

Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung
Center for European Integration Studies
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn



Yannis Tsantoulis

**Subregionalism in the Black
Sea and the EU's Role**
Incentives, Obstacles and
a 'New Synergy'

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Yannis Tsantoulis, born in Athens 1980, obtained a BA in 'Political Science and Public Administration' from the University of Athens in 2003, an a MA in 'European and International Studies' from the University of Athens in 2005 and a Master of European Studies from the Center for European Integration Studies of the University of Bonn in 2007. He has worked for the Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Center for European Integration Studies (ZEI). Currently, he is working on his Doctoral thesis. His main research interests include the theoretical debate on regional integration, the external relations of the European Union (ENP, CFSP) and security policy issues around the wider Black Sea region.

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Subregionalism in the Black Sea and the EU's Role

Incentives, Obstacles and a 'New Synergy'

1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation and Objectives

The rationale that lies behind the choice of the wider Black Sea region as a case study is basically twofold and is primarily driven by challenges. The first reason is related to current geopolitical trends. Given the prominent list of regional and external players, the Black Sea as a crossroads and an area of – and in – transition is characterised by a high degree of geopolitical pluralism and thus is considered to be above all geostrategic in nature and an area where geopolitical competitions might flare.¹ The enlargement of the European Union (EU) – and of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at the same time – towards the Black Sea comes to reveal the importance of the region as these parallel moves implied the removal of the divisions of the Cold War from the heartland of the European continent to

1 For a detailed – and to a certain degree prophetic – overview of the geopolitics in the region see: Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *The Grand Chessboard*, New York: Basic Books, 1997. The author describes the mega-continent of Eurasia as a chessboard on which the struggle/game for world power and hegemony will take place. Ten years later it is interesting to read his comments on the geopolitical gravity of the wider Black Sea region albeit he prefers to use another term, i.e. Eurasian Balkans, southern part of Eurasia etc.

its periphery. Moreover, these shifts proved to be key components in a broader process that fundamentally altered the security architecture of Europe and consequently its political geography.² Also, the fact that the region is becoming – in economic terms (e.g. trade, investments, new markets) – increasingly attractive enhances the argument that the EU should boost its role in the region and foster a dynamic and coherent policy. However, the lack of resolution of the ‘frozen conflicts’ in the region, the conundrums posed by energy security issues and the involvement of key external actors constitute a rather complicated geopolitical puzzle.

The second reason for the choice of this region, as a case study, lies in the fact that the study of the Black Sea has been a largely neglected phenomenon within the discipline of international relations. The entire region has been divided among the studies of the Balkans, Middle East and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); thus no regional dynamic was taken into consideration.³ In many ways, the Black Sea region has been the ‘Bermuda Triangle of Western strategic studies’⁴. Lying at the crossroads of European, Eurasian and Middle Eastern security spaces, it has been in principal ignored or even mistreated by experts in each of these faculties. Geographically located at the edge of each region, it has not been at the centre of attention of any of them.

Charles King, in his seminal work, supports the argument that for entire stretches of the Black Sea’s history there have been no more than a few specialist monographs.⁵ Moreover, the question of ‘European’ identity – understood in terms of a cultural and civilisational homeland – also provides a compelling reasoning for the ‘peculiarities’ of the region and thus

2 Cornell, Svante, Jonsson, Anna, Nilsson, Niklas and Häggström, Per, “The Wider Black Sea Region: An Emerging Hub in European Security”, Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program – A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, December 2006, p. 13.

3 Georgiev, Adrian, “The Black Sea Region – EU’s Black Sea Region policies and Bulgaria’s potential contribution”, MA Thesis, College of Europe, Bruges Campus, Academic Year 2005-2006, p. 10.

4 This term can be found in: Asmus, Ronald, “Developing a New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region”, Istanbul Paper No. 2, German Marshall Fund, p. 1.

5 King, Charles, *The Black Sea – A History*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 4.

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for the difficulties in approaching it. Milan Kundera captured the essence of Central Europe as the West's 'vital centre of gravity'⁶. However, unlike 'Central Europe' the Black Sea region has always provided the canvas upon which competition over divergent paths to Europe and Asia has stretched.⁷ Thus, from an academic point of view, one of the 'hidden' challenges of this thesis is the attempt to approach the Black Sea as a *Unit of Analysis* with its own regional and geopolitical dynamics.

With these considerations in mind, the main objectives of this Discussion Paper are, first of all, to define the wider Black Sea Region in terms of history, geography and current geopolitics. However, this is not an easy task. As Aydin stresses, there are many analysts who question whether the Black Sea area is a region at all, arguing that it is not seen as such from the outside (by the international community), nor from the inside (by the Black Sea countries themselves).⁸ Furthermore, Valinakis claims that the term 'Black Sea area (or region)' has been used in the literature in a rather flexible way⁹ and Roberts simply argues that defining the Black Sea region is still a 'matter of taste'¹⁰. Also, the various terms (*Mare Maggiore* and *Mare Maius* – the Great Sea, *Pontos Axeinos* – the dark or somber Sea, *Pontus Euxinus* – the welcoming sea, *Kara Deniz* – the dark forbidding Sea among others) used over the long course of history reveal the 'uniqueness' of this sea. Nevertheless, as it will be shown in the subsequent chapters all the re-

6 Regarding the significance of identities see: Neumann, Iver, "European Identity, EU Expansion and the Integration/Exclusion Nexus", *Alternatives*, Vol. 23, 1998, pp. 379-416 and Kundera, Milan, "The tragedy of Central Europe", *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, pp. 33-38.

