

Contending Agendas for the Black Sea Region

A Regional Alternative

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Abstract: The Black Sea has been a site of conflictual relations for centuries, though changes since the end of the Cold War have allowed for the emergence of a cooperative environment. Because of the region's strategic location, controlling it represents an exceptional geopolitical value, which attracts international attention and interests in the region's future. This paper argues that the increased attention to, and various policies toward, the region by the US, the EU, and the Russian Federation have not always attested to prosperity; instead, they have at times induced the emergence of conflictual situations, threatening regional and international stability. Alternative approaches, based more upon a regional outlook than upon global calculations, may have better values to offer.

Keywords: Black Sea region, great power security, regional geopolitics, Turkish foreign policy

The fall of the Soviet Union created an atmosphere in the Black Sea area in which historical sources of tension and grievances became difficult to manage. The disputes over Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia have prevented expansion and the deepening of regional cooperation. The transformation of regional politics since the end of the Cold War, on the other hand, has induced the emergence of a cooperative environment around the Black Sea. It has enabled the Euro-Atlantic community to interact with regional countries, prompting a gradual shift in the area toward Western political and economic space.¹

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Discussion about whether the Black Sea constitutes a region in the post-Cold War era still continues. The willingness of regional actors to be considered within a shared regional identity was clear at the beginning of 1990s when these states laid the groundwork for a regional organization and defined its emergence.² As a growing body of literature has attested, it is certainly academically possible to argue in favor of regional identity for the Black Sea area.³ This paper accepts its definition as a specific region, and refers to an area stretching from southeastern Europe to the western shores of the Caspian Sea.

The number of political, economic and military actors who can influence the region's future has multiplied since the end of the Cold War. In terms of regional geopolitics, control of the region constitutes a prize of considerable value. This, at times, has led to threats to regional and international stability. This paper will argue that the attention of larger powers—specifically the US, the EU, and the Russian Federation—can cause conflict, and that regional alternatives may offer better prospects for the area's future. Accordingly, the paper will first discuss how the security interests of these larger powers have centered on the Black Sea; then, it will focus on one of the regional alternatives to the great powers' conflicting visions of the region's future.

Great Power Competition in the Wider Black Sea⁴

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, while the Euro-Atlantic community was occupied with conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and the restructuring of Central and Eastern European countries, the Black Sea region did not attract much interest. Russia, preoccupied with maintaining global influence and an ongoing arms race with the US, chose to limit its sphere of influence to its "near abroad"—specifically the South Caucasus, Ukraine, and Moldova. After the successful integration of the Central and Eastern European countries to transatlantic structures and the pacification of southeastern Europe,⁵ Western attention shifted further east. The Black Sea gained even more strategic significance as Euro-Atlantic threat perceptions shifted toward the east and south during the early 2000s—particularly in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US and the March 2004 attacks in Madrid. The region began to be seen as the backdoor to the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) region.⁶ This heightened Western attention was further strengthened through the admission of Romania and Bulgaria to NATO in April 2004. Moreover, a number of former Soviet states along the north and east of the Black Sea—Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—became strategically important to the US in securing the east-west energy corridor linking Europe to Caspian-area resources and in controlling northern approaches to BMENA. Thus, the US decisively moved to extend its influence to the Black Sea area, arguing that it had become a stakeholder with vital interests in the region.⁷

American involvement prompted other interest in the region. Both Russia, which perceived the US as an unwelcome guest, and the EU, which had previously resisted pressures to develop a regional outlook, became more interested in regional projects. Russia felt increasingly surrounded; as the US simultaneously exerted greater military and political pressure over the region via NATO enlargement, bilateral defense agreements, and encouragements of pro-western elites, Russian President Vladimir Putin revealed his discomfort about the "US intrusion" on February 10, 2007 at the Munich Conference on Security Policy.⁸ The Russian response was to pay more attention to regional grievances,

tighten its connection with dissatisfied regional minorities, and attempt to prop up groups friendly toward Russia within a number of former Soviet countries.

The EU, too, began to show more interest in the region from 2004 onward, following the American lead, with various political and economic initiatives. Although regional countries had favored the “EU-ization” of Black Sea politics within European security and economic architecture since the early 1990s, and Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) members had tried for years to convince EU countries to pay more attention to the region, the EU fell short of defining institutional relations with the region as a unit of attention until the initiation of Black Sea Synergy in 2007⁹—prompted in part by increased US attention. Until then, while the EU preferred bilateral ties with Black Sea countries instead of a multilateral approach, regional countries (with the exception of Russia) had supported direct BSEC-EU interaction.¹⁰ As the EU’s need to secure energy supply lines from the east and prevent emerging security risks affecting Europe’s own security come to be pronounced more often, the stability and democratization of former Soviet states became more desirable for the security of Europe.¹¹

Regionalization of Great Power Securities and the Black Sea¹²

The end of the Cold War and the September 11, 2001 attacks had profound effects on international relations. These events forced, primarily, global players to be more interested in regional developments. Despite the contrary arguments emphasizing the role of globalization in world affairs, the focus on regionalization—particularly in the security field—has expanded in practice. Although regionalism was seen almost universally as a positive development during the post-Cold War era,¹³ whenever the focus on regional security affected big power interests it led to increased tension when not managed properly. Although one can identify a number of countries and regions that have attracted more than one power, thus setting the stage for confrontation due to overlapping peripheries,¹⁴ this paper concentrates on the Black Sea, which became the focal point for three regional outlooks/projects produced by the bigger players of the world politics: the Near Abroad Policy (NAP) of the Russian Federation, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) of the EU, and the Broader Middle East-North Africa Initiative (BMENA) of the US.

