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Re-scaling 'EU'rope: EU macro-regional fantasies in the Mediterranean

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Abstract

This article engages with the most recent spatial fantasy for the making of 'EU'ropean space: the idea of trans-European macro-regions, currently in vogue in the policy literature. In particular, we focus on the imaginings of a Mediterranean macro-region as the latest incarnation of the macro-regional fad, but also as a useful prism for reflecting on some of the underlying conceptual as well as political and geopolitical challenges of the on-going remaking and rescaling of 'EU'ropean space. We argue that, although there exists by now a vast literature by geographers and other scholars that engages with the production of 'EU'ropean spaces through regionalization, the policy literature generated by EU 'macro-regional experts' appears to entirely ignore these debates, professing an understanding of regions that is a conceptual pastiche at best, and that entirely occludes the political and geopolitical implications of region-making within, at, and beyond 'EU'rope's borders

Keywords

Borders, Europe, European Union, Mediterranean, regions

Introduction

The spatial imaginations of the European Union's policy makers have commanded the attention of political and urban geographers for quite some time now (see, among others, Bialasiewicz, 2011a; Böhme et al., 2004; Böhme and Waterhout, 2008; Casas-Cortes et al, 2013; Clark and Jones, 2008; Jones, 2006; Jones and Clark, 2010; Moisio, 2011; Paasi, 2005). Geographers have long argued for a critical

engagement with such imaginations as a key to understanding the multiple processes of 'EU'ropeanization,

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for, as Jensen and Richardson (2004) note, these are a fundamental part of the EU's attempts to (re)territorialize both 'European' spaces and those at their borders. Indeed, over a decade's worth of critical geographical work has elucidated the ways in which 'EU'ropean space making is explicitly about the political production of 'European spaces', rather than simply the deployment of 'European' policies in already existing political space (see, among others, Brenner, 1999; Hudson, 2004; Jones and Clark, 2008; MacLeod, 1999; Painter, 2002).[1] Recent years have witnessed new momentum in the elaboration of EU policies aimed at remaking both 'EU'ropean and extra-'EU'ropean spaces, as part of the EU's wider refashioning of its real and imagined role in the world and, especially, in what it considers its immediate Neighbourhoods. One important aspect of this new momentum is the current vogue of European 'macro-regions' as a novel policy fix for the making of 'EU'ropean spaces. It is on this new geographical fad that we wish to focus our attention here, inspired in particular by the most recent proposals for a 'Mediterranean Macro-Region' promoted by the EU-funded MEDGOVERNANCE Project.[2]

We choose to focus on this particular initiative not because it is unique (for, as we shall argue in the pages to follow, it is just the latest spatial creature spawned by the macro-regional fad) but because we believe it highlights some of the underlying conceptual as well as political and geopolitical implications of the on-going regionalization of 'EU'ropean space. At the same time, we will suggest that the projection of the macro-regional template upon the Mediterranean in particular raises a whole host of additional questions – questions seemingly ignored by the developing policy and think-tank literature (which we in part examine here), but that deserve the critical attention of geographers and other scholars concerned with the making and the 'scaling' of 'EU'ropean space (for a discussion of this notion see Brenner, 2003; Leitner, 2004; Moisio, 2011).

The idea of European 'macro-regions' was first formally enshrined within the European Commission's *EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*, published in June 2009. Although originating in the specific context of Nordic/Baltic cooperation strategies (Galbreath and Lamoreaux, 2007; Moisio, 2003), the

macro-regional perspective has, nonetheless, been recently projected by the Commission onto other European spaces too: a Danube Macro-region has been instituted, and other initiatives aimed at macro-regionalization have been envisaged, from the Adriatic to the Alps, to the western Mediterranean, the English Channel and the North Sea (for a review, see Adriatic Euroregion, 2009; Ágh et al., 2010; Medeiros, 2011a, 2011b). The conceptualization and planning of such macro-regional strategies have also mobilized particular communities of geographical expertise, drawing into the macro-regionalizing project some of the most prestigious European think-tanks (see Lagendijk, 2005). In recent years, political geographers have fruitfully scrutinized the formation and operation of a variety of forms of expertise within EU institutions and associated European policy networks (see, for example, Kuus, 2011a, 2011b; Prince, 2012). We would like to build upon such work here, analysing specifically some of the forms and sites of geographical knowledge production implicit in the current and on-going 'making' of the macro-regional concept in the Mediterranean and elsewhere.

In particular, we contend that the MED GOVERNANCE project is illustrative of what Moisio (2011: 30) describes as the 're-scaling of European [spatial] expertise'. Commenting on the horizontal networks that helped sustain the Baltic Sea macro-regional(izing) project, he illustrates how such networks 'bring together policy-makers and professionals *in the name of Europe*' (Moisio, 2011: 30, emphasis in original). Moisio also notes, however, that, while such experts' involvement in EU-sponsored projects 'can be considered a practice whereby [existing] ideas of European spatial planning are implemented in interpersonal interaction, and become subjectified in the ways of being or identities of those involved' (2011: 30), such '(macro) region-makers' are, at the same time, quite aware of 'playing [spatial] games in the name of the EU' (2011: 31). This also appears to be the case in the MEDGOVERNANCE project, which brings together the representatives of a number of European regions[3] with experts drawn from a variety of local and regional think-tanks,[4] all in the name of a common, 'European', goal. The project was

originally conceived and received funding from the ERDF, through the European Union's MED Programme in 2009, with the aim of 'analyzing the governance framework for the preparation and implementation of major policies affecting the Mediterranean region', and in particular 'the issue of multilevel governance' and 'new regional strategies' (MEDGOVERNANCE, 2010).

