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The Black Sea has been on the global agenda since the end of the Cold War; and Turkey has appeared as a rising regional power in the region. Turkey's policies in the Black Sea have aimed at the creation of region-wide multilateral cooperation schemes. Starting with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, it initiated several institutions with varying degrees of success. In addition to creating a stable environment, conducive to increased cooperation and enhanced trade relationships, sustaining maritime security through an elaborate balance of power in the region has been important for Turkey. While it supported closer relations with and further integration into the European Union, Turkey does not wish to see competitive projects aimed at the region evolving into a cause for instability.

Introduction

When the Cold War gradually ended in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Turkey found itself searching for alternatives in its international relations as well as new markets for its expanding economy. During the Cold War, Turkey was considered, by its allies, as an outpost on the European periphery. Its place within NATO's southern flank was deemed valuable from a geostrategic perspective and its large land-based military, the second largest in NATO, was seen as a barrier to Soviet ambitions in the Middle East as well as a constant thorn in the Soviet Union's soft underbelly. As such, Turkey was a contributor to the security of Europe. By the end of the Cold War, however, these evaluations started changing and more measured analyses regarding Turkey's 'value' to the Western alliance were heard.

While Europe was moving away from conflicts, mostly insulated from the former Soviet threat with the emergence of a buffer zone and Russian assurances that it no longer represented a threat to Europe, Turkey suddenly found itself with new zones of conflict on its three sides. Several conflicts took place within Turkey's vicinity, leading to discussion whether they would spill over to Turkey.[1]

While these discussions presented Turkey as a country dangerously close to some of the more conflict-prone regions of the post-Cold War era, the relevance of NATO, the anchor of Turkey's Western vocation, became a subject of discussion in the West. Turkey's European connection was also fundamentally disturbed by the rejection of

the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1989 of Turkey's membership application of 1987.[2] Under the circumstances, Turkey, feeling threatened from every side and left alone by its long-standing partners, started to look for alternative policy formulations.

On the economic front, too, Turkey desperately needed alternative markets. Its economy was liberalized during the 1980s and by now was dependent, more than ever, on sustainable export markets. When Turkey moved away from a centrally controlled economy and state protectionism by opening up its economy to market forces, it relied on the growing success of its exporters mainly to Middle Eastern and North African markets. By the early 1990s, however, the cessation of the Iran–Iraq war, the decrease in oil prices, hence revenues for the regional producers, and increased competition in the new environment forced Turkey to look for new markets. In addition, in the 1980s, the former Soviet Union was successfully developed into a supplementary market for Turkish exporters. At the same time, the Libyan market, a lucrative outlet for Turkish construction companies that emerged as regional competitors since the late 1970s, was also drying up under the erratic polices of Muammar Gaddafi. Thus, these companies were also looking for alternative market outlets.

Although Turkey's immediate attention was turned to the 'Turkic Republics' at the end of the Cold War,[3] one of the regions that also attracted the attention of then Turkish President Turgut Özal was the Black Sea. He eagerly followed the idea developed by one of the most seasoned diplomats at the time, Ambassador Şükrü Elekdağ. Hence, with Özal's enthusiastic support, Turkey, since the early 1990s, started to argue in favour of multilateral cooperation in the Black Sea area and, to support it, the creation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone, which later became a reality with the signing of the Bosphorus Declaration in 1992, and became a treaty-based regional organization (Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization—BSEC) after the adoption of its charter in 1998.

Historically, the Black Sea was a Turkish lake for centuries during the Ottoman Empire, but was later turned in effect into a Russian/Soviet lake from the 19th century onwards. During the Cold War, Turkey faced alone the Soviet Union and its satellites across the sea. However, by the end of the Cold War, the Russian Navy lost its overwhelming supremacy in the Black Sea and the Russian Federation ceased to be a direct threat to Turkey. At the same time, Turkey's natural gas procurement from Russia, which had started back in 1984 with the Soviet Union, was growing substantially. Finally, while the emergence of the newly independent states around the Black Sea as well as in the Caucasus and Central Asia was presenting opportunities to Turkey, the end of the Cold War enabled the Euro-Atlantic community to interact with the regional countries and triggered a gradual shift in the region towards the emerging pan-European political/economic space.

Under these circumstances, it was deemed opportune to move towards a regional alternative to replace the former East–West rivalry, and Turkey's suggestion to establish a regional gathering, primarily to enhance economic cooperation and ease the political, social and economic transformation of the newly independent countries of the region generated interest.

The BSEC from the Turkish Perspective

The BSEC has encouraged the economic transformation of the newly independent states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, the 1990s were years of Euro-Atlantic neglect towards the Black Sea region. While the 'Russia First' policy, aiming to placate Russia and keep it within the international system, was at the top of the US foreign policy agenda, the Europeans were preoccupied with the Balkan wars and were trying to find a way to deal with their new eastern neighbours.

