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The Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea Area

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The Black Sea region is a distinct geographical area rich in natural resources and strategically positioned at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. The region faces a range of opportunities and challenges. It is an expanding market with great potential for development and represents an important junction for energy and transport routes. Nevertheless, is also a region with frozen unresolved conflicts, with many environmental problems, and inadequate border checks which encourages illegal migration and organized crime. The aim of the article is to provide an appraisal of the interplay of national interests in the region and to explore strategic options for the developing of a Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea Area.

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1. Black Sea Synergy

The Black Sea region is a distinct geographical area rich in natural resources and strategically positioned at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. Home to a large population, the region faces a range of opportunities and challenges for its citizens. The region is an expanding market with great potential for development and represents an important junction for energy and transport routes. Nevertheless, is also a region with frozen unresolved conflicts, with many environmental problems, and inadequate border checks which encourages illegal migration and organized crime¹.

"The strategic positioning of the Black Sea", as presented by the European Commission, is not an approach devoid of meaning. As history has shown, this area represents the starting point of three of the four strategic routes fought over between East and West:

- the north-European strategic route, starting in Eastern Galicia, passing through the northern European mountain ranges (the Carpathians, the Alps, the Pyrenees) and ending in Normandy;
- the Danube strategic route;
- the maritime strategic route of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea².

On this East – West axis migratory peoples have invaded Europe and still on this axis, combined in the latter part of history with the North – South axis, the crusades and most Eurasian wars have unfolded, including most of the land and aerial battles of the two world wars.

Perpetuating a legacy of intense imperial rivalry between Russia and the Ottoman Empire (spanning five centuries), with a short break in the inter-war period, the Black Sea region³ has become, in the period 1940 – 1990, a border of the Cold War, with implications both in the political and economic spheres as wells as in the military sphere for all the riparian countries clustered around the two big geostrategic players - U.S. and former USSR.

After 1990, the region was placed between post-soviet Russia (with its identity, social and economic problems) and the Western

¹ Commission Communication to the Council and European Parliament. *Black Sea Synergy - a new initiative for regional cooperation*, Brussels, 11.04.2007 COM (2007) 160 final, p. 2;

² The fourth European strategic route is the Baltic one (for details see Samuel P. Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor*, Antet Publishing, 1997)

³ The Black Sea region includes Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova in the East, Ukraine and Russia in north, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in the East and Turkey in the South. Although Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Greece are not states with access to the Black Sea, by history, through proximity and close links are natural regional actors, *Black Sea Synergy - a new initiative for regional cooperation*, Brussels, 11.04.2007 COM (2007) 160 final, p. 2

Alliance (victorious as political and economic system - following the financial crash of the socialist economic system and implicitly CAER) comprised of the U.S., on one hand, and of the EU countries, on the other.

The complex transformation of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) during the 1990s, including post-Yugoslav crisis, maintained the attention and resources of the West, rendering the Black Sea problems as a secondary priority on the Western strategic agenda.

At the same time, because of the particularly important energy resources, the Western planners and decision makers have always paid attention to the events and developments inside and around the Black Sea region. Given its potential importance for the West, it only awaits its place in the spotlight.

Since the Caucasus and Central Asia represent the Eurasian strategic energy corridor, the Black Sea plays and will continue to play a very important role in the reconfiguration strategy of the Eurasian space, in accordance with the European and Euro-Atlantic vision, not only as an area of contrast and confluence, but especially by the "synergistic" effect over a vast region, and valuable strategic directions that are being opened and, at the same time, converge here.

From this point of view, the Black Sea is a true strategic binder within the Eurasian space. In addition to the three strategic routes that are related to the Black Sea, a series of routes will open in the Asian region, routes which lately have gained ever increasing value and potential in the equation for "world supremacy":

- the energy strategic route/space (Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, Central Asia);
- the south-west Asian strategic route/space (Black Sea, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Persian Gulf);
- the strategic route/space of the Don, Volga, and Western Siberia;
- the Ukrainian-Polish strategic route/space.

At the same time, the Black Sea and separates the two major religions, two cultures, and two great great mentalities: Northern Orthodox (Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Georgia in part) and the southern Islamic (Turkey and all countries in the Caucasus region and Asia Minor).

With the expansion of NATO towards Eastern Europe and especially with Romania and Bulgaria joining the Alliance, the post-Soviet transformation agenda for the Black Sea has gradually penetrated the political agenda of both the EU and the U.S. (the strategic interests of both great players of the West need to be defined separately, even if

they are partially interconnected⁴). Thus, the present situation, according to most political analysts' opinion in the Black Sea region, strongly manifests three major categories of fundamental interests, depending on the "actors" that promotes them:

- Western interests, divided almost explicitly among those between the U.S. and major continental European countries (both Washington and the EU put into practice strategies for change and transformation of the Black Sea region on the basis of different political agendas - which coincide only partially);
- the interests of post-Soviet Russia and Turkey (interests which increasingly brings together the two countries and that ultimately want to maintain their power and influence at regional level);
- the interests of small river states (including Ukraine, even if its size does not correspond to the definition of "small state") relatively different from each other and that have different political agendas, not always intrinsic.

2. The U.S. strategic perspective on the Black Sea region

For the U.S., the Black Sea is a strategic corridor in the service of three fundamental strategic reasons linked together, namely:

- the Black Sea links Europe to Central Asia through the Caucasus, the focus of interest being Central Asia, the place of a geostrategic balance between China and Western in the 21st Century. The level of influence and control that the only existing superpower could exercise in Central Asia will largely determine the preconditions for global competition already existent between Washington and Beijing. The Western control over Central Asia also plays a central role in shaping the strategic choices between Russia and Western China;
- the Black Sea represents an access gate to the Greater Middle East. The opportunity to shape and control the agenda of the Black Sea and Caucasus offers the U.S. the possibility to integrate both regional powers - Russia and Turkey - in the Western Alliance. On the other hand, an eventual failure of Washington to dominate the Black Sea agenda offers Moscow and Ankara substantial resources to conduct autonomous strategic games and to dominate the

⁴ R. Asmus., B. Jackson, *The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom*, "Policy Review Online" (<http://www.policyreview.org/jun04/asmus.html>).

region⁵;

- the Black Sea is an important trade route and energy corridor, with the potential to provide Europe with oil and gas resources, reducing the old continent's dependence on Middle Eastern and Russian resources. Thus, it acts as a tool for balancing access to resources.

The fundamental goal of the U.S. strategy in the Black Sea region is to anchor the post-communist societies - and especially the post-Soviet ones - in the Euro-Atlantic security area, to support democratic reforms and the free market in these countries and to advocate for their rapid integration into the EU.

To achieve these goals, Washington is allied with the democratic reformist elites of the post-communist and post-Soviet societies. The main dissenters of the U.S. strategy are the old Soviet national nomenclature and the KGB, which transformed into the corrupt and criminal national elites of the so-called "new independent states".

The basic directions of U.S. policy in the Black and Caspian Seas were formulated in the State Department statement, aired at the OSCE summit in November 1999, in Istanbul. On that occasion, the objective of bolstering the U.S. and Turkish positions in the region was stated, opposing Russian interests.

The Bush Administration has concentrated all efforts undertaken previously in the "Grand program" of establishing "regional unity" in accordance with the U.S.-Turkey-Great Caucasus scheme, which involves the promotion of U.S. national interests based on the premise of U.S. presence in regions of international strategic importance."

U.S. strategic interests involve:

- diversification of energy sources from the Persian Gulf with those from non-OPEC members;
- establishing links with countries with predominantly Muslim population, counterweighting radical Islam;
- support the independence of South Caucasus countries (and the Black Sea basin) and encourage their democratization⁶.

⁵ Turkey's efforts to jeopardize the extension of the NATO operation "Active Endeavor" from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea represents a good example. Turkish naval forces are controlling the Black Sea alongside the remains of Russia's naval fleet, against the wishes and interests of other riparian countries.

