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Geopolitical situation in the Black Sea region and its main challenges

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Geopolitical situation in the Black Sea region and its main challenges

Region which is the main topic of the theme is in the centre of interests not only among the countries of the Region but also beyond the area as well and it is one of the most perspective place on the political map of the world. Main goal of my essay is to describe exact geopolitical situation of the region and to say my opinion about these and other main issues and challenges.

Black Sea region itself was connecting bridge between the West and the East throughout the centuries and was in the center of attention of many countries. There have taken place big historical events. The region was main trading route centuries ago, because here was Big silk road connecting east to the west.

During the soviet times region had lost its Geopolitical and Geo-economic function. It was divided into two confronted military-political blocks, NATO and Warsaw Pact countries.

Region has returned its main importance after collapse of Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, there has emerged new opportunities for regional cooperation and new independent countries appeared in international relations.

Nowadays region is bridge between the Geopolitical and Geo-economic spaces. Within its population of 330 million people and trade potential, the Black Sea area is one of the attractive place of new century. It offers the world society various opportunities through its rich natural resources, strong trading market, and qualified human resources. As it has unique geographical location region is the centre of transportation of energy resources from central Asia to the western countries, according to these fact we can underline the importance of the region as „wider black sea area”. The meaning of transportation of energy resources is such a big that it can have influence on oil and natural Gas world prices. Region has also military-strategic status. The reason for it is the fact that Black Sea region is located close to the Middle East, these could be seen through the military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, than it is clear the Geostrategic importance of the region. As to the whole region, also to the all states of the region and to the connected with them International Actors these factors create huge perspectives, unique opportunities for regional and interregional cooperation and for the countries economic, social and politically quick development.

As it was mentioned above Black sea region is in the centre of international interests. These is caused by:

- Regional Cooperation and connected with it events.
- Increasing interest of European Union to the region as to the important political Actor.
- Main function of Region as transit centre for energy supplies.
- Geopolitical condition of the region and its Trans-regional dimension.
- Priorities and approaches of different strong countries.

When we speak about the sense of Black Sea region, we should underline importance of energy resources of Russia, Azerbaijan, Romania and Ukraine and Transit potential of Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania. According to International experts, potential of Caspian Oil resources is 2-3 per cent of total Oil resources of the world., in spite of that Gas and Oil potential of Caspian sea and transportation resources of Black sea has attracted huge attention after collapse of Soviet Union and especially after signing „Contract of Century” in 1994 between Azerbaijan and the world’s biggest oil companies. We can use an idea of Wider Black sea region, according to unique geopolitical location of the area and we can involve in these wider sphere: Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. These factors underline once more the Political status of the region in International society. One of the key issues for development of the region was membership of Romania and Bulgaria in NATO and EU, these has put forward the area on International arena.

Geopolitical situation in the Black Sea region

As it was aforementioned fundamental changes on the political Map of the Region took place in the end of 80th and in the beginning of 90th of the last century, first of all It was connected to the collapse of soviet Union and to the development of the democratic processes in the Eastern Europe. Today every country has its foreign-political and national security priorities. After Cold War main positive aspect were:

- Foundation of Black Sea Economic Cooperation in 1992.
- Involvement of post soviet countries in the NATO program Partnership For Peace in 1994-96.
- Region countries got members of council of Europe.
- Four countries of Black Sea Region have founded regional organization GU-AM in 1997.
- Open Door Politics of NATO and EU and Romania and Bulgaria getting membership of these organizations in 2004 and 2007.
- Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004.
- Beginning of Intensive Dialogue Process with Georgia and Ukraine by NATO.
- Black Sea Area countries were involved in European Neighborhood Policy.

- Economic projects of Global dimension.

It would be very interesting if we underline the negative processes as well, which are connected to these factors.

First of all terrorism, all terrorist organizations continue to commit terrorist acts. Very interesting is labor party of Kurds which commit such kind of acts in Turkey, it is necessary to mention terrorist organizations in Ckhinvali region and in Abkhazia who commit acts of terrorism and acts of sabotage. It is necessary to underline the fact that these organizations are supported by Russian Government, which was clear after August events in 2008, but also in Chechnia and in other Northern Caucasus Republics of Russian Federation are such kinds of Problems.

