



Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation:
The Role of the EU
6th EU Framework Programme

The EU and the Wider Black Sea Region: Challenges and Policy Options

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Garnet Policy Brief

Number 5, January 2008



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Introduction

The increasing importance of the Wider Black Sea Region (WBSR) as the focal point of Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian security is encapsulated in the conceptualization of the region itself. The definition of the region is not only a matter of geography but also is related to politics, economics, security and culture. The Wider Black Sea Region includes Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, the Eastern Balkans, and the South Caucasian States. Therefore, the security environment in the region is a product of diverse interests of coastal states and their neighbors. Some of these interests coincide with those of European and North Atlantic structures while others reflect the security agenda of regional powers. The consecutive enlargements of NATO and EU, the increasing dependence of EU energy security on Russia and the focus on the Caspian Sea as a potential alternative, have moved the center of gravity of European security towards South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia – three very sensitive areas in terms of *soft* and *hard security*. The collective and individual security of EU members depends on a vast array of new threats and sources of instability that rise from inside and around the *Wider Black Sea Region*.

The challenges and opportunities that emanate from the area have motivated the German Marshall Fund of the United States to promote a Euro-Atlantic strategy towards the WBSR. The strategy is designed to enhance cooperation between the various actors of the region including international organizations and the coastal states. It also addresses common challenges in a coherent and consistent manner: from weak states, poor governance and frozen conflicts to issues such as organized crime and energy supply. The American initiative has been followed by the European Commission's publication in April 2007 of *Black Sea Synergy: A New regional Cooperation Initiative*. This publication provides concrete proof that the European Union has begun to think strategically about the Black Sea.

This policy brief analyzes the importance of the Wider Black Sea Region for European security. To this end we shall begin by responding to the following question: what are the stakes for the EU? In the second section of this brief, we will examine strategies and policies that the various state actors have developed during the past decade according to their interests in the Black Sea region. Stability in this region depends largely on the interactions, convergences and divergences between a wide range of international and regional actors (Russia, other bordering countries, NATO, EU, the United States, international organizations). The third part of this policy brief underlines existing frameworks of cooperation that have been established in the Black Sea Region and evaluates their contribution to the democratization and stabilization of the region. Finally, we shall emphasize the challenges and opportunities of a Euro-Atlantic strategy towards the WBSR, which may be the only workable approach to efficiently solve the various security problems of the region.

1. What Stakes for the EU?

The EU's interests in the region can be defined through five dimensions.

1) Democracy, respect for human rights and good governance. One of the major interests of the European Union is to promote democracy in its neighborhood. Over the past two decades, the force of Europeanization in Central and Eastern Europe transformed a number of illiberal regimes into consolidated democracies, one of the greatest successes of the EU in terms of promoting democracy. WBSR offers a mixed landscape of fragile liberal democracies (Bulgaria and Romania), illiberal democracies or pseudo-democracies (Ukraine and Turkey), weak states (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova) and authoritarian regimes (Russia). The fall of the communist rule and the uncertain economic and political transitions that followed have impacted the quality of life of individuals, as the region is plagued by poverty, corruption and other forms of human insecurity. Besides, a number of Black Sea countries are multiethnic states and the cultural and religious differences are still hard to reconcile. Last but not least, the area lacks democracies in its immediate vicinity. In the East, Central Asia offers various forms of authoritarian governments and in the North a more and more assertive Russia dominates its former Soviet space. The democratic deficit of the WBSR suggests that the EU has several pragmatic reasons to duplicate the strategies used in the democratization of the Central and Eastern Europe and to export its values and standards in the WBSR.

2) Frozen Conflicts and Regional Stability. In geographic and cultural terms the WBSR is not only an important civilisational crossroad, but also a bridge between Europe and more distant and troubled areas. This vast region of high political and

economic vulnerability has faced important challenges of *hard security* since the end of the Cold War. The conflicts in Transnistria, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Chechnya are a part of today's EU neighborhood and increase the risks of violence and instability in the area. Thus, it is not surprising that the *European Security Strategy* (December 2003) and the *Communication from the European Commission – European Neighborhood Policy Strategy Paper* ((COM) 2004 – 373) emphasize that the EU's task is to "make a particular contribution to stability and good governance in the immediate neighbourhood [and] to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union.

