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**Black Sea Extroversion at  
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# Black Sea Extroversion at European and International Level

By Seven ERDOĞAN<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Each enlargement process of the European Union (EU) brings along new neighborhoods and alters the old ones. This motivates EU to develop a way to deal with the new or old neighborhoods to transform them in line with European values and to protect the zone of security, peace and stability in Europe. This paper aims to deal with the EU's involvement in the Black Sea region. In this scope, firstly, the EU policy mechanisms, namely the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership (EaP), will be considered to be used in the relations with the Black Sea countries. Secondly, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the EU in its engagement to the Black Sea region will be identified. The paper finally, will conclude that the EU has to devote more resources and efforts for the Black Sea region to enhance its strengths, to mitigate its weaknesses, to utilize the opportunities and to protect itself from the threats of its new neighborhood.

## Keywords

European Union, Black Sea, European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, Black Sea Synergy

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## 1. Introduction

Each enlargement of the European Union (EU) brings along new neighbourhoods and alters the old ones. The great eastern enlargement, covering twelve acceding states, was finalised in 2004 and 2007 in two successive rounds. It led the EU to think more systematically about re-ordering its relations with its neighbours in the South and the East.<sup>2</sup> The further development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) with the creation of new means and policies in the aftermath of eastern enlargement cannot be seen as a coincidence, but as a direct result of the EU's urgent need for reconsidering the relations with new and old neighbourhoods.

One of the reasons motivating EU to develop innovative policies towards its neighbours was underlined very briefly by Romano Prodi, European Commission ex-president: "The Union cannot expand indefinitely in order to promote its values and we must, therefore, develop a policy toward our neighbours".<sup>3</sup> It seems as if EU will be more hesitant about further enlargements for a long time in the future. This has forced the EU to develop new forms of mechanisms to be able to cooperate with the regions in its neighbourhood aiming to promote prosperity, peace, democracy, security and stability beyond its borders and in the absence of effective transformative capacity of enlargement process.

The Black Sea region incorporates many opportunities, as well as challenges for outside actors having an interest in the region. Outside actors, including the EU, aim to benefit from these opportunities, by mitigating the potential negative effects of the challenges in the region. The level of success of outside actors in their involvement depends heavily on the strength of the policy tools in their hands and on their ability to keep up with their weaknesses in the region.

Main factors that have been motivating the EU to be involved in the Black Sea region can be listed under five headings. Firstly, EU would like to see the emergence of stable political systems based on democracy, human rights and good governance in the countries of the region. Secondly, EU has been supporting the solution of the frozen conflicts in the region, which could impact the stability of the region and the security in Europe. Thirdly, the EU has been pushing the countries of the region to act against challenges, such as the fight against organized crime and terrorism. Fourthly, EU has been trying to strengthen its energy security by improving its relations with the countries in the region, which are very vital for the transmission of energy sources to Europe. Lastly, EU's performance in developing its relations with the countries of the region is also a test case for the EU's standing as a fully-fledged international actor.<sup>4</sup>

This paper aims to provide an account regarding the EU's involvement in the Black Sea area. In this scope, EU policy mechanisms, namely the European Neighbourhood

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Lippert, "European Neighbourhood Policy: Many Reservations, Some Progress, Uncertain Prospects", Friedrich Ebert Stiftung International Policy Analysis, June 2008, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Romano Prodi, "A Wider Europe- A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability", Speech to the Sixth ESCA World Conference, Brussels, 6 December 2002, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Odette Tomescu Hatto, "The European Union and the Wider Black Sea Region: Interests, Challenges and Opportunities" in A. Gheorghe & L. Muresan (eds.), *Energy Security: International and Local Issues, Theoretical Perspectives and Critical Energy Infrastructures*, Springer, 2011, pp. 24-26.

Policy (ENP), the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership (EaP), used in relation with the countries of the Black Sea region will be considered. Secondly, by taking inspiration from the four dimensions of the SWOT analysis; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the EU in its engagement to the Black Sea region will be elaborated.