The MEDGOVERNANCE project's promotion of the macro-regional concept as a privileged spatial formation for governing and administering Mediterranean space is worthy of attention also because it exposes some of the key ways in which such local and regional policy and practitioner networks 'play spatial games' with a concept that has a long history in the geographical tradition. We identify this (seemingly forgotten) history, highlighting the distinct genealogy of today's macro-regional understandings, and locating these most recent attempts at the remaking of 'EU'ropean space within a much longer trajectory of European spatial ideologies, projected both upon EU spaces as well as on those beyond its borders. The external(izing) function of the current EU macro-regional initiatives is indeed crucial, for the transnational regions being imagined (and, in some cases such as the Baltic, already practised) have also as their aim the making of a 'Wider Europe', extending forms of European territoriality beyond and across the EU's current borders. We elaborate upon this in subsequent sections, for the at once 'internal' *and* 'external' intent of macro-regionalization is, we suggest, key to its allure. As Andreas Faludi (2011: 83) has argued in a recent article commenting on EU regional policy, this latter, while a flagship 'internal' policy of the Union, 'at the same time [...] bears witness to its ambivalence apparent also in foreign, energy and defence policy'. For Faludi, this ambivalence is about the EU's territoriality – or, more precisely, the tension between the 'hard' and 'aspirational' notions of territoriality that mark the European project (see Bialasiewicz et al., 2005); between the bordered space of the now EU27 and 'EU'rope's wider spaces of action and (inter)action, whether defined through notions of 'European values' or 'European responsibility' (the term adopted by Espon (2006), cited by Bachmann, 2011 in mapping the 'greater

spaces of the EU's influence in the world – see the discussion in Bachmann, 2011).

Such ambivalence derives from multiple and often contradictory understandings of what regions are or may become. In popular understandings (but also in much of the EU policy literature), regions are envisioned as *both* a scale lower than the nation-state (for example Tuscany or Provence, to use two Mediterranean examples) *and* a supra-national one (for example the Middle East or the Mediterranean itself). In the first case, the region is conceived as a territorial container of functional, or cultural, or historical, or administrative, or physical attributes, or at times all of these things together. This kind of region is also often presented as a sort of spontaneous, 'organic' container, fashioned by the workings of local communities, their histories and mundane geographies. In the second case, on the other hand, the regional scale is seen as a flexible grouping of states brought together by some common features (religion, culture, past, etc.). Such 'macro' (although the prefix is not necessarily always – or even predominantly – applied) regional mappings also contain echoes, however, of a long-standing tradition of pan-regionalist ideologies dating back to not only the theorizations of political geographers such as Friedrich Ratzel, Halford Mackinder, Karl Haushofer, Nicolas Spykman and many others (see Heffernan, 1998; Kearns, 2009; O'Loughlin and Van der Wusten, 1990) but also the geopolitical fantasies of statesmen from US President Woodrow Wilson to the Nazi ideologue Heinrich Himmler. Although the parallel may appear extreme, these are echoes that we should not forget when considering region making in and beyond 'EU'rope, for, as Bachmann and Sidaway (2009: 106) remind us, current projections of 'EU'ropean influence all too frequently 'simultaneously internalise and occlude prior visions of Europe and European world roles'.

What is problematic is that most existing EU policy documents dealing with the macro-regional question seem to adopt a gallimaufry of such understandings, frequently opting for the rather loose definition of macro-region as 'an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges' (INTERACT, 2009: 1).[5] Indeed, what is most

striking to a geographer about the EU's renewed policy emphasis on macro-regions is that these appear to be, conceptually as well as practically, the product of a mix of *both* scales, with all that such mixing may imply. The macro-regions envisaged by the contemporary 'EU'ropean policy literature are thus presented as curious aggregates of already existing regions belonging to more than one country, bound by some assumed common spatialities; in other words, macro-regions intended as agglomerations of (micro)regions.

This conceptual pastiche becomes even more problematic when forcible macro-regionalization is applied to the Mediterranean, a space that can be defined as an endless (and un-mappable) 'field of tensions' at best (Giaccaria and Minca, 2011); that resists any attempt at regionalization (that is to say, at spatial reification and homogenization); and that, as Iain Chambers (2008) has argued, can be described only with metaphors of 'pluriversality'. Paradoxically, however, the Mediterranean has long been presented as a unified 'sea-region', and has inspired comparative work on other 'regional seas', including the Baltic (Wójcik, 2008). Also, in the most recent macro-regionalizing projects, comparisons (or 'lessons', the term usually adopted in the policy literature) are frequently drawn between these two sea-regions; in our discussion we will highlight some of these assumed parallels.

The imagination of the Mediterranean as a sea-region par excellence draws, of course, on the influential geo-ecological accounts of Fernand Braudel and the wider body of work (in history as well as geography) in the Braudelian tradition. We should recognize, nonetheless, that Braudel himself was influenced and inspired, in turn, by longer-standing regional imaginations and, in particular, by the work of the doyen of French geography, Paul Vidal de la Blache, and key Vidalian concepts such as *genre de vie, genius loci* and *personnalité* (Claval, 1988), concepts that are deeply organicistic (Archer, 1993). It is crucial to acknowledge such organicistic echoes in Braudelian (and Braudelian-inspired) accounts of the Mediterranean. Vidal de la Blache's description of the Mediterranean as a 'unique coming together' of natural conditions and human settlements, of nature and culture, is revealing in this regard: 'ces genres

de vie subsistent, non comme survivance, mais comme l'expression d'harmonies naturelles qui ont favorisé la multiplication des hommes' (1918: 179). Paradoxically, both Vidal de la Blache and Braudel wrote about the Mediterranean whilst ignoring its marine and maritime features, establishing a tradition of regionalization of the Mediterranean space that, as we shall discuss in the next pages, still influences the European geographical imagination (Horden, 2005). Inspired as they were by Vidalian understandings, hence, such imaginations of a Mediterranean 'region' were directly linked to the birth of the European regional idea/ideal itself, and the first projects for the modern regionalization of space (see Clout, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Raffestin, 1984; Vidal de la Blache, 1979). Critically, then as now, region-building projects are fundamentally about the (power-full) making of spaces for political action.

In the next section of the article, we attempt to disentangle some of the implicit and not-so-implicit spatial imaginations/spatial ideologies that lie 'behind' (in both a genealogical and conceptual sense) the recent EU macro-regional approach, highlighting their frequently contradictory nature. Following this we then focus upon 'on the ground' histories of regionalization of the Mediterranean, examining the evolution of Euro-Mediterranean policies and their understanding of the Mediterranean space. We subsequently reflect on some key geopolitical implications of contemporary macro-regionalization of the Mediterranean, highlighting in particular the explicit tensions between the macro-regional narrative of partnership and a 'shared' Mediterranean space and the increasingly 'hard' attempts at the bordering and ordering of this very space. We conclude by briefly addressing the broader implications of such macro-regional projects, while calling attention to the inherently political nature of all 'EU'ropean space-making, within, at, and beyond the EU borders.

