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**SUB-NATIONAL GOVERNANCE  
STRUCTURES IN THE NORTHERN  
DIMENSION AND THE BLACK SEA  
SYNERGY: PERSPECTIVES FOR  
EUROPEAN REGIONALISM**

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the emergence and effects of European regionalism and the European Union's (EU) external governance in the Northern Dimension (ND) and the Black Sea Synergy (BSS), two regional cooperation partnerships within the European Neighborhood Policy. In particular, it explores the evolution, development, configuration, and structural properties of the regional interorganizational cooperation systems and examines their effects on democratic governance and policymaking in the Russian northwestern and southern regions that participate in the ND and BSS initiatives. The paper also examines local factors that account for the resistance to or acceptance of EU norms and standards. The results of the analysis indicate that the intensity and effectiveness of regional cooperation and regional convergence of policies and approximation to EU norms and standards depend on the degree of decentralization, density, and cohesiveness of regional cooperation networks, and also on the regional ethno-cultural, historical, and geopolitical contexts.

## **Keywords**

Regional cooperation, European regionalism, Northern Dimension and the Black Sea Synergy, Russian northwestern and southern regions, European Union, interorganizational networks, network governance, sub-national regionalism, sub-national integration, democratic governance.

## **Introduction**

Academic debate on European Union (EU) external relations has mainly been focused on the EU's capacity to export its norms and standards beyond its borders within the different legal frameworks, such as Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, Stabilization and Association Agreements, or the European Neighborhood Policy. Very little research has been devoted to the analysis of the character, degree, and effects of the EU's involvement in the domestic governance structures of its neighboring countries as well as to the internal factors that would account for the resistance to or acceptance of EU norms. Moreover, studies of EU-related democratization processes and acquisition of norms of good governance in the neighboring non-candidate countries are mostly concerned with national-level changes and countries exhibiting authoritarian tendencies (*e.g.* Russia or Belarus) are often considered to be impervious to EU influences.

Focusing on the EU-Russia sub-national cooperation, this paper contributes to the emerging literature on the EU's effects in the neighboring countries by offering an explanation of how the networks among regional public, civil society, and private-sector actors involved in EU-sponsored projects and cooperation initiatives with European actors can generate social capital, build support for democracy among local and regional actors, and improve governance in the neighboring countries at the sub-national level, even when national-level conditions are not favorable for EU influences. The paper also examines local factors that inhibit or catalyze EU-related transformations.

After a short reflection on the peculiarities of the EU-Russia center-to-center and sub-national level dynamics and a brief discussion of theoretical models relevant to this research, the paper presents a network analysis of complex EU-related interorganizational governance systems in the Russian northwestern and southern regions. The analysis examines the strength of cooperative efforts in these systems, identifies the key actors in regional cooperation and analyzes their propensity to influence decision-making processes in the regions. Additionally, the analysis explores regional actors' resource attributes that affect their network positions and help explain the evolution and development of regional cooperation. The paper also investigates local factors that contribute to or inhibit the effectiveness of regional cooperation on the basis of interviews with local policy makers, NGO representatives, private-sector representatives, professors, and regional experts. The paper concludes by discussing perspectives for further development of European regionalism.

### **Peculiarities of the EU-Russia center-to-center and sub-national level dynamics**

Observers generally assume that Russia will not be able to benefit from the democratization processes related to European integration and the enlargement of the EU due to the lack of the EU conditionality as it is not an EU candidate country and will not become one in the foreseeable future.

Additionally, scholars of the EU-Russia relationship have primarily focused on the analysis of the center-to-center dynamics, arguing that both sides are ambivalent about the desirability of deepening their relationship due to serious mistrust problems (Roberts, 2006; Trenin, 2005; Emerson, 2005). Among the factors affecting the relations between the two parties, scholars mention Russia's new assertiveness as a regional power and its dissatisfaction with the way the EU is imposing its norms and values on its large

neighborhood, and the EU's dissatisfaction with Russia's coercive energy policy, politics in the Caucasus, and lack of commitment to economic diversification and eroding democracy.

However, despite strained relations between Moscow and Brussels, interaction between the two sides at the sub-national level has grown substantially in both depth and scope (Stoliarova, 2007; Obydenkova, 2006; Lankina and Getachew, 2006; Prozorov, 2004). Russian provinces have been actively interacting with the EU institutions, member-states and regions of member-states in various projects and programs under the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the EU's TACIS (Technical Assistance to CIS countries), ENPI (European Neighborhood and Partnership), and CBC (Cross-Border Cooperation Program) instruments. In addition to the EU-sponsored programs, Russian regional actors have been involved in a multitude of inter-regional economic, social, cultural, and educational partnerships and cooperation initiatives with different European actors. Very few studies have been concerned with the assessment of these sub-national cooperation processes. This paper argues that with a strong focus on Moscow-Brussels relations some important changes occurring at the sub-national level might have been overlooked.

The main focus of this paper is the analysis of the effects of the regional cooperation between the EU and Russia in the Russian northwestern and southern regions that are included in the regional dimensions of the EU's Neighborhood Policy - Northern Dimension (ND) and the Black Sea Synergy (BSS), respectively. The ND and the BSS initiatives complement already existing regional policies of the EU and the EU member-states in the regions and specifically focus political attention on the regional level. These regional cooperation initiatives address specific challenges and opportunities arising in the regions and represent intensified inter-regional and transnational cooperation between the EU, its member-states and the regions of the member-states, and the neighboring countries and the regions of those countries.<sup>1</sup> Both initiatives aim at developing regional networking and involve a multitude of regional actors. The initiatives cover a wide range of sectors, such as transport, environment, justice and home affairs, culture, health care, nongovernmental cooperation and civil society development, promotion of trade and investment, economy and business, cross-border cooperation, information technology, science, education, and research. The initiatives are financed from multiple sources including the budgets of individual countries and regions of participating countries, EU financial instruments, international financial institutions (*e.g.* European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Investment Bank (EIB), Nordic Investment Bank (NIB)), and the private sector.

Both the Northern Dimension and the Black Sea Synergy initiatives are described as 'strategically important' in Russian foreign policy documents, the EU neighborhood policy documents, and various regional statements. However, according to the number and the breadth of regional programs (the variety of actors participating in regional projects), cooperation between the Russian northwestern region and Europe seems to be much more intense than cooperation between the southern region and Europe.

Additionally, the Northern Dimension also includes an interesting phenomenon, the so-called 'Euroregions' that represent special politically and economically integrated cross-border zones between Russia and the EU. The concept of the Euroregion was first applied to

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Northern Dimension, see [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/north\\_dim/](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/north_dim/).

For more information on the Black Sea Synergy, see [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/blacksea/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/blacksea/index_en.htm).

the Dutch-German border in the 1960s, and later became a common model for enhancing regional cross-border cooperation along the internal borders of the EU (Liikanen, 2005). With the enlargement of the European Union and the development of European integration, the concept of Euroregions was extended to the EU external borders and became an important instrument for the facilitation of European integration and coordination of cross-border programs, activities, and partnerships.

The first Euroregion binding Russian and EU borders was Euroregion Baltic (ERB), which was established in 1998 and represented an enhanced political and economic cooperation in the south-east of the Baltic Sea region, consisting of eight regions of Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The main aims of the ERB have been improving life conditions for its inhabitants, promoting bonds and contacts among local communities, and providing measures for more sustainable development within the region. Euroregion Baltic “constitutes the operational network of substantial and effective links across the borders, facilitating the promotion of political dialogue and reform, as well as sustainable, economic, social and environmental development, and thus strengthening local democracy and fostering people-to-people contacts between civil societies; the cooperation actively involves both local and regional authorities, private and public sectors, and NGOs”.<sup>2</sup> At present, there are 9 such Euroregions along the EU-Russia northwestern border. Administratively speaking, Euroregions have different organizational structures, but usually they include some sort of steering committee composed of regional and local authorities (Liikanen 2005). In addition to solving specific social, political and economic problems within their geographical boundaries, Euroregions also play an important role in the implementation of the broader Northern Dimension policies.

It is also important to note that according to the project reports and evaluations, the Northern Dimension projects are more efficient and effective than those in the Black Sea area. For instance, a series of projects in the Northern Dimension under TEDIM (Telematics for Foreign Trade and Delivery Management) program umbrella effectively smoothed the logistical chain in inter-regional and international trade by improving border crossing points, and developing common maritime and railway transportation systems. At the same time, a similar joint project between the Russian southern region and European Black Sea countries supported by the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) aimed at the development of sea port terminals and facilitation of sea trade routes did not bring expected results on time and was extended with additional financial support from the federal center and the Russian development bank.

More intense and effective regional cooperation in the Northern Dimension than in the Black Sea Synergy can be partially explained by the fact that the Black Sea Synergy is a more recent policy initiative. However, both initiatives complement already existing policies of Russia and bordering European countries in the regions and are supposed to provide more resources for the regional actors and enhance already existing cooperation processes. Therefore, they just attract more attention to the regional level and capitalize on existing regional cooperation.

