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**European Architecture of Sub-regional
Groupings: The Regions of Europe or
Europe of the Regions**

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**Faculty of International Relations
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European Architecture of Sub-regional Groupings: The Regions of Europe or Europe of the Regions

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Summary:

The aim of this article is to investigate the regional architecture of the European continent of today. The existence of a great variety of sub-regional cooperation and integration groups is a reality brought about by the end of the Cold War and following collapse of the Soviet Union. In this paper we identify various cooperation and integration tendencies and concrete activities on the European continent. We try to classify these sub-regional arrangements according to various categories. Later, we summarize common features of sub-regional activity and justify their future continuation. We conclude that sub-regional activity contributes to the stability, prosperity and security not only of the EU but of the whole Europe and therefore needs to be acknowledged.

Keywords: European cooperation and integration process, sub-regional arrangements, European regional architecture, Europe of regions, the EU

Evropská architektura sub-regionálních skupin:

Regiony Evropy nebo Evropa regionů

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Abstrakt:

Cílem článku je zkoumat regionální architekturu současného evropského kontinentu. Dnes nepřekvapí existence velkého množství sub-regionálních kooperačních a integračních skupin vzniklých zejména v období od konce studené války a rozpadu sovětského bloku. V článku identifikujeme různé kooperační a integrační tendence a jejich konkrétní vyjádření na evropském kontinentě. Tyto sub-regionální aktivity klasifikujeme dle zvolených kategorií. Dále shrneme společné prvky sub-regionální aktivity a zdůvodníme jejich zachování a další aktivitu. V závěru shrneme, že sub-regionální aktivita přispívá ke stabilitě, prosperitě a bezpečnosti nejenom Evropské unie, ale rovněž celé Evropy, a z toho důvodu by měla být více akcentována.

Klíčové slova: evropský kooperační a integrační proces, sub-regionální skupiny, evropská regionální architektura, Evropa regionů, Evropská unie

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Introduction

The European continent has undergone several fundamental changes in the last two decades when it comes to regional and sub-regional settings. It has been in a process of permanent change since then when one structure influences the other and vice versa. However, one integration project stands out from the many others, as the one having the biggest ambition to cover (if not geographically then definitely ideologically and morally) the whole continent. Moreover, none of the sub-regional arrangements comes even close to the institutional setting, financial background and agenda coverage as the European Union.

So, we come out of the premise that the European continent is a puzzle made up of a significant number of sub-regional groupings varying in form, size, structure, content and orientation. The European Union as a unique and, by far, the biggest and most comprehensive integration structure in Europe is, however, not only the sole body on the continent. Still, the EU is the structure that defines the movement and the well being of the continent. Thus, we call the EU the main influencing factor of what is happening in Europe, including the sub-regional integration.

The article looks at the variety of sub-regional settings in Europe, their different nature, and their relationship to that comprehensive integration unit – the EU. It also aims to investigate and to categorize the different formats of the EU's relations with these sub-regional structures and tries to explain its motivation for doing so.

The existence of numerous sub-regional settings in Europe raises several questions about the future of this territory. How has the EU as the main actor on the European continent dealt with the splitting of its territory? Is this development going towards the creation of the various regions of Europe or is it heading towards a Europe of the regions? What is the European architecture going to look like in the future? To better understand the European setting we will describe the various cooperation and integration patterns in Europe of the past two decades and then draw conclusions about their nature. And finally, we shall attempt to predict the situation in the Europe of the future.

1. Methodology and Basic Concepts

Before the actual analysis, let us explain the main terms and concepts used in the text. The notion of the *European architecture* as used in this article is understood as a complex of various sub-regional structures of varying size, form and ambitions present in Europe. However, these structures often overlap and double their activity; which is another sign of mutual interdependence; and the density of their activities within Europe. By *regional structures*, we mean regional cooperation and integration arrangements in all their variations from tight supranational unions, to loose political dialogue forums. Thus, European architecture here is not perceived

as a single integration project as it is often interpreted in favour of the EU. Instead, we suggest that it is a multi-actor and multi-layer complex of complementary arrangements, no matter how chaotic it may seem.

We also work with the concept of a *region* and its adjective form *regional* and/or *sub-regional*. Definitions of regions vary significantly across different fields and authors. For our purposes, *region* is understood as a distinct geographical and geopolitical territory made of states that shares similar historical traditions, ethnic backgrounds, and basic practises. Region can be defined politically, geographically, culturally, historically, economically or linguistically. However, the differentiation from the outside must be generally perceived. The adjectives *regional* and *sub-regional* are often used interchangeably; with *regional* usually describing larger concepts, such as the European integration process of the EU, with *sub-regional* describing smaller (in size, content or ambitions) groupings within the European continent.

When it comes to the form of regional structure, we basically identify two forms: “*sub)regional integration form* and *(sub)regional cooperation form*. International relations recognize both concepts; however, they do not always distinguish between them. Cooperation and integration could either be a) two distinct levels of the general integration process; or b) two levels of the same integration process leading from loose cooperation to supranational integration. We argue that cooperation is the basic step on the way towards whatever type of integration; however, in some cases cooperation can remain the only step/level that the subjects agree to create. The main differentiation factors are a) the wiliness to surrender some of the national powers to a higher authority; b) the existence of supranational institutions; c) the supranational decision-making; and d) a common budget. Still, not all factors have to be present at the same time and in the same magnitude. Moreover, the frontier between cooperation and form integration is often blurred and unidentifiable.

As far as the methodology is concerned, we use the description of the existing sub-regional settings, followed by the analysis of their fundamental documents, declarations and final reports, as the primary source in order to investigate their original motivations and primary goals, as well as how they have been achieved. The findings are used to categorize sub-regional structures according to various determinants. In respect to the scope and the focus of this paper¹, we are not able to present an in-depth analysis of every sub-regional setting in Europe. We only summarize findings and compare the fundamental characteristics in order to clarify the status quo. Finally, the comparative analysis is used to find common and differing characteristics in order to draw conclusions about the future setting of the European continent.

1 This paper goes out from a detailed investigation carried out during several years and published as a part of the dissertation work of the author finalized in June 2010.

The cooperation and integrational activity is referred to as a continuous process of change, open to internal as well as external influence. The main idea coincides with the social constructivist concept² of ever changing social construction involving all actors. We are working on the premise that all actors – in our case sub-regional groupings – and their identities and interests are socially constructed by permanent mutual interactions – in our case in the interactions with other sub-regional or regional structures. The structures are identified by shared ideas which construct their identities and interests.

This paper aims to fill in the knowledge gap that has appeared in the field of European studies and International relations. Namely, that there is almost no comprehensive literature on European architecture as a complex of various sub-regional groups. Most European integration literature focuses on the integration processes leading to the formation of the EU, omitting most of the other cooperation and integration formats.³ Recently, there have been some attempts to bring back the focus to on the European architecture, as it is a very timely and current issue that deserves academic and scientific examination.

2. Regional Activity Dynamics

Beginning in the 1950s, the European continent was characterized as a continent divided between the East and West. The Western, developed, world started to unite itself due political, as well as economic, reasons in order to overcome the impact of the Second World War. The European integration process (EIP) has become the synonym for Western unification towards prosperity, stability and security. However, the EIP was not the only integration initiative in this area. There were numerous initiatives (whether they materialized or not) with the aim of creating regional units, complementary or substitute to the EC. From the most important (and durable) let us mention the BENELUX initiative of 1944, the Council of

² See A. Wendt's work on the Social Theory of International Politics (Wendt 2007).