⁶ Speaking at the "U.S. Committee of NATO", in 2003, about "Project on Transnational Democracies ", neoconservative Bruce Jackson declares that "we have to take advantage of opportunities in these countries for democratic reform and integration." In other words, the United States must speed up the "colored revolutions" in countries such as Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kirghistan, thus weakening Moscow's influence in former Soviet republics bordering Russia. The task of promoting "colored revolutions" in former-Soviet space fell on NGOs, which resulted from the

The recommendation adopted at that time highlighted the need for intensifying diplomatic efforts and boost investment flows for energy from the Caspian in order for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline to be used, limiting passage of oil through the territory of competing countries (Russia and Iran).

A parallel strategy was devised to gradually introduce NATO in the South-Caucasus region, a strategy related to maintaining the stability on the Baku-Ceyhan oleoduct route.

In the context of the Black Sea "strategic security concept" the focus is also on the promotion in the region of NATO's anti-terrorist program, with the support of Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria, as members of the Alliance, as well as Ukraine and Georgia.

In January 2006, the American Institute for National Strategic Studies organized in Bucharest a presentation of its strategic security concept: "Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea". Preceding this event, agreements had been signed with Romania and Bulgaria on the establishment of military bases, "in order to improve communications with armed groups in Iraq."

These layovers - Constanta and Burgas - coincide with the outbound oil terminals, existing or planned, the Burgas - Alexandroupolis and Constanta - Trieste oleoducts, which seem more than a simple coincidence.

One of the reasons for setting up the bases - the existence in the region of four frozen conflicts - in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, seriously complicates the situation in the Black Sea basin. According to the Romanian president, Traian Basescu, the U.S. bases should balance Russia's position in the region and deter the use of violence as a means for conflict resolution. Additionally, in the opinion of the Georgian political scientist, Ghia Nodia, placing the bases on the western bank of the Black Sea represents a stage of U.S. advancement towards Eastern Europe. This has a political importance, as well as a militarily strategic one.

On the other hand, many experts analyzing the U.S. foreign policy argue that the war on terrorism, prompted by the events of September 11, fundamentally reshaped the U.S. global strategic perspective.

The United States government has shifted from a course characterize by multi-directional strategic doctrine, balanced global influence, and control over the key-trends of global development, to one characterized by uni-dimensional strategy, focused on the pursuit and destruction of the ramified network of radical Islamic cells throughout the world, with the aim of sabotaging their ability to organize and carry

privatization of certain CIA activities, in the early '80s, the most important ones being "Freedom House" (ran by Admiral James Woolsey, former CIA director), "The National Endowment for Democracy"(NED), "Open Society", belonging to billionaire George Soros, an advocate of government change "without violence".

out attacks in the United States. The war in Iraq, a strange attempt, even from the narrow perspective of the war on terrorism, has reduced even more the strategic approach to the global realities and challenges of sole superpower. One consequence of this de facto situation is Washington's relatively delayed and weakened strategy in regards to the Black Sea.

Perceiving the weakening of U.S. power in the region, Russia - and to a lesser extent Turkey - regained the strategic initiative in the region.

Analysis of the two regional powers' strategies are detailed in Chapter 4, however, some key developments resulting from the changing of the strategic balance in the region must be mentioned.

The controversial developments in Ukraine and Kremlin's concentrated efforts to threaten the "Orange Coalition" government's option after the March 2005 elections was the first example: the desertion of the socialist leader A. Moroz and a number of parliament members of the Orange Coalition was not random. The status quo stagnation of the "frozen conflicts" in Georgia in the last 2-3 years constitutes the second example in this case ⁷. Moscow has, too, taken advantage of the disagreements between Washington and key regimes of Central Asia - Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan - to remove and marginalize U.S. military presence and policy influence in the region. The United States condemnation of the Andijon massacre completely convinced the Uzbek President, Karimov, that Moscow is more friendly towards authoritarian leaders than the West and Washington especially ⁸.

Another external obstacle for U.S. strategy in the Black Sea region represents the disputes between Washington and larger continental Europe states - the strategic gap between the two shores of the Atlantic was accentuated particularly after 2002, in the context of the dispute regarding Iraq intervention ⁹.

Currently, we cannot even speak about a relatively substantial compatibility of policies between the United States and the EU on the ex-Soviet Black Sea. The dissension can be outlined along the following lines:

1. Attitudes towards Russia. While Washington perceives Moscow as an opponent, if not a rival in the agenda on issues of democratization and reform of the Black Sea region, Berlin and Paris share and

⁷ Georgian special forces have organized an operation in Kodori valley, in northern Abkhazia, in 2005, regaining the strategic initiative for extinguishing the conflict with the Sukhumi separatist region. For a more detailed presentation of the Kodori valley case, see: http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371395.

⁸ See also E. B. Rumer, *Collision Avoidance: US-Russian Bilateral Relations and Former Soviet States*, Strategic Forum No 27, April 2004 (<http://www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/SF207/sf207.htm>).

⁹ For a review of this division, see Ronald D. Asmus, "Rebuilding the Atlantic Alliance" in "Foreign Affairs, September / October 2003, available at <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/article.cfm?id=69>.

understand Russia's legitimate right to maintain its own sphere of influence around the border its to counter NATO expansion towards the east. Given that starting point this assumption, the major European capitals keep a precautionary attitude towards Georgia's efforts to transform and its positions from a satellite of Russia into an ally of the West, to transform from a dominion of Moscow in - a reformed partner of the West. Aceiași European leaders were very pleased to follow, "orange revolution" in Kiev, Ukraine tried transformation dintro amorfă buffer zone between Russia and Europe in a reformist candidate for inclusion in NATO and UE¹⁰.

2. EU enlargement dilemma. Washington believes that the more rapid the EU enlargement eastwards, the better. The EU expansion stamps economic and social stability to the regions integrated into the Euro-Atlantic security area by broadening NATO. This was the model of interdependence between NATO and EU for the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe - NATO accession opened the door for EU accession. This interdependence model no longer works. There is an open revolt at Brussels - a refusal to follow the path of commitments on enlargement after the "Big Bang" of ten new members in 2004, plus Bulgaria and Romania beginning with January 1st. 2007, plus Croatia pending expansion in 2009, and continuing with Turkey.

The "politically correct" definition of this rebellion is that of "enlargement fatigue". However, there is a tacit consensus among many European leaders and citizens that the United States is pursuing a secret agenda of compromising the European unity and its political integration through a process of rapid expansion in order to prevent Europe of becoming an international competitor of American power. Whatever the supporting arguments behind the expression "enlargement fatigue", one thing is certain - at least in the next decade there will be no process of EU expansion in the post-Soviet Black Sea region. If the EU will support the U.S. strategy in the Black Sea, then the EU enlargement will not be an instrument of assistance to this strategy.

3. European Union and the Black Sea

It is more appropriate to speak about a future comprehensive EU strategy linked to the Black Sea, rather than past or present¹¹. European presence in Ukraine and the South Caucasus after 1991 is confined mainly to the activities of organizations such as OSCE, European Council, and through EU assistance programs for development, such as TACIS. There has been a cooperation between Brussels and the BSEC - the only multilateral institution of political and economic partnership of

¹⁰ However, the EU has successfully mobilized efforts for a diplomatic mediation resumption of presidential elections in Ukraine by the end of 2004.

¹¹ See also: M. Vahl, *The EU and Black Sea Regional Cooperation: Some Challenges for BSEC*, April 2005 (http://www.ceps.be/Article.php?article_id=420)

the Black Sea region. Exhausted by its own institutional development since Maastricht, by granting priority to assistance programs to Central and Eastern European states, and especially because of post-conflict arrangements in the Balkans, the EU could allocate very few resources to the process of transformation and reform of the Black Sea region. Some big European states were active in seeking conflict mediation in the post-soviet Black Sea region, but their approach was very precautionary not to bother the former imperial master and current regional superpower - Russia.