Scholars of EU-Russia relations note that out of all the regions of the Russian Federation, the northwestern provinces have been most active in shaping Russia’s foreign policy in respect to the bordering European countries and at the same time have pursued their

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Baltic Euroregion, see <http://www.euroregionbaltic.eu>.

own strategy of establishing international contacts with the European regions and countries, thus becoming deeply involved in various regional cooperation networks (Prozorov, 2004; Obydenkova, 2006; Lankina, 2004). Administratively speaking, Russian northwestern and southern provinces that are involved in the BSS and ND initiatives have similar internal prerogatives to engage in international activity and pursue inter-regional cooperation with foreign actors (Gella, 2007; Prozorov, 2004). However, the northwestern region has been much more proactive in establishing effective networking with European actors and became much more deeply involved in European integration than the southern region. At the same time, the northwestern region is much more advanced in terms of democratic governance, from economic and political openness and transparency and accountability of institutions to provincial government strength and independence and the level of maturity of civil society and social capital (Petrov, 2005; Lankina and Getachew, 2006). Additionally, the northwestern region remains one of the most economically developed regions of Russia with a relatively diversified economic structure, the highest standards of living and the most equal income distribution, while the southern region is one of the poorest regions of the Russian Federation and is heavily dependent on federal support.

It is important to explore whether variation in the structure, intensity, and effects of the regional cooperation with the EU might be a significant factor explaining these regional differences. At the same time it is important to consider regional ethno-cultural, historical, and geopolitical contexts that can also account for the existing differences.

### **Theoretical models for regional cooperation**

There are several theoretical models that are relevant to the research on the EU-Russia regional cooperation. However, their thorough investigation is not the main purpose of this study; rather they are provided for better conceptualization of the regional cooperation and sub-national integration phenomena.

First, certain aspects of the Europeanization theory (Morlino, 2002; Cowles, Caporasso, Risse 2001) can be applied to this analysis. According to the Europeanization framework, regional cooperation and sub-national integration with the EU may cause change at the domestic level, because interaction between Russian regional actors and European regional, national and supranational actors can allow for the gradual transfer of the EU democratic norms and values into the domestic sub-national and then national politics. Within the Europeanization framework, it is helpful to consider EU external governance models (Lavenex, 2008, 2004; Klitsounova, 2007; Tiirmaa-Klaar, 2006; Noutcheva, Emerson, 2005) that theorize under what conditions EU norm transfer to external states is the most effective. This type of research emphasizes the importance of the modes of horizontal interaction between the EU and external actors that engage in collaborative processes generated by the ENP instruments and regional partnerships where objectives are jointly defined and promoted by policy networks. These policy networks are composed of policy-makers and stakeholders from the relevant countries and regions who agree on common objectives and concrete activities in the respective regional and national contexts. Exploring such horizontal interaction can be helpful in analyzing the EU's involvement in the decision-making processes of the neighboring non-candidate countries.

Second, certain aspects of the theory of regionalization (Obydenkova, 2006; Makarychev, 2000; Keating, 1995) stipulating that regions bordering foreign countries can be

subjected to external influences can be helpful in explaining the development of sub-national regionalism between the EU and the northwestern and southern regions of Russia bordering the EU.

Third, Lankina and Getachew's (2006) geographic incremental theory of democratization is useful in connecting the EU's external influence factor to internal democratization processes in the regions of the neighboring countries. The theory presupposes the existence of a powerful regional player (in this case, the EU), which could be one country or a union of states adhering to core democratic and good governance values. Inevitably, there will be greater intensity of movement of people, goods, information, ideas, and technologies between this player and the neighboring regions than between this player and localities that are more remote. "The spontaneity of these processes (Lankina and Getachew argue) forces the external actor to pursue targeted policies aimed at facilitating exchanges with a neighboring unit ...or at improving governance there in an effort to reduce the negative spillover effects from problematic neighbors" (Lankina and Getachew, 2006). A combination of spontaneous diffusion processes and targeted efforts of the external actor contributes to changes in policy making in a given country.

Fourth, Burt's network contagion theory can be applied to this analysis. Network contagion mechanism concerns the particular structure of a network that facilitates the transmission of knowledge, norms, beliefs, values, visions, ideas, and practices among network actors. In addition, network characteristics like reciprocity and interdependence temper power asymmetries and conflicts between network actors. Additionally, according to institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), in the process of interaction, organizations often mimic other organizations and start to become more similar to one another, a phenomenon called isomorphism. Joiner (2001) found that local firms in less developed/developing countries often changed their organizational culture to mimic the culture of successful organizations from the more industrialized nations. Therefore, cooperation between more advanced European and Russian economic and business actors might positively influence business culture and foster economic development in the Russian regions. The same can be true for political actors and civil society organizations.

While several studies explored the factors explaining the emergence of sub-national regionalism, very little research has been devoted to the factors that explain the level of engagement of sub-national units in regional cooperation and to the effects of regional cooperation on domestic sub-national governance infrastructure. Additionally, very few studies have been concerned with the exact structural mechanisms through which regional cooperation processes influence democracy and governance at the sub-national level.

### **Sub-national governance structures in the Russian northwestern and southern regions**

#### *Network perspective*

A regional cooperation framework creates an opportunity structure that provides economic, social, and cultural benefits and geographical mobility for various organizations, companies, educational institutions, firms, and provincial government bodies in the Russian northwestern and southern regions. Therefore, different regional actors voluntarily enter this structure and deliberately choose to use the resources offered by it: additional financial support and an opportunity to make partners, improve information processing capabilities,



lower uncertainty and reduce transaction costs, learn more about the regional environment by establishing strong contacts and socializing with diverse regional actors, and occupy a prominent position in the region by becoming connected to important actors in the regional socio-economic, cultural and political arenas.

Complex interactions among different regional actors participating in the EU-Russia regional cooperation form complex interorganizational networks. Such networks are peculiar forms of regional network governance as interdependent interconnected private, public, and civil society actors cooperate in a more or less institutionalized infrastructure to address common regional problems – environmental, social, economic, cultural, and other, which often transcend the borders of single national governments and provincial authorities. In some areas, cooperation arises from shared interests and values and common cultural and historical background; in other areas, it is encouraged by benefits that come from collective action such as common economic projects or building common transportation systems.

For the purpose of this study, regional governance network can be defined as a structure consisting of agents (or nodes/actors) represented by all kinds of cultural, educational, economic, civil society, and public-sector actors and links among those agents represented by complex interactions through EU programs and regional projects, partnerships, and cooperation initiatives with the European actors.

Consideration of the structural properties and the evolution of the northwestern and southern governance networks is important for understanding the strength, effectiveness and development of the EU-Russia regional cooperation and its effects on the social, political, and economic activity in the northwestern and southern regions. Therefore, the main questions for the network analysis of the regional governance structures are:

- Are there any differences in the configuration and functioning of the southern and northwestern interorganizational networks induced by the EU-Russia regional cooperation?
- What effects do these differences have on regional policymaking and democratic governance?
- What structural factors account for the difference in the levels of democratic governance and involvement of the northwestern and southern regions in European integration?

*It is hypothesized that there are significant differences in the configuration of the northwestern and southern regional governance networks that help explain why the northwestern region is more deeply involved in European integration and is more advanced in terms of democratic governance than the southern region.*

A structuralist perspective assumes that the structural position of agents in their relational set explains the constraints and the opportunities emerging for them in the system and the patterns of their behavior and influences the probability of their achieving some objectives (Jackson, 2008; Semitiel García, 2006; Burt, 2000). Network analysis scholars argue that complex interactions among network agents create structural interdependences among them, and agents have a capacity to impact each other through these interdependencies (Granovetter 2005; Wasserman and Faust 1994). Therefore, network linkages have important consequences for all the network actors: the relationships a given

actor has with others in the system affect its perceptions, norms, beliefs, values, visions, ideas, and behavior.

Network structures and substructures can be rigorously analyzed using a set of network analysis tools which are uniquely designed to confront specific research questions of interest. Depending on the focus of research and the level of analysis, scholars study structural attributes and characteristics of ego-networks (a focal node (ego) and the nodes to whom ego is directly connected to plus the ties among them), or network clusters, or structural features of the whole network (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

This study is focused on the analysis of the network-level characteristics of the EU-Russia regional cooperation systems, since the main aim of the study is to compare whole interorganizational networks in the Russian northwestern and southern regions and examine structural factors that can help explain the regional differences discussed above. Over the past decade, there has been a steady increase in the number of studies focusing on whole interorganizational networks; however, network-level research has primarily been theoretical or based on descriptive case studies performed at a single point in time (Provan, Fish and Sydow, 2007). This study contributes to the interorganizational network literature by conducting an empirical longitudinal study of the northwestern and southern regional cooperation networks.