³ Recently there have been two attempts to focus on this topic. Namely, it is the dissertation thesis of L.-A. Ghica, under the title "Friendship Communities? The Politics of Regional Intergovernmental Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe 1990–2007" conducted at the CEU in Budapest in 2008. It primarily focuses on the constructive analysis of international regionalism, regional cohesion and its dynamics in the area of Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the fact that the author describes and analyses several regional arrangements in the spirit of constructivism and, thus, comes to interesting conclusions, we cannot agree with all her findings and conclusions, and so, present a slightly different view on the subject. The second publication is the analysis of A. Cottey under the title: "Sub-regional Cooperation in Europe: An Assessment" from 2009. The author examines the period since the early 1990s, and observes the dynamics and driving forces of the sub-regional processes in the wider European territory. He classifies the processes studied in three basic periods, and assigns them their characteristic functions. Cottey's classification varies from the one suggested in this paper, which offers an alternative explanation and viewpoint on cooperation and the integration processes in Europe. However, most of the research on the existing regional structures was conducted by the author herself.

Europe of 1949, the NATO of 1949, or the EFTA of 1960. The Eastern Europe was forced to unity within the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union; which did not allow any deviations from the main communist doctrine. The existence of sub-regional groupings was unthinkable, while all were members of the COMECON and the Warsaw Pact organisations.

The situation changed dramatically after the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The main idea of the Cold War period was to overcome the division of the whole world, especially of the Europe, and to prevent the continent from dividing further. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe were the ones which made the greatest efforts to make a clean break from their communist past and to adopt the prosperous Western future. They proclaimed their final “return to Europe”, where they have always belonged. Their main foreign policy goal was (after the consolidation of their national affairs) to integrate into the Western European and transatlantic structures. Political and security motives stood behind most of the initiatives. However, this time was also favourable for developing the ideological, moral and cultural awareness necessary for building a new region.

Later, in the 1990s, the EU took over the role of fostering the cooperation initiatives, especially in the external areas still crucial for its own development – the Western Balkans. The obvious reason was that the Western Balkans has been a nightmare for the EU, which felt the moral onus upon it to somehow help this troubled part of Europe. The EU, as well as the USA, have initiated numerous cooperation offensives with the aim of stabilizing and normalizing the situation in the region. Moreover, the EU has defined functional regional cooperation as a necessary pre-condition for any eventual further association of these countries to the Union.

The last decade, especially after the latest wave of EU enlargements, has been characterized by the ambition of the EU to become a pan-European leader, as well as by the wishes of the outer rim to get closer to the EU. The EU has thus developed cooperation formats that cross its own borders, and reach out to its neighbours. Moreover, globalization and increasing interdependence raise issues that must be dealt with efficiently and collectively. Cooperation evolves around such issues as environmental protection, energy insufficiency or cultural cooperation. Today, Europe is a unique web of political, economic and cultural ties that deserve further investigation and academic attention.

3. Categorization of European Sub-regional Arrangements

The European continent is a domain of a significant amount of cooperation and integration structures. They vary in the membership, size, form and level of integration, institutions and/or the content of their activity. The time and historical context of their origin, motivation and ambitions, as well as the accomplishment of their original goals also varies significantly. Because of the great variety and

uniqueness of all groupings, we face several difficulties as far as distinct categorization is required. That is why the categorization may vary according to different authors.

However, keeping the above mentioned restraints in mind, we try to sketch the complex European architecture of sub-regional groupings followed by their brief characteristics, as well as an attempt to evaluate their performance.⁴

So, let us designate the main categories of sub-regional groupings within Europe according to their:

1. *regional profile*: Western-, Central-, North-, South-East-European;
2. *date of origin*: post-revolutionary (1989), in the 1990's, after 2004;
3. *integration form*: cooperation or integration;
4. *main activities*: economic, political, security;
5. *the EU participation*: EU member/non-member;
6. *the role of the EU*: member states, associate members, candidate states.

The end of the Cold War's division of Europe presented new challenges to the European integration process, as well as invisible dynamics. With the Maastricht Treaty's coming into force, the European Union has entered a new era of its existence, when economic integration has gained a significant political dimension. The EU has thus become the wider integration framework, not only for its current members, but also for the European aspirations of the Central and Eastern European countries. We will primarily focus on those regions and their groupings, which have had to overcome the already mentioned geopolitical changes, and whose main foreign policy ambitions included membership in the EU.

From the geographical point of view we can divide the sub-regional groupings into the following categories:

1. *Western Europe*: Benelux, British-Irish Council, European Union EU, European Free Trade Agreement EFTA, European Economic Area EEA, Weimar triangle W3;
2. *Central Europe*: Visegrád Cooperation V4, Regional Partnership RP, Danube strategy,
3. *Northern Europe*: Baltic Cooperation B3, Nordic Cooperation NC, Nordic-Baltic Cooperation NB-8, Council of the Baltic Sea States CBSS, Barents

⁴ The time framework for this analysis was limited from the end of the 1880's due to the fact that: 1) that the mapping of all regional initiatives on the European continent would need much extensive research; 2) the end of Cold War brought about a new unique wave of regionalism that deserves research; 3) and that these significant geopolitical changes started up two parallel processes: the process of unification and the process of regional differentiation.

- Euro-Artic Council BEAC, Northern dimension, EU strategy for the Baltic Sea;
4. *South-Eastern Europe*: South-East European Cooperative Initiative SECI, South-East European Cooperation Process SEEC, Regional Cooperation Council RCC, Stabilisation and Association Process SAP, Energy Community, Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, Danube strategy, Central European Free Trade Agreement CEFTA;
 5. *Eastern Europe*: Eastern Partnership EP, GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, Black Sea Economic Cooperation BSEC, Black Sea Synergy;
 6. *Mediterranean Europe*: Barcelona Process, Union for the Mediterranean.⁵

However, we can also name one extra category; the *pan-European integration* that would include most of the European states. This could include the 1949 Council of Europe (CE), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) of 1973/1995, European Union (EU) of 1952/1993; and European Economic Area (EEA) of 1994.

4. Three Generations of Regional Activity

Invisible integration activity began to occur immediately after the revolutionary changes of 1989/1990. This new wave of regionalism was influenced by the following factors: 1) the end of the Cold War; 2) the disintegration of the Soviet Union; 3) the disintegration process in Yugoslavia; 4) the wish for a democratic basis in Europe.

According to the timing of the origin of the sub-regional groupings along with the prevailing motives we characterize these categories:

1. *First generation* – the period 1988/91 – strides for political, security, and economic guarantees (V4, B3, NB8, CEFTA, BFTA);
2. *Second generation* – the period of the 1990's – the effort to prevent the creation of new dividing lines in Europe, and the stabilization of the Western Balkans (SECI, SEEC, SAP, ...);
3. *Third generation* – post 2004 – the effort for the democratic consolidation of the whole of Europe (RCC; V4+; Q4; the Nordic dimension; the Danube strategy; the Eastern Partnership; The Union for the Mediterranean, ...).⁶

⁵ Later in the text only abbreviations of the full names of sub-regional cooperation and integration groups will be used.

⁶ Similar classifications of the Post-Cold War Era, the Enlargement Era, and the Post-Enlargement Era was introduced by Cottey (2009).

