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OLD POWERS RE-EMERGING IN THE WIDER BLACK SEA: SECURITY AND REGION- BUILDING STRATEGIES IN EUROPE'S EASTERN NEIGHBORHOOD

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Abstract

The Black Sea has lost none of its geopolitical significance over time. Historically, the Black Sea has played an important economic and political role in a wider-region. The realignment of geopolitical and security strategies in Eurasia during the last two decades have led to the “re-discovery” of one of the world’s most significant geostrategic playing fields. Securing access to new energy deposits from the Caspian has heightened the strategic significance of the Wider Black Sea (WBS) in Western external policy thinking. Unfortunately, since the early 1990s, the region has been bogged down in a belt of protracted conflicts that could potentially threaten both European stability and energy supply, while trans-national crime and other asymmetric security threats are thriving.

The EU has begun to project itself as a regional power in the WBS since the launch of the *Black Sea Synergy* in 2007. The European tools for implementing regional policy, the European Neighborhood Policy, and, since 2009, the Eastern Partnership have soon exposed their limitations, and the ineffectiveness of EU’s security strategy in the region. The growing regional influence of Turkey and Russia put further pressure on European strategy displaying its weaknesses, and leading to “competing regionalisms” in the WBS. In that context, the case for rethinking EU’s strategy for constructive, coordinated security engagement in the WBS became stronger than ever.

In this paper we elaborated on the need to develop an European strategic approach for constructive and coordinated security engagement in the WBS against the background of the regional strategies of the “old powers re-emerging”: Russia and Turkey, as well as on the potential for power sharing in the EU-Turkey-Russia triangle.

We concluded that in order to fill in the power gap left by the shift of the US pivot to Asia, **the EU needs to become a regional player in the WBS willing and capable to engage on an equal footing with Turkey and Russia.** To that end, Europe should significantly raise its regional political and strategic profile, and might need to negotiate the scope and modalities for undertaking such a role with the “old powers re-emerging”.

A European security strategy for the WBS should be built upon a pragmatic *cooperative security* approach which has become vital to the integrity, peace and security of the area. Moreover, it should underlie efforts to fully integrate the WBS into the globalization process, and open it up to free trade, the knowledge revolution and democratic development. Strategic requirements for the EU might include:

- being realistic about Russia and looking forwards, not backwards;
- nurturing a stronger relationship with Turkey in sustaining initiatives in the Eastern Neighborhood;

- tackling the evolving challenges¹ in Eurasia in strategic coordination with Turkey and Russia;
- playing a leading role in searching viable solutions to the protracted conflicts;
- revitalizing its involvement in strengthening regionalism in the WBS.

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¹ 1) A growing ideological gap between Russia and the West; 2) The chronic persistence of the protracted conflicts; 3) The dilemma of the post-Soviet states: European vs. Eurasian integration

1. The current outlook and the changing dynamics of the Wider Black Sea security.

The Black Sea is located between Europe to the West, the former-Soviet Union territories and Asia Minor to the North and South respectively, and the Caucasus to the East. Referred to as Pontus Euxinus in antiquity, the Black Sea has played an important economic and political role in the wider-region within which it is located for millennia. Its geopolitical importance has survived the ages, losing none of its significance during our present time. According to some opinions it is still, just as in the Nineteenth Century, the door to the heartland of Eurasia, the domination of which has eternally played a role in the struggle for global hegemony.

Developments over the last decades have dramatically reshaped the strategic landscape of the Wider Black Sea (WBS) area against the older regional historical patterns. These include not only the end of the Cold War, in which the WBS region was at the forefront, but also the processes of globalization and European integration, which are collectively driving the region into a wave of major economic, political, and strategic changes. Furthermore, the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO and the European Union (EU) have also had a major impact on the regional power structure.

Experts have noted the rise of the region's "old powers", Russia and Turkey, while arguing that prominent "external actors", namely the United States and the EU, are seeing their roles increasingly reduced to mere monitors of the situation, in spite of investing limited resources in support of their regional interests. While it can be argued that Russia and Turkey have for centuries served as the "gatekeepers" of power-politics in the WBS, their newfound zest for asserting their power in the region and beyond – particularly in the last decade or so – has resulted in medium-sized littoral countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine, having to re-consider their options in the new geopolitical environment. These trends go further down the power-chain, with smaller local regional actors including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, which are all directly involved in the "frozen conflicts", re-balancing their policies against those of the key regional actors, with a view to placing themselves in tune with any potential wave of geopolitical change in the highly fluid and dynamic regional environment.

Regionalism in the Wider Black Sea (WBS) has been hampered by the lack of consensus over its geographical definition, as well as by political, security, economic, and cultural differences among regional states, which undermined the development of a regional identity. The lack of regional strategic leadership was also obvious and it has been related to a large extent to the current shifts in the global and regional patterns of power.

In addition, just like other parts of Eurasia², the WBS is facing the spectrum of a renewed East-West geopolitical competition underpinned by three evolving challenges³: 1) a growing ideological gap between Russia and the West; 2) the chronic persistence of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and in Moldova- Transnistria; 3) the dilemma of the post-Soviet states: European vs. Eurasian integration. Moreover, the neighbouring Middle East is simmering. Basically, all regional actors have the potential to spark or to be dragged into a new war in the Middle East whose spill over effects may swiftly encroach the WBS.

In a region where – due to its strategic significance – a comprehensive regional dialogue and cooperation between all local and external actor-stakeholders is now arguably more necessary than ever, tacit (and occasionally belligerent) *powerpolitik* appears to be winning the order of the day.

The WBS region is at a turning point: is it to remain a closed Nineteenth Century type of regional space dominated by the two "old powers re-emerging" which would make and enforce arbitrary political and security arrangements? Or will it move into the Twenty First Century by opening itself up to free trade, the knowledge revolution and democratic development? Against this complex and deeply worrying regional background, could the EU, Turkey and Russia share rather than compete for power in the WBS? How would such an EU-Turkey-Russia power sharing likely impact on the evolving challenges in Eurasia?

² Without any prejudice against the geopolitical vision which might be enshrined within building the Eurasian Economic Union, Eurasia is referred hereafter as the territory of the former Soviet Union, bar the Baltic states.

