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THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE ADRIATIC  
SPACE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Emilio Cocco

**G | M | F** The German Marshall Fund  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Located at the crossroads of the Balkan Peninsula, Central Europe, and the Mediterranean, the Adriatic has historically been characterized by partitioning of the basin into separate spaces of national sovereignty and regional integration. These centrifugal and centripetal forces are still at work today and the future of the region will depend on two different geopolitical dynamics: further European integration and EU efforts to stabilize the Mediterranean region. Without a simultaneous orientation toward Europe and the rest of the Mediterranean, the Adriatic Sea will not be able to perform its inter-locking role and will run the risk of progressive marginalization. Adriatic stakeholders should therefore move toward a vision that sets the space on a path toward stronger EU integration *and* a strengthening of the EU's Mediterranean dimension.

## FOREWORD

**R**elations between the Adriatic and Mediterranean spaces are not as strong and self-evident as one would expect, given their geographic interdependence. Indeed these spaces are fragmented and this is also reflected in research on the area. While studies on Southeastern and Central Europe tend to concentrate on their continental rather than Adriatic or wider Mediterranean dimensions, despite their importance for the economic, cultural, and political development of southeastern Europe,<sup>1</sup> Mediterranean studies tend to underestimate the maritime dimension of the Western Balkans. Adriatic questions are treated apart from wider Mediterranean politics. The loose connection between the Adriatic and the Mediterranean Basins reflects a lack of shared geopolitical approaches of Adriatic countries toward the Mediterranean, hindered by two centuries of nation-state building processes that fractured an area that was once built upon a Mediterranean “connectivity”<sup>2</sup> into sovereign spaces of land-oriented continental

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<sup>1</sup> Emilio Cocco, “The Adriatic Space of Identity,” *Narodna Umjetnost. Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research*, Vol. 43, No. 1, June 2006, pp. 7-14, [http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id\\_clanak\\_jezik=36540](http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=36540).

<sup>2</sup> Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000.

states.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, this state of affairs may not be permanent, especially since the inclusion of the Western Balkans in the European project, were there to be a push for a new Mediterranean initiative.

The purpose of this paper is to assess how the Adriatic space is developing and examine what role it could play in the wider Mediterranean. It begins with an overview of actors, players, and networks against a specific historical and social background that still has an influence on present day dynamics before analyzing ongoing practices of regional cooperation in the Adriatic region *vis-à-vis* international disputes and disagreements. Finally, it sets these dynamics into the wider frameworks of the European and Mediterranean contexts and assesses the relevance of the Adriatic space for the Mediterranean focusing on limits and opportunities in the Adriatic sub-region.

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<sup>3</sup> Pamela Ballinger, “Lines in the Water, Peoples on the Map. Maritime Museums and the Representation of Cultural Boundaries in the Upper Adriatic,” *Narodna Umjetnost. Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research*, Vol. 43, No. 1, June 2006, pp. 15-39, [http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id\\_clanak\\_jezik=36542](http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=36542); Pamela Ballinger, “La frantumazione dello spazio adriatico,” in Emilio Cocco and Everardo Minardi (eds.), *Immaginare l'Adriatico*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2007, pp. 27-43; Reinhard Johler, “A Local Construction -- or: What Have the Alps to do with a Global Reading of the Mediterranean?,” *Narodna Umjetnost. Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research*, Vol. 36, No. 1, June 1999, pp. 87-101, [http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id\\_clanak\\_jezik=53503](http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=53503)

# 1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In his seminal book on the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel suggests that at the beginning of the modern era, the Adriatic was perhaps the most coherent and unified of all regions in the Mediterranean Sea, although he was speaking of geographic rather than political unity.<sup>4</sup> No political actor has ever succeeded in politically integrating a region characterized by such physical proximity between two coastlines and, at the same time, such linguistic, political, and cultural diversity.

The contemporary history of the Adriatic Basin has been characterized by two simultaneous processes of progressive partition and fragmentation into separate spaces of national sovereignty, on one hand, and regional integration, reunification, and multi-national regional cooperation, on the other. The first process started in Napoleonic times (the end of the maritime Republic of Venice), grew in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and reached its peak with the post-World War I collapse of the empires in the area. The 20<sup>th</sup> century's stage was set by the fragmentation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which led to a prolonged political struggle between Italy, Yugoslavia, and Albania for the definition of their Adriatic borders and the limits of their state sovereignty, even though this process was somewhat frozen in the post-World War II period by the Iron Curtain.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the second process merged with the first one as the fight for separate national spaces and the narratives of multi-national regional integration sometimes

<sup>4</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Vol. I*, New York, Harper & Row, 1972.