Now, let's look closer at the attitude and position of the EU towards these generations. First, the EU was quite reluctant about the new groupings, whose main aim was to get as close to the EC/EU as possible. Indeed, the EU was absorbed with its internal debate on defining its post Cold War role in Europe. Moreover, the coming Maastricht Treaty was a big internal change to the decision making procedures, as well as to the institutional and financial setting. That is why the self-centred problems of the EU were more important and pressing than the question of relations towards the newly emerging sub-regional groupings. The EU has never officially asked for, nor requested, their creation, nor has it approved of, or supported them in any way. The only (relatively small) political and financial support from the EU was directed towards individual states rather than sub-regional groupings. The groupings themselves expressed doubts on many occasions about the support of the EU, and its true basis. They believed that the limited support of the EU stemmed from its reluctance to grant potential candidate states full membership status. They feared that sub-regional integration was supported only as a substitute for full EU membership. The irony of that period was the fact that the groupings looked to the EC/EU as the only guarantor of stability, democracy, security and prosperity and thus they desired full membership as a symbol of their final return to Europe. But the EU stayed cold towards their wishes and ambitions. Among the first cooperation groups that emerged after the end of the Cold War were the Central European Initiative of 1989⁷; the Visegrád Cooperation (V4) of 1991⁸ and the Baltic Cooperation (B3) of 1991⁹. The last two, in particular, were created to: 1) give shape to the newly emerged regions – as the expression of their regional identity and a way to show the West that they also belong to Europe; 2) to facilitate their EU and NATO membership ambitions.

The situation changed slightly after 1993, with the Copenhagen membership criteria, which basically meant that their wishes were acknowledged. The situation for the Central-European states improved then, but, conversely, for their sub-regional groupings the situation worsened, as the EU preferred a strictly individual approach, ignoring existing regional settings. This approach caused competition and rivalry instead of cooperation and coordination. Common activity re-emerged with the approaching accession date; however the original level of activity has never been achieved again. All of the sub-regional groupings (except the Baltic Free Trade Agreement, which lost its *raison d'être*) have survived, even after the accomplishment of the original goal; i.e. integration into the EU. They have re-structured, re-evaluated their goals and priorities, and have thus adapted to their new role as integral parts of Western, developed, Europe.

However, since their incorporation into the EU, they have been still searching for their new utilization, within the EU as well as outside its boundaries. They use

⁷ CEI: <http://www.ceinet.org/content/cei-glance>.

⁸ V4: www.visegradgroup.org.

⁹ B3: <http://www.baltasam.org>.

various cooperation formats to join forces 1) within the Union to enhance their decision making power, as well as 2) outside Europe to forward their transformation and association experience to European neighbours and intermediate their European ambitions.

The second period of integration activity had a slightly different motivation. We can say that the end of the Cold War had, among newly defined states, both the winners (Central European states including the Baltic states) and the losers (the Balkan countries, including the former Yugoslavia). The 1990s can be characterized as the lost period for the Western Balkans, especially for the former Yugoslavia, which has been tossed into violent conflicts and wars since the beginning of the new decade. The disintegration of Yugoslavia attracted great attention all around the world, but especially in Europe and the EU. The EU realized that instability in its South-Eastern corner could threaten the stability and security of the whole of Europe, and so became active in this region. In this case it was the EU that imposed regional (political, security and economic) cooperation in the region as a precaution against eventual conflicts, and as the premise for its potential association with the Union. And so, the second generation of sub-regional groupings has enjoyed official EU support from the very beginning. Moreover, the EU became a fully participating partner in many of the regional initiatives. The main aim was to prevent the creation of new dividing lines in Europe, and to stabilize the Western Balkans so that it does not pose a threat to European security and stability.

The trend of the second generation sub-regional groupings in the Western Balkans is the durability, flexibility and adaptability to changing conditions. The emphasis is put on the progress of the states in their mutual cooperation as a necessary pre-step for their further integration into the Western structures.

The newest generation of sub-regional groupings in Europe reacts to the ambitions of the EU to become a regional, as well as a world, leader. The last Eastern enlargements of 2004 and 2007 revived debates on the finality of the EU's shape and form. The EU aspires to the role of pan-European guarantor of democracy, stability, security and prosperity; that is why events beyond its borders also concern it. The irony of the last enlargement, and with its attendant enlargement exhaustion and fatigue, is that it has created a new, visible, line of division in Europe. This division line seems to be quite thick and unbreakable, certainly not in the short-term. On the other hand, the EU has created platforms of cross-border cooperation between the EU and its outside partners which blurs, at least a little, the lines between them. Another reason for responding to their calls for closer cooperation and/or association, and to a certain, very limited, extent, satisfy their European ambitions, is so as not to drive them away from the European democratic future. These wider formats include Southern Europe and Northern Africa, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, as well as Northern Europe. Compared to the first wave of regionalism, the EU (or its institutions; mostly the Commission) is often a full

member, or an observer in these initiatives, to ensure their proper use and to promote the EU's interests.

Another parallel trend is that of creating cooperation formats that include the various sub-regional groups, as well as non-member countries. These platforms arise especially due to the challenges presented by globalization; for instance, financial and economic crises, environmental issues, insufficient natural resources, culture, infrastructure, etc. Examples of such designated platforms could be the Baltic Sea strategy, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Cooperation, the Danube strategy and the Northern dimension.

Another type of categorization is *according to the form of integration*. Here we acknowledge two basic types and their sub-categories: 1) *cooperation* (ad hoc political forum, consultation forum, institutionalized cooperation); 2) *integration* (economic integration, political union, regional organization).

Moreover, we can also divide the existing structures *according to their main activities* into: 1) *specialized*: a) economic (BFTA, CEFTA, EFTA, BSEC, etc.); b) “high politics”/political/security (WEA, OSCE, etc.); c) “low politics” (environment, culture, education, etc.); and 2) *universal/complex* (V4, B3, NC, CBSS, SAP, etc.).

Now, we will focus on the last two categorizations as they are highly relevant when it comes to the nature of the European architecture.

5. European Architecture according to the Core Activities

What are the areas that sub-regional structures agree to cooperate in? The basis for our considerations is the fact that in Europe, a complex integration structure exists – the European Union. The EU is taken as a political, economic, as well as a security, organization of its own type (*sui generis*). That is why it is understandable that membership of the Union offers political, economic and security guarantees to its members. Moreover, the EU partly applies its guarantees even beyond its borders. We could then assume that there is no need to create additional sub-regional structures (political, economic, security) when the EU ensures political, economic and security guarantees for all.

However, the reality shows a different pattern, namely that there exists a complementary process of creating the sub-regional structures of varying natures and sizes. The reason for this we can see in the fact that the EU is still only a collection of heterogeneous actors that stem from differing starting positions, and follow different political, economic or security goals, which, on the other hand, all fall under the general ideas, values and goals of the EU. The EU thus represents the lowest possible denominator of political, economic and security demands of the EU-27. For this reason, the existence of various specialized sub-regional structures that address specific issues of the particular sub-region is justified.

As was said before, the sub-regional structures have emerged before EU accession, as well as after it. Still, we work from the premise that all states, and their groupings, are heading towards the EU in some way, whether it be full membership aspiration, or any kind of association that brings benefits of all kinds. That is why we can also apply the above mentioned idea to the area outside the EU. Furthermore, the European integration process has been an open one with no defined end. According to the Establishing Treaties, membership is open to any democratic European state that fulfils given conditions.

