

A PROJECTION ON THE BLACK SEA'S 21ST CENTURY SECURITY STRUCTURE

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The Black Sea region is a significant geographical area with its rich natural resources, expanding market opportunities, and important corridors for energy flows and transportation at the intersection of Europe, central Asia and the Middle East. The collapse of the Soviet Union widened considerations on the Black Sea region, in addition to producing a security gap and raising sensitivity and instability in the area. There are also several ongoing unresolved conflicts, environmental problems, and insufficient border controls in the Black Sea basin. On the other hand, the Black Sea region has become a center of contention for superiority and interest between some littoral countries, international organizations, and some other countries. Therefore, this paper will focus on: delineating the implications of the Black Sea region and the main threats to security and stability in the Black Sea Region; which actors have an influence on regional issues, whether the current security structure in the Black Sea area meets the 21st century's needs; and if not, what should be done to prevent conflicts, and establish an efficient security and stability system in the area for the benefit of all.

A PROJECTION ON THE BLACK SEA'S 21ST CENTURY SECURITY STRUCTURE

The Black Sea basin is situated at the center of Eastern Europe and central Asia where the continents meet and the land routes and sea lanes connecting east, west, north and south intersect. In geographical terms it is relatively easy to define the boundaries of the Black Sea region; however, from political and international security point of view, it is not easy to specify its boundaries. From a political and international security point of view, there are several inseparable related regions and sub-regions. Generally speaking, these regions include the Balkan Peninsula, the Caucasus and the northern and southern shores of the Black Sea linking the Caspian and Mediterranean Seas as well as the Middle East and southeastern Europe. Besides its economic potential and vast natural resources, the region is a crucial corridor for energy transfer and for transportation nets. Furthermore, ongoing state-building processes and conflict, unstable governments, and their links with other geographical areas put the region in an extremely important and sensitive position.

A range of developments over the past two decades has attracted increasing attention to the emergence of the wider Black Sea region as a new hub of European security. The collapse of the Soviet Union is a distinctive landmark to understand the Black Sea's current position. At the end of the Cold War, the states around the Black Sea regained their freedom, ending a unipolar facet of the Soviet Union and adding new faces to international community. After their freedom, we witnessed transformation processes in these countries from communist societies and political structures to democracy and market economies. These countries' initiatives towards independence, democracy and market economies also released suppressed ethnic, national and

territorial conflicts. In the 1990s, while Europe focused on the integration of eastern and central European countries, the Black Sea had a secondary significance. But, after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, transatlantic security shifted its focus from central and Eastern Europe towards the broader Black Sea and the greater Middle East. Following the 11 September 2001 events, the U.S. and NATO's interest in the Black Sea became important. NATO's role in Afghanistan added much more value to the Black Sea due to its central position in "the Eurasia Corridor."¹

Due to increasing awareness of the implications of the EU's energy dependence on Russia and of the Caspian Sea's and central Asia's role as a potential alternative, and repeated Russian-Ukrainian crises over gas, the Black Sea region has had a growing strategic importance in terms of the EU's energy diversification and security. The parallel enlargement of the EU and NATO in 2004 mirrors these organizations' decisiveness on being effective in the Black Sea region.

In terms of the conflicts, the Black Sea region has been plagued by unresolved and persistent conflicts. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Black Sea region has witnessed Georgian-Abkhazian conflicts, Georgian-Ajar conflicts, Georgian-Ossetian conflicts, the Chechen-Russian wars, the Armenian invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflicts, the Trans-Dnestr conflict in Moldova, and the Russo-Georgian war in South Ossetia in August 2008. Additionally, the Russian Black Sea fleet in Sebastopol, developments regarding the conflict in Transnistria, and the changing nature of Russo-Turkish relations have emerged as other soft disputes strongly affecting the region's stability and in turn, impacting global politics.

Historically, the Black Sea area has provided the highway and a crossroads for trade. Today, the Black Sea maintains its significant economic and geostrategic importance to Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and even Russia as a water way. Without the Black Sea, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and Georgia would be terrestrial countries, and Russia would lose its historical connection to the warm waters and a direct link to the Balkan countries. To Turkey, which has the longest coast line among the littoral counties, the Black Sea region is vital for national security, stability, and economic welfare.

As an asymmetric threat, the spread of the organized crime, which threatens both littoral and European countries, is another major security concern in the Black Sea area. Because of institutional weakness, corruption in governmental institutions, and flawed border security brought about by persistent conflicts, political instability, and authority vacuums, several states and territories in the Black Sea region have become an attractive center for illegal organized syndicates. These organized crimes include illicit drug trafficking, arms trafficking, nuclear material trafficking, trafficking in women, and illegal migration.

Given all these facts, it is obvious that the Black Sea region has an undeniable importance for the EU, NATO, the littoral countries, and even for Asia when considering the benefits, challenges and threats simultaneously. Therefore, this paper will essentially strive to find out whether or not the current security structure in the Black Sea area is adequate to meet the 21st century's requirements; and if not, what should be done to prevent further conflicts and political disorders, and establish an efficiently secure and stable region. To do so, this paper will start with defining the key actors

trying to be effective in the Black Sea area and their approaches, and then move on delineating the current security and stability environment of the Black Sea, and finally put forward some options on what should be done in order to create feasible, acceptable, and sustainable security and stability structures in the wider Black Sea area.