<sup>5</sup> The post-World War II redefinition of the borders between Italy and Yugoslavia was a complicated and tense process where local, national, and global interests played a role. The Memorandum of Understanding signed in London in 1954 by the two parties outlined the solution that eventually became fully effective after the Treaty of Osimo (1975). Nonetheless, after the Memorandum, relations between Italy and Yugoslavia progressively normalized and quite soon the Italo-Yugoslav border became an extremely "open" one, probably the most open border of the so-called Iron Curtain. Flows and exchanges of people and goods revealed an eagerness to cooperate in different fields.

intertwined ambiguously. This was especially true when national questions regarding the areas overlapped with the political ideologies of fascism and communism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> This ambivalent nature of the Adriatic geopolitical space is still one of its long-term features.

The violent collapse of federative Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the parallel process of European enlargement opened a new round of the two-fold process of nation-building and regional integration that was so characteristic of the region. The development of the EU from an economic community into a more integrated supranational political body merged with the Yugoslav wars, ethnic cleansing, the displacement of people, and the restructuring of public and private property. The European integration path soon became the "polar star" for all post-Yugoslav states, as it enabled them to pursue the dual goals of national sovereignty and regional cooperation (plus democratization and economic prosperity). Thus, the Adriatic space was increasingly seen as a chance for countries that were eager to leave all Balkan and Yugoslav affiliations behind them and associate themselves with a more Western and European space (i.e. the Western Balkans or Eastern Adriatic). Nonetheless, this process is by no means consolidated. Historical antagonisms and conflicting memories are still able to turn the Adriatic Basin into a "virtual battlefield" where these nation- versus region-oriented processes can easily clash.

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003; Marina Cattaruzza (ed.), *Nazionalismi di frontiera. Identità contrapposte sull'Adriatico nord-orientale, 1850-1950*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2003; Rolf Wörsdörfer, *Krisenherd Adria 1915-1955: Konstruktion und Artikulation des Nationalen im italienisch-jugoslawischen Grenzraum*, Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004.

## 2 THE ADRIATIC SPACE: ACTORS AND SHARED ISSUES

Today the Adriatic regional space is shared by six states, of which three are EU members (Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia) and three have signed Stabilization and Association Agreements with the EU (Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Commercial exchanges and trade between the two shores of the Adriatic are quite developed and Italy is one of the most important trade partners for all the countries of the eastern Adriatic (the largest for Croatia, Slovenia, and Albania). A traditional competitor of Italy in the region is Germany, joined more recently by Russia and China, which are increasing their investments in the fields of infrastructure and energy.<sup>7</sup> This is not surprising since the Adriatic Sea is a strategic energy corridor to Central Europe. Coastal cities and their ports function as commercial, industrial, and tourist hubs for the region.<sup>8</sup>

Other stakeholders in the region include major financial and banking groups such as Unicredit Bank, which is active in all countries of the Eastern Adriatic and maintains a leading position in the sector. Other Italian banks like Intesa San Paolo and Banco Popolare are present in the Eastern Adriatic countries, showing a good degree of financial interconnection between Italy, former Yugoslav countries, and Albania. The Catholic Church is the most important religious actor and the Vatican has been playing a role in the management of challenging issues such as the process of returning real estate and redefining property rights both in Croatia and Slovenia. Pilgrimage routes (i.e. Medjugorje) represent a steady factor enhancing

<sup>7</sup> Stefan Ralchev, "Energy in the Western Balkans: A Strategic Overview," Sofia, Institute for Regional and International Studies, August 2012, [http://www.iris-bg.org/files/Energy\\_in\\_the\\_Western\\_Balkans\\_Overview\\_%20Aug12.pdf](http://www.iris-bg.org/files/Energy_in_the_Western_Balkans_Overview_%20Aug12.pdf); Lavdrim Lita, *I "nostri" Balcani*, Roma, Fondazione Magna Carta, <http://www.magna-carta.it/content/nostri-balcani>.

<sup>8</sup> Daniele Del Bianco (ed.), "Protecting the Adriatic Seaways," *Critical Infrastructures Protection Project Report*, Gorizia, ISIG, 2008, <http://provaisig.altervista.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Final-Report.pdf>.

religious tourism and supporting an inter-Adriatic movement of people year round. Transnational crime networks are also active in the region. Human trafficking was a main issue in the 1990s, but the region is still dangerously exposed to the impact of illicit activities such as smuggling, drug trafficking, and illegal migration-related businesses.<sup>9</sup> The risk of migration waves toward Europe from the Eastern Adriatic countries has proved to be relatively low so far. However, the Eastern Adriatic could work as a transit area for Asian and African illegal migration flows directed toward the EU, as well as for other types of illicit exchanges and movements of goods. In this context, the stabilization and stronger integration of the Balkans is crucial for the security of the whole Adriatic Basin.