The main areas where sub-regional structures are useful are: 1) political security and stability; 2) security guarantees; and 3) economic prosperity. Current European architecture can be thus divided according to the main motives of their activities. However, it must be noted that in some cases the profile of the grouping is not clear, or easily readable. In such cases, the most usual activity will be decisive; or when more activities will be pursued in an equal manner, the group will be assigned to multiple categories.

5.1 Cooperation and Integration in the Area of Political Security and Stability

Knowing the basic nature of integration process and the conditions in the Europe of the end of the 1980s, we can say that all initiatives in this territory are rooted in the need for political stability, democratic foundations, the rule of law, and guarantees of basic human and political rights.

The most representative example is the Process of Cooperation in South Eastern Europe SEEC¹⁰, which aims at trust building, stability, security and good neighbourly relations in the region, using political and diplomatic dialogue. It is one of the few activities that was initiated from the inside, namely the Bulgarian initiative of 1996. This cooperation process complements other integration processes in the region, such as the: Stabilization Pact, South Eastern Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI) and the Stabilization and Association Process SAP. Another good example is the Visegrád Cooperation and Baltic Cooperation that were designed as structures for political and security foundations within the European architecture from the very beginning. Moreover, the political emphasis is crucial for the maintenance, and the future development, of such cooperation.

All other sub-regional groupings of a political nature are listed in following table¹¹:

Western Europe
▪ Benelux – <i>Political and Economic Union</i> (1944) – Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg
▪ <i>British-Irish Council</i> (1999) – Ireland, UK, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Guernsey, the Isle of Man, Jersey

¹⁰ SEEC¹⁰: <http://www.seecp-turkey.org/icerik.php?no=16>.

¹¹ For the EU member countries the accustomed abbreviations are used.

Central Europe

- CEI – *Central European Initiative* (Nov. 1989) – CZ, HU, PL, SK, AT, SI, IT, BG, RO, Albania, Belarus, , Montenegro, Macedonia, Moldavia, Kosovo, Serbia, Ukraine
- V4 – *Visegrád Four* (Feb. 1991) – CZ, HU, PL, SK
- W3 – *Weimar triangle* (1991) – PL, FR, DE
- RP – *Regional Partnership* (June 2001) – AT, CZ, HU, PL, SK, SI
- DCP – *Danube Cooperation Process* (2002) – AT, DE, CZ, SK, HU, SI, BG, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldavia, Serbia, RO, Ukraine, EC, SPSEE

Northern Europe

- *The Nordic Passport Union* (1954) – DA, Faeroe islands, SV, NO, FI, Iceland
- CBSS – *Council of the Baltic Sea States* (March 1992) – LI, LT, ET, DA, DE, FI, IS, NO, RU, SV, EC
- NC – *Nordic Council/Nordic Council of Ministers* (1952/1971) – DA, FI, IS, NO, SV
- NB-8 – *Nordic-Baltic Cooperation* – „5+3“ (May 1992) – LI, LT, ET, DA, FI, IS, NO, SV
- B3 – *Baltic Cooperation* (1991/June 1994) – LI, LT, ET
- BEAC – *Barents Euro-Arctic Council* (Jan.1993) – DA, FI, IS, NO, RU, SV, EC

South-Eastern Europe

- SECI – *South-East European Cooperative Initiative* (Dec.1996) – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, BG, Croatia, GR, Macedonia, HU, Moldavia, Montenegro, RO, Serbia, SI, Turkey
- SEECP – *South-East European Cooperation Process* (July 1996) – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, BG, Croatia, GR, Macedonia, Moldavia, Montenegro, RO, Serbia, Turkey
- SPSES – *Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe* (June 1999) – successor to the Royaumont Initiative-Process of stability and good-neighbourly relations in South-Eastern Europe (1995) – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, BG, RO, HU, EU, RF, Turkey, the USA
- RCC – *Regional Cooperation Council* (Feb.2008) – successor to the SPSEE – EU, Albania, Bosnia a Herzegovina, BG, Croatia, GR, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldavia, Montenegro, RO, Serbia, Turkey
- SAP – *Stabilisation and Association Process* (2000) – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia
- Energy Community (July 2006) – EU, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia
- AII/AIC – *Adriatic-Ionian Initiative/Council* (March 2000) – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, GR, IT, Montenegro, Serbia, SI
- Q4 – *Quadrilateral Cooperation* (2000–2010) – HU, IT, SI, Croatia, original aim fulfilled, activity dissolved into the RCC, CEI, EU, NATO

5.2 Cooperation and Integration in the Area of Security

Some sub-regional structures emerge solely for security reasons. This type of cooperation/integration – in the area of so called “hard security” – is relatively rare in Europe, because security guarantees are given by NATO, OSCE and, to a lesser extent also the EU. Compared to the politically induced cooperation and

integration, which is sufficiently general in its nature, purely security cooperation is quite limiting. Limits are given by the military inputs, e.g. military equipment, technology or manpower which is, in principle, financially very demanding. Moreover, the duplication of activities in the military field appears to be useless. Thus, security cooperation takes place within NATO, OSCE, or eventually, EU frameworks.

On the other hand, the so called “soft security” can be included under the political cooperation and integration headings. Elements of cooperation in security matters, together with such issues as migration, cross-border crime or international terrorism can be also found in the Visegrád Cooperation (V4), Baltic Cooperation (B3), Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), Nordic-Baltic cooperation (NB8), as well as in the whole range of cooperation processes in the South-Eastern Europe (SEEC, SECI, BSEC).

5.3 Cooperation and Integration in the Economic Area

Compared to security cooperation, economic integration and cooperation, and to a greater extent, FTA and economic union integration is easier to reach agreement upon, and so, is more common. Discussions on economic matters can be heard also within political groupings as it is an important part of citizens’ lives. On the other hand, strictly economic integration groups emerge, mostly in the form of free trade zones, common markets and/or, eventually, economic unions. As such, they often serve as a pre-step for integration into the European single market. That was the case of the Central European Free Trade Agreement CEFTA, and the Baltic Free Trade Agreement BFTA. In contrast to the BFTA, which dissolved upon the accession of its members into the EU; CEFTA has transformed into the economic integration grouping in the Western Balkans. The not very accurate name “Central European” is more symbolic today, as the main idea of economic integration as a means to get closer to the EU’s economic standards, eventually culminating full membership has remained.

Another still active group is the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)¹² from June 1992 that also includes elements of political cooperation with the aim to provide for the peaceful and prosperous co-existence of the Black Sea states, and good neighbourly relations in the region. In 1999, the BSEC became an international economic organization, as well as a legal entity. The South-East Cooperation Initiative (SECI)¹³ is another example of economic cooperation and the removal of trade barriers in the region of South-Eastern Europe. The main goal is the economic development and the restoration of the region, along with attracting investors, as a reaction to the critical developments which took place after the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

¹² BSEC: <http://www.bsec-organization.org/Information/Pages/testt.aspx>.

¹³ SECI: <http://www.secinet.info/>.