Related Countries and Political Factors Affecting the Black Sea Region

There are many countries and regional and international factors related to the Black Sea area. However, NATO, the U.S., the EU, Russia, and Turkey appear the most effective and relevant ones.

NATO's strategic goals towards the Black Sea region include both defending their members' territories and defending and promoting their core values, even beyond its borders. NATO's enlargement after the Cold War, involvement in the crisis in the Balkans, and support for the transformation of domestic societies in the Black Sea states, such as Georgia and Ukraine, were examples of its strategy.² Post-9/11 events led NATO to perceive the Black Sea region with a broader scope; the term wider Black Sea Region has emerged as a result of the fight against global terrorism after the events of 11 September 2001. NATO needed overflight rights for the corridor that stretches from Eastern Europe over Ukraine and through the Caucasus and central Asia to Afghanistan in order to provide logistical support for its fight against terrorism in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Located in the center of this flight pattern, the wider Black Sea region became crucial for the success of the NATO operations in Afghanistan.³ The security and sustainability of this corridor urged NATO to focus on

combating terrorism in the Black Sea region, which was expounded on in NATO's 2002 Military Concept for Defense against Terrorism.⁴

To achieve its goals, NATO has striven to implement several policies towards the countries in the wider Black Sea region spanning between cooperation in specific realms and full membership in the NATO. The Partnership for Peace (PfP) program has been extended to most countries of eastern and south Eastern Europe, the southern Caucasus, and central Asia. Even though it is not committal, NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP) of 1999 is the closest stage to future NATO membership. In order to uphold and enhance the capabilities of states against terrorism in the region, Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAPs) were inaugurated in 2002. IPAPs are the first step from membership in PfP to full NATO membership. Beyond IPAPs, Intensified Dialogue (ID) was created as a prerequisite to MAP status especially for Ukraine (2005) and Georgia (2006).⁵

With regard to the Black Sea region, the U.S. shares the same perception as NATO. To the U.S., the Black Sea region means "a nexus of security, energy diversification and trade, and political and economic freedom linking Europe with the Caspian basin, Central Asia, and the broader Middle East."⁶ The U.S. has also envisioned the Black Sea region as an increasing concern with regard to the proliferation and smuggling of both contraband and arms, trafficking in persons, drug trafficking, and even weapons of mass destruction.⁷ The U.S. seeks to achieve peace, prosperity, and security in the Black Sea region. Within this context, the U.S. intends to promote three basic goals in the region: "democratic and market reform; improved energy security and connectivity, greater economic growth and prosperity; and

security.”⁸ To achieve these goals, the U.S. intends to work with all countries of the region, regional organizations like the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR), Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH), the Black Sea Border Security Initiative, and other partners such as the EU.⁹ The U.S. also attaches great importance to enforcing a coordinated policy with the EU in order to address some of the most crucial issues of the decade, such as Iran, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and energy security.¹⁰

Since the admission of two Black Sea littoral states, Bulgaria and Romania, to the EU on 1 January 2007, the prosperity, stability and security of the EU’s neighbors around the Black Sea became an immediate concern to the EU.¹¹ The EU’s basic interests in the Black Sea region can be summarized as establishing long term stability and conflict management; improving democracy and the rule of law; ensuring a stable energy supply for Europe; struggling with organized crime and terrorism; increasing border control, and managing illegal migration.¹² To achieve these interests, the EU seeks to implement both regional projects and strategies towards the Black Sea region. The EU has participated in initiating and funding regional cooperation projects about transport and energy.

The Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) project was started in 1993 in order to link Europe and central Asia through Turkey and the Caucasus by a network of roads, railroads and ferry connections. Regarding European security of energy supply, the Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe (INOGATE) was launched in 1995 by the EU so as to integrate oil and gas pipeline systems in Eastern Europe and central Asia by providing technical assistance and some financial support

for the building of new pipelines in the region. In order to develop projects on transport axes within the Pan-European Transport Area (PETrA), the EU initiated the Black Sea PETrA project. This project is a part of the trans-European networks project and aims to cover the Black Sea region with the EU countries. The Black Sea PETrA project includes two sub-projects. While the central axis project aims to connect the EU, Ukraine, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, the southeastern axis project aims to link the EU, the Caspian Sea, the Balkans, Turkey and the Caucasus.¹³

The EU also has three basic strategies with regard to the Black Sea Region: The Enlargement Policy (EP), European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), and the Common Economic Space (CES). The enlargement policy provides candidate countries admission to the EU, like the last enlargement policy of 2004 did for Romania and Bulgaria. The ENP is directed towards the eastern and southern neighbor countries which are not candidates for membership. The Common Economic Spaces policy is a bilateral agreement with Russia that covers economic and environmental issues; freedom, security and justice; research and education and external security.¹⁴ The EU's enlargement procedure in the Black Sea is based on the ENP, which can be perceived as the EU's basic plan towards the Black Sea region. The Black Sea Synergy (BS) document of 2007, which could be regarded as a spearhead to the EU's strategic vision for the Black Sea region, complemented the ENP, the strategic partnership between the EU and Russia, and the negotiation with Turkey. The EU launched the Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy in March 2009 in order to focus on enhancing bilateral cooperation and alignment with the EU.¹⁵ The proliferation of the EU policies and programs towards the Black Sea reflects two points. The first one is increasing EU

interest in the Black Sea region. The second one is the EU's bilateral approach and lack of broader frameworks of policy so as to integrate the Black Sea countries with the EU. Instead of being bilateral, the EU strategies towards the Black Sea region should be multilateral, and seek to establish a completely integrated relationship with both the Black Sea region and the world.¹⁶