Macro-regionalization and the ghost(s) of the region

EU macro-regional policy has a complex, twofold genealogy. On the one hand, it derives directly from the regionalization of 'EU'ropean space and its

multifaceted narratives (Lagendijk, 2005), related to the vanishing of internal borders and the subsequent rise and promotion of cross-border cooperation between member states and regions (Häkli, 1998). On the other, EU macro-regional policies must be understood in the framework of the rebordering of the margins of Europe and the reconfiguration of relations between the EU and countries in its immediate and more distant Neighbourhoods. 'EU'ropean macro-regional policies thus occupy and represent a threshold in between *internal* territorial cooperation and *external* cross-border cooperation.[6] It is important in this context to note the role of successive INTERREG initiatives in providing the inspiration – and the conditions of possibility – for current macro-regionalizing endeavours. In his recent review, Medeiros (2011b) notes how the current macro-regional push is in fact directly linked to the making of Euroregions and various other cross-border initiatives supported by the INTERREG programme, seen also by other scholars as an important creator of 'New European Regions', providing the 'terrains for producing new transnational actors and new opportunities for existing actors' (Perkmann, 1999: 657). Medeiros (2011b: 2) also argues that the new 'Macro Territorial Agreements' are

> not just a result of a momentary European Macro-Regional political will, but instead can be taken as a step-by-step process which has been solidified by the experience gained through various INTERREG B (transnational cooperation) programmes in the European Union, which acted as a kind of laboratory […] enabling the consolidation of transnational networks between entities with common interests.

Indeed, one of the main aims of the INTERREG B projects has been, as Moisio (2011: 30) notes, the promotion of a distinct 'transnational vision for a wider Europe'. Moisio cites the Commission's 2004 Communication in this regard:

> Transnational cooperation between national, regional and local authorities aims to promote a higher degree of territorial integration across large groupings of European regions, with a view to achieving sustainable, harmonious and balanced development in the Community and better territorial integration with candidate and other neighbouring countries. Special attention will be given to the four transnational regions implementing the neighbourhood dimension.

> <div align="right">(Commission of the European Communities,
2004: 5, cited in Moisio, 2011)</div>

So, while the most recent macro-regional approach was formulated by the DG Regional Policy within the Baltic Sea Strategy and, subsequently, taken up by the Committee of the Regions (that is, the two EU bodies dealing with *internal* regionalization), at the same time (and as we note above), the macro-regional push had clear and explicit links to *external* policy and especially to the rebordering of EU space and its 'stretching' into 'EU'rope's various Neighbourhoods.

This transference of macro regional ideas also to spaces *outside* EU borders is, indeed, best typified by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), launched by the EU in 2003. This spatialization has acted as a policy blueprint for 'EU'ropean 'space-making' at its margins, creating new 'geometries' (the term adopted in the policy literature) of spatial association and integration, including a variety of cross-border regional initiatives (for a discussion see, among others, Kramsch and Hooper, 2004; Scott, 2005; and the contributions in Scott, 2006). Such early macro-regional spatializations (although the term 'macro-region' has not been necessarily applied in all instances) have had a number of goals in policy terms including, inter alia, environmental protection, trade promotion, migration control and security. Indeed, the political emphases within these spatializations have varied over time, reflecting shifting 'EU'ropean priorities. So, whereas the ENP was initially conceived with the explicit aim of fostering 'stability and peace' at the Union's margins by creating a 'ring of friends', its focus has shifted considerably in recent years from a rubric of collaboration and 'friendly' exchange to an explicitly security-led agenda, rendered in the phraseology of 'preventative security'; an intentionality that, albeit not explicitly, also underpins many of the current macro-regionalizing initiatives (see Guild, 2010, as well as Van Houtum and Boedeltje, 2011 and the associated special section of *Geopolitics*; on the ENP in the Mediterranean, also Jones, 2006, 2011; Jones and Clark, 2008; Pace, 2007, 2009).

The antecedents of the EU's currently-promoted macro-regional conceptualization can be traced back to the Brussels European Council of 14 December 2007, with the Council's 'invitation to the Commission to present an EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region' (European Council, 2008: 17). For the purposes of our argument, the (con)text is revealing: the five-line 'invitation' is, in fact, embedded in between two other key paragraphs. The previous one (paragraph 58) calls for increased cooperation in specific maritime regions, 'including islands, archipelagos and outermost regions as well as of the international dimension' (European Council, 2008: 17). The one that follows (paragraph 60), on the other hand, 'welcomes the Commission report on the 2004 Strategy for the Outermost Regions stating its positive results and presenting the future prospects for Community actions in those regions' (European Council, 2008: 18). It is worth remarking that these three paragraphs conclude the section related to 'internal' European politics and policies, and open up the part of the Presidency's conclusions dedicated to 'external relations'. In the Council's 2008 conclusions, such 'Outermost Regions' are indeed conceived as the putative 'margins' of Europe, and thus as a sort of spatial threshold between the internal and external dimensions of EU policy and agency. The new macro-regions (such as the Baltic one) are, accordingly, envisioned in the Council document as, at once, (internal) common maritime spaces, and at the same time, 'marginal' spaces (the 'Outermost Regions') that hold a privileged role in dialoguing with 'EU'rope's exterior.

As Michelle Pace (2008) has also argued in her work, macro-regional narratives have thus been related, on the one hand, to the spatialities of the 'internal seas' and, on the other, to the redefinition of the actual 'margins of Europe' (Pace, 2008).[7] This is also the way in which they are conceived in the existing policy literature on the Mediterranean macro-region (see, for instance, Stocchiero, 2010a, 2010b).