When President Özal suggested creating a regional economic cooperation zone, his primary intention was to cut a leadership role for Turkey in the wider region of Eurasia. It was largely part of the puzzle that included Central Asia, the Caspian Basin, the Caucasus, the Black Sea and Eastern Europe, *inter alia*. The zone was described as linking the old Silk Road to Europe/West, while helping the regional countries to adopt the requirements of the modern international system.[4]

He also envisaged that it might support Turkey in its post-Cold War loneliness and possibly assist the country's political agenda to craft a distant alternative to the European Union (EU) should its designs for eventual full EU membership not work out as planned. This was an unspoken agenda and more likely a distant thought in the minds of a few individuals.[5] However, in general, Özal and his advisors at the time primarily intended for Turkey to become a 'role model' for the former Soviet countries and newly independent states in their intertwined economic and political transformations in order to strengthen Turkey's status as an important regional player. This was one of the themes Özal had constantly been evoking since the end of the Cold War;[6] and it was not certain that other players in Turkish politics shared his sentiments. Nevertheless, they let him go ahead with the idea, though not putting much emphasis on it at the governmental level.

His efforts were rewarded with the signature of the Bosphorus Declaration of 1992. Thus, Turkey paved the way for multilateral cooperation in the Black Sea in the sector of the economy, and followed it up with regional cooperation schemes on security matters through the establishment of the Black Sea Naval Co-operation Task Group (BlackSeaFor) in 2001 and the Black Sea Harmony initiative in 2004, as well as several lesser noticed projects.

With its diverse member states, the BSEC was one of the earliest initiatives in the post-Cold War era, intended at establishing cooperation between NATO members (Greece and Turkey) and former members of the Warsaw Pact. While border disputes and historic grievances between its members persisted, it marked an attempt towards cooperation in a region alienated from within by differences. It was also a locally developed idea, indicating willingness by the participating states for cooperation at the regional level and an attempt to create a regional identity where it did not previously exist.[7]

However, after an enthusiastic start, it soon became clear that the member countries lacked the necessary political will to create a genuine working regional political institution. Thus, President Özal's initial vision was never fully realized, although it could be argued that the BSEC realized one of its aims—that is,

facilitating the transition of the former Soviet countries into open, market-based and private-sector-driven economies. It served as a multinational venue for them to adapt to global trading norms.

Another Turkish aim in the Black Sea region since the end of the Cold War has been to increase economic cooperation and increase intra-regional trade with a view to achieving steady gross domestic product (GDP) growth. Despite the initial lack of private sector capital accumulation and commercial banking in the region as well as the collapse of trade flows, the BSEC was able to contribute to trade creation in the region since 1992. Its trade with the outside world has since increased manifold, though the region is still suffering from a lack of diversification in export goods, incomplete trade policy reforms and a poor investment climate.[8]

On the other hand, the BSEC was clearly established as an organization aimed at increasing regional cooperation mainly in the economic field. Since the early 1990s however, armed conflicts and increasing political tension marked the region instead of expanding economic cooperation. The Transnistria problem in Moldova, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Chechen issue in Russia, and the Abkhaz and South Ossetian problems in Georgia emerged one after another and overshadowed regional economic cooperation in the region. Since the BSEC was not entrusted with a political role, it lacks the necessary institutions for proactive diplomacy and cannot assume the role of a regional actor in such an overly securitized setting. Thus, the real potential of economic cooperation in the Black Sea region has not been unleashed due to the persisting confrontational political agendas of individual states and several lingering security problems.

It nevertheless generated a discussion of identity both within and outside the region, leading to the emergence of a sort of rudimentary regional identity. The BSEC, according to Turkey, should facilitate its members' further integration into the global economy and advance their political cooperation capacities within the region. Thus, when Turkey took the rotating Chairmanship of the BSEC in May–October 2007, coinciding with the 15th anniversary of the organization, it had another chance to revamp its original idea. This time Turkey had three priorities: (1) to encourage further domestic reforms in the BSEC member states to achieve market-based and private-sector-driven economies; (2) to strengthen the BSEC's multilateral relations with the EU; and (3) to encourage the active participation of all the littoral states in the Black Sea Harmony, with the aim to establish a permanent task force to meet new asymmetric threats and counter risks in the Black Sea maritime domain.[9]

From the Turkish perspective, the BSEC, by that time, had fulfilled its initial task of facilitating the transformation of the newly independent states to market economies. The Turkish Chairmanship thus sought to encourage further economic reforms. Although steps were taken in the transition economies toward market reforms, parts of the region had begun to suffer from the 'oil curse' and there was a need to diversify export goods. To this end, the Turkish Chairmanship aimed for sectoral clustering programmes and a qualified industrial zones concept.[10]

Turkey aimed at strengthening the BSEC's multilateral relations with the EU, even though its own relationship with the EU was not exactly on track. While Turkey had finally started to negotiate with the EU for full membership in October 2005, by 2007

early signs of fatigue and disconnect were already visible.[11] Nevertheless, Turkey supported the EU's Black Sea Synergy policy of 2007, and later, the Eastern Partnership of 2009.[12] Turkey's expectation at that time was that the Black Sea Synergy needed to be bolstered by concrete projects especially in the fields of transport, energy and public administration reform.

