



Institute for Regional and International Studies

***THE EU POLICY TOWARDS ITS BLACK  
SEA NEIGHBORS***

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## **INSTITUTE FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

# **THE EU POLICY TOWARDS ITS BLACK SEA NEIGHBORS**

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The EU's External Relations Commissioner Mrs. Benita Ferrero-Waldner cautioned in the spring 2005 that there is no point in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia seeking to start the process of joining the Union.<sup>1</sup> Was this a harsh, discouraging statement to the reformist governments in these countries, which seek additional legitimacy in a EU accession process? Or was this the necessary reality check, cautioning against an overly enthusiastic strive by the countries in the region?

In fact, the Union has been very cautious in its relations with the eastern neighbors and has been even more cautious to prevent any expectations for membership for the former Soviet Union space (besides the Baltics). Although the European Union ranks low in influence in the region, for example compared to Russia and the United States, for the sheer gravity and proximity it is an essential player that could have an essential stake in institutional development, democratization or conflict mitigation in the region. However, until very recently – until the announcement of its Wider Europe/Neighborhood Policy

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<sup>1</sup> RFE/RL report, Prague 2 May 2005, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)

the Union did not have any special strategy for this part of the world, pre-occupied with the Balkans, the enlargement and the internal institutional development. Things are changing though and the mutual interest rises with the two democratic revolutions in Georgia and the Ukraine, and the far less spectacular, but not less exiting to the expert community change of direction by the old guard in Chisinau.

In the hindsight, the statement of EU's Commissioner reflect the current state of relations between the European Union and its neighbors – divergence of intentions and general lack of clarity beyond the formal pledges of support to reform and cooperation. This state of affairs is inevitably a result of the actions or inactions of the two sides involved – the countries in the region and the European Union.

The countries east of the fifth wave of EU enlargement, for most of 1990s and the beginning of the new century have been plagued by their internal problems that of transition, downward spiraling economies and welfare systems, frozen conflicts. Their center of gravity was Moscow, as it has been for centuries. The West, and the European Union in particular, has had only a marginal interest in their more “Eastern” neighbors or as far any developments there concerned their relations with Russia.

On the EU's side there has been a definite uneasiness in its dealings with the countries in the region, stemming from a combination of lack of strategy and shortage of policy capacity, both conditioned by several factors:

- The EU is experiencing an “enlargement fatigue” with the fifth wave of enlargement still unfinished. Bulgaria and Romania's membership is pending in 2007, Croatia's bid has been halted by its lack of cooperation with the Hague and there are still fundamental debates about the possible accession of Turkey. Hence, while membership for the Eastern neighbors has not been ruled out as an option, it will be possible in a very long-term perspective and only after the eventual inclusion of the Western Balkans states.
- The EU's fledging foreign policy capacity and focus is stretched too thin by commitments to the Western Balkans. The European Union is investing considerable aid funds, providing staff for administering the two protectorates of BiH and Kosovo. Moreover, the EU has taken over NATO in the peacekeeping operations in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and it's still testing its capacity for these kinds of operations.
- The EU member states often cannot formulate a unified and vigorous position on many of the pressing issues of the region. The main reason is that major European states inform and shape their decisions by taking into account Russia's sensitivity, while Russia does not like to watch anyone meddling in its “near abroad” and experience major changes in the status quo.

- The internal institutional transformation of the Union these days (second quarter of 2005) seem at a halt after the Constitutional Treaty is certainly dead after the unsuccessful referendums in France and the Netherlands. This treaty, however, contained major changes specifically for streamlining the decision-making and policy implementation process of an enlarged Union. Moreover, there were special arrangements on the foreign policy capacity, stipulating for the creating of Minister of Foreign Affairs, thus avoiding the current duplication and often lack of coordination among the different European institutions (to the Council and the Commission) that are responsible for different aspects of the relationship of the EU with the rest of the world.