³ G. Niculescu- "The Evolving Challenges in Eurasia", published on 05/03/2013, on <http://www.cseea.ro/publicatii/view/brief-analysis/the-evolving-challenges-in-eurasia>.

2. An overview of Western involvement in strengthening regionalism in the WBS.

The EU is a relative newcomer in joining a range of external, as well as local actors seeking to project themselves as regional powers in the WBS area. In April 2007, the European Commission produced its first substantive policy document relating to engagement with the Black Sea on a regional basis, the so called “*Black Sea Synergy: A New Regional Initiative*”.⁴ Although this document was not the first EU paper making reference to the Black Sea region in policy terms, given the fact that its promulgation was almost immediately preceded by the entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the EU (on January 1, 2007), it was immediately identified by experts as the announcement of the Union’s new Black Sea policy.⁵

By the time the Black Sea Synergy (BSS) initiative was promulgated in 2007, Brussels already had a wide range of existing institutional instruments at its disposal relating to countries in the WBS regional vicinity, including the EU-Turkey accession talks, the Partnership for Modernization with the Russian Federation, and the so-called (Eastern) European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), later turned into the Eastern Partnership, applied to Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The BSS would essentially draw from this previous body of documents in order to further project EU policy into the region.

The BSS should be seen as Brussels’ effort at spreading *Europeanisation* – European rule of law and governance culture – into the newest territories which have come under the scope of the Union’s Eastern neighborhood. Energy, particularly with reference to the EU’s obsession with diversification and supply security, has acted as a key driver for Brussels’ increasing engagement with the WBS, while the steady process of *Europeanisation* in the context of the Union’s eastward expansion has provided both an instrumental and legal basis for realizing objectives related to security of supply.

In May 2011, the European Commission released a revised ENP in the shape of a Joint Communication of the Commission and the High Representative (HR) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood” (COM(2011)303). This revised ENP aimed *inter alia* at intensifying political and security cooperation with partners entailing: enhanced involvement in solving the protracted conflicts; making common use of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and other EU instruments; promoting joint action in international forums on key security issues. However, the EU strides at enhancing its involvement in solving the protracted conflicts had been highly disappointing so far, mainly since they didn't support a more

⁴ Commission of the European Communities, “Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative”, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels, 11.04.2007 COM (2007) 160 Final

⁵ Michael Emerson, “The EU’s New Black Sea Policy”, in Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott (eds); *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives*; Centre for Transatlantic Relations, Washington DC, 2008, p.254.

pro-active role of the EU in this area. With the exception of the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, where in fact the French presidency of the EU at the time actually played the key role, the EU role was mainly passive, or, at best, in a supportive, rather than a leading role.

Now that some six years have passed since the European Commission published the BSS Communication heralding Brussels' contribution towards a Black Sea strategy, the scope for projection of EU policy into the region remains in flux. The BSS has helped clarify the fact that the EU has "put its hand on the table" and declared the intention to participate as an actor in one of wider Europe's most important spaces of geopolitical and geo-economic competition. However, the projection of the process of *Europeanisation* in the WBS is at risk of getting bogged down in the hard-nosed geopolitical realities which have dominated the history of the Black Sea for centuries. Worse still, from Brussels' perspective, "EU policy in the region is under threat from being swept aside altogether by fast-moving events taking place on the ground in the region, which have become yet more pronounced since the EU's adoption of BSS".⁶ The EU has increasingly found itself in a position of having to react to events rather than showing leadership in the WBS. In this context, the European Commission's BSS Communication of April 2007 currently appears to be little more than just an afterthought.

NATO's and US's articulation of strategy towards the WBS emerged after the September 11th (2001) terrorist attacks on New York which highlighted that the greatest threats to Euro-Atlantic security were likely to emanate from the Greater Middle East. This threat perception pushed the WBS area into a more central role within the Trans-Atlantic strategic thinking. While it cannot be said that NATO has developed any specific Black Sea policy, the geopolitical debate about the Black Sea has resulted in NATO taking a more nuanced outlook at the region. "Since the Istanbul Summit in 2004, the Alliance has repeatedly recognized the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic security and it has pursued a rather vague mandate in order to contribute to regional cooperation. However, NATO has been playing a self-restraining role in the WBS region focusing on soft security cooperation, as well as on bilateral dialogue and practical cooperation with individual regional countries."⁷

The question remains, however, as to how intellectual forces shaping the policies of European and Euro-Atlantic institutions can forge greater consensus in the compilation of a strategy for constructive, coordinated engagement in the WBS.

⁶ M. Terterov, G. Niculescu- "The Evolution Of European And Euro-Atlantic Policy Making In The Wider Black Sea: EU and NATO Attempts at Strengthening Regionalism in an Area of Strategic Interest", 2012, retrieved from: http://gpf-europe.com/upload/iblock/c03/black_sea_paper_mt_gn_june_8_2012.pdf.

⁷ Ibidem.

3. Russia and the Prospects of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

Russia is proving itself as an increasingly assertive political and economic force in the WBS. Exerting influence in the region is a crucial element in Russia's geopolitical strategy, given the region's importance as an energy producer, and its vitality as a primary corridor for the transit of oil and gas to international markets. Seeking to control the region's energy supply routes and opening up its domestic markets to commercial opportunities for major Russian corporations are Moscow's overarching objectives in the WBS. In addition, mostly for geopolitical and national security reasons, Russia is highly sensitive to any efforts by the regional states (particularly those among the former-Soviet Republics) to develop concerted political ties with Western partners (particularly with reference to the military expansion of the NATO alliance) and remains vigilant towards harder security threats emanating from the region to the Russian North Caucasus, particularly those relating to separatism and Islamic extremism.

