

SECURITY POLICY OF TURKEY AND RUSSIA IN THE BLACK SEA BASIN

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ABSTRACT

The Black Sea which had seen the struggle between the two blocks during the Cold War era, has later been an area of multilateral cooperation and conflict after the Cold War period. Black Sea that takes over by its security dimension after Russia's leaving her policy of being indifferent to her "Near Abroad", which was the followed policy immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has also been discussed by time at the international level in the field of energy. In this article, the importance of the Black Sea region, position of Russia in the post Cold War era, global change in the Black Sea region, regional security, Turkey and Russia and the U.S. regional policies, interests, and with this aspect Turkey and Russia's goals and the new strategies are analyzed.

Keywords: *The Black Sea, Turkey, Russia, BSEC, Security*

ÖZET

Soğuk Savaş döneminde iki blok arasında mücadeleye sahne olan Karadeniz, Soğuk Savaş dönemi sonrasında çok taraflı bir çekişme ve işbirliği sahası olmuştur. Rusya'nın, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından hemen sonra izlediği "Yakın Çevre" ile ilgilenmeme politikasını bırakmasıyla güvenlik boyutuyla ön plana çıkan Karadeniz, zamanla enerji alanında da uluslararası düzeyde tartışılır olmuştur. Bu makalede, Karadeniz Bölgesinin önemi, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Rusya'nın konumu, Karadeniz bölgesinde küresel değişim, bölgesel güvenlik, Türkiye ile Rusya ve ABD'nin bölge politikaları, çıkarları ve bu bağlamda bu bölgeye yönelik Türkiye ile Rusya'nın hedef ve yeni stratejileri analiz edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Karadeniz, Türkiye, Rusya, KEİ, Güvenlik*

Introduction

Black Sea, which is surrounded by the Ottoman Empirement (nowadays Republic of Turkey) in its south and by the Russian Empirement (later USSR

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and nowadays the Federation of Russia) in its north and east, is in the junction of Asia and Europe and has always been the natural area for rivalry and struggle.

During the Cold War period two great powers were in effect in the Black Sea, namely NATO and Warsaw Pact. But after the collapse of Soviet Union, the number of actors in Black Sea has started to increase and the neighbouring countries of the region try to become regional powers as they carry the intention to solve their economic and security problems within the framework of their national interests. To make an analysis from the perspective of today, the powers intending to follow an active policy in Black Sea Basin can be classified as follows: Global powers: USA, European Union and Russian Federation; Regional powers: Turkey, Ukrain, Romania; international organizations: NATO, OSCE, GUAM and Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).¹

In order to understand and solve the security issues of the region, the security policies of the global powers and the new regional actors must be well analyzed. Development of cooperation and economy will help the regional countries to prosper and realize their mutual interests. Thus this will aid in solution of the security problems as the policies that enhance insecurity will surely inhibit the prosperity of the region and will not be adopted.

The security policy of Russia followed in the Black Sea region after the post Soviet period comes out basically to be a reactionary policy which aims to cause failure of the strategies of the western countries and organizations related to the region. This situation lacks the strategies that would effectively supply an extensive and multi-sided regional cooperation progress. It is proposed that Moscow's following such a reactionary policy in the region can be explained by Russia's disability to develop an extensive alternative Black Sea strategy yet in response to the changing international conditions of the post September 11th era. Russia is one of the big players that has legitimate benefits in the Black Sea.

Being another country playing for influence in the region, Turkey had two objectives in mind when she started the initiative of the Black Sea Project. The first one of this was to transform the Black Sea into a sea of peace, stability and prosperity on the basis of friendly relations and good neighborhood policies. And the second the second objective was to improve and diversify economic relations between the regional states by taking the full advantages from the existing historical ties and geographical proximity amongst the states.

¹ Cabbarlı, "Security Policy of Russia in the Black Sea Basin", p.166.

