

SECURITY ISSUES AND PATTERNS OF COOPERATION IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

ERHAN BÜYÜKAKINCI

ABSTRACT

The “Black Sea region”, widely defined as the area covered by the eleven states participating in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Area (BSEC) and the main states around the Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, became one of the new scopes rediscovered within the realities of the post-Cold War period. In the Black Sea and Caspian regions, the strategic interests of the global actors form a complex picture with the economic interests of multinational companies, the national interests of regional powers as well as traditional international security alignments and domestic politics. Active participation in the contemporary “Great Game” around the Caspian oil is an important challenge for each state of this region in search of developing its own foreign and security policy priorities. This article aims to analyse the different points of view on the concept of the “Black Sea Security Zone.”

KEYWORDS

Black Sea, Black Sea Security, Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Energy, Pipelines.

Introduction

The “Black Sea region”, widely defined as the area covered by the eleven states participating in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Area (BSEC)¹ and the main states around the Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, became one of the new scopes rediscovered within the realities of the post-Cold War period. The region is strategically important for the West as an area of transit for trade, and because of its oil and gas reserves. As the political crises in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Caspian region have shown, ethnic animosities, economic crises, refugees, environmental problems, and disparities in military power make the area prone to instability. On the other side, the existence of large oil and gas reserves encourages cooperation, involving multinational consortia and external actors.

In the Black Sea and Caspian regions, the strategic interests of the global actors form a complex picture with the economic interests of multinational companies, the national interests of regional powers as well as traditional international security alignments and domestic politics. At this point, it is possible to emphasise the importance of these two regions from political points of view. Active participation in the contemporary “Great Game” around the Caspian oil is an important challenge for each state of this region in search of developing its own foreign and security policy priorities.

The first question to ask is how it is possible to make these two regions connect in the same perspectives. At this point, the development of economic relations should not be considered as a final goal, because each country in these regions aims to guarantee its own security interests and to use the economic relations as an instrument of foreign policy. Within this aspect, our work aims to study what are the different points of view on the concept of the “Black Sea Security zone”. However, the conceptualisation of the Black Sea and Caspian regions within the framework of security studies necessitates the determination of the common points of discussions and by this way, it is possible to consider the “Black Sea

¹This area covers widely Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine.

zone” in a wide sense, by including the Caspian region’s political inputs.

The BSEC was originally inspired by Turkey’s cooperative strategy, but has developed into a collective project since 1992. The member states, with different data on area, population, and wealth, share a desire to join forces in common projects and avoid relegation to the “periphery of world politics”, by transcending traditional rivalries. In 1999, the BSEC was transformed into a full-pledged regional organisation, which enables it to intensify cooperation with other regional and international organisations. Its development can be considered a political success: its regular summits and other meetings have in themselves contributed to greater stability. However, for economic cooperation to advance into the area of political commitment, latent antagonisms and conflicts will have to be overcome, rather than left to one side as at present. Cooperation is restricted by historical perceptions, lack of homogeneity, implementation mechanisms, resources, international visibility, and a clear vision of priorities.

The strategic importance of the Black Sea region

The problem of defining the Black Sea region is complex, as there are many different interpretations. It is perceived either as a concrete geopolitical entity, actual or resulting from history or as a process in hand; as a sub-region or a network of bilateral, trilateral, or multilateral links. However, the creation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Project (BSEC) in 1992 and its transformation into organisation have contributed to the intensification of regional cooperation and strengthened the perception of emerging common interests.²

The Black Sea region’s strategic importance for the West and for Europe in particular, is bound to increase substantially in the next years. Given the region’s geostrategic position as a natural bridge

²V. Chechelashvili, “BSEC: The way from the regional economic initiative to the full-fledged regional economic organisation”, *Turkish Review of Eurasian Studies*, 2001/1, ISIS, pp. 5-20.

between Europe and Asia, and between Central Asia and the Middle East, it constitutes a vital trade link as well as an important area of transit. Consequently, instability and conflicting trends, the energy resources and economic prospects make the international community involve directly within this area.

Many analysts consider the Black Sea and Caspian region as the third source of oil and gas in the world after the Persian Gulf and the Western Siberia. They emphasise that this region is rich in other mineral resources of worldwide importance, and has a favourable climate for agriculture and a well-educated and comparatively well-qualified labour force. However, the successor states of the former Soviet Union are incapable of exploiting these resources without enormous investments to develop the outdated transportation system and infrastructure.

Today, the importance of the Black Sea and Caspian regions seems to be generally accepted. However this new geopolitical consideration does not replace any existing concepts of regional security. This is a specific form of interpreting the geopolitical interests; it is not directly linked to any regional concepts that are determinant in international politics, such as European security structures. The Black Sea's strategic importance also calls for the involvement of other European actors: the EU, the Council of Europe (in enhancing democracy and peace-building), the OSCE (through the stability pacts initiatives), and the European security architecture.³

Most Ukrainian politicians and analysts understand that cooperation in the Black Sea and Caspian region is helpful for achieving the ultimate goal such as membership in the EU and other Western institutions.⁴ This becomes more apparent with V. Yushchenko's election as president with many discussions in late 2004. But at this point, it is possible to ask the following question: why linking the efforts to joining the Western institutions with the

³I. Kuklina, "Security Issues in the Black Sea-Caspian Region", *Russian Politics and Law*, Vol. 40/6, (Nov.-Dec. 2002), pp. 80-93.