Geographical tenets of EU macro-region building

Indisputably, the sea and the border are the two fundamental spatial markers of the European Union's macro-regionalization strategy. Adapting Horden and Purcell's historiographical terminology (2006), we could argue that a 'New Thalassology' is shaping 'EU'ropean spatial imaginations and policies. Well beyond the narrow limits of the EU's marine and maritime policies (Douvere and Ehler, 2009), the trope of the 'inland sea' plays a key role in the making of the European space, particularly with reference to the regionalization process. Within the ENPI-CBC (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument-Cross Border Cooperation) programme, the internal seas appear as the 'connective tissue' framing the grand spatial scenarios of the EU. Despite the fact that the ENPI-CBC programme, launched in 2007, consists of both land border/sea crossing and sea-basin sub-programmes, most of the land borders are *de facto* nested in maritime spaces. Hence, sea-basins assume a specific geographical, political, and cultural relevance:

> whether in the Baltic or Black Seas, or in the Mediterranean, economic and cultural links across these sea-basins have been one of the most fundamental characteristics of economic and social development in these regions for thousands of years. Here, also CBC has a pivotal role to play, building on the persistent, shared heritage of contact and cooperation across these sea-basins. […] A broader environmental cooperation will be particularly important in the sea-basin programmes in the Baltic and Black Seas and in the Mediterranean.
>
> (ENPI, 2007: 8, 18)

This quote highlights the two polarities of the EU imagination incorporated by the 'inland sea' concept. On the one hand, sea-basins have a direct functional relevance for policies in the marine (environmental cooperation, resource management) and maritime (transportation) domains. On the other, they are understood as historical spaces of communication and cooperation (but also of conflict and confrontation), setting an enduring foundation for economic and social co-development. In this way, what is perceived as the seas' 'self-evident' geographical unity is arbitrarily translated into functional and historical unity, bringing together the two pillars of contemporary 'EU'ropean spatial policy: competitiveness *and* cohesion. Here, again, the

promotional documents of the EU's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region convincingly support this point:

> The countries around the Baltic Sea are joining forces to save their shared inland sea and to strengthen the competitiveness of the region. Europe's largest inland sea is in a bad way – the Baltic countries together have major environmental problems to address. However, it is not just problems that unite them. The countries also have a similar history, common features and already cooperate in a number of areas. To overcome environmental problems, but also to increase the region's competitiveness and prosperity, the Baltic countries have united on a common Baltic Sea Region Strategy.
>
> (INTERACT, 2009)

Such understandings speak directly to the EU's wider geopolitical imaginations, where inland seas define both soft and hard borders (Kostadinova, 2009), both 'network Europe' and 'fortress Europe' (Rumford, 2008). The 1000-year history of maritime contact and interaction, of trade and cultural exchange (described by Braudel) is here interpreted as a socio-economic precursor and a cultural foundation of European liberalism, hence sustaining the 'four freedoms' rhetoric (Barnard, 2007). Such a maritime imagination becomes ancillary to the rhetoric of a connected and 'soft-bordered' 'EU'rope, where networking and trading are inscribed into the DNA of the Union, and where neoliberal freedoms are the main engines of growth and prosperity.[8] At the same time, the inland seas' porous and soft borders, their mobility and their cosmopolitan nature represent a challenge to the EU's security concerns and need to be hardened through stricter immigration policies and military patrolling of the maritime space. Securitization of the maritime margins of Europe is therefore necessary exactly because they are 'naturally' open and porous, a border-space with uncertain and disputed sovereignty.

Consequently, the spatial imagination that lies behind the macro-regionalization of the 'EU'ropean space is twofold. It is clearly a 'seascape' (Bentley et al., 2007), a discourse that relies on the representation of the sea as an open space of networking and connecting, of trading and understanding, of meeting and prospering. At the same time, it is also a 'borderscape' (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007), a counter-discourse partially contradicting the seascape narrative *while relying on it*, for the very nature of maritime openness demands regulation and control. This inner tension between 'seascapes' and 'borderscapes' produces, we argue, a distinctive spatial imagination and 'meta-geography' (Paasi, 2005) that underpins the idea (and practice) of macro-regions.

At first glance, in the current policy and think-tank literature, the envisioned macro-regional spatialities are 'fuzzy' and 'soft-bordered'. In the European Commission's own words, the macro-region is simply 'an area covering a number of administrative regions but with sufficient issues in common to justify a single strategic approach' (European Commission, 2009: 5). Moreover, its borders are not delimited once and for all, but their 'extent depends on the topic: for example, on economic issues it would involve all the countries in the region, on water quality issues it would involve the whole catchment area' (European Commission, 2009: 5). The macro-region is thus presented as a functional region, sharing challenges, opportunities and solutions. Concurrently, the Commission outlined in other documents an additional meta-geographical narrative centred on the concept of 'inland sea', intended as a space 'naturally' unified by both common geomorphological and historical features. Sometimes the key shared geographical commonality is a water basin, as if physical geography and morphology could be unproblematically understood as an obvious reason for people and territories to 'cooperate' (European Commission, 2010). At other times, however, such documents appeal to history and 'sedimented' functional relationships between the constituent 'regions'. In most cases, no relationship between the 'physical' and the 'historical' features is mentioned, though both are often implicitly used together, whereas at other times they are treated separately. A third category of aggregation adopted in the literature is 'cultural affinity'; again, sometimes considered in relation to history, at others simply assumed on the basis of variables such as language, religion, ethnicity or something resembling Huntingtonian 'civilisational' cartographies.

What is most striking is that all of the existing EU policy documents on macro-regional initiatives that we examined treat the above concepts/criteria as if

they could/should be taken for granted, as something already existing that must be recognized, valorized and possibly 'strengthened' (European Commission, 2010: 6, 8). No evidence of the actual existence of these same 'commonalities' is presented, no questions posed about the meaning of a presumed 'shared culture' or 'shared history'. The macro-regionalizing exercise thus appears to be conceptually based on essentialist and highly problematic assumptions. Both already-existing regions and the embryonic soon-to-be-unveiled-and-developed macro-regions are envisaged as 'simply' spatial containers, as discrete territorial entities endowed with a distinct personality and vocation (which may be historical, cultural or simply functional). In this imagined geography of territorial subjects potentially coming together in greater macro-spatialities, there is constant implicit and explicit reference to undefined terms and unexplained concepts such as *community* (especially local community), *space* and even *place* (as is the case with policy documents referring to the Mediterranean macro-region; see Tourret and Wallaert, 2011).