### *Modeling the regional cooperation networks*

Representative samples of one hundred regional organizations in each region were selected for this study. The actors were selected from 8 provinces in the Russian Northwestern Federal District and 9 provinces in the Russian Southern Federal District that are included in the EU's Northern Dimension and the Black Sea Synergy regional initiatives and are covered by the majority of regional cooperation programs, projects and partnerships.<sup>3</sup>

The actors selected for the analysis include provincial administrations existing in the regions, economic and business actors, various non-governmental organizations and associations and other third-sector actors, educational institutions, local newspapers and media agencies, environmental organizations, and other regional actors participating in the regional cooperation with the EU. The data on the organizations were taken from multiple sources: EU TACIS, ENPI, and CBC reports, EU regional partnership and cooperation reports, the Northern Dimension and the Black Sea Synergy resources and reports, Euroregions' websites, Russian regional actors' archives and websites (information on European partners), websites of provincial governments, and different local and regional newspapers, journals, and brochures.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Northwestern selected province: St. Petersburg (Leningrad) oblast, Novgorod oblast, Vologda oblast, Arhangelsk oblast (excluding Nenets Autonomous District), Pskov oblast, Republic of Karelia, Murmansk oblast, and Kaliningrad oblast.

The Southern selected provinces: Rostov oblast, Astrakhan oblast, Krasnodar Krai, Stavropol Krai, Republic of Adygeya, Kabardino-Balkar Republic, Karachaevo-Cherkessk Republic, Republic of Kalmykiya, Republic of North Osetia.

<sup>4</sup> For information on Tacis, see [http://www.delrus.ec.europa.eu/en/p\\_259.htm](http://www.delrus.ec.europa.eu/en/p_259.htm); for ENPI programs, see [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-cross-border/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-cross-border/index_en.htm); for information on the Northern Dimension initiatives, see [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/north\\_dim/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/north_dim/index_en.htm); for information of the Black Sea programs, see <http://www.eubusiness.com/topics/transport/black-sea/>;

Organizations were selected in a way that each sector of the regional cooperation was represented by a more or less equal number of actors. In addition, the samples were composed of more or less equal numbers of private and third-sector actors. The strength of the relationship between two network actors was measured by the normalized intensity of interaction through cooperative effort: the number of EU-related regional initiatives that existed between two actors divided by the total number of initiatives in the system.

The data on the strength of the network ties correspond to the actual cooperative effort in the northwestern and southern systems. In many cases, besides the actors enumerated in official program design documents, other regional actors were involved in the implementation of cooperation programs/initiatives/partnerships/projects/events and it was important to consider them in the analysis. For instance, in the southern region it sometimes happened that provincial administrations were not mentioned in the project design documentation; however, in practice they took an active part in the project by making decisions concerning public events (*e.g.* conferences, seminars, roundtables) designed by the project, or/and subjecting project finances to bureaucratic control, or making decisions concerning actors that should be involved/excluded from the project, or participating in project activities at different stages of project implementation. Or, as another example, many initiatives that were primarily designed for establishing cooperation among various economic actors included civil society actors, as in the case of the joint EU /Finnish /Swedish/ Russian Development Program (northwestern region) called ‘Euro-Russia regional development’, which was designed to improve the investment conditions and networking of companies across the border between Russia and the EU through investment projects. Many actors from other sectors like the Northwestern Association of Workers, Russian Institute for Radio Navigation, and various environmental organizations were involved in the implementation of the program. It also sometimes happened that actors that were initially included in the project design documents did not participate or withdrew for different reasons from the program/initiative/partnership/project at an early stage of its implementation.

Therefore, the information on project participants was verified through multiple sources including program evaluations, project intermediate and final reports, local newspapers, provincial websites, organizations’ websites and reports, and any information available on project events. Thus, the data on the relations between actors in the systems correspond to the actual activities in the regions.

At first, two-mode cooperation initiative by organization matrix was constructed for each region at time 1 (1999), when the majority of cooperation programs were already taking place, since all sorts of regional partnerships in addition to already existing TACIS programs were launched in 1997 under the PCA agreement, and some of the regional business and economic contacts were established even before 1997; and then at time 2 (2006), when the latest consistent data on the regional cooperation were available. Then these four two-mode

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for information on the neighborhood initiatives, see [http://www.delrus.ec.europa.eu/en/p\\_647.htm](http://www.delrus.ec.europa.eu/en/p_647.htm); for information on cooperation partnerships, see [http://www.delrus.ec.europa.eu/en/p\\_258.htm](http://www.delrus.ec.europa.eu/en/p_258.htm); for external cooperation programs, see [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-cross-border/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-cross-border/index_en.htm); for Euroregions, see <http://www.siauliai.aps.lt/saule/about.html>, <http://www.euroregionbaltic.eu>, <http://euregio.karelia.ru/site/?lang=eng> Baltic Euroregion Network <http://www.benproject.org/en>; for the information about regional partnerships, see the websites of the provincial governments and regional and local newspapers.

matrixes were converted into four square matrixes (actor by actor). The resulting matrixes represent valued graphs, where the strength of relationships is measured by the normalized intensity of interaction through cooperative effort (the number of initiatives that existed between two actors divided by the total number of initiatives in the system). The matrixes were analyzed with UCINET, NETDRAW and MATLAB tools and techniques.

### *Analysis of the northwestern and southern regional cooperation networks*

#### *Network centralization*

While collaboration has become common in different areas, there are few methods to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of cooperative initiatives. In the interorganizational field, network analysis can rigorously assess the degree to which and by whom information and other resources are exchanged in the network (Valente and Davis, 1999; Provan and Milward, 1995). For that reason, network analysis is the widely preferred method for evaluating the evolution and effectiveness of cooperative partnerships (Tanjasi *et al*, 2007). Network analysis provides statistical measures of intensity of cooperative efforts within a network and the degree to which all the actors of the network have equal access to network exchanges and opportunities.

It is generally argued that effective network governance and effective functioning of interorganizational networks depends on the degree of network decentralization (Tanjasi *et al*, 2007; Joas, Kern, and Sandberg, 2007; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 1995; Putnam, 1993). Decentralization is associated with more efficient information flows, greater knowledge, and advance intelligence of possible changes in cooperation structures (Zmerli and Newton, 2007). Additionally, decentralization and participation strengthen governance and build social capital in society (Narayan, 1999).

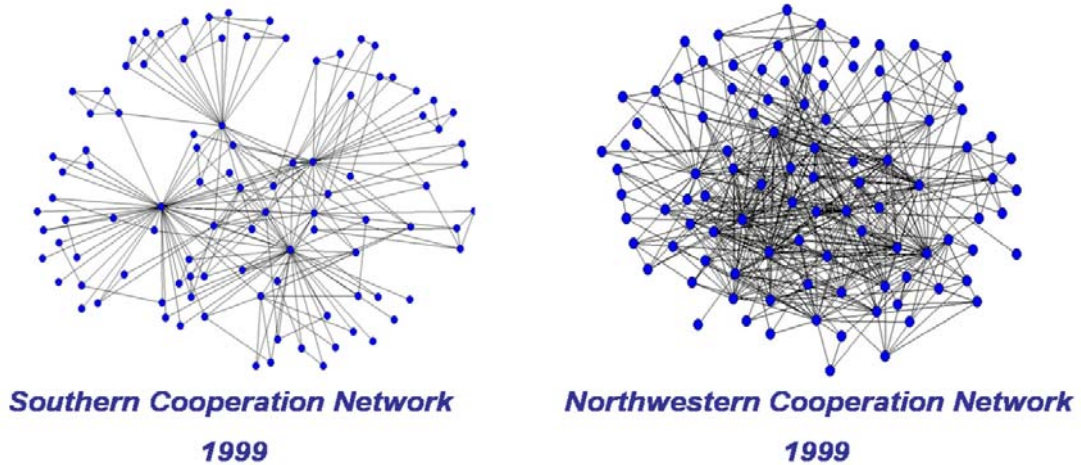
Network centralization in network analysis measures the degree to which an entire network is focused around a few central actors (Scott, 2000) or ‘dominated by a few places’ (Irwin and Huges, 1992). According to Scott (2000), actors have higher centrality to the extent they can gain access to and/or influence over others. In governance networks, most central actors are those who have important decision-making and coordinative roles. Centralization affects the spread of information, ideas and practices in governance networks as central actors have more influence and control over how information, resources and practices spread to others and in most cases, given the position of control and power, act as bottlenecks and slow diffusion (Tanjasi *et al*, 2007; Valente, 1995). From a governance perspective, centrality determines whether the governance network is dominated by public, private, or civil society decision makers (John and Cole, 1998).

Another important negative feature of centralization is that if central actors in a centralized network are removed or damaged, the network quickly fragments into unconnected sub-networks (Krebs, 2008). Additionally, in governance networks, central actors can hurt a network if they are pursuing their own agenda, different from the goals of the regional cooperation. Therefore, a less centralized network is considered a much better structure for cooperative efforts, since it has no single points of failure and it is ‘resilient in the face of many intentional attacks or random failures... as... many nodes or links can fail while allowing the remaining nodes to still reach each other over other network paths’ (Krebs, 2008).