## 2. EU Policy Mechanisms in the Black Sea

After a virtual obscurity during the Cold War, there has been a renewed interest, academic or other, in the Black Sea region.<sup>5</sup> The EU's involvement in the region can also be considered as a part of this general tendency. Throughout the 1990s, EU solely concluded partnership and cooperation agreements with all post-Soviet littoral states of the Black Sea. In this way, some economic favours were given to these states by the EU in return for economic and political reforms.<sup>6</sup> However, the Black Sea area was generally neglected by the EU to a great extent till the beginning of the 2000s.<sup>7</sup>

EU has been involved in the Black Sea region by means of various mechanisms. Firstly Bulgaria and Romania became EU Member States. Secondly, a process of accession has been operating for Turkey which is candidate country for EU membership. Thirdly, there is a strategic partnership between EU and Russia. At the end, there are ENP countries, namely Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. This shows that all the countries in the Black Sea region have already established different types and different levels of cooperation with the EU. In addition, there is also an EU initiative, the Black Sea Synergy, which is unlike others due to the specific focussing on the region, while others are broader in their scope. From among the various mechanisms through which the EU has been involving in the Black Sea region; ENP, Black Sea Synergy and EaP will be covered in this study and will be elaborated briefly below.

### 2.1. European Neighbourhood Policy

The need for the development of a policy targeting the new EU neighbours by the EU was stressed in the Agenda 2000 Document by the Commission. Afterwards, the Commission paid a great effort for the designing of a neighbourhood policy.<sup>8</sup> The need for a neighbourhood policy was also identified in the European Security Strategy in 2003. The document stated that "The integration of acceding states increases our security, but also brings the EU closer to troubled areas. Our task is to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the EU and on the border of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations."<sup>9</sup> As a result, ENP was launched in 2004 in the context of the new enlargement which forced EU to deal with instabilities and insecurities in its new neighbourhood.<sup>10</sup> ENP was identified by Kahraman as the EU's attempt for sharing the benefits of eastern

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<sup>5</sup> Eyup Özveren, "The Black Sea World as a Unit of Analysis" in Tunc Aybak (ed.), *Politics of the Black Sea: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict*, I.B. Tauris, 2001, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Haydar Efe, "The European Union's Black Sea Region Policy", *Karadeniz Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 5, No. 16, 2013, p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> Şerban Filip Cioculescu, "Rethinking the Black Sea: Between the Transatlantic and Euroasian Projects", *South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2013, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Sevilay Kahraman, "The European Neighbourhood Policy: The European Union's New Engagement Towards Wider Europe", *Perceptions*, Winter 2005, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> A Secure Europe in a Better World- European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12.12.2003.

<sup>10</sup> Elsa Tulmets, "The European Neighbourhood Policy: A Flavour of Coherence in the EU's External Relations?", *Hamburg Review of Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, Iss. 1, June 2008, p. 109.

enlargement with the neighbouring countries by handling the challenges of the new geopolitical environment of Europe.<sup>11</sup>

ENP can be seen as a revolution in the EU's relations with its neighbours. Since, for the first time in its history, EU has been trying to develop its relations with its neighbours without providing a membership perspective. ENP covers sixteen countries neighbouring to the EU.

Six of them are in the East; ten of them are in the South. ENP was an attempt of bringing different Member States' preferences under a single roof, to stop further dimensionalisation or regionalization of EU foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> However, the ENP was divided into two branches, the Eastern Partnership and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, to deal with strong heterogeneity of countries covered.<sup>13</sup> In addition, to the geographical location, cultural factors and historical relationships with the EU are also becoming vital to the division of ENP countries into two different pillars.<sup>14</sup> ENP aims to transform the neighbourhood of the EU in accordance with the principles, values and procedures on which the EU is based on and for which it enters in international relations.<sup>15</sup> In other words, through the ENP, EU is aiming to reshape its neighbourhood by exporting its norms and values. Furthermore, by means of ENP, the EU not only wants to enhance the cooperation with neighbouring countries; but also, it encourages the cooperation among the neighbouring countries which are geographically close to each other.<sup>16</sup>