Maintaining and reinforcing its power and preventing other powers' emergence in its periphery are Russia's two main concerns in the Black Sea region, since it has always perceived the Black Sea region as a crucial component of its national security.¹⁷ From the Russian standpoint, the proliferation of the NATO's activities in Russia's periphery, whether through the enlargement policy of 2004, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, Membership Action Plans (MAPs), the signing of bilateral defense agreements with the U.S., or supporting pro-Western elites, have made it feel encircled by the West. Therefore Russia has followed a policy to strengthen its influence around its borders by manipulating various energy related projects, preventing anti-Russian collaboration, trying to restrain NATO expansion, and countering secessionist activities within its borders while supporting them abroad.¹⁸ As a result, whereas some countries such as Ukraine and Georgia feel that Russia is a threat, Russia in turn has strived to keep other actors, including the U.S., NATO or other western security organizations, out of the region.¹⁹ In other words, Russian interests in the Black Sea Region can be defined as: maintaining Russia as the key actor in the region; retaining Russian dominance on energy-related issues; maintaining Russian-controlled military coalitions; preventing regional countries from joining NATO; and struggling against separatism, fundamentalism and terrorism.²⁰

In order to achieve these national interests, Russia strives to exert active and passive strategic approaches towards the region. While Russia's passive approach contains preserving as much as possible of the status quo inherited from the Cold War era, and resisting external influence in its near abroad, the active approach of Russia focuses on powerful geopolitical gain through its energy policies.²¹

Like Russia, Turkey considers the Black Sea region as a crucial component of its national security not only because it has the longest border among the Black Sea littoral countries, but also because it possesses the only water way connecting the Black Sea to open waters through the Bosphorus (Istanbul Strait), the Marmara Sea, and the Dardanelles (Çanakkale Strait). For fear of agitating the Turkish-Russian bilateral equation of power in the region, and thus harming its vital interests, Turkey is inclined to oppose the entrance of western powers into the region. In order to prevent, and push out, western military and political interference from the Black Sea region, Turkey and Russia pursue a common strategy to some extent. Both Turkey and Russia seek to improve a comprehensive strategic approach for mutual economic and political cooperation, although each country has a different strategic approach to defending and extending its own influence over the Black Sea.²² Both countries tend to adhere to the status quo of the Black Sea region inherited from the Cold War era. Even though Turkey is a member of NATO, it refuses to cooperate with the U.S. in extending international military influence over the Black Sea, on the pretext of maintaining the 1936 Montreux Convention, which gives Turkey a naval monopoly and privilege.²³ In addition to being a fervent adherent of the Montreux Convention of 1936, Turkey has initiated and participated in three major initiatives to reflect its decisiveness on Black Sea issues.

These are the Black Sea Naval Co-Operation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR), Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH), and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC).

For the purpose of enhancing peace and stability in the Black Sea area, by increasing regional co-operation and improving relationships, Turkey initiated BLACKSEAFOR in 1998; it came into force on 2 April 2001.²⁴ BLACKSEAFOR was designed for search and rescue operations in the sea, humanitarian aid, environmental protection, mine sweeping, and goodwill visits as well as other tasks determined by the member states in concert with the principles of the UN charter.²⁵ As a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks, empowering BLACKSEAFOR with the operational capabilities for combat against asymmetrical threats was adopted in 2004,²⁶ achieving cooperation in information sharing, employment of command, control and communications capabilities, training opportunities through exercises and other tasks that may be contemplated in the future for enhanced cooperation among the participating states. Preventing the threat of terrorism and illicit trafficking, weapons of mass destruction, and their means of delivery and related materials have become the basic purposes of the organization.²⁷

The Turkish Navy began to perform OBSH on 1 March 2004, in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions on combat against terrorism adopted following the September 11 events.²⁸ Functioning as a complementary initiative to NATO's Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean Sea, OBSH is perceived as a major security provider in the Black Sea maritime domain. This operation has become a multinational organization with the participation of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Romania.²⁹

Turkey initiated BSEC in 1992 in order to uphold the value of good neighborliness, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights; to strive in good faith to oppose violence, aggression, lawlessness, and terrorism; and to promote peaceful settlements, and transformation of the Black Sea into a region of peace, freedom, and stability that should facilitate processes and structures of European integration.³⁰ In addition to encompassing the entire wider Black Sea region, BSEC is also open to other related countries, such as Greece, Albania, Serbia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. Furthermore, individual EU states, such as France, Italy, Germany and Poland have obtained observer status in BSEC, though the EU itself has showed little interest in it.³¹ As summarized above, many internal and external countries and organizations are interested in the Black Sea region, and have been striving to impose their policies and projects in the region to achieve their interests. However, there are still significant gaps and a lack of cooperation between these actors, policies and organization in terms of regional cooperation, enhancing security and stability, resolving conflicts, and integration to the wider world.

