which no other states, Romania included, did ever participate. However, the Visegrád economic cooperation, which later became the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), allowed other countries to gain membership and Romania became its sixth member in 1997. Meanwhile, Romania

²⁴ This table refers only to the processes of welfare-enhancement cooperation. For this reason, security dominated initiatives, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), are not included. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation has a strong security component but, due to its development in other fields of activity, the growing emphasis on the importance of economic transactions in the area, as well as importance in Romania's foreign policy programs, it was maintained in this overview.

²⁵ The year after the abbreviation of each initiative represents its founding year. Central European Initiative is the name acquired in 1992 by an initiative created in 1989 by Austria, Hungary, Italy and Yugoslavia, known at that time as the Quadrilateral Cooperation, then, after the admission of Czechoslovakia in 1990, as the Pentagonal, and finally, after Poland was awarded membership in 1991, the Hexagonal. For this reason, it is usually assigned both years (1989 and 1992) as founding years.

participated as founding member to the creation of the South East European Cooperative Processes, the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. In each of these organizations it has proposed key documents, hosted conferences and had an active role in supporting regional cooperation as a means of releasing the international pressure on the Balkans, particularly in the context of the civil wars in the former Yugoslav states. After this potential was rather exhausted, in 2002 it tried to resuscitate the Central European direction of its foreign policy through the establishment of a Danube Cooperation Process.

Table 4. Romania's membership in regional welfare-enhancement agreements in Central and South Eastern Europe

Regional agreements to which Romania participates	Type of intergovernmental regional cooperation	Orientation	Scope
BSEC (1992) ²⁶	Regional widening organization	Political	Large
CEI (1989-1992/ 1996) ²⁷	Regional soft organization slowly transforming into a regional widening organization	Policy	Large
SECI (1996)	Cooperative framework	Policy	Medium
SEECF (1996)	Regional process	Political	Medium
CEFTA (1992/1997)	Regional Trade Agreement	Policy/ Economic	One-dimensional
SP (1999)	Cooperative framework	Policy	Large
DCP (2002)	Regional meetings	Political	Medium

Finally, as showed in Table 4 (above), Romania's regional membership is also very diverse, covering all the institutional types of cooperation, from regional meetings to regional widening organizations. The country also involved almost equally in politically and policy oriented initiatives, with several or many areas of activity, and did not miss to be part of the major one-dimensional process and regional trade

²⁶ The year in the brackets represents the year when the regional agreement was signed. If Romania is not a founding member than it is followed by the reference to the year when this state was granted membership. The organizations are listed in an order reflecting the chronology of Romania's participation to regional arrangements.

²⁷ See note 24 on the problem of the CEI's founding year.

agreement in the area – the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). There is no evidence to support the idea that Romania would prefer a certain type of regional arrangement or that it would be reluctant to enter some processes. On the contrary, its behaviour so far suggests that it would rather try to participate to any regional arrangement, irrespective of its type, size or orientation, than be left aside.

III. ROMANIA’S REASONS FOR INVOLVING IN REGIONAL COOPERATION

Most officials that were responsible in the 1990s for the creation and promotion of Romania’s foreign policy objectives remember the emergence of the idea of regional agreements in the area as a suggestion coming from Western European states and the US. Moreover, from the perspective of the Western partners, these arrangements were perceived as a solution that should have showed the democratic potential of the former communist countries and that fitted the uncertainties of those times.²⁸ These people also remember that regional cooperation seemed to be formulated as a prerequisite of the European integration, however, when and how exactly this requirement came from EU, nobody can say with certainty.²⁹

²⁸ Literature on this topic, with the exception of a few scattered references to the subject, is practically inexistent. In 2004 and 2005 I conducted a series of interviews with high ranked officials from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, former Ministers of Foreign Affairs, representatives of the business environment involved in regional cooperation programs and scholars with expertise in the international development of Central and South Eastern Europe. Most of the findings in the following pages are based on this research and accompanying secondary literature.

