

U.S. POLICY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

From the U.S. point of view, NATO is and will remain the premier provider of security for the Euro-Atlantic region, which includes the Black Sea. Far from seeking to charge into the region, the U.S. approach is to work with its Allies and friends, and within the frameworks they find comfortable, to strengthen cooperation and collaboration on security. The U.S. is not seeking to establish a permanent naval presence in the Black Sea, but it is committed to engaging with its allies and friends to enhance security and cooperation throughout the region.

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In looking at the Black Sea, a key point of departure is to reflect on the nature of the region, which may seem both specific and rather amorphous at the same time. Anyone can look at a map and see that the Black Sea is a major body of water that draws together the countries around it. But in recent history, this area has not acted like a region at all. Real interaction has been, at times, blocked, and sometimes it has been an opportunity waiting to happen, but it has always been disappointing and less than it should be.

American policy towards the region flows from what has been its policy toward Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall: To promote a region that is free, prosperous, peaceful, secure, and whole.

Democracy

A common commitment to democratic values was the ideological underpinning of American and Allied policy during the Cold War, and it remains the foundation of U.S. foreign policy toward the Black Sea countries today. Turkey and Greece are strong and stable democracies, now joined by Romania and Bulgaria. Georgia and Ukraine have made great progress in building participatory democracies that are symbolized by the 2003 Rose Revolution and the Orange Revolution of 2004-05. Other countries in the region are also building new societies and institutions, and the U.S. strongly encourages the further development of the Black Sea's democratic community of nations. At the heart of freedom lie open political systems, free and fair elections, a vibrant and independent media, strong civil society, and mutual respect among the players – that government will act predictably and honestly, and that citizens and their free institutions will obey the law.

At the Black Sea Forum that took place in Bucharest earlier this month, Deputy U.S. National Security Adviser Crouch announced that the United States intends to participate in a new public-private partnership called The Black Sea Trust. The Trust would fund programs across the region to strengthen cross-border cooperation, civic participation, democratic governance, and the rule of law. In partnership with the German Marshall Fund, the Romanian government and other donors, the United States intends to make a significant financial contribution to the initiative this year.

Prosperity

Open and free markets have been the basis of rising European prosperity for sixty years. In the years ahead, market economics, unfettered and open trading and investment regimes, and the effective rule of law to underpin the free marketplace will be essential elements for developing prosperity in the Black Sea region. The rule of law is particularly important in a region where distrust, corruption, and inadequate governance remain the legacy of less democratic and open pasts. Within the region, the U.S. government encourages the development of more honest courts, more predictable decision making, simplified regulatory regimes, and the fair treatment of investors, foreign and domestic.

Cooperation on practical projects has the potential to open doors for expanded cooperation in the region and with the rest of the world. The broader Black Sea region is perhaps the world's largest source of new oil and natural gas resources. Geography makes the region, and the Black Sea itself, a key corridor for delivering energy to the international marketplace. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and South Caucasus gas pipeline are immensely important accomplishments. The proposed Nabucco pipeline will be another. These and other pipelines

– multiple pipelines – will foster competition, help bolster global energy supplies, and enhance the welfare of producing, transit, and consuming countries in the region and elsewhere.

The Turkish Straits are no less important, and not just for oil. Approximately 45,000 ships of various sizes and purposes transit the Straits each year. The U.S. supports shared public-private efforts to assure safe ship transit through the Straits and to develop commercially viable alternative routes for oil that bypass the Bosphorus.

Peace and Stability

Democratic values and prosperity are enhanced everywhere by peace and stability, and this applies to the Black Sea region as well. Perhaps some of the progress made in the region can best be evaluated by recent developments. It is a very long time since there were naval battles on these waters. Armenia and Azerbaijan are not fighting one another; there is a cease-fire. The Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts, while clearly not stable, are also not hot. But it is not a good thing that these conflicts are merely frozen. They undermine security, prosperity, democracy, and freedom in the region. They foster organized crime, smuggling, trade in armaments, drug trafficking and other problems. They ensure that hatred and distrust endure. The rest of the world is marching ahead, and too many people in this region remain mired in outdated conflicts that have more to do with the Soviet Union than the 21st Century.

