



Institute for Regional and International Studies

MAJOR INTERESTS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE BLACK SEA REGION

Framework Analytical Review

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There are three groups of basic interests, represented in the Black Sea region of today. **First**, we have the interests of **the West**, divided quite explicitly between the US and the positions of the major continental European countries. Both Washington and the EU powers pursue strategies for change and transformation of the region around the Black Sea, motivated by different – only **partially** coinciding - policy agendas. **Second**, the interests of post-Soviet Russia and Turkey, getting closer and closer together in a block of the **status quo powers** in the Black Sea region. **Third**, we observe the interests of the smaller Black Sea countries (Ukraine included, even if its size does not correspond to the definition of a “small country”). Those smaller countries are quite diverse and challenged by different policy agendas. Bulgaria and Romania are NATO members and EU hopefuls for January 1, 2007. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova struggle – each country within its own environment – for independence from Russian neo-imperial grip, for national integration and successful reform and modernization. Armenia is following its own strategic agenda, dominated by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan and the effective blockade, imposed by Turkey on the grounds of several disputed bilateral problems, Karabakh included. Azerbaijan – last but not least - is distantly present in the Black Sea environment, both with intensifying transfer of Azeri oil across the Caucasus and the Black Sea (the BTC pipeline), and with its integral presence into the South Caucasus strategic balance and in the broader post-Soviet context.¹

I. WESTERN INTERESTS IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

The Black Sea was a Cold War frontier, reproducing a legacy of intense imperial contest between Russia and Ottoman Turkey for five centuries, with a short interwar break before the establishment of a bipolar world in the late 1940s. After 1989, the region has fallen into the eastern tier of the buffer zone between post-Soviet Russia and the victorious Western Alliance. The complex transformation of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) throughout the 1990s - the post-Yugoslav crisis included - has occupied the attention and the resources of the West, ranking the Black Sea problems as a remote priority in the Western strategic agenda. At the same time, for a number of important reasons, the Western policy planners and decision-makers have always kept an eye on the developments in and around the Black Sea. The region has always been a potential priority for the West, waiting for its time to come. After the last round of NATO enlargement – the “Big Bang” of the Vilnius group accession – the agenda of post-Soviet Black Sea transformation has gradually penetrated the policy agenda of both

Europe and the US. However, the strategic interests of both major players of the West should be defined separately, even if they're partially interrelated.²

1. The US strategic perspective towards the Black Sea region

For the US the Black Sea is a strategic corridor, serving three basic and interrelated strategic causes. **First**, the Black Sea connects Europe with Central Asia through the Caucasus, with Central Asia being the focus, the seat of the geo-strategic balance between China and the West for the 21st century. The level of influence and control, which the only present superpower could exercise on Central Asia, will determine to a large extent the preconditions for the upcoming global contest between Washington and Beijing. The level of Western control over Central Asia plays also a key role in structuring Russia's strategic choices between China and the West. **Second**, the Black Sea represents a gateway to the larger Middle East. The opportunity to shape and control the agenda of the Black Sea and the Caucasus provides the US with the potential to fully integrate both regional powers – Russia and Turkey – into the Western Alliance. A failure of Washington to dominate the Black Sea agenda, on the other hand, provides Moscow and Ankara with powerful resources for autonomous strategic games and domination of the region.³ **Third**, the Black Sea is an important commercial route and energy corridor, which could provide Europe with alternative oil and gas resources, reducing the Old Continent's energy dependence on the Middle East and Russia, thus serving as a strategic balancing resource against cartelization of energy provision. .

The basic aim of the US strategy towards the Black Sea region is to anchor the post-communist, in particular – post-Soviet societies - into the Euro-Atlantic security space, to support democratic and market reforms in those countries, and to advocate their fast track integration into the EU. In achieving those goals, Washington is allied primarily with the reformist democratic elites of the post-communist, post-Soviet societies. The key opponents of the US strategy are the national branches of the old Soviet *nomenklatura* and the KGB, restructured as corrupt criminal national elites of the nominally “new independent states”. Russia, with its revived imperial instincts is the key supporter of those criminalized elites, and – therefore – the key rival to the US strategy in the region. In order to promote a sufficient success of its Black Sea regional strategy, the US government badly needs to achieve particular results to ensure the irreversibility of the reform process in countries like Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova.⁴ The impediments to this major task are both **internal** – affecting the countries in transition realities, and **external** – related to the global strategic agenda of the sole superpower.

The **internal** impediments to the US strategy are manifested mostly in the structural weakness of the reformist movements in the Black Sea post-Soviet societies. The US and the West in general have accumulated particular experience with heavy and controversial transformation of the Balkans in the 1990s, where at least Bulgaria and Romania proved – at the end of the day – to be relatively successful cases of societal reform and Euro-Atlantic integration. The cases of Ukraine and the South Caucasus, though, are much more complicated and resistant to change. A societal tradition of full dependence on Russian tsarist and – later on – Bolshevik model, no legacy of Western style modernization, let alone – democratization, strong culture of kinship and patriarchal syncretism – those are only the first key factors of structural weakness of modernizing elites, urban strata and professional middle class in those societies. Russian domination – direct and obscured – on national economies,

security systems and intellectual–cultural fields (in particular – in Ukraine) is efficiently enforced. If national potential for change is more or less successfully mobilized – as in the case of Georgia - a scenario of regulated ethnic conflicts is put into action. We have series of “frozen” and “melting” conflicts throughout the post-Soviet space, indicating systematic efforts of Russia to jeopardize successful nation-building on modern democratic basis – Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transdnistria. Nagorno Karabakh – which has more specific and autonomous root causes in Armenian – Azeri relationships, is used by Russia to maintain control over the South Caucasus too.

Fragile and inexperienced reformist elites tend to produce hectic political coalitions, easy to block while in government, overburdened by inter-personal animosities and discords. The latest developments in Ukraine, where four months of post-electoral deadlock ended up with victorious return of the pro-Russian, oligarchy-based Party of Regions in government, is a key case to the point.

The **external** obstacles to the US strategy for Euro-Atlantic integration of the Black Sea region have three basic dimensions. **First** come the realities, related to the post-September 11 strategic environment. The Black Sea strategy of the US was a consecutive part of a broader process of expanding the Euro-Atlantic strategic space, which gained momentum with the collapse of the Soviet dominated communist rule. Societies of Central and Eastern Europe, liberated from Soviet oppression have enthusiastically chosen the European integration model of development and the Euro-Atlantic system of security guarantees. More than that – the newly established democratic governments intensely lobbied Washington and the European capitals for faster accession into the international system and the organizations of the West. The democratic choice of these European post-communist countries completely coincided with the strategic agenda of the US to extend the frontiers of Euro-Atlantic space to the east, closer to the division lines with the world of Islam and China. Between 1998-2002 all ex-Soviet satellites in Europe, the three Baltic ex-Soviet republics included, joined NATO. The Alliance has hit the frontiers of post-Soviet space, the Black Sea in particular. The next step of successful development of Western strategy for integration should have been Ukraine, plus Georgia and most of the South Caucasus – anchored and included into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream. There came September 11.

The war on terror reshaped fundamentally the global strategic outlook of the US. From a strategic doctrine of multi-priority, globally balanced influence and control over the key trends of global development, the US government moved to one-dimensional, single-focus strategy of chasing and destroying the diversified net of radical Islamist cells around the world, aimed at preventing their ability to organize and hit targets on US territory. The war in Iraq – strange enough endeavor, even from the narrow perspective of the war on terror, additionally narrowed the strategic approach of the world sole superpower to global realities and to global challenges. One particular consequence of this state of affairs has been the relative delay and weakening of the Washington’s Black Sea strategy. .