Most of the cooperation and integration activities on European territory also pursue other, complementary, goals, for instance, in the area of culture, education, or environmental protection. To name just a few, there are, for example, the V4 group, whose practical activities cover already mentioned fields (through the International Visegrád Fund). The B3 also includes complementary activities. They have even created special Baltic awards in science, literature and art for outstanding contributions made by Baltic state citizens. It is also worth mentioning the Baltic medal for extraordinary contributions to the strengthening of the Baltic unity and cohesion. Similarly, the Central European Initiative (CEI)¹⁴ covers a great variety of states of Central and South-Eastern Europe, and aims at lessening the political and economic differences among its members by activities in the fields of education, civil society, tourism, science, infrastructure or the environment. An environmental subtext is also present in the Cooperation of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS¹⁵), or the Danube Strategy.

6. European Architecture according to the Form of Integration

Now, we will focus on division according to the integration form. As has been described in the beginning, cooperation and integration could be defined as two stages of a general integration process leading to some supranational elements. However, the integration process only rarely culminates in the final stage of economic, and finally political, union. Usually, it stagnates at some earlier point. That is why we can identify structures that stayed at the initial cooperation stage, as well as structures that created supranational institutions and decision making processes. The evolution of the integration process and its progress depends on various factors, but mostly on the objective and, even more often, subjective (un)willingness to surrender competences and decision making powers.

Existing structures are put into two basic categories: *cooperation* and *integration*; and subsequently, three sub-categories of cooperation (*ad hoc cooperation* – meetings only when needed, or in case of a pressing issue; *consultative forum* – permanent meetings at various levels as set to a time table; *institutionalized cooperation* – cooperation of a number of institutionalized bodies under specified rules), and integration (economic integration, political union, regional organization).

The decisive factors are following: 1) existence of supranational institutions and decision making; 2) the binding power of final documents; 3) legal entity; 4) the existence, and construction of, a budget.¹⁶

¹⁴ CEI: <http://www.ceinet.org/content/cei-glance>.

¹⁵ CBSS: <http://www.cbss.org/main>.

¹⁶ Let us remember that not all attributes are represented in the same amount; that is why we take their own view of themselves into consideration as written in their official documents. We also

Cooperation

- a. *Ad hoc cooperation*: RP 2001, W3 1991, SEECP 1996;
- b. *Consultation forum*: *British-Irish Council* 1999, V4 1991, Danube Cooperation DCP 2002, CBSS 1992, Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation (BEAC + BRC) 1993, SECI 1996, (SEECP 1999) → RCC 2008, AII/AIC 2000;
- c. *Institutionalized cooperation*: B3 (BC+BCM) 1991, NB8 1992, Nordic Cooperation (NC+NCM) 1952/1971.

Integration

- a. *Economic integration (customs union/free trade agreement/common market/economic union)*: Customs Union Lichtenstein a Switzerland 1922, EFTA 1960, (BFTA 1994), CEFTA 1993, Benelux 1994, + EU
- b. *Political union*: Benelux 1944;
- c. *Regional organization*: Western European Union 1948, OCSE 1973/1995, Council of Europe 1949, CEI 1989/1992, BA 1991, NC1952, BSEC 1992, Energy Community 2006.

As the list above shows, the most prevailing trend in Europe is the (with varying degrees of rigidity) *intergovernmental cooperation* on the basis of a consultative forum for its member states. Typically, it is a specific region that geographically binds member countries together. For an example of this, see: the Visegrád Cooperation, Council of the Baltic Seas States, Barents Sea Cooperation, Danube Cooperation and the processes in the Western Balkans. Despite their geographic proximity, the member countries often differ significantly. The wish to pursue their own foreign policy strategies, as well as specific national problems, are the main reasons why states don't proceed with deeper integration. Cooperation is based on a prearranged schedule of representatives' meetings at all levels, as well as non-binding declarations, recommendations or statements as the outcomes of their activity. Their activity covers cooperation in areas of both high and low politics; however, because of the sensitive nature of most high-political matters, cooperation is limited to such areas as culture, education, science, research, environment, cross-border cooperation, transport, infrastructure or economic cooperation.

The second suggested category, *institutionalized cooperation*, is an arrangement of mutual relations that builds on the existence of institutions with certain integration characteristics, as well as their mutual cooperation. Usually this means the comprehensive cooperation of inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary forms and/or their joint meetings. This setting is typical for Baltic Cooperation and its model, Nordic Cooperation, and even for their joint cooperation on the platform of Nordic-Baltic Cooperation "NB 5+3" (NB8).

admit that the categorization is not fixed and unchangeable and it could vary according to the author, and the criteria used.

The third type, *ad hoc cooperation*, such as the Weimar triangle, or Regional Partnership, are very loose types of cooperation which are active only when there is an urgent need to solve some regional issue, or less frequently, when a matter of common interest to the member states arises. These are loose forms, more commonly called a “coordination of positions”; however, they could, in the case of a strong common interest play useful role.

Surprisingly, in the regional architecture of Europe the *integration form* is less frequent. In general, the best known category of economic integration takes such forms as passport union, customs union, FTA, common market or monetary and economic union. To this category we would assign the (now non-existent) Baltic FTA, as well as the still functioning CEFTA, which have served as preparation for their members’ eventual Single European market entry. Another EEC alternative has been the EFTA which has indeed also served as an EC/EU accession “pre-school” for some of its members.

The most common integration form became the *regional organization*. Regional organization refers to an institutionalized organization under international law, with international institutions, secretariat, budget and supranational decision making. The Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council call themselves regional organizations, as they are supranational bodies with decision making power. However, in aggregate constellation with other bodies they are manifestations of the above mentioned institutionalized cooperation.

In 1992 the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) was established, originally as a model for multilateral political and economic cooperation aiming to ensure stability, prosperity and peace in the region, as well as harmonious neighbourly relations. Upon signing the Charter of 1st May 1999, the BSEC obtained international legal entity status, and became a regional economic organization – the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation – with a permanent secretariat, Council of the Foreign Ministers and other bodies of inter-parliamentary, inter-governmental and business cooperation, including its own bank. Each institution has its own budget and outputs in the form of agreements, decisions or declarations that are binding for the signatories.¹⁷

From the smaller sub-regional structures, the Central European Initiative (CEI) comes close to this category. The CEI is considered to be the oldest sub-regional organization in Central and Eastern Europe, dating from 1989. Its main objective is to promote political and socio-economic development in the region so as to prevent new dividing lines emerging in Europe. Today, it focuses on drawing EU non-member countries closer to community standards. Basically it is a consultative forum that operates in three dimensions: the inter-governmental, inter-parliamentary and business dimension. The CEI is based on a sophisticated system

¹⁷ BSEC: <http://www.bsec-organization.org>.

of all-level meetings. It provides for a permanent secretariat, and a common budget that is used to finance many common projects. Member states contribute to one compulsory, and two optional, funds. Moreover, the CEI has been enabled to participate in, and draw financial resources from, EU funds. The functional structure, and financing in particular, characterize the CEI as a regional organization.

The Energy Community is another form of organization with the participation of the EU and western Balkan states. It has a strong institutional background with the aim of implementing community *acquis* in the field of energy in the countries of the Western Balkans. In doing so, the internal energy market is being expanded into South-Eastern Europe on the basis of legally binding legislation, which has a positive influence on the energy security of the region, as well as the EU as a whole. Contributions to a common budget come from the seven member states, but the majority (98%) of the contributions come from the EU.¹⁸

Comparing the representations of *cooperation* and *integration* (afterwards *regional organization*), we come to the conclusion that the European architecture is dominated by more or less tightly bound cooperation arrangements. It is a reflection of the states' unwillingness to surrender their sovereignty in favour of supranational institutions. Furthermore, integration in the framework of the EU demands a significant transfer of decision making competences to community bodies; loss of more national powers is unacceptable. In order to stay sovereign, and at the same time gain the benefits of mutual cooperation, the states must choose a system of loose, uninstitutionalized cooperation on a regional basis. However, that also reveals another characteristic of the sub-regional forms; that is, the significant dependence on the political will of particular members to cooperate.