Current Security Environment in the Black Sea Area

There are both external and internal factors and challenges that affect the current security and stability structure in the Black Sea area. With the end of the Cold War and collapse of Soviet Union, the EU's and NATO's enlargement policies in the region are external factors. Internal factors include historically unresolved problems, a complex security equation in the area, economic and political competition, and cultural differences. The collapse of the Soviet Union released historical tensions and armed conflicts suppressed by the communist regime in addition to revealing six new

sovereign states and bringing about several secessionist movements. In parallel to the birth of a slow region-building process, the collapse of the Soviet Union opened the region to outsiders' influences and competition.³² Since then, we witnessed conflicts between Georgia and Abkhazia; Georgia, Ossetia and Russia over Ossetia; Moldova and Russia over Transnistria; two Chechnya-Russia Wars; the Armenian invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh; and tension between Georgia and the Ajar autonomous region. Currently, these conflicts seem to be frozen as Russian military supremacy compelled the sides to accept Russian-dictated solutions. It is difficult to say that these conflicts will not recur in the future.

From a cultural and political standpoint, the countries of the Black Sea region do not have much in common except the sea itself. Most of them still have a deep fear of Russia's ambition to be an effective power in the Black Sea area. And Russian intervention in the previously mentioned conflicts proved them right. The relationships between the Black Sea countries are uneasy. Even with the exception of the Turks, who are basically Muslims, most of the inhabitants of the shores of the Black Sea are Orthodox Christians, who have different cultures and come from different ethnic groups; they speak different languages, and have different histories, interests, and aspirations, which occasionally prevent them from getting along.³³

Another major problem that affects security and stability in the Black Sea is the conflict between the interests of main actors. This is especially obvious between Russia, the EU, the U.S. and NATO. In the early post-Cold War period, Euro-Atlantic policy aimed to prevent newly independent states from falling under Russian influence and guarantee a steady and secure supply of Caspian oil and gas. After the 9/11 terrorist

attacks, due to the change of the transatlantic community's security perception in terms of new geopolitical concepts such as the broader Middle East and North Africa and the wider Black Sea Region, NATO tried to expand its expeditionary reach.³⁴

The EU has elaborated a number of policies towards the Black Sea region. The enlargement process of 2004 is still ongoing, and Turkey and the Balkan states are part of this process. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) of 2004 offers a privileged relationship without the promise of accession,³⁵ and includes Moldova, Ukraine, and the three south Caucasian states.³⁶ The ENP is followed by the Black Sea Synergy (BSS), focusing on the promotion of regional cooperation and encouraging the resolution of conflicts through a region-wide, projects-based approach. Then, after the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia, the Eastern Partnership with its emphasis on deeper integration with the EU through bilateral action was introduced.³⁷ There is also a strategic partnership between the EU and Russia.³⁸ The appointment of special representatives and the dispatching of Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions have come into force in order to complement these policies.³⁹ These approaches explicitly show that the EU has had a strong interest in the Black Sea region; however its different legal mechanisms with the countries in the region prevent it from adopting a comprehensive approach with regard to the Black Sea. EU member countries Romania, Greece and Bulgaria also have BSEC membership; Turkey has been striving to be a EU member; the Caucasian countries, Ukraine and Belarus are in the scope of the ENP; Albania, Serbia, and Macedonia are the countries included in the agreements on stability and partnership with the EU, and Russia has special ties with the EU through its strategic partnership.⁴⁰

There are also significant discords between the U.S. and the major European countries on the perception towards Russia. From a geopolitical stand point, the U.S. still perceives Russia as an adversary, while France and Germany are more inclined to accept Russian influence in its former Cold War space. In the 1990s, due to its priorities revolving around membership processes, the EU had little interest in the Black Sea region and thus basically followed NATO policies towards it.⁴¹ But, as from the early 2000's, the EU has become more interested in the Black Sea region and has been striving to enforce its own policies and projects such as EP, ENP, BS, EaP, TRACECA, INOGATE, and PETrA.

In terms of the security, Turkey has the same goal as Russia towards the Black Sea region. Turkey's overarching aim is the creation of a region where extra-regional powers would not be needed in the security realm.⁴² The other states of the area are caught between the more powerful actors, and apply different policies according to their relationships with Russia, the EU or the transatlantic community. For example, the smaller littoral countries, especially Romania, object to Turkey's and Russia's approach towards the Black Sea region, and try to attract extra-regional powers, especially the U.S., to balance the influence of the two main regional actors. As a result of the lack of a clear NATO policy towards the Black Sea region, EU members Greece, Bulgaria and Romania favor an increase in the influence and role of the EU regarding its common foreign, security and defense policies towards the Black Sea region.⁴³

There are also numerous regional organizations such as BSEC, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), BLACKSEAFOR, OBSH, the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI), the Civil-Military Emergency

Planning Council in South and Eastern Europe (CMEPSEE), the Black Sea Border Coordination and Information Center Security (BBCIC), and the Southeast Europe Defense Ministerial Process (SEDM). Even though these organizations have common goals, there is not a full overlap between their key goals, which undermines unity of effort, makes each others' efforts inefficient, depletes already limited resources, and requires a bottom-up approach to develop any new regional security cooperation framework.⁴⁴