The **second** external obstacle to efficient development of the US Black Sea strategy is closely related to the first. Having sensed the relative weakening of American power in the region, Russia – and to a lesser extent Turkey - have regained strategic initiative in the region. The detailed analysis of both regional powers’ strategies follows in the next chapter, yet it is important to mention several key phenomena, stemming out from the changing strategic balance in the region. Controversial developments in Ukraine and the concentrated efforts of the Kremlin to successfully jeopardize a governmental option of the Orange coalition after the

March elections was the first example: the Socialist leader A. Moroz and a number of his MP's defection from the Orange coalition was not incidental. The stagnation of "frozen conflicts" status quo in Georgia for the last 2-3 years is a second example to the case.⁵ Moscow has also decisively taken advantage of the discord between Washington and key Central Asian regimes – namely Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan - in order to push out or marginalize American military presence and political influence in the region. The principle rejection of Washington of the Andijon massacre has fully convinced Uzbek president Karimov that Moscow is much better friend to authoritarian leaders rather than the West and Washington in particular.⁶

The **third** external impediment to the US Black Sea strategy is the strategic discord between Washington and the major countries of continental Europe – the strategic departure between both sides of the Atlantic intensified particularly after 2002 in the context of the Iraq war dispute.⁷ At present we could hardly talk about any substantive compatibility between the policies of the US and the EU towards the Black Sea post-Soviet space. The discord is along the following lines. First - the attitudes towards Russia. While Washington perceives Moscow as an opponent, if not a rival in the key issues of Black Sea democratization and reformation agenda, Berlin and Paris share the understanding of Russia's legitimate right to keep its own sphere of influence around its borders in order to balance the extension of the Atlantic Alliance to the east. Based on that presumption, the major European capitals maintain cautious attitude towards the Georgian efforts of to transform its positions from a Russian satellite to a Western ally, from a backward dominion of Moscow, to a reformed partner of the West. The same European leaders were not very happy either to watch the Orange revolution in Kiev, which attempted to transform Ukraine from an amorphous buffer zone between Russia and Europe to a reformist applicant for NATO and EU membership.⁸

The second line of US – European discord in the Black Sea relates directly to the EU enlargement dilemma. The faster the EU enlargement to the east – the better - is the position of Washington. The EU enlargement adds economic and social stability to the regions, integrated into the Euro-Atlantic security space through the NATO enlargement. This has been the model of interdependence between NATO and EU membership for the ex-communist countries in CEE – NATO membership opened the door for EU accession. This model of interdependence does not work anymore. There is an open rebellion in Brussels – a refusal to follow the path of further enlargement commitments after the "Big Bang" of ten new members in 2004, plus Bulgaria and Romania waiting for January 1, 2007, plus Croatia knocking on the door for 2009, and Turkey further in the line. The politically correct definition for this rebellion is "enlargement fatigue". Yet, there's a silently shared consensus among many European leaders and citizens that the US pursues a hidden agenda of jeopardizing European unity and political integration through speedy enlargement, in order to prevent Europe from becoming a major international competitor to American might. Whatever the arguments behind "enlargement fatigue", one thing is for sure – at least in the next decade, no further EU enlargement process in the Black Sea post-Soviet space is going to take place. If Europe is to assist the Black Sea strategy of the US, the accession into the EU will not be the instrument.

Summing up the external impediments to the Black Sea strategy of Washington in midterm perspective, we face a relatively unfavorable framework for successful transformation of the region from the perspective of the long term US interest. The Black Sea is sucked into the global maelstrom of a worsening environment for the US strategic interests. The geopolitical revival of Russia, based on rising energy prices, the growing influence of

Iran, based on the removal of Iraq's balancing role in the Middle East, the growing danger of an open civil war in Iraq, Turkey's growing discontent with the US and the clear attempts of Ankara to play its own role in the region, based on flexible alliances with US adversaries – all those factors coincide and interrelate into an environment of weakening America's strategic potential to influence the transformation and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Black Sea region. Instead of a region, integrated into the Western mainstream, a region of serious division lines and potential fault lines is shaping up. If the US does not succeed in reversing this trend, the general strategy of opening secure corridors to Central Asia and the larger Middle East in order to favorably face the geo-strategic contests of the 21st century may generally be doomed to failure.

2. United Europe and the Black Sea

To speak about a comprehensive EU strategy towards the Black Sea is more appropriate in future, rather than in past or present tense.⁹ The European presence in Ukraine or the South Caucasus after 1991 is measured mostly by the activities of organizations like the OSCE, the Council of Europe and by programs for developmental assistance of the EU like TACIS. There was little, if any practical cooperation between Brussels and the BSEC – the only multilateral institution of economic and political partnership around the Black Sea. Being overwhelmed by its internal institutional evolution after Maastricht, by the priority of assisting the reform processes in CEE, and in particular with the post-conflict settlement of the Western Balkans, the EU could allocate few if any resources to the Black Sea reform and transformation process. Some major European countries have been quite active in trying to mediate in particular conflicts of the post-Soviet Black Sea space, yet their approach has been quite cautious not to anger the former imperial master and present superpower of the region – Russia.

The Black Sea appeared on the Brussels radar screen with the accession of the CEE countries into the EU in 2004, and – even more so – with the expected accession of Bulgaria and Romania, both littoral countries in the Black Sea basin. The Turkish membership negotiations, even if presuming membership at best within a 10-15 years period, are also motivating the strategic planners of Brussels to consider the agenda of the region as part of the immediate neighborhood of the EU. The interest towards the Black Sea among the EU members is uneven. Poland, the Baltic republics and Slovakia are acting very intensely in favor of reform processes in Ukraine, in assisting the democratic governments around the Black Sea to resist Russian pressure and successfully fulfill their nation-building and democratization agenda. The support for the GUAM countries, the involvement of new CEE members of the EU into initiatives like the CDC (Commonwealth for Democratic Choice), the Black Sea Forum (organized by Romania), the group of six countries “Friends of Georgia”, established in 2004 – those are only the most essential examples of CEE EU members assistance to the transformation of the ex-Soviet Black Sea countries.

The interests of larger EU countries in the Black Sea are mostly structured through their relationships with Russia. The fundamentally positive attitudes of Paris and Berlin towards Russia make them cautious in intervening in issues and effects of Russian arbitrary policies towards the fragile and helpless ex-Soviet republics – the ethnic conflicts, territorial separatism efforts and criminal puppet regimes, established or sustained by Moscow. The danger of being involved deeper into the labyrinth of irresolvable conflicts, tribal contests and hectic geopolitical environment of regions like the South Caucasus, prevents major European

capitals from adopting clear and efficient political standing on the regional agenda. There's also another reason for Brussels to be cautious – the EU pattern of resolving problems is through stabilization – association, integration and accession. Throughout the period after 1990, the US, together with all newly established democratic governments of CEE have strongly advocated enlargement of the EU to the east as fast as possible. So far, the strongest weapon of successful European intervention has been integration and further accession. The problems of “absorption capacity” that the EU encounters after the “Big Bang” of 2004-2007 makes it hardly possible, if not suicidal to seriously consider the Black Sea post-Soviet countries in an agenda of potential further enlargement in the observable future. The EU had to invent the policy of the New Neighborhood.¹⁰

The ENP is a concept, designed to provide the answer to a basic strategic dilemma of the EU. On the one hand, the EU has exhausted its capacity to interrelate and cooperate with its neighbors on the basis of the enlargement presumption – in which a successful cooperation process with a country leads to accession.¹¹ No further enlargement in the observable future is possible – neither from institutional capacity perspective (after the adoption of the EU Constitution failed at the French and Dutch referenda of 2005), nor from the point of view of public opinion in Europe. On the other hand, Europe has to seriously consider its interest and obligation to influence and support the reformist and democratic nation-building processes in its eastern periphery, the Black Sea included. It's hardly possible for Brussels – or for the member states, to ignore dictatorial rule in Belarus, to tolerate Transdniestrian neo-communist junta in Tiraspol, to stand the influences of a neighborhood with a network of criminal gangster type puppet governments in fragmented and conflicting zones like the Caucasus, the Western Balkans and others. Neither is it in Europe's interest to neglect the collapse of modern reformist elites in neighboring Islamic societies in favor of religious radicalism and fundamentalism. It is important for Europe to sustain and extend its potential to influence democratic reform, modern economic and institutional development, to support neighboring nations' capacities to fight corruption, organized crime, inter-communal intolerance and tribal fragmentation.

The ENP is an instrument, designed to develop European policies for support and assistance of neighboring nations outside the institutional process of accession negotiations. European institutions have had three levels of influencing reformist policies and transformation after 1989. The **first level** represents the threshold of Council of Europe membership. General criteria for representative government and human rights respect apply here, and the accession is relatively easy.¹² The **second level** applies to the process of association with the EU.¹³ Even if associate membership opens clear perspective for future full accession whenever the country is prepared, the influence of the EU over the domestic developments of the associate member remains largely consultative and general. It is only the **third level** of negotiations for full membership accession, which provides Brussels with explicit instruments to influence, press and claim the adequate reforms and transformation from the candidate country in order to fully comply with the criteria of the *acquis communautaire*.

The principle task in front of the ENP is to develop powerful instruments of influence and cooperation with neighboring countries, in order to successfully assist on bilateral basis their strategies for development and modernization. Of course, this principle task applies only to nations which wish to develop and modernize in the European way. It's inapplicable – no doubt – to nations and regimes that have chosen other tracks for development. If we come back to the Black Sea context, it is very important to see the ENP strategy applied in relation

to the reformist post-Soviet countries of the region. The bilateral format of the ENP supports the requirement to address different issues in different regional and national environments – Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan. A successful cooperation within the ENP format could provide the neighboring countries with a substantive part of resources, technical assistance, market access and institutional support, which are granted at full scale to the accession countries and underdeveloped members of the EU.