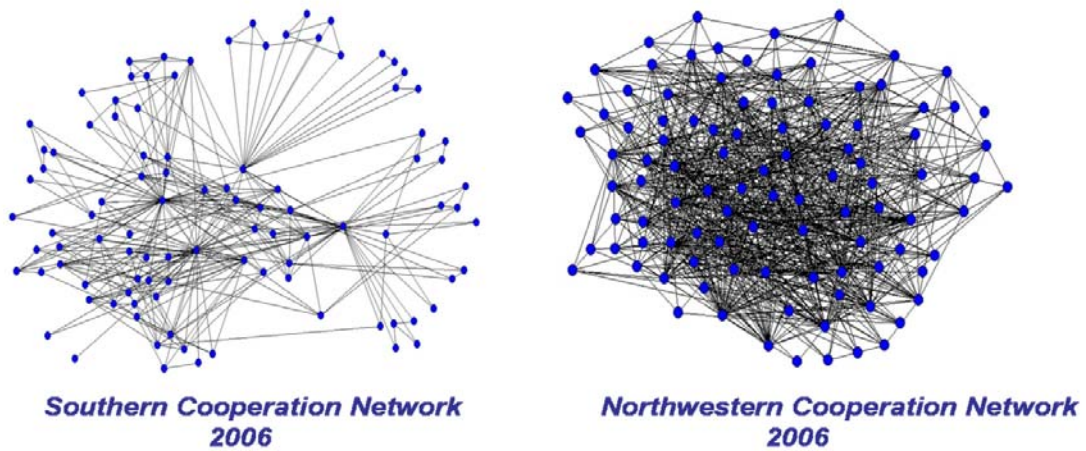
Thus, centralization helps to measure how resilient regional governance networks are and how effective cooperation processes are in terms of equitable sharing of information, resources, and influence and distribution of decision-making power among network actors.

Figures 1 and 2 represent regional cooperation networks visualized in NETDRAW at time 1 (1999) and time 2 (2006) and Table 1 reports the networks' centralization indexes calculated by the eigenvector routine.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



**Table 1**

**NETWORK CENTRALIZATION (N = 100)<sup>a</sup>**

	Centralization
Southern Cooperation Network 1999	61.32%
Southern Cooperation Network 2006	59.58%
Northwestern Cooperation Network 1999	32.17%
Northwestern Cooperation Network 2006	15.22%

<sup>a</sup> The closer the centralization is to 100%, the more centralized the network.

The results of the analysis indicate important differences in the structural composition and evolutionary development of the regional cooperation systems.

Southern regional cooperation network

In 1999, the southern regional cooperation network appeared to be twice as centralized as the northwestern network (61.32% compared to 32.17%) implying greater inequality in the distribution of information, resources and decision-making power among the network actors. In 2006, the southern network remained highly centralized (59.58%), while the northwestern network developed into a decentralized system (15.22% compared to previous 32.17%) indicating much more equitable sharing of network resources and a more or less equal distribution of influence among the network actors.

The results of the analysis demonstrate that in the 1999 southern cooperation network provincial administrations held ‘global’ network central positions, which implied that they were the most influential network actors in the regional cooperation processes. Moreover, cooperation activity seemed to occur most intensely within provinces and there was a lack of inter-provincial interorganizational linkages. Rostov, Krasnodar, Stavropol provinces and the republic of Adygeya exhibit some interconnectedness, while cooperative activity in the republic of Karachaevo- Cherkessia and Astrakhan province is largely isolated from the other provinces.

The 2006 southern regional cooperation network remains highly centralized around provincial governments. The overall number of linkages in the southern system increased, implying that more actors operating in different provinces established cooperative contacts; however, actors from the republic of Karachaevo- Cherkessia and Astrakhan province remain quite isolated from the rest of cooperative structure. It is important to note that some actors form cohesive cooperative alliances still isolated from each other. This means that in the centralized interorganizational system where control and power positions are occupied by public sector actors, these actors try to find their own niche of influence and act strategically to benefit from the network exchanges.

Additionally, in the 2006 network, centrality indexes of provincial administrations increased while indexes of many other actors decreased, implying that the whole system became more asymmetrical. Big standard deviations for centrality measures (both in 1999 and 2006) show that in the southern cooperation network control, power, and influence are unequally distributed in the system as there is a big difference between highly centralized and highly peripheral actors. Highly peripheral actors in the southern regional cooperation

network are highly constrained by their limited access to other actors and network information and resources.

#### Northwestern regional cooperation network

The center of the 1999 northwestern network was shared by organizations coming from various sectors: economic, education and science, social, culture, journalism, and public sectors; though overall, economic and business actors prevailed in the central positions and performed a 'connector-function,' as many of the interorganizational linkages among different sectors went through economic and business actors. As far as the public sector is concerned, St. Petersburg and Novgorod province administrations and the administration of the Republic of Karelia were more influential in regional cooperation processes than the other administrations. Additionally, important actors in the regional cooperation processes were organizations specifically focused on the integration of the northwestern region with Europe: the Office of the Nordic Council of Ministers, Finnish Cultural and Academic Institute, Regional Support Bureau, and Austrian Cooperation Bureau KulturKontakt. Another important feature of the northwestern network (both in 1999 and in 2006) is that many interorganizational linkages transcend the geographic boundaries of single provinces, implying that organizations from different provinces extensively cooperate with each other.

While in the 1999 northwestern network cooperative effort was largely segmented into collaboration areas and economic actors prevailed in the core of the network, in the 2006 network the composition of the cooperative effort becomes much more diverse and the core of the network is shared by representatives from all the sectors of the regional cooperation. These findings are in line with the European integration theories that stipulate that economic interaction is the driving force of integration and the spillover effect from economic interaction and economic interdependencies will quickly create strong incentives for integration in further sectors. Standard deviation figures for centrality indexes indicate that there was not a very big difference between most central and least central actors in the 1999 northwestern network, unlike in the southern cooperation network (both in 1999 and 2006); but in the 2006 northwestern network the difference became even smaller, which implies more equitable distribution of network resources and decision-making power. Another important feature of the 2006 northwestern network is that almost all the central actors from the 1999 network conceded their central positions to other actors. This indicates strong mobility and adaptability of the northwestern cooperation system.

The results of the centralization analysis indicate significant differences in the configuration of the regional cooperation networks in the northwestern and southern regions, which have important implications for the regional integration processes. The southern cooperation network appeared to be a highly centralized system with asymmetrical distribution of decision-making power and network resources largely controlled by the public sector actors. The northwestern network, by contrast, turned out to be much more decentralized, implying more equitable distribution of influence and control, and access to network exchanges. From the longitudinal perspective, the northwestern network showed a tendency toward further decentralization, while the southern system showed little change in the patterns of governance over time.

### *Network cohesion*

Network cohesion is associated with the level of interconnectedness and embeddedness of network actors in the networking structure. High network cohesion is important in interorganizational governance networks, as the degree of network cohesion correlates with the levels of trust and social capital in the system (Hanneman and Riddle, 2005).

There are different approaches to characterizing the extent of interconnectedness and form of ‘embedding’ of actors in networks. Social network analysts usually use a combination of different approaches. The most popular ones are: density, transitivity, and compactness. Density is usually defined by the extent that all actors in the network are connected. It shows the general level of connectedness among network actors and measures the ratio of the number of existing links in the network to the number of possible links, if each network actor had linkages to all the other actors. (Scott, 2000). Transitivity is associated with the existence of all the possible connections in triads. Governance networks with a high level of transitivity are considered to be more cohesive, stable, balanced, and harmonious. The concept of compactness is based on the ‘distance’ between actors. More compact, or cohesive networks, have shorter distances between network actors.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 report the results of the cohesion analysis.

**Table 2**

#### **NETWORK DENSITY (N = 100)<sup>a</sup>**

	Density
Southern Cooperation Network 1999	7.03 %
Southern Cooperation Network 2006	10.27 %
Northwestern Cooperation Network 1999	13.32 %
Northwestern Cooperation Network 2006	36.67 %

<sup>a</sup> The closer the density is to 100%, the denser the network.

**Table 3**

#### **NETWORK TRANSITIVITY (N = 100)**

	Transitivity
Southern Cooperation Network 1999	14 %
Southern Cooperation Network 2006	21 %
Northwestern Cooperation Network 1999	48 %
Northwestern Cooperation Network 2006	81 %



**Table 4**

NETWORK COMPACTNESS (DISTANCE-BASED COHESION) INDEXES (N = 100) <sup>a</sup>	
	Compactness Indexes
Southern Cooperation Network 1999	0.332
Southern Cooperation Network 2006	0.344
Northwestern Cooperation Network 1999	0.546
Northwestern Cooperation Network 2006	0.620

<sup>a</sup> range 0 to 1; larger values indicate greater cohesiveness.

All the measures of network cohesion indicate that the degree of cohesiveness of both regional cooperation systems increases over time. However, in the northwestern network it increases at a faster pace and the northwestern network is more cohesive than the southern one, both in 1999 and in 2006. Therefore, the northwestern system generates higher levels of trust and social capital.

Centralization and cohesion analyses indicate that the regional integration processes in the northwestern region represent a cohesive, stable and balanced structure with equal opportunities for all the regional actors and equitable sharing of power, influence, and control among them. The northwestern cooperation network approximates a good network governance model based on self-organization, adaptability, mobility, and collective action. In the southern system, public sector actors dominate cooperation and control integration processes occurring in the region, while other network actors are not very well connected and cooperative effort is largely segmented.