Due to its connective position between producer and consumer, the Black Sea region is indisputably a very significant region with regard to the transportation of energy resources. By 2030, the EU states will import roughly 90 percent of their oil, 60 percent of their gas, and 66 percent of their coal. More importantly, diversification of energy resources becomes a strategic necessity in addition to transportation routes.⁴⁵ The energy-related crisis dates back to March 2005, and chronically recurred almost every year since then, peaking during the winter of 2008-2009. Given Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are the producers; Russia, Georgia, Turkey and Ukraine are the transit countries; and the EU countries, Turkey and others are the consumers, the Black Sea region basically contains complex energy relationships between the above three types of actors since it has the principal transport and pipeline routes for oil and gas from the Caspian basin and Russia to the West. The ability to achieve a sustainable compromise between the interests of all actors is a crucial challenge for the development of security and stability between the Black Sea states. This compromise should include a secure demand and supply mechanism for producers and consumers, and secure and stable revenue for transit countries.⁴⁶ For example, the relapsing natural

gas disputes between Ukraine and Russia, which affected many European countries dependent on Russian natural gas imported through Ukraine, were over natural gas prices, the cost of transit, the amount of gas imported, and gas related debts.

Trafficking and transnational crimes which basically contain drug trafficking, money laundering, smuggling of arms and nuclear materials, human trafficking and migration in the Black Sea region are yet other challenges to be dealt with. For example, secessionist regions such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria are cut off from the international legal system and the continuation of unresolved conflicts make these regions highly attractive hubs for organized crimes. In addition, difficult economic situations, political instability, limited governmental control of territories, insufficient border controls, and lack of efficient law enforcement helps criminal networks to infiltrate into state organizations so as to make many of the Black Sea countries a convenient environment for the development of organized crime. For example, the intertwinement of state actors and organized criminal syndicates is still a significant problem in Moldova, Ukraine, the south Caucasus (Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia), Russia, and the north Caucasus (Chechnya, and Dagestan).

The Georgian paramilitary groups conducted guerrilla activities in Abkhazia in concert with Abkhaz crime groups and militia. Even though the Georgian government recently officially disbanded them, they still continue their criminal activities, which mainly cover illicit trade and smuggling. In South Ossetia, the Ergneti market became a trade center for all kinds of legal and illegal goods, and provided a great deal of income to both Georgian law enforcement structures and the South Ossetian de facto

government until 2004. Transnistria has been perceived as a center for smuggling of conventional goods into Moldova, Ukraine and the EU. Transnistria has also been alleged to be a hub for the trafficking of arms, drugs and human beings. In the north Caucasus, whereas the Chechen freedom movement has primarily been financed by means of Chechen organized crime groups' activities in Russia and elsewhere, Russian military leaders in Chechnya have not abstained from participating in organized crime. In Dagestan, state structures are substantially criminalized because of government officials affiliated with organized crime.

In order to solve these problems, the Black Sea countries should trust in and provide enough resources for the regional organizations such as BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR, and OBSH. Based on this trust and resources, BSEC should assume more responsibility to mitigate protracted conflicts, enhance security, promote law enforcement and border security institutions, and establish an effective international monitoring mechanism in areas which can easily turn into hot conflict zones. Since these transnational criminal activities spread out far beyond the Black Sea region, and the EU is in the proximity of the Black Sea region, the EU should seek to cooperate with regional organizations through sharing experience and intelligence, and by promoting and enhancing the credibility and capacity of the regional organizations.

Overall, in addition to other issues in the regional countries, these problems, which basically consist of frozen conflicts, trans-national crime, terrorism, and unstable governments and regions, threaten the security, core values, and interests of Euro-Atlantic community.⁴⁷ A solution to these complex and cross-border problems for the

benefit of all can only be resolved through comprehensive regional cooperation integrated with the wider world.

Alternative Strategic Options for Security and Stability in Black Sea Area

These challenges and problems related to the Black Sea region also represent opportunities for multi-national cooperation. Many initiatives can be mentioned in terms what should be done. But, any robust and promising strategy to achieve a peaceful, secure, stable and prosperous Black Sea region should seek to enhance both regional cooperation through regional organizations, and integration with wider, even global, processes and structures. Based on these two-components of an overarching vision, a successful strategy should focus on: peace, security and stability; economic development and welfare; improving democracy and human rights; assuring energy security; and combating organized crime. Due to the fact that all the problems related to the region are interconnected, they can be resolved effectively and permanently only in a comprehensive and holistic way.

This new comprehensive and overarching approach may enable key actors to improve their understanding of what should be done and what can be done in addition to developing innovative approaches to solve problems related to the area's security, stability and welfare.⁴⁸ This holistic and overarching vision should also help to promote regional cooperation if it takes into consideration future changes in the region, such as the EU, and/or NATO enlargements, and the EU's security concerns.⁴⁹ From this stand point, conceptualizing the Black Sea region as a wider Black Sea region should help all relevant actors to gain a comprehensive and overarching point of view and enable them to deal with all the threats and issues in a cohesive and coherent manner instead of

through inconsistent, bilateral temporary solutions.⁵⁰ This coherence should be sought both within organizational policies and between organizations.