7 Herd, Graeme and Moustakis, Fotios, "Black Sea Geopolitics: Dilemmas, Obstacles & Prospects", G-84, Conflict Studies Research Centre, July 2000, pp. 8-9.

8 Aydin, Mustafa, "Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea and the role of Institutions", *Perceptions*, Autumn 2005, pp. 59-60.

9 Valinakis, Yannis, "The Black Sea Region: Challenges and Opportunities for Europe", Chaillot Paper, No. 36, Institute for Security Studies of WEU, 1999, p. 6.

10 Roberts, John, "The Black Sea and European Energy Security", *Journal of South-east European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, June 2006, p. 222.

gions are to some extent subjectively defined and can thus be understood, as Adler has remarked, as ‘cognitive regions’.¹¹

The second objective of this thesis is to analyse the policies of the EU towards the region by emphasizing the policy failures of the past and the opportunities and challenges for the future. The third objective is to demonstrate the sudden emergence of the Black Sea region into the zone of interest and influence of the EU – and of other key external actors at the same time – and also to reveal the obstacles towards enhanced cooperation that stem from various factors. Last but certainly not least, the most ambitious part of this thesis is to propose some guidelines for a new EU driven strategy towards the region.

2. Defining the Wider Black Sea Region

2.1. The history of the Black Sea World – A Historical Unit of Analysis?

The historical evolution of the wider Black Sea region is very much reflected by the developments that bind it at present: A veritable *mélange* of ethnic, religious, economic and political factors bond past and present with audacity and persistence. A *mélange* of lifestyles, customs and people that for a long time swirled around the shores. Why is this region – if it is one – the way it is?

In a historical perspective, it has moved from the centre to the periphery of the Western World and *vice versa*¹² while at the same time it has been going through periods of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Russian and Ottoman

11 Adler, Emanuel, ‘Imagined (Security) Communities’, Paper presented at 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Meeting, New York, 1-4 September 1994.

12 From Marco Polo’s famous work *Le divisament dou monde* (The Description of the world) until Mark Twain’s writings and up to now to Charles King’s work on the region, one could see the ambivalent relationship of the region with the West. A good example is the story of the city of Odessa, i.e. from a trade center to a dusty Tartar village, then from a European city “as any other European capital” to a city dominated by the USSR.

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dominance. Thus, there has been a constant flow of new conquerors, but always stopped around the Sea, which in turn shaped common traits to the region.¹³ After centuries, and more specifically in the 18th century, the whole region was again beginning to be known for its divisions, turmoil and confrontations, while Western Europe was discovering the notions of peace and cooperation among nations.¹⁴ Later on, in the 19th century, the Black Sea lay at the heart of the “Eastern question” and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Between the two world wars, the area stood at the intersection of the turbulent Balkan Peninsula, Russia and European protectorates. Later on the countries of the region were on the front line in the global struggle between capitalism and communism, either as mavericks (Albania, Yugoslavia and Romania) or as the vanguard (Greece and Turkey) of the West against the Soviet Union. Since the end of communism, South-East Europe, King concludes in his analysis, has become “a region of risky political transitions and relatively poor states, a ‘worrying lacuna’ in EU’s vision of creating a united and prosperous neighbourhood.”¹⁵

2.2. Geography and geopolitics of the Wider Black Sea Region

The Black Sea region is a distinct geographical area rich in natural resources and strategically located at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East where geographical coordinates play an essential role in the examination of the region. Aydin argues that, the usage of the term ‘Black Sea Region/Area’ exceeds the simple political and geographical barriers and refers to a vast region stretching from South Eastern Europe into the Western shores of Caspian Sea. There are geo-strategic, economic, and socio-political reasons to link the ‘Black Sea’ area (in the strict geographical sense, consisting only of six littoral states) with the wider geographic areas of the Caucasus, the Caspian, and the Balkans.¹⁶

13 Georgiev, op.cit., pp. 14-17.

14 Bordonaro, Federico, “Bulgaria, Romania and the Changing Structure of the Black Sea's Geopolitics”, The Power and Interest News Report (PINR), 2005. Available at: http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=302 , 04.01.2008.

15 King, op.cit., pp. 5-6.

16 Aydin, op.cit., pp. 58-61.

In this sense, as a geopolitical construct rather than a simple geographical space, the wider Black Sea region includes riparian states and adjacent states that are affected by and affect developments across this broad area.¹⁷ Although there is no doubt that South-East Europe, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Caspian are separate regions in the turbulent post-Soviet Eurasia, with different political dynamics and plenty of internal diversity and conflicts, the working definition of the ‘Black Sea region’¹⁸ used in this paper, has a value as an outline for unfolding and amplifying the complexity of this dynamic area. Nevertheless, as Jean Dufourq argues, it should be borne in mind that notwithstanding the utilitarian viewpoint, the usefulness of the “Wider Black Sea” concept remains to be seen. It is believed that the development of this geopolitical space is hampered at present by the absence of any real regional leadership and littoral state solidarity, as well as by lack of determined commitment by external actors, both states and institutions.¹⁹

2.3. The Black Sea in the New Geopolitical Context – Searching for a New Role, a New Identity.

The strategic reopening of the Black Sea after the end of the Cold War is far from complete. However, if positive political and economic evolutions

17 Aydin, Mustafa, “Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area and its Integration into Euro-Atlantic Structures” in *The Role of the Wider Black Sea Area in a Future European Security Space*, Occasional Paper, Vol. 1, NATO Defence College, Research Branch, Rome, December 2005, pp. 31-32.