Finally, Turkey's Black Sea Harmony related focus aimed to stabilize the wider Black Sea area. While Russia and Ukraine had joined the Black Sea Harmony by that time, Bulgaria and Romania were still cautious with regard to a permanent Russian presence in the Black Sea.

While the official Turkish agenda was clearly primarily an economic one, some of the member countries as well as experts on the region had been complaining about the lack of a political perspective. While the argument that any attempt at creating a political agenda would cloud the economic cooperation achieved to date, seemed plausible, even Turkish policymakers readily admitted at the time that political considerations often prevented the furthering of economic initiatives.[13] Even though powerful BSEC members were insisting only on enhancing economic cooperation, it was clear to anyone watching from outside that regional integration had reached a level where political and even security considerations of the region could no longer be ignored by the BSEC. In particular, the rapid political and economic developments that took place on the eastern and western shores of the region since 9/11 clearly necessitated new approaches to address the challenges facing the region.

In the end, Turkey did not engage such a widespread overhaul of the organization during its chairmanship. There was clear opposition for the idea from within the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[14] It was also doubtful whether Turkey could have done much to overhaul the BSEC due to the unwillingness of many other member states to expand its scope. In the meantime, the changing security environment after the 9/11 attacks, Turkey's uneasy relations with the USA over Iraq and growing tensions between Russia and the EU/NATO led Turkey to follow a more 'cautious' approach regarding Black Sea developments and highlighted the importance of maritime security for the country's Black Sea politics.

When Turkey assumed the BSEC Chairmanship again in 2012, this time on the 20th anniversary of the organization, even the title of its programme—'From Regional Cooperation to a Zone of Prosperity in the Black Sea Area'—clearly showed Turkey's intention.[15] It summarized Turkey's priorities this time as focusing on the spheres of transport; intra-regional trade and investments; sustainable energy; combating organized crime; education and involvement of youth and civil society; science and technology; taxation; culture and tourism; and strengthening the BSEC and its cooperation with international partners. These were closely following some 17 common priority areas, identified by the 20th Anniversary Istanbul Summit Declaration of 26 June 2012, which also adopted the 'New Economic Agenda for the Region'.[16]

Even though Turkey avoided introducing any political issues into the BSEC agenda during its chairmanship, it tried to enhance the organization's cooperation with the EU and the United Nations (UN). In this context, the Turkish Chairmanship was marked by the re-adoption of the UN resolution on 'Cooperation between the UN

and the BSEC' after Turkey, as Chairmanship-in-Office, introduced a draft resolution at the UN General Assembly. It confirmed BSEC's commitment to promoting practical and result-oriented cooperation in areas of common interest with the UN agencies and programmes, which coincided with Turkey's policy priorities for the BSEC at this time.[17] Turkey also attempted to revitalize the BSEC–EU interaction and a joint meeting between the BSEC Troika and European Commission experts took place in Brussels in December 2012 to discuss the future of BSEC–EU cooperation. Although some of the discussed areas of cooperation were democracy enhancement, respect for human rights and good governance among others,[18] there has not been much follow-up since.

By the time of the 20th anniversary of the BSEC, Turkey's priorities for its international connections and economic expectations had changed substantially, and the Black Sea area was not mentioned much in discussing Turkish foreign policy, let alone defining part of it. So much so that it was relegated to the care of deputy director general level at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and security aspects were left to the care of the Turkish Naval Command. The Black Sea was never seen as a unique region which necessitated special attention and specific policies. As a result, Turkey's Black Sea policy is expressed through the combination of its bilateral political relations with the littoral states as well as multilateral economic cooperation with them. Although the diplomats who deal with the region inevitably come to the conclusion that the underlying problems of the region are mostly political in nature, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as an institution, prefers to deal with the political issues bilaterally with regional countries instead of through multilateral fora. This inevitably limits the BSEC's function to the area of the economy, leaving political and security issues out of its purview.

Turkey also seemed to oppose, at least not encourage, the development of other regional organizations that might take up these issues and challenge the supremacy of the BSEC. In this sense, the Community of Democratic Choice, which was the overhauled version of GUUAM in 2005,[19] and the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership, which was initiated by Romania in 2006, did not get much support from Turkey. Both of these initiatives were clearly created with the encouragement of the USA and with the aim to limit Russian primacy in the region. Taking the precarious balance of the region into account, Turkey opposed moves to counter Russia openly in the region, mainly fearing that a cornered Russia might destabilize the region and create further security challenges.

