

TRANSATLANTIC STRATEGY FOR BLACK SEA STABILIZATION AND INTEGRATION (BSSI STRATEGY)

Ognyan Minchev, Marin Lessenski and Plamen Ralchev¹

Integrating the post-Soviet countries of the Black Sea and the South Caucasus into the Euro-Atlantic security system requires an organized and systemic effort on behalf of the Euro-Atlantic community. It is hardly reasonable to expect a fast, successful democratization and modernization of those countries, leveling within a decade their record of transition to the standards of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. A realistic goal to pursue would be a comprehensive process of successful stabilization, including: conflict management and settlement; economic growth and improved institutional performance; strengthened national sovereignty; and improved standards of representative government and an increase in the level of public participation in civil society.

What we could expect within a decade is a successful process of anchoring this region into the common Euro-Atlantic security space, and integration of the Black Sea and the South Caucasus countries into the security system of the international community. In the long term, clear perspectives for full membership in NATO should not be ruled out, provided that the international community successfully assists such a positive process of transformation. The strategy of transforming and integrating the Black Sea and the South Caucasus into the common Euro-Atlantic security space necessarily starts with a concentrated effort to mitigate and - where possible - to resolve the "frozen conflicts" of the post-Soviet period in the South Caucasus and Moldova. The inter-communal conflicts of the post-communist/post-Soviet type started with the revival of nationalism after decades of merciless totalitarian oppression of the nations and the ethnic groups of non-Russian origin. The nationalist upsurge caused a domino effect. After the key nationalities of the former Soviet Empire claimed independence from Moscow, smaller and diverse ethnic entities escalated claims for autonomy and independence from the newly emancipated nations of the former Soviet republics. This process of tribal nationalism has caused conflict

¹ Ognyan Minchev is Director of the Institute for Regional and International Studies in Sofia, Bulgaria. Marin Lessenski is Program Director and Plamen Ralchev Program Coordinator at the same institute. The authors appreciate the comments and notes on this position paper made by Ronald Asmus, Bruce Jackson and Konstantin Dimitrov.

fragmentation of the newly emancipated national communities, jeopardizing the effort to build sustainable nation states out of the old Soviet republics.

The absence - or the fragility - of an independent statehood tradition in most of those newly emerged national entities has additionally weakened the organized effort to sustain the escalating ethnic-national ambitions within a framework of common institutional arrangements acceptable to most, if not all, clashing parties. The inter-communal conflicts of the 1990s in Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, with centrifugal tendencies also in Ajaria), in Karabakh and in Moldova have been actively assisted and manipulated by Russia, using the instruments of the old imperial dependence. In some cases Russia has directly participated in the conflict, establishing on the ground a status quo of long-term privilege for its interests - commercial, military and political. In Abkhazia, the Russian troops have helped the local ethnic minority of Abkhazians to cleanse the territory of the majority Georgians and establish a puppet statelet under full Russian control. In Moldova, Russia has occupied the Trans-Dniester region, establishing a neo-Stalinist dictatorial regime of mafia type, run by local gangsters of Russian origin. Another pattern of Russian conflict manipulation involves indirect support for one of the conflicting parties - as in the case of the Armenian-Azeri conflict in Karabakh. In all cases of interference Russia aims at turning a conflict situation into a systemic and long-term fact on the ground. This undermines the local potential for effective nation building, thus guaranteeing Russian access and control over the territory in the long run, or for good. This is a strategy of classical colonial imperialism.

The goal of stabilizing and integrating the Black Sea region into the Euro-Atlantic security space presumes a strategy of seven basic components.

Opening a Legitimate Space for NATO to Operate in the Region

With the enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe, NATO has ceased to exist as a military-political bloc with a restricted mission to contain potential aggressors against the territory of its members. At present, while retaining its core collective defense *raison d'être*, NATO is an evolving system of security for the Euro-Atlantic space of democratic nations. A substantial part of this mission is to promote, secure and guarantee - over its entire territory of operation - the

institutional prerequisites for democracy, respect for human rights and freedom for all individuals, irrespective of their culture, citizenship, ethnic and religious affiliation. It is debatable where the territory of NATO mission ends. What is definite is that the territory of NATO responsibility expands to the east, driven by the logic of the new security challenges after the demise of communism.