Russia considers much of the WBS to be part of its sphere of "privileged interest," and growing Russian assertiveness is reflected by a number of operational instruments which Moscow has been deploying as part of its geopolitical strategy in the region, including the following:

- Inserting itself into the domestic political affairs of its (often much smaller) neighbors among the former Soviet Republics in order to achieve political gain (or in certain cases, regime change).
- Simultaneously acting as crisis mediator/peacekeeper and fostering regional tension to provoke further crisis.
- Behaving as the regional "strong man" in the name of protecting Russian minorities.
- Strengthening energy ties with other former-Soviet Republics.
- Bilateral commercial deals with select Western corporate partners and governments.⁸

While Moscow's approach to regional geopolitics remains purposefully unpredictable and invariably continues to take its international partners by surprise, Russia will continue to allocate a larger amount of resources to ensuring that its stake on the region's geopolitical chessboard is respected by all regional actors. "Indeed, it appears increasingly evident that Russia will seek to consolidate, if not expand, its geopolitical presence in the BCS [n.a. Black and Caspian Sea] in the years to come".⁹ This mechanism appears to be the most effective tool that Russia has for dealing with the West, particularly given the fact that Moscow feels that the West has been slowly encroaching on its spheres of influence in the region through the various Euro-Atlantic initiatives. This perception has caused Moscow to become increasingly bellicose toward the West and the regional regimes (i.e. Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine) that do not adhere to the

⁸ M. Terterov, J. Van Pool, S. Nagorny - "Russian Geopolitical Power in the Black and Caspian Seas Region: Implications for Turkey and the World", in *Insight Turkey*, vol.12, No.3, 2010.

⁹ David R. Sands, "Kiev sees payoff for Russian naval deal," *The Washington Times*, April 26, 2010.

Kremlin's geopolitical worldview. Despite more Moscow-friendly regimes currently in power in Kiev and Tbilisi, Russia's foreign policy towards its ex-Soviet neighbors will most certainly remain interventionist, a stance which is only likely to reinforce the current levels of instability in the WBS. However, since Russia is no longer the military power it was in the Soviet times, its regional strategy also appears to include efforts aimed at expanding its regional business ties and ensuring the security of the energy supply routes running through the WBS.

In a defensive reaction to Moscow's growingly assertive and interventionist policies in its "near abroad", a Western myth of the Eurasian Economic Union as a means to "*re-Sovietize*" Eastern Europe and Central Asia has started to emerge. For example, in December 2012, in the margins of the OSCE ministerial meeting in Dublin, the US state secretary at the time, Ms. Hillary Clinton, warned against "a new effort by oppressive governments to "*re-Sovietize*" much of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It's not going to be called that. It's going to be called customs union, it will be called Eurasian Union. [...] But let's make no mistake about it. We know what the goal is and we are trying to figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it."¹⁰

The origins of the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) go back to January 1995, when Russia signed a treaty on the formation of a customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan (Kyrgyzstan also joined that treaty in 1996, followed by Tajikistan in 1997). A decision to this effect was taken at the Minsk summit of June 2006. In October 2007, the leaders of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed a second treaty setting up the customs union. The three countries established a Customs Union Commission as a permanently functioning regulatory body, and continued negotiating and signing agreements necessary for the functioning of the ECU.

Furthermore, the three member states were keen to place the ECU within a wider framework for advanced economic integration – a single economic space, followed by an economic union. The former envisaged a common market of goods, capital and labor, and the operation of common macroeconomic, competition, financial and other regulation, including harmonization of policies such as on energy and transport. By mid 2012, the Eurasian Economic Commission has been established as the common coordinating institution of the Eurasian integration process, while the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) could be launched on 1 January 2015.

The myth of "*re-Sovietizing*" large parts of the former Soviet Union has not been supported by the realities of the ECU so far. The current membership of the ECU is limited to Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, while the Kyrgyz Republic has also announced recently its intention to join. However, many leaders of other post-Soviet

¹⁰ Bradley Klapper, "Clinton Fears Efforts to 'Re-Sovietize' in Europe" from http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_CLINTON_EUROPE?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2012-12-06-08-14-08

republics have been mostly reserved, if not hostile to joining the ECU. In contrast to the situation in the EU, the current decision making process in the ECU is inter-governmental rather than supra-national, as it had been the case in the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, establishing an Eurasian Parliament (the potential counterpart of the Supreme Soviet in the former USSR) was not on the agenda of the ECU even though there would be many parliamentarians in the member countries who struggled towards this end. A sort of inter-parliamentary dimension of the Eurasian Economic Union (possibly including also members of the parliaments of Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic) would be rather more likely to emerge. Finally, but not least important from the perspective of the potential effectiveness of the EEU in generating economic growth, a recent study by the Centre for European Policy Studies assessing the Eurasian integration process against the benchmark of the early stages of the European integration pointed to "a rather uncertain future for the economic integration within the context of the EEU."¹¹

However, the EEU project might evolve in the future in a way that might be challenging the European Union as a "normative power" in its "shared neighborhood" with Russia. A paper published by the Chatham House stated that: "A corollary of Russia's aspirations to return to a 'great power' status is its claim to hegemony in the 'near abroad'. Much doubt has been cast on its status as a rising power. To dispel these doubts, Russia has shifted its focus to a legal, rule-based domain of integration. [...] While both the EU and Russia endeavor to influence this space, 'what for Brussels is just one of its "neighborhoods" is for Russia the crucial test case which will either prove or dismiss the credibility of its Great Power ambitions'."¹²

For the time being, it seems that Moscow would be keen to start talking to the EU about establishing a Common Economic Space (CES) stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok. However, according to sources from the European Commission, establishing such a CES would be hardly feasible since Russian trade policy would be inconsistent with the free trade norms of the WTO. In addition, there would be a blatant incompatibility between the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreements, currently negotiated by the EU with a number of post-Soviet states, and the commitments that should be made by a member of the ECU. This incompatibility would place third parties, such as Ukraine, in the uncomfortable position of having to choose between joining the ECU and setting up free trade with the EU.

Another emerging obstacle to starting EU-ECU negotiations on a CES would stem from EU's policy to conclude bilateral agreements with individual states, as third parties,

¹¹ Steven Blockmans, Hrant Kostanyan and Yevgen Vorobiov, -"Towards an Eurasian Economic Union-The Challenge of Integration and Unity", No 75/December 2012, from www.ceps.eu.

¹² Rilka Dragneva, Katarzyna Wolczuk - "Russia, The Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry?" from http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0812bp_dragnevawolczuk.pdf

which would be conflicting with Russia's claim that the EU should negotiate any free trade arrangements with the ECU (implicitly with Belarus and Kazakhstan) rather than with individual members. While focusing both Russia and the West on competition rather than on cooperation, the current Russian-European disagreements on the CES will rather create favorable conditions for turning the myth of "*re-Sovietizing*" Eastern Europe and Central Asia into reality.