The cooperation between NATO's Operation Active Endeavor in Mediterranean Sea and OBSH in the Black Sea is a significant cooperative and adaptive model in terms of security. This cooperation may also cover BLACKSEAFOR, because both BLACKSEAFOR and OBSH are aiming to align their operations with UN charter or the UN resolutions. From this stand point, the fact that the UN and the EU give credit to these regional organizations will promote political trust and thus regional cooperation and integration with other parts of the world. Similar cooperation should be introduced between BSEC and the EU through proper linkages in the economic, environmental, border security, and combating crimes realms. In concert with the principle that anticipates security as an indivisible entity, these regional arrangements should not be perceived as an alternative to the Euro-Atlantic region and NATO systems, but rather as complementary and as means to strengthen links between regional arrangements, NATO and the EU. Additional organizational collaboration should be established between BSEC and SECI on countering organized crime, terrorism, and border security; between OSCE and BSEC on terrorism, organized crime, and trafficking; and between the EU and BSEC on nuclear safety, counter terrorism, organized crime, science and technology, economic and social projects.⁵¹

In order to improve regional democracies and economies, and accelerate previously communist littoral countries' adaption processes to western democracies and economies, the U.S. and the EU should exert coherent and harmonious policies towards the region. Such policies should include: enhancing state institutions and the

rule of law, improving security structures and the judiciary, assuming a more active role to address the unresolved conflicts, decreasing the EU's energy dependence on Russia through strong support for the alternative oil and natural gas pipeline projects between the Caspian Sea region and Europe, strengthening border security within the wider Black Sea region, promoting human rights and democracy through promoting existing cooperation between regional frameworks such as the BSEC, the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (ODED-GUAM), the BLACKSEAFOR, the Baku Initiative, and the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC). Due to their democracy and anti-Russian tendencies, Ukraine and Georgia should be perceived and supported as models in the region with regard to western integration and values.⁵² In this process, to prevent Russian aggression, the EU should take more responsibility, rather than NATO. That is to say, instead of further NATO enlargement in the Black Sea region, the EU policies such as the EU enlargement, ENP, BS, EaP, or EU projects such as TRACECA, INOGATE, and Black Sea PETrA should be given priority. In this context, EU's Romania and Bulgaria membership process experience can provide useful contributions to the development of a coherent EU strategy.

The area of the wider Black Sea covers essentially the geography of the BSEC countries. One may conclude that the aim of the wider Black Sea concept is to establish U.S. political and military presence in the region.⁵³ But, given that the U.S. strives to promote peace, security, stability, democracy, market economies and human rights as basic values in the region, and since the U.S. military existence would agitate Russia, these basic values and interests can also be achieved through cooperation between key regional actors such as Turkey and Russia, and key organizations such as the EU,

BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR, and OBSH, all of which already exist in the area. Given the current weakness and lack of resources and enough political trust in regional organizations, the EU should assume more economic and political initiatives in order to enhance regional organizations for both regional and extra-regional actors' benefit. The significant change in the wider Black Sea strategy of the U.S. in recent years included achieving U.S. aims through existing regional cooperation mechanisms and through bilateral relations with the countries in the region. This is a constructive, promising and seminal attempt. According to its new strategy, the U.S. is inclined to recognize Turkey as regional leader in the Black Sea area, will continue to observe the Montreux Convention, and acknowledges OBSH and BLACKSEAFOR as confidence-building measures in the field of maritime security in the Black Sea.⁵⁴ As to Russia, which has generally been seen on the other side of the equation, this new U.S. strategy must recognize Russia's security interests in the area. In this context, the new U.S. approach that prefers to cooperate with regional entities can be perceived as an inclusive approach that keeps Russia on the "playground."

The Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialogue, launched by Romania in June 2006 as an initiative concerning the EU's orientation to the Black Sea region is quite relevant and noteworthy. This initiative aims to create coherence between the activities of the different organizations in the region such as the BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR, GUAM, SECI and the Stability Pact.⁵⁵ This initiative should be enhanced, expanded, and linked to global organizations.

In order to prevent the nugatory effects of the proliferation of economic and political organizations, policies, projects and programs which reflect overlapping

agendas, rivalry and tense bilateral relations, and bring about an insufficient institutional capacity for initiating major regional projects and policy confusion, an initiative to serve the common interests of region needs to be initiated. Moreover, increasing the awareness of the importance and relevance of multilateral cooperation and renewing efforts to identify and implement significant projects of long-term and common benefit within the region are strongly needed. Regional cooperation which yields sustained development can only be achieved through establishing agreed goals and objectives. Appropriating necessary resources to fund projects and the prioritization of regional policies are also equally important.⁵⁶ This initiative should focus on regional sectors which require a high level of cooperation between state, regional, local and non-state actors; policy coordination between the approach of the regional countries and the EU; mutual agreement between the EU and Russia; and the coordination of existing initiatives. Additionally, policy coordination, the giving of financial and technical support to existing institutions, and fulfilling the feasibility studies and cost benefit analyses of specific projects are also needed.

BSEC should lead these efforts since it has all the right tools and elements, such as an inclusive nature and comprehensive institutional structures to be the overarching regional framework for cooperation.⁵⁷ Prioritizing issues that require regional attention is essential due to its guidance for donors, governments and investors to define their funding priorities. Lessons learned from other areas which have experienced similar issues, such as the Baltic, the Balkans, and the Danube region, can provide useful and constructive inputs to this process.⁵⁸ BSEC's inclusive, robust, permanent structure and

relative legitimacy (due to being initiated regionally) makes it a convenient asset and tool for regional cooperation.