Following the Balkan crisis, from the mid-1990s well into the first years of the new century, the European Union set on developing a more coherent approaches with its immediate environment. The diverse set of “neighbors” was broadly divided into two groups, more or less depending on their “application for membership status” – or lack of it therefore. The Enlargement Directorate dealt with the hopeful members – Bulgaria and Romania, followed by Turkey and Western Balkan states. The rest of the countries were placed within the prerogatives of two main arms for foreign affairs of the EU – the Common Foreign and Security Policy to the European Council and the External Relations Directorate to the European Commission. Representing respectively the inter-governmental and the supranational foundations of the Union, these two bodies had to device and coordinate the EU foreign policies and aid. The performance of the CSFP and the External Relations Directorate marked a huge improvement in the Union’s previous experience in these areas, which was characterized by clumsy decision-making mechanisms. However, even after these improvements, the question of the tools to implement foreign policy decisions is still opened. The enlargement directorate had at its disposal the strongest foreign policy tool of the EU at its disposal – the enlargement. However, in case accession is not even contemplated, the capacity of the EU to assert its interests is limited.

The beginning of the new century marked a new dynamics in the relations of between the European Union and its neighbors. The Balkans have been pacified, and the EU could look beyond its immediate concerns. Moreover, with the fifth wave of EU enlargement the Union now borders a number of former Soviet republics (reaching out further east after the inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania). There was another major turning point that compelled the EU to seriously reconsider its interactions with the global environment. The US-led War on Terror fundamentally changed the way international politics and security issues are being perceived and addressed. This extraordinary period provided the Union with the opportunity to finally come up with a more structured policy towards its environment. It wasn’t long before a set of framework documents in that regard were publicly announced: the European Security Strategy and the series of papers outlining the “neighborhood policies”.

## THE NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE EUROPEAN SECURITY STRATEGY

The European Security Strategy is the first documents of its kind that shapes EU's interactions with the outside environment.<sup>2</sup> The document was prepared by the office of Javier Solana, High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy. The documents has been developed within the foreign policy and security arm of the inter-governmental European Council, reflecting as the considerable changes of the security environment as well as the political evolution of the Union and its own intentions in the foreign policy domain.

Situated next to the global hot spots – the Greater Middle East, the Balkans and the post-Soviet space - the Union had to have a specific policy, prioritizing not only the threats but also recognizing the special importance of some geographic areas over other, more distant regions. There is a special section in the European Security Strategy on the neighborhood, dwelling on four such areas: the Balkans, the Mediterranean, the Arab/Israeli conflict and the eastern dimension with the South Caucasus. The three sentences devoted to the eastern dimension outline four points:

- There should be no more new dividing lines in Europe;
- The benefits of economic and political cooperation should be extended to the eastern neighbors;
- The political problems in the east should tackled with by the EU;
- The Union must get more involved with the problems of the South Caucasus;

These are obviously the markers of a strategy that would need to further developed to include specific actions. But any action planning should include also a threat-based approach and it is actually the intersection of geographic reach and threat assessment that would provide for policy action.

The threats that are listed in the document entail top international concerns such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. However, there are specific challenges that are even more important for Europe for a single reason – they are located at the continent's periphery and/or are penetrating the Union from its borderlands. Regional conflicts, state failure and organize crime top the list of these threats, intertwined and reinforcing each other:

*“Violent or frozen conflicts, which also persist on our borders, threaten regional stability. They destroy human lives and social and physical*

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<sup>2</sup> A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy. Brussels, 12 December 2003. Available at <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

*infrastructures; they threaten minorities, fundamental freedoms and human rights. Conflict can lead to extremism, terrorism and state failure; it provides opportunities for organised crime.... The most practical way to tackle the often elusive new threats will sometimes be to deal with the older problems of regional conflict.”*

By essentially stating that “with the new threats, the first line of defense will often be abroad”, the Union commit itself into exerting due influence on processes taking place outside the member-states confines.

Looking from this perspective, the EU’s intentions sound more robust. The “securitized” approach in the foreign policy domain would serve as markers in developing consequent policy strategies.