3) The fight against organized crime and terrorism. A third aspect of European interest in the WBSR involves the fight against organized crime and terrorism. The prosperity of European space strongly contrasts with the areas of conflict and instability found in certain countries bordering the Black Sea but also in Central Asia and in the Middle East. The frozen conflicts encouraged the over-militarisation of the area and increased the risks of terrorism. The process of globalization contributes to a growth in criminal phenomena including weapons and drugs trafficking and human trafficking. Terrorist activities also benefit from organized crime and often use the money laundering networks of other criminal groups. The weakness of the Caucasian divided states acts as a magnet for such criminal groups. The need to face these types of threats constitutes one of the EU's preoccupations in the region.

4) Energy Security. Another aspect of European interest in the WBSR involves the EU's quest for alternative sources of energy. The gas crisis in Ukraine in 2006 pointed out the strong dependence of the EU on Russia and the need to diversify its energy suppliers. The energy dimension is bringing the WBSR closer to the EU's preoccupations. The energy resources of the Caspian Sea constitute one of the potential alternatives (in particular Azerbaijan). Moreover, Europe tries to set up pipelines over the long-term which would be directly connected to the producers in Central Asia, avoiding any interaction with Russia.

5) EU as a Foreign Policy Actor. The WBSR constitutes a test for the EU's ambitions to promote security and stability at its borders. The Black Sea region is part of the struggle over spheres of influence between Russia and the EU and to a certain extent between the EU and the US. The EU-Russia Summit (May 2005) ended with an agreement on the *Road Map for the Common Space and External Security*. Targeted to enhance the cooperation in their common neighborhood, the agreement makes no major progress in sensitive areas such as the frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space and energy. If the EU wants to assert itself as a foreign policy actor, it needs to negotiate difficult matters of *hard security* with Moscow, however without jeopardizing its geo-strategic interests. The WBSR is both a challenge and opportunity for the EU to act within its neighborhood and evaluate its instruments of cooperation, stabilization and democratization, including the ENP and the bilateral Action Plans, that tend to be regarded as strictly soft security tools.

The Communication of the European Commission *Black Sea Synergy, a New Regional Cooperation Initiative* encompasses the five dimensions described above and reflects the EU's concerns regarding the WBSR. Nevertheless, this document gives little attention to the way in which the EU is going to negotiate a number of *hard security* issues with the main regional powers: Turkey and Russia.

2. The Contrasted Interests of State Actors

In order to understand the complexity of the region and to emphasize different scenarios for the EU involvement in the area, we must examine the geo-strategic interest of the Black Sea State Actors. There are three groups of states interested in the WBSR today: **1)** the Western powers like the EU and the United States, **2)** Russia and Turkey which are moving closer and closer together, creating a block of Status Quo powers in the WBSR, and **3)** the "Community of Hopeful" - the other Black Sea countries (Minchev, 2006). For the European Union, NATO or any other international organization, the challenge of promoting a security regime in the WBSR is compounded by the fact that the area is home to a range of countries with diverse and competing interests and security agendas.

Russia is incontestably the most important actor in the WBSR and is likely to represent a factor of regional instability. For Russia, the WBSR falls under its spheres of influence – the "near abroad" - and Moscow has adopted two parallel strategies regarding the area. The first strategy is a **defensive** one and is based on the resistance to all types of "westernization" of the region. The second strategy is an **active** one and focuses on the use of the energy weapon against the dependent Eastern and Western countries. In order to affirm its predominance in the WBSR, Russia uses the economic and political weakness of post-Soviet republics (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) as well as its oil and energy resources. Through Gazprom, Moscow is establishing relations with its neighbors on the basis of energy domination. The gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine has proven that Moscow is ready to use the geopolitical dimension of energy to protect its *near abroad*. Moscow has recently paid close attention to the Caspian Area and the way in which gas is integrated into European and Asian markets.

Alongside economic sanctions, Russia has tried on several occasions to influence the electoral processes in neighboring countries by openly supporting the pro-Russian candidates (Moldova and Ukraine). Furthermore, Moscow never contributed to the resolution of the frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space. On the contrary, it did everything to preserve the *status quo*. By encouraging separatist Republics (Transnistria in Moldova; Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia), Russia weakens the Moldovan and Georgian States and

justifies the presence of Russian military bases on the territory of these states. The Russian strategy in the WBSR is part of a broader tactic to keep the former Soviet space under direct influence.