Turkey was especially suspicious about the Black Sea Forum idea, thinking that it was designed to bring the USA in, keep Russia out and Turkey down. As a result, Turkey was represented at its inaugural summit in June 2006 with a state minister, despite constant appeals from Romania and the USA for representation at the highest level. The initiative, which was opposed by Russia and cold-shouldered by Turkey and Greece, has not displayed any significance and lost its appeal after the change in the US approach towards the region. Similarly, the Community of Democratic Choice also lost its significance after Barack Obama came to office and the US interest in the region declined.

While they were active however, these initiatives became part of a campaign, spearheaded by Romania and Bulgaria, and occasionally supported by Ukraine and Georgia suggesting that Turkey was siding with Russia to control the region. They also argued that a sort of Turkish–Russian condominium was closing the Black Sea to outside influence thereby preventing its further liberalization and democratization. This was repeated regularly until the USA started to change its policy from 2007 onwards. As the political tension eased up, Turkey seemed to lose its appetite in the region.

Turkey's Maritime Security Concept in the Black Sea[20]

Turkey's reservations about the US long-term objectives in the Black Sea region became apparent when controversy erupted in the first months of 2006 over suggestions to expand the activities of NATO's Operation Active Endeavour to the Black Sea, which was initiated in October 2001 in response to invocation of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, following the 9/11 attacks in the USA to avert the movement of terrorists and/or weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).[21] Turkey and Russia jointly opposed the idea, though they differed in their motives and reasoning. Russia's opposition to Active Endeavour's entry into the Black Sea was clear-cut: Moscow was loath to see any expansion of US influence in its neighbourhood. Turkey's opposition, on the other hand, has been driven by its concern to preserve the current legal regime of the Turkish Straits (covering the Strait of the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus) established under the Montreux Convention of 1936 and thus, the political and military balances that have emerged in the region since the end of the Cold War.

This *sui generis* treaty recognizes the sovereignty of Turkey over the two straits, allows for the free passage of commercial ships and places limits on the non-littoral states' military vessels in terms of their tonnage and their duration in the Black Sea.[22] During the Cold War, the USA and NATO favoured the agreement because it limited the ability of the Soviet Navy to shift forces to the Mediterranean in a short time. However, with the changing security dynamics, Bulgaria and Romania brought about the possibility of relaxing the terms of Montreux, in favour of a large US Navy presence in the Black Sea. These suggestions were strongly opposed by Turkey, fearing that this could threaten and corner Russia in the Black Sea unnecessarily; forcing it to retaliate/respond and thus end the maritime force equilibrium and stability achieved in the region for the first time in centuries.

Turkey also argued against the expansion of Active Endeavour to the Black Sea by stating that of the six Black Sea littoral states, three were NATO members and two were NATO Partnership for Peace countries, thus they could have effectively maintained maritime security activities in cooperation with other visiting NATO ships. Therefore, there was no need to violate and thus make obsolete the long-standing Montreux Convention for no apparent gain.

The tension was somewhat mollified during the second half of 2006 and early 2007 when the USA signalled a change in its Black Sea politics and reduced the potential for disagreement with Turkey. In particular, the USA no longer raised the issue of a

possible revision of the 1936 Montreux Convention. Nevertheless, the echoes of the Cold War rhetoric were yet again heard around the Black Sea during and after the August 2008 crisis between Russia and Georgia. Renewed suggestions by some countries to increase NATO presence in the Black Sea and Russian protests to Turkey for allowing US ships into the Sea created tensions and showed that Turkey is again to some extent caught between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia in the highly sensitive agenda of Black Sea security.[23]

With similar concerns in mind and in order to strengthen the maritime domain security in the Black Sea, Turkey had earlier initiated several cooperation mechanisms. The earliest attempt was the suggestion to establish the BlackSeaFor at the second Chiefs of the Black Sea Navies (CBSN) meeting held in Varna, Bulgaria in 1998. It was formally established in April 2001 by the signature of all the littoral states to perform search and rescue operations, humanitarian assistance and environmental protection. The partnership was to be 'activated' by the rotating commanding navy when necessary.[24]

This 'on-call' activation was transformed into a six-monthly activation after 9/11, when the members felt increased asymmetric risks and decided, with Turkey's instigation, to extend the area of cooperation in 2004 to cover the prevention of terrorist activities, smuggling and the spread of WMDs, and established a High Level Experts Group to monitor these issues and assess the security situation in the region. According to the *Maritime Risks Assessment in the Black Sea* report prepared by the Group and approved by the deputy foreign ministers or undersecretaries of the member countries on 15 December 2005, there was no evidence of terrorists abusing any security vacuum in the region and the maritime security arrangements established so far were adequate in terms of dealing with terrorist threats and the spread of WMDs.

The BlackSeaFor also participated in the *Sea Breeze* naval manoeuvres in the Black Sea, organized within NATO's Partnership for Peace Program since 2009 and attended by NATO members and partner countries in the region.

One disadvantage of BlackSeaFor's operations has been that the task force is not permanent. To overcome the difficulties associated with such a sporadic assistance mechanism as well as to forestall the calls to allow Active Endeavour to extend its operations to the Black Sea, while acknowledging emerging asymmetric maritime risks, Turkey also initiated Black Sea Harmony in March 2004, which constituted a permanent naval operation established in accordance with the post-9/11 UN Security Council Resolutions 1373, 1540 and 1566.[25] The aim of Black Sea Harmony, which was initially established as a national operation in Turkish national and international waters, but open to other littorals to participate, was the same as NATO's Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean Sea. It aims to deter terrorism, asymmetric threats and prevent the illegal movement of peoples. It also became affiliated with Operation Active Endeavour in September 2005 and shared the information it gathered with the NATO command in Naples.[26]

Following its earlier multilateral approach to Black Sea security, Turkey invited other littoral states to join the Black Sea Harmony initiative, although none of them showed interest at first. Possessing the biggest navy in the Black Sea, Turkey's creation

of such a task force was looked at suspiciously by the other littorals. Nevertheless, as Turkey opposed the establishment of a NATO-led operation in the Black Sea and as the USA gave up on its idea of sending further naval forces to the region, other states began supporting the operation. Russia joined on 27 December 2006, while Ukraine signed a protocol on information exchange regarding its participation in January 2007 in Ankara. While Romania had previously perceived the initiative as a challenge to its policy of inviting permanent foreign forces to the region, it finally decided to join in March 2009 after the US policy became clearer. Georgia, on the other hand, was unable to do so earlier due to a lack of operational ships in the Black Sea, while it became reluctant to join after its short war with Russia in August 2008. Bulgaria has also declined joining it primarily due to its 'historical baggage' against Turkey playing a leading role in the region, as well as its unwillingness to associate with what it perceived to be a joint Turkish–Russian operation and was deeply distrustful of their intentions.[27]

Additional initiatives on maritime security were also developed. Besides several joint naval exercises, a coordination and information exchange unit was established, on Turkey's initiative, in Burgas, Bulgaria in 2003 to achieve direct communication between national coastguards and border police forces. Turkey also supports confidence-building measures in the Black Sea maritime domain, as suggested by Ukraine in 2004. In addition, littoral states created the *Black Sea Littoral States Border/Coast Guard Cooperation Forum* in November 2006 to enact manoeuvres against the dissemination of WMDs and terrorist activities in the region. Finally, another cooperation activity that Turkey considers relevant regarding security in the Black Sea is the trilateral consultations mechanism established between Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania. For Turkey, all the aforementioned initiatives contribute to regional maritime security.

The security situation in the Black Sea was affected during the early 2000s by the widening gap between the Euro-Atlantic policy towards the region and Russia. Although eventually granted, the BSEC delayed (in the face of Russian opposition) the consideration of the US application for observer status in March 2006. While the former Warsaw Pact members of the BSEC issued a statement stating their regret regarding the exclusion of the USA, NATO members Greece and Turkey kept silent. To some extent, the controversy and dissent within the transatlantic community over the Black Sea has been mollified over the course of 2006–2007 through a greater emphasis given to the EU's role in the region and through eventual efforts undertaken by the USA towards encouraging regional partners to join the Turkish-proposed Black Sea Harmony operation. Yet the disagreements have left a bad aftertaste and led to doubts about the possibility of establishing a viable multilateral security structure in the Black Sea.[28]

Turkey in the Black Sea and the EU's Engagement

The Black Sea countries have, since the end of the Cold War, created a multitude of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and cooperation schemes. The EU, on the other hand, has now expanded to the shores of the Black Sea where it

faces a new region with diverse problems. The BSEC, bringing together some 350 million people and covering 20 million square kilometres, has been the most comprehensive and institutionalized structure within the region. Since its launch by Turkey in 1992, it has succeeded in creating an extensive cooperation scheme in one of the most conflict-prone regions of the post-Cold War world. It has also been able to instil among the member countries a certain sense of joint ownership and belonging to a region, where no common identity had previously existed.

The EU's approach towards the region has been threefold: first, it offers certain incentives such as cooperation or integration, thereby attempting to Europeanize the countries of the region through democratic reforms, strengthening institutional capacities, the reconstruction of economies and building strong civil societies as well as offering its expertise in conflict management to the region's protracted quarrels. Second, even though the EU has officially adopted a number of multilateral policy frameworks towards the region, the implementation of its polices are mostly piecemeal and differentiated between the regional countries, which in fact weakens the dynamics of regionalism in the Black Sea. Finally, somewhat contradicting its earlier approaches to the Balkans or the Nordic region, the EU's approach to the region has not been unequivocally supportive of the creation of further regional groupings and/or institutions, if nothing at least for the sake of regionalism.