The Black Sea region appeared on Brussels' radar with accession of Central and Eastern European states in 2004, and especially with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, both countries from the Black Sea basin. Turkey's intention of joining the EU - even if it will produce, under the best case scenario, in 10-15 years - also motivated the strategic planners from Brussels to consider the region's agenda as part of the EU's immediate neighborhood. The interest EU members towards the Black Sea region is not equal.

Poland, the Baltic Republics and Slovakia are acting intensely in favor of the Ukrainian reform processes, for assisting democratic governments around the Black Sea to resist Russian pressure and to successfully complete the agenda of democratization and nation-building. Support for the member states of GUAM, the involvement of the new Central and Eastern European EU members in initiatives such as the CDC (Commonwealth for Democratic Choice), the Black Sea Forum (organized by Romania), the group of six state "Friends of Georgia", a group set up in 2004 - these are only the most significant examples of the support offered by the EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe for the transformation of ex-Soviet Black Sea region.

The interests of larger EU member states in the Black Sea region are structured taking into account their relations with Russia.

The generally positive attitudes of Paris and Berlin towards Russia lead them to a precautionary approach when they intervene in issues related to arbitrary Russian policies directed towards the fragile and helpless ex-Soviet republics - ethnic conflicts, territorial separatism, puppet regimes based on crime, established or supported by Moscow. The danger of being deeply involved in the labyrinth of irreconcilable conflicts in regions with tribal conflicts such as those in the South Caucasus, prevents most European capitals to take a clear and effective position on the regional agenda. There is yet another reason for Brussels adopting a precautionary position - the EU model of problem solving is through stabilization - association, integration, and accession. Throughout the period after 1990, the United States, together with the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, have strongly supported EU enlargement eastwards, as far as possible. Until now, the most powerful weapon of European intervention was integration and eventual accession.

The problems of "absorption capacity" which the EU has after the "Big Bang" of 2004 - 2007 make it impossible to incorporate the post-soviet states of the Black Sea region on the agenda of a potential expansion in the foreseeable future.

Considering this, the EU has to invent the New Neighborhood.¹²

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is a concept built to meet a key strategic dilemma of the EU.

On one hand, the EU has used its ability to inter-relate and cooperate with its neighbors based on the presumption of enlargement - a process under which effective cooperation with a state automatically led to accession¹³. Expansion is not possible in the foreseeable future - not from the perspective of institutional capacity (after the EU Constitution failed due to referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005), nor in terms of European public opinion.

On the other hand, Europe must seriously take into consideration its interests and obligation to influence and support the reformist and democratic processes of nation-building in the eastern periphery, including the Black Sea.

It is impossible for Brussels - or EU member states - to ignore the dictatorial regime in Belarus, to tolerate the neo-communist junta from Transnistrian Tiraspol, to neglect the influences of a neighborhood with a network of puppet governments organized on mafia-style principles of fragmented and conflict zones such as the Caucasus, Western Balkans and others. Additionally, it is not in the interest of Europe to neglect the collapse of modern-reformist elites in Islamic societies in favor of religious radicalism and fundamentalism.

It is very important for Europe to support and extend the influence or the potential for democratic reform, economic and institutional development, capacity to assist neighboring nations to fight against corruption, organized crime, intra-social intolerance and tribal fragmentation.

ENP is a tool designated for the development of European support and assistance policies to neighboring nations outside the institutional process of accession negotiations.

The main objective of the ENP is to develop powerful tools of influence and cooperation with the neighboring states to support their

¹² The main documents on the European Neighbourhood Policy can be accessed at: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm

¹³ "Presumption of enlargement" applies especially the relationship with the European Union Member ex-communist Eastern Europe. ENP (ENP) was originally designed to serve the Brussels policy towards non-Mediterranean states and North African countries, which have not enjoyed any real opportunities of integration. Applying subsequent ENP and eastern neighbors has caused a re-evaluation in planning policies, which is very likely to continue to transform itself and the notion of "European Neighborhood".

successful strategies of development and modernization on a bilateral basis. Of course, the main objective applies only to countries that want to modernize and develop according to the European model.

The objective can not be applied - without doubt - to the states and regimes who have chosen other ways of development. If we return to the Black Sea context, it is very important to see the ENP strategy, applied to regional post-Soviet reformist states. The format of bilateral ENP includes requirements that address the various issues of national and regional environments - from Ukraine, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan.

A successful cooperation within the framework of the ENP format could provide states found in the EU neighborhood substantial volume of resources, technical assistance, access to markets and institutional support, all of which were fully guaranteed to recently acceding and developing members of the EU.

Besides the ENP, as an instrument of bilateral implementation of EU's New Neighborhood strategy, there are other instruments with a wider opening that might be relevant to neighboring states wishing to develop according to the European model. A multilateral approach could help establish a community of states (not necessarily all European states in terms of geographic position and cultural identity), which share the same values, principles, strategic objectives as those of united Europe in a globalized world.

Such a European Community of Nations could develop as an outer circle, relaxed, of European integration, complementing the European Union itself. EU could develop an area of friendly states, encircling the community of members with full rights by maintaining that kind of relaxed frame of institutional partnership.

Including the Black Sea region states in this format of EU commonwealth could prove an impetus towards ensuring the success of the regional stabilization and reform process. Such a project would create a solid basis for a stronger EU-Russia relationship in the long term. It would also develop the strategic role of the EU as a legitimate regional actor in a sphere where Russia and Turkey have a tendency to consider themselves natural hegemon.

The efficiency of EU strategy related to the Black Sea region as part of the New Neighborhood in Europe is subject to the influence of several factors, namely:

- the successful development of the Common EU Foreign and Security Policy and the alignment of the political position amongst member states. The essential differences between "new" and "old" Europe, as well as between the positions of left or centre-right of Western Europe in relation to Russia, the Atlantic partnership policies, policies on energy security in Europe etc., will influence more or

less EU's ability to participate with a significant authority in the balance of powers of the Black Sea region;

- EU policies on the Black Sea region need a more detailed assessment of European interests in the region, within the wider European economic, political strategy, and development contexts. From this point of view, the initiative of German Chancellor Angela Merkel for a comprehensive European project, from the perspective of the future German EU presidency, is a positive element;
- the effectiveness of an EU Black Sea strategy depends on the initiative of the member states surrounding this region, referring primarily to Romania and Bulgaria and their ability to promote at Brussels a vision of the specific regional problems, the challenges, and opportunities;
- a successful European strategy for the Black Sea depends on the ability of Brussels and Washington to coordinate views and priorities for the region and for the wider context.

After 2002, there were few who believed in the ability to rebuild an integrated structure of the Western Alliance interests. However, identifying the causes and interests of common transatlantic partners remains crucial for defining a common area of security and Western stability in a highly unpredictable world characterized by global transformation. The world of multi-polarity, which is the global structure after post-Iraq, will compel Europe and the United States to recognize in advance their common elements, rather than the diversity of their interests.

4. The geostrategic interests of status quo powers of the Black Sea - Russia and Turkey

Both major powers of the Black Sea - Russia and Turkey - have tendency to oppose (each in its own way) penetration of security and development infrastructure by Western countries in the region, which has been, at least the past five centuries, the field of bilateral competition and the balance of power between the two countries.

One thing is certain - Russia and Turkey will continue to be in competition for influence and control over nations and the smaller ethnic communities in the Black Sea area. It is an issue related to their vital interests, namely that of preventing external actors to intervene in their bilateral equation of power in the region.

Both countries share common elements of the strategy to prevent and reject Western military, naval, and political interference in the Black Sea region. Both countries have developed advanced strategies of

economic and political cooperation¹⁴. However, each of the two countries is developed a strategic approach for defense and expansion of their own influence in the Black Sea.