We attach great importance to the work of American and other countries' mediators, particularly those tasked by the OSCE, to develop practical, sustainable, and fair solutions based on international principles, including the reality of compromise.

Security

Peace and stability are the product of policies to promote security. In the 21st Century, traditional security concerns are increasingly becoming a thing of the past. But the Black Sea is a tempting target for terrorists, traffickers in weapons and people, drug smugglers, and the like. Black Sea regional countries, led by Turkey, among others, have focused individually and multilaterally on the need to improve the security of their and the region's waters, ports, and borders.

The U.S. government's approach to Black Sea security takes two important realities into account. First, the United States is not a littoral state, and that affects what it can do and how it might do it. Second, the U.S. has been allied to littoral Turkey for over five decades and to littoral Bulgaria and Romania for not quite ten. NATO has had a presence in the Black Sea since Turkey joined the Alliance in 1952. From the U.S. point of view, NATO is and will remain the premier provider of security for the Euro-Atlantic region, which includes the Black Sea. NATO is already playing a role through dialogue mechanisms with non-member littoral states. These include the NATO-Russia Council, the NATO-Ukraine Commission, Partnership for Peace (PfP) activities with countries throughout the region, and the intensified dialogue that is expected with Georgia. Far from seeking to charge into the region, the U.S. approach is to work with its Allies and friends, and within the frameworks they find comfortable, to strengthen cooperation and collaboration on security.

No mention of Black Sea security can fail to mention the Montreux Convention, which is obviously important to Turkey, to the region, to the United States, and to many others. The U.S. government fully respects the convention. U.S. Navy vessels transit the Straits under its terms regularly. They visit many Black Sea ports, and these visits are an important channel for building military-to-military relations that are essential to issues of common security. So are PfP and bilateral exercises. The U.S. is not seeking to establish a permanent naval presence in the Black Sea, but it is committed to engaging with its allies and friends to enhance security and cooperation throughout the region.

Integration

A Black Sea region whole and free, as stated at the outset, is a good overarching principle to describe American policy, and the “whole” part requires concerted efforts at integration. Regional integration promotes democratic trends, open market development and prosperity, peace and stability, and security.

Turkey and others have played leadership roles in launching regional security initiatives; BLACKSEAFOR and BLACK SEA HARMONY are the fruits of this work. BLACKSEAFOR has been instrumental as a means to move away from hostility and toward trust, transparency, and practical collaboration among the region’s navies. Romania’s initiative to convene a Black Sea Forum was also an important step forward.

As also noted, the importance of energy development and trade is another key integrator. But, real economic integration means more than cooperative arrangements to transport one commodity. The waters of the Black Sea are the glue that holds the region together. But, sadly, it seems, the Black Sea is as much a barrier to trade and investment as it is a highway for trade or a means for real integration. The barriers to trade and investment remain remarkable.

In an effort to overcome, these barriers countries of the region established the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in 1992. BSEC is uniquely placed to advance economic prosperity and cooperation in the Black Sea region. The United States is pleased to have recently gained observer status in BSEC, and is eager to support the work of members to revitalize and reinvigorate it. The U.S. welcomes the initiative under the current Russian BSEC Chairmanship to focus on results-oriented cooperative activities to address such issues as port security, highway systems, energy and electricity transmission, telecommunications, science, health and infectious diseases, terrorism, and organized crime.

As Russia’s “results-oriented” mandate is examined further, BSEC may want to look at its counterpart in the Far East, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, to see what strategies have worked there to break down barriers and foster effective integration. For example, APEC’s business forum has been particularly productive as a means to focus the work of governments on the things businesses believe impede trade and investment. APEC has very usefully focused on the harmonization and simplification of customs procedures, regulatory and standards issues, law enforcement cooperation, infrastructure, and other policy steps to facilitate imports, exports, cross-border investment and travel by business people, tourists, and others among countries in the region.

It is easy to imagine a bright future for the Black Sea. It is certainly attainable. Getting there will require hard work and cooperation on many levels by governments, as well as by civic leaders and business. As countries move to tackle these issues, the United States will play its role.