²⁹ This information is recurrent in all interviews, irrespective of the interviewee, but no one could tell in what official document EU asked for the creation and reinforcement of regional structures as a prerequisite for European integration. Interestingly, with no exception, everybody assumed that such documents must exist, although they had never seen one or knew where to look for. The accession criteria, known also as the Copenhagen criteria and adopted in 1993 by the European Council, do not refer particularly to regional cooperation and no official document in the negotiation process contains such requirement. It is true that, especially in the first stages of the negotiation, there are references to good neighborhood relations and the political stability of the region. However, these should be read more in relation with the existing tensions and conflicts in the area at that time than in relation to the EU push for establishing specific regional structures in Central and South Eastern Europe. In fact, there is an entire direction of studies showing that regional cooperation in this area might be a serious impediment to European integration. For a noteworthy research investigating the issue of compatibility

Apparently, the idea was put forward unofficially by different experts who visited the region officially, during meetings at international conferences and through policy papers more or less backed by the European Union (usually through funding for the seminars or the publications where such studies are presented).³⁰ In the early 1990s, when it was not clear whether the EC/EU or NATO would integrate any former communist country, when these states were very eager to be accepted by the “old democracies,” when high ranking diplomats in the region were still accustomed to guessing and supposing what the other part wishes and when there was an inflation of policy studies on these topics, it is very probable that a missing or insufficiently detailed official position be interpreted in this sense.

However, what the respective governmental representatives understood was that, if Romania had involved in processes of regional cooperation in its neighbourhood, it would had been more likely to gain membership to Western European structures, such as the European Union and NATO.³¹ It seems that this is what other governments also understood.³² Therefore, several regional conferences took place and all participants underlined the importance of regional collaboration, as well as their will to cooperate

between regional cooperation and European integration, see Othon Anastasakis and Vesna Bojičić-Dželilović, *Balkan Regional Co-operation and European Integration* (London: The Hellenic Observatory, LSE, 2002).

³⁰ This hypothesis was suggested by Liliana Deac, Director of the External Relations Department of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania, in an interview I had with her in Bucharest (22 July 2005) and was also confirmed by some of the other interviewees.

³¹ At another scale, this process is very similar with that identified by Frank Schimmelfennig with respect to the official discussions on the EU Eastern enlargement and called by him “rhetorical action.” Schimmelfennig, Frank. “The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Actions, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union.” *International Organization* 55 (1/2001): 47-80. In this case, however, there is no shaming involved, while the problematic nature of regional cooperation in relation with the enlargement process makes the effects of rhetorical action less consequential.

³² Empirical evidence on this can be found in many of the questionnaires analyzed by Anastasakis and Bojičić-Dželilović in 2002. Recently, the fact was acknowledged in a very interesting analysis of EU impact on the democratisation process in six former communist countries: Milada Anna Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Vachudova masterfully introduces the useful distinction between active and passive leverage and shows that the reaction to EU incentives was one of the major factors that explain the development of these states since the collapse of the authoritarian regimes.

in the sectors most important for the development of the region.³³ Yet, in the early 1990s, beyond such regional talks, no action or program was put forward.

At the same time, Romania was reshaping its foreign policy priorities. Despite a surprising treaty signed with the USSR shortly before its disintegration, the Romanian government has become increasingly interested in the Western institutions, which were perceived as a unitary bloc. This is how the Council of Europe, NATO and the European Union were all targets of a general foreign policy objective commonly known as the “Euro-Atlantic integration.” Interestingly, one of the most difficult problems in this process of foreign policy redefinition was to convince all political parties that this process should be Romania’s priority.³⁴ With permanent reshuffling and reconfigurations of the political environment dominated by former members of the *nomenklatura*, this was not an easy task. In fact, until the 2000 elections, when even the far-right party *România Mare* (Greater Romania) declared itself pro-European, this uncertainty always existed.

Even more interesting is the fact that the regional context itself had a significant impact on the creation of a new agenda for the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The collapse of the Yugoslav states and the subsequent civil wars had made the notion of Balkans less fashionable than ever and the association with it even less attractive. Yet, Romania’s interest and involvement in South Eastern Europe was a century-long tradition, partially continued during communism³⁵ and certainly impossible to ignore.