Russian tough stance against the West and the post-Soviet states willing to develop broader ties with the Western institutions is counter-productive, and it will negatively impact on the Eurasian regional integration process. To avoid turning Ms. Clinton's warning about "*re-Sovietizing*" Eastern Europe and Central Asia into an "Obama doctrine" for *neo-containment of the Russian-led Eurasian integration*, Moscow should fundamentally review its foreign and security policies by adopting a cooperative attitude towards the West. Russia doesn't have the economic, financial and even the human resources needed to impose itself as a regional power in any part of Eurasia through blunt military power. Economic integration under the threat/umbrella of tanks', fighters' or battleships' fire will hardly work. The more Moscow would delay this review, the likelier is both to scare off potential future members of its Eurasian Economic Union, and to have the West developing and implementing strategies for countering the Russian-led economic integration process.

4. Turkey: A Rising Regional Power.

Turkey's rise as a regional actor has by-and-large come about as a result of the geopolitical restructuring at, and immediately after, the end of the Cold War. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Turkey reshaped its foreign policy from being "the tail end of Europe" into "the center of its own newly emerging world." Former Turkish president Turgut Özal attempted to transform Turkey from being simply a base for the Western alliance into a regional power. "Under Özal, Turkish foreign policy increasingly concentrated on regions such as Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Middle East. Özalist Turkey attempted to be the political and economic center or the "regional hegemonic power" of these regions. It shifted its strategic priorities and began to focus on regional issues rather than "bandwagoning" in global power games."¹³ Today, this development doesn't look as overly surprising, given that Turkey is a large country, with one of the most dynamic global economies, and one of the world's largest military forces. Having foreign policy ambitions is just natural for such state actors.

The intense debate about Turkey's economic interests and the frustration linked to the slowing EU accession process in recent years generated a serious nationalistic backlash in the country, which, in turn, further strengthened the co-existence of both the European and Eurasian dimensions of Turkish foreign policy. "This new trend indicated a breaking away from the old Kemalist notion of Turkey as a country surrounded by enemies and strategically located in the West. Instead, it emphasizes cooperation between Ankara and its neighbors in order to provide stability in the region".¹⁴

In the views of many experts, Turkey is emerging as a regional power. It has not yet become one for a host of reasons, including limited institutions for managing regional affairs, a political base that is not yet prepared to view Turkey as a major power or support regional interventions, and a region that is not yet prepared to view Turkey as a beneficial, stabilizing force. "At present, Turkish strategy finds itself in a transitional stage. It is no longer locked into its Cold War posture as simply part of an alliance system, nor has it built the foundation of a mature regional policy. That being said, geopolitical factors such as instability to its south, the rise of an Iranian sphere of influence, the deepening of Russian influence in the Caucasus, and the likelihood that at some point the United States might change its Middle East policy again and try to draw Turkey into its coalition, all allude to the view that there is no particular light yet visible at the end of the transitional tunnel."¹⁵

¹³ Muhittin Ataman, "Leadership Change: Ozal Leadership and Restructuring in Turkish Foreign Policy", in *Alternatives*, Vol.1, No.1, 2002.

¹⁴ Valeria Giannota, "Turkish Foreign Policy Evolution and Goals Under the AKP Government", January 2012, from <http://www.balkananalysis.com/turkey/2012/01/19/turkish-foreign-policy-evolution-and-goals-under-the-akpgovernment/>.

¹⁵ George Friedman, "Turkey's Strategy", Stratfor, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/turkeys-strategy>.

During his second mandate (2007-2011), the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan began using a new approach to foreign policy called "strategic depth".¹⁶ This approach centers on the notion that Turkey sits between two "geo-cultural basins" comprised of an Islamic Middle East and a secular-progressive West. By playing to both factions, "Erdogan intends to make Turkey the preeminent actor in the crossroads between the two camps, extending its influence into the WBS as *the* regional power".¹⁷ Moreover, according to the current Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, the architect of the "strategic depth" theory, Ankara's foreign policy may draw on several strengths: holistic understanding of historical trends and a sense of active agency, its progress in establishing a stable and peaceful domestic order, and its reintegration with neighbors by means of the "zero problems" concept¹⁸.

The *rapprochement* between Turkey and Russia in the first decade of the 2000s was rather a result of several developments including: "the predictability of political leaderships in both Russia and Turkey, Turkey's process of Europeanization and its emergence as a global actor, Russia's increasing self confidence in regional and global politics, as well as the instability in the Middle East and Central Asia."¹⁹ Ankara and Moscow have developed a significant level of cooperation in the Black Sea region in particular on naval security, trade, economic cooperation and energy projects. For example, Turkey's economic relations with Russia peaked in the 2000s "with Moscow becoming the main trade partner of Ankara, while Turkey became the fifth largest trade partner of Russia."²⁰ Tourism has become one of the driving forces in Turkey's economic cooperation with Russia. "The fact that millions of Russian tourists spend their holidays in Turkey, mostly around Antalya, and the growing number of Russian-Turkish marriages demonstrate that in addition to economic ties, socio-cultural ties were also developing due to the growing economic relations".²¹ Moreover, Turkey's energy cooperation with Russia intensified after the inauguration of the Blue Stream natural gas pipeline project, linking Turkey with Russian Black Sea coasts through a natural gas pipeline, thereby increasing significantly Turkey's dependence on Russian natural gas supply.

However, the mutual trust that characterized until recently the relationship between the two former empires shouldn't be deemed as the end of the mutual suspicions on both sides, but rather as a more practical approach which the two powers have taken due to

¹⁶ Ibrahim Kalin, "Strategic Depth at work," *Today's Zaman*, August 13, 2009.

¹⁷ Zeyno Baran and Ian O. Lesser, "Turkey's Identity and Strategy: A Game of Three Dimensional Chess", (December 2008), retrieved from http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/Turkey_BaranLesserBagci.pdf.

¹⁸ Ahmet Davutoglu, "Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring", in Turkish Policy Briefs Series, March 2012.