#### *Intersectoral linkages*

It is generally argued that cooperation between different actors (public, private, civil society, mass media, etc) is crucial in modern society as it helps to solve intractable development problems and builds social capital, which is critical to stability, democracy, and economic development (Brown and Ashman, 1996). Maloney and Robteutscher (2007) claim that democratic governance requires linkages between civil society and both the state and the market, as civil society has to ‘mobilize and activate influence on state-market mechanisms.’

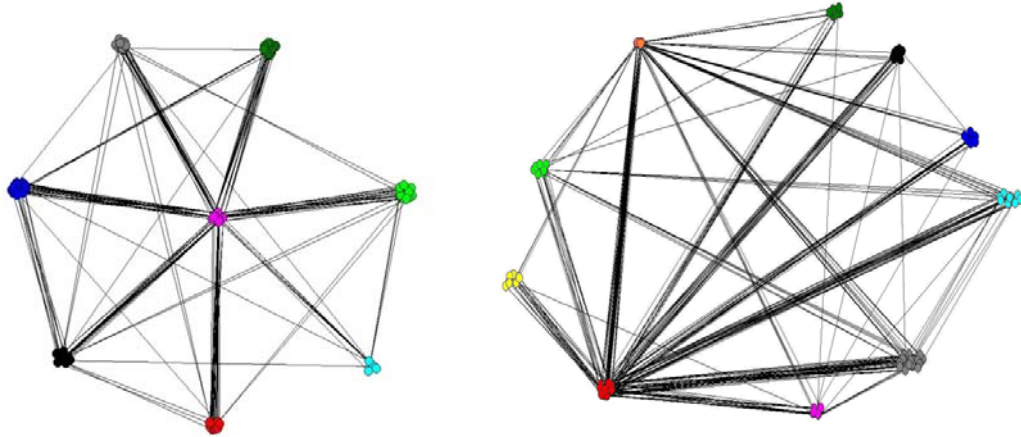
Joas, Kern, and Sandberg (2007) explored transregional cooperation among various actors in the Baltic Sea region and found out that participatory decision-making and mutual influence were essential for solving important regional problems. According to Narayan (1999), interorganizational collaboration networks that contain a high number of intersectoral cross-cutting ties have better governance capabilities and higher adaptability to evolving complex societal and economic problems.

EU-Russia regional cooperation aims at solving complex transregional problems in the Northern Dimension and the Black Sea Area and the problems existing in the Russian northwestern and southern regions. It is important to see whether the regional cooperation networks are structurally equipped for tackling such problems. A high level of cross-cutting intersectoral ties would be an indicator of networks’ flexibility and effectiveness in turbulent regional environments. According to Sorensen and Torfing (2005), if actors from different

sectors are equally involved in the decision-making processes, they will tend to develop a sense of joint responsibility and ownership for the decisions, which will oblige them to support, rather than hamper, their implementation.

Figures 3 and 4 display the results of the intersectoral analysis. Each network was rotated in a way to represent regional cooperation sectors grouped together and linkages among them.

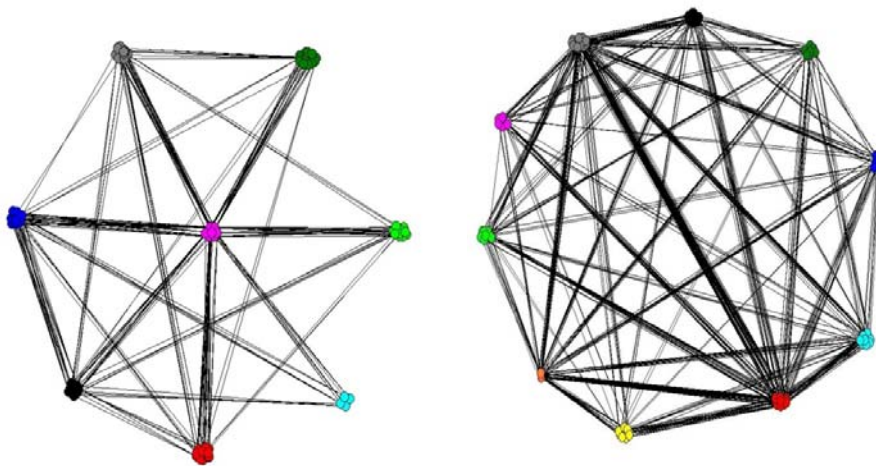
Figure 3



Southern network / Intersectoral Interaction  
1999

Northwestern network / Intersectoral  
Interaction 1999

Figure 4



Southern network / Intersectoral Interaction  
2006

Northwestern network / Intersectoral  
Interaction 2006

The results of the analysis indicate that there is a lack of cross-cutting ties in the southern regional cooperation network and some sectors of cooperation are disconnected. In addition, in accordance with the previous findings, public sector actors occupy dominant positions in

the system by having strong links to all the other sectors thereby controlling the system. As far as the northwestern regional cooperation network is concerned, it had a higher level of cross-cutting ties than the southern network in 1999, and in 2006 it developed into a very cohesive system with more or less evenly distributed strong intersectoral linkages. Thus, the northwestern governance network involves stable horizontal interactions between groups of actors that represent a plurality of organizations, indicating that decisions are made in diverse collaborative environments.

Therefore, we can conclude that in the northwestern region, regional integration processes are effective and efficient, while in the southern region the high level of centralization of political control over cooperation processes poses the principal obstacle to greater sub-national regionalism. The northwestern network represents a good approximation of the EU external governance model, discussed in the theoretical part of this paper, which emphasizes modes of horizontal interaction among regional cooperation actors. The southern regional cooperation network, on the contrary, seems to be far from the Putnam's (1993) ideal of a horizontally structured network with equitable distribution of network resources and information, where actors are inter-connected and have strong linkages to one another.

*Strength of cooperative effort*

A special method of evaluation of the strength of cooperative effort in the regional cooperation networks was developed based on the network models used in information theory and electrical engineering. Table 5 reports the scores for the strength of cooperative activity in the regional cooperation networks.

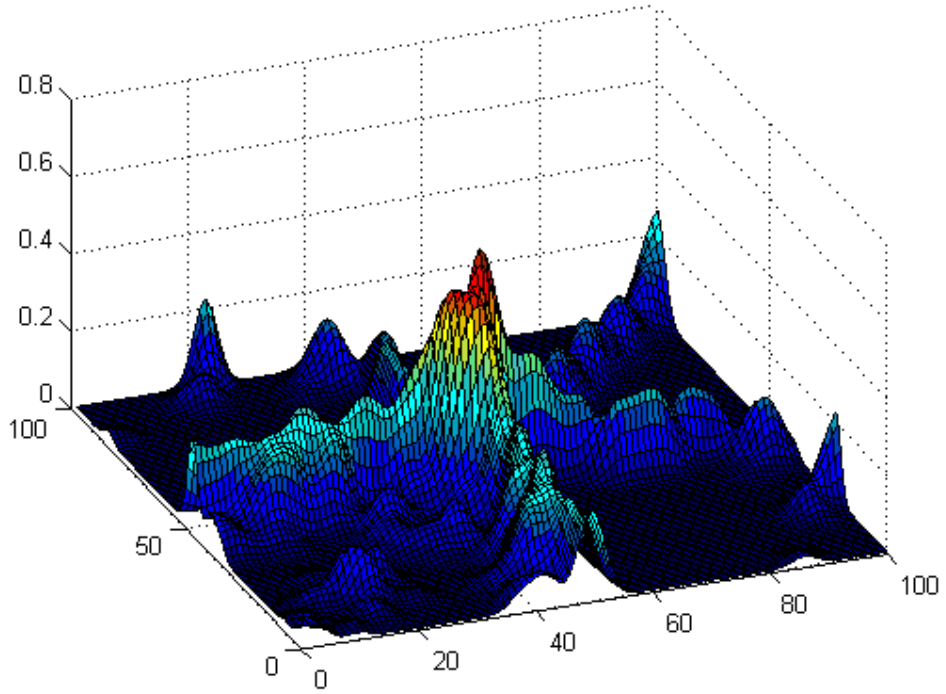
**Table 5**

Strength of cooperation	Southern99	Southern06	Northwestern99	Northwestern06
$\tau$	0.25	0.34	0.50	0.69