The Near Abroad Policy of the Russian Federation refers to the states in the non-Russian post-Soviet space that until 1991 were part of the Soviet Union. This implies that these countries are not as foreign as others, and therefore may be subject to different rules or treatment. Russian leaders from across political and military spectrums have regularly asserted that Russia has “special rights” and responsibilities for maintaining security within this area.¹⁵ There have been many reasons, ranging from historical claims to economic connections, behind the desire for further Russian involvement in the Near Abroad, all of which have been explored in the literature in great detail.¹⁶

Russia has primarily implemented its Near Abroad Policy through bilateral agreements instead of multilateral arrangements; it has preferred to deal with regional states through signing cooperation agreements on a wide range of issues that reflect each country’s specific needs and aspirations. Several bilateral agreements have been signed by Russia and the newly independent states since the early 1990s. Despite its interest in the Near Abroad, however, Russia’s own serious economic problems have hampered its efforts to restore regional hegemony. As a result, Russian policies in its near abroad

often included open or circumspect threats should the regional countries oppose vital Russian interests.

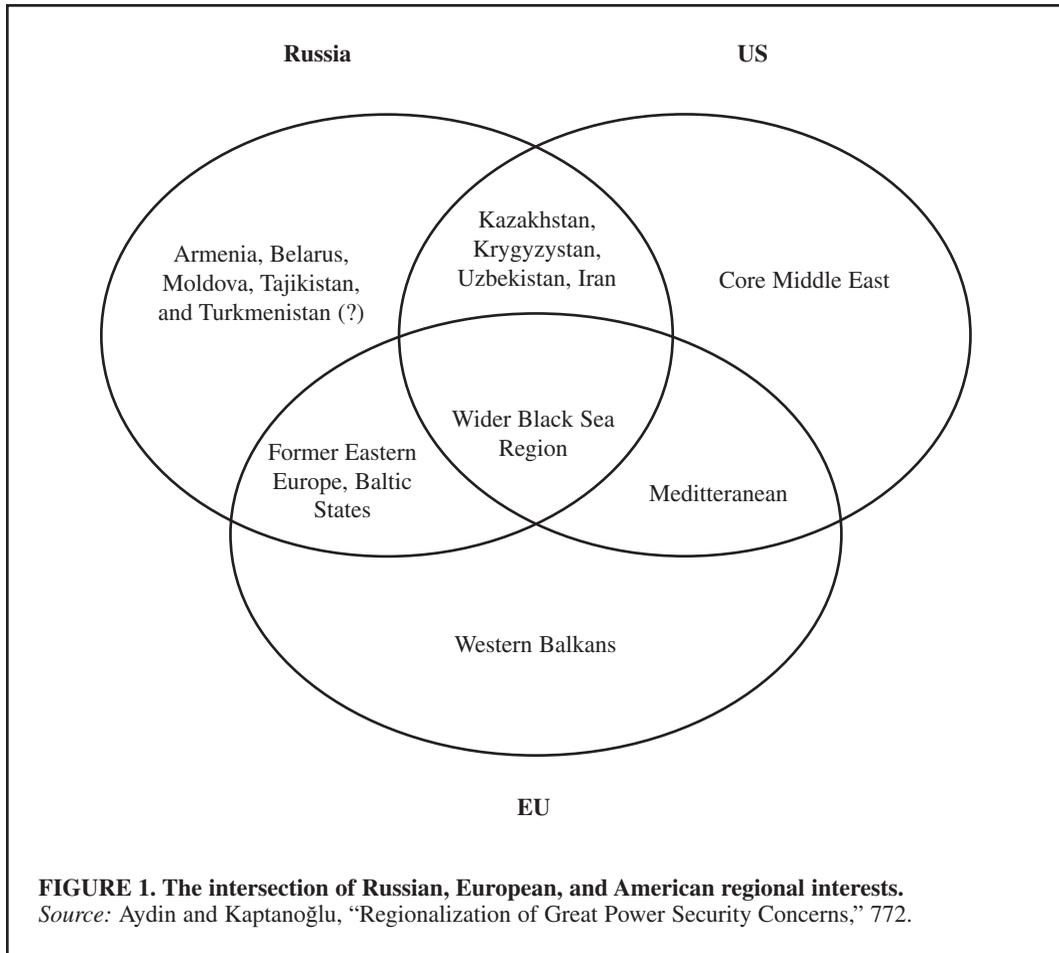
The birth of the Broader Middle East can be traced back to the US's enhanced threat perception as a result of the September 11 attacks and the understanding that many of the threats were emanating from the wider Middle East area in general.¹⁷ This led to the BMENA initiative, which envelopes the Black Sea area from the south, just as the Near Abroad covers the north and east of Black Sea. In time, the BMENA initiative also gave rise to Wider Black Sea Region (WBSR) concept. Though not much different from other regional definitions related to Black Sea, the Wider Black Sea Region concept represented the transatlantic (more precisely the American) security perceptions and plans for the region. As such, it implied the possible future presence of American forces in the region and presupposed the existence of democratically elected pro-Western governments in most of the regional countries.