The Black Sea Region: The Changing Situation

In the middle of the twentieth century, the Black Sea emerged as a region of direct contact between two opposing military-political blocs: NATO and the Warsaw Pact. At that time Turkey saw the Black Sea as a border region adjacent to a “hostile encirclement”.

There were two reasons for this. First, the Warsaw Treaty Organization had collapsed. Turkey began building up relations with the former members of the alliance on the basis of bilateral agreements aimed at obtaining mutual advantages for both parties. Second, the formation of the new independent governments of Ukraine and Georgia promoted the consolidation of ties with Turkey, especially against the background of persisting political disagreement with Russia. Furthermore, in the political circles of Turkey during the 1990s, it was believed that Russia was not a stable government.²

The role of the Black Sea region in Turkey’s foreign policy has changed over the course of the country’s history. Turkish politicians believed that this inhibited the development of the Black Sea coast, which played an important and undervalued role in the country’s economy so far.

As a result of the changing situation in the region during the 1990s and 2000s—which above all indicated a decreased security risk—it was no longer necessary for Turkey to maintain an overly close alignment of its interests in the region with the military and political strategy of the West. In Turkey, the Black Sea was increasingly viewed as a shipping corridor that would open up alternative transportation and trade routes to Eastern and Northern Europe, as well as to the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Turkish foreign policy thus saw the Black Sea region first and foremost as a hub where the most essential distribution lines converged.³

This region, where Turkey has to follow an active policy as a regional country in order to protect her interests both in the security and energy subjects, has at the same time given Turkey the opportunity to make her voice heard in the international arena and let her show that Turkey is a regional power that may influence the global politics. Turkey’s protection of both her self-interests and the interests of the countries which are strategically in cooperation and the harmonization of these interests are all dependent to Turkey’s continuation of the worth given to this region and generation of new strategies. Turkey, who is capable of this, will be more influential both in her region and in the global arena. Turkey’s acting together with the countries which are cooperative to Turkey, especially in

² Vasiliev, “The Black Sea Region in Turkish Foreign Policy Strategy: Russia and Turkey on the Black Sea, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p.2.

³ Vasiliev, *Ibid*, p.2

the resolution of the frozen conflicts in the Caucasus, will provide Turkey more political power. Another subject which is as much important as this is the development of the trade and cultural ties among the Black Sea countries. Turkey has to have new strategies in this subject too.

Development of the Region

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC):

A Project to develop the transportation capacity and infrastructure of the Black Sea coast was to be undertaken. Turkey's active participation in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) was destined to play an important role in the realization of the country's foreign-policy plans.

Established in 1992, the BSEC is the most institutionalized homegrown organization in the region. It officially became a "regional economic organization" with an international legal identity in May 1, 1999 upon entry into force of its Charter. It is the only organization that includes all the six countries in the Black Sea (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine) as well as six neighboring countries (Albania, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova and Serbia and Montenegro). Poland, Slovakia, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Egypt, Israel, Tunisia, BSEC Business Council and the International Black Sea Club have observer status.⁴

Membership has not been restricted to countries which have access to the Black: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova, and Serbia do not have a coastline on the Black Sea. Montenegro's application was vetoed by Greece after Turkey vetoed the previous application of the Republic of Cyprus, prompting Greece to cease to approve future applications from any country.⁵

Within the BSEC umbrella, three interrelated and mutually reinforcing goals are aimed: to achieve cooperation rather than conflict, to support reinforcing goals are aimed: to achieve cooperation rather than conflict, to support regionalism as well as globalization, and to avoid new divisions in Europe.⁶

The organization's goal is the development of economic cooperation and trade between the countries of the Black Sea basin. In addition, BSEC devotes

⁴ Papadimitriou, "BSEC presentation, work programme and report of activities of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSRC) to the CPMR Political Bureau meeting held in Gijón", Asturias on 15-16 February 2010.