⁴For more details on the foreign policy rhetorics in Ukraine, see G. Turan, "Bağımsız Ukrayna'nın Dış Politika Seçenekleri", in E. Büyükkıncı (ed.), *Değişen Dünyada Rusya ve Ukrayna*, Ankara, Phoenix Kitabevi, 2004, pp. 365-400.

development of cooperation around the Black Sea and Caspian regions? This cooperation will provide no doubt an opportunity to partly resolve the economic problems, such as the diversification of the energy supply, attraction of foreign investments for the national economy, creation of new transportation routes, etc.

In June 1998, the BSEC summit at Yalta approved a declaration aiming the integration of the Black Sea region into the "European common economic space" for the development of international cooperation. Although the Russian Federation is also a signatory state to this declaration, some of the former Soviet states do not expect Moscow to share their regional security interests and aim to develop themselves their own alternatives of alliances. Within this aspect, it is also possible to consider the formation of some clusters of interests between the countries in this region; Russia is supported generally by Bulgaria, Greece, and Armenia on the basis of the development of economic relations⁵, while the other group comprises Turkey, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. On the other side, it is possible to underline the initiatives of rapprochement between Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria on the security matters.

Sources of instability and conflicting trends

Since the break-up of the USSR in 1991, a number of violent conflicts have erupted leading to instability and raising questions over security in the Black Sea and Caspian region. The region has an inherent potential for conflict, as illustrated by the crises in former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus area and the oil-rich Caspian Sea region. While the communist system had the means to repress the existing conflicts from their open outbreak or to deal with it behind closed doors, the collapse of the Soviet Union inevitably opened the way to conflicting claims with which no diplomatic machinery was adequately prepared to cope efficiently. The question of national borders and the mutual territorial claims have been further complicated by several newly independent states failing to demarcate

⁵N. Özgür, "1989 sonrası Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri", in F. Sönmezoğlu (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*, 3rd Ed., Istanbul, Derin yay., 2004, pp. 638-641.

their borders, and by the absence of effective control over armed forces. There is a high and ever-present danger of unauthorised groups gaining control and dragging regional states into conflicts. The Chechen conflict was one of these examples.

Ethnic animosities in the former Soviet region result of an extraordinary ethnic diversity in that area, which is populated by more than twenty different large ethnic groups and nationalities. Besides, these nationalities are dispersed in the territory of several countries, where the national minority often plays a substantial role.⁶ Administrative and national borders are frequently in sharp contrast with the perceptions of the local population about the entitlement of certain ethnic groups to specific territories (Ingushetia-North Ossetia). The struggles of smaller ethnic communities for the attributes of nationhood come into conflict with previously established borders, and have been exacerbated by forced and spontaneous migrations.

The emergence of Ukraine as an independent state is an important geostrategic development in Europe. Moscow and Kyiv have been at odds over a wide range of issues: the Black Sea Fleet, the division of former Soviet property, international debt repayments, energy deliveries, the shape of the CIS and the control and ownership of nuclear weapons. The Crimea is and will remain at the heart of the Russian-Ukrainian relationship; the future of the Black Sea Fleet was settled with the signing of a Friendship Treaty on 30 May 1997, but analysts warn that the 'lord-vassal' relationship between Moscow and Kyiv could turn into a new economic struggle.⁷

The case of Moldova contains some of the major problems of Russian policy towards the successor states of the former Soviet Union: a large Russian-speaking population, economic dependency and Russian military involvement. The Dniester conflict in Moldova

⁶For instance, ethnic Russians make up 22 per cent of Ukraine's population, 13 per cent of that of Moldova and 8 per cent of the Georgian population. Many ethnic Ukrainians reside in territories adjacent to their country: 300,000 live in the adjacent Rostov region and another 600,000 in Moldova.

⁷E. Büyükakıncı, "Bağımsızlık sürecinde Ukrayna-Rusya ilişkileri", in E. Büyükakıncı (ed.), *Değişen Dünyada Rusya ve Ukrayna*, Ankara, Phoenix Kitabevi, 2004, pp. 401-436.

led to armed struggle in Transdnier and regional instability in 1992 and this could be resolved with the Russian military intervention. However with this opportunity, the Russian have implemented their military forces in the Transdnier region by supposing they were guaranteeing the political stability in those localities.⁸

Economic crises are additional causes of instability in this area. Almost all Black Sea nations were hit by crises (due to dependency on the Soviet market and post-Soviet transition to a market economy) at the time when the BSEC was conceived, and continue to suffer from it today. Inflation rates remain fairly high. Output in all countries in transition in the region is below the pre-transition levels, and full recovery is still some years away. States in the region have only recently begun making progress on economic reform. Positive growth rates have been the result of economic programs primarily sponsored by the IMF. However, the difficulties are both macroeconomic and structural. Living standards have dropped sharply, and social tension – caused largely by the pains of transition – could seriously destabilise the whole region. Economic and political turmoil is undermining regional stability and has severely affected the real economy. There are also prospects of asymmetries in economic growth in the region.