But BSEC still has some weaknesses such as a lack of resources to initiate major regional projects and political support. The members of BSEC should be more enthusiastic to strengthen and reinvigorate this organization so as to achieve their common interests. To do so, BSEC should establish specific goals and deadlines so as to develop a legally compulsory commitment and implementation mechanism, considerably increase its own budget (e.g. requesting the resources of the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank for this purpose), develop a security dimension⁵⁹ (e.g. integrating BLACKSEAFOR and OBSH to BSEC), and develop a mechanism for regular consultation and coordination between itself and all the other regional and extra-regional organizations and initiatives. This will make it a more relevant and efficient regional organization.⁶⁰ Since Turkey and Russia are key regional actors and members of key regional organizations, BSEC needs to gain their lasting support. This cooperation would be beneficial for both sides, including other littoral countries and extra-regional countries, since it could help establish basic western values such as democracy, human rights, good governance, and the market economy in the region.

In this context, Russian resistance should become a significant difficulty to cope with since Russia will still strive to maintain its dominance on former Soviet countries. But on the other hand, for Russia “this worldview is gradually eroding.”⁶¹ There is no doubt that Russia will insist on using its potential 60 billion barrels oil and 1,680 trillion cubic feet natural gas reserves,⁶² which makes Russia the EU’s third biggest trade partner,⁶³ as a weapon against the energy hungry EU. Additionally, the EU also has its

tools to deal with this problem. For instance, the Black Sea countries are generally inclined to join or cooperate with the West, in other words with the EU and/or NATO. While EU membership is a strategic aim for Moldova and Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine have repeatedly stated their desire to join NATO. Even Russia has begun developing strategic partnerships with both NATO and the EU.⁶⁴ The NATO PfP program, the Strategic Partnership agreement of the EU, BSEC membership, the Black Sea Synergy, and OSCE membership are the western-originated organizations in which Russia participates. These facts provide the West powerful political and economical instruments to enhance desired change in the Black Sea region and improve democracy, global integration, market economies, and human rights in the Black Sea countries. Therefore, because BSEC is a part of a transition strategy towards European integration rather than an alternative,⁶⁵ and because it profits from being a regional organization, BSEC can play a significant role by facilitating the aforementioned basic western values in the Black Sea region through robust collaboration between BSEC and the EU.

Developing policies that can prevent tensions and establish proactive and effective international monitoring mechanisms in areas which can easily turn into hot conflict zones are also needed in the areas in which tensions can turn into armed conflicts.⁶⁶ To achieve this objective, a military armament agreement of all the states in the region and political and military restrictions should be adopted by both regional and extra regional actors in order to prevent both further tensions and sustain a regional balance.⁶⁷ While littoral countries should allow the regional organizations such as BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR, and OBSH to tackle the security problems, these regional

organizations should assume more responsibility and initiative in this effort. The fact that the NATO littoral countries of Romania and Bulgaria minimize their military activities can obviously help prevent tensions and enhance peace.

Due to the firm linkages between economies, common challenges related to the economic realm require cooperation and communication. The policies on economic development and welfare of the Black Sea region have to include both regional and international dynamics. Whereas cooperation and coordination through regional institutions such as BSEC is vital in terms of the regional dynamics, good relations between BSEC and the U.S., the EU, China and the Middle Eastern and central Asian countries, are important from an international standpoint. But, concerning regional cooperation, the most significant incentive is the future development of relations between the Black Sea countries and the EU since the EU is a critical market and principal source of financing, lending, investment and official assistance for Black Sea countries, and its policies have direct impacts on the regional economy.⁶⁸ Accordingly, the organizational cooperation through physical links between the EU and BSEC will be beneficial for both organizations. These links should include “policy coordination and harmonization, cross-country regulation, enhanced information sharing in order to stimulate growth and overlapping activities, as well as economic security which means avoiding misunderstandings or undertaking policies which may have adverse impacts.”⁶⁹

The EU should support regional initiatives aiming at developing effective democratic institutions, promoting good governance and the rule of law through sharing experience on promoting human rights and democracy, providing training, program exchanges, and dialogue.⁷⁰ In its approach to improve good governance, democracy

and the rule of law in the weaker states of the region, the EU should establish a long-term strategy built on the EU's experience in Romania and the rule of law mission to Georgia in order to strengthen the functioning and accountability of basic state institutions, such as judiciaries and security structures.⁷¹ The EU should focus on working through regional organizations instead of actively working with government agencies or pursuing policies that "alienate state institutions from reform processes."⁷² In order to promote further development of existing cooperation frameworks, as well as initiating robust linkages between Black Sea states and the EU members, the EU needs to be much more optimistic towards the capacity of BSEC and strive to enhance and integrate BSEC into the EU structure.

In order to decrease its energy dependence on Russia, the EU should support the development of pipeline projects of both oil and natural gas between the Caspian region and Europe. This support must include the linkage of the Turkish and European gas network in addition to the linkage of the west Caspian shoreline to the east Caspian through Trans-Caspian pipelines, which in the long run should link Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.⁷³ For example, the EU should support the Nabucco pipeline project, which is an effective energy transportation project that links non-Russian producers, transit countries, and consumers and provides a measure of diversified energy security to various EU countries. Reinvigorating TRACECA through robust political commitment and financial supports should be another significant initiative for the EU. Regarding the EU states' development and funding cooperation in the south Caucasus and central Asia, the building of transport and communications infrastructure must be priority sectors.⁷⁴

Russia will probably react and strive to counter any initiatives aiming to decrease its energy dominance which serves as a strategic weapon against consumers (e.g. the EU countries, Ukraine, Turkey) and transit countries such as Ukraine to prevent them from taking a path towards NATO and the EU, and even against some producer countries such as Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan because their energy transit lines reach consumers predominantly through Russia. But, energy relations are not a one way street. In fact, the economic relations between EU countries and Russia display interdependence.