With the spread of Terrorism is linked aggressive separatism. Exciting Separatist regions are non-controlled territories, as a result there is comfortable environment for founding terrorist camps.

One of the important problem which brakes cooperation and development of the region is tensed multilateral relations and territorial conflicts between the countries of the region. Such as conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia, Russia and Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, Ukraine and Romania.

Economical Problems and challenges are connected with the regions energy security and low level of Social-economical development of the Regions most countries.

Main aspects of interests of different countries in the region

It is very interesting to look at the interests of different leader countries and international organizations. We can discuss interests of the USA, EU, Russia, NATO etc.

Each of them tries to get maximum profit through active participation in large regional and interregional project implementation and they try to strengthen their political influence on regional countries.

United States of America

Especially active in the region is USA, which participates in regional Projects very actively since 1990 and realizes its interests successfully. On the one hand it is widening the influence of the North Atlantic Alliance and on the other hand it is creation of strategic Platform. In the region, main reason for these is its politics in the Middle East. Special accent here refers to Ukraine and south Caucasus. Very successful in this region is development of pro-American orientation of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Also very important is participation of the USA in the issues of

transportation of energy resources From Caspian Sea and Central Asia to the West through Black sea. Successful implementation of these projects was caused partially because of the participation of United States in almost every project.

European Union

It is necessary to underline the interests of The EU in the Region. First in 1993 EU showed its issues when there was ready fundament for implementation of project „TRACECA” and when Euro commission aimed to have dialogue about regional cooperation in the Black sea region, in 2007 after Bulgaria and Romania joined European Union, EU initiated regional cooperation so called „Black Sea Synergy” as a part of his Neighborhood policy. New politics underline the importance of cooperation in the fields such as: Transport, energy, environmental protection, strengthening democracy, trade, science, technologies. One of the priorities for EU is also solving the problems connected with so called Frozen Conflicts, such Transnistria, South Osethia, Abkhazia, Nogorno-Karabakh. From that point it was clear EU’s role in building the peace between Georgia and Russia. Efforts of European Union to be the leading political Actor in this part of the world to make security stronger, comes up against Russian ambitions as a main stakeholders of the Region. Russian isn’t part of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), it has its own frame of cooperation with the EU in four common spaces. Russia said no to sign the declaration accepted by Foreign Affairs ministers of EU member states and by synergy ministerial on 14ty February of 2008 in Kiev. In spite of all these EU gets more and more involved in co operational issues of the Black Sea region. Its interests have two aims geostrategic to support security in his neighborhood and take measures against disturbances and destabilizations and geo-economic which means to grow his part in implementation of energy projects of the region (NABUCO, GUEU) after Russian Georgian war and tensed relations between Russia and Ukraine EU saw that its own security stands in the danger.

Russia

Especially interesting is Russia’s role in the region, which represents itself as regions one of the strong countries and has ambition to be regional leader. Russias interests In these area is various and covers almost all fields. One of the main interests might be rising its influence on strategic centre of region especially to dispose, control and develop navy and military basis in Black sea, for instance as it is in Kirim. Also it is important to mention that such a basis might be founded in Ochamchire. In Russian-Georgian war the main aim of Russia was to control oil and gas pipelines. So that’s why Russia tries to oppose to the NATO widening towards the east.

On the other hand as it is known Russia develops its political and economical strategy and for that, every energy project has huge importance.

Turkey

It would be very interesting if we speak about Turkey's interests in the Black Sea region. This country is one of the important regional players. It does estimate the importance of the Black Sea region not only from the energetic point of view. Countries' political position gives the opportunity to play the role of the regional power and participate in the building process of the strength and solidity. Black Sea Economic Organization (BSEC) was Turkey's initiative after the war. Turkey wants to use the rising geopolitical importance of the region and its role in it as an important accessory of its geostrategic position. And which from its side makes the negotiations with the EU about the membership faster. Turkey has underlined its wish to become the transit route between the east and the west. With his active effort it was possible to implement number of projects. He is participating in several projects itself such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan or Blue Stream, also Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum oil pipelines and Kars-Akhalkalaki railway project. These projects are important because it raises Turkey's role in International Relations and satisfies its rising demand on energy resources. It was thought that Russia and Turkey should be competitors in energy projects, but relations between these two countries get better, according to political experts, these might be caused by active trade relations (last year in 2007 it has reached 40 billion dollars) by active energetic relations and rising investments. Also next to all of it both Russia and Turkey agree on one issue that they want to oppose EU and USA activities in the region and they want to support their own status quo.