18 The wider Black Sea region includes Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova in the West, Ukraine and Russia in the North, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the East and Turkey in the South. Though Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Greece are not littoral states, history, proximity and close ties make them natural regional actors. It should be mentioned that I adopt the approach of the European Commission (COM 2007, (2007), 160 final) and of other scholars (i.e Aydin et. al.) towards the geography of the region for a variety of reasons and hereinafter terms like Black Sea World, Black Sea region or simple “region” will always refer to the Wider Black Sea region as defined here.

19 Dufourq, Jean, “Introduction”, *The Role of the Wider Black Sea Area in a Future European Security Space*, Occasional Paper, Vol. 1, NATO Defence College, Research Branch, Rome, December 2005, p. 7

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continue, the Black Sea region could become a part of a new strategic concept.²⁰

However, within this context, there is no single locus of threat but a complex picture of hot spots, associated weaknesses and growing instabilities. Four main processes could be considered the basis for a new strategic concept for the Black Sea area:

1. the enlargement of the EU and of NATO, the changing risk perceptions after 11 September along with the 'frozen conflicts',
2. the redrawing of the energy map with the building of new oil and gas pipelines,
3. the complicated EU- Russian and EU-Turkey rapprochement and
4. the redefinition of the relations among the states of the region.

2.4. Defining a region from different theoretical angles

As the 'Cold War' balance of power came to an end and as the process of globalization affects the current delicate balance of power, new regional schemes emerged and multi-dimensional exchanges intensified on a regional scale. Thus, the reality of the contemporary world seems to be also expressed in terms of regionalism. In other words, power, authorities and competences traditionally attributed to states seem increasingly to be expressed through regional constructions in which the nation state, in its traditional Westphalian form, is now embedded.²¹

Nonetheless, post Cold War developments have also raised conceptual problems about how to define a region. Many argue that geographical proximity, common history and a sense of community is a good start for this intellectual endeavour. Others go even further by defining a region as being "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together suffi-

20 NATO is already involved in energy security issues and the safety of infrastructure. There is also a thought that NATO Respond Forces might be also deployed for the energy security interests of the EU in case of an emergency.

21 Telo, Mario, (eds.), *European Union and New Regionalism - Regional Actors and global governance in a post-hegemonic era*, Ashgate, England, 2001, p. xiii.

ciently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another”²² while others define a region as “a function of rising or declining hegemonies” or as “a localism-oriented gathering against the pressures of globalization”²³.

Indeed, in the International Relations literature, no standard definition of ‘region’ exists and the term ‘region’ has many different connotations and interpretations both in scholarly and popular parlance. Actually, there are many who still argue that a region can be anything ranging from an area within a single state to a whole continent. For example, Nye in 1968, argued that: “Regions are what politicians and people want them to be”.²⁴ This ambiguity is also reflected in how associated/correlated terms such as ‘regionalism’ and ‘subregionalism’, ‘region building’, ‘regionalisation’ ‘regionness’ are used in the literature.²⁵ In this sense, Hettne is right by arguing that this overproduction of concepts signals a certain disarray and thus produces also ontological and epistemological problems.²⁶ Many attributes have been presented to depict regions including elements such as geographical proximity; internal and external recognition as distinctive area; the number of members; a regional equilibrium of local forces; ‘social and cultural homogeneity’²⁷, ‘regional awareness and the identity’²⁸, but

22 Buzan, Barry, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies for the Post-Cold War World*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Colorado, 1991, p. 190.

23 Walt, Stephen, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1987.

24 Nye, Joseph, (eds.) *International Regionalism*, Boston, Little Brown, 1968, p.VI-VII.

25 The proliferation of groupings like Central European Initiative (CEI) and Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) among others has prompted some scholars to coin the term ‘subregionalism’ in order to distinguish them from larger integration projects, most notably the EU.

26 Hettne, Björn, “Beyond the ‘New’ Regionalism”, *New Political Economy*, Volume 10, Number 4, December 2005, Routledge, London, pp.543-571.

27 Russett, Bruce “Delineating International Regions”, in Singer, David (eds.) *Quantitative International Politics: Insights and Evidence*, New York, Free Press, 1968, pp. 317-352.

28 Russell, Andrew “Explaining the Resurgence of Regionalism in World Politics,” *Review of International Studies* 21, 1995, pp. 333-338.

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still a consensus in the studies of regional integration is not on the horizon.²⁹

2.5. The Case of the Wider Black Sea Region

Some of the above-mentioned definitions could be applied to the Black Sea region. Definitely, geographical proximity and the presence of regional groupings are key elements. However, other elements such as shared social features might be questionable, since the Black Sea's diversity of cultures, religions, and political allegiances could be seen as obstacles to the emergence of a distinct community or of a single, politically and socially shared identity. Actually, various studies in the region reveal that there is little evidence of a sense of belonging to the Black Sea region.³⁰ Moreover, the countries of the wider Black Sea region often do not view themselves as a distinct geographic entity.³¹ Nevertheless, there are a number of reasons which have hindered the meaningful development of a Black Sea regional consciousness or self-perception and might act as barriers and in the near future. These are:

1. the geopolitical legacies, occasionally involving regional rivalries (Greece-Turkey, Russia-Turkey etc.),
2. the differing economic performances and levels of standards of living, and perhaps most importantly

29 Thompson, William, "The Regional Subsystem. A Conceptual Explication and a Propositional Inventory", *International Studies Quarterly*, 17.1, 1973, pp. 89-117 and Cantori, Louis and Spiegel, Steven, *The International Politics of Regions: A Comparative Approach*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1970, p. 6.

30 IREX report, *Regionalism, Sub-regionalism and Security in the Black Sea Region*, IREX Black and Caspian Sea Collaborative Research Program, 2004. Available at: <http://harvard-bssp.org/publications/?id=146>, 12.04.2006.