⁵ Permanent International Secretariat. "About BSEC". Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). Archived from the original on 2007-09-28. Retrieved 2009-05-29. "With the accession of Serbia and Montenegro in April 2004, the Organization's Member States increased to twelve".

⁶ Aydın, "Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea and the role of institutions", p.62.

attention to opposing such threats to regional security as the pollution of the Black Sea, organized crime, narcotics trafficking, and terrorism. In the beginning, Turkey was an enthusiastic participant in BSEC. In particular, the project for the creation of a circum-Black Sea transport corridor was very attractive for Turkish politicians and business circles. Turkey's active participation in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) had to play an important role in helping the country to realize its foreign policy goals in the region.⁷ However, the "five-day war" between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, together with a number of problems in the bilateral relations between Turkey and other members of BSEC, made the possibility of the route's realization doubtful.

The organization seeks the development of economic cooperation and trade among the countries of the Black Sea basin. However, in recent years, Turkey has increasingly criticized the BSEC for delaying the joint projects. The BSEC is a product of both globalisation and regionalism aimed at making the Black Sea area a region of peace, cooperation and prosperity.⁸

The Black Sea Naval Co-Operation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR):

For the purpose of enhancing peace and stability in the Black Sea area, by increasing regional co-operation, and improving good relationship, the idea of establishing a multinational naval on-call peace task force "The Black Sea Naval Co-Operation Task Group-BLACKSEAFOR" has been initiated by Turkey at the second Chiefs of the Black Sea Navies (CBSN) meeting which was held in Varna/Bulgaria in 1998. BLACKSEAFOR establishment agreement was signed by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine on 2 April 2001 in İstanbul. BLACKSEAFOR was first activated in Gölcük/Turkey between 27 September-16 October 2001 under the Turkish command. The second activation was held in August 2002 at Sevastopol under the Ukrainian command and the third activation took place on 3-31 August 2003 under the command of Bulgaria. The first phase of the fourth activation was held on 5-27 August 2004 under the Georgian command. The second and last phase of the fourth activation is expected to be held on 4-27 April 2005.

Upon the invitation of Turkey, the "First Political Consultations" meeting of the BLACKSEAFOR took place at the level of representatives of Foreign Ministers in Ankara on 19 January 2004 with the participation of all Black Sea littoral countries. At that meeting, the representatives of the littoral countries underlined the strategically important location of the Black Sea. The representatives also reaffirmed their common understanding that

⁷ BSEC (2008), "About BSEC".

⁸ Valinakis, "The Black Sea Region: Challenges and Opportunities for Europe", p.197.

security in the Black Sea constitutes primordial importance for the littoral states and that, therefore, they should take primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and stability in the area through the engagement of their common assets and capabilities. They further underlined the fact that BLACKSEAFOR is an already available instrument, which can be used for the achievement of this objective through various means compatible with the overall aims of the BLACKSEAFOR Agreement. Within this context, the representatives shared the assessment that the Black Sea area should be protected against threats and challenges such as terrorism, organized crime, illegal trafficking and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This meeting emphasized the importance and necessity of further regional cooperation among the littorals for the creation of peace, security and stability in the Black Sea.⁹

Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA):

The technical assistance programme for the development of the transport corridor between Europe and Asia across the Black Sea, the countries of the South Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and the Central Asian countries – the TRACECA programme – was launched in May 1993. Since then the EU has financed 62 technical assistance and 14 investments projects.¹⁰

TRACECA aims at supporting political and economic independence of the Republics by enhancing their capacity to access European and World markets through alternative transport routes, encouraging further regional co-operation among the partner countries and increasingly being a catalyst to attract the support of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and private investors.