Finally, the fragile ecology<sup>10</sup> of the Adriatic Sea also makes stronger integration in the area a necessity. The locked-in nature of the Adriatic Basin together with comparatively high tourism and energy traffic make it highly vulnerable to marine pollution. Tourism traffic is very high from May to September, although it drops significantly during

<sup>9</sup> Matteo Albertini, "The Adriatic Connection: Mafia Links from Italy to the Western Balkans," in *Balkananalysis*, June 1, 2011, <http://www.balkananalysis.com/serbia/2011/06/01/>; Francesco Strazzari and Fabrizio Coticchia, "The Phantom Menace: Transnational Organised Crime," in Paul Stubbs and Christophe Solioz (eds.), *Toward Open Regionalism in South East Europe*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2012, pp. 147-174.

<sup>10</sup> Considering the physical features of the Adriatic Basin, which is a semi-land locked sea, the intensity of maritime traffic is a sensible cause of ecological risks. The Adriatic Sea mean breadth is about 160 kilometers (85 nautical miles, 100 miles), although the Strait of Otranto, which connects with the Ionian Sea, is only 45-55 nautical miles wide (85-100 kilometers). Moreover, the Adriatic is a quite shallow sea, especially in its northern part. Between Venice and the Croatian peninsula of Istria, the depth rarely exceeds 46 meters (25 fathoms), whereas in the southern part of the sea, between Bari, Italy, and Dubrovnik, Croatia, it reaches around 900 meters (500 fathoms). The maximum depth is 1,460 meters (800 fathoms), and the mean depth is 240 meters. See Daniele Del Bianco (ed.), "Protecting the Adriatic Seaways," cit., pp. 29-30. See also the REMPEC (Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea) database for a list of the major accidents took place in the Adriatic Sea since 1977, <http://www.rempec.org>.



the rest of the year. In the case of oil and containers (and their tractors), the practice of carrying lorries by ferry increased consistently during the 1990s when the Yugoslav wars produced harder border control with long waiting periods, bad road connections, and safety concerns. Trucks coming from Turkey and the Black Sea region started to bypass the Balkans on their way to Europe by being shipped to northern Adriatic harbors and then continuing their trip toward Central and Northern Europe. A particularly intense activity throughout the year is maritime oil transport,<sup>11</sup> with ships coming from several Mediterranean ports and heading mostly for Italian harbors. Consequently, the Adriatic Sea, with its annual oil transport of 70 million tons is extremely endangered by pollution from the estimated 15,000 metric tons of residues deliberately discharged every year.<sup>12</sup>

Balancing local and regional environmental protection with the global interests of international shipping and industrial development is becoming *the* strategic challenge for the Adriatic Basin.<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, the planned pan-European

transport corridors 5 and 8,<sup>14</sup> as well as the so-called “Adriatic Corridor,” all cross the Adriatic sea region and could turn it into a “Highway of the Sea.” Such large-scale projects require plans for integrated transport systems and logistics in a regional framework. Moreover, they necessitate joint regulations for major sea ports. A three-fold approach that combines sea-land intermodal logistics, critical infrastructure protection, and energy policies should inspire strategies of sustainable territorial development of the Adriatic maritime region from a transnational perspective. Such strategies are critical when economics, logistics, and environmental concerns are discussed and harmonized in multi-level decision-making processes. They concern issues such as plans for the construction of liquified natural gas terminals and pipelines,<sup>15</sup> off-shore oil and gas plants, policies enhancing renewable energies, management of fisheries, and joint initiatives to tackle the risks of pollution of the sea and maritime man-made accidents (i.e. oil spills).

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<sup>11</sup> Beside oil, liquified natural gas represents the other important source of energy supplied through the Adriatic Basin. In this regard a quite advanced off-shore terminal named “Adriatic LNG terminal” was built nine miles off Veneto (Rovigo) in the Northern Adriatic. The terminal is a gravity based regassification structure lying right on the seabed and has been operating since 2009. Another more contested LNG terminal should be placed in the Gulf of Trieste but the project is facing several objections and resistances both in Italy and Slovenia. See <http://www.adriaticlng.it> and <http://www.edison.it/en/company/gas-infrastructures/adriatic-lng-terminal.shtml>.