To implement various aspects of the BMENA initiative and WBSR concept, the US has worked both in multinational environments and with individual partnerships. State-to-state connections have ranged from ideological support to financial aid and sending in military advisors, as in the case of Georgia.¹⁸ Also, various civil society initiatives have been created to support and/or implement policies that have led to further integration of the relevant regions into transatlantic world.

The borders of the European Neighborhood Policy are defined in European Commission documents. The area was originally intended to include the immediate neighbors of the EU: Algeria, Belarus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine; it was later extended by the European Neighborhood Policy Strategy Paper (in May 2004) to include the Southern Caucasian countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. As such, it envelopes the Black Sea region from the west, south, north and east; in a sense, it defines the region. The EU aims at improving its long-term security by shaping its near abroad through different tools and modalities, resembling the EU model itself.¹⁹

This policy was developed in relation to the EU's enlargement policies to avoid the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbors, and aimed at strengthening the stability, security, and well-being of its environment. With these priorities in mind, the EU offers to its neighbors a privileged relationship in return for a commitment to common values, democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles, and sustainable development. Even though the policy offers a deeper political relationship and economic integration, it does not include enlargement and does not offer an accession perspective.²⁰

None of the three regional security concepts (NAP, BMENA, and ENP) and their related competing visions reviewed above has been clearly delimited by the pertinent powers, which makes it more difficult for the countries in the related regions to cooperate with or reject the policies of big powers. Part of the wider Black Sea area lies at the intersection of the three regional security concepts mentioned; for example, the South Caucasian countries, since 2004, simultaneously have been part of the European Neighborhood Policy, the Near Abroad Policy, the Wider Black Sea Region, and the Broader Middle East and North Africa policy (see Figure 1). It is obvious that these concepts are not mutually inclusive, and political dynamics make it difficult for the regional countries to cooperate or reject the policies of the larger powers.



Due to its position at the intersection of the interests of the great powers, the Black Sea region has become the scene of a great power rivalry between Russia, the EU, and the US, as well as within regional countries. Thus, assessment of the wider region’s security challenges must encompass an extended regional approach. The developments in this area are closely related to the security developments in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. The region has become the new frontline in tackling the problems of illegal immigrants, narcotics, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the trafficking of women, and transnational organized crime. Moreover, the four “frozen conflicts” of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh have all affected the region. As a result, the region has become the epicenter of the projects to provide stability for wider Europe and BMENA. The competing visions of the relevant projects have created difficult policy choices for the countries in the region, and elevated them into a high stake power game, especially since September 11, 2001. Although tensions emerging from these competing visions have not yet led to outbursts of armed conflicts all around (the Russia–Georgia conflict in August 2008 being an exception to this), this could easily change in future.

One way to avoid the trappings of, or lessen the possibility of, big power confrontation in the region is to develop regional alternative approaches for its political, economic

and security concerns. The Russia–Georgia conflict of August 2008 attested to the growing need to develop cooperative regional programs to counter tendencies that might lead to great power confrontations in the region. One such alternative approach, instigated by Turkey, was developed in early 1990s in the form of Black Sea Economic Cooperation initiative.²¹ It may be an opportune time to review this region-based initiative and assess whether it could offer an alternative to great power confrontations.

A Regional Alternative to Big Power Politics: The Case of Turkey

The interplay between the regional and global powers' political and security agendas determine the future of politico-military issues in any given region. In the Black Sea area, in addition to global players, some regional countries have also developed alternative visions. Among them is Turkey, which, as mentioned above, initiated the establishment of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (later Organization) in the early 1990s and has continuously supported various regional cooperation initiatives.

Turkey's international position during the Cold War was largely determined by its role within the Atlantic Alliance and, more narrowly, its place within NATO's southern flank. By the end of the Cold War, the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new conflict zones around Turkey had changed this perception. The Iran–Iraq War, the Gulf War, continuing crises between Israel and the Arab countries of the Middle East; wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution in the Balkans; and the conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya and Abkhazia in the Caucasus, all took place within the immediate vicinity of the country. As the relevance of NATO in the new world order was opened up to discussion, especially within Europe, Turkey found itself in a situation in which it was threatened by the uncertainties of its new neighborhood. As Turkey was looking for alternative regional connections, the Black Sea gradually emerged as a promising region in which it could develop a regional zone of influence and an area in which peaceful existence based on economic cooperation might prevail. The decline of the Soviet Union and the emergence of newly independent states around the Black Sea presented opportunities to Turkey.