In the design of the ENP, EU heavily borrowed from the enlargement policy, which is undisputedly the most effective foreign policy tool of the EU. The most significant divergence between these two policies is the absence of a commitment from the EU side for an EU membership, if the partner country achieves a certain degree of progress. Through the ENP, for the first time in its history, EU is supposed to develop neighbourly relations with countries that cannot join the Union in the short or medium term, at least not officially.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, ENP has never excluded a prospect for the EU membership.<sup>18</sup>

ENP is based on bilateral relationships between the EU and each partner country to share European knowledge, principles and to enhance stability, security and welfare

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<sup>11</sup> Sevilay Kahraman, "The European Neighbourhood Policy: A Critical Assessment", *Ankara Review of European Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2006, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Aydın, "Europe's New Region: The Black Sea in the Wider Europe Neighbourhood", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, May 2005, p. 260.

<sup>13</sup> Tina Freyburg and others, "Democracy Promotion through Functional Cooperation? The Case of European Neighbourhood Policy", *Democratization*, Vol. 18, No. 4, August 2011, p. 1027.

<sup>14</sup> Pernille Rieker, "The European Neighbourhood Policy: An Instrument for Security Community Building", *NUPI Working Paper*, No. 832, 2014, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Lippert, "European Neighbourhood Policy: Many Reservations- Some Progress- Uncertain Prospects", p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> European Commission, "European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper", Brussels, 12.05.2004, p. 20

<sup>17</sup> Timofei V. Bordachev, 'The Russian Challenge for the European Union- Direct Neighbourhood and Security Issues' in Iris Kempe, *Beyond EU Enlargement*, Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 2001, p. 47

<sup>18</sup> Marcia Lapczyński, "The European Union's Eastern Partnership: Chances and Perspectives", *Caucasus Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 2009, p. 144.



in the neighbouring regions. ENP encourages cooperation between the EU and participating states not only in traditional and easy-to-cooperate fields, such as education, environment and transport; but also in more politically sensitive areas like border management and control, good governance, visas and energy.<sup>19</sup> Despite the existence of common rules applicable for all ENP partners, partnerships between the EU and partner countries have been managed on the basis of the Action Plans. A country's success is also judged on the basis of its compliance to the issues identified in its Action Plan. ENP is conducted on the basis of 'more for more' principle. This means a partner country should do more reforms to get more incentives from the EU. As a result, 'more for more' principle can be considered as the reflection of conditionality in the enlargement process to the ENP framework.

ENP covers a variety of areas such as energy, health, education, trade, transport, environment, etc. ENP is financed through European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI) and €15.4 billion were allocated to the ENPI for the period of 2014-2020 to assist sixteen partner countries.<sup>20</sup> The main incentives provided by the EU within the framework of the ENP are market access, mobility of people and a greater share from the financial assistance allocated to the programme.

The Black Sea region is a part of the eastern dimension of the ENP. There are EU Member States like the United Kingdom, Sweden, Poland and Germany who are ardent supporters of the development of relations with the eastern neighbours; on the other hand, there are France, Spain and Italy complaining about too much attention and resources that have already been given to the EU's eastern neighbours and arguing for strengthening the relations with the southern neighbours as a priority.<sup>21</sup> Changing power balance between two groups of the EU Member States which are supporting southern and eastern dimensions will define the future evolution of the ENP and the future of the EU in the Black Sea region.

## 2.2. Black Sea Synergy

The EU concluded partnership and cooperation agreements with all post-Soviet littoral states of the Black Sea region during the 1990s. In this way, some economic favours were given to these states by the EU in return for economic and political reforms.<sup>22</sup> However, the EU did not develop any specific policies and policy tools targeting the region till 2000s.