Although Turkey has ardently advocated the Europeanization of the Black Sea region since the end of the Cold War, the EU lacked a comprehensive multilateral policy towards the region. While the EU preferred bilateral ties with the Black Sea countries instead of a regional approach, Turkey supported a vibrant BSEC–EU interaction arguing that the BSEC was established to fit into the European architecture. Accordingly, Turkey supported an agenda to bring the BSEC closer to the EU and to promote the idea of a Black Sea regional dimension for the EU.[29] Yet, until the formulation of Black Sea Synergy, the EU and the Black Sea region were only linked to each other via bilateral relationships and, for some countries, with the prospect of eventual membership.[30] The EU also supported thematic projects in the region such as Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe (INOGATE), Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA), Technical Aid to Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) and Black Sea PETrA (Pan-European Transport Area).

However, as a result of enlargement and the regionalization of its external relations, the EU moved to develop a special relationship with the BSEC after the 2004 round of enlargements. Thus, the European Commission developed its Black Sea Synergy policy, institutionalizing relations between the Union and the BSEC.[31] The Black Sea Synergy's project-oriented approach suited well Turkey's Black Sea vision as the main areas of cooperation prioritized included good governance, border management and customs cooperation as well as transport and trade.

With the Eastern Partnership, launched in March 2009, the EU took the connection a step further and aimed at deepening bilateral relations with its partners (Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine alongside the South Caucasus countries) through more political and economic integration including an offer of various privileges such as mobility, visa liberalization, free trade and market access, etc.[32]

Turkey's position towards the EU's policies in the Black Sea is shaped both by its ongoing accession negotiation process and the latter's above-mentioned initiatives towards the region.[33] The EU accession process for Turkey has lost momentum since it began in late 2005. One can thus easily speculate about the affect of the resentment about the responses of some of the EU countries to the negotiation process on Turkey's approach towards the EU in general, and its presence in the region. On the European side, too, the fact that Turkey is a negotiating country, affects the responses of some of its member states when EU policy collides with Turkey's presence in the region. Although Turkey, as a negotiating country, needs to eventually comply with the *acquis* on Common Foreign and Security Policy, which includes all common positions and joint actions of the EU for the Black Sea countries, it seems that both Turkey and the EU find it difficult to coordinate their policies in the region, thereby hurting Turkey's initiatives and raising concerns about the credibility of the EU.

Apart from the accession process, Turkey's approach to the EU's presence in the region is also shaped by the Union's attitudes towards the various Turkish regional projects as well as the EU's own programmes. As Turkey instigated a number of regional cooperation proposals including the BSEC, BlackSeaFor, Black Sea Harmony and the Caucasian Stability and Cooperation Platform,[34] its general aim has been the creation of a stable region 'where extra-regional powers would not be needed in the security sphere'.[35] In other words, while actively engaging in regionally developed cooperation schemes, Turkey opposes the presence of external powers in the region, including the EU if their initiatives carry the danger of alienating Russia, and thereby creating instability in the region.[36] On the other hand, as long as the EU aims at increasing economic cooperation and intra-regional trade, does not endanger the regional peace and stability by provoking Russia, and does not intervene in the security problems of the region, Turkey supports its initiatives for the Black Sea region.[37]

Conclusion

The Black Sea region has been subject to competing visions for its future since the end of the Cold War; and the transition has not yet ended. It was perceived as a Turkish lake for centuries, and then it fell to the control of Czarist Russia and finally communist rule. Now, it stands at the intersection of regional and extra-regional powers with claims on its future. Turkey's resurgence as a regional power coincides with Russia's near abroad policy that includes the Black Sea, as well as the EU's various formulations of influence and the current distant yet interested approach of the USA. While Turkey aims at creating a secure ring around its borders, its vision inevitably clashes with the power projections and regional policies of other interested stakeholders.

Developments surrounding the August 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia highlighted the weaknesses of regional institutions and halted regional cooperation schemes. In fact, the inherent dangers of confrontation between alternative great power strategies in the region for the smaller regional countries came to the fore. The

crisis also highlighted that only the initiatives that are clearly inclusive, project-oriented and regionally owned/supported could have some measure of success.

In this context, since the end of the Cold War, in all its regional initiatives Turkey has supported these principles, while having reservations regarding some of the Euro-Atlantic strategies towards the region, especially when they challenged the Montreux regime. At the same time, it has consistently advocated the region's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and the global economy since the early 1990s. However, in order to prevent its initiatives for regional cooperation from being harmed by the rivalry between the West and Russia, Turkey chooses to defend the status quo, a somewhat difficult position to maintain in the face of recent emerging open confrontation in the region, first over Georgian territory in 2008 and now over Crimea and other parts of Ukraine in 2014. It is too early as yet to analyse the impact of the latter; but it is quite clear that regionalism and regional cooperation in the Black Sea will be affected negatively from this crisis irrespective of the course it takes.

Although Turkey failed, since the early 2000s, to replicate its earlier visionary approach towards region-wide multilateral cooperation by pushing for further integration as well as inclusion of hitherto unchartered areas into the Black Sea agenda, the region is now desperately in need of a new vision. Otherwise, the danger of succumbing to region-wide conflict is only too real. Whether Turkey is ready to take up the challenge is of course an altogether different question.

