

Wolfgang Petritsch and Christophe Solioz (Eds).
Regional Cooperation in South East Europe and Beyond
(Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008, 187 pp.)

The Balkans in popular memory is an area of trouble and little understood conflicts leading to the First World War, trouble during the Second World War, not to mention the more recent conflicts related to the break up of Yugoslavia. Thus, perhaps a change of name would help — a positive rebranding. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was one effort to project a new image, but the Pact produced little stability, and the Kosovo ‘final status’ issue was an ever-present reminder that no solutions were ever final. This useful collection of essays plays it safe by calling the area ‘South East Europe and Beyond’. A difficulty arises, however, in that none of the inhabitants think of themselves as living in ‘South East Europe’ though some, like the Greeks and the Turks can think of themselves as ‘Beyond’ that once had important interests in the area. The Balkans are a region of overlapping regions.

The core of the Balkans is the states of former Yugoslavia. Slovenia would prefer to think of itself as a member of the European Union, but it cannot escape its relationship to its former federal partners. Bulgaria is part of the club, as is Albania which has usually gone its own way. However, there are Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia which complicates matters. Romania has certain affinities but is sure that it does not want others to think of it as a Balkan state. For certain purposes, the Republic of Moldova can be included because of its links to Romania, but Romania and even more so Moldova stress their differences from the Balkans, its culture and its history.

Seen from the distant offices of the World Bank in Washington or the European Union secretariat in Bruxelles, it would be logical if these countries cooperated among themselves. Regional cooperation not only boosts the region in meeting its common challenges, but also builds confidence outside the region in the whole enlargement and cooperation process. Most had been part of a common planning system of Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary had been members of COMECON, a somewhat weak copy of Western European integration. A major difficulty arises from the fact that the people in these states do not want to cooperate among themselves. Basically, they do not trust one another. Cooperation requires a certain amount of trust to get off the ground. Cooperative structures without trust that common interests can be found and continued over time become empty shells. The Balkan states are members of a number of cooperative arrangements, but none have given rise to deep changes in attitude. Regions are invented by political actors as a political programme, and there have been no political actors with a region-building priority.

As Othon Anastasakis notes “While regionalism from abroad may suffer from the inconstancies and discrepancies of international actors or the problematic nature of the regional initiatives, its most significant obstacle is the lack of local political will and a perceived problematic legitimacy of the externally imposed conditionality.” Political leadership is needed to inspire an electorate tired from transition difficulties, weak economies, plenty of corruption, and personal and national uncertainties.

Much hope for regional integration is based on the functionalist hypothesis: cooperation should be established through the promotion of cross-border activities such as transport, trade, production and welfare. See the useful analysis of functionalist thinking Stefan Schirm *Globalization and the New Regionalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) This

cooperation would develop security and stability and lead to political integration. However as Theodore Winkler and Gregor Zorn point out in their essay “Regional Security Cooperation in South East Europe” “Not more cooperation programmes are needed but more focused, concrete and result-oriented cooperation and prioritised.” Without priorities South East Europe and Beyond is not really a region, but as regions are considered a ‘good thing’, South East Europe is considered as an example of ‘new regionalism’ — characterised by its multidimensionality, complexity, fluidity and non-conformity, and by the fact that it involves a variety of State and non-State actors who often come together in rather informal multi-actor coalitions.

The informal multi-actor coalitions have been particularly strong in illegal transactions and trans-national crime. As Mary Kaldor writes “There has been an expansion of human trafficking, money-laundering and the smuggling of cigarettes, alcohol, drugs and weapons over the last decade — much of it to satisfy European and American markets — and all in the face of international agreements, aid programmes and the presence of foreign troops and agencies.” These trans-frontier flows are an important part of the ‘unobserved’ economy, comprising the informal economy, the underground economy, and the illegal economy.

Leadership requires vision of the future. As the editor Christophe Solioz writes in the conclusion “Currently, Europe is fragmented into various subregions; there is an obvious need to overcome this by focusing on interregional strategies and working out a renewed pan-European cooperation strategy. Thus, both at the economic and the geostrategic levels, pan-European organizations should reinvigorate their approach and work out a road map — focusing on key issues of regional cooperation for pan-European policies that could be used as a long-term strategic framework.”

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Drawing: Cecile Wadlow