³³ Such declarations can be found in any of the major documents of the regional initiatives, particularly those elaborated in the mid 1990s. For a list of the most important, see the appendices at the end of this paper.

³⁴ Although the “Euro-Atlantic integration” seems to have been Romania’s major foreign policy objective since the fall of communism, this is not true. Permanent political reshufflings in the Romanian parliament as well as the predominance of former apparatchiks in the parliaments formed until the mid 1990s had a significant role in delaying the establishment of this direction as the main one. Although many interviewees that have been active in Romania’s political life suggest this perspective, the most articulated position on this issue belongs to Teodor Meleșcanu, MP, professor of international law and Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister (1992-1996), in one of interviews I conducted with him in Bucharest (28 July 2005).

³⁵ Usually, research on Romania’s involvement in the Balkans is highly abundant with respect to the Balkan Wars and quite well developed when it comes to the Interwar period. This kind of literature is, however, very scarce in relation with the communist period, although some regional activity existed in

At the same time, especially in the early 1990s, the debates on Central Europe, the positive connotations the concept acquired in the last two decades of communism, as well as its extensive employment by the Visegrád Group countries in their relation with Western states and structures, made the notion much coveted by Romanian politicians and governmental bureaucrats.

To solve this regional identity puzzle, a solution appeared somewhere between 1992 and 1996, when in the national foreign policy program and other similar documents one could frequently meet, under different variants, the idea that Romania is a Central European country “with interests and responsibilities” in the Balkans.³⁶ Another direction was pursued in 2002, when Romania strongly backed up Austria’s initiative to establish a Danube Cooperation Process, the first regional agreement in Central Europe since the creation of the Visegrád Group and the Central European Initiative.

Nonetheless, it was in South Eastern Europe that Romania managed to satisfy its regional ambitions, imposing itself as a regional leader, pushing forward the existing processes and strongly supporting new ones, particularly between 1996 and 2000. Interestingly, through South Eastern European arrangements Romania also managed to contribute to the improvement of the relations with its neighbours, particularly Serbia-Montenegro, and pursue other important objectives of its foreign policy, such as the development of a special relation with Moldavia.³⁷

For almost a decade Romania’s foreign policy programs have ranked regional cooperation in its top priorities. However, most of the existing data suggests the fact

the Balkans outside the framework of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. For instance, between 1988 and 1990 the representative of the South East European countries met at official level at Conferences of Foreign Ministers. For a good but rather general presentation of the South East European initiatives after World War I, see Duško Lopandić, *Regional Initiatives in South Eastern Europe* (Belgrade: European Movement in Serbia, 2001). Another useful analysis of the regional interaction of communist regimes can be found in Ghiță Ionescu, *Comparative Communist Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

³⁶ In slightly different forms this expression appears as early as 1992 in foreign policy documents but it becomes increasingly employed only in 1995.

³⁷ The support for Moldavia’s deeper integration into international, Western or Western-like structures, is a common theme in many of the documents presented by Romanian governmental representatives at regional meetings, but also in foreign policy programs. This objective is also included in the current *Government Program on Foreign Policy* (2005-2008), which can be partially consulted on the official website of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<http://www.mae.ro>)

that, despite the associated rhetoric, regional cooperation has always been a second-class objective. It was given a life of its own just to fulfil other foreign policy objectives, such as to gain legitimacy as a regional leader, improve relations with neighbours and gain rhetoric capital, but most prominently it was a means for succeeding with the “Euro-Atlantic integration” agenda. This was confirmed once more as recently as last week when Romanian PM Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, present at the Summit of the Southeast European prime ministers for discussing the future of CEFTA after EU enlargement, declared that,

“we want to show our EU partners that we are capable of playing an important regional role, in ensuring stability and security in the region; on the other hand, Romania wants to offer its neighbours an economic cooperation framework through CEFTA in order to help them modernize their economies, restructure them and make them more competitive; in other words, to prepare them for a future European option.”³⁸

From this perspective, it becomes evident that regional cooperation as a long-term direction is extremely vulnerable and this comes out of its status as a secondary objective. And since, with the enlargement of the European Union, the “Euro-Atlantic” flagship of the foreign policy programs increasingly exhausts its driving-force capacities, this vulnerability becomes even more obvious. I will call this *rhetoric vulnerability*.

IV. ROMANIA’S OTHER PROBLEMS WITH REGIONAL COOPERATION

As showed in the previous two sections, Romania’s interest for regional agreements has been manifested particularly through initiation of and support for developing key documents and hosting of conferences, a type of actions that does not require much involvement or many resources allocated to regional cooperation. The South Eastern European initiatives, which are less institutionalized, as well as regional complex

³⁸ Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, acting Prime Minister of Romania, fragment from the speech held in Bucharest, 5 April 2006, at the Summit of the Southeast European prime ministers, published by ROMPRES, Romanian National News Agency, 6 April 2006 (<http://www.rompres.ro>).

arrangement sufficiently large in scope, such as the Central European Initiative are very well suited for such behaviour from the part of a government.

Unlike all other regional agreements in Central and South Eastern Europe, CEFTA, a one-dimensional initiative, required the participant countries not only rhetorical commitment but also to undertake specific actions for the liberalisation of trade. Apparently, at least in the initial stages, this was rather surprising for the Romanian officials who believed that CEFTA was only a political initiative and unpleasantly discovered they had to respect an agreement that forced the government to take seriously into consideration the non profitable economic sectors and build a strategy to restructure them. Or, as put by Teodor Meleşcanu, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time of the initiation of negotiations for accession to the newly instituted free trade area, the Romanian government “believed that [CEFTA was] yet another political project but soon realised free commerce is really difficult.”³⁹

Apart from the Central European Free Trade Agreement, whose results have been relatively modest compared to its proposed goals⁴⁰ and whose content was anyway implemented at national level by each of the participant countries like any other international agreement, in the mid 1990s no other organization in Central and South Eastern Europe managed or was interested to develop regional projects with both visibility and impact in the region. When questioned by the European or American partners, the almost invariable answer was that they could not do anything more specific due to the lack of money, or as put by one of the interviewees, “these countries are too poor to share something.”⁴¹ The governments thus recognised that

³⁹ Interview with Teodor Meleşcanu, Bucharest, 18 June 2005.

⁴⁰ For the best analysis so far, see Martin Dangerfield, *Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe: The Political Economy of CEFTA* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2000). After the founding countries and Slovenia became members of the European Union in 2004, only Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania remained partners of the agreement, with Macedonia signing the agreement in February 2006. Even before the 2004 enlargement, there have been discussions on the possibility to transform the arrangement in a Southeast European Free Trade Agreement but Croatia lobbied in 2005 and early 2006 against it, particularly because, after Bulgaria and Romania become EU members, this would gather again together all the former Yugoslav states (without Slovenia). On the 5th of April 2006, in Bucharest, a temporary agreement was reached.

⁴¹ Interview with Liliana Deac, Bucharest, 22 July 2005.

they were not able to fund their participation in such associative processes and that even mere enthusiasm costs. I will call this *structural vulnerability*.

The Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI, 1996) and the Stability Pact for South East Europe (SP, 1999) were created partially to solve this problem and to finance programs for the reconstruction and the development of the region in the post-Dayton period. The first one, an American proposal, is a loose institutional framework that has developed projects supported for the most part by the World Bank. The Stability Pact, backed up by the European Union, is an initiative whose main objective is to foster regional cooperation in the area.⁴²

Both organizations came with a similar approach, which very roughly respects the following scheme. The participant countries propose national or regional projects with impact for the development of the region. Then, the respective organizations select the best projects and propose them to the donor community (international organizations, governments and private institutions) who finances them. In theory, this public-private partnership (PPP) approach has been capable to produce funding for all the chosen projects. In some cases, like the “Quick Start Package” program of the Stability Pact, the organization was even able to collect significantly more funds than the value of the projects in question.⁴³

In practice, sometimes the regional organization becomes an unnecessary intermediary who makes the bureaucratic procedures even slower. Sometimes the final contract is not concluded because the parts involved do not agree on the terms and the rules imposed by the regional agreement are inappropriate for the companies interested in the deal and that seek to make a profit. It also happens that companies wanting to get specific contracts, usually paid by the government, propose projects through intermediaries. In this way, the governments are paying money they initially did not have by investing them in projects considered useful for their countries development. At the same time, since there are few companies and governmental

⁴² For an overview of the goals and programs supported by these initiatives, see their respective websites (<http://www.secinet.org>) and (<http://www.stabilitypact.org>).