The year of 2008 in the life of TRACECA is notable by such significant events as 15th Anniversary of the TRACECA Programme and 10th Anniversary of signing the “Basic Multilateral Agreement on International for Development of the “Europe-the Caucasus-Asia” Corridor”.¹¹

The strategic framework of the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) TRACECA comprises a number of pillars in order to achieve by 2015 the desired objective of delivering a sustainable, efficient and integrated multi-modal transport system at both the EU and TRACECA levels:

- Assisting in the development of economic relations, trade and transport communications in Europe, Black Sea region and Asia

⁹ <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/blackseafor.en.mfa>

¹⁰ <http://www.traceca-org.org/en/home/>

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/regional-cooperation-central-asia/transport/traceca_en.htm, Last update: 02/12/2010.

- Ensuring access to the world market of road, rail transport and commercial navigation
- Ensuring traffic security, cargo safety and environment protection
- Harmonisation of transport policy and legal structure in the field of transport
- Creation of equal conditions of competition for transport operations

The TRACECA transport corridor is another strategically important project for Turkey on the Black Sea. For the realization of this project, BSEC and shipping agreements with Russia are at odds. TRACECA assumes the construction of a transport corridor connecting Central Asia with continental Europe via the South Caucasus. However, for the moment the project has encountered definite problems. First, the construction and installation of the stretch of railroad on the Georgian-Turkish border is dragging on; second, an active campaign of modernization and expansion of the Turkish railroad system is necessary; third, the presence of the Turkish Straits slows the speed of conveyance between Europe and Asia (we do not take into consideration combined or intermodal transport on the Black Sea).

Simultaneously, construction of an underground tunnel under the Bosphorus met with certain difficulties. In the long term, the realization of the Trabzon-Batumi railroad construction project could make a perceptible contribution to the development of transport on the Black Sea coast of Turkey and the Caucasus.¹²

Turkey and Russia

Turkish-Russian relations were transformed in a unique way during the aftermath of the Cold War era and there was a dilemma in bilateral relations in the early 1990s. The two countries were seemingly rivals in the newly emerging geopolitics of the Eurasia, while cooperating in the economic realm in an ever increasing manner. The relationship between the two countries was shaped by a combination of cooperation and rivalry.¹³ The strongest point of cooperation was the increase in trade relations. At the core of the rivalry between Russia and Turkey was the odd perception of the geopolitical roles pitted against each other as well economic matters such as energy.¹⁴

The new foreign policy orientation of Turkish policy-makers has provided the impetus and the political will to develop better relations with

¹² Vasiliev, *Ibid*, p.3.

¹³ "Stratejik Ortaklık Önerisi", *Milliyet*, December 17, 1997; Sami Kohen, "Bir 'Stratejik Ortaklık' Daha...", *Milliyet*, December 17, 1997.

¹⁴ "Türkiye ve Rusya: Hem Ortak, Hem Komşu", p. 4.

Russia. In their perception of Russia, Turkish policy-makers emphasize adopting a good neighborhood and zero- problem policies in the bordering regions.¹⁵ Turkish politicians have also made developing bilateral political and economic relations with Russia a priority. Furthermore, they also think of Russia as a necessary partner for regional peace and stability in Eurasia. Russia “as an important country from the perspectives of trade, investment, tourism, and energy security” for Turkey.¹⁶ Turkey is pursuing—and will continue to pursue—its own goals and interests in dealing with Russia.

- **Main spheres of cooperation:** The core of Russian-Turkish cooperation includes the areas of energy and tourism, as well as construction and contracting work carried out by Turkish companies in Russia. Trade in Turkish agricultural products, light industrial goods, and textiles also play an important role in bilateral relations.

- **Turkish-Russian projects:** The decisions to create the Samsun-Caucasus rail transport ferry, as well as the Russian-Turkish customs and logistics centers in the Krasnodar and Rostov regions in Russia, look promising from the economic point of view.