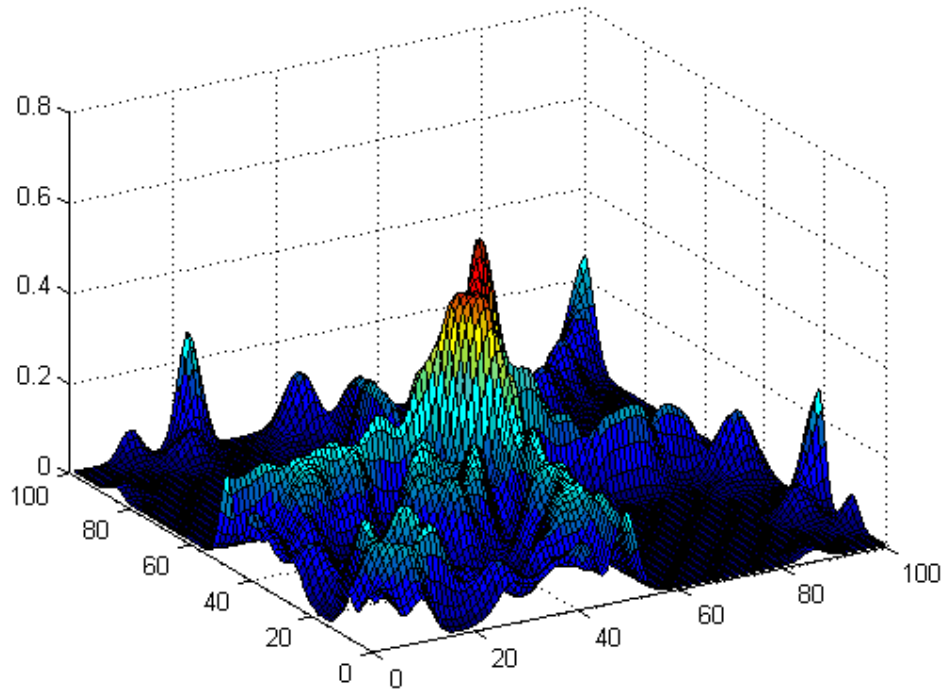
According to the results of the analysis, the strength of cooperative activity grows in both networks. However, in the northwestern network, the strength of cooperative activity is significantly higher and the difference between the 1999 value (0.50) and the 2006 value (0.69) is bigger than the difference between the southern network's scores (0.25 in 1999 and 0.34 in 2006). This implies that the strength of cooperative effort increases faster in the northwestern network and therefore, the northwestern system has better cooperative dynamics.

Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8 depict visualized representations of the strength of collaboration in the southern and northwestern governance networks.

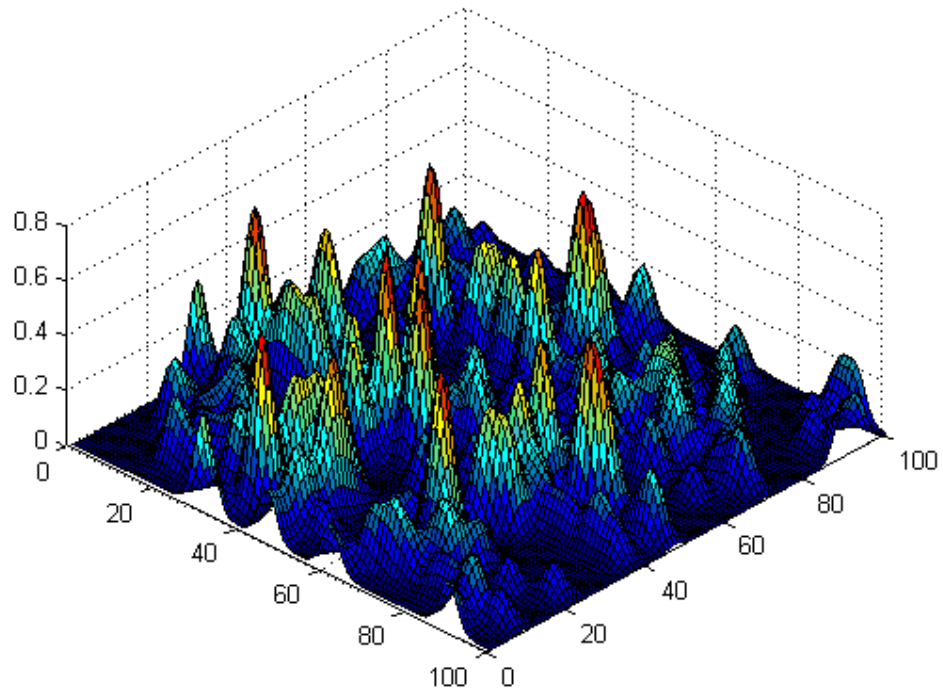
**Figure 5: Cooperative effort field/Southern Network 1999**



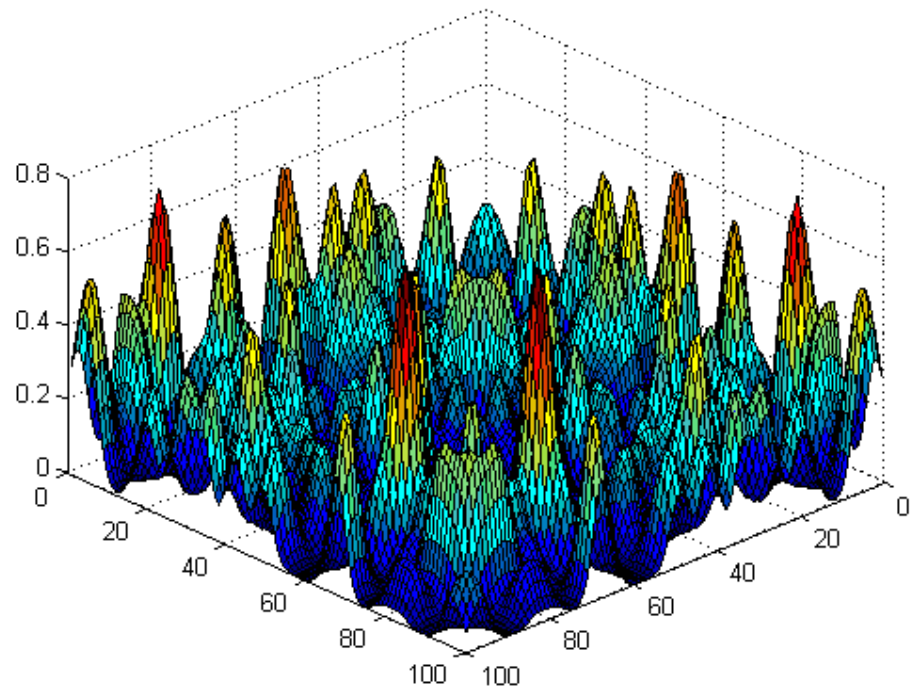
**Figure 6: Cooperative effort field /Southern Network 2006**



**Figure 7: Cooperative effort field /Northwestern Network 1999**



**Figure 8: Cooperative effort field /Northwestern Network 2006**



The results of the analysis indicate that the strength of cooperative effort increases in both networks over time; however, in the northwestern network it increases faster and it is much more evenly distributed across the system. This implies that in the northwestern network more actors are engaged in cooperative effort with many other actors and therefore have access to information about processes occurring within different policy sectors and are capable of influencing regional events and the formation of regional policies. The strength of cooperative effort indicates better awareness of regional processes, greater openness of the whole system, and better participation, mobilization, and adaptation capabilities of the northwestern actors.

Additionally, as discussed previously, participation strengthens governance and builds social capital in society. Therefore, we can conclude that due to the structural peculiarities of the networks, the northwestern network generates social capital more intensely and has a stronger effect on democratic governance than the southern network.

#### *Factors explaining agents' degree of power and centrality in the networks*

The analysis has been so far focused on the structural peculiarities of the whole networks. In the course of the analysis, significant structural differences and differences in the network development trends were discovered and their implications for democratic governance and policy processes in the regions were extensively discussed.

It is important to understand the factors that explain the positions of power and centrality in the regional cooperation networks. It is hypothesized that an actor's degree of centrality and power in the northwestern cooperation network is a function of its size, alliance proactiveness, level of activity in local environment, and international competence.

Size is defined as the total number of people working for an organization. Bigger organizations might have more contacts with other organizations (both formal and informal), and therefore may have greater awareness of opportunities provided by the regional cooperation and, as a consequence, may engage in cooperation processes and occupy central network positions faster than smaller organizations. European actors might also be interested in involving larger partners in projects and initiatives because of trust and reliability issues: they might have better knowledge about bigger regional actors than smaller ones.

Alliance proactiveness is defined as the total number of partners. If an organization is already engaged in partnerships with other organizations, there might be a better chance that it will get engaged in collaboration with other actors in the regional cooperation framework. The level of activity in local environment is defined as the number of public events organized by an actor during the period of time of one year. International competence is defined as the level of engagement in international activity of any kind - whether having international partners or participating in exchanges, conferences, or other international events. International competence was measured on a 3-point scale: '0' for no competence, '1' for moderate competence, and '2' for high competence.

It is hypothesized that the power and centrality of an actor in the southern cooperation network depend on its size, budget/income, and whether it comes from the public sector. Public sector variable was coded as '1'. All the other sectors were coded as '2', '3', '4', etc.

For the first dependent variable – centrality – the degree centrality measure was chosen. Degree centrality indicates how many other network actors are in direct contact with a particular actor. The more agents connecting to an actor, the higher is its degree, and therefore, the greater the potential to be in the center of events and other network exchange processes (e.g. information flows, financial flows, activities).

The second dependent variable – power - was defined as an eigenvector centrality measure. This measure is based on the principle that the power of a given actor is an increasing function of the sum of all the centralities of all the actors with whom that actor is connected. Actors who are connected to many well connected actors are more powerful than those who are connected to an identical number of poorly connected actors. In other words, those who are in contact with well-connected or ‘popular’ actors will tend to be more influential and powerful than those who are connected to the unpopular. In network analysis, eigenvector centrality is usually used to capture this aspect.