<sup>12</sup> Ugo Bilardo and Giuseppe Mureddu, *Traffico petroliero e sostenibilità ambientale*, Roma, Unione Petrolifera, 2004; Mira Morović and Andrei Ivanov, “Oil Spill Monitoring in the Croatian Adriatic Waters: Needs and Possibilities,” *Acta Adriatica*, Vol. 52, No. 1, June 2011, pp. 45-56, [http://jadran.izor.hr/acta/eng/v52\\_1\\_5.htm](http://jadran.izor.hr/acta/eng/v52_1_5.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Davor Vidas, “The Adriatic Sea Today: Unsolved Issues and Challenges,” *Mepielan E-bulletin*, December 22, 2010, <http://www.mepielan-ebulletin.gr/default.aspx?pid=18&ArticleId=51>.

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<sup>14</sup> Corridors number 5 and 8 are two of the ten pan-European corridors that should connect Central and Eastern Europe. These corridors are not part of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) although they serve a similar function. Corridor number 8 will connect the Adriatic and the Black Sea from Durres, Albania, to Varna, Bulgaria. Corridor number 5, originally planned between Lisbon and Kyiv, has been reduced for financial reasons to a “Mediterranean Corridor” that would exclude Portugal and Ukraine. Maps and descriptions available at: <http://magnetbahnforum.de/index.php?Maps-Trans-European-Networks>.

<sup>15</sup> Umberto Profazio, “Trans Adriatic Pipeline: Economic Advantages over the Competitors but Equal Political Risks,” *PECOB Business Reports*, March 2011, <http://www.pecob.eu/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/EN/IDPagina/2996>.



# 3

## COOPERATION IN THE ADRIATIC SEA

The Adriatic Basin has a strategic geopolitical location at the crossroads of the Balkan Peninsula, Central Europe, and the Mediterranean. As a result, its political communities are included in a number of overlapping multilateral initiatives driven by civil society, states, and supranational organizations. Particularly since the 1990s, bottom-up dynamics have played a central role in the Adriatic Basin.<sup>16</sup> As the collapse of federal Yugoslavia generated social emergencies and humanitarian risks in the Balkans, European civil society organizations promptly reacted by investing conspicuously in the area, anticipating but also following the roadmaps put forward by states and international organizations. On the state level, EU members with historical ties to southeastern Europe, such as Italy and Austria, were especially active. They put forward their own governmental strategies to establish new regional frameworks of international cooperation, thus contributing to the emergence of an “open regionalism.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the EU and other prominent international organizations, such as NATO and the OSCE, projected themselves in the area after the 1995 Dayton agreement with the intent of paving a clear Euro-Atlantic and pro-Western path for all the new post-Yugoslav entities.

Since the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these patterns of transnational cooperation have become more established and institutionalized as pioneering initiatives rooted in civil society and the local political bodies of cities or regions have coupled with renewed neighborhood policies at

both the national (i.e. Italian law 84/2001)<sup>18</sup> and EU level (i.e. Interreg or partnership agreements). As a result, the Adriatic is progressively becoming an area of intense multi-level cooperation. To clarify these dynamics, the most relevant cooperation initiatives, their main features and stakeholders are outlined below.

### North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has played a crucial role in the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Adriatic area since its military intervention in former Yugoslavia. Within a few years after having deployed its first peacekeeping mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 1995, NATO mobilized to intervene in the Kosovo controversy to prevent a humanitarian crisis, deploying the NATO-led Kosovo Force in 1999. In 2001, NATO, along with the European Union, helped the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia bring its internal conflict to an end and later deployed a task force to collect weapons from insurgents and supported the implementation of a peace agreement. Today, besides Italy, three eastern Adriatic countries are part of NATO: Albania (2009), Croatia (2009), and Slovenia (2004). Moreover, three more partners in the Western Balkans aspire to membership. Montenegro joined the Membership Action Plan (MAP) in 2009; Bosnia and Herzegovina was invited to the MAP in 2010; and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is likely to be invited to start accession talks soon, once a solution to the issue over the country's name is reached.<sup>19</sup>

### European Union

The European Union (EU) is certainly the most influential supranational actor in the area. One

<sup>16</sup> Battistina Cugusi, “Macro-regional dynamics in the Mediterranean area(s): The Case of the Adriatic-Ionian Macro-region,” *EUborderregions Working Papers*, No. 6, January 2013, <http://www.euborderregions.eu/dissemination/policy>.

<sup>17</sup> Christophe Solioz and Paul Stubbs, “Emergent regional co-operation in South-East Europe: toward ‘open regionalism’?” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1-2, March-June 2009, pp. 1-16.

<sup>18</sup> Act regulating the Italian participation to the stabilization, reconstruction, and development of the Balkan countries, <http://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2001;84>.