Apart from the ENP as a bilateral instrument of implementing EU strategy towards the new neighborhood, broader frameworks to integrate the neighboring countries to the European mainstream could also prove useful. A **multilateral approach** may contribute to the establishment of a commonwealth of countries – not necessarily all European by territorial location and culture identity – which share the values, principles and strategic aims of united Europe in the global world. Such **European Commonwealth of Nations** could develop as an outer – looser circle of European integration, complimentary to the EU itself. The EU could develop a space of friendly nations, surrounding the community of full member states through maintaining that kind of a loose multilateral framework of institutional partnership. Including the Black Sea region countries into the EU Commonwealth format could prove a powerful impetus to stabilization and reform success in the region. It will create a solid background for the longer term relationship between the EU and Russia. It will develop the strategic role of the EU as a legitimate player in the region, which Russia and Turkey tend to consider a realm of their natural hegemony.

The efficiency of the EU strategy towards the Black Sea region as part of the New Neighborhood of Europe is subject to several major factors. **First** comes the factor of successful development of the European CSFP and synthesis of integrated policy positions among the member states. Substantial differences between “new” and “old” Europe, as well as between left and center-right political positions of Western Europeans towards Russia, towards the Atlantic partnership policies, the policies of energy security in Europe etc., will more or less directly affect the ability of the EU to participate with relevant authority in the power balances in the Black Sea region. **Second**, the EU policies towards the Black Sea require a more detailed assessment of European interests in the region, within the larger context of the general European economic, developmental and political strategy in the present world. The initiative of German Chancellor Ms. Angela Merkel to initiate a comprehensive Black Sea strategy project of Europe in the framework of the upcoming German presidency of the EU is very positive news in this perspective. **Third**, the efficiency of a EU Black Sea strategy is dependent upon the initiative and capacity of the member states directly bordering the region, primarily Bulgaria and Romania (members after January 1, 2007), to promote in Brussels a vision of the region’s problems, challenges and opportunities.

Last, but not least, a successful strategy of Europe towards the Black Sea is dependent upon the capacity of Brussels and Washington to coordinate their visions and priorities for the region and its larger context. After 2002 few people believe in the likelihood to restore an integrated structure of interests of the Western Alliance. Nevertheless, identifying common causes and interests of the transatlantic partners remains crucial to defending the common security space and the stability of the West in a world of growing unpredictability and global transformation. The world of multi-polarity, which is shaping up in the post-Iraq global environment will push Europe and the US to recognize sooner the communality, rather than the diversity of interest between them.

II. THE *STATUS QUO* POWERS OF THE BLACK SEA

Both major powers of the Black Sea – Russia and Turkey - tend to decisively oppose (each one of them in its own way) the penetration of security and development infrastructure of the West into the region, which has been – now for more than five centuries – the realm of their bilateral contest and power balance. One thing is beyond doubt – Russia and Turkey will continue to compete for influence and control over the smaller nations and ethnic communities around the Black Sea shore. It is an issue of their common vital interest, however, to prevent outer players to intervene into their bilateral equation of power in the region. Both countries share elements of common strategy to prevent – and push out - Western military, naval and political interference into the Black Sea. Both countries develop intense strategy for mutual economic and political cooperation.¹⁴ Yet, each one of them develops specific strategic approach of defending - and extending its own grip over the realm of the Black Sea. Russia is a former superpower, reduced to a secondary role in global politics after 1991, but harboring strong ambitions to return to the first line of world powers. We've seen the start of those ambitions' implementation in the last year, when a concentrated energy policy, in a combination with strong diplomatic efforts to build anti-Western alliances, has brought Russia to the fore of world politics in the context of US sinking in Iraq and in the Iran nuclear dispute.

Turkey is a key member of the Atlantic Alliance, performing a viable role in the South-Eastern tier of the Western strategic realm. Yet, Ankara is strongly alienating itself from the US strategy to deal with the agenda of the Middle East and the war on terror. Turkey refuses to cooperate with the US in extending international military and naval control over the Black Sea, claiming to save its naval monopoly and privilege based on the 1936 *Montreux Convention*. A combination of revived Big Power revisionist appetites and deep frustration, caused by the controversial treatment of Turkey by the West (by the US in the Iraq war and by the EU in Turkey's accession controversies) pushes Turkey into a strategic game of its own, including the agenda of the Black Sea.

1. Russia and the Black Sea

Reduced to the scope of the Black Sea region, Russia's global strategic framework is reflected into two basic strategic dimensions: **passive** dimension of resistance, and **active** dimension of powerful geopolitical return through the policies of energy. The **passive dimension** of Russia's Black Sea strategy concerns the policies of preserving as much as possible of the *status quo*, inherited from the Cold War period. With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania into NATO the territorial *status quo* of Soviet times could not be maintained anymore. The presence of the Western Alliance at the shores of the Black Sea has become a matter of fact. Reducing this fact to the least possible strategic value is the core purpose of Russian policies in the region. Provided that the Black Sea has the value of a **strategic corridor**, connecting Europe to the Caucasus, to the Caspian and to Central Asia, the most important thing is to cork, to plug up this corridor, to turn it into a dead end, an impasse for the Western security and developmental infrastructure. Jeopardizing politically Ukraine's and Georgia's application for NATO membership is one possible instrument to pursue this aim. Causing and maintaining low intensity conflicts in the "bottlenecks" of the Black Sea region – like the South Caucasus - is another instrument, used by Russia. The ethno-communal contests effectively fragment the fragile national structures of post-Soviet republics, putting

into jeopardy the key prerequisite for those countries to join the Western Alliance – institutional stability, transparency and rule of law.

Understanding Russia's strategy towards the Black Sea requires assimilating two formal paradoxes of Kremlin's power. **First**, for a society like post-Soviet Russia, shaken by deep crises of identity, economy, demography and welfare, to focus on domestic reform and revival seems to be the only natural and reasonable approach – in particular after president Putin's program to rebuild Russia was put into action. Paradoxically enough, post-Soviet Russia has spent a very sizable share of its efforts to empower and sustain marionette type of oppressive splinter regimes around the ex-Soviet periphery. Only in Georgia Moscow installed and supported the separatist regimes in Adjara¹⁵, Abkhazia and South Osetia, headed by local thugs and/or KGB officers. In Moldova, Russia backs the neo-communist junta of Transdnistria region. The Lukashenka regime in Belarus also enjoys substantial Russian support. Intervening in the elections of Ukraine was part of the same phenomenon of post-Soviet Russia being overwhelmed by developments in the "near abroad" rather than by pending domestic challenges like poverty, demography and health care, organized crime and institutional inefficiency (to enlist just a few).

Secondly, in international terms post-Soviet Russia is pressed by two powerful phenomena, most likely to shape the long-term fortunes of the country to survive and develop as a sizable international factor.¹⁶ These are the expansion of radical Islam from the South and the growth of China into a superpower of the 21st century in the East. The demographic expansion of the Muslim community of Russia, together with growing Islamist penetration into the southern periphery of the country, supporting separatism, terrorism and destruction of governmental control, are problems of irresolvable nature for the Russian government of today and in the observable future. The growth of a 1.3 billion strong China on the edge of scarcely populated Siberia may prove even bigger danger than Islam for Russia's independence and territorial integrity in a perspective of the next few decades. Paradoxically enough, official statements and doctrines of the last decade in Moscow focus primarily on the danger of ... NATO enlargement in CEE and "the ambitions of the West" ... to "decompose Russia" and, allegedly – "conquer" it. What is the logic of ignoring the obvious long-term challenges to Russian security in favor of underlying "the threat", coming out of NATO membership for the Baltic republics, Poland or of independent Georgia for Russian security and wellbeing?

Exporting domestic pressure into conquest abroad is possibly the most fundamental principle of imperial policy in human history, Russian imperial history included. Today, like in many other circumstances in the past, the Kremlin team feels sizable shortage of opportunities to cope with the enormous scope of domestic problems within such a gigantic territorial proximity and communal diversity. Success in outward expansion is the cheapest available instrument to achieve domestic consolidation and self-confidence. This is how small operations to split and integrate negligible (in the context of huge Russian landmass) parts of neighboring Georgia and Moldova become irresistible to the Kremlin. The bad news for all other small neighbors is the necessity of Moscow to apply the same instrument further in time in order to maintain domestic pride and integrity intact. This is how the NATO enlargement becomes a threat, and peaceful, soft Euro-Atlantic periphery of CEE becomes a favorite target for Russia's ambition for a successful geopolitical return on the global stage.