## **THE WIDER EUROPE/EUROPEAN NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY**

Roughly in parallel with the announcement of its Security Strategy, the European Union came up with another strategic document that focused more on its immediate surrounding. This was a document entitled the “Wider Europe— Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors”, espousing the concept of a “Wider Europe”.<sup>3</sup>

On March 11 2003 the Commission published a document, entitled Wider Europe – Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with Our Eastern and Souther Neighbors”. This is a strategy for developing relations with the neighboring countries, which prioritizes the commitments in the framework of the external relation of the union – along the lines of EU’s own perceptions for its own security environment and interests.

This strategy provides a guidelines for developing relations with a circles of countries, which are immediate neighbors of the Union, taking into account the fifth wave of enlargement. Initially, the strategy did not include the three South Caucasus countries but after considering the fact the Black Sea will become EU’s external border after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia are included. Later on, the interest towards a particular region – the South Caucasus – has been underlined.

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<sup>3</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Wider Europe— Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors. Brussels, 11.3.2003 COM(2003) 104 final. Available at [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/com03\\_104\\_en.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf)

This is in line with the 2003 European Security Strategy, which says that the EU should take stronger and more active interest in this region.

The Wider Europe initiative was formally announced in June 2003 at the Thessaloniki Summit. The framework of the initiative is based on the understanding that most of these countries are not eligible for membership (in the southern Mediterranean), while for the others membership has not been ruled out, but it's not considered likely in the near or mid-term. However, the Union's strategic goal is to create a concentric circle of stable and predictable states around its borders.

This document presented by the Commission in the first quarter of 2003 no more, no less pursued the development of a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighborhood – a 'ring of friends' – as the document says - with whom the EU would enjoy close, peaceful and co-operative relations.

The three pillars of the relationship between the EU and its neighbors would be "proximity", "prosperity" and "poverty". The proximity clause reiterates the importance of geographic location, whereby defining the imperative of transborder issues for developing relations - first of all of external border management and trans-boundary – including migration – flows. In economic and trade terms there are the energy, transport and telecommunications sector given priority. There is also the security dimension of relations present with a long list of challenges that concerns the Union – starting from environmental hazards to illegal immigration, organized crime and terrorist activities.

The "prosperity" and the "poverty" clauses actually revolve around the issues of political instability, economic vulnerability, institutional deficiencies, conflict and poverty and social exclusion that plague the countries in the region.

While the Union is trying to diagnose the causes of the problems in the adjacent regions it is also providing its recipe for overcoming them. Democracy, pluralism, respect for human rights, civil liberties, the rule of law and core labor standards are mentioned in the EU's do-to list for its neighborhood.

Besides the more general assessments and recommendations, the EU has referred more boldly to pressing issues such as the Transdnistria issue, which eventually would be the basis for policy decision. In this case, the entity has been labeled a statelet, which is a magnet for organized crime, and in another occasion in the text the EU pledges support to multilateral organizations as the OSCE, which are involved in conflict resolution.

On the basis of identified common challenges, the EU sets to offering its own agenda to help the neighboring states cope with these problems for a mutual benefit. This agenda

outlines as the goals of the European Union as well as its actions in support to these goals. The two pillars of the neighborhood policy would be: first, the extensions of the zone of prosperity beyond the Unions' borders, reducing poverty and management of conflicts, and second, tying up the system of benefits (aid, trade preferences, etc) to the implementation of undertaken political and economic conditions. Quite resembling the "conditionality system" undertaken by accession countries in their membership process, the latter system, entitled here "benchmarking", is meant to be the "stick" in EU's hands to spur reforms in the desired by it direction. The EU admits that previous assistance has not been efficient because it did not entail conditionality and stipulates a new pattern for developing the relations. This would be a gradual, step-by-step approach, conditioned on certain achievement, whereby a progress in the implementation of reforms has been measured against a benchmarking system. This would include not only economic indicators, but also indicators measuring progress in the area of values such as respect for human rights, etc.