⁴³ According to the official website (<http://www.stabilitypact.org>), at the first Regional Funding Conference that took place in Brussels in 2000 the value of the over 200 projects chosen was EUR 1.8 billion but at the end of the conference the collected sum was EUR 2.4 billion.

structures capable to manage the funds allocated through regional projects, since many of these structures are complicatedly interconnected and usually far from the public eye, there is always the suspicion that regional cooperation is a means for feeding corrupt bureaucrats from different ministries.⁴⁴

For these reasons, a relevant problem is who should participate in these public-private partnerships. The ministries and professional associations such as the Associations of the Romanian Businessmen and the Chambers of Commerce are obvious choices. However, their decisions and choice of projects might not reflect the needs and possibilities of the companies that could be offered the contracts, therefore, for direct feed-back, the representatives of large companies should be also invited. On the other hand, with a growing number of large companies and a more competitive business environment, the participation to such initiatives might be very useful for certain companies, which in this way can get inside information. I will call this type of weakness an *institutional vulnerability*.

To solve it the governmental representatives frequently mimic consulting themselves with the business environment, commonly through seminars and trainings (sometimes funded through programs of regional initiatives).⁴⁵ Particularly if they do not have to pay participation fees, many businessmen are pleased to be at such reunions, hoping for useful information and contacts. As for the organisers, they can report to their donors a significant number of participants and thus prove that the goals of the event have been achieved.

A similar situation can be found in relation with the structures responsible for informing the local business environment about the activity of regional initiatives in South Eastern Europe. For instance, both the Stability Pact for South East Europe and the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative had specific institutions that finally merged into a Business Advisory Council (BAC) formed by a couple of businessmen

⁴⁴ Interview with Liliana Deac, Bucharest, 22 July 2005. This view is also supported by Marian Stoian, Director of Initial Advisory, Romanian company providing information and consultancy services for business development. Interview with Marian Stoian, Bucharest, 19 December 2005.

⁴⁵ Interview with Marian Stoian, Bucharest, 19 December 2005. The information appears in other interviews as well, especially with clerks from different governmental agencies but due to their position, they talked about this off the record.

from each participant country and whose role is exactly to facilitate communication between these organizations and the national business environment.

This device is, however, tricky. First, one must find important and prestigious businessmen who have time to participate to such reunions and inform the national structures (the ministries, the Chambers of Commerce and other professional associations) about their discussions. Then, these businessmen should be enough uninterested by the business opportunities provided by such meetings to share the information with others. Third, even if such businessmen exist they should not be linked to any particular economic interest other than the interest of the national business community. Of course, the chances to find these people are very small and what happened in practice in the case of Romania is that these representatives either did not go to the reunions or when they went they usually did not inform. When they nevertheless gave any information on what had been discussed, it was never enough for the others and this fuelled the suspicions related to particular economic interests.⁴⁶

For these reasons, Romanian businessmen interested in expanding on the regional markets are rather solitary and do not use the channels provided by the regional organizations, which are currently both costly and do not provide enough useful information. At present, these companies are few and expanded in countries close to Romania mainly because the national market became too small and not because information on regional development opportunities were presented by the government.⁴⁷

But sometimes, even if they wanted to expand they would not dare, particularly in the Western Balkans, which still have the reputation of combat places. Moreover, since business information on the region is not easily available, most entrepreneurs rely on regular media that almost never presents news from the neighbouring countries except for the ethnic conflicts or revolutionary changes of government.⁴⁸ It might be, however, reasonable to expect that an increase in the number of Romanian companies investing in the region shift partially this information balance but also change

⁴⁶ Interview with Liliana Deac, Bucharest, 22 July 2005.

⁴⁷ Interview with Marian Stoian, Bucharest, 24 August 2005.