Adverse policies towards Russia's neighborhood serve also another important reason, apart from exporting domestic pressure in the "near abroad",. All serious politicians and experts in Moscow understand perfectly well the unavoidable logic of aligning Russia with

the West in order to meet the geopolitical challenges of 21st century. There's no community of long-term interest neither between Russia and the world of Islam, nor with China as superpower. The dilemma of Russia is not whether to align with the West. The dilemma is what price should the West pay for aligning with Russia, what is the price of the Russian bride in the family of the allied West? If Ukraine becomes an independent and democratic country – member of the NATO and the EU, if the South Caucasus and Central Asia evolve into open and easy accessible trade routes and strategically accessible territories to the West, Russia could be reduced to a sizable and important, yet ordinary member of the Western Alliance. If Ukraine is kept under the auspices of the Kremlin, if the South Caucasus is blocked by numerous and endless ethno-tribal contests, if Central Asia is kept under the despotism of local, friendly to Moscow personal feudal regimes, and Eastern Europe is cyclically shaken under the threat of energy blockade – then the price of Moscow as partner and ally is jumping high. Whether this assumption is truthful to the power holders in Washington or Brussels is not of key importance. The fact that matters is that it is truthful and reliable for the power holders in Moscow. Empire sells best.

An important psychological – cultural factor of identity and political value system of Russian elites is additionally supportive to the strategy of **passive resistance** of Moscow towards its long-term partners in the West, while aligning with Russia's most dangerous rivals in the East and in the South (namely – China and Iran). This factor could be defined as “authoritarian temptation”.¹⁷ Deep in their minds, the post-Soviet leaders harbor strong anxiety towards the West (the Cold War defeat is only one reason for it). This is combined with slightly hidden contempt and disgust at Western democracy with its restrictive checks and balances of power. The liberalization of the 1990s, designed after Western democracy is blamed for the blows on Russia's statehood. Chinese and Islamist despotism is much closer and understandable for the current post-Soviet elite, originating mostly from the hierarchy of the KGB. “Authoritarians from all countries – unite”, could be the intimate logo of this deep affinity between Beijing, Teheran and Moscow, behind the official purpose of their alliance – to promote a multi-polar world order.

The fragmentation through low intensity conflicts of regions like the South Caucasus also serves as a legitimization tool for Russia's military forces to stay in key zones of geopolitical importance to Moscow, officially involved in peace keeping on the dividing lines between clashing communities. Russia's military presence in such areas does not necessarily serve only as a barrier to Western interference – it may well guard old geopolitical frontiers like the one with the Ottoman Empire (and later – with the Turkish Republic), cutting through the border between Turkey and Armenia. From the perspective of international law it is difficult to explain the multiple roles, which Russia plays in conflicts like those in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russian military have initiated and organized the conflicts, support separatist authorities against the legitimate Georgian government, and perform “peace keeping operations” between Georgian and separatist forces, while Kremlin diplomacy often “mediates” between the “conflicting parties”.

Another instrument for Russia to sustain the regional *status quo* and to prevent further Western interference is the support Moscow provides for Turkey's firm commitment to safeguard the clauses of the *Montreux Convention* for admitting foreign naval forces for a period, not larger than 21 days.¹⁸ Both Turkey and Russia insist on the Black Sea Force and Black Sea Harmony formats of naval cooperation among the littoral countries, refusing to admit other NATO members' vessels into the Black Sea aquatory.

Russia is also aligned with Turkey in supporting the BSEC as the single legitimate multilateral format of Black Sea economic and political cooperation. Apart from neighboring non-littoral countries like Greece, Serbia and Azerbaijan, major countries of Europe and the US have access to the BSEC infrastructure only in consultative – observers’ status. Without providing too big benefits to its members in the last 15 years, because of its loose structure and bureaucratic inflexibility, the BSEC has practically maintained so far the Russian – Turkish hegemony in the lethargic regional debate for economic and political cooperation around the Black Sea.¹⁹

The **active dimension** of Russia’s policy for geopolitical control over the Black Sea is focused on using energy flows and exports for strategic political purposes. Since the early 1990s, gas, and to a lesser extent – oil exports, have been the key resource for economic survival and geopolitical influence of post-Soviet Russia.²⁰ “Gasprom” has been the only system, functioning on the entire gigantic territory of Russia at the time when the great country has started to split into regions on economic and institutional-administrative grounds. Historically, the key principle of Russia’s statehood has always been **ironclad centralization** and in the period after Yeltsin, “Gasprom” has played its part in restoring central government control over Russia. “Gazprom” is vested with a similar role in the foreign policy domain, being the main instrument of Russia’s outward expansion. There, the key principle of Russia’s energy exports and trade is **monopolization**, direct full dependence and reliance upon Moscow for energy.

In the 1990s “Gasprom” strongly attempted to buy and concentrate control over the entire gas pipelines infrastructure on the territory of ex-Soviet CEE satellites and the ex-Soviet republics, in order to establish monopoly in decision making on gas supplies and gas transit through the region to outer Europe. Governments have been shaken and removed from power for declining Moscow’s offers to give up gas pipelines. The refusal of Bulgaria and Romania to sell the gas pipelines infrastructure to “Gasprom” has led to the construction of the “Blue Stream” pipeline at the bottom of the Black Sea, connecting Russian and Turkish territory.²¹ The exports of Russian oil followed the same logic (yet with less successful results than with gas) of closing technological and property cycle in a system of full monopoly of Russian companies, with the purchase of oil refineries, gas stations’ networks and removal of alternative – Middle Eastern – sources of crude oil and gas supplies. Russia struggled hard, yet with no success, to jeopardize the alternative routes for Caspian oil exports to the West – the BTC pipeline represents the first independent from Moscow route for mineral fuels’ exports from former Soviet territory westwards.

With the significant authoritarian centralization swing of the second Putin government, the ambitions of Russia to utilize energy exports for significant geo-strategic purposes have grown immensely. In late 2005, using the favorable environment of US government immersed and hypnotized with Iraq and the war on terror, Mr. Putin’s team performed a vast scale brilliant operation of powerful geopolitical return of Russia on the global scene. The operation included the following elements: **First**, agreement with the German Chancellor for constructing the Baltic gas pipeline shortcut between Russian and German soil, bypassing Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic republics and their gas transfer infrastructure. This shortcut is the northern correlate of the Black Sea “Blue Stream” project. **Second**, urgent and unexpected claims for “world market” gas prices, made by “Gasprom” to Ukraine, Georgia and all other CIS countries. The political turmoil was unexpected and very painful and destabilizing for all pro-Western governments in the region. **Third**, Moscow negotiated agreements with Turkmenistan, Iran and Algeria for full-scale cartelization of the

European gas market.²² **Fourth**, series of “special agreements” are pursued by Moscow for doubling the gas transfer infrastructure under the “Gasprom” control.²³ The basic purpose of such doubling is to concentrate all possible routes for energy (gas in particular) diversification in Russian hands, and – in this way – to jeopardize the very opportunity for diverse and balanced energy flows into Europe. **Fifth**, large scale projects of Russian investment and development of the energy systems of many European countries have been undertaken in order to further reduce sources of energy flows out of Russian control on European soil. The growing prices of oil, reflected in the rapid growth of Russia’s GDP figures have supported those investment projects’ implementation.²⁴

The results of the Kremlin energy monopolization plan have been more or less spectacular, in particular in Europe, where all talks of energy diversification leave an explicit taste of impotence and discord. A country with the GDP of the Netherlands – as Russia was in 2004 – has managed to implement a strategy of subordinating the entire Old Continent to its interest through establishing a practical monopoly of energy flows – in particular in CEE. In the realm of the Black Sea the effects of Russia’s energy monopoly will be even more direct and immediate – both in terms of economic balances and cooperation, and in terms of geopolitical – strategic impact. The collapse of the Orange coalition of Ukraine and the establishment of an Orange – Blue government, the successful jeopardizing of NATO’s “Active Endeavor” transfer to the Black Sea, the stagnation in the Euro-Atlantic Black Sea strategy are the first indicators for a changing strategic balance in favor of Russia and the *status quo* powers of the region in general.

It is highly uncertain for how long Russia’s successful geopolitical return on the energy monopoly ticket could hold. Prices of oil will most likely continue to rise for the observable future. Europe will continue to be directly dependent at disproportionate levels on Russian energy flows. The US strategic involvement in hot spots outside Europe and the Black Sea will obviously deepen, which could further slow down the Atlantic Black Sea strategy dynamics. After partially regaining positions in the post-Soviet periphery, Russia may also try to extend its strategic influence in the “soft belly” of Europe – the Balkans, where controversial post-conflict settlement fails to achieve significant results. Yet the longevity of Russian strategic success, based on energy monopoly is uncertain. First, there are few – if any indicators of successful re-investing of the abundant oil money into the Russian economy and infrastructure development. High-tech elites and modern technological development occupy marginal positions in Russia of today. There is an obvious absence of administrative infrastructure, of market and political mechanisms to address the pending issues and challenges of demography, welfare, health care and education. The governing team in the Kremlin commands high level of skills for strategic planning and operational abilities, but highly insufficient resources to influence societal, economic and human development. That makes it difficult for Russia to invest in a long-term strategic success.