¹⁹ O. Tanrisever- "Turkey and Russia in the Black Sea Region: Dynamics in Cooperation and Conflict", EDAM Black Sea Discussion Papers Series No. 2012/1.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ See Sergey Markedonov and Natalya Ulchenko, "Turkey and Russia: An Evolving Relationship", 19 August 2011,

the actual geopolitical requirements. For example, regional stability hinges on avoiding a new armed outburst of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia is heavily reliant on Russian aid and can be influenced by Moscow. The same can be stated, albeit to a lesser degree, of Turkey's relationship with Azerbaijan. Commitment from both Turkey and Russia, as well as active cooperation between them, will be required to manage that conflict in a peaceful manner. On the other hand, if Russia again invades or destabilizes Georgia to the point where Tbilisi pulls out of EU-endorsed southern energy corridor projects, Turkey may be compelled to reopen its border with Armenia, which could lead to a backlash in relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan. This situation is a direct threat to Turkey's unique ability to break the Russian dominance on energy supplies to Europe, and could raise tensions between Russia and Turkey.

Russia has realized that Turkey aims to be a regional player in the WBS and that, in the long run, Ankara will not accept anything less than an equal partnership with Moscow. Therefore, diplomatic overtures from Ankara to Moscow, and vice-versa, are likely to remain inevitable into the medium term, which itself is a reflection of both the complex and competitive nature of geopolitics in the WBS. Ultimately, the current Moscow-Ankara relationship is one of convenience: the two nations must cooperate due to each other's vested interests in the entire region, which predominantly encompasses the Caspian and Eurasian energy supplies, and particularly their transportation to international markets. But, "this is not a marriage made in heaven" and the situation is far more fluid than static. Indeed, several factors emerging out of the regional geopolitical jigsaw puzzles both in the WBS and in the neighboring Middle East could have a dampening effect on the present level of cordiality between Turkey and Russia, causing either or both parties to alter the course of their present engagement. Therefore, both Ankara and Moscow might eventually come to the conclusion that the EU, if it succeeds to become a major regional player in the WBS, may actually help them guarantee a peaceful and balanced relationship against the other.

Turkey's relations with the West have been marred by significant tensions since 2003 when the Turkish Parliament rejected the access to Turkish territory of the US troops during the war in Iraq, and were further poisoned in 2004 by the accession of Cyprus to the EU. Moreover, in the aftermath of Romanian and Bulgarian accession to NATO (both of them Black Sea Littoral states), the access of allied naval forces to the Black Sea and the role of non-Littoral states in regional cooperation have been subjects for contention between the US and Turkey. These developments have brought with them new clichés to describe Turkey's active foreign policy in the region as neo-Ottomanism.

However, while the West cannot prevent Turkey from playing a more prominent regional role, Ankara should also admit that the political stability and economic growth fuelling the last decade of Turkish prosperity were underpinned by the democratic and socio-economic reforms inspired by Turkey's EU candidate status, and by the security

blanket offered by its NATO membership. Turkey's strategic relations with the EU and with the US are essential to Ankara's aspirations for regional leadership. As E. Alessandri and J. Walker have put it: "Turkey's increasingly strong performance in recent years has led some to think that a resurgent Ankara could take on an ever-larger share of the responsibility for governance in the vast expanse of former-Ottoman lands it once ruled. This so-called "neo-Ottoman" dream, serving Turkey's rising regional ambitions while relieving Western countries at a time of economic weakness and shifting U.S. attention to the East, has been a re-occurring theme in Washington and other Western capitals. Turkey may have the greatest future potential as a regional player, but it needs the United States and the EU now more than ever. Simultaneously, the reverse is also true for its transatlantic partners."²²

At the end of the day, Turkey might only prove itself as a regional power in the WBS by undertaking a leadership role in opening up regional cooperation in the WBS to the neighboring economic integration processes, as well as by maintaining a balanced relationship with, and among, Russia, Europe and America.

²² Emiliano Alessandri and Joshua Walker, "The Missing Transatlantic Link: Trilateral Cooperation in the Post-Ottoman Space", May 2012, in GMF Analysis on Turkey.

5. Could the EU, Turkey and Russia Share Power in the WBS?

At present, the area from Vancouver to Vladivostok is on the brink of being hijacked by a new East-West geopolitical competition. Small, mostly symbolic, achievements such as setting up a NATO-Russia military to military telephone line, and the outcomes of practical cooperation with Russia might be either the germs of a new blueprint for cooperative security, or drops of cooperation in a sea dominated by geopolitical competition in Eurasia.

The EU-Turkey-Russia power sharing in the WBS might open new cooperative opportunities to address the evolving challenges in Eurasia while creating appropriate conditions for revitalizing WBS regional cooperation. It would probably be the best geopolitical choice if regional *cooperative security* policies are to prevail over *powerpolitik* approaches to security in the WBS.

5.1. Bridging the Ideological Gap between Russia and the West

The aftermath of what most international observers deemed as flawed Russian parliamentary elections at the end of 2011 has deepened the gap between the West and Russia in sustaining the Euro-Atlantic values, in particular democracy, individual rights and freedoms. According to the "Freedom in the World 2013" report, recently published by the Freedom House, "Russia took a decided turn for the worse after Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency. Having already marginalized the formal political opposition, he pushed through a series of laws meant to squelch a burgeoning societal opposition"²³. Under his lead, Moscow would have imposed measures severing new penalties on unauthorised political demonstrations, it would have restricted the ability of NGO's to raise funds and conduct their work, and it would have placed new controls on the internet. For example, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) was forced out of Russia while the ability of foreign broadcasters to reach Russian audiences was seriously hampered. Moreover, in retaliation to the so called Magnitsky Act, passed by the US Congress, which imposed visa and asset restrictions on Russian human rights abusers, Moscow banned the adoption of Russian orphans by families from the United States.

Not only had Russia gone in the wrong direction in terms of sustaining the values of democracy and individual rights and freedoms, but it would have also projected a negative influence beyond its borders within the post-Soviet republics: "With Russia setting the tone, Eurasia (consisting of the countries of the former Soviet Union minus the Baltic states) now rivals the Middle East as one of the most repressive areas on the

²³ Freedom House- "Freedom in the World 2013: Democratic Breakthroughs in the Balance", Selected data from Freedom House's annual survey of political rights and civil liberties, from www.freedomhouse.org

globe. Indeed, Eurasia is in many respects the world's least free sub-region, given the entrenchment of autocrats in most of its 12 countries."²⁴

Russia and the West seem to be readying to embark on another ideological competition similar in many respects with that during the Cold War. The difference is that Moscow is now supporting a sort of a mixture of state-based nationalism and autocratic traditionalism to counter Western support for democracy and individual freedoms across Eurasia. Others bluntly call the current Russian dominant ideology as *anti-Americanism*.

Whatever its roots and motivations, "the clash between the Russian oligarchic model of economic and political control and a Western-style democratic system produces structural instability in the Eastern part of Europe, which may prove a strategic challenge for the EU and the transatlantic security system."²⁵ Although the author of this statement was specifically referring to Bulgaria, a similar judgment may be applicable to each and every post-Soviet state, as well as to Eurasia as a whole, given the common heritage of political culture within the former communist bloc.

In a certain way, Turkey is sharing a somewhat comparable situation with Russia regarding the compatibility of its (Islamic) values with the European democratic values. While the early 2000s provided hopes for the supporters of democracy, and individual rights and freedoms in Turkey, tightly linked to the strong drive towards *Europeanization*, recent years have seen a reversal of that trend. "Turkey has experienced marked deterioration on some central pillars supporting a balance of power, such as the media and the judiciary."²⁶ The Turkish commitment to democratic principles and to European integration has significantly declined among most of the political forces, as well as in the public opinion. Moreover, it has become increasingly clear that Turkish leaders do not consider themselves as Western, neither in terms of managing domestic affairs, nor on foreign policy matters. But the huge distinction between Moscow's and Ankara's attitudes against the West is that while Moscow pursues almost every time conflicting positions against the West, Ankara proved itself more pragmatic: in contrast to Russia, Turkey is "a power with which the West can work. [...] [although] whenever Turkey and the West do cooperate, it will be because their interests happen to align rather than as a result of shared values"²⁷.

Consequently, while separate EU-Turkey and Turkey-Russia power sharing built upon targeted cooperation opportunities may work, on a case by case basis, the EU-Turkey-Russia power sharing will never work as long as the EU and Russia remain at odds on

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ognyan Minchev, "Russia's Energy Monopoly Topples the Bulgarian Government" in Transatlantic Take, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 4 March 2013.

²⁶ Diba Nigar Goksel- "Turkey and the EU: What Next?", German Marshall Fund of the United States "On Turkey" series, December 2012.

²⁷ Svante Cornell, Gerald Knaus, Manfred Scheich- "Dealing with a Rising Power: Turkey's Transformation and Its Implications for the EU", Centre for European Studies, 2012.

ideological matters, specifically against sustaining democracy, and the individual rights and freedoms. Conversely, in case the political will to share power in the WBS in a EU-Turkey-Russia format would prevail, the growing ideological gap between Russia and the West might be gradually bridged by pragmatic ways to harmonize European and Russian political and human values. A comparative study of the Russian, and European (EU) models of governance, respectively, might facilitate identifying elements of convergence and ways to downscale the possible elements of divergence between the two governance models. Turkish experience in harmonizing European and Islamic identities in its own governance system might be an inspiring case study in that regard.

5.2. Trilateral Approaches to the Resolution of Protracted Conflicts

The unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus and in Transnistria undermine efforts to build up effective regional cooperation and generate regional instability, as well as asymmetric security risks. The existing crisis management mechanisms (the Geneva peace process, the Minsk Group, or the "5+2" talks) haven't yielded the expected outcomes, and this might have rather a lot to do with the lack of regional strategic leadership. To offer better coordinated strategic leadership of the existing crisis management mechanisms, international experts have been calling on Russia, the United States and Europe to re-energize conflict resolution in the Euro-Atlantic area by developing new means to strengthen diplomacy, and by supplementing traditional negotiations through contributions of the civil society, and efforts to build up public support for peaceful conflict resolution, under the umbrella of the OSCE.

For example, in the aftermath of the autumn 2012 parliamentary elections, the peaceful shift of government in Georgia might have actually emphasized the geopolitical competition between Russia and the West over the South Caucasus. Georgian prime-minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's overtures towards Russia, aimed at mending Russo-Georgian relations in the aftermath of the 2008 war, seem to be heralding the change of the whole balance of power in the South Caucasus. "As Georgia shifts toward Russia, the geopolitical balance of power in the Caucasus is undoubtedly changing. This process will become even more visible in the months to come. [...] Resolute action by the West will be necessary to salvage Georgia from sliding toward Moscow and hence avert further expansion of Russia's influence in the South Caucasus."²⁸

In the same vein, Russia and the West have found themselves in opposing camps against Ukraine's recent efforts, as chair in office of the OSCE, to move on the Transnistrian conflict resolution process. On the one hand, Ukraine, supported by the United States and the European Union, tried to gradually expand the scope of negotiations from the socio-economic aspects towards political and security issues. On the other hand, Russia pressured Tiraspol to claim socio-economic benefits in relations with the Republic of

²⁸ Vasili Rukhadze, "The Shift in Geopolitical Balance of Power in South Caucasus is Underway", in Eurasian Daily Monitor, volume 10, Issue 23, of 7 February 2013.

Moldova which would preclude the shift of negotiations on the political and security tracks. Moscow would have also requested the Transnistrian leader, Yevgeny Shevchuk, to reject the Ukrainian proposal supported by the West to meet the [former] Moldovan prime-minister Vlad Filat in Lvov, in parallel to the "5+2" meeting.²⁹ These might seem as minor tactical moves inherent in a multilateral political negotiation processes. However, they clearly reflect the lack of strategic coordination among Russia and the West in approaching the resolution of a protracted conflict, which has decisively contributed to the chronic lack of progress on conflict resolution in the Euro-Atlantic area.