The problem of refugees and forced migrants as a result of conflict, political and economic malaise is clearly of particular concern. Fighting in South Ossetia (1991) and Abkhazia (1992-93) resulted in many hundred thousand internally displaced persons from Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Georgia, including 40,000 persons displaced during 1998 in western Georgia. Russia alone, in the last few years, has hosted an estimated five million people, mainly ethnic Russians who were uprooted from the CIS and Baltic countries.⁹ Among these are some 150,000 internally displaced persons from Chechnya (Russian Federation), 23,000 internally displaced persons

⁸W. Crowther, "The Politics of Democratization in post-communist Moldova", in K. Dawisha and B. Parrott, *Democratic challenges and authoritarian reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997, pp. 282-329.

⁹A. Korobkov, "Sovyet Sonrası Göç Hareketlerini Oluşumunda Etnik ve Mesleki Etkiler", in E. Büyükkakıncı (ed.), *Değişen Dünyada Rusya ve Ukrayna*, Ankara, Phoenix Kitabevi, 2004, pp. 67-112.

from North Ossetia; 29,000 Georgian refugees; and 20,000 formerly deported Meskhetian Turks.¹⁰

The inability of authorities to provide requisite social assistance for refugees leads to inevitable disorder, which in turn becomes a fertile breeding ground for organised crime. There is a very real and confirmed danger of the region, which lies at the crossroads of trade routes from Asia to Europe, turning into a haven for international drug traffickers.¹¹

Tensions could gradually develop as a result of aggravated environmental problems that are increasingly detrimental to the interests of the Black Sea littoral states and even beyond. The sea, whose coasts provide a home to many million people, is becoming one of the most polluted in the world; resources have been squandered through over-exploitation and short-sighted development policies, and it has always served as a sink for man-made and natural waste dumped into the rivers that feed it – the Danube, Don, and Dniester.¹² The environmental catastrophe is so serious that many fear the sea will never recover.

Last but not least, the combination of the afore-mentioned tensions could be further aggravated by disparities in military power. The Black Sea region includes the states with the three largest armed forces in Europe – Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. The other countries remain militarily fairly weak and are unlikely to spend large amounts of their budgets on defence. Albania and Moldova in particular have found themselves with virtually no armed forces after the collapse of the communist regimes.

¹⁰UNHCR 1999 Global Appeal, “Operations in Russian Federation”, (Geneva, UNHCR, 1999).

¹¹D.V. Trenin and A. Malashenko, *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in post-Soviet Russia*, Washington D.C., Carnegie Endowment, 2004, pp. 132-133.

¹²Intensified oil shipments, construction of oil terminals and oil and fuel spills from vessels will increasingly result in the greater contamination of water, and have an adverse impact on the fishing industry and tourism. V. Aleksandrov, ‘Ecological Problems of the Black Sea’, *International Affairs* (Moscow), vol. 43, no. 2, 1997, p. 87; and C. Woodard, ‘Reviving the Black Sea’, *Transition*, vol. 3, no. 4, (7 March 1997), p. 50.

Table 1 - Defence expenditure (1992 and 2000) and military manpower (1992 and 2000) of the Black Sea littoral states¹³

Years	Russia	Turkey	Ukraine	Bulgaria	Georgia	Greece
Defence expenditure (US\$ million, current prices)						
1992	47,220	4,140	4,320	1,310	?	4,400
2000	58,810	10,609	1,081	347	116	5,457
Armed forces (thousands)						
1992	2,030	480	438	99	?	159
2000	1,520	609	304	79	16	162

Despite certain countries' reduction of military power immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union (the abandonment of Ukraine's nuclear capacities is an important example), others opted for the opposite direction. Some states (Azerbaijan, in particular) have developed important arsenals. Arms acquisitions and indigenous production capacities have become increasingly noticeable and sophisticated weapons systems are being introduced.

Military alliances are another important factor. Russia has formal military agreements with both Armenia and Georgia. Greece and Turkey are members of NATO, and Bulgaria and Romania also aspire to full membership, while on 27 May 1997 Russia and NATO signed the "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security". As full membership of NATO is not yet a viable prospect for Ukraine, on 9 July 1997 Kyiv signed a "Charter on a Distinctive Partnership" with NATO, which does not include hard security guarantees. However, Ukraine's characterisation by NATO as a key

¹³*The Military Balance 1993-1994*, London, Brassey's for the IISS, 1994; *The Military Balance 2001-2002*, Oxford: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 2002.

factor for ensuring stability in Central and Eastern Europe has been interpreted as recognition of Ukraine's Western orientation.¹⁴

Energy and economic potential

It is on this background of complicated territorial and ethnic conflicts and competing interests that the development and transportation of energy resources takes place. It raises two main questions: first, whether economics will be a divisive or a stabilising factor. The energy issue (oil and gas) is both a factor that encourages cooperation and an obstacle, a divisive factor. The second question is whether or not there is a primacy of politics over economics, and whether the development of one is conditional on the other.