- **Regional security:** The Agreement on Participation in BLACKSEAFOR (the Black Sea Naval Co-operation Task Group) was signed by Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, and Turkey. The intended function of BLACKSEAFOR is organizing humanitarian missions; providing relief to disaster victims; locating mines; fighting terrorism, contraband, and illegal migration; and seeking to reduce environmental pollution in the Black Sea region. Despite the formation of this multi-national task force, the Turkish armed forces regard the Russian Navy as their main partner in the area and the most powerful force on the Black Sea. Since 2006, the Russian Navy has taken part in the Black Sea Harmony exercises, which are organized by Turkey.¹⁷

However, for all of its statements about establishing a “strategic partnership” with Russia, Turkey remains a serious economic and geopolitical competitor to Russia in the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus.

Turkey and USA

During the Cold War, Turkey and the United States had a close cooperation. It seems that military partnership was the most important part of this cooperation. The two countries were close allies against the common threat of the former Soviet Union. At the end of the Cold War, in place of US-

¹⁵ Aras, “Turkey and the Russian Federation”, p.4.

¹⁶ Akgün, “Rusya’nın Önemi”.

¹⁷ Vasiliev, *Ibid*, p.2.

Soviet rivalry and the dividing lines that differentiated the Western world from the Soviet bloc, they faced new conditions. Thus more than being allies, a new concept called 'enhanced partnership' was introduced in 1991 to the Turkish-US relations, which has widened the content of partnership behind security.¹⁸ U.S.-Turkey relations have developed over the past decade.

Especially in the Black Sea region, the United States and Turkey have been working together to advance democracy in Georgia as Georgia pursue their NATO aspirations. Turkey can play an important role in resolving the conflict in Abkhazia, drawing on its large Abkhaz Diaspora, which is anxious to invest in Abkhazia, Georgia, and thereby stimulate cooperation and reconciliation. More broadly in the Black Sea, the United States strongly supports Turkey's leadership in Operation Black Sea Harmony to foster maritime security cooperation with Russia, Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Georgia against threats of proliferation and terrorism. US also welcomes strong information sharing between Operation Black Sea Harmony and NATO's Operation Active Endeavor in the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's vision and policy toward the Black Sea region (BSR)

The Black Sea region constitutes the most crucial area in Russian foreign policy due to its geopolitical and geo-economic importance and specific Russian interests during the period of systemic transformation following the collapse of the USSR.²⁰

In the two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's vision and policy toward the Black Sea region (BSR) has gone through at least four stages:

- The "initial phase:" 1991 (or even 1988) – 1994, characterized by the emergence of armed ethnic conflicts, their "freezing," and the establishment of a new post-Soviet status quo;
- The "Chechen" phase: 1995 – 2002, when Russia mainly viewed the situation in the BSR through the prism of the Chechen war;
- The "recovery" period: 2003 – 2008, when Russia began acting along several dimensions. Though loosely connected in practice, these activities were marked early on as a high priority in Russia's strategy. As early as September 2003, then Russian President Putin referred to the Azov-Black Sea region as a zone of Russia's "strategic interests." He stressed that the

¹⁸ Gökse, "The Post-Cold War US-Turkey Partnership" p.116,

¹⁹ Bozkurt, "Gürcistan'daki Etnik Çatışmalar Karşısında Türkiye ve Rusya'nın Tutumu", p.1-10.

²⁰ Ivanov, "Vneshnyya politika Rossii na sovremennom etape".

Black Sea provides Russia with a direct exit to its most important transport routes, and thus that an effective security system is needed for the region;

- New active regional strategy phase: August 2008 - present, beginning with the five-day war in the Caucasus.