NATO

Very important is to have a look on the role of the North-Atlantic Alliance toward Black Sea Region. According to the spread statement NATO doesn't have any kind of specific goal in these region. While in reality USA, NATO and other European states such Poland and Baltic States want to spread the North-Atlantic strategy in the region. These points on NATO's will to widen towards the East. In 2008 on NATO Bucharest summit NATO has underlined the importance of these region for Euro-Atlantic security. The fact that Georgia and Ukraine didn't get Membership Action Plan points that most of the European countries aren't ready to answer possible challenges from the Russian side. Despite these Open Door Politics was successful in 2002-2004-2006 when Bulgaria and Romania joined the Alliance. Istanbul Communiqué says „we underline the importance of the Black Sea Region for Euro-Atlantic Strategy, littoral states allies And partners work together to strengthen security and stability in the region”.

Ukraine

Ukraine is one of the perspective economic and political partners. If we foresee his political weight and importance, which on the one hand is caused by its geographical location and on the other hand by its economic potential, Ukraine has possibility to become regional leader, in political processes as well as in implementation in great economic projects.

Cooperation perspectives in the region

Economical cooperation

BSEC

Black Sea Area Countries have signed cooperation declaration and have determined multilateral relations priorities in 1992. In 1998 Black Sea region countries, Caucasian and Baltic States such as: Albania, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine have signed Black Sea Economic Organizational treaty. The activities of the organization became very fast in the centre of attention beyond the region as well. As a result after the creating organization soon there was created observatory institute, which members became Austria, Germany, Italy, France, Slovakia, Poland, Tunis, Egypt, Israel. In different kinds of activities of the BSEC participate representatives of different international organizations. The main aim of creation such kind of regional organization was clear

Inevitability of cooperation between the countries of the Regional economical, social environmental issues also in the battle against organized crimes etc. one of the main goal became stability and security of the organization. As one of the newest and important regional integrative projects BSEC has opportunity to become main element of European Architecture.

GUAM

Very big importance in the region has such a political alliance as GUAM, organization for democratic and economic development, which members are Georgia Ukraine Moldova and Azerbaijan. It was signed on 10th of October 1997 on the OSCE summit. These organization was created on the fundament of cooperation between the member States. This kind of multilateral Cooperation got huge interest from Europe as well as from America. GUAM member countries have similar kinds of problems such as: Territorial Integrity, struggle with Separatism. Main goal for Georgia and Azerbaijan is to find solutions to these problems in the case of Georgia there are Abkhazia and South Ossetia and in the case of Azerbaijan it is Nagorno-Karabakh. Ukraine plays big role in The frame of GUAM and

in the regional development totally, as one of the big and perspective country of Europe. Unfortunately it has also similar kind of problems as the most population of Kirim is Russian-speaking Kirimian Tatars, who have political claims to the central government.

Main priority of GUAM member states is cooperation in solving conflicts, also coordinated action and implementation of the Provocations created by Russian side. One of the main priorities for sure is cooperation in economical issues among the member states.

European Union's participation

Today its important to look at the EU from the co-operational point of view. Above was mentioned that European Union has worked on the partnership project Black Sea Synergy with the regions States. These initiative involves EU's active participation in the implementation of the new regional economic projects. These will support the security of these projects from one side and from another, it will stipulate European Energy security. It should be underlined that in the Document there is not mentioned that Black sea region countries will become members of EU, but it foresees interregional co-operation between EU and BSEC. It should be underlined as well that these Black sea synergy is not only initiative and partnership relations include cooperation with the five states in the frame of ENP these countries are Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova, exists partnership strategy with Turkey and Strategic Partnership Plan with Russia. One of the reason for such an active actions from the side of European Union became Russia-Georgian war in August 2008 and Russian-Ukrainian so called Gas war, here EU saw insecurity to its energy issues and Europe saw that European stability in these fields is dependent on decreasing its dependence on Russia's energy resources. So it stood up the question to find alternate ways of resource transportations. Such an alternative route might be to transport Oil and Gas from Caspian See and Central Asia through Black Sea to Europe. Next to all these it is important to mention Russian Georgian War's influence not only above Caucasian politics but also above the whole Wider Black Sea Area. Main participant of existing energy projects supposed to be Georgia our country is direct and the smallest corridor from Caspian see and central Asia to Black sea. Post war non-stabile situation caused fears and doubts about security of these projects, it is very difficult to find alternative ways, because of the existing conflicts there are tensed relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Armenia and Turkey, Turkey and Greece, Russia and Ukraine, also war decreased amount of investments in the region, hindered development of tourism, so as a result August Events had big influence on the Black Sea Region in total. supposedly in order to achieve stabilization in the region Brussels will participate actively in realizations of the projects, probably in these processes will be actively involved European Bank for Development and Reconstruction, European Investments bank, and other private foundations.