The region's economic potential and huge natural resources, especially the energy resources of the Caspian Basin, are increasingly attracting the West's strategic attention. In the foreseeable future, the stability of the Black Sea area will depend very much on the development and transportation of Caspian oil and gas.

The most problematic aspect of the energy question, however, is the choice of a route for the oil main line. Oil and gas pipelines built to serve the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) are inadequate and are not matched to major markets. As a result, new pipeline proposals are now under consideration. These proposals involve enhancing the capacity of existing networks and the reorientation of transport routes to new markets. They directly affect the interests of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey and several other countries and major multinational oil companies. They have therefore assumed major geopolitical importance. For foreign oil companies the region holds a further attraction: unlike the majority of the world's proven oil reserves, these resources are available for exploitation by Western companies.

¹⁴For more discussions on Ukraine-NATO relations, see L. Polyakov, *Ukrainian-NATO Relations and New Prospects for peace-keeping*, London, RIIA, 2003.

Oil and engineering companies, as well as states, determine the rules of the oil game and have their own 'private' interests in the region. Investment decisions therefore depend on perceptions of commercial risks and rewards. Profitability considerations are, however, accompanied by evaluations of political risk, but oil companies take a more relaxed attitude to political risk than do other firms. They are more used to dealing with violent or unstable countries than other industries are.

Pipelines are by definition ideal targets for terrorist attacks, which would not only disrupt the flow of oil or gas but also render certain routes less attractive. The safety of each and every project, apart from the question of profitability, is therefore a key parameter for the investors concerned. Moreover, multinational consortia are involved in almost all these projects (i.e. American, Russian and partially European companies). Although they are competitors, these companies have opted for the consortium as a means of spreading risks, as well as of securing Russian cooperation.¹⁵

Against this background of complicated and competing interests, and in view of impending decisions, the major players are positioning themselves as to their specific commitments and the exact shaping of these large-scale investment projects. Intense lobbying and diplomatic tactics have also made increasingly clearer to the interested parties that effective and rational exploitation of the region's vast energy resources may be possible only under conditions of wide international cooperation. West European, American and Japanese companies have signed several agreements in the region for the extraction of oil and the construction of gas and oil pipelines.

In terms of the Black Sea region's overall economic prospects, there has been slow progress in its integration into the global economy. Foreign investment has been limited and economic cooperation in the region has faced a number of barriers: economic recession, political instability, lack of infrastructure and legal framework, and managerial inefficiency.

¹⁵A. Andrianopoulos, "The Economics and Politics of Caspian Oil", *Journal of South-Eastern Europe and Balkan Studies*, September 2003, Vol. 3/3, pp. 76-91.

However, the prospect of a market of 200 million people has also attracted business interests beyond the energy sector. A number of joint ventures have been established, mainly in financial services, telecommunications, transport projects and the tobacco industry. Foreign banks have already established a presence in the Black Sea region, as they are interested in the market due to the capital coming from oil. In theory, if properly addressed, factors such as a well educated human capital, huge natural resources, a potentially big market and new market opportunities might give a comparative advantage to the Black Sea area.

What is Russia's position in the Black Sea region?

The Black Sea region constitutes a most crucial area in Russian foreign policy due to its geopolitical importance and specific Russian interests during the difficult period of transition. The concept of "Near Abroad" was developed to reflect the sudden replacement of the former Soviet Union republics by sovereign states, thus giving rise to widespread concerns in the Black Sea area as well. There are a number of reasons for Russia's interests in this zone. For Russia, the Black Sea has always been a gateway to the world's oceans. The region also constitutes a natural bulwark for Russia, and it is seen as marked by a string of potentially destabilising factors such as the alarming situation in the Transcaucasus and the northern Caucasus, a festering crisis in the Balkans, the Kurdish problem and the charged situation around Iran and Iraq. In addition, many Russian regions have maintained strong economic links with the Black Sea area. Russia is witnessing a transformation of the geopolitical environment in the Black Sea region that is distinctly marked by a growing number of international actors in the area.

Moscow's policy has conveyed ambiguous signals as a result of internal fighting and the interaction of separate lobbies or interest groups within the Russian leadership. North Caucasus preoccupies Russia most as it is seen as an exclusively domestic issue; the issue of Chechnya is high on Russia's political agenda not only due to its importance for Russian territorial integrity but for geo-economic reasons, as the only existing pipeline capable of carrying Caspian oil runs through Chechnya. Moscow is clearly eager to develop a strong

military presence in the Transcaucasus, as it has done in Armenia and Georgia and tried to do in Azerbaijan.¹⁶

While North Caucasus is an issue of territorial integrity for Russia, Transcaucasus forms an area where Moscow has witnessed a decline of its influence and its efforts aim at strengthening its levers over developments in the area. It feels that it is obliged to take appropriate actions to oppose attempts to lock it within its own borders or infringe upon what it sees as its legitimate interests in preventing the northern Caucasus ethnic patchwork from falling apart. It has therefore reacted to the formation of what it sees as new blocs such as the GUUAM (Georgia-Ukraine-Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan-Moldova) initiative, which are perceived as part of a non-Russian policy.¹⁷ Regional cooperation in the Black Sea region is seen in Moscow as complementary to cooperation with the EU, but might be seen by the Russians as being in competition with the CIS. Russia has pushed for closer security and economic agreements in the CIS framework, and the BSEC could be seen as potentially threatening the CIS if it posed an alternative to Russian predominance.