Yet, while such a soft-bordered spatial imagination marks all the macro-regionalization policies promoted by the EU thus far, from the Baltic Sea Region Programme onward, this set of representations runs parallel to other prevailing 'EU'ropean spatial discourses regarding, for instance, infrastructure and transport plans, based on topographies made up of graphs and networks. Existing EU policy documents indeed tend to mix and conflate different, seemingly incompatible, geographical visions. On the one hand, we find narratives about functional, natural, historical and cultural regions, defining the macro-region as 'the region' par excellence; on the other, macro-regional policies are articulated within a purely network-based discourse.

Such confusion between 'regional' and 'networked' geographies clearly emerges in the Action Plan for the Baltic Sea Region Strategy, the first of the macro-regional projects and, as we have noted before, in many ways a model for all subsequent ones:

> [t]he geography of the Baltic Sea Region, the very long distances by European standards (especially to the northern parts which are very remote), the extent of the

sea that links but also divides the regions, the extensive external borders: all these pose special challenges to communication and physical accessibility in the region. In particular, the historical and geographical position of the Eastern Baltic Member States, with their internal networks largely oriented East–West, makes substantial investment in communication, transport and energy infrastructures particularly important.

> (European Commission, 2010: 46)

The sea, the region, borders, history, geography, networks and infrastructures all come together here in a conceptual *pastiche*, with no theoretical reflection offered that might justify this apparently messy mobilization of geographical concepts.

A similar meta-geography is at work in the second macro-region institutionalized by the European Commission in 2010, the Danubian one (European Commission, 2010). The *cliché* deployed is the same as in the Baltic: transportation, energy, competitiveness, environmental protection, tourism, education and security are the mantras, while culture, heritage and history play an ancillary and rhetorical role, reinforcing and sustaining the allegedly self-evident nature of the macro-region. Also in the Danubian case, we find a similar overlap of functional, geomorphological and historical regional narratives, all based on the self-evident 'nature' of the Danube basin, which plays the same role as the Baltic Sea, naturally 'connecting and unifying' the macro-region:

> In ancient times rivers determined civilisations and often served as boundaries from geographic, economic and cultural points of view as well. Currently, our existence is not bound anymore to territories defined by rivers, since we live in complex structures of various territorial, political and economic entities. Nevertheless, it seems that Europe's river, the Danube has been obtaining a new role, stepping forward as a connecting link between local communities, and becoming a revived symbol of the old continent.

> (Ágh et al., 2010: 9)

The Danube river functions in this spatial imagination like an inland sea, mobilizing a specific geographical imagination based on 'unity' and

'connectivity'. This mobilization, however, is at the same time related to territorial labelling, branding and marketing, as explicitly admitted by the action plan of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (European Commission, 2010: 28), while at the same time aiming at 'identity building' and 'community making' in the region (Koller, 2010: 182).

We wish to draw attention to how the Baltic and Danube macro-regional geographies are articulated in the relevant policy documents since a very similar template is at work in analogous recent initiatives concerning the Mediterranean, simultaneously blurring functional, geomorphological and historical understandings. While such homogenizing templates are already problematic in the Baltic and Danubian contexts, they are, we contend, even more difficult to project upon the Mediterranean. So while much of the existing think-tank and policy literature sees[9] the Mediterranean as a sea-region *par excellence*, other documents and analyses suggest that the Mediterranean is 'too big', too complex and, above all, too diverse and divided to be successfully macro-regionalized (some of these writings argue, rather, for a 'sub-regional macro-regionalization', e.g. Tourret and Wallaert, 2011: 101; Wallaert, 2011). In the following section, we examine some of the historical antecedents of contemporary projects and debates, outlining how Mediterranean space has been regionalized in 'EU'ropean policies from the late 1950s until the most recent realization of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and how such spatial imaginations can be related to current macro-regional endeavours.

'EU'ropean imaginations of the Mediterranean

As some of the current advocates of Mediterranean macro-regionalization also admit (MED GOVERNANCE, 2010; Tourret and Willaert, 2011: 114–117), the main challenge in designing an inclusive Mediterranean macro-region has long been how to imagine and implement a 'European' tool of governance in this highly diverse and divided context; how to codify the Mediterranean space in ways that

consent to the pursuit of particular political and geopolitical aims (Jones, 1997, 2006, 2009, 2011). Since the late 1950s, numerous efforts have indeed been expended by EU elites to 'make' a Mediterranean region to further 'EU'ropean geopolitical goals; efforts that have produced a varied and chequered history of EU–Mediterranean relations, framed by changing 'EU'ropean geopolitical preferences. We can identify five broad periods in EU efforts to create a Mediterranean region, each characterized by particular tropes and representations of Mediterranean space. The first of these spans the first decade of the EU's existence. Here, the Mediterranean was portrayed by EU elites as the most problematic flank of 'EU'rope, a representation underpinned by Cold War security discourses and potential threats to the fledgling common market being fashioned within EU space. While members of the European Parliament (EP) called on the European Commission to draw up a political action plan for the Mediterranean in the mid-1960s, the EU's response was to continue with bilateral trade agreements with specific Mediterranean states, reflecting as much the lack of progress in the political dynamic of European integration as the EU's concerns over economic disruption to its own markets. By 1971, the EP's Rossi report forcefully argued against this approach, however, maintaining that 'it did not create among Mediterranean peoples this certainty of belonging to one and the same region of the world, having its own personality, its brand image' (Rossi Report, 1971).

To assist this branding of the Mediterranean, the EU launched the Global Mediterranean Policy in 1972, encompassing trade, aid and investment under a benevolence trope for Mediterranean region building. Symbolically, the Mediterranean was portrayed as a 'backward space' and ripe for EU-sponsored economic and social development programmes institutionalized through bilateral agreements and aid budgets. 'EU'ropean economic recession, growing trade protectionism, Arab–Israeli hostilities and moves by several states to seek and eventually secure full EU membership put paid to any hopes of a coordinated EU Mediterranean policy. This led to the Mediterranean being viewed as an 'unsettled space' in 'EU'ropean political discourses and one characterized by fragile economies and political volatility,

with obvious security concerns and dangers for 'EU'rope (see Tsoukalis, 1977).

The Barcelona process launched by the EU in 1995 was underpinned by a 'EU'ropean representation of the Mediterranean as an unstable and fragmented space devoid of political collective identity and with a socio-political complexity that 'EU'rope was forced to manage. This problematic spatial reading of the Mediterranean is acutely reflected in comments made by a senior European Commission official as:

> an unstable region on our back door promotes concerns in terms of terrorism and the knock-on effects for investors in the region. Generally countries that respect human rights and have reasonably stable political systems are easier to do business with those that do not. The fact is that none of the Arab States respect human rights or have political systems which we could recognize as being acceptable.
>
> (Interview with Senior Official European Commission, 18th September 2004 and quoted in Jones, 2006)

The symbolic codification of the Mediterranean as 'unstable' produced a 'EU'ropean response based on the trope of a partnership for change which framed the scope and intent of EU actions, and included socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions aimed at facilitating overall state reform. Such hopes for the Mediterranean were shattered very quickly, nonetheless, by 'EU'ropean self-assessments of disappointing policy progress, the fragility of the partnership concept, varying levels of interest and commitment among Mediterranean states, and hardening positions on 'EU'ropean security after 9/11. From this assessment emerged the spatial imagination of the Mediterranean as a 'European Neighbourhood' and space of Europeanization.

We have already alluded to the important role of the European Neighbourhood Policy, launched in 2003, in inspiring and shaping macro-regional agendas; in particular, the ENP's attempt, in its spatial imagination, to bring together the internal and external dimensions of EU action. Within the ENP's envisioning, the Mediterranean was indeed represented by EU elites as something 'other', an 'external', 'marginal' space to be Europeanized by the outward projection of 'EU'ropean norms and values. As

the former European Commissioner Chris Patten explained, 'for the coming decade we need to find new ways to export the stability, security and prosperity we have created within the enlarged EU. We should begin by agreeing on a clearer vision for relations with our neighbours' (quoted in Jones and Clark, 2010: 91). As the Commission's then President, Romano Prodi, confirmed, '[Europeanization] instead of trying to establish new dividing lines should deepen integration between the EU and the ring of friends which would accelerate our mutual political, economic and cultural dynamism' (quoted in Jones and Clark, 2010: 91). With a trope of friendship underpinning this new spatial imagination, the principal goal was to anchor the EU's offer of concrete benefits to the level of progress made towards political and economic reform in the targeted countries of a Mediterranean region now conceptualized as a human, social and historical (spatial) reality. Continued problems over access to EU markets, worries by 'EU'ropean governments over intelligence sharing with Arab governments, and generally low levels of progress on human rights and 'good governance' plagued this regional approach, nonetheless, prompting new rounds of attempted regional refashioning by both French and other 'EU'ropean political elites (Jones, 2011).

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) initiated by the EU in 2008 represented, until this year, the most recent spatial imaging of the Mediterranean. Here, the Mediterranean is represented as historically, geographically and culturally bound with 'EU'rope, in many ways recalling the Vidalian/Braudelian imaginary of a 'common sea' that we alluded to previously. In the UfM vision, it is to be a shared space co-owned by 'EU'rope and those Mediterranean states lying outside 'EU'rope's physical and legal space. Learning from past errors, EU elites have highlighted the principle of mutual respect and set up new institutional templates to improve the nature and visibility of relations between 'EU'rope and the Mediterranean. Symbolically, the UfM has been an attempt to reconfigure the Mediterranean as a peace and stability space based on what is referred to in EU circles as the three Ms: money, markets and mobility. The UfM's key goals since 2008 have been to promote economic integration and democratic reform across 16 neighbours to

the EU's south in North Africa and the Middle East, though the UfM had barely got off the ground before it ran into trouble as a result of the Gaza conflict between Israel and Hamas at the start of 2009. High-level UfM meetings were suspended both in 2009 and 2010. Like the earlier Barcelona process to promote stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean, the UfM thus became a victim of deep-rooted political tensions in the Middle East, at the mercy of spiralling popular unrest across North Africa as autocratic regimes (many of 'EU'rope's erstwhile partners) toppled one by one.

The North African revolutions necessitated new envisionings of the Mediterranean by EU elites, in search of a 'new response to a changing neighbourhood' (European Commission, 2011: 2). Under political pressure, the European Commission published a Medium Term Programme for a Renewed European Neighbourhood Policy (2011–2014) on 25 May 2011. The Renewed Policy explicitly sought to create a '[Mediterranean] space where political cooperation is as close as possible and economic integration is as deep as possible' (European Commission, 2011: 37) and ushered in a new trope, the 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity' (European Commission, 2011: 2), committing EU funds and promising investment safeguards and 'deep democracy' privileges. How long this particular regional imagination will survive before the EU is forced to replace it with new spatial readings of the Mediterranean remains to be seen, however, if only because of what is, in many ways, 'the elephant in the room' when discussing current region-making endeavours in the Mediterranean. We are referring here to the question of border control at the EU's southern borders, a preoccupation that has come to dominate the EU's (and many Member States') envisioning of – and relations with – the Mediterranean space in the past few years, a topic that we engage in more detail in the next section.

Governing Mediterranean mobilities: border-work or region-making?

As we have hinted in the opening sections, 'EU'ropean region-making has always *also* been about border-making, above and beyond other understandings

popularly associated with the regional concept that most frequently highlight some sort of common/shared 'character' or 'identity' (for an excellent critique, see Paasi's classic work from 1996). We have noted, moreover, how, in the specific case of the EU's macro-regional approach, macro-regions are envisioned *both* in the rubric of commonality – the (internal) sea-region – and, at the same time, margins or (external) boundaries. In the existing policy literature on the Mediterranean macro-region, such regional commonality is phrased in the language of 'partnership', 'common challenges' (or a 'shared priority axis') and 'territorial collaboration', which all somehow bind the Euro-Mediterranean space (see Cichowlaz, 2011; MEDGOVERNANCE, 2010; Tourret and Wallaert, 2011). The notion of the Mediterranean as 'EU'rope's external margin or border is, however, largely absent; an absence that commands our attention.