Russia is a former superpower reduced to a secondary role in global affairs after 1991, but still maintaining strong ambitions to return among elite global powers. The beginning of implementation of these ambitions could be observed in the last year, with the emergence of a concentrated energy policy, combined with sustained diplomatic efforts to build anti-Western alliances, which brought Russia in the forefront of global policy in the context of the United States deepening in the Iraqi issue and the Iranian nuclear dispute.

Turkey is a key member of the North Atlantic Alliance, having an essential role in the south-eastern flank of the Western strategic sphere. However, Ankara is visibly detaching itself from the U.S. strategy in the Middle East and the war against terrorism. Turkey refuses to cooperate with the United States regarding the scope of naval and military international control of the Black Sea, claiming to protect the naval monopoly and privileges based on the Montreux Convention of 1936. A combination of reborn revisionist guidelines, specific to a major power, and a deep frustration, caused by controversial treatment of Turkey by the West (by the United States in the war in Iraq and the EU controversy linked Turkey's accession) are pushing Turkey into a strategic game, where the agenda of the Black Sea question is included.

4.1. Russia and the Black Sea

Relative to the Black Sea, the Russia global strategic conception is reflected by two essential strategic - the passive dimension of resistance, and the active one, that of geopolitical revival through energy policies.

The of passive dimension of Russia's Black Sea strategy refers to the policies of maintaining the status quo as long as possible, policies inherited from the Cold War period. With the accession to NATO of Bulgaria and Romania the territorial status quo of the Soviet era could not be maintained. The presence of the Alliance on the Black Sea shores has become a reality. Reducing this fact to the lowest strategic values represent the focus of Russia's policies in the region.

Given that the Black Sea is a strategic corridor linking Europe to the Caucasus region, to Central Asia, and to the Caspian region, the most important thing is to block this corridor in order to deadlocked the development and security infrastructures of Western Europe. Sabotaging the political dimensions of Ukraine's and Georgia's accession to NATO

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

represents a possible tool for achieving this objective.

Starting and maintaining low intensity conflicts in sensitive areas of the Black Sea region - like that of the South Caucasus - is another tool used by Russia. The ethno-national dissensions effectively fragment fragile national structures of the post-Soviet republics, putting in danger the key elements necessary for those states to join NATO - institutional stability, transparency, and maintaining the rule of law.

The export internal pressures for conquest abroad is probably one of the fundamental principles of imperial policy in the history of humanity, including the Russian imperial history. Today, as many times in the past, the Kremlin is experiencing drastically reduced opportunities through which to cope with the immense spectrum of internal problems in a huge territorial proximity and a like-wise important community-wide diversity.

The expansion success beyond national borders is the cheapest tool to achieve internal consolidation and confidence in itself. This explains that the actions of fragmentation and swallowing of small parts (relative to Russia's territorial magnitude) of neighboring states such as Georgia and Moldavia have become very attractive for the Kremlin. The not so good news for the small neighboring states lies in the need for Moscow to apply this tool in the future to maintain intact its reputation and integrity at national level. This explains why NATO enlargement becomes a threat, and the Euro-Atlantic periphery of Central and South Europe, peaceful as it is, becomes a favorite target of Russian ambition to return to the global geopolitical stage.

Unfavorable policies in Russia's neighborhood also serve another important consideration, besides the projection of internal pressure to the "immediate vicinity". All politicians and experts from Moscow perfectly understand the undoubtedly logic of Russian alignment to the West in order to cope with the geopolitical challenges of the 21st. Century.

There is no community of a long-term interests between Russia and the Islamic world, nor between Russia and China, as a superpower. Russia's dilemma lies not in whether or not to align with the West. The dilemma relates to the price that the West should pay for Russia's alignment, and what is the price of attracting Russia in western alliance family?

If Ukraine will become an independent and democratic state - a member of NATO and the EU, where the South Caucasus and Central Asia will evolve into open trade routes, as well as strategic areas easily accessible to Western Europe, then Russia could be reduced to the status of high and important actor, even if she will be an ordinary member of the Western Alliance.

If Ukraine is maintained under the influence of Kremlin, and the South Caucasus is blocked by numerous and never-ending ethno-tribal

conflicts; if Central Asia is held under the authority of local despotism, a regime of feudal friends of Moscow, and Eastern Europe is frequently shaken with the threat of energy blockade - then the price of gaining Russia as a partner and ally increases greatly.

It does not matter if this assumption is regarded as having validity by the decision makers from Washington or Brussels. What counts is that this assumption is valid and reliable for Moscow. Empire sells best.

The fragmentation produced by low-intensity conflicts in regions like the South Caucasus serves also as a legitimizing instrument for the stationing of Russian troops in areas of key geopolitical importance for Moscow, troops that, officially, are involved in operations to maintain peace along the division lines between communities in conflict. Russia's military presence in such regions serves not only as a necessary barrier against Western involvement - just as well, it can be a shield for the old geopolitical frontiers, such as the Ottoman Empire (and later the Republic of Turkey) a shield along the border between Turkey and Armenia.

From the perspective of international law, it is difficult to explain the multiple roles that Russia plays in conflicts like the one in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russian troops have initiated and organized conflicts, have supported the separatist authorities in their fight against the legitimate Georgian government, and organized "peacekeeping operations" between Georgian and separatist forces, while the Kremlin diplomacy "mediates" between "the warring parties".

Another Russian instrument dedicated to maintaining the regional status quo and to prevent Western interference is Moscow's support to Turkey for its firm commitment to protect the terms of the Montreux Convention which provides for the acceptance of foreign naval forces for a period of no more than 21 of days.¹⁵

Both Turkey and Russia insist on naval cooperation between coastal states through formats such as "Black Sea Force" and "Black Sea Harmony", refusing to receive ships of other NATO members in the Black Sea basin.

Russia, as well, is allied with Turkey in support of BSEC (Black Sea Economic Cooperation) as the sole legitimate form with the format for multilateral economic cooperation and political in the Black Sea. Except in states that do not shore the Black Sea, states like Greece, Serbia, and Azerbaijan, the major states of Europe and the United States do have access to BSEC infrastructure but only in the position of observers.

¹⁵ Nilufer Oral of Bilgi University in Turkey says: "Montreux Convention does not render Turkish straits into international waters. They are open to international shipping, but are not under international administration. Turkey has legal control over the Straits. " (<http://www.platts.com/Oil/Resources/News20Features/Bosphorus%%20Traffic/table.xml>). See also: Z. Gurcanli, The Montreux Dilemma, "The New Anatolian", 13 April 2006 (<http://www.thenewanatolian.com/tna-4689.html>).

Without bringing too many benefits to its members in the past 15 years, due to the unorganized and rigid bureaucratic structure, BSEC has practically maintained Russo-Turkish hegemony in the lethargic debate on political and economic cooperation in the Black Sea area.¹⁶ 2. The active dimension of Russia's policy for geopolitical control of the Black Sea is focused on the use of energy flows and exports for politically strategic purposes.

Since the early 1990, gas and, to a lesser extent, oil exports have been key resource for economic survival and the preservation of post-soviet Russia's geopolitical influence. "Gazprom" was the only system that work across Russia's giant territory in a period in which the state had to divide itself in several economic and institutionally administrative regions.

From a historical viewpoint, the key principle of Russian statehood has always been reinforced centralization and, during Eltân's administration, "Gazprom" and has played its role in the restoration of central government control over Russia. "Gazprom is invested with a similar role in foreign policy, being the main instrument of Russia's expansion. In this case, the key principle of energy exports and trade is Russia's monopoly, total direct dependence, and Moscow's support for energy supply.

In the 90s, "Gazprom" had several attempts to buy and focus control on the infrastructure of gas pipelines¹⁷ found on the territory of former-Soviet satellites in Central and Eastern Europe and the former-Soviet republics. The purpose of these attempts were to establish a monopoly in the decision-making processes regarding the reserves and the transport of gas through regions beyond Europe.