Another conclusion we can draw is, the pattern that the bigger the number of members in a grouping, the harder it is to formulate the particular objectives of regional cooperation. With increasing membership, the risk of incompatibility of foreign policy regional and pan-European priorities also increases. Moreover, the acting capability, as well as the group's dynamics, decreases in direct proportion. Comparing "cooperation" and "integration", the challenge of finding a common solution is much higher in the case of integration. The failure to meet the intersection of priorities, interests and objectives in the case of integration could lead to the expulsion, or suspension, of the non-conforming member. In the case of cooperation, the differences in positions don't necessarily result in states leaving the group, while the nature of cooperation arrangements does not oblige them to take a unanimous stance, and so, there are no sanctions imposed.

¹⁸ Energy Community (EC): http://www.energy-community.org/portal/page/portal/ENC_HOME/ENERGY_COMMUNITY/Facts_and_Figures.

7. European Architecture according to the EU Participation

As has already been stated, the EU is a dominant but not exclusive actor on the European continent. All of the above mentioned arrangements have one thing in common: their membership included either 1) only EU member states; 2) both EU member and non-member states; 3) both EU member and non-member states, as well as the EU institutions (often the Commission). European integration arrangements with no direct EU participation are relatively rare; most of them are in the Eastern part of Europe, e.g. GUUAM¹⁹, CIS²⁰, Black Sea Synergy²¹ or EFTA.

Thus, we can conclude that the EU is indeed an important factor of sub-regional structures. Even in such cases where no EU institutions directly participate in regional cooperation or integration, the regional agenda setting is highly influenced by the Union. The main objective (either specifically stated, or implied) of all the structures we have examined is, at the very least, to come nearer to the democratic, economic and/or security standards of the EU, or, eventually, to a form of association, or indeed, full membership.

Examples of cooperation and integration arrangements with only EU members are: Benelux, British-Irish Council, Visegrád Cooperation, Regional Partnership, Baltic Cooperation and the Weimar Triangle. Both EU member and non-member states join in the: CEI, Danube Cooperation, Nordic Passport Union, Nordic Cooperation, NB8, SECI, SECP, Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, BSEC, CEFTA. The Commission participates in the Baltic Sea Cooperation (CBSS), Barents Sea Cooperation BEAC, SAP, RCC and the Energy Community.

From the lists above we can conclude that smaller groups (of about 3 to 6 members) form cooperation on the basis of historical, ethnic, or language proximity –that which is typical for fewer states, and which makes them different from the others. They demonstrate their uniqueness also against the EU – by not including EU bodies.

Groups bigger in numbers of members, and larger in area, unite on the basis of a geographic region and the fact that geography affects their existence (environment, fishery, energy dependence, etc.). The membership is, thus, not limited to EU members only, but includes all concerned European states which seek to solve a particular regional issue. The EU is often represented on the level of associate members, partners or observers.

¹⁹ GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova) – Cooperation of five states from 1996 as a political, economic and strategic alliance with the aim to strengthen the independence and sovereignty of post soviet republics and their mutual cooperation. See <http://www.guam.org/general/browse.html>.

²⁰ The Commonwealth of Independent States: <http://www.cis.minsk.by/>.

²¹ Black Sea Synergy, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/blacksea/index_en.htm.

When the regional problems become too serious, whether on environmental, economic or security grounds, the EU actively participates in the cooperation process. A typical environmental and energy conscious group is the one cooperating around the Baltic Sea; or the political/security based support for the stabilization and association process in the Western Balkans.

8. Regional Concepts of the EU

Another aspect of European architecture is the EU's relations with its surroundings. The EU is quite aware of the ongoing, and still open, debate about its own finality. The reality of today is that the EU is spread out over most of the European continent; the rest is called its neighbourhood. It is obvious that events taking place in the EU's neighbourhood cannot be ignored, or neglected, for security, stability and ideological reasons. However, the EU is pushing an inclusive approach/agenda (also seen by the Visegrád and Baltic states' accession to the EU). Due to internal (institutional) and external (economic and political immaturity of its neighbours) reasons, the EU maintains following scheme of relations with its neighbours (outlined in a very simplified way): 1) *candidate states* – from 2005 Croatia, Macedonia, and Turkey; 2) *potential candidates* – Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo; 3) *associate or partner countries* – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Barcelona Process participants (Northern Africa, the Middle East).

The process of enlargement is one of the instruments for enforcing the EU's inclusive concept, and, at the same time, it is an important attribute of its soft power. The EU strives to create an area of stability, prosperity, security, democracy and governed by the rule of law that is quite attractive for its neighbours. EU membership has been the ultimate goal for most European countries and their groupings. After 1989, the EU's attention turned towards the Central and Eastern European states, thus aiming at the final unification of Europe. And, conversely, the Central and Eastern European states turned towards the EU, and wished for fast track membership as the final confirmation of their return to Europe. After the successful Eastern enlargement of 2004/2007, the Union's attention turned to South-Eastern Europe – traditionally a priority region, suffering from violent conflicts. The cure for this long troubled region is seen in its closer association with the EU. Future enlargement is thus going to have South-Eastern direction.

The convergence of the Western Balkans and the EU occurs within the framework of the *Stabilization and Association Process* (SAP). Similarly to Europa Agreements on Eastern enlargement, the EU concluded with each Balkan country a so called Stabilization and Association Agreement that sets out mutual rights and obligations. Also, in this case, the EU has an individual approach to potential candidates; i.e., it

evaluates each country on the basis of its putting into action the Copenhagen criteria²², and the conditions under the SAP.

The main objectives of the SAP are:

1. The stabilization of countries, and their swift transformation to the market economy;
2. The promotion of regional cooperation;
3. Eventual membership in the EU.

Namely, the second point is a new one that appears for the first time using the experience of Eastern enlargement. SAP is, thus, not a strictly bilateral approach; it puts the emphasis on regional cooperation. Part of SAP Agreements is a clear obligation and manifestation of regional cooperation. According to EU officials, regional political and economic cooperation is the only possible way to successfully face such common challenges as the insufficiency of energy resources, pollution, underdeveloped infrastructure, cross-border criminality, etc. The EU hopes that such an approach would teach the countries to peacefully cooperate on a smaller scale before they become members of the EU; it urges them to create FTAs before they enter the European single market, and wishes to reintegrate the Western Balkans into the infrastructure networks.²³

Besides enlargement, the EU creates other regionally specified formats of cooperation. These formats apply to both member and non member states. It began in the mid 1990s with the Barcelona Process, with the holding of political and security dialogue, economic and financial partnership and social, cultural and civic cooperation.²⁴ Originally, it covered only the Mediterranean states with no ambition to become full members; in contrast to the Central and Eastern European states. Later, this policy evolved into the so called European Neighbourhood Policy ENP. Now, a similar framework of mutual relations is applied to the Mediterranean area – *The Union for the Mediterranean*; Eastern Europe – *The Eastern Partnership* (both parts of ENP²⁵); Black Sea region – *Black Sea Synergy*; and the strategy for the Western Balkans – *Stabilisation and Association Process*.