2. Turkey and the Black Sea

It is really interesting to elaborate on the logic of Turkey’s transformation from a most devoted Euro-Atlantic partner in the Cold War to a *status quo* power in the Black Sea region. Turkey has a complex legacy of relationships with Russia. The Ottoman Empire was the key rival and obstacle to Russia’s imperial strategy to conquer the Straits and reach the shores of the “warm seas” southwards. Both empires fought for every inch of Black Sea littoral territory and for control over both regions of strategic importance in the Russian-Ottoman contest – the

Balkans and the Caucasus. After the Bolshevik revolution – and with the establishment of the Turkish republican government - the Soviet regime proved the most ardent supporter of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his republican project. Significant ideological, political and organizational influence of Lenin’s Bolsheviks contributed to the constituting of independent Turkish Republic.

In the Cold War era Turkey was completely absorbed into the strategic agenda of the Atlantic community for one simple reason – Soviet power has “sandwiched” the country from north and south – through involving Syria and other parts of the Middle East into its strategic realm of influence. In this way the Kremlin pushed Ankara into closer cooperation with the West as a collective guardian of Turkey’s independence. The modern pro-European – pro-Western ideology of Kemalism has additionally supported Ankara’s integration into the Atlantic Alliance.

The collapse of Soviet communism has coincided with the end of the “golden decade” of Turkey’s economic and political development. Emerging from the military coup of 1980, the government of Turgut Özal has managed to gradually transform the ideological and the economic legacy of Turkey. The *etatiste* economic system gave way to the orthodoxy of fashionable neo-liberalism, and the Kemalist political – ideological integrity has been cautiously, yet insistently loosened and diversified. Together with its staunch secularism, Kemalism adopted non-interventionist doctrine of neighborhood and foreign policy – “Peace in Turkey – Peace in the World”. Özal insistently injected into Turkish political visions growing portions of reconciliation with the country’s Islamic legacy, and sincere pride of the Ottoman past as a superb expression of “Turkishness”. The new economic and political might of the country boosted pan-Turkish sentiments and ambitions at the very moment when the Soviet superpower collapsed – with a number of republics with Turkic population emerging formally independent out of Soviet rule.²⁵

Turkey initiated two major projects to reflect its new might and regional importance – one designed to integrate the post-Soviet Turkic republics to the pan-Turkish visions of Ankara (Turks live “from the Adriatic to the Great China Wall”), and a second one designed to install Turkey as the major power of the Black Sea. The institutional framework for the second project was developed through the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) initiative. It has become clear in the first half of the 1990s that the Caucasus and Central Asia Turkic communities could not be integrated into a Great Turkish political project. Series of cultural, economic and important political – strategic factors prevented easy success of Ankara in turning its pan-Turkish sentiments into geopolitical power and supremacy. The resources of Turkey itself proved smaller than needed to cope with such an ambitious task, and the rumors of total collapse of Russia together with communism proved vastly exaggerated. Instead of enjoying new imperial fortunes in Asia and the Caucasus, Ankara had to urgently cope with the PKK rebellion on its own soil.

Turkey enjoyed better results in the Black Sea dimension.²⁶ The BSEC did not serve as an appropriate instrument to extending Turkish economic and political interests in the field of regional cooperation. The economic destruction and the institutional disintegration of most post-communist countries in the region produced weak governments, impotent to stand the obligations, accepted by them in the multilateral format of the BSEC. Turkish endeavor with the BSEC proved successful in a longer term in two basic ways. **First**, it has created a regional format of economic and political partnership, where Turkey enjoys the position of a “superpower”. **Second**, the other superpower of the region – Russia, was unexpectedly

strongly attracted by the BSEC format. Both historical rivals – Russia and Turkey – have found an institutional design of cooperatively sharing their bilateral hegemony over the Black Sea region. The BSEC did not matter much for the smaller countries of the region. Yet it delivered a lot in boosting economic, commercial and political cooperation between Moscow and Ankara, raising step by step the level of confidence between them. Step by step, year by year, economic partnership and political cooperation would lead to a community of strategic interest, to a deeper and longer term affinity between both countries' visions for the region and for the world.

Throughout the 1990s, Turkey remained a staunch ally in the Atlantic community, maintaining traditional special relationships with the US on the basis of its viable position as a bridgehead of the West in the Middle East. Turkey's alienation from its major partner in the West started in early 2000s, with two major transformations in America's global strategy. The **first** of them relates directly to the 9/11 events and the American strategy for war on terror. The complex restructuring of the Middle East as the backbone of President Bush's administration strategy for war on terror affected directly Turkey's vision and practices of national security. The war in Iraq provided growing autonomy to the Kurds in the North – with all possible repercussions on Turkey's internal war with the PKK and the Turkey's Kurdish question in general. Turkey's commercial routes with the Arabic world were complicated or terminated. The new outburst of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in the Islamic world has put Turkey as an Atlantic partner – particularly governed by the Islamist AK Party – into dire straits of relationships with the Islamic world. The nuclear crisis with Iran – if it enters a hot phase, could additionally compromise Turkish national security – both in re-shaking again the Kurdish issue and in putting Ankara into the frontline between its major Atlantic partner and the Islamic world, to which Turkey belongs.

The **second** transformation of global Atlantic strategy refers to the growing importance of the Black Sea after a decade of integrating CEE countries as full members of NATO. Turkey supported NATO enlargement “from Talin to Bourgas”, but now it is hesitant to see the Black Sea realm fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream. Turkish national doctrine – much as the Russian one - harbors traditional nationalist-imperial worldview of the 19th century. The world is composed of bigger Powers, with their spheres of hegemony and control over smaller powers, and a system of balancing among the Powers of the day produces a viable international system. For Ankara (and for Moscow either) the Black Sea is a Turkish-Russian lake. America and Europe are welcome to care about the strategic identity of the Black Sea – but only through partnership and mediation of the hegemonic powers of the region. The West has Turkey as ally – why does America need to intervene in the region itself? There are two possible answers – mistrust or arrogance - both very offensive for the proud Turks... This type of logic is explicitly manifested in Turkish inexorability to compromise with the *Montreux Convention* regulations and to let foreign - be it NATO allied - naval vessels for more than 21 days (as Article 18/2 of the Convention states).²⁷ The official Turkish position on the “Active Endeavor” operation of NATO to be extended from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea is negative, based on the argument that other littoral countries – that is the Russian Federation – will resist it.²⁸ Following this logic, littoral – “inner” powers have supremacy over NATO allies. Collective security – as meant by the strategic doctrines of Europe and the US - is a concept, recognized by Ankara only to the extent and in cases, in which Turkey benefits: as for example in the collective – consensual decision making in NATO on issues out of key Turkish national and security interest. Once the inner circle of Turkish regional – territorial and national security interests are affected (as in the case of Black Sea naval regime), collective decision making paradigm is being decisively

transformed into a Great Powers' 19th century "European Concert" mentality – "mine is mine, yours is common" approach.

Turkey's role and interest in the Black Sea will be significantly transformed with the country's accession into the EU. No one is certain when and for what period of time Turkish membership will become *fait accompli*, yet the key effects of Turkey being granted, or being denied membership, are relatively clear. Ankara has to fight for membership mostly on the grounds of its political adaptation to the norms and rules of the EU. Some basic obstacles in this context could be mentioned. **First**, the EU is a community of post-national – post-nationalist character, which does not welcome particularly ethnic nationalism and inter-communal conflicts, caused by oppression of ethnic minorities' rights. Turkey is a community of state and society, enthusiastically devoted to strong nationalist identity and nationalist pride, where any claim for ethnic or religious autonomy is generally considered as treason. **Second**, the nationalist doctrine of Turkey causes irresolvable conflicts with ethnocentric movements – as the one of the Kurds, claiming cultural and communal autonomy, long ago granted by all major European countries to their minorities. This doctrine has also led Turkey into an impasse on the issue of the Armenian slaughters in the early 20th century as the Turkish state does not recognize the killing of more than a million of Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire as genocide. **Third**, Turkish political identity is hard to adapt to EU standards because of both the practices of official secularism and political Islam. Secular character of the Turkish state is still guaranteed by the National Security Council, controlled by the army, and political Islam in government still tends to produce precedents, unacceptable for EU political rules – like the dispute for the criminal character of adultery.²⁹ **Last, but not least**, the issue of Cyprus seems to be an indelible division line between Ankara and Brussels.

