



EU Policy towards Black Sea Region

By Rima Khalatyan

20.05.2012

The Black Sea Region runs anticlockwise around the Black Sea from Greece, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria, through Russia and The Ukraine, onto Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the east, and Turkey in the south. Though Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Greece are not littoral states, history, proximity and close ties make them natural regional actors. Within the European Union, the region is no more than a thin coastal strip some 20–60 km wide that runs down almost the entire length of Romania and Bulgaria, eventually culminating in a series of low-lying mountains on the border with Turkey. Altogether, the Black Sea Region covers just 0.3% of the EU territory but it is nevertheless sufficiently distinct in character to be in a category of its own.¹ Black Sea region was always in the center of interest and attention of all countries during the history of humanity. It was and is important region for the security and stability of Europe and Asia. There are large amount of actors and clashing interests within this region. In addition to the numerous other issues in the region, ethnic conflicts, ongoing state building processes, the presence of vast natural resources, and strategic transport and energy corridors mean that the region is an extremely important and sensitive area.

In the 21st century the changing global and regional balances created new political and security dilemmas for the Black Sea Region. The global and regional powers increasingly supported competing political and security agendas which, although they occasionally contradicted each other, were clearly interlinked. After 11 September 2001 the US increased its involvement in the region, for example with new programs in Georgia and Ukraine. This went hand in hand with the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement processes and global political developments. The differing approaches to the

¹ Black Sea Region, <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/info/pubs/docs/biogeos/Black%20Sea.pdf>

19 Sayat Nova Ave.

Yerevan 0001, Armenia

Tel./Fax: +374 (10) 582638

E-mail: mail@ICHD.org

www.ICHD.org

creation of security and stability in the region led to tension and rivalry between the regional actors.²

On 1 January 2007, two Black Sea littoral states, Bulgaria and Romania, joined the European Union. More than ever before, the prosperity, stability and security of these countries around the Black Sea are of immediate concern to the EU. The European Union has already made major efforts to stimulate democratic and economic reforms, to project stability and to support development in the Black Sea area through wide ranging cooperation programs. Three EU policies are relevant in this context: the precession process in the case of Turkey, the European Neighborhood Policy (with five eastern ENP partners also being active in Black Sea cooperation) and the Strategic Partnership with the Russian Federation.

Turkey is an important actor in the region regarding the energy issues not only in the Black Sea but also east Mediterranean, Caspian, and Central Asia. In this framework the main actors who can really play a role in sub-regional cooperation are Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania due to their close links to each other as well as the EU.

In the region there is a need for bigger and competitive companies, due to the lack of funding for the investments. However the inclusion of more companies in the regional politics creates different political situations. The companies sometimes become more

² Security in the Black Sea Region, Policy Report II, http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/en/media/xcms_bst_dms_30921_30922_2.pdf

important than states i. e. GAZPROM.³ On December 27 of 2011 A working meeting between Alexey Miller, Chairman of the Gazprom Management Committee and Taner Yildiz, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey was held in Ankara. During the meeting a wide range of issues were discussed in the field of cooperation between Russia and Turkey in the gas sector. In 2010 Gazprom exported 18 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Turkey via two transmission routes: the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline and the Blue Stream gas pipeline, which is Black Sea gas pipeline that carries natural gas from Russia into Turkey.⁴ Thus the influence of Russian Federation in the region grows. There won't be any doubt about the fact that Russian Federation is one of the main actors in the region when it comes to economy and security.

In the two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's vision and policy toward the Black Sea region (BSR) has gone through at least four stages:

- The "initial phase:" 1991 (or even 1988) – 1994, characterized by the emergence of armed ethnic conflicts, their "freezing," and the establishment of a new post-Soviet status quo;
- The "Chechen" phase: 1995 – 2002, when Russia mainly viewed the situation in the BSR through the prism of the Chechen war;
- The "recovery" period: 2003 – 2008, when Russia began acting along several dimensions. Though loosely connected in practice, these activities were marked early on as a high priority in Russia's strategy. As early as September 2003, then Russian President Vladimir Putin referred to the Azov-Black Sea region as a zone of Russia's "strategic interests." He stressed that the Black Sea provides Russia with a direct exit to its most important transport routes, and thus that an effective security system is needed for the region;
- New active regional strategy phase: August 2008 - present, beginning with the five-day war in the Caucasus.

A new BSR strategy closely coincides with the main characteristics of Russian foreign policy: it is very assertive, based on principles of realpolitik, and clearly geo-economically and geopolitically motivated. Underpinning this strategy is the notion that Russia has more rights than the United States or the European Union to play a leading role (or perhaps a shared leadership role with Turkey) in the BSR for a number of historical, geographic, military, economic, and political reasons. The paradox of the situation is that in the West, Russia, in spite of being one of six Black Sea littoral states, is predominantly perceived of as an outside power. In truth, Russia has not only its finger but its whole arm in this regional "cake." The five-day Georgia-Russia war strengthened Russia's position in the BSR, while the new postwar regional political context has provided Russia with unprecedented levers in it. These levers can be used either to stabilize and develop the region or to transform it into another arena of geopolitical competition, part of a zero-sum game between Russia and the West. The BSR thus stands to become either the grounds for a regional partnership (including elements of peace enforcement, as needed) or competition between non-regional forces. In the current situation, both scenarios are equally realistic.⁵ An analysis of the postwar situation paradoxically does not yield entirely pessimistic results. The initial reactions of key world players (the EU, NATO, and leading European powers) to Russia's military (re)action in the Caucasus and recognition of the two republics were rather moderate and toothless, surprisingly so for Moscow which expected far worse. By December, the EU had restarted negotiations on a new cooperation agreement with Russia, NATO suggested a return to "business as usual" mutual activities, and Ukraine and Georgia did not receive NATO Membership Action Plans (MAPs). At the same time, Russia welcomed the prompt intervention of the EU—or rather of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. This was due to the simple fact that it came from the EU, rather than NATO or the United States. To Russia, the EU is a valid political actor, counterbalancing the