In the 1990s, NATO's mission expanded to the East not only with the pressing need to stop massacres in ex-Yugoslavia, but also under the urgent demand for security and stability of the newly established fragile democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. Today, the fight against terrorism makes it essential that the gateways to the Greater Middle East are stabilized and transformed into reliable peripheries of the Euro-Atlantic security system. The ex-Soviet countries of the Black Sea region constitute an important part of the gateways to the Middle East. NATO has to apply in those countries the instruments of conflict management and democratic stabilization that have been successfully implemented in other conflicting areas of Central and Eastern Europe, that is:

- NATO peacekeeping missions have to establish rules of conflict management and containment;
- legitimate institutions of democratic civil statehood have to be encouraged, established (where needed) and stabilized;
- universal standards of human rights respect have to be enforced;
- both principles of national sovereignty and communal autonomy have to be applied simultaneously as a prerequisite for conflict resolution;
- war crimes and atrocities have to be prosecuted by independent bodies of justice.

It is obvious that implementing the entire agenda of conflict resolution and stabilization in the Black Sea area might take decades before full-scale democracy and stability become facts on the ground. To anchor the region in the Euro-Atlantic mainstream through short and mid-term instruments of stabilization, integration and development will involve the tasks of:

- a) Conflict management and resolution, applying simultaneously the principles of national sovereignty and communal autonomy;
- b) Strengthening and empowering of national institutions, civil society mobilized and set in motion.

There are three advantages of NATO that make the alliance the natural institutional host of the proposed BSSI Strategy:

Capacity for peace-support operations. NATO has proved its effectiveness in the

Balkans, where it has enforced the peace and has been instrumental in nation building. Both the Bosnian and the Kosovo conundrums were resolved after NATO's involvement, to substantiate previously undertaken initiatives by the UN, the EU and the OSCE. As a community of democratic nations, with credible military-political capabilities, NATO has both the legitimacy and the capacity to assume a role, similar to that in the Balkans, in resolving the "frozen conflicts" in the South Caucasus and Moldova as part of a UN or OSCE-mandated operation. Extending its "open door" policy by encouraging partners to develop a strongly integrationist Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAP) for close cooperation with NATO, including full use of the option of intensified dialogue with the alliance on membership-related issues. Following the review of the first two-year cycle of each IPAP relationship the alliance should decide about the possible inclusion of willing and able partners in the Membership Action Plan (MAP) format as the next phase of their pre-invitation integration. NATO's policy of openness towards the former communist states since the early 1990s has now resulted in full membership for ten of them, including three former Soviet republics. The new members are a testimony to NATO's capability to nourish high standards of democratic conduct, transparent decision-making and institutional efficiency.

Unlike the case of the Balkans and the NATO membership of Central and Eastern European countries, the mission of NATO in the ex-Soviet Black Sea countries would be problematic without a systematic effort at a strategic partnership with Russia. NATO has already designated a unique operational mechanism ("NATO at 20") for including Russia to address common security concerns. Such an inclusive, yet firm approach towards Russia will be essential for the implementation of the suggested BSSI Strategy.

Attracting Russia as a Partner

Throughout the post-Soviet era, the Russian political elite reproduces the general attitude towards geopolitics and international relations, inherited from the Russian and the Soviet Empire. This attitude involves:

A worldview of great powers' competition and power politics, aimed at establishing an international system of shared and balanced "legitimate spheres of influence."

From the perspective of such a world view, Russia has been unjustly deprived from

its "spheres of influence" and reduced to governing solely its own territory, plus small sections of its former empire, named as "near abroad." From such a perspective, the national interests of Russia as a great country implicitly require some form of imperial reconstruction.

The failure of Russia to defend its "natural" - that is "legitimate" - "spheres of influence" opened opportunities to the U.S. as a sole super power to extend its spheres of influence over the previous Russian domains. This is the model of perception of the NATO enlargement process. The more the U.S. and the West expand into the legitimate Russian domains, the more vulnerable and doomed to failure the Russian national interests are. For the Russian side, this is a zero sum game.