31 Maybe, it could be useful to distinguish two micro-regions with the wider Black Sea region. Namely, a core one including the littoral states and a peripheral consisting of the neighbouring ones.

3. the differing supranational/intergovernmental affiliations and national political priorities although in the recent past there have been some signs of rapprochement.³²

At the end of the day, the states of the region appear not to possess a common regional identity, namely what people, politicians and governments make out of it.

Notwithstanding this forceful reduction in the heterogeneity of the region, it is remarkable to find even today the great ethnic mosaics of the past. Each of the Black Sea region countries is a rich mixture of peoples of all over the Black Sea. The common past and those shared civilisations are and could be a 'region-forming factor'. Sharing a common territory for centuries inevitably leads to the acquisition of related "civilisational traits, mentality, and treat reality"³³. Furthermore, it could be argued that the years of communism have created a common mentality, as far as the entire Black Sea region, except Turkey and Greece, was under Soviet rule fifty and seventy years.

For those reasons, the Black Sea region might be considered as an ideal multicultural laboratory. The Black Sea geo-cultural region has its own particular characteristics (e.g. different religions, customs, languages) which give the Black Sea region an important place on the cultural scene of Europe.³⁴ One might agree with King's argument that, "what is happening these days is the unearthing of a forgotten system of relationships, a filigree of human links, which were hidden under the layers of communism and post-communism"³⁵.

32 Gavras, Panayotis, "The Black Sea and the European Union": Developing Relations and Expanding Institutional Links", *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vo. 4 Number 1, Frank Cass, London, January 2004, p. 27.

33 Parakhonskiy Boris, "The Black Sea-Caspian region in the European context: New landmarks of security and cooperation", in: *Journal of Social and Political Studies*, Institute for Central Asian and Caucasian Studies, 2003.

34 BSEC Business Council, Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation, Bulgargas Joins Bourgas-Alexandroupolis, BSEC BC business news. Available at: <http://www.bsec-business.org/news.asp?newsid=72>, 05.01.2008.

35 King, op.cit., p.6.

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Beyond the neorealists, the neo-functionalists and the intergovernmentalists (all of them with a strong explanatory power *vis-à-vis* the phenomenon of regional integration), the contribution of the constructivists is exactly the idea that geopolitical identities change over time and that defining others and drawing borders between 'us' and 'them' is a key step in the articulation of identities, whether national or regional.³⁶

3. The EU's Policy Towards the Region

3.1. Why was the wider Black Sea region neglected in the past?

The Black Sea was for a long time treated as the 'black hole' of Eurasia. Why was that the case? First, as mentioned before, in many ways the wider Black Sea region has been the 'Bermuda Triangle' of Western strategic studies. Second, given the crowded agenda of the European Union since the collapse of communism, there was little time or political energy left to address coherently the wider Black Sea region. There was also little push from the region and from the EU as well for a closer relationship. As Asmus and Jackson cynically remark, in the Western world, there is always a tendency to ignore or neglect problems for which one has no immediate answer or prospect for success: the 'too hard to handle' category.³⁷

Moreover, the Black Sea has been a 'civilisational black hole' in the European historical consciousness. Europe proved to suffer not only from a lack of familiarity with the region, its people, its problems, its rich culture, and its contribution to the spread of Western civilization, but also from a kind of historical amnesia. For some, Europe meant Western Europe; for others, it extended to the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, but in the case of the latter, only to its western and southern edges.³⁸ Furthermore, the emergence of the 'frozen conflicts' in the Black Sea region contributed to the isolation of the

36 Bechen, Dimitar, "Contested Borders, Contested Identity: The Case of Regionalism in Southeast Europe", *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 4 Number 1, Frank Cass, London, January 2004, p. 84.

37 Asmus and Jackson, *op. cit.* pp.1-4.

38 *Ibid.*

region.³⁹ This state of affairs continued throughout the 1990's. Also, an important point is that, the Black Sea countries still lack strong lobbyists and thus influence in the formation of the European Neighbourhood Policy within the institutions of the European Union is limited.⁴⁰

Besides that, the divergence of policy approaches in regards to the relations with Russia is also an important parameter. There is a group of countries that for a number of reasons want to maintain excellent relations with Russia, whereas other countries adopt a different approach.⁴¹

3.2. The Failure of the 'Old' EU Policies/Initiatives

Unfortunately, the EU lacked in the past a coherent strategy for the Black Sea region. During the 1990s, EU's 'foreign policy' – if this is the appropriate term – revolved around the question of membership/non-membership. To put it bluntly, if membership was on the table, then the EU had a fully developed policy towards a given state, but if it was not, then the EU had little policy at all. One could argue that during the 1990s the Black Sea was too far away and too messy for the EU, and too close and important for Russia. In any case, it is relatively difficult to talk of an EU policy towards the conflicts in the region in the 1990s. There was virtually none. The EU has been involved in the Black Sea region mainly through

39 SIPRI Seminar report, "The Black Sea as Boundary or Bridge? Implications of EU and NATO enlargement, and the Regional Security", International Peace Research Institute, Stockholm, 28 November 2003, p.11.

40 However, that seems to change if someone reads the recent Documents of the European Commission.

41 For instance, according to the EU-Observer, Greece and Cyprus are often regarded as 'Trojan horses' for Russia. Germany, France, Italy and Spain are seen as strategic partners for Russia. Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia and Portugal are put into a 'friendly pragmatic' category. The Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Romania and the United Kingdom are considered to be 'frosty pragmatic', critical of Russia but still prepared to do business with it. On the other hand Lithuania and Poland are the 'new Cold-Warriors'. For further information see <http://euobserver.com/24/25101>, 19.12.2007.