If Turkey proves successful to implement necessary political reforms (or if Brussels at some point of negotiations decides to silently accept the *status quo*, wrapped in nominal adoption of the *acquis* by Ankara), the EU membership will definitely be granted. Turkey's membership will make dramatic difference in the Black Sea region. **First**, the EU accession will fully legitimize Turkey as a regional power on the Balkans in economic, demographic and political terms. There is no country in the region – neither a community of countries, which could balance the potential of Turkey in economic and demographic terms. The role, which Turkey insistently assigns for itself – as patron of all Turkish and Muslim minorities of the Balkan countries, and even in wider Europe³⁰ - will definitely provide Ankara with the resources to support and arbitrate inter-communal disputes of the Balkan countries in favor of its regional superpower status³¹. **Second**, as member of the EU Turkey will hold particular responsibility to initiate – and direct – the policies of united Europe towards its eastern and southern neighborhood. That will install Turkey as a powerful factor of influence (much more powerful than today) towards the Caucasus region and the Middle East. **Third**, EU membership will further extend Turkey's autonomy from the US and will reopen the contest for regional hegemony with Russia. It is questionable, however, whether the EU will be capable to function at the present level of institutional and political integration with a powerful member with uncompromising nationalist agenda as Turkey is. Some of the answers to this question will be provided in the next decade to come.

If Turkey is put on a very slow track towards EU membership, or is practically denied accession, the pressures to change the country's political identity will mount up. For the first time in modern history, we encounter a strong view of Eurasian identity of Turkey, shared by influential circles in Ankara. Eurasian ideology is part of this growing affinity between Turkey and Russia in the post-Cold War period, which signifies a widening scope of common

concerns, opportunities and interests. Both Moscow and Ankara are suspicious and mistrustful towards Europe's postmodern exercises in multiculturalism, decentralization of state power, liberal culture of growing diversity and pacifist-constructivist methodologies of interdependence as a background for security. Empire and traditional authoritarian nationalism sell much better on the Turkish-Russian political markets, pushing both countries closest to each other in their long history of relationships. If this growing affinity is transformed in a more established union of interest, we'll have to face a Black Sea region, dominated by Russian-Turkish interest, where Europe and the US will have to negotiate their strategies from an unprivileged position, or to confront the Russian-Turkish hegemony and *status quo*.³² The smaller littoral countries of the Black Sea will either be absorbed into the Russian-Turkish axes as satellites, or will have to adopt an uneasy position of representing the frontiers of the West *vis-à-vis* the powerful bilateral hegemony in the region.

III. THE COMMUNITY OF HOPEFUL: THE POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES OF THE BLACK SEA REGION

Apart from Russia and Turkey, the other countries of the Black Sea region share several common features and community of interests. **First**, they all represent post-communist societies, and with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, all they are post-Soviet republics. Nation-building, modernization, institutional transformation, democratic and market reform are their common agenda for the present and – for most of them – for the observable future. **Second**, all those countries have been part of one or of both major empires of the region – the Russian and the Ottoman - in large periods of their history, or throughout their history. Their national identity has been constituted through numerous battles for emancipation and independence. **Third**, most, if not all, of those countries (or at least large sections of their elites and general populace) desire and apply for membership in the institutions of security and development of the West – the NATO and the EU. It is essential for them to involve the West in the equation of their security and development as the key prerequisite to exit the vicious circle of repeating imperial dependencies of the past in their future. Therefore, all those countries represent a group of natural allies of the Western strategy to transform and integrate the Black Sea region into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream.

The communality of interest among the Black Sea post-communist nations is rather potential than effective at present. Unlike the Mediterranean, the Black Sea has not represented an integral region historically – neither in cultural, nor in economic – commercial and political terms. Both major sub-regions along the Black Sea coast – the Balkans and the Caucasus – do share similar agendas of development in history, but have always been parallel realities, with few if any precedents of interdependence or mutual influence. Ukraine has been an integral part of Russia and the USSR, and makes its first steps of independent existence after 1991. Geographic location and post-Soviet legacy also matter a lot in defining diversity among the Black Sea countries. Bulgaria and Romania, for being situated on the western flank of the region, were faster embraced by the integration process into the NATO and the EU. They have been part of the Soviet block, but not of the Soviet Union, which made their post-communist legacy easier to cope with and to overcome (even if their process of transformation is not over yet).

The countries of the South Caucasus pass through a painful process of nation-building and establishment of integral nation states, facing a broad variety of hostile factors and

obstacles in the process. Some of those obstacles spring from the relative weakness, or even absence of modern tradition of societal development, which makes it difficult to overcome tribal identities and conflicts, economic backwardness and political fragmentation and instability within the post-Soviet transitional environment. Additional barriers to development and reconciliation have been raised within a complicated environment of regional conflicts and disputes between major nations and communities of the region – Armenians and Azeris for example. Interference of Russia in the region, considered by Moscow to be a natural sphere of its interest, has led to several major conflicts, particularly on the territory of Georgia. These conflicts cannot be resolved without the goodwill of the Kremlin, or in a broader international framework of restoring the rules of international law towards cases like Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The same applies to Transdnistria in Moldova, even if it is far from the Caucasus. It is also important, in this context, to bring Turkey and Armenia to a reconciliatory process, which could lead to lifting the Turkish blockade on Armenia and to opening the Turkish – Armenian border.

Ukraine is a specific case of a post-Soviet country, searching for its identity and internal communal and cultural balance through a complex process of nation-building and political transformation. Countries like Ukraine, which share double identity, could serve both as bridges or frontlines between major civilizations or geopolitical divides. The controversial development of the Orange revolution is a case in point. It will take time for Ukrainian people to decide about their desired future, and it is important for Europe, the US and Russia to create and maintain decent environment for Ukraine's efforts to constitute itself as an independent and successful nation. Ukraine, for its size, location, economic and societal potential is a key partner in the Black Sea cooperation process. Most regional initiatives for democratic partnership – GUAM, the CDC, and the Black Sea Forum – could not be successful without the full value participation of Ukraine.

We can observe a mosaic picture of attitudes and policies among the post-Soviet – post-communist countries of the Black Sea region, towards Euro-Atlantic and EU integration processes. For **Georgia** NATO membership represents the vital precondition to stand for the country's independence and territorial integrity provided the adverse policies of Russia towards Tbilisi.³³ For **Armenia**, stuck into the long-term conflict with Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, partnership with Russia and Russian military presence represent a key factor to sustain territorial benefits and to guarantee independence for the Karabakh Armenians. Iran, on the other hand, is a valuable partner of Yerevan – in particular for energy supplies and for providing export markets to the small republic in blockade. This double dependence of Armenia on Russia and Iran does not presume public enthusiasm on behalf of Yerevan to join NATO, yet Armenian government has shown enough pragmatic interest in NATO's partnership programs like IPAP. Armenians – both in the country and of Diaspora generally view their country's future within the European – Euro-Atlantic context.

Azerbaijan is also hesitant to openly apply for integration into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream for a number of important reasons and concerns. The country is in complicated relationships with Russia for both the Karabakh issue, and – more importantly – for the policies of energy exports. Moscow has kept Azeri oil sealed within the single export route through Russian territory until the BTC pipeline has opened the alternative route to the coast of the Mediterranean. Azerbaijan also faces complicated agenda of relationships with Iran, where Azeri minority represents a bigger community than the Azeri's living in independent Azerbaijan. Maintaining a system of authoritarian rule (power has been transferred from

father to son Aliyevs and electoral procedures have been quite brutally violated) does not bring Azerbaijan closer to Atlantic partnership either.