In terms of peacekeeping, for example, Russia has tried to dominate all missions within the CIS. Following the outbreak of hostilities in South Ossetia, Transdniester and Abkhazia, which required urgent action, only Russia was able to step in without delay.¹⁸ Furthermore, Western unwillingness to commit troops to this part of the world, as well as Russian success at suppressing hostilities, rendered the Russian role justifiable: short of any other feasible alternative, its role was seen as a necessity for equilibrium and stability.

¹⁶A. F. Demir, *Türk Dış Politikası Perspektifinden Güney Kafkasya*, Istanbul, Bağlam Yay., 2003.

¹⁷In early 2002, Uzbekistan has suspended its membership to GUUAM for political purposes. This decision was taken at the same time with the US-led international intervention in Afghanistan.

¹⁸For more details on Russian peacekeeping policies in Moldova and Georgia, see J. Mackinlay and P. Cross (eds.), *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian peacekeeping*, Tokyo, The UN University Press, 2003.

Russia's motives apparently went beyond traditional fears of a 'power vacuum' to be filled by hostile forces: peacekeeping was also being used as a means to secure a predominant position in regional politics.¹⁹ However, given that traditional power politics thinking has been the initial and instinctive reaction of most players involved, Russia was not alone. It strove to overcome its internal crisis and the paralyzing trauma following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and to re-enter the area through its "Near Abroad" policy.

Turkey's interests in the Black Sea region

As early as 1990 and 1991, Turkey displayed a strategic interest in several of the Soviet republics; it saw this as a historic opportunity to increase its influence in a region encompassing the Black Sea, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Turkey continued to exploit this opportunity in the post-Soviet era, bearing in mind Russia's strategic interests in the region. Turkish analysts closely monitor the internal debates on Russia's foreign policy orientations. Turkey also monitors Iran, which it considers a rival for influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Turkey's goals in approaching the former Soviet republics have been to export its own political regime pattern and to cultivate cultural and economic relations at a time when its position in Europe was faltering. A series of intergovernmental meetings were held between Turkey and the Turkic countries throughout 1992-93 in a "historical embrace of the Turkic world", as the then prime minister Süleyman Demirel said on his return from visiting the Central Asian republics. Initial euphoria, however, was soon replaced by realism as the newly independent states in Caucasus and Central Asia, eager to secure political and economic support from all possible sides, refrained from identifying themselves solely with a Turkic identity. Turkic summits and unofficial meetings continue as forums for discussion and rapprochement.

¹⁹D. Sagramoso, "Russian peacekeeping policies", in J. Mackinlay and P. Cross (eds.), *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian peacekeeping*, Tokyo, The UN University Press, 2003, pp. 13-33.

Turkish efforts to mediate between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and to involve BSEC in security issues, when in May 1994 it appealed for the formation of a BSEC Consultation Committee, have been dealt with suspicion by the states in the region.

Pipeline politics have primarily influenced Turkey's policy towards Transcaucasus, as it is an important area through which access could be secured to Central Asia while avoiding other routes through Russia and Iran. Azerbaijan enjoys a special relationship with Turkey, underlined by cultural elements and economic considerations. Azerbaijan's potential wealth makes it of great importance to Turkey, as the latter is a net importer of fossil fuels. Kazakh oil could be transported across Turkey via Azerbaijan. Pipeline politics have led Turkey to pursue a policy of close cooperation with Georgia, as oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian and Central Asia will have to go through Georgia, given the problems between Ankara and Yerevan.

The transformation of the BSEC into a regional organisation has been a landmark. In Yalta in June 1998, the group acquired definite form as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation, after signing the new organisation's charter, which provided the forum with a legal basis and enables it to intensify cooperation with other regional and international organisations.

The BSEC can be seen as a framework for forging closer economic, and political ties and thus conducive to more stability and security in a volatile and strategically important area. So far, it has accomplished some progress in the sphere of action that was determined by the 1992 Istanbul Declaration, and its success can be seen in the list of states aspiring to full membership or observer status. However, critics say that practical achievements have been minimal and that no concrete measures have been implemented for enhancing economic cooperation among its participating states. The BSEC's contribution to security building has also been seen as marginal.²⁰

²⁰E. Sieca-Kozłowski and A. Toumarkine, *Géopolitique de la Mer Noire*, Paris, Karthala, 2000.