There are two interesting points in EU's neighborhood policy. First, it is the "equal opportunity" approach, whereby the states in the region are being given opportunity to develop relations on bi-lateral basis with the EU. Second, the progress of these relations will be made on individual basis, taking into the account the progress made by the particular country with regard to political and economic reforms.

In the political sphere, the interest of the EU is focused on the political institutions based on the values – democracy, the rule of law, human rights. In the security domain (both hard and soft) the emphasis is on regional stability and co-operation in justice and home affairs. In the economic sphere these are economic and social reforms that will create new opportunities for development and modernization, for further liberalizations of trade and for gradual participation in the internal market.

In the section of the document, entitled "A New Vision and a New Offer", there is really intriguing statement, claiming that:

*all the neighbouring countries should be offered the prospect of a stake in the EU's Internal Market and further integration and liberalisation to promote the free movement of – persons, goods, services and capital (four freedoms).*

Furthermore, the documents says that:

*If a country has reached this level, it has come as close to the Union as it can be without being a member.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Wider Europe—Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors. Brussels,

What has been offered here to the neighbors is the “second best” option to membership. With the perspective of the “four freedoms” fully implemented the European Union is providing an excellent alternative to countries that do not consider such a path of development. However, there is a price to be paid and it is reforms in line with aligning regulations and standards with the *acquis communautaire*.

The document continues with a list of “carrots” that the Union might offer to its counterparts. Starting with market access and preferential trade treatment, the strategy continues with a number of security issues, which resolution underlies any further development and reform.

These are as matters of primary bilateral concerns as environmental hazards, organized crime, etc., but also residual conflicts in the neighboring countries. This role is defined as “political”, calling for greater involvement of Europe as in conflict prevention as well as in conflict management. The document goes on to recall the fledging Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defense Policy.

It is obvious that the Union is trying to assert if not global, at least a regional player role by pledging its greater involvement in matters of regional concerns – whether they are Palestine, Western Sahara or Transdniestria. Furthermore, the Union even considers committing its military and civilian crisis management capabilities, once a settlement has been achieved.

In terms of EU capacity to realize policy impact, the neighborhood policy is situated between the structured and disciplined accession approach and the “weaker” components of external relations, aid and fledging conflict management capabilities. Thus, it strives for achieving results in stabilization and development, similar (yet not identical) to those it has achieved with the enlargement process.

The Wider Europe initiative has continued its development, not only with altering its title into European Neighborhood Policy, as it is widely known now. In June 2004 there was a substantial geographic extension of the policy by the inclusion of the three South Caucasus republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This was done on suggestion by the Commission with the full understanding that the South Caucasus will soon be an adjacent region in the immediate neighborhood.

Furthermore, the later developments espoused three goals that are especially interesting to the EU<sup>5</sup>. Two priorities are related to the security situation, referring a) to conflict resolution and b) developing of good neighborly relations. These obviously refer to the intrastate problems of secessionist “republics” in Georgia as well as the interstate tensions – primarily between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The third priority relates to all countries and these are the shortages in the rule of law.

The regional cooperation component would run in parallel with the differentiated approach. Though regional cooperation has not been a priority in the beginning of the development of the “Wider Europe” concept, as it is assumed that there is already a certain level of sub-regional cooperation within the CIS arrangements. Consequently, the role of regional cooperation has been reexamined to include two patterns of interaction. The first one provides for cooperation between EU member states and their neighbors. The second pattern provides for cooperation between the neighbors themselves. Both approaches concentrate on issues of mutual concern, including reinforced cooperation in economy, business, employment and social policy, trade and infrastructure; environment, nuclear safety and natural resources; justice and home affairs with an array of issues including border management, asylum and migration, organized crime, terrorism, etc.; the so-called people-to-people issues, involving civil societies, education, training, etc.