For all post-Soviet republics EU membership is desired, yet unattainable goal for the foreseeable future. The EU enlargement capacity, the complexity of relationships between Russia and the EU, the complicated agenda of inter-communal conflicts and controversial political reforms are obstacles hard to surmount. The unbinding of the package NATO – EU membership, which served as a powerful stimulus to democratic reforms in CEE, does not support reformist incentives in the post-Soviet space either. It is in Europe's interest and EU responsibility to develop its neighborhood policies in a format, which could support the longer term strategy for full integration of post-Soviet periphery into the European mainstream.³⁴

Bulgaria and **Romania**, having almost completed the efforts for their double accession to the institutions of the West – NATO and the EU – have the responsibility to initiate and promote policies of efficient integration of the Black Sea countries into the European and the Atlantic community. Both countries represent the frontier of the West to the Black Sea and it is in their direct interest to extend those frontiers further to the East. Sofia and Bucharest follow considerably different policies in the Black Sea context in the last years, dependent on their specific legacy and present policy agenda. Lately Bucharest has been more active than Sofia in the Black Sea regional policies. Romanians' perception of selves as "Latin bridgehead" into a "Sea of Slavs" brings them to more explicit pro-Atlantic and anti-Russian standing in assessing the Black Sea agenda. Bucharest has also the ambition to lead Black Sea cooperation process from the positions of the Atlantic community, which causes wrathful reactions both in Moscow and Ankara. Bulgaria, with its historic affinity towards Russia, and with its sizable Turkish minority, over-represented in Bulgarian government – has a narrower space to initiate pro-Western Black Sea policies. Yet all official documents and positions of consecutive Bulgarian governments confirm the country's interest and responsibility to the Black Sea region from the perspectives of its belonging to the institutions of the West. Both Sofia and Bucharest will have shortly after their EU accession to transform principle political standings into concrete policy proposals for common European Black Sea strategy.³⁵

With all the delicacy of their Black Sea policies *versus* the regional superpowers Russia and Turkey, both Bulgaria and Romania have supported – until the very last moment, the extension of NATO "Active Endeavor" operation from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Sofia and Bucharest did not get "Active Endeavor" into the Black Sea, but the success of Turkey – with Russian support – to keep the Black Sea as a closed lake for NATO cooperation raises an important question and principled debate. NATO countries – Bulgaria and Romania included – have chosen membership in the Alliance in order to enjoy the privilege of common security. What is the value of NATO membership for Sofia and Bucharest, if Turkey and Russia will keep for themselves the exclusive right to naval hegemony in the Black Sea?³⁶

With its entire mosaic diversity and particularity of interest, the policy agenda of Black Sea post-communist countries is concentrated and homogenized around one basic priority – to support and promote the strategies of integrating the Black Sea region into the mainstream of Euro-Atlantic security and development. It is only the Euro-Atlantic perspective, which could help the region to get rid of its legacy of imperial contest, communal fragmentation and autarchic isolation, reproduced for centuries by the Big Powers of the

Black Sea. The worst case scenario for the Black Sea region is a new *status quo* and strategic balance among major international factors – the US, Europe, Turkey and Russia – splitting the region into rival pieces and fractions. We all need to push geopolitical divides and rivalries – if they're unavoidable – as much further to the East as possible. The best-case scenario for the Black Sea is the homogeneous geopolitical integration of the region to the West.

IV. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR BLACK SEA SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN SHORT AND MIDTERM PERSPECTIVE

The alternative options for implementing the Euro-Atlantic Black Sea strategy in the next 3-5 years should be considered within the classical scale of **optimism**, **pessimism** and **realism** from the perspective of likelihood to accomplish the following basic strategic tasks. **First** comes the NATO enlargement in the Black Sea region. To consider the enlargement task as being successfully accomplished would mean at least to have a clear road map and time schedule of NATO accession at least for Georgia, Ukraine and – possibly – Moldova at the summit of 2008. Georgia is the only country where the political prerequisites for membership – that is good will, institutional adjustment and security sector reform – might prove sufficiently accomplished for setting an accession timeline. With Mr. Yanukovich in office as prime minister of Ukraine, it is unlikely that Kiev would be willing or able to deliver seriously upon the NATO accession goal within the next 2-3 years. In Moldova we also have a combination of political determination to go on with democratic reforms with a controversial agenda of conflict management of Transdnistrian issue and institutional fragility hindering the security sector reform. The strong opposition and the concerted efforts of Russia to prevent further NATO enlargement in its “near abroad” further reduce the chances for fast track accession process within the post-Soviet Black Sea space. It is most likely that NATO is going to focus on an extended agenda of partnership programs and adaptation schemes anticipating more favorable political environment to accomplish an enlargement effort in the region.

The second important strategic task of the Atlantic agenda is resolving the “frozen conflicts” issue. It is partly possible to improve the conflict situation and push ahead the resolution process as in the case with the Kodori Gorge³⁷ in Abkhazia this summer, and with the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh issue in a series of consecutive measures and partial goals accomplishment.³⁸ It is not realistic, though, to seriously consider final settlement of the “frozen conflicts” issue without an agreement between Russia and the US about the general format of their strategic relationships, in the Black Sea region in particular. The “frozen conflicts” zones are hostages to Russia's strategic gambling with the American superpower on the general framework of their bilateral relations. There could hardly be any substantial improvement of the “frozen conflicts” agenda before the issues of this framework are being sorted out.

Third, after the successful attempt of Moscow to consolidate its energy exports strategy and impose practical monopoly of Russian gas supplies – in particular for Eastern Europe – the success of the Euro-Atlantic Black Sea strategy will also be measured by the degree of guaranteeing diversity of energy supplies for the region. The fragile agreements of Georgia with Azerbaijan and of Armenia with Iran for gas imports, bypassing “Gasprom” are far from achieving real diversity, let alone independence from Russian supplies. It is an extremely complicated mosaic of interest, involving Turkey, Iran, Kazakhstan, Europe and a

number of other governmental and corporate players, which determines the logic of growing energy dependency of Eastern Europe, and the Black Sea in particular, on Russia. The only realistic project for gas supply diversification – the Nabuco pipeline – is dependent upon Turkmen and Iranian gas. “Gasprom” is trying to counter Nabuco with a Russian – Hungarian project of re-exporting gas, supplied to Turkey through the “Blue Stream” via the territories of Bulgaria and Romania to Hungary, and to Western Europe. It will take longer period of time and resources consolidation, before a realistic strategy of energy diversification against Russia’s monopoly could take place.

Fourth, in order to succeed in midterm perspective, the Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea needs to be elevated higher in the priority list of strategic goals of both Washington and Brussels. The EU will definitely focus on other priorities within the next decade, rather than the Black Sea development – and the reasons for that have already been clarified in Chapter I/2. Yet this state of affairs will not make a dramatic difference provided the low level of EU interest towards the region throughout the entire period after 1989.³⁹ The slowing down of US involvement in the region will have deeper effects on the entire process of reformist transformation and the Black Sea strategy implementation. Being almost entirely consumed by the one-dimensional logic of the war on terror, it is more likely for Washington to take an informal break from the Black Sea issues and just play a rearguard game of preserving positions *vis-à-vis* Russia and Turkey. Time will let us see how successful that kind of game could be.

Last but not least, a relative success of the Black Sea strategy could be achieved as a consequence of a more concerted Western action plan in the fields of security and development in the region. The departure of worldviews in Europe and in Washington in the context of the Iraq war signified a deeper process of gradual split in both parties’ security paradigms that had taken place with the end of the Cold War. As the US under the G. W. Bush administration returned straight back to traditional power (military power) politics of the 19th and 20th century, Western Europeans turned to the other pole of constructivist – interdependency paradigm of security. It is probably time for reassessment on the both sides now, when it is obvious that the US is failing to achieve its initial goals in the Iraqi desert, and Europe can hardly report any success in “the interdependence” game with new and unconventional security challenges like radical Islam on European soil. Such reassessment could bring strategic views closer and in better harmony with the communality of long term interest of both sides of the Atlantic, representing both major parties of the West *vis-à-vis* a world of growing diversity and multi-polarity.

Finally, and with all conditionality of the multi-factorial analysis of complex realities, we could forecast a period of relative slow down and rearrangement of elements within the Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea region. It will be difficult to keep the balance of power that was reached in the region until 2005 and it will be difficult to avoid the transfer of strategic initiative in the hands of competing powers. The broader strategic context of the present global world will soon require more fundamental decisions on further development – and regaining initiative - of the Black Sea strategy of the West.

Notes:

¹ See also: Sperling, J. (ed.), *Limiting Institutions?: The Challenge of Eurasian Security Governance*, Manchester University Press, 2003

² For further reference see also: Rasmus, R., B. Jackson, *The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom*, Policy Review Online (<http://www.policyreview.org/jun04/asmus.html>)

³ Turkey's success to jeopardize the extension of "Active Endeavor" NATO Mediterranean operation to the Black Sea is a good example for the point. In effect, Turkey's naval forces control fully the Black Sea together with the residual Russian navy, against the will and the interest of the other littoral countries.

⁴ The strategic weight of Moldova is smaller, compared to Ukraine or Georgia, yet it's a responsible partner of the Black Sea community of nations in transition and should get decent support to succeed in its painful reforms.

⁵ Georgian special forces carried out an operation in the Kodori Gorge in the north of Abkhazia this summer, in regaining strategic initiative to resolve the conflict with break-away Sokhumi. For a more detailed account of Kodori Gorge case, see: http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371395

⁶ See also: Rumer, E. B., *Collision Avoidance: US – Russian Bilateral Relations and Former Soviet States*, Strategic Forum No 27, April 2004 (<http://www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/SF207/sf207.htm>)

⁷ For an account of the drift see Ronald D. Asmus, "Rebuilding the Atlantic Alliance" in *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2003, available at <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/article.cfm?id=69>

⁸ Yet the EU efficiently mobilized its efforts for diplomatic mediation for a successful re-run of presidential elections in Ukraine in late 2004.