Notes

[1] For an assessment of Turkey's early post-Cold War situation in international affairs, see M. Aydın, 'Turkish foreign policy at the end of the cold war', *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 36, 2005, pp. 1–36; and 'Between euphoria and *realpolitik*: Turkish policy toward Central Asia and the Caucasus', in T. Ismael and M. Aydın (eds), *Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003, pp. 1–20.

[2] M. Aydın, 'The determinants of Turkish foreign policy, and Turkey's European vocation', in G. Nonneman (ed.), *Analyzing Middle East Foreign Policies and the Relations with Europe*, Routledge, London, 2005, pp. 197–222; and J. M. Brown, 'Isolated and suspicious', *Financial Times Special Report: Turkey*, 20 May 1991, p. 4.

[3] For a discussion regarding using the term 'Turkic Republics', see M. Aydın, 'Türk, Türkik, Türki', in B. Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası, Cilt II, 1980–2001*, 14th edn, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2013, p. 371. For analysis of Turkey's post-Cold War policies towards Central Asia and the Caucasus, see M. Aydın, 'Between euphoria and *realpolitik*', op. cit., pp. 139–160; and M. Aydın, 'Foucault's pendulum: Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus', *Turkish Studies*, 5(2), 2004, pp. 1–22.

[4] Most of the analysis in this section is summarized from M. Aydın, 'Geographical blessing versus geopolitical curse: great power security agendas for the Black Sea region and a Turkish alternative', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 9(3), 2009, pp. 271–285.

[5] Personal interviews with Turkish Foreign Ministry personnel over the years.

[6] See M. Aydın, *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Gulf War*, Cairo Papers in Social Science, 21(1), The American University in Cairo, Cairo, 1998; and *2000'li Yıllara Doğru Türkiye'nin Önde Gelen Sorunlarına Yaklaşımlar-33: Dış Politika*, Türkiye Genç İşadamları Derneği, İstanbul, 1998.

[7] In this part of the paper, I benefited from M. Aydın and O. Fazlıoglu, 'Turkish policy towards the wider Black Sea region and its chairmanship of the BSEC (May–October 2007)',

in P. Manoli (ed.), *Unfolding the Black Sea Economic Cooperation: Views from the Region*, Xenophon Paper 2, ICBSS, Athens, 2007, pp. 129–140.

[8] S. Sayan, 'The effects of the BSEC on regional trade flows', *Agora Without Frontiers*, 10(4), 2005, pp. 334–347.

[9] Aydın and Fazlıoglu, op. cit., pp. 132–133. Also see *Press Statement Regarding the assuming of Turkey the Chairmanship-in-Office of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), 1 May 2007*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/_p_o_73–-1-may-2007_-press-statement-regarding-the-assuming-of_-turkey_the-chairmanship-in-office-of-the-organization-of-the-black-sea-economic-cooperation-_bsec___unofficial-translation___p_.en.mfa> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[10] Aydın and Fazlıoglu, op. cit., p. 133.

[11] It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the reasons for such disconnect, but further discussion can be found at O. Senyuva, 'Türkiye Kamuoyu ve Avrupa Birliği, 2001–2008: Beklentiler, İstekler ve Korkular', *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 6(22), 2009, pp. 97–123; and B. Dedeoglu, 'Türkiye'de AB Karşıtlığı-Küreselleşme Karşıtlığı İlişkisi', *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 7(28), 2011, pp. 85–109.

[12] See Šejla Jusufovic, 'Turkey–Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) relations', *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, 14 May 2013, <http://politikaakademisi.org/turkey-black-sea-economic-cooperation-bsec-relations> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[13] Personal discussions with Turkish MFA personnel before and during the Turkish Chairmanship in 1997.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See 'Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister announced the priorities of the Chairmanship', *Black Sea News*, 26, December 2012, pp. 1–2, <http://icbss.org/media/947_original.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[16] See *BSEC İstanbul Summit Declaration*, <http://www.bsec-organization.org/documents/declaration/summit/Reports/ISTANBUL%20SUMMIT%20DECLARATION%2026June.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2014); and *The BSEC Economic Agenda—Towards an Enhanced BSEC Partnership (2012)*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-bsec-economic-agenda—towards-an-enhanced-bsec-partnership_-26-june-2012_-istanbul.en.mfa> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[17] 'UN General Assembly adopts resolution on UN–BSEC cooperation', *Black Sea News*, 26, December 2012, p. 8, <http://icbss.org/media/947_original.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2014). The UN General Assembly has adopted similar resolutions every two years since 2000, after BSEC was granted Observer status by the UN in 1999.