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economical cooperation and technical assistance.⁴² The EU coordinated its national foreign policies on a case by case basis without any collective coherence.⁴³ A typical example is the vital issue of energy the policy. The EU was – and still is – driven by national governments and ‘national elites’ as well.

4. EU's Interests and Challenges in the region

4.1. Identifying the Need to Act

Yves Lacoste, the famous French geographer and geopolitician, has remarked that during the last decades the most important geopolitical and geostrategic transformations did not take place on land, but happened in the atmosphere and at sea.⁴⁴ This affirmation is also true for the wider Black Sea region. Neglecting the Black Sea region is not an option anymore for the EU. The expansion of the EU to Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and at a later stage – at least – a privileged partnership with Turkey, will make 50% of the Black Sea coastline making up the EU, with more than 50% of the coastal population of the Black Sea.⁴⁵ Within this context, the inclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to the extended European Neighbourhood Policy is of vital importance.⁴⁶

Under these circumstances, there can be spelled out four main reasons which make the Black Sea region of significant importance for the EU:

42 SIPRI Seminar report, op.cit., p.12. The main fields of involvement were trans-boundary ‘soft security’ challenges such as border management, environmental degradation, inter-state infrastructures and trans-boundary crime.

43 For instance; France co-presides the Minsk Group, Germany is involved in solving the conflict in Abkhazia while Britain appointed Brian Fall as the special representative for Georgia in 2002 and then for the South-Caucasus. Neorealism constitutes the theoretical basis of EU's policy making, since national interests and balance of power are the main elements.

44 See Lacoste, Yves, “Questions de Geopolitique”, Le livre de poche, Paris, 1991, p.117.

45 Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution, Permanent Secretariat.

46 Ukraine and Moldova were already included and Russia is engaged through a distinct strategic partnership, the so-called Four Common Spaces.

1. the frozen conflicts all around the Black Sea and the instability they provide;
2. the access to the Caspian region energy resources;
3. the unintentional encirclement of a part of Russia by the EU; and finally
4. the position of the Black Sea region as neighbour of the Greater Middle East or to put it more clearly as a linchpin between core Europe and the Middle East.

4.2. The Challenges and Risks of the 'Frozen Conflicts'

The growing strategic importance of the Black Sea region to the EU is basically a consequence of EU enlargement. The EU is now a Black Sea riparian power and a regional actor. Transnational issues relating to the Black Sea region, that fall within the scope of EU competences, will require a collective approach and agreed common EU policies. The sense of urgency about confronting the new security threats in the wider Black Sea region has been growing within the EU, as have been the calls for tackling those issues in a trans-Atlantic format.⁴⁷

Indeed, the Black Sea region presents practically all the security challenges that characterise the post-Cold War period.⁴⁸ The secessionist conflicts in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood are also important tests for the whole web of the EU's bilateral and multilateral relations with all of its Eastern partners. The conflict in Transnistria is a test for EU relations with Moldova, Ukraine and Russia. The conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are a test for EU relations with Georgia and Russia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is at the heart of EU relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, but is also a factor in EU-Turkey and EU-Russia relations. Popescu is right when he

47 Celac, Sergiu and Vahl, Marius, "Ready for a breakthrough: Elements for a European Union strategy Towards the Black Sea Region" in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 6, No.2, June 2006, pp. 169-191.

48 That is to say: the transformation of the newly independent states; regional conflicts and separatist movements, the difficult process of democratisation; internal and in-

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argues that the EU can do little in the East without stumbling on these secessionist conflicts.⁴⁹ Therefore, the wider Black Sea region figures de facto on the EU's security agenda at a practical level, with the nomination of an EU Special Representative for the Caucasus and Moldova⁵⁰; and at a conceptual level, since the region has been recognised as an area where the main tools of the Common and Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) are typically applicable.⁵¹ It is also interesting to notice that the attention of the states is directed more outside the region rather on the region itself or with their neighbours.⁵²

4.3. *Protecting EU's 'energy security'*

4.3.1. **Defining Energy Security**

Along with the issue of the 'frozen conflicts' comes energy. It is widely argued that, issues related to energy security involve primarily, but not exclusively, problems and concerns over the transportation of natural gas and crude oil to outside markets. However, this is not exactly the case. Energy security also encompasses various technical, legal and environmental aspects and this is certainly the case for the Black Sea.⁵³

Nowadays, the concept of security is expanded in such a way that it also includes political, economic, societal and environmental components in

ternational terrorism; the security of oil and gas pipelines; ecological risks and massive economic underdevelopment.

49 Popescu, Nicu, "Europe's Unrecognised Neighbours – The EU in Abkhazia and South Ossetia", Working Document, No. 260, CEPS, March 2007, p. 1.

50 The Council appointed Heikki Talvitie, the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus on 7 July 2003. The decision was declared to be in line with the Council's wish to play a 'more active political role' in the region. See Council Joint Action 2003/496/CFSP.

51 An interesting list of different conceptual frameworks/lenses vis-à-vis the South Caucasus can be found in Helly, Damien, "EU Policies in the South Caucasus", Conference – Europe and the South Caucasus, Baku, CERI / Sciences Po, June 2001, pp. 2-4.

52 Lynch, David, "A regional insecurity dynamic" in Lynch, David (eds.) "The South Caucasus: a challenge for the EU", Chaillot Paper, Institute for Security Studies, December 2003, pp. 9-10.

53 Winrow, M. Gareth, "Energy Security in the Black Sea – Caspian Region", *Perceptions*, Autumn 2005, p. 85.

addition to a military dimension.⁵⁴ The term energy security focuses on the imperative for governments to secure adequate supplies of energy at affordable prices. Moreover, in order to reduce the vulnerability of a state to possible disruptions of energy supplies, the key is the diversification of supplies. Indeed, over-dependence might give the comparative advantage to an energy supplier to exert political and economic leverage over the energy consuming state. Furthermore, energy security also concerns the vital issue of access to energy since it is important that energy is safely delivered through pipelines or by other means of transport. This is a particular problem in the Black Sea-Caspian region due to the above mentioned unresolved and ongoing ethnic conflicts and the increased activities of radical Islamic groups in the northern and southern Caucasus.

4.3.2. The Geopolitics of Energy (Security) of and Around the Black Sea

Within a context of continued instability in the Middle East, volatile energy prices and growing concerns about the energy supply, the wider Black Sea region, by all accounts, emerges, both as a producer and as a transit area for energy, as an 'energy security hub'. As Lesser puts it, "the Black Sea has become a leading theatre in which the new dynamics of energy security are being played out, a theatre in which transit countries as much as producing countries are leading stakeholders."⁵⁵ From this viewpoint, the main features that portray the Black Sea's geopolitical identity in terms of energy are the following:

1. First of all, the Black Sea region is in good posture to become a channel and a path for energy resources from Azerbaijan, Iran and Central Asia. Overall, the energy transit factor of the Black Sea region should not be underestimated, since oil is not only shipped by sea but also transferred through existing pipelines and there also other under construction in Ukraine, Russia and Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and Bulgaria and Greece. Especially, if one takes into

54 Buzan, Barry, Waever, Ole and de Wilde, Jaap *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder, Colo and London: Lynne Rienner, 1998.

55 Lesser, Ian, "Global Trends, Regional Consequences: Wider Strategic Influences on the Black Sea", Xenophon Paper No.4, ICBSS, Athens, November 2007, p. 13.

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consideration the congestion in the straits of Bosphorus and the building of new bypass pipelines the picture becomes quite clear.

2. Second, as Winrow points out, in the Black Sea-Caspian region there is a real concern that crude oil and natural gas pipelines running over third countries may be sabotaged by rebel groups. Transit states could also illegally tap into the pipelines to satisfy their own energy needs.⁵⁶
3. Third, the side-effects of the pipeline projects, since they can stimulate economic development and thus spur economic development and cooperation in the Caucasus and throughout the Black Sea region. Most importantly, building pipelines requires high level of regional cooperation and stability, thus promoting from the outside the regional cooperation level in the Black Sea region.⁵⁷
4. Fourth, the opportunity to project stability in Europe's East and by extension to the central part of the Greater Middle East. The Black Sea region isn't seen anymore as the periphery of the European continent, but is starting to become "a core component of the West's strategic hinterland".⁵⁸
5. Fifth, the Black Sea region could also be used as a transport route for oil and gas pipelines bypassing Russia. The building of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) oil and gas pipelines respectively is a typical example. However, once again it should be noted that Russia should be treated as a strategic ally for the EU. Nevertheless, monopolies and dominant positions in the energy sectors should be always avoided or at least controlled in advance. In that sense, bypassing Russian routes is one of the most efficient ways to achieve that.

56 Winrow, *op.cit.*, p.89.

57 Kempe, Iris and Klotzle, Kurt, "The Balkans and the Black Sea Region: Problems, Potentials, and Policy Options", in: Bertelsmann Group for Policy Research, Policy Analysis, C.A.P., No 2, April 2006. p.9.

58 Asmus and Jackson, *op.cit.*

6. Sixth, it is the increasing competition for energy resources from rapidly growing economies in China and India. It is argued that, the Black Sea region is set to become a pivotal conduit for non-OPEC, non- Persian Gulf, and non-Russian oil and natural gas flowing from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to western markets.⁵⁹

It is quite obvious that, in terms of geography, the attention is onto how oil and gas will reach Europe's major consumer markets. However, in terms of politics, the countries of the region have to weigh their domestic energy security with their current or prospective roles in ensuring broader regional or continental energy security and economically, the Black Sea states may be in a position to influence the terms under which oil and gas reach Europe. Nevertheless, the balance between these different parameters varies considerably from country to country and therefore it is even more important to assess whether a regional Black Sea identity could be established in order to promote the three elements of the energy chain: supplier, transit and consumer countries.⁶⁰

4.3.3. The EU's Drive for Multiple Suppliers

The EU is clearly looking for multiple supply sources. Commenting on the beginning of the construction of the Turkey-Greece pipeline, Loyola de Palacio said in January 2004 that the Commission was particularly pleased at the outcome of the Turkish-Greek commercial negotiations.⁶¹ Few months before the pipelines starts to flow gas from the Caspian and the new Commissioner Pielbags has restated and reaffirmed the EU's satisfaction. The EU Green Paper states that "as long as the European Union's external supply of gas depends on 41% of imports from Russia and almost 30% from Algeria, geographical diversification of our supplies would appear desirable" – although it does go on to add the key phrase 'particularly in

59 Kempe and Klotzle, *op.cit.*, pp.9-10.

60 Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 207-223.

61 The exact words were "these [the negotiations] will not only bolster peace and stability in the region, but it will also make it possible to supply new gas resources from the Caspian Basin and Iran to the internal gas market of the Enlarged European Union and to the Balkans thus improving security of supply for all stakeholders concerned by this infrastructure", quoted from Palacio, Loyola, "Greece-Turkey Gas Agreement", IP/04/71, Brussels, 20 January, 2004.

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LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas)'. Within this context, Turkey believes that it will develop into a conduit through which much of this gas will reach markets in Europe. Also, it is true that the Nabucco project offers a serious prospect for delivering Middle Eastern and Caspian gas to major European markets.

It is quite obvious, that again much depends on Russia's decision what role – cooperative or dominant – it wants to play in terms of acting as both a supplier and transit country for gas for the EU. Actually, the EU is currently seeking to secure an agreement with Russia on the core issue of transit. The EU's solution to the monopoly transit powers is straightforward. It would like Russia to ratify the Energy Charter Treaty and, in particular, to sign up to the Energy Charter Secretariat's Transit Protocol, which would, in essence, open up Russia's pipeline system to third parties on a transparent and non-discriminatory basis.

In general, of course, the fact that the EU, the world's second largest gas consumer, is located next door to Russia, the world's largest gas producer, makes it eminently sensible for the two parties to determine how they can best serve each other's requirements. There is a prospect that the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) organisation might yet play a role in either resolving the Bosphorus bypass issue or in helping to get the Nabucco project off the ground. Ambassador Chechlashvili and General Secretary of the BSEC said in September 2003: "We've presented a platform of Cooperation with the European Union; we are trying to develop new infrastructure and cooperation paving the way for new networks of security".⁶²

5. Ready for a 'European' Breakthrough?

5.1. Europe's Attitude Towards Subregionalism

Subregionalism gained momentum in Europe in the early 1990s. After regaining their independence, all the post-Communist countries of the Black

62 Address to the Conference of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), Athens, September 2003.

Sea region started a process of reviving their Europe friendly attitude.⁶³ “In this quest for identity, they soon became aware of the need to recreate regional historical entities to replace the faceless post-Communist space to which they had been identified. Regional organisations were created to give a voice and a face to these aspirations”.⁶⁴

Although, there have been some important regional schemes in the region the EU was neither directly involved in the regional cooperation structures of the Black Sea region, nor does it want to get directly involved at this stage especially in energy and security issues. The countries of Black Sea region itself find little stimulus to get serious on regional cooperation in the light of the bigger prize – EU membership. Additionally, the principle of differentiation is applied by all EU policies, and especially in the ENP, which means that the EU deals and will continue to deal with all of these countries bilaterally.⁶⁵ Of course, this approach finds its justification in the practice of the EU to reward countries, which are better applying democracy and market reforms. As a result, the ENP replaces in the eyes of the Black Sea region countries the need of regional cooperation and is so far in the eyes of the EU a replacement policy for a ‘Black Sea dimension’.

5.2. ENP as the framework of cooperation?

Up to now EU’s policies towards the Black Sea region were either ineffective or absent. However, it seems that the ENP has a very appealing logic. The accomplishing of the vast May 2004 enlargement put the EU in an existential dilemma. Victim of the success of its enlargement policy, the EU began experiencing tremendous difficulties in setting the nature and limits of its final frontiers. One cynical could say that ENP’s tacit logic is to blur the boundary between being “in” and “out” of the EU.

63 Georgiev, op.cit., pp. 30-31.

64 Di Puppò Lili, “An elixir of youth for regional cooperation in the Black Sea basin”, Caucaz.com, 2005. Available at: http://www.caucaz.com/home_eng/breve_contenu.php?id=201, 11.06.2007.

65 Di Puppò Lili, “The European Union is feeling its way in the Black Sea”, Caucaz – Europe News, 04.11.2005.

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Despite the EU's enthusiasm about the ENP, the target countries of the Black Sea region were far from satisfied with this policy. As currently conceived the ENP still does not have a regional concept for the Black Sea region, in terms of what the Black Sea region represents for the EU. The countries from the Black Sea region perceived the ENP as an alternative to membership, as a well-ornamented gesture to avoid promises of accession. The President of the European Commission, at the time, Romano Prodi recommended the EU to give EU's new neighbours "everything but institutions". However, ENP offers much less.⁶⁶

Despite its innovations, the ENP is largely inspired from the experience and experts of the enlargement policy. The ENP contains strict criteria and assessment benchmarks, "sticks" very comparable to those of the enlargement policy. The asymmetry lies on the side of the "carrots". Being an enlargement candidate, is not only about labelling. It has also serious financial consequences.⁶⁷ The ENP is insufficient as an alternative to membership. Such a large typology of countries inside a single policy framework cannot be geared to tackle any pan-European challenges, but only serves the internal institutional needs of the EU, not its strategic interests.⁶⁸

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that to some extent at least, the EU's absorption capacity for new members has been stretched, some will say to the breaking point. Evidently, over-expanding the EU is the least desirable scenario and the effectiveness of the EU to function as union must persist at any cost.⁶⁹

It is evident that a weak neighbourhood policy, as the present ENP is perceived to be, is neither a solution. Heavy obligations can be very effective,

66 Asmus, op.cit., p. 9.

67 In the 2000-2006 EU budget, on average, the enlargement candidates have received 1200 EUR per capita, the Western Balkan countries 200 EUR per capita, while the CIS countries received only 13 EUR per capita PABSEC, Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, "The Black Sea region within the context of the enlargement of the European Union", Recommendation 73/2003, Bucharest, 9 December 2003.

68 Kempe and Klotzle, op.cit., p.12.

69 Emerson, Michael, "European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy or Placebo?", *Working Document*, CEPS, November 2004, p.1.

but not when counter offered by light incentives. In this light it should be also mentioned that: first, most of the populations of the Black Sea region are in favour of EU membership; secondly, there are reformist leaders in the region and thirdly the strength of the Russian factor is indeed present although, the EU has shown in the past that the relations with Russia can be smoothly managed.