From priority programs of EU we can choose out transport corridor „Europe-Caucasia-Central Asia” and INOGATE (Intergovernmental Oil and GAS Transportation Corridor)

Energy Projects

For sure every country has its national interests and each of them tries to use its potential maximal for its interests. That's why different international projects and initiatives create new configurations of multilateral cooperation. For example very interesting is the fact that Azerbaijan Georgia and Turkey cooperate in many ways. Such as the project of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceihan which can transport 50-80 billion tone, or Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum(8 Billion cubic meter of Gas) very interesting case is coincidence of Russian turkey interests and the project Blue Stream (20-22 Billion cubic meter) according to the project Russia will transport central Asian and its own energy resources through Turkey to the Europe. With these projects Turkey rises its role in Global Processes as distributor of energy, In Transportation projects very interesting is Akhalkalaki-Kars Railway, with these line it would be possible to convey goods from the distant East, Europe, Kazakhstan through Georgia and Azerbaijan to Turkey and then in the Mediterranean Sea. Very interesting is Baku-Sufsa oil pipeline which is very short and cheap. Also very interesting is Nabuco project which was created by Council of Europe and European.

And parliament of Europe. These includes transportation of Gas to Austria through Bulgaria and Romania. These pipeline will be connected to the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline in Turkey and it gives opportunity to convey Gas from Caspian see and the Middle East. It is possible to transport approximately 20-26 Billion cubic meter Gas per Year.

From the energy projects also very interesting is Shah Deniz gas field. These field is located in the Caspian Sea and it is about transporting gas from Shah Deniz to Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Also very interesting is Burgas-Alexandroupoulos trans-Balkan pipeline. Russia Greece and Bulgaria will cooperate in building these project. Huge pipeline is going to be constructed from Kazakhstan till Black sea the name of the project is „Tengiz-Novorosiisk” also very important is Baku-Novorosiisk Project. After all of that very interesting would be if we mention that Armenia got isolated from all of these projects almost. These was caused, one the one hand by its geographical location and on the other hand because of its tense relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Turkey and Azerbaijan are playing big and important parts in the regional projects, for instance Baku-Tbilisi-Ceihan, in that project, even from the beginning, was excluded participation of Armenia also it was excluded from the project of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway station constructing, and these was despite USA lobbying actively for these. USA was lobbying it so much that it said no to participate in financing it because of the exclusion of the project.

Military Cooperation

BLACKSEAFOR

Regional co-operation also includes such unification as BLACKSEAFOR which is maritime, military collaboration of the littoral states, it was founded in April 2001 main issue is to rescue and reconnaissance operations, humanitarian AID, environmental protection, measures against mining. In 2004 by leading of Turkey member states decided to base permanent Control Centre, to sign multi-lateral agreements between the countries about the exchange of information. In march 2005 BLACKSEAFOR has widened its mandate against Terrorism via accepting these documentation „Taxation of maritime risks”.

Black Sea Harmony

Black Sea Harmony is a naval operation initiated by Turkey in March 2004, It is similar to the NATO-led Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean and aims deterring terrorism and asymmetric threats worldwide also aims at ensuring the security of littoral states through active communication and reconnaissance of the suspicious ships. Turkey has also invited other littoral States to join Black Sea Harmony, Ukraine and Russia have shown their intention to join it.

So next to all of these I want to mention that main obstacles for regional cooperation are frozen conflicts, and for successful development of the collaboration it is necessary to include and involve local factors actively and to decrease influence from outside.