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.nato.int>.

of its focuses has been promotion of “Adriatic” cross-border cooperation at the regional level through the Interreg program, which is financed under the European Regional Development Fund.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the 2007-2013 Adriatic cross-border cooperation program Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) seeks to stimulate further regional cooperation in the framework of the forthcoming integration of the entire Adriatic area in the European Union. Besides integration and association processes, all post-Yugoslav countries plus Albania have been involved in some forms of European-sponsored regional cooperation. EU actions have also triggered regional initiatives. The EU-sponsored Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe led to the creation of the Italian-sponsored Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII). Indeed, the EU emerges as the first and most important frame of reference for all initiatives outlined here although this was only recently institutionalized when the European Commission, namely the Environment Directorate General (DG) and the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries DG, produced a Macro-Regional strategy for the Adriatic Basin in June 2011, following a statement by the European Council in May 2011. To understand the role of this strategy and before examining it in detail, the relevant initiatives are now briefly reviewed.

A regional forum with an important Adriatic connotation is the *Central European Initiative* (CEI), based in Trieste since 1996. CEI is an intergovernmental forum promoting political, economic, cultural, and scientific cooperation among member states, which include all Adriatic states plus most Central and East European ones (with the exclusion of Germany and the Baltic states, but including Ukraine and Belarus).<sup>21</sup> The Central European Initiative sprang from the *Quadrangone*, established in Budapest on

November 11, 1989, by Italy, Austria, Hungary, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. That initiative was aimed at overcoming the existing division in blocs by re-establishing cooperation links among countries of different political orientations and economic structures. At the first summit in Venice in 1990, Czechoslovakia was admitted and the Initiative was renamed *Pentagonale*. In 1991, with the admission of Poland, it became the *Hexagonale*. Even though the initiative was relatively low-key, it fostered networks between universities, economic actors, and local political bodies.

Similar in its intent, but with a clearer and sharper Adriatic focus is the *Adriatic-Ionian Initiative* (AII), which represents the most important inter-state multilateral Adriatic forum since its establishment as part of the European Union’s “Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe,” involving all southeastern European countries aspiring to join the Union.<sup>22</sup> AII was set up in Ancona (Italy) on May 19-20, 2000, by the heads of states and governments of Italy, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, and Slovenia. At the end of the conference, the foreign ministers of participating countries signed the “Ancona Declaration,” which states that strengthening regional cooperation helps to promote political and economic stability, thus creating a solid base for the process of European integration.<sup>23</sup> The Initiative was later extended to the federative union of Serbia and Montenegro, and, after the referendum in Montenegro, to both states. Following the EU approach to supporting multilateral sub-regional cooperation and given the successful example of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea, the AII started to push for a macro-region for the Adriatic-Ionian basin in early 2010.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.aii-ps.org>.

<sup>23</sup> See Introductory notes, comma 2 of the Ancona Declaration, May 19-20, 2000, <http://www.aii-ps.org/index.php/about-the-aii/guidelines-and-rules-of-procedures/item/4-the-ancona-declaration>.

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.adriaticpacbc.org>.

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.ceinet.org>.

Another relevant transnational player in regional cooperation is the *Adriatic-Ionian Euro-Region*, founded on June 30, 2006, in Pula, Croatia. It represents a model of cooperation that includes transnational and inter-regional cooperation between regions along the Adriatic coast.<sup>24</sup> Its goal is to set a joint stage for local authorities to solve common issues of the Adriatic area. It consists of 26 members: regional and local governments from Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Albania. At the level of municipalities, the leading network is the *Forum of the Cities of the Adriatic and Ionian Basin*, as established at the initiative of the Municipality of Ancona and ANCI (Italian National Association of the Municipalities) with the approval of the “Charter of Ancona” in Ancona, on April 20, 1999. It brings together the coastal cities of the seven countries of the Adriatic–Ionian basin (Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, and Greece)<sup>25</sup> and aims to build and develop the economic, social, environmental, and cultural heritage of the Adriatic and Ionian coastal cities and to collaborate on European integration and enlargement. Closely related to the Forum of the Cities is the *Forum of the Adriatic Chambers of Commerce*, which is a transnational non-profit association with legal personality set up in 2001. Among the academic cooperation initiatives, *Uniadrion*, established to create a permanent connection among universities and research centers in the Adriatic-Ionian region, links several academic institutions from all the former Yugoslav countries as well as Albania, Greece, and Italy. Originally hosted by the University of Bologna, it is now based in Ancona at the Polytechnic University of the Marche Region, and promotes cooperation mainly through didactic