There were governments that were affected and removed from power because of their refusal to accept the renunciation of gas pipelines in their territory.

Bulgaria and Romania's refusal to sell the gas pipeline infrastructure to "Gazprom" has led to the construction of pipeline "Blue Stream" on the bottom of the Black Sea, pipeline that links Russian and Turkish territories.¹⁸

¹⁶ See also: P. Manoli, *The Black Sea Economic Cooperation: What Contribution to Regional Security, limiting Institutions: The Challenge of Eurasian Security Governance*, edited by J. Sperling, Manchester University Press, 2003.

¹⁷ For an overall analysis of Russian projects of gas pipelines and oil pipelines, see: http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/russia_pipelines.html).

¹⁸ In 1995, "Gazprom" created the "Topenergy" company with Bulgarian Corporation "Multigrup" - a behind the scenes group, having links with the security services of communist Bulgaria and their Soviet "connections". "Topenergy" was created by "Gazprom" and the ex-communist Bulgarian Prime Minister A. Lukanov to maintain control over the pipeline infrastructure in Bulgaria, thus depriving Bulgaria of the natural monopoly benefits of its gas exports to other Balkan countries. The Bulgarian Government, led by Z. Videnov, had refused the sale of pipelines to "Topenergy. A year later, Videnov had been removed from power through logistic and

Exports of Russian oil have followed the same pattern (though with less success than in the case of gas) that of closing the technology and property cycle in a system of total monopoly of Russian companies, and the supposed purchase of oil refineries, of gas stations networks, and disposal the competition - sources of crude oil and gas reserves from the Middle East. Russia has fought a lot, although unsuccessfully, to endanger the alternative routes for Caspian oil exports to the West - the BTC pipeline represents the first route independent of Russia for the export of mineral fuels from the former-Soviet territory to the West.

With the significant authoritarian shift of Putin's second term, Russia's ambitions to use energy exports for important geo-strategic purposes grew tremendously.

Towards the end of 2005, using the favorable context in which the United States were preoccupied and hypnotized by the Iraqi issue and the war on terrorism, the regime in Moscow had implemented an excellent large-scale operation of strong Russian geopolitical return on the global stage. This operation included the following items:

- - the agreement with the German Chancellor for building the Baltic gas pipeline that shortenes the distance between the Russian and the German, avoiding Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic republics and their infrastructure to transport gas. This shortened route is a replica of the "Blue Stream" project.
- - the urgent and unexpected requests of gas price increases according to the "world market" submitted by "Gazprom" to Ukraine, Georgia, and other CIS states. The political chaos was unexpected, very painful and, destabilizing for all pro-West governments in the region.
- - the negotiation of agreements with Turkmenistan, Iran, Algeria, Venezuela, and other major gas-producing countries to form a gas cartel based on the OPEC model and isolating Europe from an energy perspective.¹⁹
- - signing of "special agreements" in order to double the gas transport infrastructure under the control of

financial support from the powerful "Gazprom" and "Multigrup". Following Bulgarian governments have suffered intense pressure to sell the pipes, but without results for "Gazprom". Pressure from Moscow continues even today.

¹⁹ The gas resources of Turkmenistan and Iran are the only opportunity for economic feasibility of the "Nabuco" project - a pipeline extending through the Iranian and Turkish territories, and fueling Europe's alternative gas reserves. Putting pressure on Turkmenistan's leader, Niyazov, and attracting Iran through political rewards regarding the nuclear program, Moscow weakens the chances of the "Nabuco" project implementation. "Gazprom" also bought the necessary gas and infrastructure resources in Algeria, the main exporter of liquid gas to Europe. In this case, the only remaining gas reserves outside Russian control are in the North Sea.

"Gazprom"²⁰. The basic aim of this doubling is concentrating all possible routes (especially gas) of energy diversification into the hands of Moscow and in this way, jeopardize the opportunity for balanced energy flows in Europe.

- taking over investment and development projects of energy systems in many European countries, in order to reduce future sources of energy flows on European territory that are not under Russian control. Increases in oil prices, as reflected in the GDP growth of Russia, have supported the implementation of these investment projects.²¹

The results of Kremlin's plan for energy monopoly have been more or less spectacular, particularly in Europe, where all debates on the diversification of energy leaves the impression of incapability and disagreement. Russia, which in 2004 was a country with GDP equal to that of the Netherlands, has been able to implement a strategy of subordination of the old continent to its interests through the establishment of its monopoly on the flows of energy - particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.

Concerning the Black Sea, the Russian energy monopoly will be even more direct and immediate - both in terms of balance and economic cooperation, and in terms of the geostrategic impact.

The collapse, the "Orange Coalition" in Ukraine and the emergence of "orange-blue government" (with the current efforts of forming a coalition government), the threat posed to the chances of transferring the operation "Active Endeavor" to the Black Sea, the stagnation of the Euro-Atlantic strategy on the Black Sea, all these are the first signs of a changed strategic balance in favor of Russia and the powers of the status quo in the region in general.

It is hard to appreciate how long it will take to geopolitically revive Russia, based energy monopoly advantage. Most likely, oil prices will continue to rise in the future. Europe will continue to be dependent on the disproportionate levels of the Russian energy flows. The U.S. strategic involvement in hot spots outside Europe and the Black Sea will increase visibly, which could additionally hinder the dynamic of the Euro-

²⁰ The current infrastructure of "Gazprom" is fueling western regions from the south and southern regions from the north. Special agreements with Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey could lead to a reversal of routes for each existing pipeline infrastructure. Currently, Bulgaria transfers gas to Turkey and Greece, but now there is a planned pipeline from Turkey to Hungary (over the route of the "Nabuco" project) to replenish the "Blue Stream" pipeline from Turkey to the north of the continent.

²¹ On September 4th, 2006, in Athens, at a meeting of President Putin, Bulgarian President Pârvanov and Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis, the green light has been given to build the highly detailed project of the Burgas - Alexandroupolis oil pipeline, which aims to circumvent the Straits, in an attempt to send Russian oil to Mediterranean markets.

Atlantic strategy on the Black Sea.

After a partial recovery of influence in the area of former-Soviet periphery, Russia might seek the extension of its strategic influence also in Europe's "soft points" - in the Balkans, where the controversial post-conflict arrangements seem to fail to produce significant effects.

However, the success of Russia's strategy based on energy monopoly is unsafe. Firstly, there are few elements that indicate the possibility of successfully reinvesting the capital from Russian oil in the economy and development infrastructure. High-tech industry and modern technology development occupies a marginal place in Russia today. There is an obvious lack of administrative infrastructure, political mechanisms, and market that can address issues and challenges related to demographics, welfare, health, and education. The Kremlin government administers a high level of quality for strategic planning and operational capabilities, but holds insufficient resources to influence the social, economic, and human development. This leads to Russia's difficulties of successful long-term strategic investments.

4.2 Turkey and the Black Sea

It is very interesting to consider the logic of the Turkey's transformation from the most devoted Euro-Atlantic partner during the Cold War in a status quo power in the Black Sea region.

Turkey has a complex history of relations with Russia. Ottoman Empire constituted the main obstacle and rival of Russia's imperial strategy to conquer the Straits and to reach to the "warm seas" borders from the South. Both empires struggled for every meter of the seaside territory of the Black Sea and control over both regions with strategic importance for Russian- Ottoman rivalry - the Balkans and the Caucasus.

After the Bolshevik revolution - along with the establishment of a republican government in Turkey - the Soviet regime has proven the most ardent supporter of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his Republican project. The Lenin's Bolshevik ideological, political, and organizational influences significantly contributed to the establishment of the independent Republic of Turkey.

During the Cold War, Turkey was completely absorbed in strategic agenda of Atlantic community by a single reason: the Soviet power "press" the country from the North and South by bringing Syria and other parts of the Middle East in its strategic sphere of influence. In fact, by its actions, the Kremlin pushed Ankara towards closer cooperation with the West, seen as a collective guarantor of the independence of Turkey.