[18] 'BSEC–EU relations discussed in Brussels', *Black Sea News*, 26, December 2012, p. 7, <http://icbss.org/media/947_original.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[19] GUAM was originally created in 1996 as a regional gathering of like-minded former Soviet countries of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (hence the name) to coordinate their policies. Uzbekistan joined the group in 1999 and its name became GUUAM to reflect the change in membership. It became a regional organization in 2001 when members signed its charter, though Uzbekistan withdrew its signature in 2002 and officially left the organization in 2005. In 2006, it was renamed as 'GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development' and the meeting was attended by several Eastern European countries, which also became the signatories of the charter of the 'Community of Democratic Choice Organization' in 2005. Since then the two organizations somewhat overlapped in their membership, aims and practice. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GUAM_Organization_for_Democracy_and_Economic_Development> (accessed 6 May 2014) and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_of_Democratic_Choice> (accessed 6 May 2014).

[20] This part of the paper is summarized from Aydın, 'Geographical blessing', op. cit., pp. 271–285, and benefitted from Aydın and Fazlıoglu, op. cit.

[21] See S. Blank, 'Black Sea rivalry', *Perspective*, 17(2), 2007, <https://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol17/blank.html > (accessed 16 March 2014). For further discussion of various country positions,

see M. Aydın, 'Contending agendas for the Black Sea region: a regional alternative', *Demokratizatsiya*, 20(1), 2011, pp. 1–15.

[22]   For the text of the Convention, see <http://sam.baskent.edu.tr/belge/Montreux_ENG.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[23]   For the summary of the disputed views, see D. Morrison, 'Turkey restricts US access to the Black Sea', 18 October 2008, <http://www.david-morrison.org.uk/us/turkey-restricts-us-access.htm> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[24]   See <http://www.dzkk.tsk.tr/denizweb/blackseafor/turkce/transformasyon/transformasyon.php> (accessed 16 March 2014) and <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/blackseafor.en.mfa> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[25]   S. Kır, 'Maritime security in the Black Sea; BlackSeaFor and Black Sea Harmony operations', in *Security and Stability in the Black Sea Area*, National Defence University, Bucharest, 2005, pp. 991–996, <http://cssas.unap.ro/en/pdf_books/security_and_stability_in_the_black_sea_area.pdf> (accessed 6 May 2014).

[26]   C. Birsay, 'The integration of regional efforts for strengthening stability efforts in the wider Black Sea area and Turkey's position', in P. M. E. Volten and B. Tashev (eds), *Establishing Security and Stability in Wider Black Sea Area*, IOS Press, Amsterdam, 2007, p. 106.

[27]   See US Embassy Diplomatic Cable, released through Wikileaks, 'Bulgaria and Operation Black Sea Harmony', Reference ID 07SOFIA87, created 18 January 2007, released 251287 Cables (2 September 2012), at <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/01/07SOFIA87.html> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[28]   See W. A. Sanchez, 'Did BLACKSEAFOR ever have a chance?', *e-International Relations*, 18 November 2012, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/11/18/did-blackseafor-ever-have-a-chance> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[29]   T. Japaridze, 'BSEC: a road map to relevance', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 5(2), 2006, pp. 21–29.

[30]   P. Gavras, 'The Black Sea and the European Union: developing relations and expanding institutional links', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 4(1), 2004, pp. 23–48.

[31]   Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Black Sea Synergy—A New Regional Cooperation Initiative*, COM (2007) 160 final, 11 April 2007.

[32]   Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Eastern Partnership*, COM (2008) 823 final, 3 December 2008.

[33]   The following section is summarized and benefitted from the analysis of M. Aydın and S. A. Acıkmese, 'EU engagement in the Black Sea: the view from the region', in A. Balcer (ed.), *The Eastern Partnership in the Black Sea Region: Towards a New Synergy*, Demos Europa, Warsaw, 2011, pp. 17–18.

[34]   In the wake of the Russia–Georgia War in 2008, Turkey, in order to calm the situation in the Caucasus, proposed on 13 August 2008, to set up the Caucasian Stability and Cooperation Platform between the three Caucasian countries as well as Turkey and Russia, which was a re-worked version of a proposal by the then President Suleyman Demirel of Turkey on 16 January 2000, to set up the Stability Pact for the Caucasus. For further information about the platform idea, see Eleni Fotiou, '"Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform": what is at stake for regional cooperation?', *ICBSS Policy Brief*, No. 16, Athens, June 2009.

[35]   Ibid., p. 18; and Commission on the Black Sea, *A 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region: A Report by the Commission on the Black Sea*, <http://www.blackseacom.eu> (accessed 16 March 2014).

[36]   For Turkey's concern of the existence of external players in the region, see Aydın, 'Geographical blessing', op. cit., pp. 271–285.

[37]   Aydın and Acıkmese, op. cit., p. 18.

Mustafa Aydın is a Professor of International Relations at Kadir Has University, İstanbul, Turkey. His research interests include security issues related to Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Middle East, as well as Turkish foreign and security policies.

Address for correspondence: Kadir Has University, Central Campus, Cibali, Fatih, 34083, İstanbul, Turkey. Email: maydin@khas.edu.tr