A new BSR strategy closely coincides with the main characteristics of Russian foreign policy: it is very assertive, based on principles of *realpolitik*, and clearly geo-economically and geopolitically motivated. More than any other dimension of Russian foreign policy, the BSR strategy is geographically-based and viewed as a strictly regional project, although it possesses global aspects and provides Russia with global options. Underpinning this strategy is the notion that Russia has more rights.²¹

From a *military-security* perspective, Russia proclaims that its main interest is in keeping the Black Sea a peaceful and stable area with an open and direct exit to the Mediterranean and Atlantic Ocean. In other words, for now and the foreseeable future, Russia is interested in preserving the status quo. Indeed, for the last five years, Moscow has demonstrated its cooperative intent in the framework of the “Black Sea Harmony” and “Active Endeavour” military exercises with other Black Sea states and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). At the same time, a number of events before and during the five day war demonstrated the *military* threats to Russia’s interests that exist in the BSR:

- Turkey’s decision to allow U.S. ships to pass through the Dardanelles to support Georgia brings into question one of the oldest BSR agreements, the 1936 Montreaux Convention restricting naval traffic of non-Black Sea nations;
- The Russian-Ukrainian dispute over the Strait of Kerch concerns the same risk, i.e. that Russian vessels will not be allowed to travel from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea;
- The expansion and utilization of military bases by the United States in Romania and Bulgaria was perceived by Russia as an exploitation of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty and a violation of the Russia-NATO agreements of 2002;
- The Russian-Ukrainian Treaty on the Black Sea Fleet, due to expire in 2017, is another headache for Moscow. A number of authoritative Russian admirals consider the new Russian naval base under construction in Novorossiysk as militarily unsuitable for a number of meteorological and geographic reasons;²²

²¹ Kobrinskaya, “The Black Sea Region in Russia’s Current Foreign Policy Paradigm”, p.1.

²² Kobrinskaya, *Ibid*, p.5

Finally, Russia remains one of the three – and in the long-term, potentially only – non-NATO country in the region. From a military-political point of view, Russia perceives NATO, Ukraine, and Georgia as actors who aim to change the status quo.

To understand what Black Sea means for Russia, the picture will be completed if we analyse the problems encountered with Ukraine lately within the framework of invasion of Georgia August 2008. Russia attacked Georgia not only from the land but also from the sea and believed to have solved the problems through realizing successful military operations in a very short time. One of the basic security problems of Russia in Black Sea is existences of Russian navy in Sevastopol. Even though Ukraine asked Russia to remove the navy from Sevastopol immediately after getting independence, the problem could not be solved so far. Second problem on respective issue burst out on June 2009. Ukraine asked Russia to remove her forces responsible for security of the navy starting from 13 August 2009. Understanding the importance of the situation, Russia started to increase its Novorossiysk navy forces. At the same time, Russia started to murmur about natural gas debt of Ukraine and stopped supplying natural gas to the country. Upon this, Ukraine stopped operations of pipeline that carry Russian gas to Europe.²³ The problem between two countries suddenly became the problem of whole Europe. Member countries of EU started to make pressure on Ukraine and Russia for solving respective problems as soon as possible.

While summarizing Black Sea security policy of Russia, its invasion and withdrawal from Georgia in recent past, recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, concluding navy agreement with Ukraine show that Russia has started to practise active policy. The main problem is up to where and when Russia can follow this policy with its weakening economy in global economic crisis.

Conclusion

In the contemporary world politics, Black Sea is a pivotal region for the global powers. After the dismemberment of USSR the number of the coastal states of Black Sea has increased much and besides the former coastal states not only USA, EU and Russia but also many other global and regional powers like Turkey and coastal countries are nowadays in struggle for the sake of Black Sea which has strategic significance.

The importance of the Black Sea basin is increasing by time. The Black Sea being the transport route of the Caspian Basin and Central Asian oil and gas to the Western markets is a dynamic region in the control of energy. Besides the oil reserves recently found in the Black Sea has even increased

²³ Cabbarlı, *Ibid*, p.167.

its importance in the energy subject.²⁴ The Black Sea is in a location which permits the direct control of Caucasia.

As we see, Black Sea Region is very important and indispensable for both Turkey and Russia. The future of Turkey-Russia relations are determinative for the Black Sea cooperation and security.

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²⁴ Gavras, "The Black Sea and the European Union", p.23.

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