The pro-European and pro-Western ideology of Kemalism has supported the Ankara's integration in the Atlantic Alliance.

The collapse of Soviet-style communism coincided with the end of "golden decade" of economic and political development of Turkey. Emerging from military coup of the year 1980, the Turgut Ozal government was able to gradually transform the economic and ideological heritage of Turkey. The state economic system ceded to the neo-liberal current. As consequence, the solid kemalist policy and ideology has been weakened and prudently diversified.

Alongside the firm secularization, the kemalism also adopted the doctrine of noninterference in the foreign policy, under the slogan - "Peace in Turkey - Peace in the world." Ozal has emphasized the need for reconciliation with the country's Islamic heritage and pride of ottoman past. The new political and economic force in the country has boosted the pan-Turkish sentiments and ambitions just when Soviet super-power crashed. Some of the former Soviet republics with the Turkish population proclaimed their independence²².

To show its new force and regional importance Turkey had launched two major projects - one to integrate the former Soviet republics with Turkish speaking population into the Ankara's pan-Turkish visions (Turks live "from the Adriatic to the Great Chinese wall") and the other in order to transform Turkey into a major power in the Black Sea region.

The institutional framework of the second project was developed through the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) initiative. However, in the first half of the 1990s, it has become clear that Turkish speaking peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia can not be integrated into a political project of the Great Turkey. A number of Ankara's cultural, economic, political, and strategic factors have blocked attempts to convert pan-Turkish feelings into a power with geopolitical supremacy. Turkey's resources have proved insufficient to face such an attempt, and the rumors of the total collapse of Russia and communism were over-exaggerated.

Instead of enjoying new opportunities in Asia and the Caucasus, Ankara had to cope with the PKK rebellion on its own territory.

Turkey enjoyed better results in regards the Black Sea region²³. BSEC has not even been an appropriate tool for extending political and economic interests of Turkey in the field of regional cooperation. Economic collapse and institutional disintegration that have passed through many post-communist countries in the region have produced weak governments, unable to comply with the obligations accepted in the multilateral format of BSEC.

²² For a more thorough study, see: A. Nachmani, *Turkey: Facing the New Millennium / Coping with Intertwined Conflicts*, Manchester University Press, 2003.

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

²³ A. Kulebi, *Eurasian Energy Lines and Turkey*, "The New Anatolian", 16 March 2006 (<http://www.thenewanatolian.com/opinion-2799.html>).

However, Turkey's approach to the frame of BSEC has proved successful in the long-run from two points of view: the creation of a regional political, and economic partnership, where Turkey enjoys the position of a "superpower" and drew the other regional superpower, Russia, in this regional initiative, putting the foundations of a regional institutional framework of cooperation through which they share the hegemony on the Black Sea region.

BSEC has not meant much for smaller countries in the region, but had an important role in strengthening economic cooperation, trade and politics between Moscow and Ankara, raising the level of trust between them. Step by step, year after year, economic partnership and political cooperation will create both a community of strategic interest as well as a long-term affinity with regard to the region and the world.

During the 1990s, Turkey has remained a trusted ally of the Atlantic community, keeping special traditional relations with the United States, based on its position as the West outpost in Middle East.

Turkey's removal of its main partner in the West occurred in early 2000, along with the two great transformations in the global strategy of the United States.

The first of these relates directly to the September 11 events which triggered the American war against terrorism. The Bush administration's accent on Middle East, seen as a backbone in the war strategy against terrorism, has directly affected Turkey's vision and practices regarding national security. The war in Iraq has offered Kurds in the North a greater autonomy. This had repercussions in the domestic war of Turkey with PKK and the Kurds problem in general. Turkey's trade routes with the Arab world have been complicated or even removed. New outbreaks of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in the Islamic world have put Turkey, as an Atlantic partner - governed by Islamist AK party - in the face of an extremely tense relations with the Islamic world.

Beyond the Kurdish issue, Ankara's movement in the first line between her Atlantic partner and the Islamic world, the nuclear crisis triggered by Iran could compromise even more the national security of Turkey.

The second transformation of the Atlantic global strategy refers to the increasing importance of the Black Sea, which took place after the integration of the Central and Eastern European countries as full members of NATO. Turkey supported NATO's enlargement "from Tallinn to Burgas", but now she hesitate to see the Black Sea region fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic community. Turkey's national doctrine - like that of Russia - hosts the traditional nationalist- imperialist vision of the 21st Century. The world is composed of big powers - and their spheres of hegemony - which controls the smaller powers and the balance of powers, generate a viable international system.

For Ankara (but also for Moscow), the Black Sea is a Russo-Turkish lake. America and Europe are welcome to take care of the strategic identity of the Black Sea region, but only through partnership and through mediation with hegemonic powers of the region. The West has Turkey as an ally. Why should America intervene in the region? Two responses are possible - mistrust or arrogance - both highly offensive to Turkish pride. Such a logic is explicitly manifested in Turkey's categorical refusal to find a compromise in the matter at the Montreux Convention and allow vessels access (even under the flag of the allied NATO) for more than 21 days (as the article 18 / 2 of the Convention states)²⁴. Turkey's official position on the extension of "Active Endeavor" Operation up to the Black Sea is that of refusal, under the motivations that the riparian States - namely the Russian Federation - will be opposed²⁵. Following this logic, the riparian powers interests pass ahead of those of the NATO allies. The collective security - as it is understood in the strategic doctrines of Europe and the United States - is a concept recognized by Ankara unless Turkey has won: for example, decisions in a consensual manner within NATO over matters which do not affect Turkey's major national and security interests. Once the regional interests - the territorial and national security are offended (as in the case of the Black Sea naval regime), the paradigm of the collective decision-making turns in a 21st-Century-approach of "European Concert" of powers - "what belongs to me is mine, what is yours is ours".

Turkey's role and interests for Black Sea will be significantly transformed along with the country's integration into the European Union. Although, nobody knows precisely when this expansion will take place, the effects of the acceptance or rejection of Turkey are pretty clear.

To become a member of the Union, Ankara must adapt its policies to the rules and regulations of the European Union. If Turkey will prove able to implement political necessary reforms (or if Bruxelles will decide to tacitly accept the status quo, covered by a nominal Ankara's adoption of the *acquis*), the membership will become indisputably obtained. Integrating Turkey into the EU will pursue dramatic consequences for the Black Sea region, as follows:

- the membership status will legitimate Turkey as a regional power in the Balkans in economic, demographic, and political terms. There is no other country - or a group of countries - in the EU who might balance Turkey's potential in economic and demographic terms. The role that

²⁴ An English-language translation of the text convention can be found at <http://www.turkishpilots.org.tr/ingilizcedernek/DOCUMENTS/montro.html>.

²⁵ S. Caglayan, *Turkey Sees No Need for NATO Operation in Black Sea*, "The New Anatolian", 2 March 2006 (<http://www.thenewanatolian.com/tna-1926.html>)

insistently Turkey assumes for itself²⁶ – as the employer of all Turkish and Muslim minorities in the Balkan countries and even further - will provide Ankara the necessary resources and support to arbitrate inter-communitarian disputes in the Balkan countries in favor of its regional superpower status²⁷;

- as a member of the EU, Turkey will have the responsibility to initiate and coordinate the policies of the United Europe as regards the vicinity of the East and South-East. This will transform Turkey into a powerful factor of influence (more powerful than today) for the Caucasus and the Middle East;
- the membership of the EU will increase even more the Turkish autonomy towards United States and will reopen the hegemony competition with Russia. It is questionable, however, if the EU will be able to operate at their current level of political and institutional integration with a state as Turkey, with a strong nationalist agenda. Some of the answers to this question will come in the next decade.

If Turkey's entry in the EU will be delayed or even rejected, internal pressures for change of the country's political identity will accumulate.