⁴⁸ Interview with Marian Stoian, Bucharest, 19 December 2005.

perceptions with respect to this area and thus contribute to the transformation of regional identities. Until then, one should note the lack of information and efficient communication, which I will call *vulnerability of (information) mobility*.

For Romania, another significant problem, at least in the first years following the introduction of the public-private partnership approach, was its incapacity to generate projects, particularly of economic nature.⁴⁹ Yet, this incapacity is not strictly related to regional cooperation. For instance, in the last phases of the negotiations for integration within EU, one of the recurrent themes of discussion has been the fact that Romania and Bulgaria will have to generate projects with a total value of over EUR 15 billion, a sum very difficult to contract given the present estimates of these states' capabilities.⁵⁰ This would be perhaps an illustration of both institutional and mobility vulnerability.

A curious case of interplay between needs, expectations, information, project generation and project management is that of a two-year survey financed by the World Bank through a program of the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) – Trade and Transport Facilitation in Southeast Europe (TTFSE) Program.⁵¹ This survey, regarding trade and transport facilitation impediments in South Eastern Europe, should have shown the problems faced by transporters and drivers in the process of transporting, with a particular emphasis on the problems occurring in customs.

⁴⁹ Interviews with Teodor Meleşcanu, Bucharest, 18 June 2005 and 28 July 2005; Interview with Liliana Deac, Bucharest, 22 July 2005.

⁵⁰ For a good overview of Romania's negotiations, see the documentation provided by the Romanian Ministry of European Integration (<http://www.mie.ro>), the European Institute of Romania (<http://www.ier.ro>) and the Delegation of the European Commission in Romania (<http://www.infoeuropa.ro>).

⁵¹ The program is best known for a website (<http://www.ttfse.org>) providing official regional and national information about trade and transport facilitation in the South-Eastern European countries, as well as some legal and other practical instruments useful for transporters. The current version does not include many features present in the initial design due either to the lack of money to make them functional or to the fact that making some information available for free or low costs would have meant for the providers of such information (usually national governmental structures) a job both costly and heavily underpaid. Interview with Liliana Deac, Bucharest, 22 July 2005.

In the initial design, in the customs would have been placed several operators who should have asked the drivers about their problems in a detailed questionnaire. However, this was a plan almost impossible to achieve. First, while in customs, the drivers, particularly those with tight schedules, do not have time to complete questionnaires (letting aside the fact that these were asking the interviewees to rank items in a long series of questions, a totally inappropriate formula given the target group). Then, even if these questionnaires were anonymous, the drivers would not have liked to complete them being afraid that, if seen by the allegedly corrupt customs authorities, they would have got problems. For the same reason, in informal discussions, although almost all recognized that they were giving or asked for bribe in order to solve something in the customs it was very difficult to convince them offer also specific examples. The same fears were present in the case of the businessmen owning transport companies that were present at different seminars created to supplement the shortcomings of the initial design of the survey. Their answers were evasive and the participation rate in the survey was very low.

As the deadline for submitting the results was getting closer and the persons in charge for the survey in Romania had exhausted all possibilities to get the desired information, a decision had to be made so that the program be saved, at least from a financial point of view. This is how, with the existing know-how, more questionnaires were filled in so that the results follow the usual (and already known) trend.⁵² The interesting thing is that in the other participant countries the results were strangely similar to the already known trend. Given the fact that drivers are facing similar constrains with respect to the filling of forms in customs, one might easily suspect that at least in some of the countries the survey was partially completed by the organizers.

