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First Contact with Distant Relatives: EU Activities in the Wider Black Sea Region¹

By Marietta S Koenig²

Marietta.Koenig@gmx.de

Editorial Staff:

Mr Sascha Arnautović, MA, Doctoral Candidate (responsible)

Ms Oezlem Yeşilkaya, MA, FES Scholar

Contact **KFIBS e.V.** (registered association): Balthasar-Neumann-Platz 24G, 50321 BRUEHL, GERMANY,
E-mail: info@kfibs.org, Web Site: www.kfibs.org

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² Marietta S Koenig, MA, doctoral candidate, is a researcher at the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE)/the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH), Hamburg/Germany.

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Introductory Remarks

In the course of the negotiations for Bulgaria's and Romania's accession to the European Union the EU realized that, with the admission of these two countries, it would also share, via the Black Sea, common maritime borders with several more countries which, with all their interests and problems, used to be far away from Europe. All of a sudden, the entire Black Sea region acquired importance for Europe in terms of economics, energy and security questions.

Taking this into account, the geopolitical focus of the EU had to be reconsidered. Up until then, the approaches were multi-dimensional: EU initiatives ran parallel to enhanced bilateral co-operation between single EU states and countries in the Black Sea region. There is still no consistent European strategy in sight. Occupied with internal affairs, failing to adopt a constitution, which would enable the EU to speak with a single voice, and having to digest the eastern enlargement by twelve new member states during the past three years, the EU is still in the process of becoming aware of its new geographic position. The Black Sea is not yet recognized as a "European" Sea.³ Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova are state names, which are hardly familiar to average Western European citizens, who are generally unable to locate these countries on a world map.

But what is the reason for this lack of knowledge? And what, as a matter of fact, does the Wider Black Sea region mean and what does it include? What are the challenges and opportunities of a future EU-Black Sea co-operation? This analysis aims at giving some possible answers to these relevant questions. Since this article originates from a conference, which was conducted in Baku/Azerbaijan, the main emphasis will be on EU-South Caucasian relations.

³ Petersen, Phillip A, The Black Sea: Frontier Zone or "European" Sea?, in: Review of International Affairs, No. 1122, June 2006, pp. 23. For the EU's position as a de facto Black Sea player see also: Aydin, Mustafa, Europe's next shore: The Black Sea region after EU enlargement. EU-ISS Occasional Paper 53, June 2004, p. 1.

An Outline of Past Euro-Atlantic-Black Sea Relations

Discussing the Black Sea region from a Western European point of view demands, for a start, a glance at the world map. Six countries – Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, and Turkey – directly border on the sea. However, there are additional states, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece and Moldova, which closely identify themselves with the Black Sea region. Further nearby states would be: Albania, Belarus, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

A focus on the Black Sea basin could even include Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and finally Slovenia.⁴ And indeed, the interest of most of the aforementioned countries in the Black Sea region is increasing, as it becomes obvious by, for instance, looking at the expanding Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). On 12 April 2004, Serbia and Montenegro became the twelfth member of BSEC. Austria, Egypt, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and, as of September 2005, the United States, have demonstrated their interest in the region by having "observer" status in BSEC.⁵ Thus, a wider definition of the Black Sea region, including more than those states directly bordering the sea seems appropriate. However, as a result of recent history, regional identity and the wish for co-operation have only just begun developing. BSEC member states belong to different cultural groups, countries with Islamic majorities border Roman Catholic or Christian Orthodox countries, some with democratic, some with communist traditions. This has led to various interethnic conflicts and wars, whose outcomes still affect relations between neighbour states, nation states and seceding entities, or ethnic groups within the same state borders.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Black Sea, apart from the Turkish coast, was part of and in the sphere of Soviet influence. Immediately after the dissolution of the USSR, this perception changed very little. The region was considered to be part of the Russian periphery, where the Euro-Atlantic Alliance was reluctant to interfere.

⁴ Aydin, Mustafa, Europe's next shore: The Black Sea region after EU enlargement. EU-ISS Occasional Paper 53, June 2004, p. 5, and for further information about memberships in various sub-regional organizations see: *ibid*, p. 28.

⁵ The EU being present at least as an observer is not yet the case, but needs to be considered in the near future. However, the European Commission has already become an observer in the Black Sea Commission. See also: Vahl, Marius, The EU and Black Sea Regional Cooperation: Some Challenges for BSEC, CEPS Commentaries, April 2005, p. 2.