Turkey is the second important regional actor in the WBSR. Turkey's role as a regional power has been reinforced since its active participation in the Gulf War (1990-1991). Starting in 2005, Turkey became an official candidate for EU integration and Ankara has placed its relations with Brussels on the forefront of its political agenda. In geo-strategic terms, Turkey could play an important role in any EU strategy in the Black Sea. Turkey controls the water supplies for the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Syria) as well as the two straits - Bosphorus, Dardanelles - and the Marmara Sea which connect the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea. Turkish territory is an important route for the transport of hydrocarbons and energy from the Caspian Sea towards Europe. The pipeline Baku-Tbilissi-Ceyhan (BTC) was opened in May 2005, with the help of EU contributions. The BTC represents an alternative option to Russian resources. The Baku-Tbilissi-Erzurum gas pipeline (in service since 2006) makes the transport of the Azeri and Turkmen natural gas possible towards Europe and completes the East-West energy corridor. This "double energy corridor" brings the Caspian area closer to the European Union.

However, Turkish frustrations concerning the last American intervention in Iraq and the European hesitations regarding the further enlargement, seems to push Turkey far from its Western allies in a time when Europe and the US need Ankara to negotiate their relations with Russia, to secure the energy transport and to stabilize the WBSR. The increased cooperation between Turkey and Russia is undoubtedly one of the most important geopolitical events since the end of the USSR in 1991. The two Black Sea powers are struggling for power and influence in the WBSR but they are likely to cooperate in order to keep the West at a distance. In 1997, Ankara signed an agreement with Moscow concerning the construction of a gas pipeline which crosses the Black Sea - Bluestream. In spite of little divergences over some geo-strategic issues such as the NATO enlargement or Kosovo, Moscow and Ankara have strengthened their economic and political ties and even find some points of convergence. The joint condemnation of the American presence in the Black Sea is another example of congruent points of view.

Ukraine is another important actor in the WBSR. Its political culture and identity are strongly influenced by its Soviet past, and Kiev has often found it difficult to choose between the East and the West. This hesitation is even more visible at the level of foreign policy. Kiev has chosen a "multi-vector approach" that allows it to play several cards at once: participation in the Community of Independent States (CIS), adhesion to the NATO Partnership for the Peace (PfP, 1994), a role inside GUAM, and beneficiary of the ENP since 2005. Strongly dependent on Moscow, Ukraine remains a Russian pivot point in the WBSR. In order to maintain its position of regional power and to facilitate Russian access to its fleet in Crimea, Moscow needs to keep Ukraine under its influence.

Among the six Black Sea States, **Georgia** is certainly the one presenting the most important challenges in terms of *soft and hard security*. Georgia is a weak state located at a crossroads between Europe and the Caucasus; it represents Russia's *near abroad* and is one of the EU's new neighbors. The frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are challenging the integrity of the Georgian States. The areas of conflict became a haven for illegal traffic and smuggled goods. As is the case for other former Soviet states, Georgia cannot solve its internal problems without Russian interference. The position of Moscow in the "resolution" of the two frozen conflicts has always been ambiguous. On one hand, Moscow declared its support for the consolidation of the Georgian State, while on the other it opened the door to Ossetian separatism and the integration of South Ossetia with the Russian Federation. In order to counterbalance Russian influence, Georgia is seeking recognition from the West (through international organizations, the EU, NATO and the United States). Additionally, American engagement in Georgia since the Rose Revolution is troubling Moscow.

Georgia represents a neuralgic point in the Caucasus and draws the attention of big regional and international powers. With regards to energy transport, Georgia's location between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, the Southern Caucasus and the Northern Caucasus, made it an ideal place to pass the Baku-Tbilissi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC) and the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP).

After struggling with economic and political reforms for several years, **Bulgaria and Romania** are the only Black Sea States that have successfully integrated into NATO (2004) and the EU (2007). The two countries have shared a common past as Soviet satellites and members of the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War. Additionally, they followed similar paths of transformation and democratization during the 1990s. As for their importance as Black Sea States, the security environment of Bulgaria and Romania is very complex. Since EU enlargement, both countries seem to operate as a buffer zone between an unstable East and the wealthy European space. Bulgaria and Romania are close to areas of instability - Kosovo and Transnistria - and therefore they are often perceived as countries of transit for illegal goods, merchandises and migration. At the same time, their geo-strategic position has motivated the United States to redeploy its military equipment and its armed forces from Western Europe to Bulgaria and Romania. Both countries are important routes for energy and oil transit. The "Progress" pipeline connecting Russia and Turkey crosses the south-east of Bulgaria and Romania. The gas pipeline "Nabucco" will also pass through Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary before being connected to Austria. The Nabucco project is included in the EU Trans-European Energy Network program and a feasibility study for the Nabucco pipeline has been performed under an EU project grant.

Despite their common past and many other similarities, Bulgaria and Romania do not have the same interests in the WBSR.