When noting how plans for a Mediterranean macro-region can 'learn' from the apparent success of the Baltic Sea and Danube Strategies, one of the programme documents published by the MEDGOVERNANCE Project (Tourret and Wallaert, 2011) pinpoints five 'fields of tension' wherein the 'lessons' of the other two macro-regional experiments may founder: '1. The scale of a Mediterranean macro-region, 2. Financial tensions, 3. Coordination with the UfM process and the other Mediterranean policies, 4.Taking into account the new EU institutional context, 5. The level of cooperation culture in the Mediterranean area, 6. Time and agenda setting'. The challenges for the projected macro-region are thus seen as largely bureaucratic/institutional, with the main 'tensions' having to do with the financial implications of the exercise (who is going to pay for what), potential conflict and/or overlap with existing structures of governance (in particular, the risk of undermining the role of the recently constituted UfM) and more nitty-gritty questions of institutional collaboration. In the 34-page policy planning document, the question of migration appears only once, at the outset (p. 4), as one of the 'policy fields' that the macro-region should somehow address/redress. The word 'border', on the other hand, appears solely as part of the binomial 'cross-border cooperation', frequently invoked throughout the document – but never alone.

This complete silence of the MEDGOVER-NANCE planning document on the question of borders and migration management in the Mediterranean is striking. Again, all European macro-regional initiatives of this sort to date have *also* been about engaging the 'external', about extending the 'EU'ropean Neighbourhood and its spaces of action (as was the aim of the Baltic Sea Strategy; see Moisio, 2003). An important part of such attempts to extend the 'EU'ropean space is, inevitably, 'border-work' (Rumford, 2008). This is visible not only – and in fact not even predominantly – in a hardening of the EU's external borders (which is indeed happening), but also through various 'soft' modes of extending the spaces of EU action into its various Neighbourhoods (as we suggest in our discussion of the changing role of the ENP). The management of the EU's borders, increasingly at a distance, is part of broader strategies for what Sandra Lavenex (2004) terms the 'externalisation' of European governance, with 'EU'rope's Neighbours actively engaged into the Union's border-work, acting as 'filters' to sort and separate legitimate from illicit flows (of people and goods) before they reach the borders of 'EU'rope (see, among others, Andrijasevic, 2010; Van Houtum, 2010; Van Houtum and Pijpers, 2007). The language of partnership and collaboration that underpins the Mediterranean macro-regional exercise is, in fact, the very same one adopted in invoking the EU's Mediterranean Neighbours into its border-management strategies, part of what William Walters (2010) refers to as 'ethicalised stylings of governance', articulated in a managerial language of 'best practice', and the promotion of certain 'shared rules and standards'. It is key to legitimizing attempts by Union institutions and agencies to remake the Neighbourhood spaces at its borders (for a discussion, see Bialasiewicz et al., 2009).

It is therefore important to confront the Mediterranean macro-regionalizing project with current attempts on the ground by European institutions to remake the Mediterranean and, in particular, to govern Mediterranean mobilities.[10] The 'renewed' European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) that we mentioned in the previous section, launched in May 2011 as a response to the momentous events taking place on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, is, in many ways, nothing new, with its focus on 'partnership' and EU support for democratization and trade and market access. The catchy slogan that frames this most recent initiative – the 'three M's' of money, markets and mobility – that should magically solve the southern Mediterranean's ills, also (as we note) mirrors earlier attempts by Union institutions to promote economic integration and democratic reform as two key pillars of EU Mediterranean policy. The explicit emphasis on mobility is, nonetheless, novel, and has been a key focus of the most recent agreements signed by the EU with its southern Mediterranean partners.

The first such formal agreement was signed on 29 September 2011 with the new Tunisian authorities, at the conclusion of the EU–Tunisia summit. The agreement – termed a new 'Privileged Partnership' – is part of the renewed ENP instrument and supported financially through the new 'SPRING' programme (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth). Alongside EU support for Tunisian economic development and new trade privileges and market access, a fundamental part of the agreement is a new 'Partnership for Mobility'. This latter, while opening the EU's doors to Tunisian students and select skilled migrants, also commits the new Tunisian state to aiding 'EU'rope with the monitoring (and halting) of illegal migration flows. The previous Tunisian government had been party to similar agreements on the policing of migration flows to the EU with individual Member States such as Italy, so in a sense this is nothing new. What is new, however, is that such border-policing functions have now been explicitly written into the text of the formal agreements on partnership with the EU. As the EU–Tunisia summit was being held in Tunis in the last days of September 2011, another international meeting was taking place in the city, with the theme of 'Rethinking migration: for free circulation in the Mediterranean space' (Repenser les migrations: pour une libre circulation dans l'espace méditerranée, 2011). The meeting brought together political activists and non-governmental organizations from across the Mediterranean, with the aim of bringing the attention of EU leaders to the deadly effects of its migration management policies and the dangers of trading economic openness for other

forms of closure (as the new 'Privileged Partnership' being elaborated with Tunisia in those very days was proposing). In its closing statement, the meeting's leaders denounced the guiding assumptions driving such new agreements: 'that of an incompatibility between the exterior and the interior of the European space', an incompatibility seen as inherently dangerous, and one that had to be carefully 'managed' through the selective control of the mobility of capital, goods and people between the two shores. Hardly a vision conducive to the elaboration of a shared Mediterranean macro-regional unity.

Conclusions: macro-regions, power, and (geo)politics

In our introductory comments, we remarked on the frequent fluidity and ambiguity with which the concept of 'region' is used in the EU policy literature, and how such ambiguity often serves to occlude (and support) 'hard' political and geopolitical strategies. We also noted how various EU regionalizing initiatives – such as the cross-border and transnational cooperation initiatives promoted and funded by the INTERREG projects – have to do as much with *external* EU policy and the rebordering of 'EU'rope as with *internal* regionalization/space making. This is certainly the case in the Mediterranean today, where new plans for region making go hand in hand with increasing control of mobility and various other forms of 'governance at a distance'. It is therefore important to note this dual dimension of 'EU'ropean macro-regionalizing projects, looking beyond their overt language of partnership and 'territorial cooperation' (whatever this problematically paired term may mean; for critiques, see Faludi, 2011; Luukkonen, 2011) to their political and geopolitical agendas. It is revealing, indeed, that the key policy document published by the MEDGOVERNANCE Project (Tourret and Wallaert, 2011) in arguing for the benefits of Mediterranean macro-regionalization notes also its potential 'geopolitical' uses: 'for the [southern] EU countries, such a model would mean to develop new capacities of influence over the accessing and neighbourhood countries'; indeed, 'for the European Union [as a whole], macro-regions

may constitute a *geopolitical continuum corridor* running from the Black Sea to the North and the Baltic Sea' (2010: 18, emphasis in original) – which brings us to some of the 'hard' political and geopolitical implications of our analysis.