Turkey also saw in this form of regional cooperation a way to strengthen its image of a privileged partner of the West in this area and increase its influence around the Black Sea basin and the Transcaucasus. Primarily Turkey's geopolitical interests motivated the preference for the BSEC framework as a state, which is linked culturally, institutionally and geographically between the European and Islamic cultures. Turkey's primary consideration in proposing the creation of the BSEC was to explore alternatives to membership of the European Union. However, other analysts view the BSEC as a scheme that has been conceived and elaborated as an integral part of Europe's new architecture, arguing that Ankara hoped that the BSEC might enhance Turkey's prospects of full admission to the EU.

The BSEC was in fact only one of several potential structures under consideration in 1990. Schemes of regional cooperation offer Turkey the possibility of being an important regional actor. In addition, given the demise of the USSR, the BSEC evolved into an important instrument of Turkish policy *vis-à-vis* the CIS. Among Turkey's motivations, economic considerations were indeed quite important. Having the second most developed economy in the area (with Greece, which is using its advantages from the EU membership), Turkey is in a position to benefit from business and cooperation with the other BSEC states.

What are the positions of the other countries in Black Sea region?

Ukraine and the other successor states joined the BSEC above all in order to underline their autonomous presence in regional and international affairs. At the same time, they aimed at creating new bilateral and multilateral relations in their immediate vicinity, which was undergoing a process of radical restructuring. Ukraine in particular wished to overcome its dependence on the structures inherited from the former Soviet Union, and to turn westwards to the rest of Europe. Ukraine's policy towards the BSEC has been consistent with its policy of diversifying its international contacts. Ukraine has also promoted the idea of Baltic-Black Sea regional cooperation, which has received little support, as most of the

countries to be included in the project have preferred direct links to the EU and NATO.

The smaller countries (*Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova*) also sought the reinforcement of their security and multilateral connections, as well as their gradual involvement in European integration processes. Fearful of isolation and an unstable regional framework, they opted for a regional system of cooperation, which allowed for more predictability, interaction and a reduction of tensions. Although many of these newcomers to the international scene are directly or indirectly involved in conflicts, these latter rivalries are not seen as impeding the development of the BSEC processes. Moreover, participation in regional schemes helps these countries to consolidate their state identity and increases the legitimacy of their governments on the international scene. Particularly for the small states, participation in sub-regional groupings guarantees their equal status while offering proportionally greater influence, discreet channels for information exchange and negotiation, and flexible agendas.

The BSEC's contribution to stability and conflict prevention

Given the uncertainties of the transition to democratic rule and market economy, and the chaotic situation and conflicts that ensued in the first few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union (for instance, in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdnierster), the BSEC's development can already be considered a political success.

Although the BSEC may not have to deal directly with purely political issues in the near future, the nature of economic cooperation itself is likely to create a framework conducive to more stability and security. At the same time it may require some commitment of political means, in order to sustain the results. In other words, if economic cooperation is to advance beyond the present stage of technical consultations, there needs to be a certain degree of political will in order to enable the on-going projects to evolve into areas of national policy. At the moment, this evolution is limited by various latent antagonisms and conflicts that exist in the region.

Moreover, cooperation in security affairs of a non-military character in the search for solutions to problems such as organised crime, illegal migration, and drugs is now also a possibility. In fact at their Moscow summit BSEC leaders considered this area of cooperation to be of primary importance, since it 'contributes to the creation of favourable conditions for promoting trade and economic cooperation in the Black Sea region'. They reiterated their support for the work done at the meeting of ministers of internal affairs in Yerevan in October 1996 'that launched interaction of law-enforcement bodies of the participating states in combating organised crime, illicit trafficking of drugs and weapons, radioactive materials, illegal migration and all acts of terrorism.' They also stressed that they attached 'special importance' to the adoption of urgent concrete measures in this direction.

Some participating states have gone further and proposed the introduction of directly political subjects into the BSEC process. Ukrainian officials have proposed a non-aggression pact, an initiative "towards economic cooperation through confidence-building", aimed at military confidence-building measures around the Black Sea. Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia and Turkey supported the idea but argued that it should be considered outside the BSEC framework.

President Shevardnadze of Georgia has proposed the creation of a "Conflict Resolution Centre"; he has also put forward the "Peaceful Skies" proposal for the settlement of the Karabakh conflict, combining a cease-fire agreement with economic incentives.²¹ The major component of Shevardnadze's "Peaceful Caucasus" initiative of early 1996 (which has been supported by Iran) is again the economic cooperation.

Security concerns have tended to be linked strongly, if often obliquely, to economic cooperation at the regional level. Assuming that the likelihood of political conflict decreases among countries with close economic relations, many states have seen regional economic cooperation as a means to achieve a more stable and coherent political environment. Given the existence of unresolved

²¹Caucasus Report, *RFE/RL*, vol. 1, no. 17, (23 June 1998).

border and ethnic disputes, regionalism has been in a sense a way to defuse the source of tension between members. Opinions are divided on this approach. For some, the nature of the region's problems (conflicts in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria) inevitably leads to a tendency increasingly to take into account security questions. Thus, the intensification of political cooperation and relations in the security sphere constitutes the condition for economic relations.

For others, the BSEC cannot in itself adequately take on responsibility for security issues, and will probably therefore limit itself to economic matters. In that sense, it might even be necessary to dissociate economic cooperation in the Black Sea and a diminution of regional conflicts. There might even be a trend towards an inverse relationship, i.e. the coexistence of economic cooperation and persistent regional conflicts.