Romania tends to be more active in the WBSR than its neighbor. Bucharest's interest in the Black Sea has been confirmed on several occasions by the President Traian Basescu who has placed the Black Sea area on the forefront of his political agenda. In June 2006, Romania inaugurated the first session of the **Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialogue (BSF)**. For Romania, the WBSR provides an opportunity to participate at the side of the big Western powers and take revenge for years of international isolation and Soviet submission. Yet the Russian factor plays an important role in the formulation of Romanian foreign policy towards the Black Sea. Bucharest is constantly concerned with the situation in neighbouring Moldova and denounced the Russian support of the separatist regime in Transnistria. The presence of NATO and the US in the Black Sea region is perceived by Bucharest as one of the most valuable solutions to the Russian dominance in the region.

As for Bulgaria, its interests and position regarding the WBSR were underlined in the Bulgarian Foreign Policy Strategy 2001-2005. Three main lines can be identified: **1)** the development of the relations between Bulgaria and Russian Federation, **2)** the development of bilateral relations with Moldova and Ukraine; **3)** intensification of the dialogue with Caucasian Republics. However, Bulgaria is less dynamic than Romania in the WBSR. This passive attitude could be explained by historical affinities with Russia and by an important Turkish minority population. In other words, Sofia is subjected to the pressures of the "status quo powers".

The United States is the most recent player in the WBSR. US interests in the WBSR are both idealistic and pragmatic. Among its idealistic notions, we may note its support of the democratization of countries in the region. The Rose and Orange Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine have been perceived in Washington as a signal of the revival of the democratic societal forces. These tiny democratic transformations have paved the way for debate amongst American decision makers. Several analysts believe that a Euro-Atlantic strategy towards the Black Sea region that merges European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) and NATO instruments together is the only way to securely anchor the Black Sea countries to the West.

In more realistic terms, the US engagement in the Black Sea region could be seen as part of wider foreign policy tendencies that focus on US national interest. The terrorist attacks of September 11th altered the broad outlines of American Foreign policy and brought specific challenges such as counterterrorism and the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to the top of the political agenda. In this respect, the WBSR is an appealing field of action for US (proximity of Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan). Second, energy security has become a major issue of concern not only for EU but also for the US. The Black Sea is already an important road for the transit of oil and gas from the Middle East and Central Asia to Europe, from ports on Russia's Black Sea coast through the Turkish straits into the Mediterranean. Third, a growing US presence in the WBSR is likely to contribute to the consolidation of the American supremacy at the top of the international order and counteract the dominance of other powers in the region.

3. Current Frameworks of Cooperation

The existing frameworks of cooperation in the WBSR have been established using various definitions of the area and the principal external actors, including the Euro-Atlantic institutions, have employed flexible approaches to the area.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) represents the most inclusive framework of collaboration in the area. The BSEC was created in 1992 as a result of Turkish initiative and includes 12 states (six Black Sea states, plus Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova and Serbia) and 11 observers (Germany, Belarus, Croatia, the United States, France, Israel, Italy, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Tunisia). During its fifteen years of existence, the BSEC has undergone several transformations and has established a number of institutions such as the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC (PABSEC), a Permanent Secretariat (PERMIS) and a Development Bank (BSTDB), and an International Center for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS).

Since its creation, the BSEC has been mainly a *soft power* actor intended to strengthen economic cooperation between its members. However, growing political instabilities have forced the organization to redefine its objectives. During its 10th Summit (Istanbul, June 2002), the Council of Ministers called on the BSEC to reinforce the security and the stability in the WBSR, officially including cooperation in the field of *hard security* in the BSEC's agenda. However, the role of the BSEC in the field of *hard security* confronts several obstacles: **1)** each state has its own preoccupations in terms of hard security and the national security strategies of countries in the region do not always converge; **2)** BSEC is both too small and too wide of an international organization to address issues of *hard security*; the big Western powers with credible defense capabilities are not part of BSEC and the diversity of its members would make coordination difficult; **3)** the member states of BSEC belong to various political and security organizations and this makes policy coordination too complex; **4)** the BSEC is characterized by weak political engagement of its members: most of the time member states privilege other instruments of foreign policy and look to other multilateral forums of cooperation to achieve their goals; **5)** BSEC members are hesitant to create a framework of regional security in which the big regional powers (Russia, Turkey) would play an essential role; **6)** the BSEC has not yet developed concrete mechanisms that would allow it to act in the field of *hard security*; **7)** there is a major lack of interface and coordination between the BSEC and other international organizations such as the OSCE and NATO (Manoli 2002).