Building a new co-operative relationship with Moscow had top priority then.⁶ Apart from that, in Western eyes, the Black Sea was not considered to be part of Europe (at least not its Eastern edges). Inadequate knowledge about the region, its people, culture, and its problems helped maintain this view. Rather than looking so far abroad, the European Union focused on its proximate backyard. The wars on the Balkan brought war back to the European continent. To stop them, the EU was dependent on NATO's support. When NATO opened its ranks for Eastern European member states, the EU did the same. The Eastern enlargement captured the EU's entire attention for the next few years. Even today, the EU is focused largely on its own backyard: the Balkans. Since February 2006, the EU has been heavily involved in the negotiations on Kosovo's final status. The next EU enlargement round will concentrate on the Balkan region.⁷

It was only with the US focus on direct access to bases and operational routes in Central Asia and the Middle East, and with the consideration of alternative pipeline routes, bypassing the Russian Federation, that the importance of the Black Sea was finally recognized. In times of growing scarcity of raw materials, the Euro-Atlantic interests in the oil fields of the Caspian Sea seemed to herald a new great game in the late 1990s. Projects focused primarily on the economy were launched, among them, TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia), established in 1993 to link the Caucasus with Central Asia and Europe, those focused on transport infrastructure projects to attract international investment, or INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe), established in 1995 to promote technical assistance and some investment for hydrocarbon infrastructure in the Wider Black Sea region.

TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States), a programme for the support of economic and political transition in the post-Soviet region, concluded in December 2006 and was replaced by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). New National Action Plans have been agreed upon with each of the South Caucasian states. They are to lay out the strategic objectives of co-operation within the region and with the EU for the upcoming years until 2011, and to

⁶ Bocutoğlu, Ersan/Koçer, Goekher, *Politico-Economic Conflicts in the Black Sea Region in the Post-Cold War Era*, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE-Yearbook 2006*, No. 12, Baden-Baden 2007, pp. 113.

⁷ Kempe, Iris/Klotzle, Kurt, *The Balkans and the Black Sea Region: Problems, Potentials, and Policy Options*, CAP Policy Analysis No. 2, April 2006, p. 8. For the disappointment of several states, such as Moldova or Ukraine, at having no membership prospects see also: Aydin, Mustafa, *Europe's next shore: The Black Sea region after EU enlargement*. EU-ISS Occasional Paper 53, June 2004, p. 11 and 13.

encourage and support further integration into European economic and social structures.⁸ Due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which prevents direct co-operation between Armenia and Azerbaijan, these ambitions can only be met in the most superficial way. Apart from that, the joint slogan of the EU has recently become to encourage participation rather than to give a perspective for a potential EU membership. However, this course of action might turn out tricky, because *a priori* lacking the perspective of a future admission into the EU could cause frustration and increasing unwillingness to further co-operate with the EU and to further support single EU activities in the region.⁹

EU Activities in the South Caucasus

In contrast to recent discord, the attitude towards the European Union within the entire Black Sea region may traditionally be described as overwhelmingly positive. Especially the South Caucasus has always felt to be strongly linked with Europe: several countries in the region wish to be part of the European Union in some form and regard their membership in the European Council as the first step to achieving this aim in the near future.¹⁰ In contrast to other international actors, the European Union is not expected to seek a new zone of influence here. However, Europe has, as yet, barely taken advantage of these positive perceptions. EU actions in the region remain functional without any ideational ulterior motives.¹¹ This leads to a huge discrepancy between reality and the expectations of the South Caucasian states. Though excluded from the EU enlargement process, they are, at the same time, affected by global economic and development processes.

The European Union has been active in the South Caucasian states since 1993, oriented to financial, humanitarian and technical (especially TACIS) support. This is regarded as a contribution towards stability, peace and prosperity in a region that is still

⁸ For documents on the National Action Plans see the web page of the European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm>.

⁹ This is already the case in Georgia. Since summer 2006, the Georgian government demands to put EU rehabilitation and democratisation programmes under Georgian control. See: Kaufmann, Walter, Politischer Jahresbericht. Suedlicher Kaukasus 2006/2007, Regionalbuero der Heinrich-Boell-Stiftung, Tbilisi, July 2007, pp. 6ff. For more information on this aspect, see: Marchetti, Andreas, Widening without Enlarging. The European Neighbourhood Policy and the South Caucasus, in: Turkish Policy Quarterly, 5,2 (2006), S. 65-77, at: <http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_id_63.pdf>.

¹⁰ As ICG rightly notices, the European Union and the European Council are frequently confused by people in the Black Sea region: ICG, Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's Role, Europe Report No. 173, 20 March 2006, p. 3.