The direct threat to Russian security is the Islamic fundamentalist insurgency, acting as "national liberation movements" on Russian territory (the case of Chechnya), and attempting in the long run to deprive Russia from control over all Muslim inhabited territories of the Federation. The growing threat of Islamic terrorism is the point of intersection of Russia's and U.S. interests. Presumably, the U.S. role is highly instrumental to such a partnership, trying to take advantage of all of Russia's hardships with its southern Islamic periphery.

Russia will hardly rebuild its great power might of the past considering the realities of the present world - the chances to successfully compete even in Asia with China and Japan are very slim. The opportunity to re-establish control over Central Europe is practically non-existent (unless a new type of relationship between Russia and the EU emerges that could push the U.S. out of Europe). The Black Sea basin and Central Asia appear to be the only regions that are vulnerable to Russia's revisionist ambitions in the short and mid-term perspective. The favorable set of factors for a potential re-conquering of Russia's "spheres of influence" includes:

- the religious and cultural affinity between Russia and the Christian nations of the Black Sea region;
- the legitimacy of action against the insurgency of Islam;
- the economic and institutional vulnerability of most of the regions' nations;
- the ethnic diversity and chaotic inter-communal hostility in most of the region's transitional societies.

Such a brief description of the current Russian geo-strategic mindset suffices to outline the complexity of the task to attract Moscow as a partner in stabilizing and integrating the Black Sea region into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream. Obviously, it

will take time before the Russian elite adopts - if ever - an alternative vision of interrelated interest and trust in a common security system. The present day transatlantic discord, the "emancipation" of France and Germany, and the unilateralist power politics of Washington vis-a-vis "old" European allies do not encourage such a transformation in Moscow, to say the least. The only possible approach on behalf of NATO and the West is to create series of facts on the ground in the Black Sea region, aimed at involving Russia in common endeavors, and targeted at restricting and containing Russia's colonial/imperial instincts and activities. This should be a strategy of creative application of the carrot-and-stick Ognyan Minchev, Marin Lessenski and Plamen Ralchev approach. Russia will be more susceptible to partnership if faced with a reality of the facts on the ground, besides diplomacy and intellectual arguments. This strategy could prove to be a test case for the cooperative potential of the transatlantic community and Russia, hence for the gradual integration of Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security space. If successful, the partnership between the West and Russia in the Black Sea area may prove an invaluable tool to the larger aim of substantively integrating Moscow into the common security system of the Euro-Atlantic space, through transforming the zero-sum mentality of Kremlin into a mutual gain mentality.

Coordinating the Efforts and the Interests of the Euro-Atlantic Community

NATO plus the EU plus Russia is the legitimate format to influence positively the developments in the ex-Soviet Black Sea countries. Sharing mutual interest is the only strategy that could be successfully applied. Such a mutual interest should be freely discussed and defined. The parties should be motivated to contribute to this strategy, rather than forced to deliver for it. As a point of departure, the basic interests of the potential parties of the international community are as follows: The United States. The U.S. would support the BSSI Strategy as part of its global effort to fight terrorism. The terrorists' strategy is to obscure and blur the distinction between normal life and life under threat. Terrorism, therefore, needs vague, invisible frontiers, in attempting to turn the world into a common space of terror. The West and the free world in general need clear-cut, explicit frontlines between terror and legitimate, normal life, including clear territorial dividing lines. The Black Sea region constitutes one of the

gray zones on the periphery of the Greater Middle East, where terrorism could establish its bases of support and logistics, utilizing the environment of conflict and lawlessness (the Western Balkans is another close region of that kind).

Stabilizing and integrating the Black Sea region into the Euro-Atlantic security space would constitute a clear-cut border between the zone of relative security and the zones of instability and danger at the gateway to the larger Middle East. At the same time, stabilizing the Black Sea region would provide a bridgehead for a further process of stabilization and security enforcement to the East.

The European Union. After the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries, the EU will receive the Black Sea region as part of its immediate neighborhood. There is a mixed attitude and motivation on behalf of the major EU factors towards strategies of fixing Europe's eastern peripheries. On the one hand, improving the security and supporting the development of the ex-communist East is a key prerequisite for Europe's own security and well-being.

An important contribution to a BSSI process would be that the EU perceives every country in the Black Sea area as a member of the wider European community.

Thus, securitization and stabilization will be based on a strategic and moral rationale. In this limited sense, EU might take a lead and, eventually, be brought into a stronger involvement with the region.

Considerable parts of organized crime and illegal immigration in Europe originate in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. On the other hand, the EU and its key members experience stronger and stronger "enlargement fatigue" vis-a-vis the endless agenda of spending in favor of the troubled East. The EU has an explicit interest in granting and developing a status of special partnership for the ex-Soviet countries of the Black Sea region, without necessarily upgrading such a status to full-scale integration, at least in the mid-term perspective.

The way, however, that the EU will have to go, is quite meandering. The EU, first, is demonstrating more and more openly "enlargement fatigue." The political discord between "old" and "new" Europe of the last year provided Brussels with further arguments to consider reducing effective development assistance even to the Central and Eastern European countries that were granted full membership. Second, the EU might be ready to confront Moscow on the human rights issue, the Chechnya issue, but not on the principal issue of Kremlin's "right" to control its near abroad. This is part of the "great powers" politics that Paris and Berlin may like to play with Moscow, especially vis-a-vis the relations with Washington.

The European Union will be a major factor in the process of stabilization of the Black Sea region and the effects of its policies could be improved through:

- Including all Black Sea states in its Wider Europe project and offering them a type of enhanced cooperation. Substantial aid to economic and institutional reform should be tied closely to political conditionality, thus achieving more than skin-deep democracy in Black Sea countries, including Russia.
- Granting the four freedoms. Though a stronger determination of the EU to the Black Sea region is strongly needed, a comprehensive initiative of decisive involvement is not very likely to take place in short and mid-term. It is only the four freedoms (freedom of movement of goods, persons, services and capital) that might have some chance to be granted to those Black Sea countries, for which the formal designation as "European" is critical.
- More vigorous engagement of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy in the resolution of frozen-conflicts. In this case, the EU should coordinate its efforts with NATO and the OSCE in post-conflict reconstruction, especially in civilian (institution building) matters.
- Even closer cooperation in the Justice and Home Affairs dimension for fighting trans-border organized crime and terrorism. This will be successful if there are strong and uncorrupted institutions in the countries in question.

The New Members of NATO and the EU. The new members of NATO and the EU from Central and Southeastern Europe are potentially the most interested partners in the BSSI Strategy coalition. All those post-communist countries are bordering the Black Sea and the entire post-Soviet space. The waves of instability and conflict, generated within that space affect primarily Central and Eastern Europe. The countries of the "New Europe" need enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic security space to the East, in order to guarantee their own eastern borders as inner borders of a common security system, rather than outer borders serving as bulwarks to a hostile world.

Both Bulgaria and Romania are the potentially the most active participants in the BSSI Strategy development from the perspective of their own national interests.

Besides the general security concerns about its eastern borders, Romania has historical bonds with large parts of what constitutes today's Moldova. The long-term de-stabilizing effect of the Trans-Dniester conflict, together with Moldova's overall instability, is a matter of special concern to Bucharest.

Together with Romania, Bulgaria is a country of "split identity" between the West and the East. The post-communist transformation processes in the both countries