For the first time in modern history of Turkey, it is seen a powerful vision - shared by influential circles in Ankara - which focuses on the Euro-Asian identity of Turkey. Euro-Asian ideology is an example of a growing affinity between Turkey and Russia in the post-Cold War era, which means broadening of the common concerns, opportunities and interests. Both Moscow and Ankara are suspicious at the post-modern exercises of Europe, such as multiculturalism, decentralization of state power, liberal culture of diversity, and the methodologies of pacifist-constructivist interdependence as the bases for security.

The traditionally authoritarian nationalism sells much better on the Russo-Turkish political market, pushing the two countries closer than ever in their long history. If this affinity will acquire an institutional framework, the Black Sea region will be dominated by the Russo-Turkish

²⁶ Turkey and the claims made before the Council of Europe. Supporting the Muslims in Europe has an enormous political potential for Ankara, which has already used it successfully in Turkish communities in Western Europe.

²⁷ For over a decade Ankara has tested extensively its future ethno-communal control model of the Balkans on the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. Turkish minority Party in Bulgaria - the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) - has successfully monopolized political representation, economic potential and communal life in all regions of Bulgaria populated by Turks and other Muslim slavic minorities. MRF practices an authoritarian control over those regions and communities, practically distinguishing them from the Bulgarian and institutional instruments of public control.

interests, where Europe and the United States will be forced to negotiate their interests from an inferior position or to face Russo-Turkish hegemony and the status quo²⁸.

The smaller riparian countries of the Black Sea will be absorbed in Turkish-Russian axis, like satellites, or will be forced to take the delicate position to represent West's borders in the face of strong bilateral hegemony in the region.

5. Post-communist countries of the Black Sea region

Except Russia and Turkey, other countries in the Black Sea region share many common interests and features:

- All post-communist societies, except Bulgaria and Romania, are former Soviet republics. The national construction and modernization, institutional transformation, democracy and a market economy is their common agenda for the moment and - for most - for the foreseeable future;
- All these countries have been part of one or both empires in the region - Russian and Ottoman - for long periods of their history, if not along the whole history. Their national identity being obtained by many fights for emancipation and independence;
- Most of these countries (or at least large segments of the elite and the population in general), if not all, want to be members of Western security and development institutions, namely NATO and the EU. It is essential for them to involve the West in their equation of security and development as key to exit the vicious circle of repetition in the future, a dependency on the imperial past. So, all these countries represent natural allies of the Western strategy for transformation and integration of the Black Sea region into the Euro-Atlantic community.

Currently, these common interests of the post-communist countries of the Black Sea region have rather a potential character.

Unlike the Mediterranean, the Black Sea has not been a unitary region - in cultural terms or in terms of economic, business and policy. The two major sub-regions along the coast of the Black Sea, Caucasus and the Balkans, share similar development agenda throughout history,

²⁸ For a testimony of the Entente in Russo-Turkish Black Sea, see Dr. Jeffrey Simon, *Black Sea Regional Security Cooperation: Building Bridges and Barriers*, NDU, paper available at <http://harvard-bssp.org/publications/?id=210> and *Testimony of Bruce Pitcairn Jackson Before the Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs*, "The Future of Democracy in the Black Sea Region", 8 March 2005, available at <http://www.senate.gov/~foreign/testimony/2005>.

but were always parallel realities, with very few or even no previous interdependence or mutual influence.

Ukraine has been an integral part of Russia and the USSR and the first steps towards an independent existence were made after 1991. The geographical location and post-Soviet legacy are very important in the definition and diversity among Black Sea countries.

Bulgaria and Romania, located in the western side of the region, were quickly absorbed by the process of integration into NATO and the EU. Both countries have been part of the Soviet block, but not of the Soviet Union itself. This fact allowed them to make it easier to face and overcome the communist legacy (although this transformation process has not ended yet).

The countries of the Southern Caucasus are passing through a difficult process of national construction, coming up against a variety of hostile factors and obstacles. Some of these factors appear from a sort of weakness (or even of an absence) of a tradition of modern social development, making it difficult to overcome tribal identities or conflicts, economic backward, and political fragmentation specific to the transition of the post-Soviet States.

Additional barriers in the path of development and reconciliation occurred as a result of regional conflicts and disputes between nations and major communities in the region - Armenians and Azerbaijanis, for example. The Russian interferences in the region, regarded by Moscow as an integral part of its sphere of interest, have led to the emergence of several major conflicts, especially in the territory of Georgia. These conflicts can not be resolved without Kremlin's goodwill or in the absence of a broader international framework to apply international law in cases such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In a similar situation is also Transnistria, even if is far from the Caucasus. It is important too, that Turkey and Armenia begin the reconciliation process that would lead to lifting Turkish blockade against Armenia and to the opening of Turkish-Armenian border.

Ukraine represents the typical case of post-Soviet country who seeks its cultural identity through a complex process of national construction and political transformation. Countries such as Ukraine, which have a dual identity, could serve both as bridges and as separation line between civilizations or major geopolitical entities. The orange revolution is a good example of this.

The Ukrainian people need time to decide their future and it is important that Europe, the United States, and Russia create and maintain an environment for Ukraine's efforts to become an independent and successful nation. By its dimensions, and economic, and social potential, Ukraine is a key partner in the process of cooperation in the Black Sea region. Most initiatives for a democratic partnership - GUAM,

CDC, and the Black Sea Forum - would not have value without the active participation of Ukraine.

It is obvious that attitudes and policies of post-soviet/post-communist states as regards the process of their European and Euro-Atlantic integration are very different.

For Georgia, integration into NATO is a vital precondition for independence and territorial integrity of the country, threatened by the Russian policy²⁹.

For Armenia, caught in a long conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the partnership with Russia and the Russian military presence is a key factor in maintaining territorial earnings and to guaranty the independence of Karabakh Armenians. On the other hand, Iran is an important partner for Yerevan - especially for energy resources and export market so important for the small republic under blockade. This dual dependency of Armenia vs. Russia and Iran does not imply the population enthusiasm against NATO, but the Armenian government has shown interest in partnerships such as NATO IPAP. Armenians - both those in the country and those abroad - see the future of the country in the context of European and Euro-Atlantic area.

Azerbaijan hesitates to look sincerely interested in integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, from a number of reasons. Relations with Russia are complicated, both because of the Karabakh problem, and because of the energy export policies. Moscow has limited the export of Azerbaijani oil to a single route on Russian territory until the BTC pipeline has opened an alternative route to the Mediterranean coast.

Azerbaijan has complicated relations with Iran, where Azeri population is more numerous than that of independent Azerbaijan. Neither keeping an authoritarian system (the power has been transferred from Aliev father to Aliev son, and the electoral procedures were seriously violated) did not bring Azerbaijan closer to the Atlantic partnership.

For all the post-Soviet republics, the EU membership is desirable, but almost impossible to achieve in the foreseeable future. The EU ability to absorb, the complexity of relations between Russia and the EU, conflicts and controversial political reforms are difficult obstacles to overcome. The difference between NATO membership and EU membership, which stimulated democratic reforms in Central and Eastern Europe, now proves to be an impediment to reforms in the post-Soviet space. It is in the interest of Europe and the European Union responsibility to develop the neighborhood policy in a format that could

²⁹ See: L. Fuller, *Georgia: Tbilisi Is Moving Toward NATO Membership?*, RFE / RL, 2 June 2006 (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/06/be7f7673-9e6b-4fcd-b817-e07323b1fa29> . html).

support long-term, full integration of post-Soviet periphery in the European community³⁰.

Bulgaria and Romania, who have completed the efforts of integration in the two Western institutions - NATO and the EU - have a responsibility to initiate and promote the integration of Black Sea countries in the European and Atlantic communities. Both countries represent the Western frontier of the Black Sea and it is in the interest of both to extend the frontiers to the East. In recent years, Sofia and Bucharest had very different policies in the Black Sea area, according to their specific heritage and the current political agenda. In recently, Bucharest has been more active than Sofia in regards to the Black Sea policies. From this perspective, self-charging Romanians as an "island of Latinity" in a "Slav Sea" placed them in a more explicitly pro-Atlantic and anti-Russian posture.