¹¹ For more critical points on these aspects see: Valinakis, Yannis, The Black Sea Region: Challenges and Opportunities for Europe, WEU Chaillot Paper 36, July 1999, p. 14.

occupied with ethno-political conflicts.¹² In the late 1990s Partnership and Cooperation Agreements were signed with all three South Caucasian states. Since 2000 there have been regular meetings between the European Parliament and the national parliaments of the region. The EU has become one of the leading trading partners in the South Caucasus region. In November 2006 "National Indicative Programmes 2007-2010" laid the priorities for the upcoming years.¹³

Political presence, on the other hand, varies in the three South Caucasian states. The establishment of the European Commission's office in Tbilisi was not a coincidence: "Si la Géorgie est traditionnellement considérée comme la capitale politique de la région, c'est d'abord dans cette capitale qu'une mission diplomatique a été ouverte. Mais lorsque les motivations économiques primaient, Bakou fut prioritaire."¹⁴

The delegation of the Commission in Georgia is responsible for activities in Armenia as well, but not for Azerbaijan. Plans have finally been made to open a full-fledged office in Baku in 2007. However, the EU has remained reluctant to further political engagement in the South Caucasus with its still unresolved ethno-political conflicts. Still, EU activities in Georgia, compared to those in Armenia and Azerbaijan, are much more complex. While Georgia's right to territorial integrity and its threat due to the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia were recognized a priori by all international actors operating in Georgia, the EU has hesitated to take sides in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process. As the only interstate conflict in the region, it has severely damaged relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Though confidence-building programmes in and around Nagorno-Karabakh are urgently needed, the EU perceives this conflict region to be a lower priority compared to Abkhazia and South Ossetia due to the large amount of aid being transferred to Nagorno-Karabakh by the Armenian diaspora. At the same time, Azerbaijan has always been reluctant to accept projects, which involve a region whose ambition to secede is strongly encouraged by the Armenian state.¹⁵ As a result, the EU concentration on activities in Georgia was the logical consequence.

¹² Cf. <<http://www.mfa.gov.ge/eu.html>>, 6 March 2003;

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cfsp/news/patten_remarks.htm>, 11 March 2003.

¹³ For documents on ENP see the web page of the European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm>.

¹⁴ A citation from Helly's doctoral thesis saying that if Georgia was traditionally regarded to be the political centre of the region, then Baku was considered to be the regional centre in economic terms: Helly, Damien (2003), p. 173.

¹⁵ Azerbaijan's position will strengthen further this year, first, because of its growing military budget which will reach 1 billion US dollars, exceeding Armenia's entire state budget; second, because of Russian-American agreements during the G8 summit in Heiligendamm/Germany in recent days to establish a joint missile defence system in Azerbaijan, FAZ, 8 June 2007.

Georgia a Guinea Pig for EU Engagement in the Caucasus?

Compared to Armenia and Azerbaijan, the EU has been particularly active in Georgia through funding, programmes and political statements. On 10 April 1997, a technical mission of the European Commission visited South Ossetia to discuss the possibilities of EU involvement in economic rehabilitation.¹⁶ The EC Delegation to Georgia and the OSCE Mission to Georgia consecutively signed a EU platform according to which the EC aims to support the process of reconciliation, to assist in the rehabilitation and improvement of socio-economic conditions, to assist in restarting the conflict-stricken economy and to promote the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced to the conflict zone. The EU's increasing interest in supporting peace and stability building measures in this conflict region manifests itself in various reports, statements, the TACIS programme and several Strategy Papers.¹⁷ The OSCE Mission to Georgia took the initiative of making the European Commission an observer of the quadripartite Joint Control Commission (JCC) in 2000, and a participant in the JCC in 2001, and enabling the EC's attendance at Experts' Group meetings.¹⁸ Whether to also engage in the negotiation process of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict has only been discussed tentatively.¹⁹

Thus, most of EU's engagement in post-conflict peace-building processes in Georgia remains focused on projects for economic reconstruction. EU policy is still broadly focused on a non-committal position, rather influenced by the national policies of individual EU member states, like France and the United Kingdom, which follow their own national interests in this region, and, for the time being, disapprove of a unique positioning or involvement of the European Union in the South Caucasus on many

¹⁶ CPC, REF, SEC/125/97, 22 April 1997, Mission to Georgia: Activity Report No. 6/97 for the Period of 1-15 April 1997 (restr.).

¹⁷ Cf. <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/georgia/csp/02_06_en.pdf>, 25 March 2003, p. 8; <<http://www.ebrd.com/about/strategy/country/georgia/georgia.pdf>>, 7 March 2003, p. 42; <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cfsp/news/comm2001_211_en.pdf>, 7 March 2003, p. 14f. For a detailed chronology of the instruments used by the European Union in the Caucasus see: Helly, Damien (2003), pp. 78ff.

¹⁸ The Joint Control Commission and the Experts' Group on the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict resolution process are the main negotiation mechanisms in this conflict. Georgia, South Ossetia, Russia and North Ossetia are members of the JCC. Both mechanisms derive from OSCE Mission to Georgia's initiatives. See: Koenig, Marietta S, The Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), OSCE-Yearbook 2004, No. 10, Baden-Baden 2005, pp. 261ff.

¹⁹ Wahlfeld, Monika (2003), p. 56. Author's interviews in Tbilisi in autumn 2003.

points of broader issues.²⁰

Although the EU traditionally regards the work of conflict prevention to be more efficient than post-conflict management, it only engages in the conflict resolution process if a member state is already actively involved, such as, for example, Great Britain is said to be in Abkhazia.²¹ The International Crisis Group demands a breakdown of existing patterns and recommends increased engagement with the non-recognized entities (e.g. Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh) and in this way "to promote democratization, civil society development and the rule of law, not as recognition of status but as a means to break their isolation, build confidence and avoid exclusion from broad EU integration processes".²²

On the other hand, it is the European Union's function as a significant donor in this region which, in contrast to the OSCE, at least puts at its disposal a set of "carrots and sticks". The EU either grants a remarkable amount of money that significantly helps to improve the situation in the conflict zone, or freezes grants if the expected results are too slow in coming. In this way the EU significantly influences the progress of the conflict management process.

However, due to the now shared sea border, the European Union's broadly focused approach to economic issues in the South Caucasus is slowly changing. In the decision-making framework of the General Affairs Council from 26 February 2001, the EU sought further possibilities for helping prevent and solve conflicts and supporting post-conflict rehabilitation in the South Caucasus.²³ Moreover, Turkey may join the European Union in the future, which would create a common land border between the EU and the South Caucasus. This is slowly becoming apparent to the EU as well, and in response they have already started to change their focus.²⁴ On 7 July 2003, the Council, willing to play a slightly more active political role in the South Caucasus, appointed Heikki Talvitie as an EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus (EUSR). But his mandate

²⁰ Ibid, p. 5. However, in another place Helly also notes that at this point financial participation of the European Union in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict resolution process is the only way the EU can be helpful: Helly, Damien (2003), pp. 91 and 225. Boden also urges stronger involvement of the European Union in the conflict resolution process and asks the European Union to draft a stability concept for the Caucasus region: Boden, Dieter (2002), p. 45. For the role of a Caucasus stability pact and the relevance of a peaceful Caucasus region for the whole Europe see, *passim*, Erler, Gernot (2002).

²¹ Cf. <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cfsp/news/patten_remarks.htm>, 11 March 2003; Helly, Damien (2003), p. 225.

²² ICG Europe Report No. 173 (2006), p. 4.

²³ Cf. <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/georgia/csp/02_06_en.pdf>, 25 March 2003, p. 3.

²⁴ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/10_99/pres_99_302.htm>, 6 March 2003.

was considered to be quite vague.²⁵ Since February 2006 this position has been held by Peter Semneby. Unlike Talvitie, Semneby is now being encouraged to "contribute" to the regional conflict settlement processes.²⁶ His engagement has already become visible in various statements in which he for example condemns recent Georgian actions carried out in the Georgian-Abkhaz border region (Kodory valley), and in the promotion of Caucasus-related projects and meetings at his duty station in Brussels.

Changes after Georgia's "Velvet Revolution"

In the course of the governmental changes in Georgia leading to the election of the western-oriented Mikhail Saakashvili as new president of Georgia, Tbilisi and the European Commission Delegation signed an agreement in 2004 in accordance with which the EU allocated 28 million Euro, within the framework of the EU's technical assistance programme (TACIS), to further assist Georgia in covering the cost of reforms within the healthcare, legal and administrative sectors, and rehabilitation programmes in the post-conflict zones.²⁷ Particularly, as related to the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, the parties to the conflict and the EC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on rehabilitation projects in the conflict zone in Tskhinvali on 31 January 2004. The European Commission agreed to give 2.5 million Euros to finance several new projects, which would focus on rehabilitation of basic infrastructure in the conflict zone.²⁸ Since the majority of projects in South Ossetia are tied to the political dialogue process with the Joint Control Commission (JCC), with implementation dependent on agreement among the four parties (Georgia, Russia, South and North Ossetia), the EU appears to be more directly engaged in the conflict resolving process in South Ossetia than in Abkhazia where direct co-operation has always been only at grassroots level.

In 2005, EU ambitions to contribute more actively to rehabilitation programmes in Abkhazia increased significantly. By mid-2006 implementing projects worth some 25 million Euros made the EU the largest donor in Abkhazia (as the EU had already been in

²⁵ Official Journal of the European Union, L 169/74, 8 July 2003, Council Joint Action 2003/496/CFSP of 7 July 2003 concerning the appointment of an EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus; author's interview in Tbilisi.

²⁶ Council Joint Action 2006/121/CFSP of 21 February 2006, Article 3 (d), OJ L49, p. 15.

²⁷ Civil Georgia – Online Magazine, EU Allocates 28 million Euro to Assist Georgia, 14 January 2004.

²⁸ OSCE-Newsline, OSCE Brokers Funds to Help Rehabilitate the Zone of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict, Tbilisi, 2 February 2004; ICG, Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's Role, Europe Report No. 173, 20 March 2006, p. 19.

South Ossetia). Ten million Euros alone have been allotted for the rehabilitation of the Enguri Hydro Power plant, a prestigious object, since it is the single project, which demonstrates that Georgian-Abkhaz co-operation is, indeed, possible.²⁹ Beyond that allocation of funds, the EU has, as yet, no ambition to actively carry out its own projects in Abkhazia, which would be required in the security sector, arms control or improvements in rule of law through policing projects.³⁰ In June 2004, the Commission organized a first-ever donors' conference during which pledges of nearly 1 billion US dollars were made.³¹

However, the Georgian "Velvet Revolution" also had an overall impact on the EU's policy towards the three South Caucasian states. This was clearly indicated in the 26 January 2004 proposal of the EUSR, Heikki Talvitie, to reverse the decision from the previous summer to leave Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia out of the "Wider Europe Initiative".³² The developments in Georgia indicated that there might be a breakthrough within the domestic policy of Georgia, since Saakashvili promised to fight against corruption and to push ahead with long-awaited reforms.³³ Not only since Saakashvili's presidency, but now, more strongly promoted than ever, Georgia is seeking a closer and stronger relationship with the European Union, and hopes to be able to join the Union one day. This is visibly demonstrated by EU flags on the government building in the centre of Tbilisi. In addition to that Saakashvili has eagerly requested stronger EU engagement in the conflict resolution processes with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The EU, meanwhile, remains reluctant to take on a greater role, so as not to interfere in Russia's activities, as long as EU involvement is not considered to significantly promote stability.³⁴ Western observers, though, now demand this engagement, as well. The International Crisis Group openly recommended in March 2006 that the EU should

²⁹ The EU finances two projects: the dam on the Georgian side and a power station generator on the Abkhaz side. Abkhazia basically receives electricity from this hydro power plant.

³⁰ ICG, Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's Role, Europe Report No. 173, 20 March 2006, p. 18.

³¹ European Commission and World Bank, "International donors give extraordinary support to Georgia: approx. 1 billion US dollars/850 million Euros pledged", Joint Press Release, Brussels, 16 June 2004, at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/georgia/intro/press170604.pdf>.

³² Kupatadze, Georgy, *Georgia: Debate Over Military Bases*, in: IWPR's Caucasus Reporting Service No. 215, 22 January 2004; Lobjakas, Ahto, *EU to Reconsider Exclusion of South Caucasus States from 'Wider Europe' Program*, in: RFE/RL Caucasus Report Vol. 7, No. 5, 30 January 2004.

³³ Civil Georgia – Online Magazine, Solana Pledged EU's Support to Georgia, 15 January 2004. According to the Transparency International Index from 2003 Georgia is, together with Angola and Azerbaijan, ranking on position 124 of 133 positions altogether.

³⁴ See: ICG, Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's Role, Europe Report No. 173, 20 March 2006, recommendations, p. 10.

participate in relevant fora, at least as an observer.³⁵ This unwillingness on EU's side to further engage plus the lack of perspective of Georgia's future admission into the EU has already caused frustration and increasing unwillingness to further co-operate with the EU and to further support EU activities.³⁶

In February 2006, an open hearing took place in Brussels, where the European Parliament's Foreign Commission discussed the EU's future role in the South Caucasus and the possible creation of a South Caucasus and Black Sea region stability pact. In the long term this would be far more binding than the present European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which for many, is not much more than mere lip service, bilaterally oriented with a strong focus, again, on economic issues.³⁷ On how the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) could help to overcome this dilemma remains to be seen.

However, Georgia's position cannot be compared to Ukraine. The so-called Orange Revolution likewise enjoyed strong Western support. Despite serious internal problems which can be observed for years already, Ukraine has a far more realistic chance of one day being admitted to the EU than Georgia. For the time being, however, the EU is rather focused on its future role in Central Asia.³⁸ The South Caucasian states need to engage themselves and to prove their reliability by implementing fundamental reforms. Only when decisive development and reform efforts have been demonstrated, can the European Union again focus on the South Caucasus. Currently the increasing concentration on Central Asia and a purely economic focus on the Black Sea region as an energy supply route leave them out.

Current Pipeline Projects

In recent years a unique footrace has started in the Wider Black Sea region. Russia, the European Union and the USA are competing for supremacy over the pipeline route

³⁵ ICG, Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's Role, Europe Report No. 173, 20 March 2006, recommendations, pp. iif.

³⁶ See FN 9.

³⁷ Cf. Vahl, Marius, The EU and Black Sea Regional Cooperation: Some Challenges for BSEC, CEPS Commentaries, April 2005, p. 1.

³⁸ For an overview on this aspect see: The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership, Policy Paper published by the German Presidency of the European Council, at: <http://www.diplo.de/diplo/en/Europa/Aussenpolitik/Regionalabkommen/EU-CentralAsia-Strategy.pdf>.

system leading from the Caspian Sea to Europe.³⁹ Europe is especially worried about its increasing energy dependence on Russia. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline became one of the first prestigious projects in the Wider Black Sea region. This pipeline carries crude oil from the oil fields in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan on the Caspian Sea to Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea. With a length of 1.760 km this pipeline was meant to make the West more independent of OPEC oil in the Persian Gulf region. Transit country Georgia is already profiting remarkably from this pipeline. The state budget has increased significantly,⁴⁰ which has aroused the interests of other countries in the region in promoting further pipeline projects. This is especially the case for those that help to liberate them from dependency on Russian energy supplies which, in past years, has often been used as a lever to enforce Russian political interests in the region. However, the realization of this intention might prove to be difficult, when observing recent Russian activities in the energy sector.

Parallel to the BTC pipeline, the Blue Stream pipeline was officially inaugurated in 2005. This pipeline carries Russian natural gas from Stavropol to the Krasnodar region and beneath the Black Sea to Samsun in Turkey terminating 444 km further in Ankara. In March 2007, Russia attended the signing of a treaty between Bulgaria and Greece for a new "Balkan pipeline", which will connect the Aegean with the Black Sea. Russia has a 51 per cent share in this project.

The decisive step followed in May 2007, when Russia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan agreed on a landmark gas pipeline deal. The Caspian shore gas pipeline with a capacity of 10 billion cubic meters per year and a parallel gas pipeline, yet to be built, will go from Turkmenistan to Russia via Kazakhstan. For the European states this meant a grave reversal. After two consecutive winters that saw Russia briefly disrupt energy supplies to Europe due to Russian-Ukrainian and Russian-Belarus disagreements, the European Union had intensified plans to tap directly into Central Asia's natural gas, bypassing Russian involvement. The 3.300 km long Nabucco pipeline would have transported gas from Turkey via Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary to Austria, starting from 2011.

However, smaller EU countries like Hungary were not so eager to support this

³⁹ Aydin, Mustafa, Europe's next shore: The Black Sea region after EU enlargement. EU-ISS Occasional Paper 53, June 2004, p. 7.

⁴⁰ However, Georgian NGOs are critical of the fact that local Georgia is not yet directly profiting from this income.

project, but rather preferred to maintain relations with the Russian Federation and the state-owned Russian gas monopoly Gazprom. Now, with the Russian-Turkmen-Kazakh coup, the pipelines will run north from the Caspian Sea through Russia. Moscow, which buys Turkmen gas at below-market rates, is likely to sell the Caspian gas to Europe at a substantial markup. The EU's non-stringent energy policy led to the failure of the Nabucco project. Right now, the EU needs time to digest its failure. Meanwhile, rumours suggest that the Gazprom coup has encouraged the USA to press ahead more eagerly with the Nabucco project, concentrating on Azeri and Iranian gas. One will have to observe what happens in the upcoming months to learn more about this issue.

Forms of Regional Co-operation in the Black Sea Region

With the downfall of the Soviet Union the first dawning interests in regional co-operation – primarily in economic terms – arose in several Black Sea states.⁴¹ While most co-operative frameworks, such as the informal security alliance GUAM, are restricted to a few states, there are hardly any, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), which are open to any state willing to participate. On the other hand, many countries were eager to find alternatives to the CIS format that, in many eyes, was imposed and was only reluctantly accepted. In June 1992, the BSEC was launched when the heads of state or governments signed a summit declaration (known as "Istanbul Declaration"). With the ratification of the BSEC Charter by the parliaments of eleven member states (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine), BSEC acquired an international legal identity and with that became a regional organization on 1 May 1999. The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs being BSEC's principal decision-making body has a Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS), which is based in Istanbul. Two of the four related bodies are based in Istanbul as well: the BSEC Business Council and the Parliamentary Assembly, while the International Center for Black Sea Studies is based in Athens, and the Black Sea Trade & Development Bank is based in Thessaloniki. Thus BSEC became the only co-operative initiative in the Black Sea region, imbedded in a basic institutional system.