The European Union began its involvement in the WBSR in 1990 when the Union launched and participated in a number of regional projects (Baku Initiative, INOGATE, PETrAS, SYNERGY Programme, TRACECA). In the context of the SYNERGY program, in 1995 the EU established the Black Sea Regional Energy Center (BSREC). The *Baku Initiative* launched in 2004 was also designed to promote cooperation and legal harmonization in the field of energy and include all Black Sea states and the Caspian Sea countries (including Turkmenistan and Iran “if political conditions permit”). However, the majority of EU programs and projects have been negotiated on a bilateral basis, which is the case for the European Neighborhood Policy and its consequent Action Plans.

The Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative launched in April 2007 constitutes the first EU attempt to treat the Black Sea Area as a region. The purpose of Black Sea Synergy is to reorganize existing regional policies and enhance the existing regional cooperation and dialogue. Among sectors and issues mentioned in the document we find: promotion of democracy and respect of human rights, fight against trafficking and organized crime, frozen conflicts, energy, transport, environmental problems, trade, research and education. Nevertheless, the Strategy does not adopt a clear and efficient political position on the regional agenda and appears to be simply a declaratory initiative that does not engage in action.

During the past few years the EU has also strengthened its relations with the BSEC. The co-operation between the BSEC and the EU started to develop in 1997 when the European Commission submitted to the EU Council a Communication on the Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area relating to the state of affairs and perspectives of EU action that encouraged further development (Doc.COM (97), 597 Final Brussels, 14 November 1997). Eight years later, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States adopted in Chisinau (28 October 2005) a declaration that included the main sectoral objectives that could be addressed by the BSEC and the EU together: **1)** development of infrastructure, including transport and energy; **2)** trade and economic activities, including cross-border cooperation; **3)** environmental protection; **4)** institutional and social sectors; and **5)** science and technology. Nevertheless, as underlined by several analysts from the International Center for Black Sea Studies, the framework of interaction between the EU and the BSEC is currently developed only at a conceptual level; there is no concrete definition of the structure, nor the content of their interaction.

NATO became a constant actor in the WBSR since the Alliance decided to increase its membership to include two Black Sea states (Bulgaria and Romania). NATO’s Concept of Defense against Terrorism published in 2002 underlines the interest of the Alliance in the WBSR and its desire to contribute to the stability and security of this area. The use of Black Sea airspace by NATO and the US during their missions in Afghanistan and Iraq reinforced the bonds between the Black Sea countries and the Atlantic Alliance. In order to reinforce the military capacities of the countries in the area, NATO inaugurated the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in 2002. Georgia and Azerbaijan were the first two countries to sign the IPAP in 2004 and 2005, followed by Armenia, Kazakhstan and Moldova. However, the presence of NATO in the WBSR has created tensions between the Alliance and some of its members (Turkey) and non-members (Russia). Russia and Turkey expressed their disagreement regarding the presence of NATO in the WBSR and warned against the over-militarization of the area. NATO’s Open Door Policy and the relations developed with a new generation of partners and aspirants from South Caucasus suggest that Bulgaria and Romania are not the final frontier of the Alliance.

Another important framework of regional co-operation in the WBSR is **GUAM** (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova). GUAM was created in 1996 by the presidents of Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan with the assistance of the United States. It was meant to weaken the military and political control of Russia in the area. Moldova adhered to the organization in 1997 and Uzbekistan in 1999. The latter left the organization in 2005. At a meeting in Kiev in May 2006, GUAM was formally institutionalized and renamed the “Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (ODED-GUAM)”. The last GUAM Summit (Chisinau April 2005) focused on three questions: the democratization of the region, the co-operation with NATO and the EU, and new approaches to solve *frozen conflicts*, including new strategies to attract international involvement.

In January 2005, the **Community of the Democratic Choice (CDC)** was created by the Georgian and Ukrainian presidents Saakashvili and Yushchenko. The CDC created a framework of co-operation which goes beyond WBSR and includes Georgia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Moldova, Slovenia and Macedonia. The prerogatives and mandates of the CDC are similar to those of GUAM: cooperation, democratization and solutions for frozen conflicts.

In order to increase the military level of integration and co-operation in the Black Sea, Turkey launched the **Black Sea Force (BLACKSEAFOR)** in April 2001. The BLACKSEAFOR is a naval initiative of Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. The initiative involves rescue naval operations and assistance to civil ships.

The Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership represents the latest regional initiative in the WBSR driven by active involvement and interaction between stakeholders interested in the future of the Black Sea region. The goals of the Forum are multiple: to reinforce mutual trust, to facilitate synergy between the various regional initiatives, to support the pragmatic regional projects, and to share information and past experiences between the countries of the area and other partners.

An analysis of the existing frameworks of cooperation in the WBSR shows how it is impossible for the different institutional actors to unite their forces and to formulate a cohesive and global strategy towards the WBSR. The complexity of the area has made impossible

the coordination between the various actors and the fight for spheres of influence prevails inside some of the institutional frameworks to the detriment of coordination and cooperation.

4. Concurrent Debates over the EU and NATO Policies in the Black Sea

The challenges and opportunities offered by the region itself, the contrasted interests of new and old actors and the limits of existing frameworks of cooperation suggest that wider involvement of the West in the WBSR is needed. Today, the EU represents one of the most powerful regional organizations in the region, but the multiple challenges call for a joint Euro-Atlantic strategy that would bring together the *soft and hard powers* of NATO, the US and the EU.

The need for such a strategy has witnessed serious attention on both sides of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, in Washington and in some European capitals, decision-makers and analysts have started to believe that it will be difficult to decouple the idea of a Euro-Atlantic strategy from the prospect of a further wave of enlargement of NATO and the EU. In fact, how can one envision a Euro-Atlantic strategy without offering a perspective of accession (no matter how vague) to the Black Sea States? From a long-term perspective of the enlargement of European and North Atlantic structures, debates have moved to the issue of whether it is NATO or the EU who should lead the effort to anchor the fragile democracies around the Black Sea to the West. This debate is not new since Westerners have already been confronted by similar dilemmas for the enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic structures to Central and Eastern Europe.

At present, there are three concurrent scenarios regarding the prospect of a Euro-Atlantic strategy towards the WBSR: 1) **NATO first?** 2) **the EU first?** 3) **Should both “rapprochements” occur simultaneously?**

From an American point of view, NATO should lead the Euro-Atlantic strategy towards the Black Sea. Following the GMF analysis, the West could not afford to lose the window of opportunity that has opened in the region since 2004. Therefore, NATO should begin the process and offer membership to Georgia and Ukraine and try to look forward to strengthen relations with other countries from the South Caucasus. Ronald Asmus argues that there are several reasons to opt for a NATO-first strategy. **First**, the Black Sea countries need the NATO security umbrella in order to give them the self-confidence and the support to entail democratic internal efforts. NATO's eventual membership could pave the way for the EU accession process, which usually takes more time and requires deep reforms. **Second**, the EU has not yet developed an effective and coherent foreign policy or security policy. Regional stability also depends on the way in which the EU negotiates with the great regional powers: Russia and Turkey. Since the end of the Cold War, Europe has maintained hesitant and divergent relations with the countries in the area. In its relations with Russia, inconsistencies of the CFSP have left important powers to Russia in the resolution of the *frozen conflicts* of the post-Soviet space, which is prolonging the *status quo*. Without the capacity to influence the great regional powers and the relations between these powers and the smaller States in the region, the EU will not be able to secure its neighborhood. **Third**, the EU continues to be divided on the need for another wave of enlargement. Enlargement fatigue which translated into strong opposition to the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005, as well as opposition to Turkey's accession to the Union, suggests that the borders of the EU will not be modified any time soon. Moreover, it will take decades before the countries in the region will meet the EU criteria for enlargement. For the time being, no Black Sea country will be able to comply with some 80,000 pages of *acquis communautaire* in the short term. The “Europeanization” process has taken almost two decades in Central and Eastern Europe, and one should not forget that those countries were an easy case to solve for the EU compared with Ukraine or with countries from the South Caucasus. *NATO's Open Door Policy* is likely to allow the Black Sea countries to reach the Western side more quickly. Therefore, NATO and US engagement in the region is essential to counter-balance the geo-strategic ambitions of Russia.