Turkey's response was plethora of regional initiatives, starting with Black Sea Economic Cooperation in 1992. The primary intention of the then-President Turgut Ozal was to cut a leadership role in the region by making it a model for the newly independent states' economic and political transformations. Another of his rumored agendas may have been to craft an alternative to the EU should Turkey's desires for membership did not work out as planned.²² Turkey's call for multilateral economic cooperation in the region resulted in signing of the Bosphorus Declaration of 1992 by 11 countries (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine), which called for setting up a regional economic organization.²³ This was followed by the creation of regional security initiatives, first the Black Sea Naval Co-Operation Task Group (Black-seafor) and later Black Sea Harmony.²⁴

With its heterogeneous composition of member states, the BSEC has been an interesting regional organization. It was one of the earliest initiatives intended to create cooperation between NATO members (Greece and Turkey) and former members of the Warsaw Pact. There were ongoing border disputes (e.g. between Armenia and Azerbaijan) and historic grievances (as between Turkey and Greece, Greece and Albania, Moldova and Russia, Turkey and Armenia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) between the members

during the establishment of the organization. Nevertheless, it was an attempt at cooperation in a region divided by power struggles for centuries and separated by one of the main fault lines of the Cold War. It was also a locally owned and developed idea, indicating the member countries' willingness toward cooperative regional initiatives and regional identity-creation.²⁵

However, after an enthusiastic start, it became clear that the member countries lacked the necessary political will to create a genuine working cooperative political institution. Thus, Turkey's initial vision was never fully realized, though it served as a multinational venue for the former Soviet bloc countries to adapt to global trading rules by transferring knowhow from the market economies of Greece and Turkey. In the bigger picture, the BSEC assumed the task of facilitating the structural transformation of members by contributing to the creation of a market economy led by the private sector. In this sense, the former Soviet bloc countries transitioned to more private sector-oriented economies, and attracted a considerable amount of foreign direct investment as a result. Although still at an unsatisfactory level, the total foreign direct investment inflow toward the BSEC countries increased from \$8.072 billion to \$31.474 billion from 2000 to 2004, and up to \$80 billion in 2007.²⁶

Another aim of the BSEC has been to increase intra-regional trade with a view to achieve steady GDP growth for its members. Despite the initial lack of private sector capital accumulation and commercial banking in the former Communist member states, as well as the collapsed trade flows caused by the dismantling of the Soviet bloc, the BSEC was able to contribute to trade creation within the region. Since 1992, the region has been able to export threefold, and its imports have more than doubled.²⁷ Yet it is still suffering from a lack of diversification in exported goods, incomplete trade policy reforms, and a poor investment climate, which hampers full integration into the global value chain.

Although the BSEC was established as an organization aimed at increasing regional cooperation mainly in the economic field, armed conflicts and increasing political tension from the early 1990s onward have plagued the region. Troubles in Transnistria, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Chechen issue, and the Abkhaz and South Ossetian problems emerged one after another, overshadowing regional economic cooperation. Since the BSEC was, and still is, not entrusted with a political role, let alone a peacemaking and/or peacekeeping one, it lacks the necessary institutions for proactive diplomacy and cannot enter the picture as a capable regional actor within such an overly securitized regional setting. It nevertheless generated a discussion of identity both within and outside the region, leading to the emergence of a sort of rudimentary regional identity through political pronouncements and expediency.

It also became clear over time that most of the members of the BSEC opposed creating a political agenda for the organization with a belief that it would cloud the economic cooperation that had been achieved—even though many policymakers have readily admitted that political considerations often prevent the furthering of economic initiatives. In the meantime, changing security environment after the September 11 attacks, Turkey's uneasy relations with the US after the latter invaded Iraq in 2003 and growing tensions between Russia and the EU/NATO led Turkey to follow a cautious approach regarding Black Sea developments. In such an environment, Turkey's maritime security concerns took over and its further initiatives focused on this area.²⁸

Turkey's reservations about US long-term objectives in the Black Sea became apparent when a controversy erupted in the first months of 2006 over suggestions to expand the activities of NATO's Operation Active Endeavour to the Black Sea.²⁹ Turkey and Russia jointly opposed the idea. Russia's opposition to Active Endeavour's entry into the Black Sea was clear: Moscow loathed seeing expansion of US influence in its neighborhood. Turkey's opposition was based on its concern to preserve the current legal regime of the Turkish Straits established under the Montreux Convention of 1936 and thus, the political and military balances that have emerged in the region since the end of the Cold War. This convention recognized the sovereignty of Turkey over the Straits, and allowed for free

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passage of commercial ships, but limited military ships of the non-littoral states to enter and stay in the Black Sea.³⁰

The US and NATO favored the agreement during the Cold War because it limited the ability of the Soviet navy to move its forces to the Mediterranean Sea in a short time. However, with the changing security dynamics and the admission of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO and the EU, the possibility of relaxing Montreux in order to favor a large US navy presence in the Black

Sea became attractive. These ideas were strongly opposed by Turkey, who feared that a US naval presence in the Black Sea might induce Russia to retaliate, thus ending the maritime force equilibrium achieved in the region for the first time since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The tension somewhat subsided during the second half of 2006 when the US signaled a change in its Black Sea politics,³¹ in particular its intention not to raise the issue of the possible revision of the Montreux Convention. Yet the same issues emerged again during and after the August 2008 crisis between Russia and Georgia. Renewed suggestions from Romania, Ukraine and Georgia to enlarge NATO presence in the Black Sea, and Russian objection to Turkey's allowance of US ships into the region, again increased tensions, and put Turkey in an awkward position between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia.