⁹ See also: Vahl, M., *The EU and Black Sea Regional Cooperation: Some Challenges for BSEC*, April 2005 (http://www.ceps.be/Article.php?article_id=420)

¹⁰ The basic documents of the European Neighborhood Policy can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm

¹¹ The "enlargement presumption" applies mostly to EU relationships with the post-communist countries of Europe's East. The ENP was initially designed to serve Brussels policy towards the non-EU Mediterranean and North African countries, which have never enjoyed real perspectives for accession. The further application of the ENP to the eastern neighbors provoked a reassessment in this field of policy planning, which is likely to continue and further transform the very notion of "European neighborhood".

¹² Only Belarus and Milosevic's Serbia have been kept out of the Council of Europe, because of non-compliance with membership criteria. Russia was accepted – and still is accepted, irrespective of its authoritarian swing of the last years.

¹³ In the case of the Western Balkans the association policies were transformed into a process of reaching Association and Stabilization Agreements to deal with the agenda of post-conflict reconciliation and restoration.

¹⁴ See the comprehensive analysis on Russian – Turkish bilateral relations and partnership of Dr. Suat Kiniklioglu in "The Anatomy of Turkish-Russian Relations", (<http://www.brookings.edu0>)

¹⁵ Removed by Georgian authorities in 2004.

¹⁶ For a detailed account of Russian Post-Soviet foreign policy, see: Lo, B., *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002

¹⁷ It is easy to conceive the vigor of Russian authoritarian temptation in Igor Ivanov's book, *The New Russian Diplomacy*. There he states that Russian policy makers in the post-Soviet era seek to incorporate the best characteristics of their Tsarist and Soviet predecessors. (<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/eav012403.shtml>)

¹⁸ Nilufer Oral from Bilgi University in Turkey claims that, "The Montreux Convention does not make the Turkish Straits an international waterway. They are open to international navigation but they are not under international administration. Turkey has legal control over the Straits." (<http://www.platts.com/Oil/Resources/News%20Features/Bosphorus%20Traffic/table.xml>)

See also: Gurcanli, Z., *The Montreux Dilemma*, *The New Anatolian*, 13 April 2006 (<http://www.thenewanatolian.com/tna-4689.html>)

¹⁹ See also: Manoli, P., *The Black Sea Economic Cooperation: What Contribution to Regional Security; in: Limiting Institutions?: The Challenge of Eurasian Security Governance*, ed. by J. Sperling, Manchester University Press, 2003

²⁰ For an overview account of major Russian oil and gas pipeline projects, see: (http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/russia_pipelines.html)

²¹ In 1995 “Gasprom” created the “Topenergy” holding with the Bulgarian “Multigrup” corporation – a shadow corporate group, related to the security services of communist Bulgaria and their Soviet “connections”. “Topenergy” was designed by “Gasprom” and the Bulgarian ex-communist prime minister A. Lukanov to hold the property on Bulgarian gas pipelines’ infrastructure, depriving the country from the benefits of its natural monopoly of gas transfers to the other Balkan countries. The Bulgarian government, headed by Z. Videnov refused to sell the pipelines to “Topenergy”. A year later Videnov was removed from power with the intense financial and logistic support of “Gasprom” and “Multigrup”. The next Bulgarian governments were heavily pressed to sell the pipelines too, with no positive results for “Gasprom”. Pressure from Moscow continues even today, 10 years later.

²² Turkmenistan and Iran gas resources are the only opportunity for economic feasibility of the “Nabuco” project – a pipeline, stretching through the territory of Iran, Turkey and feeding up into Europe alternative to “Gasprom” gas supplies. Exercising pressure on Turkmen leader Niyazov and charming Teheran with political bonuses, related to its nuclear program, Moscow weakens the chances for “Nabuco” to be implemented. “Gasprom” has also purchased facilities and gas resources of Algeria, the key importer of liquid gas into Europe. In this way only residual North Sea gas remains beyond Russian control.

²³ The present “Gasprom” infrastructure feeds gas from the east westwards, and from the north – southwards. Special agreements with Hungary, Turkey, Bulgaria could lead to a second, reverse route of each established pipeline infrastructure. Today Bulgaria transfers to Turkey and Greece, now a reverse pipeline from Turkey to Hungary is planned (over the route of “Nabuco”) to feed “Blue Stream” gas from Turkey northwards.

²⁴ On Sept. 4, 2006 a meeting in Athens of President Putin, Bulgarian President Parvanov and Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis gave political “green light” to the construction of long delayed Burgas – Alexandroupolis oil pipeline, aiming at bypassing the Straits in delivering Russian oil to Mediterranean markets.

²⁵ For a more detailed study, see: Nachmani, A., *Turkey: Facing a New Millennium/ Coping with Intertwined Conflicts*, Manchester University Press, 2003

See also: Rygiel, K. *Stabilizing Borders: The Geopolitics of National Identity Construction in Turkey*, in: *Rethinking Geopolitics*, ed. by S. Dalby, Routledge, 1998

²⁶ Kulebi, A., *Eurasian Energy Lines and Turkey*, *The New Anatolian*, 16 March 2006 (<http://www.thenewanatolian.com/opinion-2799.html>)

²⁷ An English language translation of the convention can be found at <http://www.turkishpilots.org.tr/ingilizcedernek/DOCUMENTS/montro.html>

²⁸ Caglayan, S., *Turkey Sees No Need for NATO Operation in Black Sea*, *The New Anatolian*, 2 March 2006 (<http://www.thenewanatolian.com/tna-1926.html>)

²⁹ See also: Rygiel, K. *Stabilizing Borders: The Geopolitics of National Identity Construction in Turkey*, in: *Rethinking Geopolitics*, ed. by S. Dalby, Routledge, 1998

³⁰ Turkey has formulated that claim in front of the Council of Europe. To patronize Muslims of Europe is a position of enormous political potential for Ankara, which is already successfully utilized among the Turkish communities of Western Europe.

³¹ Ankara intensely tests the future model of ethno-communal control over the Balkans with the Turkish minority in neighboring Bulgaria for more than a decade now. The party of Bulgarian Turks – the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) – has successfully monopolized the political representation, the economic potential and communal life in all regions of Bulgaria, populated mostly with Turks and other Slav-Muslim minorities. The MRF practices strong authoritarian control over those regions and communities, effectively splitting them off and isolating them from the national Bulgarian institutional system and instruments of public control. Some critics of MRF’s political behavior claim that the Movement has created “a state within the state” in utilizing the relative weakness and fragility of Bulgarian post-communist democratic government.

³² For an account of Russian-Turkish entente in the Black Sea see also Dr. Jeffrey Simon, “Black Sea Regional Security Cooperation: Building Bridges and Barriers”, NDU, available at <http://harvard->

bssp.org/publications/?id=210 and Testimony of Bruce Pitcairn Jackson Before the Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs “The Future of Democracy in the Black Sea Region” March 8, 2005, available at <http://www.senate.gov/~foreign/testimony/2005/JacksonTestimony050308.pdf#search=%22Bruce%20Jackson%20testimony%20on%20the%20Black%20Sea%22>

³³ See also: Fuller, L., Georgia: Is Tbilisi Moving Toward NATO Membership?, RFE/RL, 2 June 2006, (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/06/be7f7673-9e6b-4fcd-b817-e07323b1fa29.html>)

³⁴ See also: Ciobanu, C., NATO/EU Enlargement: Moldova and the “Frozen and Forgotten” Conflicts in Post-Soviet States, USIP, July 2004 (<http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/74/en/Report%20July%2025,%20revised.doc>)

³⁵ See also: Bordonaro, Fr., Bulgaria, Romania and the Changing Structure of Black Sea’s Geopolitics; Power and Interests News Report (http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=302)

³⁶ The naval hegemony of Turkey, to a lesser extent – of Russia in the Black Sea is a fact on the ground provided the negligible naval forces of all other littoral countries, with the possible exception of Ukraine.

³⁷ A successful operation in late July 2006 of the Georgian security forces has led to establishing the control of Georgian government upon a strategic part of Abkhazia – the Kodori Gorge, which would allow the transformation of conflict management process from negotiations between Tbilisi and Sokhumi to negotiations between communities in Abkhazia itself.

³⁸ Chances are improving for partial withdrawal of Armenian forces from some Azeri provinces, kept under Armenian control in exchange for setting a longer-term plan for referendum and final status of the region definition.

³⁹ See also: Tassinari, F., A Synergy for Black Sea Regional Cooperation: Guidelines for an EU Initiative, CEPS Policy Brief No.105/ June 2006