Security challenges and patterns of cooperation in the Black Sea region

There is a general consensus among the political decision makers of the states in the region and many analysts that Russia bears responsibility for the great part of the conflicts within the former Soviet area. The political elites in the states around the Black Sea see clear evidence that Russia aims at fuelling conflicts in order to propose itself as the region's chief peacekeeper. Understandingly, Ukraine is unwilling to participate in Russian-led conflict-management activities in the Southern Caucasus or in Tajikistan. It should be underlined that Ukraine refrains from contributing to the regional peace-building process other than in the framework of the OSCE or mandated by the UN Security Council.

At this point, new challenges should be analyzed within the CIS structures; the establishment of the GUAM forum in 1997 (GUAAM since 1999) was seen as an important alternative of cooperation based on security concerns within the framework of the CIS' evolution. It is very clear that the GUAAM countries' distinct interests are concentrating on diminishing the Russian presence and influence, however this new initiative was adequately perceived in Russia as an alternative to CIS on the territory of the former Soviet

Union. On the other side, besides symbolising the opposition to Moscow's reintegration plans, the GUUAM pursues an important economic goal too: to decrease the member states' dependence on Russian gas and oil supplies and networks.

Political cooperation within the GUUAM is generally described as a further development of interaction and coordination of positions related to the activities of the OSCE. All the GUUAM countries try to approach the Euro-Atlantic security structures and to become full-fledged members of the Council of Europe. As for conflict management, Ukraine condemns all forms of separatism and interference with the internal affairs of other states. It is very important to quote that each member state recognised the territorial integrity of the others. At this point, Ukraine developed an important position by calling the withdrawal of Russian military structures from Moldova and declaring that the peacekeeping operations in the region should be legitimated by a UN or OSCE mandate and be of multinational composition.

Clearly the GUUAM states face common problems and pursue common goals. All of them are threatened by a possible disintegration due to separatist movements and are involved in potential or actual regional conflicts. All of them face the challenge of improving their national economies. They share a wish to participate in the exploitation of Caspian oil exploration and rely on improvement of their transport structures. All of them identify integration with the Euro-Atlantic structures as a national strategic goal. However, there was no direct link between the GUUAM structures and NATO till now; the GUUAM states have been always invited to the EAPC meetings and each one has established direct relationship within the framework of the Partnership for Peace program.

However, it is possible to quote the different political priorities between the member states; for example, Kyiv aims to gain access to the Caspian oil, while the Azerbaijani elite seems to be largely preoccupied with securing its political power. At the same time, Baku is interested in enhancing security cooperation in the GUUAM framework and improving its relations with NATO. Ukraine's failed initiative to hold NATO-GUAM consultations in the 16+4 format was warmly supported by Baku, while NATO and Moldova had rejected this proposal in 1998.

Baku's relations with Moscow further deteriorated when the Azerbaijani president accused Russia of supplying missiles and warplanes to Armenia, leading to the decision of not prolonging Azerbaijan's membership in Tashkent Treaty and inviting NATO and Turkey to deploy troops on the former Soviet airbase in the country. The timely coincidence of the renouncement of participation in the Tashkent Treaty by Georgia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan suggests that this decision followed consultations among these countries. On the other side, the international analysts observe the coinciding timing of the GUUAM states' withdrawal from the Tashkent Treaty and Ukraine's decision to open Yarıvıy for PfP manoeuvres in 1999.

The Georgian government intensified its demands that Russia should withdraw its armed forces from its national territories. In January 1999, the last Russian border guards left Georgia, while new squads are to be based along the Russian-Georgian borders. The decision to dispose of Russian assistance for joint border control is to be seen against the background of an increasingly open Georgian-Turkish border.²² On its side, Tbilisi is not able to control the Abkhazian region. This fact constitutes a great obstacle for the establishment of political stability in this country, even in the new period which has begun with Saakashvili's arrival to power in Georgia in 2004.

From the very beginning, Moldova has been reluctant to increase military-political cooperation within the GUUAM. For example, the Moldavian president rejected the idea of 16+4 consultations between NATO and GUAM. In 1999, the defence ministers of Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan discussed the GUAM cooperation within the framework of UN, OSCE, or PfP activities, a joint position in the CFE Treaty negotiations and the creation of a tripartite peacekeeping battalion to ensure the regional security.²³

²²H. Kanbolat and K. Ağacan, "Gürcistan'daki Rus üslerinin tasfiyesinde mehter adımları", *Stratejik Analiz*, No. 16, August 2001, pp. 5-19.

²³G. Herd and F. Moustakis, "Black Sea Geopolitics: A Litmus Test for the European Security Order?", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 5/3, Autumn 2000, pp. 117-139.

The considerable difference in commenting on the defence ministers meeting by Ukrainian, Georgian and Azerbaijani analysts reveal ever-differing priorities among the regional elites in regard to military-political cooperation within the GUUAM. Azerbaijan and Georgia aim to form a joint military unit for the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia, while Ukraine supports the idea of a battalion to protect the oil pipelines. But at this point, there is a great risk that Ukraine can be directly involved in Caucasian conflicts.