However, the “NATO first” scenario tends to involve a long process from inception to implementation. **First**, the concept of WBSR is new for NATO. The role and activities of the North Atlantic Alliance in the area are important but their political impacts are rather limited. In spite of the increasingly institutionalized relations with countries in the region, the Alliance continues to negotiate on a bilateral basis. Until now, no long-term, global approach to the region has been discussed inside the NATO circles. The complexity of frozen conflicts spread throughout the WBSR and its focus on more urgent matters, such as the Balkans and Afghanistan, have kept NATO from developing a coherent regional strategy towards the Black Sea area. **Second**, NATO's interest in the WBSR is expected to radicalize Russian positions vis-à-vis countries in the region and perpetuate old rivalries between Moscow and the West. NATO's image in Moscow is that of an “aggressive” organization that serves American interests. **Third**, the divide among Black Sea countries between choosing a pro-NATO versus a more pro-EU position is expected to influence the decision concerning who will lead any Euro-Atlantic strategy. Supported by the US, Georgia has demonstrated its wish to join the North Atlantic Alliance. Nevertheless, if Tbilisi is not going to sign a *NATO Membership Action Plan* in 2008 during the NATO Summit in Bucharest, public support towards NATO membership is likely to decrease. As for Ukraine, Kiev is somehow divided between a pro-NATO and a more pro-European position, though for the moment Brussels seems to have stronger support.

The **“EU first” scenario** has received an equal amount of attention and criticism. In Javier Solana’s optimistic words, “the EU could provide an institutional framework larger than the region itself, providing security and critical mass for regional cooperation. . . . Finally, it has transformational power directly applicable to conflict situations because on its focus on common values, such as human rights, the rule of law and the market economy.” Geographically-speaking, the EU is already largely involved in the region through a number of programs and bilateral agreements (including the ENP). However, in spite of all the attributes it possesses and all the programs and technical aid it deploys, it is still premature to assess the transformative power of the EU and its capacity to anchor the Black Sea countries to the West. **First**, there is no definitive evidence in terms of how far the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) capabilities could contribute to the stabilization of the WBSR and how far the previous EU experiences in crisis and post-conflict management may be duplicated in the Black Sea Area. The European Security Strategy (ESS), adopted on December 2003, focuses on the building of a “secure Europe in a better world.” Effective multilateralism through cooperation with other international organizations is the core principle of the ESS. The “prevention” and not the “preemption” stands as the main code of the European Security Strategy. **Second**, the WBSR concept and the Euro-Atlantic strategy were originally American and Eastern European initiatives. For Bulgaria and Romania, a Euro-Atlantic project towards the region represents an opportunity to affirm themselves as potential regional “powers.” For Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and even for Turkey, such a strategy would bring them closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures. As for the US, it will play the role of a leader.

Moreover, for the EU, the engagement in a Euro-Atlantic strategy towards the Black Sea implies a number of complex actions and diplomatic initiatives. **First**, the EU should reassess its CFSP and ESDP instruments in order to act effectively in the area. This requires reconsidering its *soft and hard power* tools to adapt them to more complicated regional tasks. **Second**, Brussels should reconsider its relations with Turkey and Russia—two important Black Sea States that would be impossible to ignore in the elaboration of any strategy in the region. **Third**, development of a Euro-Atlantic strategy that requires the participation of the United States, the EU and NATO must imperatively consider the state of transatlantic relations (Gomart, 2005). Washington’s strategy at the Black Sea cannot be separated from US global strategy which sometimes hides purely economic and military motives that are likely to affect the Euro-Atlantic structures. For the US, the Black Sea is one arena among many others, while the WBSR represents the direct neighborhood of the EU.

The **last** debate that focuses on the eventuality of launching a Euro-Atlantic strategy **through the simultaneous enlargements of NATO and the EU**, is not going to become a reality any time soon. Nonetheless, this momentary utopian vision toward future developments in the region could be seen as a “wait-and-see” approach. This means that all the relevant actors should not exclude the possibility to act simultaneously for the stabilization and integration of countries around the Black Sea in the Euro-Atlantic structures. The three scenarios presented above have their limits and it appears that for several reasons, all the major Western players accept somehow the *status quo*. This attitude is unfavorable to any Western strategy towards the region.

Conclusion: Building a Bridge between Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian Dynamics

The EU is not the only player with interests in the WBSR. This brief intentionally addressed the piece of the puzzle for each actor in the region. In this concise analysis, we do not propose to anticipate the developments in the debate surrounding the EU initiative towards the Black Sea region, nor to predict the future of any Euro-Atlantic strategy. In fact, for the time being it is too early to assume that the EU, NATO, and US initiatives would exceed a declaratory level and emerge into real policy actions. However, it is advisable – and this was our first goal – to begin reflecting on the importance of the Wider Black Sea Region as a concept and as a goal for future policy actions not only in Brussels and Washington but also in the capitals of Black Sea countries. Indeed, the reasons for stronger Western involvement in the WBSR are to be found in its potential to act as a *bridge vs. border* in Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian Dynamics.