However, in the second half of the 1990s the attractiveness of BSEC began to

⁴¹ For more detailed information on regionalism in the Wider Black Sea region see: Aydin, Mustafa, Europe's next shore: The Black Sea region after EU enlargement. EU-ISS Occasional Paper 53, June 2004, pp. 19ff.

decline. Several member states still had to deal with unresolved ethno-political conflicts. Parties to the conflicts were member states of the same organization. Even today several interstate and intrastate borders are still closed, former relevant train connections in the region are non-continuous due to these closed borders, and significant sections of the railway systems are in very bad condition. Different historical perceptions, unequal access to resources, and the lack of a joint vision of priorities have aggravated the situation. This, in turn, has prevented BSCE from establishing further institutions to build capacities for joint action and for the creation of a joint security pact, to become attractive e.g. for cooperation with the EU. BSEC has given the impression of being disorganized. It has remained a forum with non-binding mechanisms. No consensus has yet been able to be achieved in terms of regional leadership. Several states bordering the sea, such as Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania, are seeking a leading role in the Black Sea region. Greece also wishes to play a decisive role arguing, before Romania's and Bulgaria's admission to the EU, to have been representing the EU at the Black Sea coastline.

Apart from that, international actors have also started to regard each other as opponents in the aforementioned region. Russia disapproved of US action in this area that was formerly Russia's "near abroad". This view is, at least to some extent, also shared by Turkey, which believes that states without ocean access should have only limited influence on Black Sea security issues.⁴² This was a setback for US policy that had wished to deploy Turkey as a balancing factor against the further expansion of Russian, and Iranian, influence. Meanwhile, the USA has criticized the EU, calling it "the great absentee", for merely declaring actions in the region, without actually becoming involved. NATO actions, which, in the opinion of the US, would be the most effective, are disapproved of by the EU and certainly by Russia.⁴³ Russia has been very reluctant to accept any NATO actions in the post-Soviet hemisphere. Many of the recent disagreements between Russia and the Black Sea countries busy with coloured revolutions (Georgia and the Ukraine), derive from their strong ambitions to be admitted as full

⁴² Cf. Petersen, Phillip A, *The Black Sea: Frontier Zone or "European" Sea?*, in: *Review of International Affairs* No. 1122, June 2006, p. 24.

⁴³ Bocutoğlu, Ersan/Koçer, Goekher, *Politico-Economic Conflicts in the Black Sea Region in the Post-Cold War Era*, in: *Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH* (ed.), *OSCE-Yearbook 2006*, No. 12, Baden-Baden 2007, pp. 118 and 121; Ryabtsev, Vladimir, *Why is there no "Security Complex" in the Black Sea-Caucasus Region?*, in: *Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH* (ed.), *OSCE-Yearbook 2006*, No. 12, Baden-Baden 2007, pp. 106f. For a plea on a stronger US involvement in the Wider Black Sea region see also: Socor, Vladimir, *Advancing Euro-Atlantic Security and Democracy in the Black Sea Region*, *Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on European Affairs*, March 2005, p. 6.

members to NATO.⁴⁴

In addition to that there is a strong regional scepticism towards Russia and, as already being mentioned, there have also been protests against various Russian-led pipeline projects, particularly by smaller countries.⁴⁵ This results from Russia's failure to present an attractive policy, which would encourage co-operation in its immediate neighbourhood. Instead, economic issues favouring those neighbours who are willing to accept and support Russia's post-Soviet leading position dominate Russia's policy. Russia is struggling for a long-term leading position in the area of the former Soviet Union. This became glaringly obvious during the elections in Georgia, Ukraine, and Belarus, where Russian officials exploited personal networks and high-level meetings to influence domestic political outcomes in its "near abroad". Especially Georgia reacted harshly to this intervention, and Georgian-Russian relations have been severely damaged, because both sides are no longer able to communicate in a co-operative way. Russia's challenge will be to develop a constructive policy, which also takes democratic values and local interests into consideration. The states in the former "near abroad" seek to be recognized as equal partners of Russia. Given the hardened positions especially in Georgian-Russian relations there is still a lot to be done.