<sup>24</sup> Diego Vecchiato, “The Adriatic Euroregion, Strategic Institution Building,” in *Pace diritti umani - Peace Human Rights*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2010, pp. 53-61, [http://unipd-centrodirittiumani.it/public/docs/PDU3\\_2010\\_A053.pdf](http://unipd-centrodirittiumani.it/public/docs/PDU3_2010_A053.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.faic.eu>.

activities, such as training courses, masters, and research projects.<sup>26</sup> Finally and even though the sea is obviously the central feature of the Adriatic region, a maritime cooperative dimension among Adriatic countries has only appeared very recently.<sup>27</sup> In December 2012, the EU Commission launched jointly with the Croatian government a “Marine strategy for Adriatic and Ionian Seas,” which is probably the first coherent and systematic attempt to implement a sea-based strategy in the region.

Eventually, all these actions and networks converged in December 2012 in the EU Commission’s plan to develop a Macro-Regional Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region by the end of 2014. The macro-region is not a new body or organization but represents an innovative mode of territorial cooperation among different regions and nations with the goal of balanced and sustainable development. Accordingly, the macro-region is not a geographical region with predefined boundaries, but a functional area, composed of national, regional, and local bodies coming together to tackle shared challenges. It is not a further institutional level within the European Union (like states, regions, municipalities, etc.) but rather a network, an operating mode, or, more precisely, a joint initiative involving several European, national, regional and stakeholders, policies, and funding programs. It involves Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

To conclude this section, cooperation in the Adriatic Basin has grown in the last 20 years mainly as a reaction to emergency situations and to counter the disrupting regional effects — as well as a feared domino effect — of the Yugoslav collapse. Some important results have been achieved, such as

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.forumaic.org>.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.uniadrion.net>.

the end to armed hostilities and a clearer vision of a European future for all post-Yugoslav countries. Nonetheless, the process of regional reintegration is still relatively slow. One of the strategic obstacles to the development of efficient Adriatic regional cooperation has been the substantial diversity in administrative practices and organizational patterns at the local and regional levels. In the case of Italy, the regional authorities engaged in Adriatic cooperation often act without clear guidance from the national government and as a result, the

overall impact of their actions responds to local views and reflects a weakness in deliberation and post-evaluation actions. Thus, the harmonization of rules and practices at local and regional levels should go hand-in-hand with a definition of priorities to achieve deeper integration in EU and NATO structures. Finally, the impact of nationalism and centralizing trends has been a hindrance, especially in the eastern Adriatic. Governments in the area are not always ready to cooperate as unsolved national rivalries continue to smolder.

# 4 TERRITORIAL DISPUTES

The disintegration of Yugoslavia led to a proliferation of Adriatic littoral states and thus an increase in the number of potential maritime and land boundaries and related disputes. A number of critical issues have been resolved (for example, the Croatia-Yugoslavia [later Montenegro] boundary on the Prevlaka Peninsula and the Bay of Kotor), but some are still unsettled, such as the Bay of Piran dispute between Croatia and Slovenia or the question of Bosnia's access to the sea.<sup>28</sup> Regional cooperation initiatives have been only partly successful in tackling these issues. While the Adriatic space did become peaceful after the end of the Kosovo crisis, buttressed as it was by several bottom-up initiatives and multilateral cooperation frameworks, national governments and even some states did not always take the kind of actions that enable effective transnational integration. Accordingly, in spite of declarations of goodwill and wishful proclamations, some national confrontations still persist.

The main dispute is in the Gulf of Piran and is related to the delimitation of the maritime boundary between Slovenia and Croatia, namely to the Slovenian claim of a corridor to international waters. The dispute also involves the issue of delimitation of land boundaries, ethnic loyalties, and unsettled real estate claims.<sup>29</sup> A third front was opened by Croatia's unilateral decision in October 2003 to establish a maritime Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) beyond 12 nautical miles on

the basis of the Law of the Sea. Slovenia and Italy almost immediately took rather critical positions and, playing upon their status as EU member states, managed to bring the issue before the European Commission. This move had a strong political impact on Croatia, still an EU applicant country at the time. After the EEZ problem was placed in the context of progress in Croatia's EU accession process, the Croatian government was forced to withdraw in 2008, but the economic and environmental status of that part of the Adriatic remains undefined.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, some progress has been observed since Croatia's recent accession to the EU, as the role of the EEZs in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean is now being discussed as a possible instrument of ecological protection and economic development.