³ Are EU's policies well defined towards the Black Sea region?, http://www.eu4seas.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=318&Itemid=23

⁴ Gazprom and Turkey Discuss Cooperation Options in Gas Sector, <http://www.offshoreenergytoday.com/gazprom-and-turkey-discuss-cooperation-options-in-gas-sector/>

⁵Irina Kobrinskaya, The Black Sea Region in Russia's Current Foreign Policy Paradigm, 1-2, http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/pepm_041.pdf

United States, and in general a very desirable one for its foreign policy strategy.⁶

However increasing EU involvement is increasingly challenging Russian interests. EU has realized the partial incompatibility of Russian and EU interests in the regard of energy sources; however, the lack of cohesion within the EU prevents the formation of common external energy policies. The EU is increasingly recognizing its interest in engaging with conflict resolution in the region. This also runs contrary to Russian strategy, which strives to maintain the status quo in the conflicts rather than working for solutions, in order to maintain Russian leverage over the South Caucasus and Moldova. In this field, the EU has yet to officially recognize its interest conflict with Russia. However, due to the intertwinement of the conflict resolution processes with the EU's deeper policy goals in the Black Sea region, namely the promotion of a stable, secure and democratic European neighborhood, the EU will likely find it increasingly difficult to pursue its key interests in the region, while simultaneously maintaining a passive stance towards Russian policies in the region.⁷ The Russian-Georgian war changed security perceptions in the Black Sea Region. It is now very clear that its security is closely linked with the protracted regional conflicts. After the end of the war certain developments enhanced Russia's role as a regional actor. It now has new military bases in the Caucasus; Western credibility is rapidly disappearing; and the regional threat perception is at its peak.⁸

However, Despite the existence of all these initiatives, which are designed to increase the presence of the EU in the region, the international community (and this includes

Russia) has tended to treat the EU as an actor with no more than a limited ability to reach collective decisions and with a limited impact on the region's security structure. Other regional actors have developed their own priorities. Romania and Bulgaria are currently NATO and EU members, and are more interested in establishing closer relations with the US. The US position in the region was promoted by Romania in particular, which was supported by Bulgaria, Georgia and to a lesser extent Ukraine. The Romanian government would like Romania to be the main actor in the EU when it comes to issues that have something to do with the Black Sea. Without the support of Greece and Bulgaria it may not be able to change a great deal, though it may be able to obtain significant concessions from the EU in the course of the bargaining processes. The complex network of relationships among and between the regional and non-regional actors and their policies is of decisive importance for the future of the political and security arrangements in the Black Sea Region.⁹

The Black Sea regional constellation has substantially changed in the past years and will continue to evolve. In these conditions, the EU's new regional cooperation initiative would usefully complement its existing wide-ranging bilateral and sectorial activities. The European Union's presence in the Black Sea region opens a window on fresh perspectives and opportunities. This requires a more coherent, longer-term effort which would help to fully seize these opportunities, to bring increased stability and prosperity to the region. Greater EU engagement in Black Sea regional cooperation will contribute to this objective.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid, p. 4

⁷Niklas Nilsson, EU and Russia in the Black Sea Region: Increasingly Competing Interests?, Romanian Journal of European Affairs, Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2008

⁸ Security in the Black Sea Region, Policy Report II, p. 9, http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/en/media/xcms_bst_dms_30921_30922_2.pdf

⁹ Ibid, p. 13

¹⁰ Black Sea Synergy - A New Regional Cooperation Initiative, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf

Bibliography

1. Black Sea Region,
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/info/pubs/docs/biogeos/Black%20Sea.pdf>
2. Security in the Black Sea Region, Policy Report II, http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/en/media/xcms_bst_dms_30921_30922_2.pdf
3. Are EU's policies well defined towards the Black Sea region?,
http://www.eu4seas.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=318&Itemid=23
4. Gazprom and Turkey Discuss Cooperation Options in Gas Sector,
<http://www.offshoreenergytoday.com/gazprom-and-turkey-discuss-cooperation-options-in-gas-sector/>
5. Irina Kobrinskaya, The Black Sea Region in Russia's Current Foreign Policy Paradigm, 1-2,
http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/pepm_041.pdf
6. Niklas Nilsson, EU and Russia in the Black Sea Region: Increasingly Competing Interests?, Romanian Journal of European Affairs, Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2008
7. Black Sea Synergy - A New Regional Cooperation Initiative,
http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf