

The Changing Strategic Situation in the Black Sea Region

Introduction

The wider Black Sea region, which includes almost a dozen countries stretching from the Balkans to the Caspian Sea,¹ has become one of the world's most dynamic and fluid areas in the post-Cold War and post-Soviet era. The Black Sea region is bordered on the west by the Balkans; on the east, by the Caucasus, two of the most conflict-ridden sub-regions in the 1990s on the periphery of Europe. Spanning thus the southern belt of the easternmost periphery of Europe, the newly evolving strategic situation in the Black Sea proper has important implications for European security.

This paper will address the following questions: What essentially has changed in the Black Sea region? Second, what are the main issues that are on the agenda of Black Sea politics? Clearly, these two questions are interrelated. The discussion is intended to throw light on how the Black Sea region has slowly been acquiring a new significance in and of itself, and how developments in this region relate to and impinge upon European security.

What has changed?

From Rivalry to Cooperation

The end of the Cold War has terminated the Black Sea's position as one of the immediate zones of global ideological and military confrontation between two power blocs. Only eight years ago the Black Sea, surrounded by three Warsaw Pact countries (the Soviet Union, Romania, and Bulgaria) and one NATO country (Turkey), was considered the microcosm of the Cold War.

Today that divide of adversity is history. The above mentioned countries and the six successor states to the former Soviet Union around the Black Sea – namely Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia – have established networks of bilateral and multilateral cooperation among themselves in a multitude of fields – political, economic and military. The NATO-sponsored Partnership for Peace (PfP) program initiated in 1994, and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), launched in 1992 upon the initiative of Turkey with the participation of eleven countries,² have provided solid platforms for the promotion of multilateral cooperation among the regional actors.

1 Defining the boundaries of the world's regions is an arbitrary exercise to some degree. Strictly speaking the Black Sea region consists of six littoral countries, namely, Turkey, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Rumania and Bulgaria. In contrast, the membership of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSECO) includes Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Albania, and Greece, none of which has direct borders on the Black Sea. For the purposes of this paper the region is defined in its broader sense.

2 The BSEC, a political initiative mobilized by Turkey in the wake of the end of the Cold War and designed to promote regional peace and stability through economic cooperation among the Black Sea countries, remained for several years after its inception at the Istanbul Summit of July 25, 1992, a highly flexible and primarily functional-oriented, unstructured gathering of member states. Over time it gained organizational structure, culminating in the declaration of a Charter at the Yalta Summit of the Heads of State or Government on June 5, 1998, transforming the initiative into the Organization of the BSEC. Until recently, the BSEC' has functioned positively as a forum for discussion, consultation and possible policy coordination. While seemingly trivial, this function has been an essential first step towards the development of collective political

This qualitative change in regional relations was predicated on one more fundamental, systemic change that will be discussed more fully below: the end of the hegemonic regional system centred in Moscow, and by definition while it lasted closed to the outside world.

From Hegemony to Pluralism

The disintegration of the Soviet Union was *the* watershed event that has rewritten the geopolitical landscape in the Black Sea region – an event rivalling in importance the end of the Cold War.³ The dramatic retrenchment in the power position of the Soviet Union ended a centuries-old hegemonic system. Today, instead of a single overpowering actor, there are a number of small-to-medium sized powers in the region. Russia, Turkey and Ukraine surpass all others in terms of major indicators of power. Thus an entirely new balance of power is evolving in the region.

The Black Sea was for all practical purposes an „Ottoman Lake“ for several centuries subsequent to the capture of Constantinople in 1453, until 1774, when the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca opened it up to the penetration and ultimate dominance of Russia.⁴ Historically, therefore, the Black Sea formed the maritime component of the broader and enduring strategic contest between the Turkish and Russian empires, a contest that spanned the vast space from Eastern Europe to the Caspian Sea.

The Black Sea is important for the littoral countries for political, commercial and strategic reasons. Control over it leads to political influence around and beyond its coasts. Nearly 60 percent of maritime trade in the Soviet Union took place through the venue of the Black Sea.⁵

and psychological preparedness to engage in actual cooperative projects. For, after, all, this is a region where not only habits of cooperation had not developed, but inter-state rivalries and conflicts have been a mark of the historical record. Moreover, other than Turkey and Greece, all member-states represent transitional economies burdened by serious structural challenges inherent in systemic transformation. The decision to turn the BSEC into a regional economic cooperation indicates a collective political will to strive for more concrete regional cooperation in the future. Trade is assigned the priority function in such cooperation. Hence, work is under way to increase intra-regional trade, to bring about accession to a World Trade Organization's Multilateral Trading System, and to move towards a BSEC Free Trade Area. For more on BSEC, see, BSEC Permanent International Secretariat, *BSEC: A New Architecture, A New Vision* (Istanbul: 1998); Ercan Ozer (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey), „BSEC and Regional Security“, *Perceptions* (Ankara), 1:3 (September-November 1997), pp. 76-106.

3 For historical, political and conceptual reasons, it is important to keep these two revolutionary events in world politics, namely the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, as distinct even if related phenomena. For a similar argument, see, Raymond L Garthoff, „Western Efforts to Shape Post-Soviet Behaviour: Contemporary Developments in Historical Perspective“, in: Karen Dawisha (ed.), *The International Dimension of Post-Communist Transitions in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 13-14.

4 Russia became a Black Sea power in the true sense in 1783, when it annexed the Khanate of Crimea, a protectorate of the Ottoman Empire since 1478. The annexation swiftly followed the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca of 1774, by which the defeated Ottomans were forced to cede independence to the Crimean Khanate. This treaty marked a turning point in the Russian-Turkish military contest over the Black Sea proper in favor of Russia. For this history, see, Norman E. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean, 1797-1807* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp 3-22. As the best and most recent account in Russian of the treaty, Saul cites E.I. Druzhinina, *Luchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir 1774 goda: ego podgotovka i zakliuchenie* (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk, 1955). For a leading Turkish source on the history of Turkish-Russian relations, see, Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Turkiye ve Rusya, 1798-1919* (Turkey and Russia, 1798-1919) (Ankara: Ankara University Publication, 1970).

Muscovy had gained an enormous advantage over a century earlier when the Cossack Hatman (leader) Bohdan Khmelnytsky voluntarily delivered the Ukraine to Moscow through the 1654 Pereiaslav treaty.

5 Dieter W. Matthei, „The Navy and Russia's Southern Flank“, in: Ingmar Oldberg (ed.), *The Russian Navy Facing the 21st Century* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Establishment. Proceedings of a conference in Stockholm, December 2, 1996), p. 83.

Militarily, the Black Sea offered a most convenient platform to Russia's enemies for offensive operations from the south to Russia's „soft underbelly“. Conversely, Russia's Black Sea Fleet projected Russian/Soviet power to „warm waters in the south“, namely to the Mediterranean, and from there to the world's oceans. Russia could claim to be a Mediterranean power only if it were a Black Sea power.

In the world of the 1990s, the Black Sea's importance for Europe primarily lies in its position as the shortest link to the natural resource-rich Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia.

Against this broader strategic picture, a major bone of contention between the two countries was the status of the straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles which controlled maritime transit between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Eventually the Turks lost unfettered sovereign rights over egress to and from the Black Sea, yielding to an international regime erected by European powers in the London Agreement of 1840. Russian/Soviet dominance generally resulted in arrangements more favorable to Russian interests than those of other great powers. The 1936 Montreux Convention that defines the latest regime for the use of the Straits places serious constraints on the movement of vessels of war of non-Black Sea countries into the Black Sea. The convention in effect endorsed the Soviet/Russian naval dominance unrivalled until 1991.

The breakup of the Soviet Union has thus terminated the two centuries-old Russian hegemony in the Black Sea proper. No longer controlled by Moscow, the newly independent states (NIS) in the region, namely Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia today constitute the autonomous elements of an open and pluralist regional system that has been evolving against the background of a revamped balance of power.

The Special Significance of Ukrainian Independence

Ukraine's divorce from Russia in December 1991 after nearly three hundred years of union has been the decisive event that has established a new geostrategic situation in the Black Sea region.

This is due to Ukraine's vast and potentially rich territory and strategic location in Eastern Europe, spanning 2,782 kilometers of coastline on the northern shores of the Black Sea.⁶ Its special location between Europe and Russia has assigned the country an enormous strategic significance as a pivotal element of European security.

Conversely, the loss of the strategic depth provided by Ukraine has revived in Russia a sense of insecurity vis-a-vis the west, from where it had been invaded twice in a little over one century. Deprived of Ukraine's physical and manpower assets, Russia has suffered a drastic loss in several vital elements – such as strategic depth, natural ports and harbours, military bases and installations, etc. – that aggregate into national power, to say nothing of the psychological shock incurred by the separation. The most devastating loss in terms of Russia's position as *the* dominant Black Sea power was incurred by the loss of the Crimea, one of the two key strategic points for control over the region, the other being the Turkish Straits. Russian/Soviet authorities had invested much energy in the Crimea to develop it as the home of the Black Sea Fleet. The port city of Sevastopol traditionally has stood as the symbol of the Crimea's „Russianness“.

The Crimea turned into a sore point in Russian-Ukrainian relations for several years after independence, because, while Moscow formally accepted that the Crimea belonged to Ukraine, Russian nationalist-communists and Crimean-Russians clamored for its incorporation in Russia. The conflict was formally resolved when, in a bilateral state Treaty of

6 The World Factbook 1993 (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc. for the Central Intelligence Agency, 1993), p. 352.

Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership signed on May 31, 1997, Russia endorsed the territorial borders of Ukraine.⁷ The treaty was ratified by the Russian parliament only in February 1999, with the caveat that it would go into force pending the ratification of the Russian-Ukrainian agreements on the Black Sea Fleet signed on May 28, 1997.

Ukrainian independence has also led to the division of the once-powerful Black Sea Fleet. Thus, while Ukraine began to claim for itself the role of a major maritime power in the Black Sea, Russia's position has drastically diminished. Negotiations on the fleet's division lasted intermittently between 1992-1997. Russia's insistence that it retain the use of Sevastopol, one of the finest natural harbours in the world and where the bulk of the fleet was based, stood as the most important stumbling block in the negotiations. Final agreements on the parameters of the division and related debt and payments issues were worked out on May 28, 1997, paving the way to the signing of the bilateral state treaty of May 31.⁸ These agreements, which permit Russia to use Sevastopol as its main base for the next twenty years, were finally ratified by the Supreme Rada (Ukrainian parliament) on March 24, 1999, against the strong opposition of the nationalists.⁹ Interestingly, the ratification coincided in time with the launching by NATO of Operation Allied Force against Yugoslavia for the resolution of the Kosovo conflict.¹⁰

Connecting with Trans-Atlantic Security: Black Sea Countries Join NATO's PfP Program

A range of cooperation programs and projected activities in the security field in and around the Black Sea have ended the isolation from the external world of former socialist, non-Russian Black Sea countries. In the military field NATO's Euro-Atlantic Council and the PfP program have been the primary vehicles of their acculturation into the universe of Trans-Atlantic security. In the last few years all Black Sea littoral countries and NATO members have held joint naval exercises designed primarily around peacekeeping and search and rescue missions.

On the other hand, it is no secret that NATO's increased presence and activity in the Black Sea has not been entirely welcomed by Russian circles even though Russia has itself taken part in several of such activities. For example, Russia refused to take part in the *Sea Breeze '97* exercises conducted in August 1997 in Odessa and the Donuzlu peninsula in the Crimea because it found unacceptable the scenario which envisaged an ethnic uprising in the peninsula and PfP peacekeeping operations to manage it.¹¹

Russian concerns towards the emerging maritime environment in the Black Sea emanate from broader strategic considerations. The country's diminished power base, NATO's increased visibility in the Black Sea through the PfP, and the relative increase in Turkish

7 For text of the treaty, see, „Russia, Ukraine: Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty“, Moscow ITAR-TASS World Service in Russian, in Foreign Broadcasts Information Service (henceforth FBIS), May 31, 1997, FBIS-SOV-97-105, May 31, 1997.

8 For the main provisions of the agreements on the Black Sea Fleet, see, „Fleet Accord Paves Way to Russia-Ukraine Treaty“, Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press (CDSP), XLIX:22 (July 2, 1997). pp. 1-5.

9 „Ukraine: Ukrainian Nationalist Says Parliament Should Not Ratify Black Sea Fleet Deal“, Holos Ukrainiy, 19 March 1999, in BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union - Political, 24/03/1999, in: Reuters, 24 March 1999.

10 Alexander Tkacehko, Chairman of the Supreme Rada, noted to journalists that the ratification took place in the ‚extremely complex international conditions‘ created by the NATO action. Also linking the parliament's recent proposal to revoke Ukraine's non-nuclear weapons status to ‚the present international situation‘, he advised Ukraine to develop a strong defence complex. See, „Ukraine: Ukraine Ratifies Basic Agreements on Black Sea Fleet“, Itar-Tass World Service, 24/03/1999, in: Reuters, 24 Mar 99.

11 The scenario clearly alluded to the tense ethnic mix in the Crimea where the population consists of a large ethnic-Russian majority, a small ethnic Ukrainian minority and a miniscule Crimean-Tatar minority, the owners of the peninsula until its annexation by Russia in 1783. For protestations in the Russian press against PfP exercises in the Black Sea, see, „Which Way Sea Breeze is Blowing?“, Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press (henceforth CDSP), XLIX: 17 (May 28, 1997), p. 19.

naval strength combine to breed fears that Russia is losing its capability for sea control in the Black Sea and for power projection in the Mediterranean, with the result that it is being cornered into becoming a mere coastal state.¹²

Turkey has recently taken initiatives to encourage the institution of confidence-building measures among the navies of the Black Sea countries. In July 1998, talks were held in Kiev among the representatives of Turkey Bulgaria, Georgia, Russia, Romania and Ukraine on measures such as the exchange of military information and the holding of joint manoeuvres. It has also been reported that General Huseyin Kivrikoglu, the chief of General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, suggested in early 1999 that the six Black Sea littorals set up a joint fleet for operational cooperation in the Black Sea basin.¹³

The Black Sea Emerges As A Major Transportation Venue for Caspian Sea's Fossil Fuels

The breakup of the Soviet Union has meant, among other things, the potential accessibility of the Caspian Sea basin's rich fossil fuel reserves to world markets. This, in turn, has meant an increased importance of the Black Sea's commercial value as a venue through which the Caspian's rich energy sources could be shipped to European markets.

Among the NIS, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan, three land-locked, Caspian littorals, possess large deposits of fossil fuels: Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan in possession of oil, Turkmenistan of natural gas reserves. The Soviet-era pipeline infrastructure has condemned these republics to total dependence on Russia, as the only outlet of these land-locked countries to the Black Sea is through pipelines that cross the territory of the Russian Federation.

The Black Sea offers one of the most economical ways for the shipment of Kazakh and Azeri oil to Europe. Soviet-era pipelines carrying Kazakh and Azeri oil terminate at the Russian port of Novorossiysk on the northeastern Black Sea. However, relying exclusively on the Novorossiysk option would merely perpetuate Russia's traditional monopoly over oil shipment routes, and the political influence and control that such monopoly breeds. Hence the concern of the national leaderships in Baku, Asana, and Ashgabat, supported by the United States, to seek to diversify the shipment routes. It was against this background that Azerbaijan and the AIOC¹⁴ decided in 1995 on the Baku-Supsa (in Georgia) pipeline for the shipment of part of the early oil to the Black Sea once it was ready to be pumped at the end of 1997. The rest was to be shipped through the old Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline. A large portion of Kazakh oil continues to be shipped through Russia.

The regional and international political struggle surrounding the choice of the pipelines to transport the Caspian Sea's fossil fuels has invoked the image of Central Asia's nineteenth-

12 For Russian strategic concerns, see, Nikolai A. Kovalsky, „The Mediterranean Process: Towards a Closer Cooperation“, in: Nikolai A. Kovalsky (ed.), *Russia: The Mediterranean and Black Sea Region* (Moscow: Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences, 1996), pp. 52-54. There are ample references in the Russian media and by Russian authorities to the adverse impact of the decline of the Black Sea Fleet on the Russian-Turkish naval balance, and therefore on Russia's security and strategic interests in the south. See, for example, „Turkey: Russia Reveals Plan for Black Sea ‚Parity‘ with Turkey“, FBIS-WEU-97-212 (July 31, 1997); „Russia: Status of Black Sea Fleet Division Process Viewed“, FBIS-SOV-96-202 (October 16, 1996). Dieter W. Matthei, German Naval Attache in Ukraine during Russian-Ukrainian negotiation on the Black Sea Fleet, argues that the Russian-Turkish force comparison while speculative points in the right direction, given officially announced plans for downsizing and budgetary constraints. On the other hand, he maintains that , „The agreements of 28 May 1997 offer Russia not only a decisive maritime strategic position at her southern flank, but also a possibility to drag Ukraine into the Russian sphere of influence. “ See, Dieter W. Matthei, op. cit., pp. 95-97.

13 „Ukraine: Ukraine Ponders Turkey's Proposal for Joint Naval Force on Black Sea“, BBC Monitoring, Former Soviet Union - Political 20/01/1999, Source: Itar-Tass, Moscow, 20 Jan 99, in: Reuters, 20 Jan 99.

14 The Azerbaijani International Operating Company is the international oil consortium granted by Baku in 1994 to explore, produce and export oil at several of Azerbaijan's off-shore oil fields in the Caspian Sea.

century Great Game.¹⁵ Regional competition to capture a piece of the Caspian oil pie by diverting the main export pipeline (MEP) to one's territory has greatly intensified over time among Black Sea countries, pitting them against each other.

For obvious reasons Russia fears losing one of its most important leverages of regional influence if and when alternative pipelines are built bypassing Russian territory. Turkey, on its part, has been a major contender since 1991 to secure the MEP for Azeri oil. The Turkish alternative, known as the „southern route“, would run between Baku and Ceyhan on the Mediterranean, possibly largely bypassing the Black Sea. Greece, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Romania have eventually joined the bandwagon, developing pipeline projects and offering deals to Baku and the AIOC. The regional contest over the MEP will continue until the AIOC reaches a final decision, already postponed several times beyond the original deadlines set for 1997 and 1998.

Areas of Actual and Potential Tension and Discord

Local Conflicts and Their Impact on Regional Stability

Clearly the Black Sea region has been passing through a highly fluid phase in terms of national and regional developments. While the bipolar adversity of the Cold War era and the overbearance of the Russian/Soviet hegemonic system have been replaced by pluralism, greater transparency and initiatives for regional cooperation, the area lacks the political, economic and social traditions, institutions, and patterns of behavior that cumulatively would qualify it as a region in the organic sense.

This state of affairs is largely due to the adverse legacy of history whose pages are filled with regional conflict and adversity with a multitude of causes.

Moreover, nearly all the countries in the area are formerly socialist, currently transitional economies and polities faced with enormous domestic challenges of state and nation-building, and systemic transformation to democracy and market economy. Law-based institution-building and economic reform, in particular, have recorded limited success so far in the majority of the countries in question. The Russian financial crisis in August 1999, and its region-wide repercussions, stand as the most spectacular example of the fragility of the post-socialist transition in the countries to the east of Europe. When domestic economic and political challenges are so daunting and when codes and institutions of regional relations historically have not had a chance to flourish, regional interrelationships and projects are bound to be fluid at best. Regional instability would be the natural outcome.

A third major force behind the region-wide fluidity, uncertainty, and instability has been the proliferation of local conflicts primarily of an ethnic-separatist nature. In fact it was in the broader Black Sea region where the greatest number of ethnic-separatist armed conflicts in CIS territory have erupted, namely in Moldova, Georgia and over Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. Russian-Ukrainian tensions over the Crimea have been managed peacefully but it continues to be a potential source of instability.¹⁶

None of the ethnic-separatist conflicts in the Black Sea region have been resolved yet, but cease-fires have held. Accordingly, while actual fighting has not occurred since 1994, a state

¹⁵ See, for example, „Caspian Black Gold“, Time, June 22, 1998.

¹⁶ Most separatist conflicts in the CIS erupted soon after independence, or in 1988 in the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh. In Moldova, ethnic Russians fought for their so-called Trans-Dniestrian state; in Georgia, South Ossetians and Abkhazians fought for independence from Tbilisi; in Azerbaijan, the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh fought for independence from Baku, eventually occupying nearly one fifth of Azerbaijani territory with Armenia's support.

of uncertainty and instability permeates the region. The local conflicts in the larger Black Sea region are a serious source of regional instability due to their adverse negative impact on internal growth and development, and to their ability to invite external powers to intervene on the side of opposing parties. Also, they are a proof that the tasks of nation and state-building confronting the NIS are fraught with profoundly complex challenges. The political, social and economic costs of the armed separatist conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan have gravely aggravated the inherent difficulties of transition.

Testing Russia's Anti-Imperial Resolve

The local conflicts in the CIS space have also offered Russia an opportunity to consolidate its transition to the post-imperial phase of its existence. In other words, they have tested Russia's willingness and ability to accept that the Russian/Soviet empire ended irrevocably.

Russian policies towards the separatist conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan in the early 1990s left the impression that Moscow was intent on exploiting them to reassert itself as a great power and ultimately to revive the Russian Empire.¹⁷ Similarly, with persistent claims on the Crimea, Russia's nationalists and communists instilled deep apprehension about the fate of Ukrainian independence. By 1999, however, Russia has shown itself incapable of reviving the empire even if Russia's empire-seekers had wished to.

In fact, not only has Russia not been capable of restoring the former empire, the federation's integrity itself is challenged from within, especially in the North Caucasus that lies between Russia's Black and Caspian Sea coasts. The Russo-Chechen war in 1994-1996 ended in the defeat of Russian forces. The armed rebellion against Moscow in the autonomous region of Dagestan in August 1999 by a radical-Islamist group is further proof of the federation's vulnerability to threats to its territorial integrity in the North Caucasus. When Russia's territorial integrity is threatened in the North Caucasus, it automatically means that the stability of the entire region from the Caspian Sea through the Black Sea is also in jeopardy.

Finally, the prospects of neo-imperial attitudes and policies in Russia towards the so-called „near abroad“ countries, meaning the republics of the former Soviet Union, will be influenced by the course of domestic developments. Increased political and economic instability might easily pressure extreme nationalists to revisit the question of Ukrainian independence in general and of the Crimea's status in particular.

The Turkish Straits and the Transportation of Caspian Basin Oil

The prospect of the export of millions of tons of Caspian Sea oil through the Black Sea has added yet another item to the agenda of Black Sea politics: the potential environmental impact of transporting oil. In 1994, Turkey moved to impose stricter controls on the traffic of

17 It is generally argued that there is a direct connection between Russia's loss of deep water harbours on the Black Sea coast and its alleged instigation of Abkhasian separatism from Georgia. According to David Satter of the Jamestown Foundation, for example, Russian defense and intelligence officials engineered the declaration of independence by Abkhasia, the northwest corner of Georgia, in summer 1992, and manned the „Abkhasian“ army by mercenaries. Facing military defeat, the Georgian government agreed to lease its Black Sea port to Russia. As a result, the Russian Coast Guard patrolled Georgian waters and Russian border guards patrolled Georgia's southern border with Turkey. See his, „The Danger of Russia's Great Power Illusions“, Prism (a publication of the Jamestown Foundation) 4:5 (March 6, 1998). In 1998 Russian-Georgian negotiations were under way at the request of the latter for Russian border troops to be withdrawn. See, „Russian Border Troops to Leave Georgia“, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines, 2:125, Part I, (1 July 1998). Clearly Georgia has stepped up its efforts in recent years to assert its independence from Moscow. One of the pillars of this strategy, also pursued by Azerbaijan, has been the promotion of the notion of NATO as an element of stability in the South Caucasus, a notion not much to the liking of Moscow.

merchant shipping through the Straits in order to minimize damage to the environment and secure the safety of Istanbul.¹⁸ The Montreux Convention of 1936 mandates freedom of navigation through the Straits for merchant vessels. However, the Turks feel that the lack of environmental awareness more than fifty years ago cannot be used to justify irresponsible use of the Straits.

Russia, the principal user of the Straits,¹⁹ views the Turkish move as a deliberate attempt to undermine the Russian project to ship Caspian oil from Novorossiysk through the Straits to world markets and objects to it as a violation of the Montreux Convention. Confronted with the opposition of Russia and other leading users of the Straits, Turkey adopted a revised set of regulations on November 6, 1998, somewhat softening the original code of 1994.

In short, the „Straits Question“ has taken on a new dimension in the 1990s, one in which commercial and environmental stakes top the list of national interests and priorities as opposed, or rather in addition, to the security/strategic concerns of the past. They are no less important as sources of conflict, however. It is possible to argue that the current Turkish-Russian disagreements over the Turkish Straits are among the most important issues of discord between the two countries and in the Black Sea proper.

The New Black Sea and European Security

The Black Sea region lies on the periphery of Europe. Hence developments there might seem removed from or unrelated to the core conceptual and policy issues of European security. While there may be an important degree of truth in this assessment, intra-state and inter-state developments would still have close if indirect bearing on European peace and security. There are several reasons for this interconnectedness. First and foremost is the fact that since 1991 the region as a whole has turned its face towards Europe in anticipation of integration in European structures, settling for partnership if integration were not within reach. Most of these countries and peoples long to be part of Europe in a civilizational sense.

Second, all of the regional countries have been included within the framework of the most important European security structures for regional security, namely NATO, the OCSE (Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe), and the CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe) Treaty. Formally, therefore, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, located in the distant South Caucasus, are as much part of the European arms control process, for example, as is Germany. Moreover, Georgia and Azerbaijan eventually hope to convince NATO to assume some type of a security role in the South Caucasus.

Furthermore, Russia, still potentially *the* most powerful Black Sea power, has historically been a vital element of European security. How it behaves in its periphery could be a test of its long-term intentions as a former imperial power. Ukrainian independence has introduced a new, positive element into the continent's security calculations by creating a neutral space between Russia and Europe. Therefore, the future course of Russian-Ukrainian relations will weigh heavily on the future course of European security.

In conclusion, changes and issues in the politics of the Black Sea of the 1990s, discussed in the text, do touch upon European peace and stability in numerous direct and indirect ways.

18 For the text in English of the Maritime Traffic Regulations for the Turkish Straits and the Marmara Region, promulgated on January 11, 1994, see, Republique de Turquie, Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres (RTMAE), Rapport annuel sur le Mouvement des Navires a Travers les Detroits Turcs (Ankara: Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, Aout 1995), pp. 53-84.

19 For the number of ships that sailed through the Turkish Straits in 1997, see the Turkish official report, RTMAE, Rapport annuel Sur Le Mouvement Des Navires A Travers Les Detroits Turcs, 1997, 61eme Annee (Ankara: Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, Aout - 1998), pp. 47-52.

Put more simply, it seems likely that Europe would benefit politically, culturally and economically if the Black Sea region, inhabited by 330 million people, evolves into a prosperous democratic space on its close periphery. Or, conversely, it would suffer at least from the spillover effects of generalized instability on its periphery in the event that the Black Sea region generates sustained poverty, dictatorship, and war, especially war among the bigger powers.

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