bear the consequences of contradictory influences from the East and from the West. Russia's attempts to isolate those countries from the common process of NATO enlargement in the 1990s have been particularly zealous and non-compromising. To anchor their national future and destiny firmly in the institutions of the West, Bulgaria and Romania need to improve significantly not only their own internal reform processes, but also the regional environment they live in. Together with improving the chances of the Western Balkans to catch up with the European enlargement process, the stabilization and integration of the Black Sea region constitute a national interest of primary importance for Bulgaria and Romania to live in an environment of integral security and shared democratic future. At the same time, compared to the nations of the Western Balkans and the ex-Soviet republics of the Black Sea, Bulgaria and Romania are countries with a record of relative success in democratization and post-communist transformation. Transferring this experience to the East would be more successful if coming from both those countries, rather than from countries of more distant territorial and cultural background in Central and Eastern Europe. Turkey. Turkey, the only secular public system with a record of successful democratization in the Islamic world, and a devoted participant in the Black Sea cooperation process, is also a potentially powerful contributor to the BSSI Strategy. Turkey is the second largest economy in the region (after Russia) and it represents a valuable and attractive model for all Muslim communities of the Black Sea post-Soviet space. Turkey is a respected NATO member and EU membership hopeful, and it is capable of assisting on the ground with the processes of stabilization and reconciliation, together with the other partners of the BSSI Strategy coalition.

Stabilizing "Weak States" - A Flexible Strategy of Democratization and Institutional Development

The simultaneous introduction of democracy and a market economy has a powerful implosive effect on underdeveloped societies. The recent history of postcommunist transition shows that only societies with strong public administrative tradition (Weberian-style bureaucracy) - Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland (to an extent) - have managed to cope with the two major challenges of transition: the political and the economic one.

In countries with weaker institutional traditions, the transition from totalitarian to representative democratic rule has substantially weakened the administrative potential and the effective performance of public institutions. The concurrent processes of privatization and the introduction of free market within an institutional vacuum results in the emergence of a powerful mafia and organized crime networks. Systemic practices of racketeering and corrupting the weak public institutions are the unavoidable effect within a newly emerging structure of oligarchic rule. Instead of strengthening the instruments of civil society's control over the power holders, a deep process of alienation of citizens from the political system takes place.

The weaker the national traditions of public administration, the stronger the oligarchic system and the more vulnerable the newly established representative institutions. The absence of nation-state traditions in the Black Sea ex-Soviet republics and the strong pressures exerted by inter-ethnic conflicts and foreign colonial-imperial interference have reduced their newly established post-Soviet institutions to nominal existence, to empty shells, systematically misused by different political-business clans for their criminal vested interests. The institution building of those new nation states needs long-term pragmatic strategy of gradual improvements, based on the careful selection and promotion of democratic and responsible national elites.

It is not enough to establish the rules of the game in the national institutions, and to name them "democratic." It is necessary to accelerate the selection of political, economic and intellectual elites, interested in complying with these rules, and capable of promoting them among the population. This task is incomplete in all post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, but in the ex-Soviet space it still needs to be formulated and launched as a key policy priority. We need organized structures to start challenging the monopoly of power of the clan-based oligarchies, and this is only the initial effort. This process is even more difficult in conflict-torn societies, where reconciliation involves inter-ethnic agreements. Even in societies where elite selection and institution building have been assigned to UN and NATO protectorate administrations (like in the Western Balkans), the results are very modest and highly contradictory. In the case of the South Caucasus and Moldova, the resources to deal with the issue seem to be much smaller.

Resolving the "frozen conflicts" and introducing democratic institutional development for Moldova and the South Caucasus seem to be a "chicken and egg"

dilemma. No institutional improvement is likely to take place in a conflict environment. Yet, no conflict resolution would survive unless the national institutions provide a reliable democratic infrastructure of guaranteed individual and ethnic rights, or responsible authority bears the responsibility of enforcing a peace agreement. Both tasks - conflict management and institutional improvement - could only move ahead concurrently within the BSSI Strategy process.

Mobilizing Civil Society Initiative and Participation

However paradoxical it may seem, the civil sector in the developing world often holds the most valuable human resources in terms of intellectual capacity, value systems and entrepreneurial qualities. This is due to the fact that all other high status sectors of society are either underdeveloped, or permeated by organized crime. The political process is largely dominated by power brokers from oligarchic business and organized crime. The corporate sector is underdeveloped, if present at all. Academia is reduced to misery within an unreformed system of government budgetary dependency. The civil society infrastructure proves to be the only decent field to apply professional knowledge and public career ambitions. The civil sector is also open to the international non-profit market, with donors, interested in development and democratic transformation.