Over the last decade, Turkish foreign policy crafted by the current foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu shifted towards engaging in all neighboring areas as a means for gaining recognition as simultaneously a European, Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea power. In fact, these multiple regional identities have driven Turkey towards a multifaceted foreign policy aiming "to promote good neighborly relations with all, to replace disagreement with cooperation, to seek innovative mechanisms and channels to resolve regional conflicts, to encourage positive regional change, and to build cross-cultural bridges of dialogue and understanding."³⁰ In the views of a growing number of experts, by pursuing a constructive peace building policy, Turkey might be actually claiming (and deserving) a bolder regional role in the resolution of the protracted conflicts. On the other hand, Turkey has only marginally involved itself in conflict resolution in the WBS so far, partially to protect its strategic partnership with Russia from potential contentious issues, partially because Turkish involvement was not welcome by all, or even bluntly rejected by some local, regional or international actors.

EU-Turkey-Russia power sharing in the shape of trilateral collaboration on the management and resolution of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and in Transnistria may help overcoming the chronic deadlock in which they have been muddling through since the end of the Cold War. Such trilateral approaches might: ensure a better regional strategic coordination of the existing crisis management mechanisms; strengthen the regional ownership of the peace processes, in particular through developing and implementing a joint post-conflict regional vision; counter the fears of some local actors of Russian-imposed solutions; allay Russian concerns with American "expansionism" in an area of vital strategic importance for its national security, while maintaining an indirect American influence via the US-EU and US-Turkish relations. However, the way towards EU-Turkey-Russia power sharing on dealing with the protracted conflicts in the WBS will not be an easy ride because of: Russian failure to adapt its conflict resolution policies to multilateral approaches;

²⁹ Vladimir Socor, "Russia Trips Up Ukraine's OSCE Chairmanship in Transnistria", in Eurasian Daily Monitor, volume, 10, issue 35, of 25 February 2013.

³⁰ Valeria Giannota, "Turkish Foreign Policy Evolution and Goals Under the AKP Government", January 2012, from <http://www.balkananalysis.com/turkey/2012/01/19/turkish-foreign-policy-evolution-and-goals-under-the-akpgovernment/>.

Turkish unsettled issues with some of the main parties to the protracted conflicts, most notably with Armenia; EU's institutional constraints regarding its involvement in conflict management and resolution in its neighborhoods, and its inability "to carry out a wider range of military tasks to protect its interests and project its values."³¹

5.3. Wider Black Sea Regional Cooperation: A Way Around the Integration Dilemma of the Post-Soviet States?

As we have more broadly described in a previous chapter, the steps taken by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan to create an Eurasian integration project have spurred suspicions in the West about an emerging geopolitical project aiming to re-build the Soviet Union (or the Tsarist Empire) into a new institutional outfit. In addition, there would be blatant incompatibility between the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreements, currently negotiated by the EU with a number of post-Soviet states, and the commitments that should be made by a member of the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU)- the current precursor of the EEU. This incompatibility is apparently facing post-Soviet states with a dilemma between setting up free trade with the EU and joining the ECU, while focusing both Russia and the West on competition rather than on cooperation.

Turkey has a unique position against European integration and trading with Russia: on the one hand, Ankara is locked in a customs union with the European Union, though it's prospects to become a full fledged member anytime soon are rather minimal. On the other hand, Turkey has developed over the last decade a vibrant economic and trade relationship with Russia. Bilateral trade relations have multiplied by seven since 2001, while Russia is currently Turkey's second largest trade partner after the EU. Ankara has had no better policy choice than being a core promoter of regional economic integration, and has struggled to make from the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) a most effective tool to achieve that goal.

In this context, the EU-Turkey-Russia power sharing on European and Eurasian integration might aim at harmonizing the European and the Eurasian normative systems for integration. The goal might be to have them eventually work jointly within a broader Common Economic Space enabling the establishment of free movement of goods, services, capitals and people from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Establishing relations between the EU or ECU institutions and individual members of the other organization, respectively, should be actually promoted as a way to adapt the EU-ECU relations to the actual needs of their members.

In effect, measures to harmonize the European and the Eurasian integration projects might revitalize regional economic cooperation in the WBS as well, which would be in the best interest of Turkey and the regional post-Soviet states facing the dilemma of

³¹ Daniel Keohane- "Strategic Priorities for EU Defence Policy", FRIDE Policy Brief, February 2013.

European vs. Eurasian integration. Eventually, the EU-Turkey-Russia power sharing might be opening opportunities for further regional integration in highly sensitive areas of the WBS which weren't covered fully yet by either European or Eurasian integration. For example, the vision for peace in the South Caucasus reinforced by comprehensive, integrated and sustainable cooperation, which would ultimately enable free movement of people, goods, services and capital at the regional level, lead to economic integration and the opening of all closed borders might be thriving in a new geopolitical context underpinned by EU-Turkey-Russia power sharing.

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6. Conclusions and recommendations for a revised European strategy for security engagement in the WBS.

In a region where – due to its strategic significance – a comprehensive regional dialogue and cooperation between all local and external actor-stakeholders is now arguably more necessary than ever, political debates now appear to be moving away from topics of regional cooperation and institutional regionalism, and we express concern as to whether it will be a case of *powerpolitik* or more broad based, *cooperative security* that will come to shape the destiny of the region, looking ahead.

Geopolitical analysis is telling us that things are quickly moving in the wrong direction. Unless the emerging challenges in Eurasia, that is the growing ideological gap between Russia and the West; the resolution of the protracted conflicts; and the dilemma of post-Soviet states between European and Eurasian economic integration, are effectively addressed by Russia, the EU, and Turkey within a comprehensive political, economic and strategic dialogue potentially leading to common approaches and pragmatic cooperation, it might be just a matter of time until most of the dividends of *cooperative security* gained over the last 20+ years would have been wasted.

The “rise” of Turkey and Russia in the WBS region is increasingly a consequence of shifting strategic interests of the United States, as well as of EU's turn towards itself, matched with lower appetite to deal with external issues which might currently look like less pressing than the evolving Arab uprisings. The “old powers re-emerging” will continue to shape the regional order in the WBS, in ways that might sometimes recall the old patterns of the Nineteenth century, as long as the West will remain complacent with its current role of mere monitor of the regional situation. Eventually, this trend might be inevitably leading towards growing regional instability and insecurity in the European Eastern neighborhood, given the Russian attraction for interventionism, and Turkey's vital need to keep the energy flows from the Caspian Sea to Europe open. In addition, the outcomes of conflicting Russian and Turkish policies in the Middle East might also spill over in the WBS.