Closing Remarks

Parallel to the South-East European stability pact, leading Caucasus analysts promoted a Caucasus stability pact in May 2000.⁴⁶ According to them this would have been a road map for trilateral co-operation among the EU, Russia and the US. Much of this may sound naïve today. However, in the long term, only co-operative actions between the global and the regional players can lead to stability, security and prosperity of the Wider

⁴⁴ For NATO activities in the Wider Black Sea region see: Cornell, Svante/Jonsson, Anna/Nilsson/Niklas/Haeggstroem, Per, *The Wider Black Sea Region: An Emerging Hub in European Security*, Central Asia Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program. Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center of Johns Hopkins University (Washington, D.C.) and Uppsala University (Uppsala), Dec. 2006, pp. 66ff. Russia's perceived exclusive right to deploy peace-keepers in its "near abroad" is also felt by the United Nations. With Russia being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia succeeded in opposing UN peace-keeping on post-Soviet territory, limiting UN.

⁴⁵ The crisis in Estonia is certainly connected to "North Stream", the natural gas pipeline currently being built, that runs beneath the Baltic Sea from Russian Vyborg to Greifswald in Germany.

⁴⁶ In parts antiquated already, but still worth reading: Celac, Sergiu, Emerson, Michael, *A Stability Pact for the Caucasus, a new deal for the whole region, incorporating: a South Caucasus Community, Russian/EU/US Southern Dimension cooperation, enhanced Black Sea-Caucasus-Caspian cooperation*. A consultative document for the CEPS Task Force for the Caucasus, Working Document No. 145, May 2000.

Black Sea region.⁴⁷

To achieve this, support for regional co-operation would be crucial. For this to happen, the EU should support reform processes in the Black Sea region by providing financial resources, training and technical support. A focus on elections and civil society alone, such as can be observed at the moment, is a shaky barometer for successful transformation. The EU has to concentrate on supporting functioning state institutions. For that reason, democracy promotion may not be simultaneously the aim and means. Rather an instrumental framework needs to be established, which enables local communities to develop autonomous mechanisms for economic and political transformation, which, in the long term, may lead to full-fledged democratic standards. Supporting further institutionalization of BSEC may enable this regional organization to become a promoter for spreading European norms and values in the Black Sea region. The EU should enhance co-operative projects with the Black Sea states to resolve regional security problems, which lead to transnational threats, such as ongoing ethno-political conflicts, organized crime, terrorist activity, weapons' proliferation and state fragility.⁴⁸ This implies an efficient visa policy and energy security programmes. Again BSEC could play a crucial role here in creating binding mechanisms for its member states. Meanwhile, these states would naturally follow these commitments, with BSEC being the main regional actor, strengthening their geostrategic position, including a possible future integration into Europe for those who still wish to. As a member state of BSEC, Russia could profit from that by encouraging the parties to the conflict to start co-operating economically, to open borders for economic actions and to engage in re-establishing important interstate railway connections which would directly link Russia with the Caucasus and Central Asia.

To feel secure, the EU needs to be surrounded by states which feel committed to democratic norms and values. However, this calls for a stronger, political engagement in the Wider Black Sea region. The EU needs to become more involved in conflict resolution processes. The EU has shirked any responsibility for the ethno-political conflicts – the key problem of the region. "Europeanization" may play a crucial role

⁴⁷ Kempe, Iris/Klotzle, Kurt, *The Balkans and the Black Sea Region: Problems, Potentials, and Policy Options*, CAP Policy Analysis No. 2, April 2006, p. 10.

⁴⁸ The BSEC Council adopted their Economic Agenda for the Future in 2001 to serve as a "road map" for regional projects dealing with the above-mentioned threats.

here.⁴⁹ However, the race for domination in the energy sector has shown that in the long term the European Union will strongly depend on good and close relations with the Russian Federation. To become a serious partner, the EU needs to seek constructive dialogue with Russia. This will only be possible when Russia sees the EU not as a competitor in the Black Sea region, but as a co-operative partner. Reviving TRACECA with its implied serious political commitment and significant financial resources might contribute to a reformation of Europe's present disastrous energy policy – and at the same time actively include Russia in this process. Only with an institutionalised focus on the Black Sea region and active engagement, will make the EU a durable impact on its recently acquired home waters.

⁴⁹ See: Coppieters, Bruno et al., European Institutional Models as Instruments of Conflict Resolution in the Divided States of the European Periphery, CEPS Working Document 195 (Brussels: CEPS, July 2003); Valinakis, Yannis, The Black Sea Region: Challenges and Opportunities for Europe, WEU Chaillot Paper 36, July 1999, p. 17.

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