Russia has become a major trade partner for the EU. For example, in 2009, Russia was the EU's third largest import partner (9.6 percent of EU import), fourth largest export partner (6 percent of EU export), and overall third largest trade partner (7.9 percent of EU trade).⁷⁵ This trend continued in 2010 as well.⁷⁶ About 25 percent of the Russian government's operating budget has come from oil and gas related revenues.⁷⁷ Approximately 85 percent of European export to Russia consists of manufactured goods such as medicine, motor cars, mobile phones and aircraft, while energy related products such as oil, gas and coal accounted for almost three quarters of the EU countries imports from Russia.⁷⁸ These economic relationships point out that Russia strongly needs European collaboration to maintain its main revenues, diversify its economy, and avoid an economic crisis. Therefore, as Russian officials mentioned on several occasions, Russia needs to be seriously more integrated with the global economy.⁷⁹

Moreover, the Russian state-centered gas company Gazprom's EU gas sales account for two-thirds of Gazprom's revenues and nearly one-third of its total

production. Add to this the fact that the EU can use U.S. shale gas as a major supply diversion to Europe,⁸⁰ and it is clear that Gazprom is more dependent on the EU than the EU is dependent on Gazprom. Furthermore, the 2006 and 2009 Ukrainian-Gazprom conflicts over gas proved that aggressive actions against customers only end up with a reduction in Gazprom's market.⁸¹

In order to prevent the EU from making tough choices between energy supplies from Russia and being on the U.S. and NATO side in terms of some significant strategic issues such as missile defense in Europe or resisting Russian policies towards Georgia, the U.S. should continue to economically and politically support its European allies' efforts against certain Russian policies. Examples include supporting European energy diversification projects; encouraging Europe to increase the usage of other gas resources from Qatar, Algeria, and Nigeria; and supporting them to develop other energy resources such as coal, nuclear power, and renewable sources to decrease their dependency on Russia.⁸² These actions will help ensure Russia's constructive engagement with all of the significant issues in the Black Sea region.

There is no doubt that combating organized crime is closely linked to improving democratic institutions, good governance, promoting regional security, stability and cooperation. Thus, all the countries in the wider Black Sea area and the EU should participate in cooperative efforts to strengthen border security, fight organized crime, and improve law enforcement. The EU should adopt a cooperative and robust role with BSEC on these issues as part of developing a coherent strategy toward combating organized crime in its near abroad. In this context, the EU Border Assistance Missions to Ukraine and Moldova are significant and successful examples. The EU should

introduce similar initiatives in the South Caucasian states.⁸³ In addition to contributing to the resolution of conflicts, these successful examples are relevant because they mean regional cooperation and solutions for regional problems, which helps prevent the intervention of external actors.

In order to manage migration, tackle illegal immigration, and enhance the capacity of national law enforcement capabilities, especially in struggling with corruption and organized crime, the BSEC should initiate additional comprehensive regional cooperative initiatives by profiting from the experiences of SECI and BBCIC. Such initiatives should include developing common practices, introducing common standards for saving and exchanging information, establishing early warning systems related to trans-national crime, and by developing common training schemes.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the Black Sea region possesses significant importance, promising opportunities, and that both littoral and non-littoral countries have indispensable interests there, regional and extra-regional organizations and littoral countries have neglected the region's real priorities and need. The regional actors failed to introduce a shared overarching understanding towards the region. The Black Sea region's sudden emergence as a region between regions and the conflicting agendas of powerful local and external actors impaired the necessary and proper regional focus and prevented proper outcomes.⁸⁵ Today, it is obvious that the Black Sea area offers challenges, problems and threats, plus promising opportunities for collaboration.

Both the regional and extra regional actors' futures will be affected by the security and stability of the Black Sea region. This stability and security includes the

need for economic development and welfare, improving democracy and human rights, improving regional cooperation, assuring energy security, and combating organized crime. All of these topics are interconnected and must be addressed simultaneously in order to achieve a comprehensive approach, thus providing a synergistic effect in favor of both regional countries and extra regional actors. The success in this approach requires the contribution of all actors to create a common understanding of what should be done, what can be done, as well as developing innovative approaches to problems and providing necessary resources to achieve them. Because it is a regional, robust, inclusive and permanent organization, which bolsters legitimacy, and because it has adequate organizational infrastructure, BSEC should lead these initiatives. But, due to its close proximity and mutual interests in the region, the EU should cooperate with BSEC by using its political, social, economic, and scientific experiences and resources.

Last but not least, in order to achieve a really secure, stable, developed and integrated Black Sea region, the regional actors must forsake the use of force and respect each other's territorial integrity, international treaties and the rule of law. Outside countries interested in the Black Sea region must support efforts to secure good governance, the creation of interdependencies and the regionalization of the Black Sea's politics and economies. The international community must encourage cooperative efforts and confidence-building measures as well as actions in favor of the peaceful resolution of disputes. Considering the impact of globalization, the main principle to be kept in mind is the fact that the emergence of a secure, peaceful, stable and cooperative Black Sea region would be beneficial to all.

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