Also, Bucharest has the ambition to lead the process of cooperation in the Black Sea Area from the Atlantic Community positions, which triggered angry reactions from Moscow and Ankara. Bulgaria, with its historic affinity towards Russia - and with a Turkish minority quite numerous, over-represented in the Bulgarian government - has more limited possibilities to initiate pro-Western policies in the Black Sea region. However, all official documents of the successive Bulgarian governments confirmed the country's interest and responsibility to the Black Sea from the perspective of the institutions belonging to the West. In the near future, both Sofia and Bucharest must convert their positions in the concrete proposals for a common strategy for Europe to the Black Sea area³¹.

Despite their softness, Black Sea policies - compared with those of regional superpowers, Russia and Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania have supported until the last moment, expanding NATO's Mediterranean operation "Active Endeavor" into the Black Sea. Sofia and Bucharest have not received such an extension, but the success of Turkey - with Russian assistance - to keep Black Sea a closed lake raise big questionmarks and asks for a debate of principle. NATO countries - including Bulgaria and Romania - have chosen to be NATO's member states to enjoy the privilege of common security. What is the value of status of NATO for Romania and Bulgaria if Turkey and Russia will keep only for them the exclusive maritime hegemonic right to ship in the Black Sea³²?

³⁰ See: C. Ciobanu, *NATO / EU Enlargement: Moldova and the "Frozen and Forgotten" Conflicts in Post-Soviet States*, USIP, July 2004. (<http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/74/en/Report%20July%2025,%20revised.doc>).

³¹ See: Fr. Bordonaro, *Bulgaria, Romania and the Changing Structure of the Black Sea's Geopolitics, Power and Interests* News Report (http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=302).

³² Turkey's maritime hegemony and, at a lower level, that of Russia's in the Black Sea is a tangible reality, as the naval forces of other riparian states are negligible, with

Despite the diversity of interests, the political agenda of post-communist countries in the Black Sea area revolve around a single priority - to support and promote strategies for integrating the Black Sea region into the Euro-Atlantic community. Only the prospect of a Euro-Atlantic region could help to escape the legacy of her disputed area of empires, fragmentation and autarchic isolation reproduced for centuries by the major powers of the Black Sea. The worst case scenario for the Black Sea region would be a new status quo that would translate through a balance of power of large international players - the United States, Europe, Russia, and Turkey - and that would lead to fragmentation of the region into rival areas. The geopolitical boundaries and rivalries - if they can't be solved - must be pushed as much East as possible.

Best case scenario consists of geopolitical homogeneous integration of this region in the West.

6. Strategic alternative options for security and development of the Black Sea Region for short and medium term.

Alternative options for the implementation of Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea Area in the next 3-5 years should be analyzed with a certain dose of optimism, pessimism, and realism, from the perspective of opportunity to successfully lead the following objectives:

- *NATO enlargement to the Black Sea region.* To consider successful enlargement of NATO, there must be a clear plan for receipt of Georgia, Ukraine, and - possibly - Moldova. Georgia is the only country where political preconditions to join NATO - that is, will, institutional reform, and defense sector - could be sufficient arguments to establish a timetable for the integration. It is unlikely that Ukraine will have the necessary political will for integration into NATO in the next 2-3 years. Also, in Moldova there is a mixture of a specific policy for determining the direction of continuing democratic reforms, a controversial agenda of conflict management and an institutional fragility that block reform in the security sector. Strong opposition and the concerted efforts of Russia to block NATO enlargement in its close vicinity reduce even more the chances for NATO expansion in the post-Soviet Black Sea states. Most likely, NATO will focus on partnership programs and waiting for a more favorable political conditions for the expansion effort.
- *Resolving "frozen conflicts".* Improving the situation is partly made possible by taking the settlement, as in the

the possible exception of Ukraine.

case of the Kodori defile³³ of Abkhazia or settle Nagorno-Karabakh issue through a series of measures resulting in consecutive partial fulfillment of the targets³⁴. It would be deprived of realism, however, to take into account the final settlement of "frozen conflicts" in the absence of agreements between Russia and the United States regarding strategic relationships, in general, and the Black Sea region, in particular. The areas of "frozen conflicts" are hostages of the Russian strategic games with the U.S. superpower within the general framework of their bilateral relations. It is difficult to imagine any substantial improvement on the agenda of "frozen conflicts" before resolving issues in this framework.

- *Success of the Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea.* After Moscow's success to strengthen the strategy of monopoly on oil and gas exports, particularly in Eastern Europe, the success of the Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea will be measured by the degree of diversification of energy sources for the region. Fragile agreements between Georgia and Azerbaijan and between Armenia and Iran for gas imports to "bypass" Gazprom are far from getting a true diversification, the less independence from Russian resources. The mosaic of interests (of Turkey, Iran, Kazakhstan, Europe, and other economic players, or states) determine, actually, increasing energy dependence vs. Russia of Eastern Europe, in general, and the Black Sea area, in particular. The only realistic project for the diversification of energy sources - Nabucco pipeline - depends on Turkmen and Iranian gas. Gazprom seeks to counter Nabucco project with a Russian-Hungarian re-export to Western Europe of the Turkish gas which arrives in Hungary through the "Blue Stream" pipe line, passing through the territories of Bulgaria and Romania. A lot of time and a consolidation of resources will be necessary until a realistic strategy of diversification of energy sources - to counter the Russian monopoly - will be created.
- *Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea Area* to enjoy a high priority on the list of strategic objectives of

³³ In late July 2006, an operation of the Georgian security forces has led to control by taking over by the Georgian government of a part of strategic importance to Abkhazie - narrow Kodori - which will allow the transformation process of managing conflict in negotiations between Tbilisi and Suhumi, even in negotiations between the communities in Abkhazia.

³⁴ The chances are increasing for the partial withdrawal of Armenian forces from some Azerbaijani provinces, kept under Armenian control, instead of establishing a long term plan which provides for holding a referendum and defining the status of the region.

Washington and Brussels. Categorically, in the next decade, the EU will focus on other priorities rather than on the Black Sea - and the reasons have already been clarified in previous chapters. This will not produce major changes, taking into account the EU low interest in regards to this region throughout the period after 1989³⁵. The slow U.S. involvement in the region will have deep effects on the entire process of transformation and reform and implementation strategy for the Black Sea Area.

Concentrating almost exclusively on one-dimensional logic of the war against terror, it is very likely that Washington will depart from the Black Sea problems and will play a defensive role by keeping actual positions in the relations with Russia and Turkey. Time will show how successful will such a game be.

Taking into account the full compliance of multi-factor analysis and the complex realities, we can foresee a period of relative slow and rearrangement if the elements of the Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea region. Russia's geopolitical revival based on growth rates in energy, the growing influence of Iran, based on the disappearance of Iraq balancing role in the Middle East, increasing the risk of a civil war in Iraq, increased dissatisfaction of Turkey towards the United States policy and Ankara's clear attempts to play its role in the region, based on flexible alliances with opponents of the United States - all these factors converge and inter-relate in an environment of weakening the strategic potential of the main geopolitical actors to influence the transformation and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Black Sea region.

Instead of an integrated region in the Western current, the Black Sea area appears as a region with serious lines of division and potential fissures. If the Euro-Atlantic community will fail to reverse this trend, then the general strategy of opening of safe corridors to Central Asia and the broader Middle East - in order to face the strategical challenges in the 21st Century - could be bound to fail.

³⁵ See: F. Tassinari, *A Synergy for Black Sea Regional Cooperation: Guidelines for an EU initiative*, "CEPS Policy Brief" Nr.105 / June 2006.