The WBSR represents a bond between different geopolitical axes (Muresan 2006). The **first axis** focuses on energy; it links the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The south of the axis stretches from the Mediterranean countries, the Near East, and the Middle East up to Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The North of the axis comprises the former Soviet States from Ukraine to the South Caucasus and Central Asia passing by the Western Balkans, and Central and Eastern Europe. The competing forces around these areas are Russia, the United States and the European Union. The **second axis** is based on the famous **Silk Road** (the East-West axis). This axis has been institutionalized through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and brings China closer to the Black Sea. The initial goal of SCO members was to fight against terrorism and organized crime, but security objectives have changed, denouncing the American presence in Central Asia. Moreover, through its activities inside the SCO and the presence of this organization in the Black Sea region, Peking is getting closer to areas of US interest. The **third axis** is the North-South connection between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, and represents an “internal corridor of democratization” meant to transfer liberal practices and experiences from West to East. This area represents an important opportunity for the European Union to advocate its interests and to deploy its strategies and programs of cooperation. A **fourth** potential geopolitical axis is the fluvial corridor Rhine - Main - Danube - Black Sea which links

Western Europe to Eastern Europe and could evolve into an important water transportation system.

These divisions of the WBSR underline the different possibilities of co-operation and discord between the various actors and impel the international community from both sides of the Atlantic to find a strategy to avoid conflicts and competing dynamics, and to reinforce the regional stability and democratization of the region.

KEY POINTS AND POLICY OPTIONS

The WBSR is a complex area which requires special attention from the West in general, and from the EU in particular.

Regional Stability, Security and Democratization

- Current regional EU involvement in the region is mainly aimed at economic and technical cooperation, while the promotion of democracy, rule of law and human rights is dealt with through bilateral programs. The EU is not sufficiently involved in the resolution of the frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus and in Moldova.
- Brussels needs to re-launch negotiations with Russia over the unresolved conflicts and increase the conflict resolution dimensions of its policies. The EU needs to remain firm but flexible in its relations with Russia and eventually confront Moscow in high-dialogue forums (BSEC, Black Sea Forum) with regard to sensitive issues such as frozen conflicts, democratization of the whole region and energy issues.
- In spite of a lack of military strength, the ESDP has proven to be an excellent driver for increased regional security in a number of difficult areas: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and even in Indonesia (EU mission in Aceh). All these experiences could be duplicated in the WBSR.
- The EU should use its recent experiences in Bulgaria and Romania to focus on strengthening the institutions in the weaker Black Sea states. Brussels should make the Black Sea countries understand that future windows of opportunity for membership are likely to be offered to countries that would be able to undertake democratic reforms. The door for further enlargement should be kept open. Moreover, Brussels needs to support the "NATO first" approach as an opportunity to anchor the Black Sea countries to the West if this option is likely to occur first.

Regional Cooperation

- The EU maintains several aid programs in the WBSR that are canalized through a huge institutional web. For instance, the main difficulty for the EU was to guarantee a certain degree of coherence and order among its initiatives. In order to avoid inefficiency the EU should consider wider discussions and coordination between all the participating parties through the existing institutional frameworks. For instance, the EU should strengthen its cooperation with the BSEC. The BSEC experience in the WBSR could serve as a platform and a background for EU regional policies in the area.
- The EU should promote further developments of existing cooperation with the OSCE and NATO. Each of these organizations have made significant progress and acquired valuable experiences in different sectors with respect to the rule of law and development of civil society, instruments of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.
- Brussels should coordinate its foreign policy in the region with the US and increase NATO-ESDP cooperation, especially regarding the settlement of frozen conflicts. The EU-US cooperation in the WBSR should not be based on a spirit of competition but rather one of cooperation.

Energy Security

The WBSR represents a valuable source of energy for Europe.

- The EU should take the opportunity shaped by the completion of the BTC and SCP pipelines to develop a European energy infrastructure across the Caspian Sea and help the East Caspian producers to channel their energy to Europe.
- Brussels should provide financial and technical support to the states in the region to develop the Nabucco pipeline and any other energy proposals that bypass Russian territory.
- In terms of regional energy relations, the EU needs to encourage Russia to cooperate with the Energy Charter Treaty, which Russia has signed but not yet ratified. The Treaty would oblige Russia to adopt a legal framework governing investment, transit, and trade in energy resources. Therefore, European leaders should make Russian implementation of the Treaty a prerequisite for any future EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Europe needs to persuade the Russian leadership to open its energy sector to outside investment. Without such concessions from Russian side, Europeans will find their energy security largely dependent on Moscow.

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