Therefore, the models for the analysis are described as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Power 1999} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Size} + \beta_2 \text{Activity} + \beta_3 \text{Alliance} + \beta_4 \text{Competence} + \beta_5 \text{Sector} + \beta_6 \text{Budget/Income} + e \\
 \text{Power 2006} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Size} + \beta_2 \text{Activity} + \beta_3 \text{Alliance} + \beta_4 \text{Competence} + \beta_5 \text{Sector} + \beta_6 \text{Budget/Income} + e \\
 \text{Centrality 1999} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Size} + \beta_2 \text{Activity} + \beta_3 \text{Alliance} + \beta_4 \text{Competence} + \beta_5 \text{Sector} + \beta_6 \text{Budget/Income} + e \\
 \text{Centrality 2006} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Size} + \beta_2 \text{Activity} + \beta_3 \text{Alliance} + \beta_4 \text{Competence} + \beta_5 \text{Sector} + \beta_6 \text{Budget/Income} + e
 \end{aligned}$$

Multiple regression method was used to estimate the significance and effect of the parameters discussed above on the positions of centrality and power in the networks. Tables 6 and 7 report the results of the analysis.

**Table 6: Southern Network**

	Size	Level of Activity	Alliance proactiveness	Sector	International Competence	Budget/Income
<b>Centrality 1999</b>	0.31*	0.12	0.36	'1'-0.74**	0.27	0.19*
<b>Power 1999</b>	0.28*	0.09	0.24	'1'-0.67*	0.23	0.15*
<b>Centrality 2006</b>	0.34*	0.13*	0.43	'1'-0.62*	0.29	0.14*
<b>Power 2006</b>	0.30*	0.10*	0.37	'1'-0.44*	0.25	0.08*

\* significant at the .05 alpha level

\*\* significant at the .01 alpha level

**Table 7: Northwestern Network**

	Size	Level of Activity	Alliance proactiveness	Sector	International Competence	Budget/Income
<b>Centrality 1999</b>	0.12*	0.34	0.27**	'2'-0.37**	0.42**	0.31
<b>Power 1999</b>	0.07*	0.31	0.24*	'2'-0.32**	0.40*	0.29
<b>Centrality 2006</b>	0.13	0.26*	0.32*	none	0.37*	0.25
<b>Power 2006</b>	0.10	0.28*	0.30*	none	0.35*	0.19

\* *significant at the .05 alpha level*

\*\* *significant at the .01 alpha level*

The results indicate that the size of an actor, its budget/income, and sector orientation (whether an actor belonged to the public sector) had a statistically significant positive effect on the positions of centrality and power in the 1999 southern network. A high coefficient for the sector orientation was expected from the previous analysis and is in line with the previous findings. In the 2006 southern network, size, budget/income, and sector orientation are still statistically significant positive predictors of an actor's centrality and power in the network. Interestingly, in 2006, the level of an actor's local activity became a significant positive predictor of centrality and power. This may indicate that when an actor is engaged in cooperative networking processes, it may acquire support from like-minded organizations and gain strength and popularity in the region by active participation in the life of the local community and organization of various events and activities. Therefore, over time public sector actors will have to start taking such 'popular' regional actors into account, thereby creating conditions for an increase in their centrality and power in the regional cooperation infrastructure.

As far as the northwestern network is concerned, in 1999 statistically significant positive predictors of an actor's centrality were the size of an actor, its alliance proactiveness, international competence, and sector orientation. Statistically significant positive coefficients for the sector orientation (economic sector) were expected from the previous analysis and indicate that in 1999, in the northwestern region, the central aspect of regional cooperation was economic integration. Budget/income and the level of local activity turned out to be insignificant variables in predicting actor centrality and power in the 1999 northwestern network. In the 2006 northwestern network, power and centrality were dependent on the actor's alliance proactiveness, international competence, and local activity variables. Size, sector orientation and budget/income turned out to be insignificant.

The findings indicate interesting tendencies in the regions. The probability that an actor becomes central in regional cooperation with the EU in the northwestern region is highly dependent on its international competence and alliance proactiveness, implying that the overall level of networking and outreach capabilities and mobility of an actor are important in determining whether it will occupy a central and powerful position in the regional cooperation process. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the northwestern actors are oriented towards collaboration with external actors and are prone to inter-regional cooperation and sub-national integration. In the southern network, centrality and power are



more a function of local factors indicating that Russian southern actors are more oriented towards an internal regional arena rather than external integrative processes.

### *Summary of results*

The results of the network analysis of the regional governance structures in the northwestern and southern regions indicate significant regional differences that have important implications for democratic governance in the regions. The analysis demonstrated that regional cooperation with the EU plays a significant positive role in creating connections among Russian local organizations, NGOs, companies, educational institutions, and provincial governments in both northwestern and southern regions. However, due to the peculiarities of the regional structures, regional cooperation with the EU has a stronger effect on the development of an interconnected regional infrastructure in the northwestern region.

According to the results of the analysis, the northwest region, which has a higher level of democratic governance, is embedded in a dense and decentralized network governance structure. On the contrary, the southern region has a sparsely connected, largely fragmented, and highly centralized regional cooperation structure. The northwestern regional cooperation network shows the prevalence of horizontal modes of decision-making, while the southern network is vertically differentiated.

The results of the analysis indicate that in the northwestern network there is a fairly equitable distribution of power, influence and control among network participants; therefore, the northwestern network approximates a good network governance model based on collective action and characterized by self-organization, mobility, and adaptability to changes in the regional environment. This indicates the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional integration processes in the northwestern area. Additionally, the northwestern regional cooperation network has a much higher level of intersectoral cross-cutting ties. This indicates that the northwestern regional structure is richer in social capital and is also more participatory, open, and democratically legitimate than the southern one.

In the southern region, public sector actors dominate decision-making processes and control integration processes, which significantly impedes information diffusion and resource exchange in the regional cooperation systems. Therefore, in the southern cooperation structure a high level of centralization of political control over cooperation processes poses a principal obstacle to greater sub-national regionalism.

Another important finding is that the level of centrality and power in the northwestern network (among other factors) depends on actors' alliance proactiveness and international competence, which implies that networking capabilities and knowledge of transregional and international environment are important factors in determining whether an actor will get engaged in the regional cooperation infrastructure and become central and influential in it. In the southern regional cooperation system, the positions of power and centrality are functions of local factors. This indicates that actors in the southern region are more oriented towards a local action arena, while the northwestern actors are more motivated and inclined to cooperate with international actors and, most important, already have significant international experience. Therefore, European regionalism and sub-national integration have much better development prospects in the northwestern region than in the southern one.

The main goal of this analysis was to discover the main tendencies and the patterns of governance in the regional cooperation systems and discuss their implications for democratic governance and sub-national integration in the northwestern and southern regions of the Russian Federation. The dimension that was neglected in this analysis is the micro-level of individual organizations and individuals. This aspect was ignored not because it is considered to be of less importance, but because this study was specifically focused on a comparative assessment of the systemic features of the regional cooperation in the northwestern and southern regions.

### **Factors that shape the structure of the networks and affect EU-related influences**

Interorganizational networks are not by definition ‘democratic’ or ‘undemocratic’, as everything depends on their actual form and functioning, which again depends on the historical and political context in which they emerge and operate (Sorensen and Torfing, 2005). This section investigates ethno-cultural, historical, and geopolitical specifics of the northwestern and southern regions that affect EU-related influences in the regions and also account for the differences in the regional governance networks.

This analysis is based on in-depth interviews with regional public officials, NGO representatives, journalists, economists, political scientists, and regional experts. The interviews gave access to greater levels of information and a more complete picture of the regional contexts based on detailed observation about the regional processes and the mechanisms of decision-making at the sub-national level, which quantitative data alone could not provide. It is important to note, however, that the interviews go beyond mere description as they were conducted with the aim of contributing to testing the hypothesis about the relationship between differences in the regional governance structures and intensity of sub-national integration, and the level of democratic governance in the regions. Therefore, this qualitative analysis seeks to evaluate the overall consistency of the interview data with the previous network analysis.

The factors that shape and influence regional governance patterns and condition the structural peculiarities and development of the regional cooperation networks can be divided into two broad interconnected categories: regional historical and ethno-cultural backgrounds and geopolitical factors.

#### *Regional historical and ethno-cultural backgrounds*

According to respondents, historical background and ethnic composition and sub-ethnic elements have a significant direct impact on the regional governance processes and shape regional governance structures.

European regionalism and cooperative governance in the Russian northwest has deep historical roots, while the southern region lacks previous regional cooperation experience with Europe. The northwestern region’s governance structure has its origin in the 9<sup>th</sup> century Novgorod-the-Great polity and later on Novgorod Republic, which was famous for its democratic governance (as it was ruled by the public assembly called the “Veche”) and was well integrated in different Northern European interregional and international cooperation and trade structures such as the Hanseatic League of North European cities.

The development of effective network governance and intense integration of the northwestern region with Northern European regions and countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union is explained by many experts as historical path-dependence: common history, significant previous cooperative experience, and geographic closeness to Nordic and other European states predetermined the openness of the northwestern region to European influences and made it seek cooperation with European actors. Both European and Russian northwestern actors have been very proactive in establishing networking, concluding alliances, and carrying out different projects with each other. This fast development of sub-national regionalism is also explained by the fact that the northwestern region has always been a significant part of Northern Europe in terms of common ethnic, cultural and social identity shared by Scandinavian, Baltic, Slavic, and Finnic people.