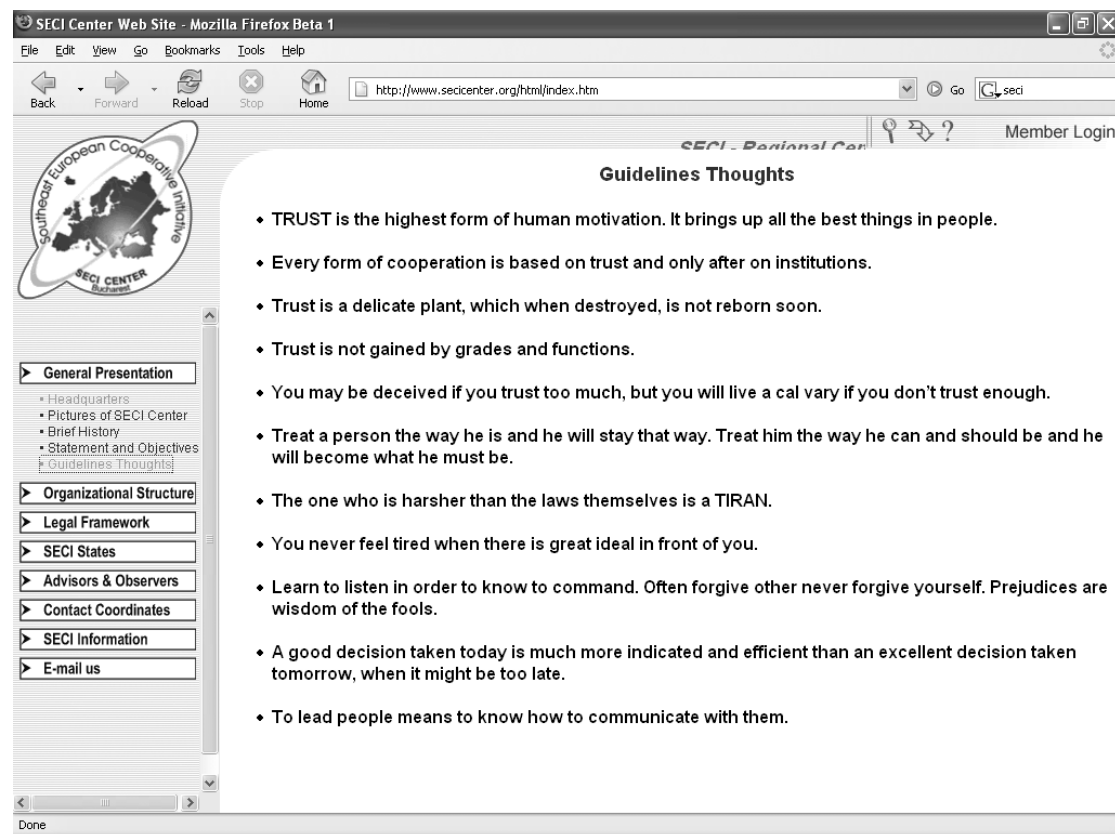
The list of the pointless actions sponsored through regional programs could continue with the making of a film in the customs showing only the “happy” cases of transporters pleased with the services but none of the cases where there are still significant problems. However, the most ludicrous example is by far that offered by

⁵² Information offered off the record by three interviewees from different institutions, two of them involved in the project and the other in its evaluation.

the website of the SECI Center, a regional structure of the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative whose mission is to support common trans-border crime fighting efforts.

This website⁵³ is supposed to be the interface between the SECI Center and all those who need information about its activities. Yet, when browsing these pages one can be very surprised to find also almost everywhere different quotes and philosophical reflections that do not fit the organization's profile. The highest density of such instances appears on a special section dedicated to the guideline thoughts of the organizations.

Fig. 3 SECI Center website snapshot



As visible in the snapshot on the previous page, the visitor easily perceives that TRUST and TIRAN (sic!) are the most important concepts behind the functioning of the SECI Center, the first one representing “the highest form of human motivation”, while the second referring to someone “harsher than the law themselves”. On the

⁵³ The official website of the SECI Center is <http://www.secicenter.org>. The headquarters is in situated in the building of the Romanian House of Parliament.

other hand, Trust should be understood as “a delicate plant, which when destroyed is not reborn soon” and cannot be “gained by grades and functions,” an interesting comparison for an institution fighting trans-border crime (which includes the trafficking of illicit herbs and fungi). The lack of professional PR skills is also evident after viewing the page of the SECI Operational Support Department (which in fact presents the director’s CV), on which there is a motto starting with “Tell me and I will forget”, or simply when looking for relevant information on the centre’s activity on this website.