From 2007 on, the European Neighborhood Instrument will be the unified, streamlined instrument, that will replace the current instruments, and which will serve as the vehicle for regional cooperation. In this regard, it suggests as cross-border as well as regional cooperation *per se*. Thus, ENI will cover all borders between EU member states and the countries, covered by the ENP. There will be two so-called “Windows” that will comprise the cooperation modalities. The “Windows One” model will support cross-border cooperation along all concerned land and maritime borders, mostly on bilateral basis. The selection and implementation of initiatives will involve national, regional and local level of authority. “Windows Two” is designed to be more flexible, providing support to wider transnational co-operation involving both actors from the member states and the neighboring states.

Though the neighbourhood concept has evolved over time this first version is interesting for showing the meandering intentions of the Union at this stage. First, it is not quite clear which the target countries and regions of this concept are. For sure, there are the Southern Mediterranean countries as well as the so-called Western New Independent States of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. Then there are Russia and the Western Balkans mentioned. For the latter, the so-called European perspective is confirmed in the sense that the countries from the region would qualify for membership sometime in the future.

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<sup>5</sup> Brussels, 12.5.2004 COM(2004) 373 Final Communication from the Commission, European Neighborhood Policy: Strategy Paper. Available at [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/strategy/Strategy\\_Paper\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/strategy/Strategy_Paper_EN.pdf)

The special standing of and attitude towards Russia is visible in the document as it is the only country not piled in a “sub-regional package”. Then there are (or actually – there aren’t) the South Caucasus countries, for which it is explained that at the time being fall outside the scope of this initiative.

It is envisaged that the cooperation, technical and financial aid will have two phases of development. The first one stipulated for optimal coordination between the existing financial instruments (like Tacis and Meda) in the period 2004-2006. The second phase will include the development and the implementation of a new, more effective instrument for cooperation.

In terms of EU future plans, it is stipulated that those countries, which wish to meet EU norms and standards will be provided with technical assistance and twinning. In addition to a new financial instrument from 2007 onwards and an increased financial assistance, there will be a new normative framework. In this regard, there will new contractual links that will supplant the old ones. The European Neighborhood Agreements –as the new normative documents are called - will be defined on the basis of the level of implementation of the Action Plans.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Just several years ago, with the exception of the US backed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and the grand European schemes for the East-West TRACEKA corridor the Black Sea region was not on the agendas neither of the Europeans nor the Americans. The pipeline was eventually built and put into operation in 2005. Nothing worth to mention happened to the TRACEKA corridor. There are however considerable changes in the outside perceptions of the region. First NATO and then the European Union became immediate neighbors of the countries in the region. The region’s geostrategic importance grew in view of its proximity to the Greater Middle East, hence its significance in the US-led “War on Terror”.

Some of the countries in the regions made it to the world headlines with the “colorful” democratic revolutions, such as Georgia and Ukraine. These have been brave attempts at breaking up the vicious circles of protracted post-communist transition with no meaningful reforms, inefficient or nominal state institutions, corrupt elites and general lack of direction. Recently, Moldova joined the ranks of Georgia and Moldova – if not in reformist aspirations – in pro-Western orientation, when President Voronin announced the priorities of his second term.

From the perspective of the European Union, there are four categories of countries in the region. First, there are Bulgaria and Romania, which aspire to join in 2007 (or 2008 if their membership is delayed). Both countries have recently started to raise their voice for bringing the attention towards the region, as they will be effectively external borders of the Union. There are sentimental reasons (notwithstanding Romania's kin relationship with Moldova) cited also - in support to fellow democratizing states and reformist governments. Second, there is Turkey, a country with serious interest in the region, a regional superpower, and a EU hopeful. However, currently Turkey's EU membership in the short to mid-term is uncertain at best. Third, there is a group of countries – starting with Ukraine, also including Georgia, Moldova and Armenia, which although are kept on the sidelines of any talks about the EU enlargement process, reiterate European identity and are ready to engage into a more committing relationship with the EU, leading eventually to membership. Four, there are two countries, which espouse individual preferences in their relationships with the EU. Azerbaijan at the time being does not demonstrate aspiration for membership. Russia too, although for a different reason and with different plans for its relations with the Union. Russia is simply a very special case because while it maintains excellent relations with major EU players, it does not want to be merely one of twenty-something members. Russia maintains that it should be treated as an equal of the Union as a whole. The dynamics changed however with the inclusion of the Central European countries and the Baltics in the Union, which definitely cannot be accused of pro-Russian sentiments.

In terms of normative arrangements of its relations with the countries of the Black Sea area, the European Union has put forward a number of documents, demonstrating the two “pillars” of its foreign policies. Under the “inter-governmental” Common Foreign and Security Policy, one of the basic documents informing the policies in the region is the European Security Strategy, “securitizing” the perceptions and actions of the Union towards the Black Sea area. Within the CFSP, the Union has launched a very special kind of mission, similar – yet of different nature and different tools - to those in the Balkans. The mission called Themis, launched in July 2004, is officially the EU *Rule of Law Mission* to Georgia. The EU is also actively employing the position of Special Representatives of Secretary-General of the Council of the EU, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), The EU Special Representatives – mentioned in the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 – are preventive diplomacy “tool”, engaged also in negotiation and mediation. There are two Special Representatives appointed so far for the Black Sea region – for the South Caucasus since 2003 and for Moldova since 2005.<sup>6</sup>

Under the “supra-national” external policy, there were a number of initiatives supported, including through developmental aid through the Tacis Program. Hopefully, the concept of “Wider Europe”, now generally known as the European Neighborhood Policy will streamline the contractual relations, including the more efficient aid disbursement – and

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<sup>6</sup> “EU Special Representatives”, short description available at [http://ue.eu.int/cms3\\_fo/showPage.asp?id=263&lang=EN](http://ue.eu.int/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=263&lang=EN)

in case the recipient countries wish to do so – to approximate legal frameworks, regulations and procedures along the *aquis communautaire* of the Union. Currently, the relations between the EU and the Black Sea states are being developed on the basis of Country Papers – prepared by the Commission for all the countries - as well as Action Plans – a detailed roadmaps for the neighbors and the EU – of which some are ready and some are pending announcement and ratification.

In terms of real-life actions, the European Union has been very cautious in its dealings with the new neighbors for at least three reasons. First, the Union does not have such an immediate interest as in the case of the Balkans for example. Moreover, the Black Sea countries still lack such strong lobbyists in the Neighborhood Policy, as is the case of Spain, France, Italy and the Southern Mediterranean. Poland and the Baltics are active in that regard and the Eastern dimension of the Neighborhood Policy will be strengthened after the inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. In that regard, the divergence between “pro-Eastern” and “pro-Southern” member states is not the only cleavage in the EU.

Second, all the more important is the divergence in regards to the relations with Russia. There is a group of countries, moreover – heavyweights such as France and Germany – which plans include not only maintaining excellent relations with Russia, but also co-opting Russia as a strategic partner and counterweight to – let’s say – the United States. For the sake of these relations these countries are ready to omit the complaints of the smaller Black Sea states of the constant Russian meddling in their affairs. Such is the case allegedly with the last elections in Ukraine, when the EU intervened in favor of Yushenko only after the insistence of Poland and the Baltics, against the position of the older member states. This duplicity can also be seen in the fact, that the “four spaces” agreement, regulating the EU-Russia relations, was signed only a day after EU member states refused to take part in Russia’s celebration of the end of WW II.

The third reason for EU’s relative inactivity in the Black Sea region is the lack of foreign policy capacity, additionally weakened by engagements in the enlargement process, commitments to the Balkans and internal squabbles over the institutional (or constitutional) make up of the Union.

However, despite the European Unions is not that active or influential in the Black Sea area as Russia or the United States are, it is very likely that it will play a major role in the near future with the gravity of its “Europeanization” model.

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