With the 2007 enlargement which made Bulgaria and Romania EU members, EU entered into the Black Sea region officially by turning into an actor having a coast along the Black Sea. It was geography and neighbourhoodness that EU had limited experience of dealing with before.<sup>23</sup> Membership of Bulgaria and Romania made the

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<sup>19</sup> Svetlozar A. Andreev, "The Future of European Neighbourhood Policy and the Role of Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2008, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Official ENP webpage of the EU, [http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index_en.htm)

<sup>21</sup> Elsa Tulmets, "The European Neighbourhood Policy: A Flavour of Coherence in the EU's External Relations?", p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> Haydar Efe, "The European Union's Black Sea Region Policy", p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> Mustafa Aydin, "Europe's New Region: The Black Sea in the Wider Europe Neighbourhood", p. 257.

part of the already existing EU Member States which are supportive of EU's engagement to the Black Sea region, like Greece, stronger. As a result, the Black Sea Synergy was adopted in 2007.

The Black Sea Synergy is based on the multilateral sectoral partnership approach. One EU Member State was defined as responsible for one of main sectors covered within the framework of the programme. In this scope, Greece was selected responsible for transport, Romania for environment and Bulgaria for energy.<sup>24</sup>

The Black Sea Synergy is designed as a complementary cooperation mechanism of the already existing EU initiatives in the Black Sea region. Its primary task is defined as the development of cooperation among the countries in the Black Sea region and also between the region and the EU. It aims to solve problems which necessitate region-wide solutions. Democracy, respect for human rights and good governance, managing movement and improving security, energy, transport, environment, maritime policy, fisheries, trade, research and education networks, science and technology, employment and social affairs and regional development are defined as the main cooperation areas by the Commission under the Black Sea Synergy.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the ENP countries, the Black Sea Synergy also includes Turkey and Russia. Since its centre of gravity is the Black Sea, the ENP's centre of gravity is Brussels. While the Black Sea Synergy is more like an intergovernmental cooperation initiative, ENP is based on a hierarchical relation between the EU and partner countries by demanding from the partner countries to change in line with the conditions set by the EU.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.3. Eastern Partnership

The EaP was launched in May 2009 in the Prague Summit as the eastern dimension of the ENP. It is a part of the ENP which solely focuses on the eastern neighbours. It emerged as a result of insistent demands of some EU Member States, notably Poland and Sweden, to reinforce the ENP's eastern dimension.<sup>27</sup> The Georgian Crisis of 2008 accelerated the process by increasing the EU's urgency for developing a policy focussing solely on the region.<sup>28</sup>

The EaP contains approximation and integration in areas such as economy, democracy, governance, energy security and people-to-people contacts. Partner countries are offered some incentives, namely financial support, economic integration to the EU internal market, easier travel to the EU countries, technical and

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<sup>24</sup> Galya Vladova & Jörg Knieling, "Potential and Challenges for the Black Sea Regional Cooperation", *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 5, Iss. 1, June 2014, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> European Commission, "Black Sea Synergy: A New Regional Cooperation Initiative", Brussels, 11.04.2007, pp. 3-8.

<sup>26</sup> Official EaP webpage of the EU, [http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index_en.htm)

<sup>27</sup> George Christou, "European Security Logics to the East- The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership", *European Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, September 2010, pp. 417-418.

<sup>28</sup> Cristophe Hillion, "The Eastern Partnership- Something New or Window-Dressing", SEI Working Paper, No. 109, 2009, p. 5.

policy assistance; as much as they take steps for the adoption and application of reforms expected by the EU.<sup>29</sup>

The Eastern Partnership was designed in a way to include both bilateral and multilateral cooperation. While meeting of individual needs and expectations is targeted with the former; achieving cooperation on a common set of issues is aimed through the latter.<sup>30</sup> EaP is intended to work in harmony with the EU-Russia strategic partnership.<sup>31</sup> However, both Russia and Turkey, which are the two major players in the Black Sea region, aren't part of platforms in which issues of common concern for the countries of the region are discussed.

The EaP will move to a new phase with the implementation of the agreed Association Agreements between the EU and partner countries. In this process, EU should be more responsive to the developments in the partner countries and should award the progress in order to achieve the sustainability of the process and to create motivation for further reforms.

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<sup>29</sup> David Král, "The Impact of the Economic Crisis on EU Enlargement and Eastern Partnership", Europeum Institute for European Policy, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> European Commission, "Neighbourhood at the Crossroad: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013", p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Yelda Demirağ, "The European Union's Black Sea Policy: In Light of Recent Developments", Karadeniz Araştırmaları, Sayı: 41, Bahar 2014, p. 82.

### **3. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the EU in the Black Sea**

Dimensions of the SWOT analysis will be used in this part in analysing the EU policy targeting the Black Sea region. As it may be known, SWOT analysis has four dimensions, namely strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It is believed that these dimensions are providing a very useful tool to get a comprehensive understanding of the EU's involvement into the Black Sea region. While the factors related to the characteristics or sources of the EU will be considered under the dimensions of strengths and weaknesses; the factors that are related to outside factors or actors and that aren't under the control of the EU will be grouped under the titles of opportunities and threats.

#### **3.1. Strengths of the EU in the Black Sea**

The main strength of the EU in the Black Sea region is its policy tools. In comparison to other actors that are willing to be influential in the Black Sea region, the EU has very well-developed, well-defined and various policy tools, some of which are identified above. By the way, the countries that decided to deepen their relations with the EU are very well aware of the process, rewards, to-do-list and etc. However, the relations with the other actors are like paths full of uncertainties.

The EU has the experience of successive enlargement rounds. Because of this experience, EU has been quite successful in achieving the political, social and economic transformation of other countries on the basis of its model. The current situation of the countries experienced this transformation process is a source of motivation for the Black Sea countries which are eager to transform themselves in the same way. As a result, the Black Sea countries have been made content in a hierarchical relation with the EU based on the superiority of the EU as the part defining the rules of the game. In addition, this also enhances EU's self-confidence in its relations with other actors, especially by enhancing its self-promotion capacity.

Since there are differences between the political and economic systems of the countries in the Black Sea region, EU designed its policy tools targeting the Black Sea countries responsive to these differences. As a result, EU has been providing different reform paths for the Black Sea countries through country-specific action plans.

#### **3.2. Weaknesses of the EU in the Black Sea**

ENP was created as a substitute for the EU enlargement policy, but these two policies have many differences. These differences can lead to a divergence in the performance of the two policies having more or less the same objective, which can be summarized to the enhancement of peace and security in Europe and its neighbourhood.

Membership perspective constitutes one of the basic tenets of the EU's soft power in the external policy. Without providing membership perspective, EU's leverage to

promote transformations in neighbouring countries became slower. In addition, the existence of membership perspective also makes conditionality more credible. Such a big award enhances the costs of non-adaptation and non-implementation of the reforms for the non-member countries and makes easier for the non-member countries to carry the costs related to reform process. By means of EaP, EU has been offering to the Black Sea region a type of relationship that is more than partnership, but less than membership.<sup>32</sup> The balance between rewards and costs in the ENP is less than in comparison to accession process.

This constitutes one of the basic weaknesses of this policy by reducing the motivation of non-member countries for reforms. For example, EU has been acting very protective in the field of trade liberalization for agricultural products.<sup>33</sup> In comparison to the funds provided to the accession countries within the scope of the instrument of pre-accession, the funds provided to the EaP countries are more limited. It becomes less attractive for the EaP countries to carry out requested reforms in the absence of big rewards. As a result, “more for more” approach of the ENP may have some troubles in producing expected results as long as there aren’t rewards that are enough to motivate EaP countries to follow the reform path defined by the EU. EaP partners’ never ending membership ideal for the future can also be seen as an evidence for their perception of EaP as a transition period in their further integration with the EU that will end up with EU membership. Therefore, EaP’s chance for being a tangible alternative to the membership in the long run seems to be less probable.

As it may be elaborated in detail below, the existence of competition between the projects of different actors having an interest in the Black Sea region constitutes one of the main challenges for the effectiveness of the EU policies in the Black Sea. Rather than establishing a harmony between its own policies and the policy alternatives of other important players in the Black Sea region, EU opted to respond to this competition by designing its policies for the Black Sea region in a way to exclude other actors having an interest in it. As a result, EU policies have led to an inevitable clash between the EU and other actors having an interest in the region by forcing the countries in the Black Sea to make a choice between the EU and other alternatives. By acting in this way, EU has been closing all the gates for the Black Sea countries to develop relations with the EU and other actors simultaneously.

Furthermore, the EU has very limited financial sources for the conduct of its foreign policy. In addition, the economic crisis hitting the Euro space and the events of Arab Spring, curbed further the EU’s capacity for the EaP’s functioning. EU hasn’t yet achieved recovery from the effects of the Euro Crisis. Since the eruption of Euro Crisis, EU has given priority to the crisis management and turned into an inward-looking actor. EU devoted many of its capacity to the erosion of negative effects of the crisis, because Euro Crisis has challenged the achievements of EU integration severely, mainly the Eurozone. Briefly, the absence of enough funding can be a severe problem for the success of the EU policies targeting the Black Sea region.

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<sup>32</sup> Sinem Akgül Açıkmeşe & Cihan Dizdaroğlu, “Squaring the Circle: The EU’s Operational Impact in the Black Sea Region”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2014, p. 315.

<sup>33</sup> Jos Boonstra and Natalia Shapovalova, “The EU’s Eastern Partnership: One Year Backwards”, *Fride Working Paper*, No. 99, May 2010, p. 4.

None of the actors, including the EU, in the region can handle all the challenges in the region with their current capacities dedicated to the region. As it will be indicated under the part on opportunities, a good division of labour may serve to the interests of all the actors by increasing the gains from the opportunities in the region. Additionally, EU initiatives targeting the Black Sea region have been formed with a top-down approach.<sup>34</sup> This means there weren't enough consultations with the countries of the region in order to define the content of the policies in line with the expectations and needs of these countries. Furthermore, EU conditionality or "more for more" approach has been applied inconsistently in the context of the ENP.<sup>35</sup>

The EU does not have a unified approach in its relations with its neighbours in the Black Sea region. The lack of consistency is not a specific problem for the ENP, but a general problem of the EU in conducting its foreign policy. Foreign policy is still a field that EU Member States are competing with each other to push their interests, rather than a field of mutual agreement between Member States. Besides, at bilateral level the situation varies. This makes impossible for the Black Sea countries to have a clear and full understanding of the EU policy and reduces the effectiveness and reliability of the EU as an actor in the eyes of its neighbours in the Black Sea region. It can be said that the EU should enhance its capacity to react promptly and effectively to the developments and newly-emerging needs in the Black Sea region. In order to reach this objective, EU should either develop new policy instruments or reconsider its existing policy tools in a way to create a capacity to respond to changes in the region. Bearing in mind that with the current level of EU integration in the field of foreign policy and security, it is not possible to be optimistic about the emergence of such a change in the EU's capacity to respond to developments in the region effectively at least in the near future.

### **3.3. Opportunities of the EU in the Black Sea**

The countries of the Black Sea region are willing to cooperate with the EU. Most of the EaP countries don't find the level of the involvement of the EU in the Black Sea region to be sufficient enough since, they see EU model as the most appropriate way to welfare, development and security.<sup>36</sup> Even despite the absence of an EU membership ideal in the EU policies targeting the region as an incentive for partner countries, many countries in the region have been dreaming about turning into an EU Member State in the long run. This gives EU a significant power to shape the Black Sea region in line with its vision by means of internal reforms carried out throughout the Black Sea countries. In addition, Black Sea countries are aware of the fact that the achievement of EU standards will enhance their probability of cooperation. Since, if the Black Sea countries follow the reform path demanded by

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<sup>34</sup> Svetlozar A. Andreev, "The Future of European Neighbourhood Policy and the Role of Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area", p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> Jos Boonstra and Natalia Shapovalova, "The EU's Eastern Partnership: One Year Backwards", p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Sinem Akgül Açıkmeşe & Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, "The Black Sea Region: The Neighbourhood Too Close To, Yet Still Far From The European Union", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2014, p. 279.

the EU, they will end up with similar political and economic systems. In other words, transformations expected by the EU will increase the commonalities between the countries in the Black Sea region and this can also contribute to the emergence of a shared regional identity. This can be seen as a factor that is enhancing the attractiveness of the EU model for the Black Sea countries and increasing EU's legitimacy in the region.

Additionally, EU is not only the main gas export market for Russia; it is also one of the primary trade partners and foreign investors of the country. Moreover, Europe's need for energy is growing constantly. In this scope, Black Sea region is important in diversifying both energy sources and routes to reach these sources, which are very detrimental for the security and continuity of energy supply for Europe.

There are many international organizations operating in the Black Sea region, such as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). EU should design its policies targeting the region in line with the activities of these organizations without causing a duplication of resources and confrontation with these organizations, but by creating complementarities that will further enhance effectiveness of its own policies. For instance, BSEC, as an organization covering nearly all the countries in the Black Sea region or the countries have an interest in the region due to their proximity, has been so far showing eagerness to make cooperation with the EU in the Black Sea region. The EU has also seen the organisation as a partner.<sup>37</sup> But, the EU should pay more effort to develop its cooperation with the BSEC further in order to utilise more from the experiences and knowledge of the Organisation which has been operating in the Black Sea region since 1992.

### **3.4. Challenges for the EU in the Black Sea**

The importance of the Black Sea region in terms of energy sources, transportation, trade routes and security has made the competition of many powers for the region inevitable. As a result, the EU adapts its policies to meet the demands of competition among powers in the region.

Briefly put, there are two competing trends over the Black Sea region. The first argues for a closer cooperation of the Black Sea countries with Europe and the second, derives from the Soviet era and aims for a closer relationship with Russia with which the countries of the region share common history and cultural ties<sup>38</sup>. As long as the two spheres of influence work in parallel and not jointly, the countries of the region are often in dilemma.

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<sup>37</sup> Svetlozar A. Andreev, "The Future of European Neighbourhood Policy and the Role of Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area", p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Grotzky and Mirela Isic, "The Black Sea Region: Clashing Identities and Risks to European Stability", CAP Policy Analysis, No. 4, October 2008, p. 14.

Russian welcomed positively the EU enlargement towards the Central and Eastern Europe on the basis of improvement of the living conditions for the populations.<sup>39</sup> From its side, Russia wanted to maintain a strong presence in the area and therefore, was not interested in becoming part of ENP or other EU initiatives that might disrupt its equal role in its relation with the EU.<sup>40</sup> In this context, it did not welcome positively the EaP, which was considered a European attempt to override the existing status in the region.<sup>41</sup> As a result, Russia frequently emerges as a factor that is hampering smooth development of the relations between the countries of the region and the EU.<sup>42</sup>

During the last decade, Russia aimed at reasserting its status in the international scene; therefore, it fostered closer influential relations with the former- Soviet regions, including the Black Sea, often playing the energy card. In this context, the EU should take into account current dynamics and adapt accordingly, for the success of its initiatives in the Black Sea region.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, the reforms expected by the EU within the scope of EaP have substantial costs, the incentives provided by the EU can be easily found insufficient by the EaP countries. Moreover, EaP countries are also severely affected from the world financial crisis. In this setting, it will be harder for them to cover the costs of the reforms related to EU approximation.<sup>44</sup>

As it was mentioned before, there are significant economic and political differences among the countries in the Black Sea region which is composed of countries that are highly diversified in terms of size, power, their systems of governance, the sophistication of their economic and financial structures and human development indicators.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, there is a long way to go before the area becomes a region in a meaningful sense. This may be a reason behind EU's giving priority to bilateral approach rather than multilateral approach in its relations with the countries in the region. The consideration of different motivations of the participating countries in their relationship with the EU, it is a very challenging exercise for the EU to design a general scheme that can meet the expectations of all the Black Sea countries.

Due to the dominance of bilateral approach, EU's relations with the individual Black Sea countries have progressed unevenly.<sup>46</sup> Recently, the EU has been also paying

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<sup>39</sup> Timofei V. Bordachev, 'The Russian Challenge for the European Union: Direct Neighbourhood and Security Issues', p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> George Christou, "European Security Logics to the East- The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership", p. 424.

<sup>41</sup> Anna Michalski, "The Eastern Partnership: Time for an Eastern Policy of the EU?", Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies European Policy Analysis, Iss. 14, 2009, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Sinem Kocamaz, "Avrupa Birliği'nin Komşuluk Politikası Çerçevesinde Transkafkasya Ülkeleri ile İlişkileri", Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Araştırmaları Dergisi, Cilt: 2, Sayı: 4, 2007, s. 73.

<sup>43</sup> Yelda Demirağ, "The European Union's Black Sea Policy: In Light of Recent Changes", p. 77; Marcia Lapczyński, "The European Union's Eastern Partnership: Chances and Perspectives", p. 155.

<sup>44</sup> David Král, "The Impact of the Economic Crisis on EU Enlargement and Eastern Partnership", p. 6-7.

<sup>45</sup> Mustafa Aydın and Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, "A 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region: The Commission on the Black Sea Proposes", Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, Vol. 10, No. 3, September 2010, p. 375.

<sup>46</sup> Sergiu Celac & Panagiota Manoli, "Towards a New Model of Comprehensive Regionalism in the Black Sea Area", Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2006, p. 201.



effort for improving neglected multilateral cooperation in the Black Sea region, through the Black Sea Synergy and EaP. This EU attempt for a balanced equilibrium between bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms may lead to negative reactions both from EU Member States and Black Sea countries, which do not want to lose the previous advantages that were gained through bilateral relations.<sup>47</sup>

The success of all EU initiatives in the Black Sea region depends on one very important factor which is the political willingness of the Black Sea countries of the region. Absence of a prospect of EU accession makes achievement of the compliance with the conditions established through action plans harder and affecting the political willingness of the Black Sea countries adversely. Moreover, absence of a developed civil society in the Black Sea countries is an obstacle for the emergence of a domestic demand for the reforms or emergence of groups who will declare themselves as the owner of these reforms.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Mustafa Aydın, "Europe's New Region: The Black Sea in the Wider Europe Neighbourhood", p. 275.

<sup>48</sup> Jos Boonstra and Natalia Shapovalova, "The EU's Eastern Partnership: One Year Backwards", p. 2.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Black Sea region is undeniably a zone of attraction for the EU with its rich natural resources, its location at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and Middle East which is very vital for transport routes and energy flows, and its expanding market having a big growth potential. On the other hand, the region hosts many challenges, such as, environmental problems, insufficient border controls, illegal migration and organised crime.<sup>49</sup> That is, Black Sea presents both opportunities and challenges for the EU. By considering the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of the EU in the Black Sea region in this article, it can be argued that the Black Sea region incorporates many opportunities for the outside actors. However, the success of EU policies in the Black Sea region heavily depends on its ability to increase its strengths and decrease its weaknesses by always considering and taking precautions against the challenges that are not under its control. As long as the Black Sea countries keep their willingness for further deepening their integration with the EU, it can find a way for establishing a proper balance between its own strengths and weaknesses and for handling the challenges to be able to utilise from the opportunities of the Black Sea region.

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<sup>49</sup> European Commission, "Black Sea Synergy: A New Regional Cooperation Initiative", p. 2.

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