Eight years earlier, in 1998, Turkey had initiated the Black Sea Naval Co-Operation Task Group (Blackseafor). It was formally established in April 2001 by the signature of all the littoral states to perform search and rescue operations, humanitarian assistance, mine counter-measures and environmental protection.³² Due to increased asymmetric risks after the September 11 attacks, member states extended the area of cooperation in 2004 to cover the prevention of terrorist activities, smuggling and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and established a High Level Experts Group to monitor and assess the security situation in the region. Later, a “Maritime Risks Assessment in the Black Sea” report was prepared by the group and approved by the member countries on December 15, 2005.³³

One disadvantage of Blackseafor operations has been its non-permanent status and deployment only for on-call duties. To overcome the difficulties associated with such a

sporadic mechanism, Turkey also initiated Black Sea Harmony in March 2004, which constituted a permanent naval operation established in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolutions 1373, 1540 and 1566.³⁴ The aim of the Black Sea Harmony was same as NATO's Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean: to deter terrorism and asymmetric threats. On Turkey's invitation, Russia joined in on December 27, 2006, while Ukraine signed a protocol regarding its participation on January 17, 2007 and Romania joined on March 31, 2009. Georgia has seemed to be unable to join because of the lack of operational ships in the Black Sea, and was understandably reluctant to join after the August 2008 debacle with the Russia. Bulgaria, too, has not yet joined the initiative, viewing it as Russian–Turkish joint attempt at regional control.

Additional initiatives on maritime security—such as joint naval exercises, establishment of a coordination unit between national coastguards and border polices in 2003, and periodic Black Sea Defense Ministerial meetings—were developed with Turkey's initiation. Turkey has also supported confidence-building measures on the Black Sea maritime domain (suggested by Ukraine in 2004) and the trilateral consultations mechanism established between Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania.³⁵

However, aftereffects of the August 2008 crisis affected Turkish Black Sea policies in multiple ways. While the Caucasus has always attracted proportionally higher interest in Turkey within Black Sea due to its strategic importance, the crisis between Russia and Georgia (as well as American and European policies during it) confirmed that the so-called frozen conflicts in the Caucasus could easily destabilize the region. Although Turkey's bilateral economic and political relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia continued to improve during much of the 2000s,³⁶ its overall Caucasian policies became convoluted by developments that lay beyond its control. Even though Turkey continued to support the territorial integrity of Georgia, the unresolved Abkhazia dispute colored relations as Turkey pushed for a peaceful resolution. While Turkey tried to bring the two sides together to discuss alternatives, the existence of Georgian and North Caucasian Turkish citizens complicated its stance, creating suspicion on both sides. Thus, Turkey faced an increasingly volatile home ground—the Caucasian diaspora has become more vocal within the country, demanding successive governments to take action that benefit their kin across the border.³⁷

The August 2008 crisis showed the weaknesses and limitations of Turkey with regard to regional problems. When Georgia and Russia began exchanging fire, Turkey found its policy options limited on three grounds. First, the Turkish government was lobbied by Turkish citizens of Georgian and North Caucasian origins wishing to sway the administration toward their supported causes. Second, Turkey was pressed between its strategically important partner Georgia and its economically and politically important neighbor Russia. Territorial integrity of Georgia has been important to, and was propped up by, Turkey for various political, strategic, and historical reasons, while Russia has been an important trade and political partner to Turkey since the 2000s.³⁸ Third, Turkey was squeezed between the demands of its newly emerging partner, the Russian Federation, and its long-term allies, the US and NATO countries. Faced with these pressures, Turkey's initial reaction to the crisis was quite mute, though it became active later with the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform idea.³⁹ Though the idea did not make much headway, it prepared the ground for Turkish–Armenian reconnection.

Armenia has been the only Caucasian country with which Turkey's bilateral relations have not shown serious improvement. While in the early 1990s there was an

understanding on both sides to develop relations, this had been replaced by the mid-1990s with a suspicion and distrust as a result of regional and domestic developments on both sides and the historical baggage that the two countries brought into the agenda. As a result, their land border remains closed and diplomatic relations have not yet been established—although air connections have been set up and dialogue on the civil society level has developed. Also, worsening economic conditions in Armenia prompted as many as 40,000 Armenians to search for employment in neighboring Turkey.⁴⁰ By the end of 2007, Turkish officials regularly cited that 70,000 Armenian citizens were working illegally in Turkey; beyond providing jobs for the families of these workers, this illegal immigration has further created opportunities for contact between ordinary Armenians and Turks.

Political relations also took an interesting turn when newly elected Armenian President Serzh Sarkisyan invited Turkish President Abdullah Gul to watch the football game between their nations' teams, played in Yerevan on September 6, 2008.⁴¹ President Gul's travel to Yerevan—the first-ever visit by a Turkish head of state—was a watershed moment in Turkish–Armenian relations, supplying the necessary political push for the long-secretive talks between the two countries. This event paved the way for a Turkish–Armenian framework agreement to normalize the nations' relationship on April 22, 2009.⁴²

Conversely, the Azerbaijani reaction toward opening the Turkish-Armenian border before solving the Nagorno-Karabakh problem created a backlash in Turkey, forcing Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan to announce that Turkey would not proceed to open its land border with Armenia unless the latter ended its occupation of Azerbaijani territory.⁴³ Although the two countries later agreed on two protocols and Turkey signed them on October 11, 2009,⁴⁴ it was made clear within the country that the government would not try to force ratification unless positive moves toward the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute were observed. Thus far, no changes have occurred.

Although relations with Azerbaijan seemed to sour with Turkey's interaction with Armenia, the overall relationship can still be classified as strategic partnership. It has developed not only in terms of shared strategic, economic, and military interests, but also as a result of cultural and social connections between the two societies. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines and the prospective Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railroad connects the two countries strategically, and trade between the countries has boomed, recording an average yearly increase of 40 percent since 2003 and making Turkey the biggest trade partner for Azerbaijan.⁴⁵ Turkey also became the biggest investor in Azerbaijan in non-energy fields, while the total Turkish investment in Azerbaijan reached \$5 billion by the end of 2008.⁴⁶ However, the relationship has increasingly come under stress since April 2009—as Turkey's overture toward Armenia has taken shape—revealing once again that Turkey's options in the Caucasus are limited and that its geopolitical prospects are usually interrelated.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, the Black Sea region has witnessed the creation of a multitude of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and cooperative schemes. The EU and NATO have expanded onto the shores of the Black Sea, and must now interact with a region rife with problems. The BSEC, bringing together 350 million people and covering 20 million square kilometers, has remained the most comprehensive and institutionalized

structure within the region. Since its initiation in 1992, it has succeeded in creating an extensive cooperative structure in one of the most conflict-prone regions in the post-Cold War world. It has been able to install among the member countries a certain sense of joint ownership and belonging to a region in which no common identity had existed.

At this juncture, developments surrounding the August 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia have highlighted the weaknesses of the regional institutions and halted regional cooperation initiatives. The crisis has also revealed the negative effects of big-power confrontation on the smaller regional countries. Furthermore, the regional initiatives do not have the possibility of success if they are not openly and clearly inclusive in their coverage, neo-functionalist in their approach, and regionally owned and supported. These principles have been observed in regional initiatives promoted by Turkey in the Black Sea since the end of the Cold War. At the same time, although Turkey had reservations in the past few years regarding some of the proposed Euro-Atlantic strategies toward the region, it has also advocated the region's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and into the global economy since the early 1990s. However, to prevent the existing initiatives (e.g. the BSEC, Blackseafor and Black Sea Harmony) from being harmed by the rivalry between competing agendas, Turkey chose to defend the status quo in the region—a position that has led to disagreements with the US.

Turkey has undergone a dramatic shift away from its traditional policy of isolationism since the end of the Cold War and has increasingly focused on its surrounding regions. Even if Turkey's initial optimism proved somewhat unrealistic, it has become one of the important players in the Black Sea rim, in which it had only a marginal influence throughout the 20th century. Although economic and political conditions in the region are unlikely to stabilize for some years, it is without doubt that Turkish policymakers will continue with their efforts to create new networks of interdependency between Ankara and the regional capitals.

There are number of challenges that need to be tackled before any country, including Turkey, can operate fruitfully in the region. In view of the continued potential for conflicts and overarching difficulties, Turkey has tried to follow a multilayered and multidimensional policy to further regional stability and connectivity. Whether Turkey will be successful is still an open question, and will depend on various regional and international developments that are largely beyond Turkey's control. In this limited-opportunity environment, Turkey's initiatives—brought about by creating innovative solutions to regional problems and by putting the region into a wider context—can contribute to the creation of a larger geography wherein stable countries cooperate with one another in multilateral conventions and in bilateral relationships. Positive results will have multiplying affects all around, just as negative results will have repercussions within a much wider area.

NOTES

1. Mustafa Aydın, "Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea and the Role of Institutions," *Perceptions; Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 3 (2006): 57.

2. Mustafa Aydın, "Europe's New Region; Black Sea in Wider Europe-Neighborhood," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 5, no. 2 (2005): 31–34.

3. For a discussion on the suitability of the Black Sea for denotation of a "region," see Mustafa Aydın, "Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area and its Intergration into Euro-Atlantic Structures," in *The Role of Wider Black Sea Area in a Future European Security Space*, Volume 1, (Rome: NATO Defence College, 2005): 31–34.

4. This part of the paper is based on the analysis previously developed in Mustafa Aydın, "Geographical blessing versus geopolitical curse: Great power security agendas for the Black Sea region and a Turkish alternative," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 9, no. 3 (2009): 271–286.

5. From 2004 to 2007, all the central and eastern European countries gradually became members of NATO and the EU. See Wade Jacoby, *The Enlargement of the European Union and NATO: Ordering from the Menu in Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). This was seen by the US and the members of the EU from a security perspective and considered as part of expanding European peace to whole Europe. See Franz Oswald, *Europe and the United States: The Emerging Security Partnership* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing, 2006) and Janusz Bugajski, *The Eastern Dimension of America's New European Allies* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 2007), available at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub813.pdf> (accessed January 9, 2012).

6. Ronald D. Asmus, *Developing a New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region, Istanbul Paper #2* (2004), available at http://www.gmfus.org/doc/07.28_GMF_Istanbul2_Report.pdf (accessed January 10, 2012).

7. Ronald D. Asmus and Bruce P. Jackson, "The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom," Hoover Institution Policy Review (2004), available at <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/3437816.html> (accessed January 9, 2012).

8. For Putin's remarks, see <http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=179> (accessed January 9, 2012).

9. See Commission of the European Communities, *Black Sea Synergy: A New Regional Cooperation Initiative*, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels, 11.04.2007, COM(2007) 160 final; available at http://www.ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf (accessed January 8, 2012). For EU policies for the Black Sea region before and after the Synergy policy see Mustafa Aydın, *Europe's Next Shore; Black Sea after the Enlargement* (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2004); Michael Emerson, *EU's New Black Sea Policy, What Kind of Regionalism is this?, CEPS Working Document No 297* (Brussels: CEPS, 2008); and Karen Henderson and Carol Weaver (eds.), *Black Sea Region and the EU Policy* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010).

10. See Tedo Japaridze, "BSEC: A Road Map to Relevance," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2006).

11. Aydın, *Europe's Next Shore*, 12–19.

12. Analysis in this section was previously developed in Mustafa Aydın and Neslihan Kaptanoğlu, "Regionalization of Great Power Security Concerns: Intertwining between New Neighborhood, Near Abroad and Greater/Wider Middle East," in *Globalization and Environmental Challenges: Reconceptualizing Security in the 21st Century*, Hans G. Brauch et al, eds. (Berlin and New York: Springer, 2007): 763–774.

13. For a summary of alternative views on regionalization and security, see, Aydın, "Europe's New Region": 256–257. Also see David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, *Regional Orders; Building Security in a New World* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

14. See Aydın and Kaptanoğlu, "Regionalization of Great Power Security Concerns."

15. The former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev stated that, "The CIS and Baltic countries are the area where Russia's primary vital interests are concentrated. We should not withdraw from these regions which have been in the sphere of Russian interests for centuries." See Albert M. Zaccor,

“Guerrilla Warfare on the Baltic Coast: A Possible Model for Baltic Defense Doctrine Today?,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 7, no. 4 (1994): 9. Former President Yeltsin reiterated in September 1993 that the external borders of the near abroad countries “are essentially the borders of Russia.” See Kevin O’Brien, “Russian Peacekeeping in the Near Abroad,” *Peacekeeping and International Relations* 23, no. 4 (1994): 14–18. And one former Yeltsin advisor flatly declared that the Near Abroad was Russia’s sphere of influence and that the former republics had best not try to form alliances among themselves or with foreign powers. They would have to submit to Russia’s domination. See Paul Kubicek, “Russian Foreign Policy and the West,” *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 4 (2000): 547.

16. See Leon Aron and Kenneth M. Jensen, ed., *The Emergence of Russian Foreign Policy* (Washington: USIP, 1994); Kubicek, “Russian Foreign Policy and the West”; Ella Akerman, “Central Asia in the Mind of Russia,” *The Review of International Relations* 2, no. 4 (2003); Gawdat Bahgat, “The Caspian Sea: Oil and Gas Export Options,” *Oil, Gas & Energy Law Intelligence* ½ (2003), available at http://www.gasandoil.com/ogel/samples/freearticles/article_16.htm (accessed January 9, 2012); Michele E. Commercio, “Exit in the Near Abroad: The Russian Minorities in Latvia and Kyrgyzstan,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 51, no. 6 (2004); Jeronim Perovic, “From Disengagement to Active Economic Competition: Russia’s Return to the South Caucasus and Central Asia,” *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 1 (2005); and Charles E. Ziegler, “The Russian Diaspora in Central Asia: Russian Compatriots and Moscow’s Foreign Policy,” *Demokratizatsiya* 14, no. 1 (2006).

17. There were three considerations by the US: First, fundamentalism, terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction were seen as the major regional threats. Second, the lack of democracy and human rights, low levels of socio-economic development and literacy were major causes for the existence of terrorist networks. Third, there was an expectation if these conditions should change in a positive direction, the new dynamics would lead to a better life quality for the Middle Eastern societies, thus alleviating American security concerns. See, Çağrı Erhan, “Human Security in the Middle East: Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative and Beyond,” *Perceptions, Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 3 (2005): 156–157.

18. For implementation of BEMENA in various countries see Erhan, *ibid.*; and http://www.transparency.org/regional_pages/africa_middle_east (accessed January 8, 2012). For US strategy in WBSR, see Ronald Asmus, Ariel Cohen and Conway Irwin, *US Strategy in The Black Sea Region, Heritage Backgrounder No 1990*, December 13, 2006, available at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/12/us-strategy-in-the-black-sea-region?mobile=false> (accessed January 9, 2012); Ogyan Minchev, *Major Interests and Strategies for the Black Sea Region* (Sofia: Institute for Regional and International Studies, 2006). For US military advisors in Georgia see “US military advisors arrive in Georgia,” BBC News, February 27, 2002, available at <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1843909.stm> (accessed January 9, 2012); and Michael Chossudovsky, “War in the Caucasus; Towards a Broader Russia-US Military Confrontation?,” *Global Research*, August 10, 2008, available at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=9788> (accessed January 8, 2012).

19. The ENP was developed in relation to the EU’s 2004 enlargement, with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbors and instead aimed at strengthening stability, security and well-being for all concerned. See Leslie S. Lebl, “Security beyond Borders,” *Policy Review* 130 (2005).

20. For details, see, Andreas Marchetti, *The European Neighbourhood Policy: Foreign Policy at the EU’s Periphery*, Discussion Paper No 158 (Bonn: University, CEI, 2006); and Bogdan Aurescu, “The Role of the European Union in the Wider Black Sea Region,” *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2011).

21. The BSEC was originally suggested by former Turkish ambassador Sukru Elekdag, and was immediately taken up politically by the former President Turgut Ozal. See Ian O Lesser, *Bridge or Barrier? Turkey and the West After the Cold War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1992): 6–8; and Serdar Sayan, *The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Project: A Substitute for or A Complement to Globalization Efforts in the Middle East and the Balkans?*, Working Paper No 9806 (Cairo: Economic Research Forum, 1998).

22. Mustafa Aydın, “Echoes of Ozal’s Vision,” *The Bridge, A Quarterly Review on European*

Integration, Issue 5 (2007): 40–41. Also see Stephen F. Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in the Age of Uncertainty* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003): 121–122; and Tunc Aybak, *Politics of the Black Sea, Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001): 31–33.

23. See *Summit Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation*, Istanbul, June 15, 1992, available at <http://www.bsec-organization.org/documents/declaration/summit/Reports/Bosphorus%201992.pdf> (accessed January 8, 2012).

24. For origins and development of Blackseafor, see <http://www.blackseafor.org> (accessed January 8, 2012) and <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/blackseafor.en.mfa> (January 9, 2012); for Black Sea Harmony see Ion Custara and Dorin Danila, “Black Sea Harmony – Attitudes and Perspectives”, *Impact Strategic*, no. 2 (2009) 35–39.

25. Mustafa Aydın and Ömer Fazlıoğlu, “Turkish Policy towards the Wider Black Sea Region and its Chairmanship of the BSEC - May-October 2007,” in *Unfolding the Black Sea Economic Cooperation: Views from the Region*, Panagiota Manoli, ed. (Athens: ICBSS, 2007).

26. World Bank, *World Development Indicators, 2007* (Washington: IBRD, 2007).

27. Panayotis Gavras, *Current State of Economic Development in the Black Sea Region, Commission on the Black Sea*, Policy Reports no 1, 2010, available at http://www.blackseacom.eu/fileadmin/users_upload/Paper/Black%20Sea%20Policy%20Report%201%20Economy.pdf (accessed January 8, 2012).

28. Following discussion about Turkey’s maritime security concerns in the region benefited from Aydın and Fazlıoğlu.

29. See Igor Torbakov, “Turkey sides with Moscow against Washington on the Black Sea Force”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 3/43, 3 March 2006; Mevlut Katik, “Geopolitical Competition Heads up in the Black Sea,” *Eurasia Insight*, March 9, 2006, available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav031006.shtml> (accessed January 8, 2012). Also see Aydın, “Geographical blessing versus geopolitical curse.”

30. For the text, see *Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits Signed at Montreux*, July 20, 1936, available at http://wn.wikisource.org/wiki/Montreux_Convention. For its implications for Black Sea politics see Hasan Kanpolat et. al, “Montreux Convention and the Black Sea Geopolitics,” *Eurasia Critics*, November 2008, available at <http://www.eurasiacritic.com/articles/montreux-convention-and-black-sea-geopolitics> (accessed January 8, 2012). For Turkish Foreign Ministry’s view on the issue, see <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/implementation-of-the-montreux-convention.en.mfa> (accessed January 8, 2012).

31. Kanpolat et. al; and Aydın and Kaptanoğlu, “Regionalization of Great Power Security Concerns.”

32. See <http://www.blackseafor.org> (accessed January 8, 2012).

33. Kyiv Declaration, *Annex A: Maritime Risk Assessment in the Black Sea*, March 31, 2005, available at http://www.harvard-bssp.org/files/news-20050705/threat_and_risk.pdf (accessed January 8, 2012).

34. Custara and Danila; also see Mitat Celikpala, *Security in the Black Sea Region*, Policy Report No 2, Commission on the Black Sea, 2010, available at http://www.bertelsman-stiftung.de/bst/en/media/xcms_bst_dms_30921_30922_2.pdf; and “Operation Black Sea Harmony,” available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Black_Sea_Harmony (accessed January 8, 2012).

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37. Mustafa Aydın, “Relations with the Caucasus and Central Asia,” in Baskin Oran, ed., *Turkish Foreign Policy: 1919-2006* (Utah: Utah University Press, 2001): 750–789; Mustafa Aydın, “Turkish Policy Towards the Caucasus,” in Raoul Mottika and Bayram Balci, eds., *Religion et politique dans le Caucase post soviétique: Les traditions réinventées à l’épreuve des influences extérieures* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2007): 69–80.

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