In spite of the opportunities that gives the region, there are obstacles which for regional cooperation, stability and security in the region as well as for economical and political development. First of all these are frozen conflicts, and separatist regimes in the region. Mostly in Moldova and South Caucasus. Also these are organized crimes, lack of democracy and weakness of the Civil society. Regional collaboration is the key to these problems, without cooperation it is impossible to develop integral processes and to achieve main goals. BSEC is the format where such kind of cooperation would be the most successful.

Conclusion

In these part of the essay I would like to conclude with main questions, about energy issues, trans-regional considerations, black sea future and also I would like to once again underline NATO, EU factors. Energy security is connected with Europe looking for alternative energy resources in Central Asia and the East. Energetically dependent Europe is in need for reliable and trustworthy energy resources. These made Wider Black Sea with the Caspian important energy sup-

plier and transit region. Debates about the questions should these energy supplies get under the control of energy monopolist Russia or should they be according to marketing rules is still on going. As a result Region became battle field for taking over energy corridors and alternative pipelines.

According to the Trans-regional considerations the geographic proximity of the wider Black Sea area to the greater Middle East makes it as a central player in the need to address terrorism and other destabilizing forces (such as radical Islamism or the prospects of a nuclear Iran) stemming from the Middle East. The trans-regional dimension is also linked to more proactive and constructive examples of regional cooperation whereby energy pipelines from Central Asia via the Black Sea feed into Southeastern Europe or transport networks passing through the region link Europe to Asia and Northern Europe with the Middle East. The Danube region's links with the Black Sea as another growing trans-regional development where environmental concerns and rights of navigation factor come into play. In other words, the Black Sea region is an ever-growing transit hub for transport networks (both land and sea based), oil and natural gas pipelines as well as threats from elsewhere. According to an American analyst, „the wider Black Sea region is the linchpin between core Europe and the wider Middle East”. As a consequence, competing strategies have emerged with regard to whether the region should look to the West, stay within Russia's (and Turkey's) sphere of influence or pursue a model of regionalism to the benefit of all. The contrasting and competing interests of the various stakeholders raise question about the ability of the wider Black Sea area to continue with its emphasis on regional cooperation. Can the region survive this enhanced international interest? The challenges ahead are many as each new initiative, policy or issue could potentially destabilize an existing one. For example The spreading of the process of Europeanization through BSEC member states Greece, Bulgaria and Romania combined with the desire of all other BSEC member states – except Russia – to eventually join the EU, could disrupt the delicate balance among BSEC member states. After the Bucharest Summit, five of the twelve BSEC member states are (or soon to be) members of the Alliance (Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania) with Georgia and Ukraine lobbying for an invitation to join in the near future. Energy question will continue to fuel discontent among the countries of the region as different interests (political, economic and strategic) make a common approach extremely complicated. The list of challenges is long and is bound to grow. Within this context, the wider Black Sea area is part of the challenges. EU tries to become a ruler foreign-political actor in his neighborhood and beyond but on the other side stands Russia with its Ambitions and also USA which tries to save his world leader role. Is it possible to find common strategy or the difference between the stakeholders is such big that it makes impossible to overcome the resistances?

In the end I would like underline that not only NATO and EU have their interests in the Black Sea region but other way round as well. On the way of coop-

eration with NATO Black Sea region States will share experience of alliance in the field of security questions. Next to the NATO widening very important is EU widening and involvement of post soviet countries in the ENP, this will positively influence on the implementations of reforms of these countries. Aforementioned energy projects, NATO and EU widening towards the East, region got new geostrategic function and got in the centre of political and economical interests of world leader Countries and its energy Companies and for sure in the centre of international relations.

As a conclusion I would like to mention the importance of the region for Georgia. As a best perspective for good cooperation with the neighbors and with it making one step forward towards political social and economical development. Relations between the countries shouldn't be based only on materialistic and practical values. It is very important to make society, who is only passive spectator, get very actively involved in above mentioned processes. There is a need for active social movement in the region. Society should actively express its position towards regional events and not only on national but also on regional level as well. Very important is social monitoring on above mentioned processes.

I am sure society is ready for its increasing role and the example for this might be youth conference, which took place in Tbilisi in June 2008, on these conference as represented youth political organizations regionally. Participants of the conference worked together during three days about the importance of peace in the Wider Black sea region and they accepted joint declaration.