Such a general estimate applies fully to all post-communist societies in transition, and - in particular - to the ex-Soviet Black Sea countries. The civil society infrastructure in those countries has definitely outgrown the reformist achievements of all other sectors of society. This potential has to be mobilized and utilized for the purposes of the BSSI Strategy. A process of growing pressure from the civil institutions over the political system has to be generated and streamlined. Civil society activists have to penetrate the political institutions, serving a collective strategy of modernizing and democratizing the political process. Fundamental reform of the public administrative system has to be designed and implemented with the resources of the NGO structures in cooperation with the international institutions.

Strategies of communal welfare, economic modernization, education and healthcare reform should be developed in partnership with international institutions (like the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and

Development, the EU, the U.S. Agency for International Development) and the local NGO networks of the Black Sea countries. The partnership of the NGOs and the media may prove to be of key importance for the successful public mobilization in favor of the BSSI Strategy goals and purposes.

Regional Cooperation

The BSSI Strategy may prove successful only in a regional context. There is no country within the region, capable of resolving the dilemmas of its reform and national reconciliation alone. Initiatives like GUUAM, aimed at coordinating the efforts of the ex-Soviet countries of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova vis-a-vis the powerful pressure, coming from Moscow, explicitly show the effect of coordinated action in achieving common goals. The effects of regional cooperation will not show up overnight: most of those countries have institutional systems too fragile to enforce a common decision. The decade long history of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) shows the opportunities, as well as the vulnerabilities of the regional cooperation potential. The shortage of enforcement powers on behalf of the weak post-communist states makes it difficult to implement the cooperative decisions made by their public representatives. Regional cooperation structures, though, especially if properly assisted by the international community, may partially compensate for the shortages of institutional resources at national level, while representing a broader regional/international legitimacy for the stabilization and reform process within the Black Sea region. A critical review of internationally backed cooperative initiatives in the Balkans (Stability Pact for South-East Europe etc.) of the last ten years could help avoiding series of typical mistakes while working with the Black Sea cooperation agenda. The most important lesson from such internationally assisted cooperative efforts is to create a firm and reliable economic engine of a regional integration initiative. The transit of oil and natural gas from the Caspian basin to the world markets could serve as a strong economic commercial background for the implementation of the entire BSSI Strategy, the regional cooperation efforts included.

The energy infrastructure projects of the Caspian and the Black Sea will stimulate - and require - institutional stability and security in the region, in order to achieve

its commercial aims. Attracting foreign investment within an integral system of efforts for regional economic development may constitute an important supplement to a successful development of the energy infrastructure.

A review should be conducted on, firstly, the mid-term capacity limits for strategic and politically backed financing of Caspian-Caucasian energy routes and the possible conditionalities for such medium-term support. Secondly, a security environment component of the BSSI Strategy should develop a long-term "safe ground" for the smooth construction and functioning of the energy routes against the background of identifiable threats and risks (such as terrorist and criminal disruptions, conflicting interests and blackmailing options in the hands of local governments and non-state influence-wielding factors etc.).

Transferring Experience of Democratization from Central and Eastern Europe to the Black Sea Countries

To implement the priorities of the BSSI Strategy, the international coalition will need the strong support and mobilization of the ex-Soviet Black Sea societies. All democratic minded citizens of those countries, apart from the organized civil society, need to pay their contribution to the efforts to transform the present day grim realities of poverty, conflict and corrupt governments into a future of stability, opportunity and reconciliation. The diverse experience of post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe could play a valuable role in directing the efforts of local democrats, political leaders and civil activists towards successful social transformation.

The first important lesson from the CEE experience is the need to unite into a coalition all political parties and movements that really share the priority of reform and democratization. It is very tempting to create all different brands of left and center-right political organizations, sticking to them the ready made labels, imported mechanically from the West - "liberals", "conservatives", "social democrats" etc. It is twice more tempting to start real competition among those movements on the newly created political market after communism. In many countries, though, where the residual power of the ex-communists and the neocommunists is big enough, where the KGB and other communist state security services control the mafia business and the newly created, fragile representative institutions, the competition among democrats is an unreasonable luxury.