²² An EU candidate state has to be a European country that respects freedom, democracy, human and minority rights and the rule of law, according to the Treaty of the EU (article 6. and 49). The Copenhagen criteria, set by the European Council in December 1993, can be summarized as 1) Stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law and human and minority rights; 2) A functioning market economy, the ability to cope with internal market forces and withstand the competition; 3) the ability to adopt the *aquis communautaire* and pursue common political, economic and monetary objectives. (http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/the-policy/conditions-for-enlargement/index_en.htm)

²³ More at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/projects-in-focus/regional-cooperation/index_en.htm.

²⁴ More at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/barcelona_en.htm.

²⁵ More at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/enp/index_en.htm.

As a subcategory of such a regional approach of the EU towards its surroundings we can also name *the Nordic dimension*, which also covers EU non-member states, and the Council of *the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)* with the participation of the European Commission. The cooperation around the Baltic Sea was quite inspiring for the new regional initiative for the Danube river – *Strategy for the Danube River*.

9. Characteristics of Sub-regional Activity in Europe since the late '80s

Studying the numerous sub-regional structures we try to draw conclusions about the characteristics of the European cooperation and integration process.²⁶ However, one must be aware of the considerable simplification of the described processes, as it is a very comprehensive system demanding further, more extensive research.

1. In the initial phase, the political elites play a crucial role – elites with regional (V4, B3), or European backgrounds (SAP) – and their active involvement and commitment to the idea of regional cooperation. Later on, this personal involvement is replaced by technical and bureaucratic processes that, unfortunately, often drive cooperation into inertia. Typical examples include: CEI, SECI or BSEC. In the case of the Visegrád and Baltic Cooperation we can also observe such “technicization”; however, as far as pure cooperation is concerned, it fully depends on political will. Therefore, the decline in political motivation obviously leads to the decline of regional activity (e.g. the period 1993–1998 for the V4 or similarly for the B3).
2. Sub-regional activity, in most cases, stems from inside the region; from the need to demonstrate the uniqueness of the region, or to address region-specific issues. The Visegrád and Baltic Cooperation, together with the CBSS and NC confirm such views. On the other hand, the complex Stabilization and Association Process in the Western Balkans is an exception, because the USA and the EU have become the main driving forces. However, even in this case, the effort to delegate the main activities to the region itself is visible, for instance, in the form of the creation of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), which, among other things, promotes the so called regional ownership.
3. There is always an external element present which significantly influences sub-regional cooperation. In our case, it is the EU that unites most of Europe’s territory, at least its Western part. The Union influences the origin, development, functioning or the agenda of the sub-regional arrangements within the Union, as well as outside, both directly (as full member, associate member or observer) and indirectly (through its “soft power” qualities). The EU serves as a reference agent for all sub-regional groupings – as a guarantor of democracy, rule of law, economic prosperity and stability, or as a framework regulating their activity, legislation or structure.

²⁶ Compare to L.-A. Ghica and her findings, Ghica 2008, or Cottey 2009.

4. There is a significant interconnection (not really interdependence) among the groupings, as well as the frequent overlapping of membership and their main activities. On a relatively small territory, a great number of sub-regional cooperation/integration arrangements exist that often overlap or even duplicate activities.
5. In Europe, the form of cooperation dominates over the integration form due to the high sensitivity towards losing sovereignty in favour of supranational entities. The mood of stiffness and resistance predominates regardless of the form of integration. That also explains the low level of institutionalization of existing structures. Moreover, even if there are any institutions, they often play only symbolic, or representative, role (secretariats). Budgets are similarly minimal.
6. In most cases, sub-regional integration is only a part of the wider integration into such European structures as the EU, or NATO. Until the SAP, sub-regional integration was not officially required. Still, it was implicitly supported as the preparation for the wider, and more complex, integration into the political and economic institutions of the EU. For example, the Visegrád or Baltic states strove to demonstrate their ability to cooperate with the aim of building up the trust of the West.
7. Inside regional groups, usually at their origin, the fear of false support often present. Countries feared that the support of the EU and NATO served only to camouflage their true intentions: to force regional integration as an alternative to full membership. Today, it is difficult, if not impossible, to uncover the authentic debate about the true reasons of the Western support of the arrangements of the early 1990's. However, such accusations have not been disproven so far. The fact is that such opinions still exist, although are not presented as official, naturally enough.
8. There is another implication of the above mentioned, and that is that the characteristics of the sub-regional arrangements act as "second-rank" structures. Most of them are products of wider Euro-Atlantic ambitions, or the residue of the enlargements. As long as there is the possibility of full membership in EU and/or NATO, regional integration is relegated to second or third position.
9. Analysis of the particular outcomes of the sub-regional structures shows a significant gap between the declared and the achieved goals. We can even conclude that most of the arrangements work only on a declaratory level. Such a gap also relates to a vague definition of goals and priorities that often lack any kind of concrete form, and, of course, real execution. The risk of non-achievement of goals decreases with progressing integration, which introduces the obligations arising from legally binding decision making, along with a set of sanctions to penalise non-compliance with those decisions.
10. The blooming of mutual cooperation is often hampered by competition and rivalry. In the case of economic cooperation, we can argue that it is caused by their common past in the Soviet bloc and similar economic structures (the

dependence on raw materials, extensive production, heavy industry, similar structure of production, etc.). All this has made them competitors rather than partners. Statistics show that after the FTA creation (CEFTA, BFTA) there was not any significant increase in mutual intra-regional trade, which has stayed at its minimum. Moreover, adding the political element, the phenomenon of rivalry has increased, even as they were approaching accession to the EU and NATO. The EU has applied the individual bilateral approach which has increased the competition among the former partners even more. We don't have to go far for good examples; remember the split of the V4 in the Czech Republic versus the rest; or Estonia against Latvia and Lithuania; or the position of Ukraine against the other Eastern Partnership participants; Greece and Russia in the BSEC, etc.

Moreover, regional cooperation should contribute to the enhancement of security and stability, both in the region and Europe as a whole. Cooperation in general helps to build common trust and predictability of partner's actions. It is also a way of overcoming, or moderating, bilateral conflicts, which are often based on historical stereotypes. Regional cooperation provides for discussion platforms for communicating different positions and demands, and in such a way as contributes to their convergence. However, reality often contradicts this thesis; that is why this point has not been included in the previous list. Unfortunately, bilateral (verbal) conflicts occur despite existing regional cooperation platforms, as is the case of V4 or B3. On the other hand, especially V4 and B3 serve as communication platforms for expressing disagreement, both directly and indirectly (refusing to participate at a meeting, boycott of summits, delegating lower rank official, etc.). However, we can only speculate as to what extent such communication platforms serve to solve mutual conflicts and settle disagreements.