According to the Swiss geographer Claude Raffestin, one of the most perceptive recent theorists of the regional idea and its (geo)political uses, 'the term region derives from *regere fines*, that is, to govern/mark out borders' (Raffestin, 1984). This act is presented as the typical prerogative of the *rex* (the king, the sovereign etc.). The border 'is thus conceived as *recto*, that is, "just", but also straight, linear. Put simply, then, the term region incarnates a distinct concept of governance over space and territory, based on straight lines' (Raffestin, 1984). Accordingly, Raffestin suggests, every discussion of 'regionalization' should take into account the fact that any understanding of the region that intends it as a sort of spontaneous organic spatial formation based on a specific community is nothing but a myth, or, better yet, a *mythologeme*. This *mythologeme*, for Raffestin, is, for instance, at the foundation of Von Thunen's concentric model based on a principle of territorial organization that inspired a very specific way of thinking about the spatialization of social interaction for decades, but also of Braudel's regional geographies of the Mediterranean, presented as though they were historical spatial formations based on specific 'territorial cultures' (Minca, 2010).

Our point in citing Raffestin is to note that regions and regionalization are *always* political and geopolitical projects; they are the result of the decisive act of spatial bordering. Every single time we 'define' the existence of a territorial body and try to codify (and sometimes even institutionalize) it, we operate a fundamental spatial act (to cite Carl Schmitt); we operate as a sovereign power trying to define meaning and content for the very spaces created as a consequence of that act. To put it bluntly: every project of regional mapping or region building is nothing but a political project translated into space(s). And the ambitious macro-regionalizations currently envisioned and implemented by 'EU'ropean institutions and think-tanks, at and beyond the EU's borders, certainly have the trappings of a grand (geo)political project, with some sinister echoes of past

pan-regionalist imaginaries of the early 20th century (O'Loughlin and Van der Wusten, 1990).

It is curious, then, that the new 'EU'ropean macro-regional 'experts' seem entirely unaware of this long-established tradition of geographical reflection on the regional metaphor and its space-making power. At the same time, however, the macro-regional policy literature draws (at least implicitly) upon a *number* of different traditions of regional geography, a hodge-podge of academic and popular understandings of what a region, regardless of the scale, is supposed to be. We can thus identify in the documents both echoes of historical possibilistic regions of a Vidalian kind, defined by distinct notions of place and *genre de vie*, but also definitions that reflect more closely the US (and, more generally, positivist) alternative since the Second World War; that is, functional regions depleted of place, but driven rather by models of a structural kind. At the same time, some of the definitions also seem to vaguely allude to system theory (which enjoyed a degree of popularity in the French-speaking context and, more generally, in those countries where planning was particularly influential in the preoccupations of geographers, for example in northern and eastern Europe).

More could be said about these trajectories, of course, but our concern here is simply to highlight how these different traditions and ways of conceiving the region are conflated and confused in the new regional fetishism that seems to pervade a great part of the EU policy literature that supports the macro-regional fad. The spaces described in the macro-regional literature (whether in reference to the Baltic or the Mediterranean) are thus defined by a multiplicity of visible and invisible functions, materialities, imaginations, fantasies, formal and informal strategies at a number of scales, fragmented individual and collective spatialities. In this sense, they also seem to echo the networked geographies theorized almost two decades ago by such scholars as Castells (1996) and Storper (1997). Yet, again, there is no explicit reference to the work of these (or other) spatial theorists in the macro-regional(izing) policy texts, where networked spatialities appear in a mishmash with old-fashioned cartographies in fantasizing a newly regionalized Mediterranean. Our key point here, however, is not simply to unpack and criticize the broader geographical tenets of the current policy debates (in all of their inconsistencies and contradictions), but rather to note that the wilful adoption of spatial metaphors such as that of the region, loaded as they are with ambiguity and potentially infinite interpretations, consents to (power)ful political and geopolitical spatial strategies that demand our attention.

Notes

1. See also work in cognate disciplines such as political sociology, international relations and political science; for example, the work of Browning (2005), Browning and Joenniemi (2008), and Rumford and Delanty (2005).
2. On 6 May 2011 a one-day workshop entitled 'Mediterranean? Macro? Region?' was held in Torino, Italy, co-hosted by the University of Torino and the Paralleli Euro-Mediterranean Institute, one of the partners in the MEDGOVERNANCE Project. Alongside representatives of the MEDGOVERNANCE Project and academic geographers, the workshop was also attended by practitioners and representatives of local and regional institutions and think-tanks associated with the project, and generated a heated debate. The current article draws upon the discussions that took place during that event, in which the four of us took part, and we would like to thank the organizers for that opportunity. See the project's website (www.medgov.net) for complete details about the Project and its other initiatives and publications.
3. Piemonte, Tuscany and Lazio in Italy, Provence Alpes Cote d'Azur in France, and Catalunya and Andalucia in Spain.
4. The Paralli Institute in Torino, CeSPI in Rome, MAEM/MEMA in Florence, IEMed in Barcelona, Three Cultures Foundation in Seville and the Institut de la Méditerranée in Marseille.
5. INTERACT is an EU-funded organization, self-defined as 'offering advice and consultation about European Territorial Cooperation programmes' (INTERACT, 2009).
6. According to INTERACT (2009), macro-regions constitute a 'third category', distinct from territorial cooperation (within the EU) and European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) cross-border cooperation.

7. It is illustrative that, in the above-cited document, the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is mentioned just before a short reference to the furthest lands of the European Union (such as the Canary Islands, the French overseas Departments and the Portuguese regions of Azores and Madeira).

8. See, for instance, the *eu4seas* project, funded within the 7th Framework Programme, under the heading 'The EU and Multilateralism' (http://www.eu4seas.eu/).

9. Or, we should say, *continues* to see, inspired by Vidalian and Braudelian imaginations (see Braudel, 1972; but also Birot and Dresch, 1953; Horden, 2005; Newbigin, 1924).

10. We do not have the space here to explicitly address the EU's response to the events of spring 2011, or the geopolitics of the NATO-led intervention in Libya, although both these passages need to be kept in mind when discussing post-conflict initiatives on the part of European institutions, as well as individual Member States (see Bialasiewicz, 2011b).

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