

The Politics of the Black Sea Region. By Carol Weaver. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. 178 pp. Bibliography. Index. £60.00, hardbound.

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Carol Weaver's *The Politics of the Black Sea Region* closes on a hopeful note, framing the body of water as an open sea whose murky depths surrounding nations may be learning to share; however, the book's preceding chapters make clear that the Black Sea region remains saturated with competing claims to sovereignty and influence in the region. Moreover, as the past year's events in Ukraine suggest, rather than unifying as a locus for multipolar engagement, the Black Sea region appears increasingly divided into Western and Russian zones of influence and is becoming dramatically less secure.

But how did the region come to find itself entangled in the deep tensions of the present day? Weaver's book focuses on three dimensions: the integration of the littoral states into Euro-Atlantic institutions, the persistence of disputes over territory and resources in the wider Black Sea basin, and efforts to reach a balance of power among interested parties through intensified "regionalization." The first two dimensions are presented as the structuring facts of the present while the third dimension may offer a way for the region to transcend its past divisions.

According to Weaver, the European Union and NATO's engagement with the region is ambivalent. Western actors are vitally interested in democratization and economic development in the Black Sea basin, but engagement in the region risks antagonizing Russia, which in turn has the power to undermine peace and stability on the EU's eastern flank. In response, the EU has created a hierarchy of different relationships with the Black Sea states. Thus, Romania and Bulgaria are member states, which means abiding by the *acquis communautaire* and harmonizing their foreign relations. Turkey has been a candidate for future membership since 1999, while Russia has negotiated a number of bilateral treaties with the EU culminating in the 2008 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which covers economic issues, the environment, security, and other issues. Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine fall under the Eastern partnership, a program intended to improve trade and political relations with a number of post-Soviet states, and are moving towards closer association. For Weaver, the EU's shift from bilateral to multilateral engagement with the Black Sea basin is a shift that may have strengthened cooperation among the littoral states; however, the European Union's innovation of alternatives to membership over the past decade coupled with some member states' opposition to expansion lends credence to the perception in the region that a new iron curtain may be forming that could exclude some Black Sea littoral states.

Future membership of the Black Sea states in Euro-Atlantic institutions depends, among many other factors, on the resolution of frozen conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabagh, and the most recent ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Weaver is correct to point out that while these wars began as contests over the right to national self-determination, they have transformed into linchpins of Russia's regional hegemony. As long as the combatting parties fail to resolve their conflicts, Russia will continue to hold the keys to peace, security, and economic cooperation in the Black Sea basin. The asymmetry that has emerged between the European Union's moderate efforts to mediate these conflicts and Russia's vital interest in maintaining the status quo suggests that these conflicts may persist indefinitely. Consequently, the region's economy is developing along the lines determined by its conflicts and the

distribution of enemies and allies. For instance, with the opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in 2005, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey have established an export route for Caspian hydrocarbons that skirts both Russia and Armenia. Similarly, since 2011, Nord Stream has allowed Russia to send its gas to Germany while bypassing Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland. Finally, Russia plans to further decrease its export risks with the opening of South Stream later this decade. The list of proposed pipelines that Weaver presents in her chapter on energy politics in the Black Sea basin emphasizes the economic inefficiencies that result from political conflicts in the region. Efforts to outmaneuver rivals may lead to infrastructural redundancy and questions about the availability of gas and oil to fill these pipelines. Though Weaver points to renewed multilateral efforts to mediate the ongoing conflicts as a positive sign, as long as economic development and the resolution of conflicts in the Black Sea basin are perceived as zero sum, increased regional cooperation seems unlikely.

Weaver's main contribution in *The Politics of the Black Sea Region* is the idea that strengthened regional institutions may provide the key to achieving "balanced multipolarity" that could lead to greater political and economic cooperation (2013:119). In particular, she focuses on the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), established in 1992, as a potential agent of increased regionalization. Suggesting that the BSEC admit the unrecognized states in the Black Sea Basin and that the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC (PABSEC) be elected directly by citizens of member states, Weaver argues that the body would become more accountable and action-oriented, and would no longer be able to avoid addressing the region's unresolved conflicts. As the most inclusive of existing regional organizations, BSEC already provides a forum for all Black Sea basin states to meet as equals and is well-positioned in Weaver's mind to grow in scope. As potential obstacles, Weaver mentions the financial costs of a more robust BSEC and adds that some member states may oppose the free and fair direct elections of delegates. However, she does not address the more formidable obstacles of convincing current member states to admit the unrecognized Black Sea basin states or to permit the direct elections of delegates to PABSEC. Given that Chapter 6, "The Black Sea Region as a Possible Future Security Community," crystallizes the author's ideas about the importance of multilateral institutions, a deeper analysis of existing organizations' work as well as direct quotations from members and leaders of these organizations would strengthen Weaver's arguments.

For a time, the Black Sea ceased to be a Russian lake but it is unclear what it will become in the future. While Weaver argues that increased regionalization of the littoral states could build political and economic interdependence on the model of Europe after WWII, this path seems unlikely as long as the interests of the great powers remain asymmetric and ambivalent. *The Politics of the Black Sea Region* deserves praise for proposing a constructive way to clear up the ambiguity that has defined the region's politics for the past few decades. However, the boots currently on the ground in Ukraine will either prolong this ambiguity for years to come or resolve it in an entirely different way.