At the same time, the southern region was initially shaped by a multitude of ethnic and cultural constituents very different from one another and has been influenced by numerous external non-European influences and affected by several very centralized and autocratic systems like the Golden Horde Khanate or the Ottoman Empire. According to respondents, this has had a significant negative impact on the development of governance structures in the southern region.

With the EU's expansion to the south, to the Black Sea, the southern region became more engaged in EU-related initiatives. However, the level of networking and collaboration still leaves much to be desired. The EU's Black Sea Synergy initiative is an important resource that has brought new opportunities to both the EU's and Russian southern actors; however, according to regional experts, sub-national integration is more a bottom-up process than a top-down policy and there should be motivation and interest on both sides for it to function properly and to be used effectively. So far, the EU actors have been quite cautious and modest in establishing partnerships with southern actors. At the same time, southern actors (in general) have not been very active in pursuing closer relations with the EU actors either.

Additionally, unlike the more or less ethno-culturally homogenous, socially cohesive, and modernized northwestern region, the southern region remains in many aspects a traditional clan-based society (especially its Caucasus provinces). Clan ties are often disregarded by scholars because of their informal character; however, according to the regional experts interviewed, they often provide the basis for political and economic groupings and formation of regional elites in the Russian south. The main problem of the clan-based politics in the southern region nowadays is that it undermines key dimensions of democracy—separation of powers, transparency, accountability, representation, participation, responsiveness, and solidarity. Clan connections define the allocation of public resources, and elections in representative bodies exercising authority, as a rule, are based not on political programs that would be beneficial for every member of society, but on clan principles. Provincial clan elites often unite in regional alliances to increase their control over regional resources. The situation is also complicated by the existence of abundant energy (mainly oil and gas) resources in the southern region that gives regional elites an opportunity to capture resource rents, prosper, and ignore the socio-economic needs of the southern society.

This is one of the reasons why the southern provinces have the greatest income inequality in the country: regional elites are interested in their own self-preservation and prosperity and, therefore, get rich at the expense of the rest of the population. This is reflected in the way regional cooperation with European actors is structured. The opportunity to

participate in regional programs and partnerships is restricted in the southern region as regional elites perceive regional cooperation as another financial opportunity and, therefore, control the resources offered by it and use them as a means to further their interests rather than to solve complex regional problems.

The multiethnic composition of the southern region and its clan-based politics also lead to the lack of interorganizational networking in society and inhibit the development of a common cooperation strategy for the region. Additionally, EU assistance programs and opportunities provided by regional cooperation have somewhat paradoxical effects on the development of civil society in the southern region, as despite their networking character they produce distinct civic elites in the region well individually connected with the provincial bureaucracies, but without a visible constituency and dense horizontal linkages among themselves.

Therefore, in the multiethnic and highly socially segmented southern region - with its clan-based politics, bureaucratic corruption, underdeveloped civil society, and the lack of previous Europe-related regional cooperation experience - democratic concerns and orientation towards European norms and standards do not play an important role in the regional decision-making processes. As a consequence, regional cooperation networks are largely segmented, sparsely connected, highly centralized around public-sector actors, and lack horizontal modes of decision-making.

At the same time in a historically oriented towards Europe, stable, socially cohesive, more ethno-culturally homogeneous, yet pluralistic northwestern region, democratic concerns play a much bigger role in governance processes, and regional cooperation networks are promoted as a means of enhancing efficient and participatory governance.

### *Geopolitical factors*

According to different respondents, the geopolitical location of the regions is a significant factor in explaining differences in the shape and functioning of regional governance structures. As mentioned previously, the northwestern region is located in northwestern Russia and shares a common neighborhood with Finland, Sweden, Norway, and the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) to the north and Poland, Germany, and Denmark to the west. Therefore, the region's foreign policy is oriented towards Northern and Western Europe, and European actors are the main foreign actors involved in the internal affairs of the region.

At the same time, the southern region's neighborhood is represented by a variety of different countries: Southern Caucasus Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia; Central Asian Kazakhstan; European Ukraine, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria; and Turkey and Iran. The main Eurasian transportation lines go through the southern region to Turkey and Iran. All the countries enumerated above are interested in the southern region, as it is the center of the major inter-regional and international transportation systems, is very rich in natural resources, and at the same time occupies a strategic position in respect to the transfer of Russian and Central Asian oil and gas to Europe.

It is also important to mention that due to the region's geostrategic location, besides the countries that share a common neighborhood with it, other important international actors

have their vested interests in the region: all the European countries that receive oil and gas through the Russian southern routes and also the US that is heavily involved in the geopolitics of Caspian and Central Asian energy. The southern region is located in the neighborhood where the EU and the US are striving to build pipelines for the transfer of Caspian and Central Asian oil and gas to Europe, bypassing Russia. Therefore, the southern region is being influenced by a very heterogeneous group of actors and is at the very center of all sorts of geopolitical games and rivalries based on the energy issue. For instance, according to many regional experts, the recent conflict between Russia and Georgia is well connected with the geopolitics of energy routes in the region, as the EU and US are pursuing building alternative pipelines through Georgia, which Georgia used as leverage against Russia to acquire support from the EU and US and solve its territorial problems.

Therefore, it is possible to say that the southern region is located in a neighborhood with an acute and pervasive security dilemma. According to regional experts, this significantly inhibits regional cooperation and sub-national integration processes.

Another important factor explaining the differences in the regional cooperation structures is the EU's motivation. Regional experts argue that while in the northwestern region the main driving force of regional cooperation is the genuine interest of European countries, regions, and actors in the northwestern region based on common history and culture; in the southern region the main force that drives the EU institutions and countries closer to the southern region and the main motivation behind the Black Sea Synergy initiative is energy security concerns. Respondents claim that in the northwestern region, regional cooperation is based on the natural regional processes rooted in the common past and every initiative involves a multitude of different regional actors at different levels and results in vibrant networking, while in the southern region, regional cooperation is a more recent and more EU sponsored and designed initiative, access to which is quite restricted due to the regional specifics discussed above.

Additionally, several respondents mentioned the fact that in the Northern Dimension, all the countries involved in regional cooperation with the Russian northwestern region are either democratic and the most developed northern EU countries, or also democratic and developed non-EU Norway and Island. At the same time, regional cooperation in the Black Sea area (besides the Russian southern region and the EU's Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria) involves a variety of countries that are still countries-in-transition and are not very advanced in terms of democracy – Turkey, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. According to respondents, this also explains the differences in the regional integration patterns and the differences in the effects of regional cooperation on democratic governance in the northwestern and southern regions. By interacting with democratically and economically advanced northern European countries, the northwestern region follows a certain policy-learning model. At the same time, the southern region is interacting with diverse actors and the effects of the interaction with the EU actors are not as strong as in the northwestern region, as they are mitigated by influences coming from other actors that are not much more democratic and economically developed than the Russian southern actors.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the analysis demonstrate that there are considerable differences in the structure, functioning, and development of the sub-national cooperation systems within the Northern Dimension and the Black Sea Synergy partnerships.

Regional cooperation turned out to be an effective mechanism for the enhancement of democratic governance and the transfer of the EU's norms into the regions' internal policies in the Russian northwestern region. In the northwestern region, regional cooperation contributes to the development of regional network governance and civic connection, which create reciprocity and trust in the northwestern society and encourage community engagement by disseminating information, connecting citizens, and enabling direct participation of people and their organizations in provincial and regional decision-making processes.

Due to important historical, ethno-cultural, and geopolitical factors, the southern region is much less responsive to the EU's initiatives and European sub-national regionalism in the southern region is much less effective than in the northwestern region. In both cases, the social basis of the governance structures had come into existence long before the establishment of the Soviet Union and was only illuminated and accentuated by post-Soviet politics and the EU's efforts to encourage regional cooperation and diffuse democratic practices.

Therefore, it is possible to generalize that in the regions where democratic concerns hardly play any role and where local governance structures are centralized and lack modes of horizontal interaction and intersectoral cross-cutting linkages, EU-induced democratization processes will be slow and inefficient. On the contrary, in the regions where democratic concerns play at least some role in existing governance patterns and local governance structures are decentralized, cohesive, and horizontally-differentiated, EU-induced democratization processes will be effective and regional cooperation networks will contribute to efficient and participatory governance. At the same time, it is important to note that European integration in Wider Europe will occur most efficiently in the areas that share a common geopolitical, ethno-cultural, and historical European heritage.

This study adds to our knowledge of the processes occurring in the regional domains of EU foreign policy and the international activity of the EU member-states and advances our understanding of sub-national integration processes and local factors that explain existing patterns of governance, shape and influence regional cooperation structures, and account for the resistance to or acceptance of EU-related norms. As such, it contributes to the recent and increasingly growing literature on EU external governance and democratization in the Wider Europe, as well as to more general studies that focus on EU relations with neighboring countries and the regions of the neighboring countries.

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