To a certain extent this pertains to the human capital invested by the governments in the building of regional cooperative processes. If one looks at the CVs of the people usually involved administratively, one can easily notice that most of them are in their 40s or 50s, had benefited from a series of grants and institutional scholarships in the early and mid 1990s, programs that were sometimes remotely related to regional cooperation and that this people do not seem to have a particular interest in regional cooperation except the benefits of the present position.⁵⁴ These, as well as the difficulty to generate projects and the badly designed programs are illustrations of what I will call *human capital vulnerability*.

CONCLUSIONS

This research showed that the vulnerability of regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe, as revealed by the study of Romania’s interactions, motivations and obstacles in the process, is structural, institutional, as well as related to rhetoric, mobility and human capital. The most important factor of weakness appears to be the existing rhetoric behind regional cooperation in the area, as the initiatives are used as means for other foreign policy objectives, which might explain the lack of direction and conclusive results of regional processes. Furthermore, regional cooperation has

⁵⁴ The lack of genuine interest for regional cooperation projects is confirmed by many of the interviewees, even by those with important roles in their management. They sometimes justify this attitude as a reaction to an unprofessionally or insufficiently developed project whose terms were forced upon them.

been constantly employed particularly to support rhetorically the “Euro-Atlantic integration” efforts, a project that due to the EU enlargement is close to its end in many countries from Central and South Eastern. For these reasons, existing regional initiatives and the whole logic behind them require serious restructuring both within the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy framework and independently of EU.

With respect to the categories of regional cooperation and the possible link to the five factors of vulnerability, the study revealed several relations. Politically oriented and less institutionalized initiatives, such as the SEECP and the DCP, seem to be more prone to rhetoric vulnerability. All variants of existing regional cooperation are vulnerable in terms of human capital, although politically oriented and less institutionalized initiatives might be slightly less affected, as lack of professionalism is more easily visible due to its significant consequences, especially on the short run. Cooperative frameworks, such as SECI and the Stability Pact, with their loose and, at the same time, complex and frequently overlapping structures seem to be more vulnerable to institutional factors. Also, regional trade agreements may be a useful short-term antidote for rhetorical vulnerability. Finally, institutional, mobility and human capital vulnerabilities are often present concomitantly and their incidence seems to be higher in more institutionalized forms of regional cooperation.

In addition to identifying these factors, the research also suggests that the prospects for more effective cooperation at regional level are highly dependent on two other aspects. First, particularly to allow for more control as to who participates in regional projects and diminish the risk of consolidating certain political and economic clienteles, there is a need for genuine democratic consolidation with effective institution building doubled by a more consistent check-and-balance system. Then, the development of a more diverse business environment in each of the countries involved in the process could be a long-term solution for coping with the structural vulnerability of the region, which is the most enduring and difficult to deal with of all the identified factors. In other words, genuine regional cooperation, which is mainly an international interaction, would not really be possible without domestic stability, as well as the pursuing of the principles of democracy and free market competition, throughout the region.

APPENDIX

Main documents of the major regional intergovernmental organizations

Black Sea Economic Cooperation. *Agreement Establishing the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank*. Tbilisi, 30 June 1994.

_____. *Charter of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation*. Adopted at Yalta, 5 June 1998. Ratified 1 May 1999.

_____. *Declaration of Intent for the Establishment of the BSEC Trade Area*. Istanbul, 7 February 1997.

_____. *Declaration of the Heads of State or Government of the Participating States of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation*. Moscow, 25 October 1996.

_____. *Statement of the High Level Meeting of the BSEC Participating States*. Bucharest, 30 June 1995.

_____. *Summit Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation*. Istanbul, 25 June 1992.

_____. *Summit Declaration*. Istanbul, 17 November 1999.

_____. *Summit Declaration*. Yalta, 5 June 1998.

_____. *The Bosphorus Statement*. Istanbul, 25 June 1992.

Central European Initiative. *Contribution to a Co-operative and Stable Europe*. Sarajevo, 29 November 1997.

_____. *Guidelines for Activities and Rules of Procedure of the Central European Initiative*. Warsaw, 7 October 1995.

_____. *Instrument for the Protection of the Minority Rights*. Turin, 19 November 1994.

_____. *Plan of Action 2002-2003*. Trieste, 23 November 2001.

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