The Black Sea Synergy raised the level of EU engagement in the WBS, but it also highlighted its limitations. For example, while the EU has increasingly been seeking to project *Europeanisation* into the WBS, the degree to which the European political and economic norms have established themselves in the region is questionable. Needless to say that, in case the current course is maintained, the prospects for the future are even gloomier.

Therefore, the case for rethinking EU's constructive and coordinated security engagement in the WBS became stronger than ever. To fill in the power gap left by the shift of the US pivot to Asia, **the EU needs to become a regional player in the WBS willing and capable to engage on an equal footing with Turkey and Russia.** To that

end, Europe should significantly raise its regional political and strategic profile, and it might need to negotiate the scope and modalities for undertaking such a role with the "old powers re-emerging". Effective dialogue and policy coordination, and, where possible, practical cooperation with the United States and NATO are welcome. However, much will depend on developments inside the Union itself, within the *Eurozone*, as well as upon the attitudes of key EU member states, namely France and Germany.

How could the EU succeed in compiling a strategy for security engagement in the WBS?

In terms of security policy, lessons learned over the recent years would suggest that a multilateral strategy for the WBS should be built upon a pragmatic *cooperative security* approach which has become vital to the integrity, peace and security of the area. Moreover, such an approach should underlie efforts to fully integrate the WBS into the globalization process, and open it up to free trade, the knowledge revolution and democratic development.

6.1. The EU needs to be realistic about Russia and look forwards, not backwards

The EU might have to understand that being challenged by Russia as "the normative power" in the Eastern Neighborhood is not necessarily bad news for Europe's future. The fact that Russia inspired itself, and tries to replicate the European institutions in line with the actual needs of, and consistent with the different political culture existing in, the republics from the post-Soviet space should be actually hailed by the Europeans as a sort of external validation of the European model for economic integration, which, in the context of the Euro crisis, is being questioned by many in Europe itself. The Russian proposal for building a Common Economic Space with the EU should be treated like a cooperative hand extended to Europe in finding the compromises required by the harmonization of the European and the Eurasian normative systems.

6.2. The EU needs to nurture Turkey's cooperation for sustaining its initiatives in the Eastern Neighborhood

In spite of the well known disagreements on issues such as the speed of Turkey's European integration, and the status of Northern Cyprus, the EU and Turkey share common interests and interdependencies which could sustain closer cooperation in the shared neighborhoods. Relevant examples include a common interest to enable free movement of people, goods, services and capital, ultimately leading to economic integration and the opening of all closed borders, and the interdependence stemming from the common vulnerability against the dependence on Russian energy supply, respectively. Positions on how to deal with the geopolitical challenges in the Middle East, and the potential spillover effects on the WBS are also much closer than ever. A friendly European hand extended to Turkey on issues related to such common interests and interdependencies might eventually result in opening up more widely the WBS regional processes towards European integration.

6.3. The EU needs to tackle the evolving challenges in Eurasia in strategic coordination with Turkey and Russia

Triangular arrangements supporting the implementation of EU-Turkey-Russia power sharing should aim at targeting three main baskets: harmonizing values and related governance models; finding ways and means for effective conflict resolution; and maintaining the compatibility of the economic integration models and processes. They may have an institutional outfit or not. If they had an institutional framework, then they should also have mechanisms for consultation and potential engagement of relevant international actors, including NATO, OSCE, the US, CSTO and the Council of Europe, so that they will not evolve into an exclusive *trilateral condominium*. If the choice was made for "on call" frameworks of dialogue and decision making at various levels (summits, ministerial or political directors meetings), then a Charter stipulating the key goals, objectives, principles and working methods should be agreed.

6.4. The EU needs to play a leading role in searching viable solutions to the protracted conflicts.

On the one hand, the relevant knowledge of EU institutions about the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and in Transnistria should be enhanced, and a more creative thinking on the use of available instruments should be developed. On the other hand, the new European External Action Service should be more involved in building up common positions of EU member states *vis a vis* the resolution of protracted conflicts. One may hardly talk of a genuine CFSP in the absence of a more assertive role of the EU in solving protracted conflicts in its neighbourhood. Cooperation with other interested actors, such as the US, Russia, and Turkey is critical. The EU can tackle these conflicts more effectively, both in the post-conflict, and in the peace building phases.

6.5. The EU needs to revitalize its involvement in strengthening regionalism in the WBS.

The Eastern Partnership was supposed to advance regional cooperation but, so far, it did little, if anything, to do so. This approach should change in the near future if the EU is to capitalize on the benefits of regional cooperation through increasing the synergies of its own policies with regional initiatives. A reshaping of existing EU policy instruments, in particular the Eastern Partnership, the EU-Turkey accession talks, and the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernization, with greater concerted emphasis on Black Sea regionalism will be critical. Further, the EU may consider a more active dialogue with regional stakeholders, including an upgrading of current levels of policy harmonization and coordination of their actions in the WBS with relevant regional international organizations. This could apply *inter alia* to relations with the BSEC and the PfP Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes.

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About EGF

The European Geopolitical Forum (EGF) was established in Brussels, Belgium, in early 2010 by several independently minded practitioners of European geopolitics, who saw a certain vacuum in the information flow leading into the European geopolitical discussion. EGF is dedicated, therefore, towards the promotion of an objective pan-European geopolitical debate incorporating the views of wider-European opinion shapers rather than simply those from the mainstream European Union (EU) member states. EGF seeks to elaborate upon European decision makers' and other relevant stakeholders' appreciation of European geopolitics by encouraging and effectively expanding the information flow from east to west, from south to north.

In order to achieve these objectives, the European Geopolitical Forum was established as an independent internet-based resource, a web-portal which aims to serve as a knowledge hub on pan-European geopolitics. EGF's strength is in its unique ability to gather a wide range of Affiliated Experts, the majority of whom originate from the countries in the EU's external neighborhood, to examine and debate core issues in the wider-European geopolitical context. Exchange of positions and interactivity between east and west, south and north, is at the heart of the EGF project. For more information about EGF, our Affiliated Experts and to view our numerous publications, please visit www.gpf-europe.com.

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³² EGF Information Partner