10. Future of Sub-regional Integration

The great number of sub-regional structures in Europe, their interconnection and duplication of effort give critics support for their argument that regionalism in Europe has reached its limits. Instead of constantly creating new platforms, we should, rather, concentrate on reforming the existing ones, making them more efficient and project oriented. Ironically, that is also an argument used by the supporters of sub-regional integration, who argue that times, situations and conditions change, so the whole structure, objectives and functioning have to change as well. Globalization brings along new challenges in a rapid way. It is absolutely necessary to make the structures more flexible, adapt to the new environment, and/or eventually create better suited structures. From the study of European cooperation and integration structures, and their own visions, their decay – even after the fulfilment of their original goals – is very improbable. Integration responds to globalization by the restructuring, reforming and redefining of objectives and priorities. From all the already mentioned structures, only the BFTA ceased to exist after joining the European single market; and the activity of Q4 –

Quadrilateral cooperation of Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and Croatia from 2000 – dissolved, in 2010, into the RCC, CEI, EU and NATO to avoid duplication of effort. On the other hand, CEFTA transformed and moved into the Western Balkan region; the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe of June 1999 transformed into the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in 2008.

The termination and decay of sub-regional groupings are improbable due to following facts:

1. It would be unwise to abolish established, and in some cases, beneficial ways of multilateral cooperation on a regional basis;
2. The dissolution of structures would send out the signal that something unpleasant is happening among the member states, and it might lead to a conflict;
3. The trend of today is to join and bond, not leave and divide;
4. Regional platforms offer great opportunities for personal contacts amongst the high representatives, and thus, lead to faster negotiations on the basis of personal sympathy (so called unconventional diplomacy);
5. A joint voice is generally heard more, and joint effort is usually more successful in pursuing such interests that would otherwise have no chance to be heard at all;
6. The creation of ad hoc coalitions on the basis of existing formats of cooperation is time saving, due to the awareness and knowledge of partners' preferences, positions or vital interests;
7. Large platforms, such as the EU, cannot address, from the overall point of view, minority regional problems, which are crucial for a specific region, but do not influence further regions.

One could definitely come up with other reasons for states to remain in sub-regional structures, despite the fact that they are multiple members of other quantitatively and qualitatively wider groupings. One could also put forward reasons against this. However, the pattern of European architecture shows that the number of regional groups is constantly increasing, rather than decreasing.

Conclusion: The Need for Sub-regional Structures within the European Architecture

In the case, under examination, of the regional architecture of Europe, we think that the multilevel, complex and variable cooperation and integration process is appropriate and desirable. The EU of today – as the euro-pessimists would say – is a huge monster, consisting of officials, bureaucrats, institutions, rules, obligations and misused financial resources. An objective observer must – willingly or not – also agree with such statement. The EU of 27, indeed, is still built upon the individual national states; however, for quite a long time now, it does not let these national states decide many issues on their own any more. That is, on the other hand, justifiable to a certain extent; in order for the Union to promote its morals, values, as well as its ambitions to

become a global player, it needs centralised regulation and decision making. Still, the EU – at least from the peoples’ point of view and according to their will – can never be a “European super-state” nor a “United States of Europe”. Therefore, the process cannot be solely managed from one centre. In times of the open criticism of the Union and its functioning, the sub-regional architecture is the only alternative to a colonial EU.

The democratic deficit and Brussels’ centralization have been pressing issues for a long time now and there not been an acceptable solution found yet. One possible solution is the so often cited (and criticized) subsidiarity principle, which relies upon the participation of the lower levels in European decision making. Subsidiarity used to be applied to overall European and national level; after the Lisbon Treaty it should also be applied at regional and local level.²⁷ The EU turns to the regions on a case by case basis in order to involve itself in dealing with region specific issues. Thus, the EU relies on the regions, but not in such a way as was presented in this paper. The Union divides its territory into regions based on their development level, or, conversely, their level of undevelopment, for the needs of its cohesion policy. Within the framework of INTERREG, the community aims to strengthen the economic and social cohesion by supporting cross-border, trans-national and inter-regional cooperation. The objective is to promote cooperation among regional and other public authorities within the EU, as well as among neighbouring countries. And that is also the key to a different understanding of regions, because the sub-regional structures in the form of regional cooperation/integration – as described in this paper – are not eligible for such treatment due to their lack of public authority status. Regions eligible for cohesion support are corporate bodies, or public authorities, (villages, towns, cities, counties, districts, etc.), in addition to some agencies. Usually, they are dealt with as micro-regions within a state, or border-regions; but not regions as whole states. Moreover, due to the nature of regional cooperation, they do not have the ambitions necessary for getting financial support from the EU.²⁸

The objectives of the Lisbon Treaty include provisions for paying more attention to the regions, and by citizens’ and interest groups’ participation, to form a “*multilevel regional Europe*” (Hübner 2009). The Eastern enlargement of 2004/2007 brought about a radical change in regional policies. The Union expanded into regions that were dramatically lagging behind the old members and belonged among the biggest recipients of financial aid from the structural funds. Regions received financial assistance; however, they were not officially acknowledged as distinct regional groups in order to strengthen their regional political cooperation.

As can be seen in EU documents and official statements, the understanding of European regions from the EU’s side varies. Most frequent is the classification of regions for the purposes of cohesion and structural policies – a definition different to

²⁷ See the interview with D. Hubner: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/059-66075-341-12-50-910-20091207STO66060-2009-07-12-2009/default_sk.htm.

²⁸ See INTERREG IV: <http://www.interreg4c.eu/>.

the one introduced by the author. The EU indeed “verbally” supports and promotes the activities of sub-regional groups, but in official documents it remains rather reserved. We could thus suppose that the EU is: 1) rather indifferent to their existence; 2) or it does not know how to address them; 3) or it considers them as its complementary, albeit unofficial, components. All three statements could be justified. The existence of sub-regional structures is institutionally and financially independent of the EU; their dependency is mostly implicit due to the agenda that is transmitted from the community to sub-regional level; at least because of the parallel membership in the EU and sub-regional structure. Moreover, the EU does not address these structures, because it defends strictly the individual, and thus, equal approach. The regional approach is used only when dealing with its surroundings, whereas the Union is the initiator of such regional platforms.

In this paper, we tried to draw a comprehensive picture of the European architecture of sub-regional groupings. We categorized these various groupings according to pre-defined categories: according to regional profile, date of origin, form of integration, main activities, the EU participation and its role. We also briefly described several groupings according to their classification and their tendencies. Later, we pointed out common features of the European sub-regional activities and also modestly tried to predict their future.

To conclude the general relationship between the sub-regional structures and the EU, we can say that there exists an asymmetric relationship: *(partly-)official from the side of the sub-regional structures* – the EU is considered to be the reference factor, and modifier of their agenda. The EU is also referred to in official documents and declarations; *unofficial from the side of the EU* – the EU does not officially mention the existence of sub-regional groupings. However, the existence and functioning of sub-regional arrangements is justified as they play the role of regional agents dealing with specific regional issues and at the same time – in accordance with the objectives and values of the Union – contribute to stability, prosperity and security of the European continent.

To answer the original question – whether these sub-regional initiatives only constitute the various regions of Europe with no direct ties and significant interconnection, or whether what makes Europe strong and unique is its characteristics as a Europe of the regions – we could rather say that the second part is true. Europe of today is designed as a web of inter-state and inter-regional relations and ties that all contribute to its strength, stability and prosperity. The most comprehensive structure – the European Union – despite its great ambitions, is not able to address all sub-regional matters with the speed, intensity and consistency needed. Then the sub-regional structures come (or should come) on stage, and use their specialized know-how, regional experience and empathy to deal with particular issues crucial to their region. However, we must think realistically and have to admit that the potential of many arrangements has not been used yet, and is still waiting for the political will to be exploited to its maximum to make Europe a better place in which to live.

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