Another dispute concerns Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with regard to Bosnia's short coastline (Neum enclave) and its access to the open sea. In this case, Bosnia's interest in having a fully functioning maritime outpost clashes with Croatia's logistical need to connect the county of Dubrovnik with the rest of the country. The Croatian project to build a bridge across the channel in front of Neum has been fiercely opposed by the Bosnian government, which wants to keep its corridor to international waters open. Nonetheless, the two countries have tried to keep the dispute under control without openly turning it into a matter of international confrontation for nationalist parties to thrive upon, as in the Piran case.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Gerald H. Blake and Duško Topalović, "The Maritime Boundaries of the Adriatic Sea," *Maritime Briefings*, Vol. 1, No. 8, 1996, <https://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/publications/view/?id=231>.

<sup>29</sup> Matej Avbelj and Jernej Letnar Čeranič, "The Conundrum of the Piran Bay: Slovenia v. Croatia - The Case of Maritime Delimitation," *The University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law & Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2007, pp. 1-19, [https://www.law.upenn.edu/journals/jilp/articles/5-1\\_Cernic\\_Jernej\\_Letnar.pdf](https://www.law.upenn.edu/journals/jilp/articles/5-1_Cernic_Jernej_Letnar.pdf); Damir Josipović and Vera Kržišnik-Bukić, *Slovensko-hrvaški obmejni prostor : etnične vzporednice med popisi prebivalstva po letu 1991* [Slovenian-Croatian Border Area: Ethnic Parallels Between the Censuses of Population after 1991], Ljubljana, Institute for Ethnic Studies, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Davor Vidas, "The Adriatic Sea Today: Unsolved Issues and Challenges," cit.

<sup>31</sup> The latter led to repeated mobilization of the Croatian and Slovenian public opinions, until the point of suggesting an international arbitrage to settle the issue, whereas the Neum case proved to be a less sensitive topic insofar. Adelina Marini, "Croatia and Bosnia from Now refrain from Opening Pandora's Box," *Euinside*, September 7, 2012, <http://www.euinside.eu/en/news/croatia-and-bosnia-do-not-want-to-open-pandoras-box>.

Eventually, the persistence of these disputes has to be understood in the context of nation-building in the wake of relatively recent state collapses (Federal Yugoslavia, and in some respects also Albania) and the consequent geopolitical fragmentation. The political stability of the Adriatic region is still haunted by territorial sensitivities, notably regarding the modification of international frontiers and the loss of territories. In fact, although the risk of serious escalation of the conflicts between Adriatic countries is quite low, micro

conflicts do function as tests of sovereignty for the new states and as challenges to the European project.<sup>32</sup> Local politicians seeking support can stir up the nationalist sentiments of public opinion by stressing security concerns.

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<sup>32</sup> Bernard Lory, "Contentieux micro-territoriaux dans les Balkans, XIXe-XXIe siècles," *Balkanologie*, Vol. 6, No. 1-2, December 2002, pp. 9-14, <http://balkanologie.revues.org/1612>.

# 5 THE ADRIATIC SEA IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SPACE

Centrifugal and centripetal forces — the disruptive effect of ongoing post-socialist nation-state building processes counterbalanced by a rich set of actions for regional integration — are still at work in the Adriatic area. The future of the region will depend on two different geopolitical dynamics: further European integration (including the possible transformation of the EU) and efforts to stabilize the Mediterranean region, namely the functional relations that the EU will be able to establish with its southern neighbors.

As far as the European dimension is concerned, the path has been outlined quite clearly in the last 25 years and it is difficult to conceive of a different future for the Adriatic Sea region than that of a truly European sea. From this point of view, the region can build on experiences in the Baltic Sea region,<sup>33</sup> which has witnessed a process of increased regional integration that has transformed it into a truly “European sea.”<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, the Baltic Sea was the first area in Europe to successfully adopt a macro-regional strategy (2009) with intense multi-level cooperation in different sectors, such as the environment, logistics, civil protection, and research and development. Indeed, a macro-region seems the most appropriate tool to turn the Adriatic Basin into an area of intense horizontal cooperation within a European framework. This would also strengthen cooperation both with other European macro-regions — such as the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region — and other maritime regions with trans-national features, like the Black Sea region.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly enough, the rotating president of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) has been invited to take part in the foreign ministers meetings of the Adriatic Ionian Initiative (AII) since 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Fabrizio Tassinari, *Mare Europaeum. Baltic Sea Region Security and Cooperation from Post-Wall to Post-Enlargement Europe*, Copenhagen, University of Copenhagen Press, 2004, <http://www.publications.fabriziotassinari.net>.