From the Ukrainian point of view, first of all, counterbalancing Russian influence would serve American and Turkish interests, contributing to closer ties with these countries and to safeguarding the national independence. Secondly, contributing to the security of the pipelines is liable to make Ukraine an indispensable partner in Caspian oil ventures. Thirdly, a higher regional profile will raise Kyiv's prestige in Europe, yielding positive effects with regard to Ukraine's integration policy. Fourthly, Ukrainian foreign and security policy tries to concentrate on the development of the initiatives with Turkey about the confidence measures in the Black Sea.

After 1999, Ukraine's position within the framework of its relations with Russia gained a different way because of the distant policies of the Western countries. While the European countries and the US accused the Kuchma administration for wide corruptions and illegal practices in domestic affairs, Kyiv began to change its direction from the idea of rapprochement toward the West to the intensification of political initiatives with Putin's administration.

The "Confidence Measures" in the Black Sea region

One of the first Ukrainian political initiatives in the BSEC framework was a proposal on Economic cooperation through confidence measures, announced by president Kravchuk at the BSEC Parliamentary Assembly in 1994. This document suggested that the countries pledge not to allow their territory to be used for an aggression or subversive activity against another BSEC state, to officially recognise the inviolability of borders and to start the implementation of concrete measures in the Black Sea region, including the limitation of naval activity. At this period, this proposal

was met with little support as the situation in Moldova and in the Caucasus was still complicated. On the other side, one of the main military-political problems, the sharing of the Black Sea Fleet, was far from being resolved. Later, this initiative was transformed into a general “declaration” on confidence measures in the Black Sea region. The so-called Vienna meetings of expert groups are the most concrete results of this initiative.

However, the declaration contains many compromises; Moscow showed its interests on the limitation of NATO naval activity in the Black Sea activity, because its fleet strength is greater than that of all other BSEC states combined and Turkey has no navy forces in the Black Sea. Russia has even suggested the expansion of the declaration’s range of action to neighbouring regions, which is unacceptable for the USA and thus rejected by Turkey.

Judging from the country’s objective long-term national interests, Ukraine’s position is more between the parties on the side of Turkey and NATO. Clearly, Kyiv has no interest in provoking Moscow with an official suggestion of increasing NATO’s presence in the Black Sea. Russia’s leverage with regard to stability in Crimea is still crucial.²⁴

Geostrategists concerned with the Crimean Tatars who might increase their calls for cultural-political autonomy use another argument against the close orientation towards Ankara. At this point, Kyiv tries to develop well-balanced policy with Turkey within the framework of this subject.

Another initiative on confidence measures and collective security arrangements was introduced in 1998 by the Turkish government. Ankara proposed the formation of a multinational navy unit in the Black Sea with Russia, Ukraine, and Bulgaria (BLACKSEAFOR – Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group). This new concept describes the unit’s primary tasks to foster mutual confidence and friendship and good neighbourhood relations among the Black Sea littoral states as well as to consolidate peace and stability in the region by deepening navy cooperation and interaction.

²⁴Büyükakıncı, *op. cit.*, pp. 401-436.

Technically, BLACKSEAFOR's training activities include rescue operations, assistance operations, and assistance to humanitarian aid, mine-clearing operations, environment protection and friendship visits. The memorandum of understanding provides for a possible action of this initiative outside the Black Sea region and participation in peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN and OSCE.²⁵

It is possible that Russia could reject this cooperation proposal and as a result, Turkey, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and Georgia can envisage creating their own multinational navy forces without Russia. The supporters of the initiative underline that Turkey is a NATO member and hopes that naval cooperation in the Black Sea can provide additional ground for a permanent NATO presence in the region. The opposite arguments depart from the fear that an implementation of the Turkish initiative without the Russian participation, the BLACKSEAFOR involvement in regional crises management would undermine the balance of powers in this region.

Within the framework of the BLACKSEAFOR initiative, it is possible to see the opportunity of confidence building in the region as well as the practical possibilities such as emergency situations, rescue operations. In April 2001, six Black Sea countries signed "the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group Agreement" in Istanbul. An official close to the Turkish government said that "the task group does not aim to constitute an alliance against other countries or international organisations and it only targets increasing cooperation between the signatory states and the international organisations like the UN and the OSCE". At this point, it should be underlined that this initiative aims to make easy the implementation of confidence building measures around the Black Sea region. In April 2002, the foreign ministers from Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine gathered in Kyiv to sign a document on measures to enhance confidence and security conditions with regard to naval activities in the Black Sea.²⁶

²⁵A. Malov, "Naval Cooperation in the Black Sea", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2002, pp. 53-58.

²⁶*Ibid.*

In terms of foreign and security policies, it is very important to consider that the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the outside world can enhance the sovereignty and independence of each GUUAM member state and create better conditions for integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. At this point, to enhance multilateral cooperation within the framework of the BSEC and GUUAM should be perceived as an instrument of a collective rapprochement towards the EU and NATO.