All democrats, irrespective of their "color" or left wing - right wing "denomination" should stick together into coalition, in order to promote and implement the basic agenda of democratic change and institutional transformation in their countries. This is particularly important for the ex-Soviet societies, where the power of the ancien régime forces is doubled by the arrogant interference of the former imperial power - Russia - under the neo-imperialist strategy of Putin. Once the remnants of the past are removed from the scene of history, there will be enough time to compete between "left" and "right" in the normal political game of a modern democratic society.

The alliance among all democratic movements is particularly important in societies, stricken by ethnic conflict. Authoritarian nationalism is the key instrument of neo-communism and neo-imperialism to utilize the principle of divide et impera. Democratic alliance across ethnic lines is the only opportunity to bridge the divides and re-align an ethnically diverse nation.

The second major lesson from the Central and Eastern European transformation process is one simple rule: do not undertake major property and economic structural transformations, before you have strong enough public institutions to rely upon. We understand how controversial such an advice could be vis-a-vis the urgent priority to stabilize national economies in the region. The problem is that privatization and introducing market instruments into a vacuum of law and order feeds directly the power of organized crime, corruption and mafia control. This might be one of the major responsibilities of the international community - to initially substitute for the absence of reliable national institutions and monitor intensely for transparency and integrity of local economic reform efforts.

Without implementing decent and just economic reform it is not possible to guarantee irreversible political change and democratization. All major assets of economy and society within the ex-Soviet countries are still in the hands of the former communist and KGB elites. They benefit immensely from the "wild" privatization, taking place in an environment of institutional weakness and vulnerability - such privatization strengthens additionally their political and media control over society. Within the BSSI Strategy the orthodoxy of the "invisible hand" at any cost should be abandoned in favor of a more balanced and reasonable approach of combining institutional change and improvement, with the implementation of economic reform.

Of course, within the last decade, intense wild privatization and marketization has

already taken place in the ex-Soviet Black Sea countries. This makes it even more important to control institutionally the further process of economic change in order to keep it within the framework of legitimate national and citizens' interest. The third lesson of change in Central and Eastern Europe for the Black Sea nations is to develop and keep high profile of activism towards the major power factors of the West, in favor of the fastest possible integration of those countries in the Euro-Atlantic community. Had the Central and Eastern European countries of the 1990s left the initiative for their NATO and EU membership to the West, both those priorities would have remained miracles even today. Only the intense pressure of the post-communist countries on the West to help to resolve the dramatic security and development dilemmas of the post-communist East has created the necessary momentum of enlarging the key institutions of the free world to the former Soviet bloc domains in Europe. One simple advice to the Black Sea countries: bore them, the Westerners, to death - until they say "yes." This is the hidden engine of your own process of improvement and transformation.

The efforts to integrate with the Euro-Atlantic institutions of security and development serve as a powerful instrument to mobilize public opinion along the priorities of democratic and economic transformation. The membership in those institutions is the reward, which the societies in transition expect for their readiness to experience the pains of change, in return for the gains of a secure and affluent future.

Concluding Remarks

This policy draft has been prepared by the Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) as a framework paper to initiate discussion on the basic prerequisites and dimensions of a principal strategy for stabilization and integration of the Black Sea countries into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream. Among the vast variety of factors and preconditions that may prove essential to the success of such a strategy, the authors of this paper presume the integrity of the transatlantic democratic community as the single-most important premise for accomplishing the goals designed: the peaceful resolution of the "frozen conflicts" with the active support of local civil society and public opinion; improvement and stabilization of the regional security environment; efficient capacity building and functioning of the national public institutions; a regional cooperation process and economic

development gaining momentum; a new framework of relationships with Russia established, based on the assumption of partnership and mutual gain, rather than on the zero sum game approach. All notes and recommendations to this position paper are very welcome, as they serve the basic purpose of our work - to provide a background for the upcoming policy debate.