Regarding the Adriatic’s place in the Mediterranean region, the future looks more unpredictable. In theory, the macro-regional strategy puts forward a “community challenge” for transnational territorial cohesion that could fit the perspective of renewed Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.<sup>35</sup> In practice, however, a sub-regional approach has prevailed so far, with two macro strategies being developed: one for the “Eastern Mediterranean,” which is progressively overlapping with the Adriatic Basin, and one for the “Western Mediterranean,” the shape of which is yet to be determined. These practices could pave the way for further Mediterranean initiatives by producing flagship projects and best practices, but they might also appear to be “exclusivist” and privileged ways in which to interpret the European vision of the Mediterranean. Thus, besides capitalizing on regional initiatives in the Mediterranean such as the ones taking place in the Adriatic Basin, a European macro-regional orientation should not lose sight of the larger Mediterranean scenario, since the large-scale geopolitical shifts taking place in Northern Africa and Middle East will inevitably have an impact on all Mediterranean sub-regions.

In light of this, the irrelevance of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) with respect to almost all contentious issues the region is currently experiencing — from huge socio-economic challenges and imperiled transition processes, to the management of illegal migration and the violent conflicts in the region — is unfortunate. This situation is not only the result of important divergences among European member states that have manifested in the lack of shared political

<sup>35</sup> Andrea Stocchiero, “The external dimension of European Union Macroregional Strategies in the Mediterranean,” *CeSPI Working Papers*, No. 77, August 2011, <http://www.cespi.it/WP/WP%2077%20external%20dimension.pdf>; “The geopolitical game of the European Union strategy for macro-regions: Where does the Mediterranean stand?,” *CeSPI Working Papers*, No. 74, July 2010, <http://www.cespi.it/WP/WP%2074%20Stocchiero%20macroregioni.pdf>.



horizons and clear political goals since the very beginning of the UfM in 2008, but also of an asymmetry in political investments. In other words, on one hand, the UfM presents an attractive opportunity for the eastern Adriatic countries<sup>36</sup> and for some other smaller European Mediterranean states to pursue European integration further and take on political responsibility and gain prestige within the EU.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, however, the countries of Northern Africa and the Middle East are not equally interested in developing further cooperation initiatives.<sup>38</sup> Since political integration in the EU is not in the cards, they are more comfortable with maintaining bilateral relations with the EU than in investing politically in the proliferation of rather ambivalent multilateral and multi-scaled cooperation initiatives. Therefore, a whole new and attractive multilateral approach by the EU, which takes account of the stark transformation the Southern Mediterranean is experiencing, is needed and would also play a key strategic role for the Adriatic. Without a double orientation toward Europe and the rest of the Mediterranean, the Adriatic Sea will not be able to perform its interlocking role and will

<sup>36</sup> Slovenia, for example, tried to carve out a role for itself in Mediterranean politics, notably through the Mediterranean University based in Slovenia, which was one of the few products of UfM-Eastern Adriatic engagement.

<sup>37</sup> Dimitar Bechev, "Distant Neighbours: The Mediterranean Policies of the Countries in South East Europe," in Schäfer, Isabel and Jean-Robert Henry (eds.), *Mediterranean Policies from Above and Below*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2009, pp. 171-185.

<sup>38</sup> Roberto Aliboni, "The State of Play of the Union for the Mediterranean in the Euro-Med Context," *Documenti IAI*, No. 1017, September 2010, <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/IAI1017.pdf>.

run the risk of progressive marginalization. The roadmap of European integration in southeastern Europe did not follow a Mediterranean path but was strongly oriented toward central-northern Europe and the western (Atlantic) side. Adriatic stakeholders could open a new perspective for the EU by moving toward a vision that sets the Adriatic space on a path toward stronger EU integration *and* a strengthening of the EU's Mediterranean dimension.

Italy, specifically, could play a crucial role in this respect. The Adriatic space could not only provide Italy with a gateway for connecting with the larger continental European regions, such as the Danube and the Baltic regions but, as one of the driving forces of the EU's Mediterranean policy, Italy could also actively seek to open the Adriatic space toward the Mediterranean and include it in a new push for a Mediterranean initiative. The latter should be reshaped as a genuinely European effort, and not be restricted to a Spanish, French or Italian-led local endeavor. Otherwise, the risk is not only that of turning the Adriatic Macro Region into an isolated, exclusive pool — a low-profile, intimate reproduction of the Mediterranean Sea in which to accumulate hypertrophic networking initiatives and perform empty diplomatic exercises — but also that of progressively losing touch with the Mediterranean region at a time when the EU is already increasingly inward- and continental-looking and in danger of losing its stakes in its South Mediterranean neighborhood undergoing fundamental change.

The background is a solid brown color. It features several horizontal white lines. Small white dots are placed at various intervals along these lines, creating a minimalist, grid-like pattern. The dots are arranged in a way that suggests a global network or map.

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