To put it bluntly, the ENP is the only available tool for the EU to ‘buy time’. Maybe, this time is needed by the EU to understand its own needs in order to formulate clear objectives and a coherent strategy towards the whole Black Sea region. If the EU answers this question, it will also be able to answer the question of its final borders. In the meanwhile and at least in the short-run, the ENP could be sufficient in extending and projecting stability in the wider Black Sea region. At the same time, EU’s interests in the region will continue to grow as previously analysed – the EU is currently just not able to offer more than the ENP to the Black Sea region countries⁷⁰ and it is true that, for the time being, the EU can offer ENP and nothing else.

6. Drafting a New Strategy

The first remark is that the EU’s intensified engagement with the Black Sea region should be viewed as part of a controlled differentiation. Only through differentiated integration will the EU remain capable of further widening and deepening. With neighbouring states making increasing demands upon European Union institutions, differentiated integration is likely to be the key to ensuring democratic governance and efficiency in a wider Europe. This differentiation, if offered to the Union’s neighbours through increased participation in EU structures, might provide the incentives for genuine reform and cooperation and at the same time avoid new dividing lines in Europe.⁷¹ In simple words: all types of privileged partnership but not EU membership.

70 SIPRI op.cit., p.8.

71 Kempe and Klotzle, op.cit., pp. 13-14.

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The second remark is that, drawing valuable experience from the case of the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea should be approached as a single component within the wider Europe, putting together into the same basket a number of member countries, negotiating and non-negotiating candidate countries, partner countries and non-EU countries with and without the intention to apply for membership. The main advantage of such a policy-approach is that the EU will skip enlargement and post-enlargement dilemmas and even more important it will form a grouping of countries where none of them will feel excluded from the benefits of further integration with the EU. Moreover, the EU itself would not need to decide the border issue once and for all, which would leave out some countries permanently. Aydin is right when he argues that this way, the EU would keep its most important trump card and would be able to continue to push for further reforms and transformation in this fragile region of the world without actually promising further membership options.⁷² It is what Asmus says “keep the door open, even if only in an ambiguous way”⁷³.

However, the above mentioned remarks might provide the appropriate framework of cooperation with the wider Black Sea region and indeed form an ambitious policy approach, but that is not enough. In a way of summing up and adding at the same time some guidelines as concluding thoughts, the EU's strategy towards the wider Black Sea region could be a ‘success story’ if it includes guidelines such as:

1. Sidestepping the membership issue. ‘Keep the door open’ but in a rather vague way without promises and timetables that would derail any discussion on how to beef up EU's action in the region.
2. Utilising existing regional frameworks of cooperation (BSEC) and thus provide the states with a feeling of regional ownership and identity. Promote the idea of joint projects and when necessary offer a financial and political backing. As Roberts points out, a concrete

72 Aydin, Mustafa, “Europe's next shore: the Black Sea region after EU enlargement”, Occasional Paper, No. 53, Institute for Security Studies, June 2004, p. 33.

73 Asmus, Ronald, “A New Black Sea Strategy” in Asmus, Ronald (eds.) *New Steps in forging a Euroatlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea*, German Marshall Fund, 2006, p. 24.

example of potential BSEC-EU cooperation concerns the development of a Black Sea Electricity Ring, which would connect all the sea's littoral nations with each other, albeit the difficulties there have to be overcome.⁷⁴ However, all parties (EU, states of the region, BSEC) should bear in mind from the very beginning the limitations and the exact role of these regional institutions.⁷⁵

3. Providing practical assistance and help in “low politics” issue (transport infrastructure, environmental issues, investments in science and technology, know-how in good governance issues) and basically concentrate only on a few key areas. Such a rather uncontroversial place to start is also related to maritime issues. After showing that EU's presence is concrete and meaningful then the chance for a positive spill over effect into high politics issues is higher.
4. Including at the core of its strategy states such as Bulgaria, Romania and Greece while also involving Russia and Turkey. Unlike the USA, the EU should not act as an actor that tries to change the balance of power in a way that promotes its interests but rather in a way that promotes mutually beneficial interests.
5. Enhancing and clarifying the role and the presence of the two appointed Special Representatives (Moldova and South Caucasus) in the region by giving the chance to the European Union to speak loud and clear with a single voice.

As a last remark, the real question on which all parties should be working is not on how the relationship with the EU can be enhanced by an increase in the funding for example or how the regional schemes can be improved. The most important bet is on how transition, progress and after all ‘Europeani-

74 Ibid, p. 27 and pp. 57-64.

75 Concerning the interest to develop a meaningful relationship between BSEC and the EU's institutions see the official website of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) <http://www.icbss.org>, where one can find a number of interesting publications, events and research projects related to this topic. More specifically, for energy related issues see Roberts, John, “Energy Cooperation among the BSEC member states – Towards an Energy Strategy for the BSEC”, Xenophon Paper No.3, ICBSS, October 2007, Athens, pp.53-56.

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sation' of the states of the region can be supported, as a goal in its own right, perhaps the most important one and perhaps the one that will lead to a genuine region-building consensus and thus to a mutually beneficial inter-regional relationship with the EU. After all, the path to greater prosperity for the Black Sea lies in greater integration, both within the region at first and then with the rest of the world.

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Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung
Center for European Integration Studies
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

Walter-Flex-Straße 3
D-53113 Bonn
Germany

Tel.: +49-228-73-4960
Fax: +49-228-73-4984
<http://www.zei.de>