

The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation

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Black Sea Regional Strategy

ESDP – A driver for an increased European responsibility for Black Sea regional security?

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Following the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. administration and many American experts made the case for a stronger Black Sea strategy, which considered the Wider Black Sea area as a region with common challenges to the West and Euroatlantic structures. The arguments for such a strategy were convincing. Yet, the U.S. debate about how to transform such a strategy into concrete policy and political steps hasn't evolved past a simple thought. This is because the U.S. strategic and political debates were soon distracted from the issue and shifted to objectives with higher priority on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. The Community of Democratic Choice (CDC), a loose cooperation forum of a few heads of state from the region, including Georgia and Ukraine, produced little more than declarations of mutual assistance in nation and civil society building.

According to the United States, NATO is considered the main tool to integrate the region into the West. Apart from NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) with Armenia and Azerbaijan and some lip services in Baku and Yerevan, the Azeri and Armenian governments don't exclude closer NATO integration. As a long-term policy goal, Georgia demonstrates the firmest political will and efforts to accelerate its NATO integration. The Georgian endeavor is supported by the U.S. government, but raises sharp reservations in many European NATO member states; so much so that a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia will probably not be offered at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. In the Ukraine, the overwhelming majority of the population is against NATO membership. Whether a Ukrainian government will be stable enough to put NATO membership on its foreign policy agenda remains to be seen. Russia is a key country of the Black Sea region and as it looks improbable that the

Continued on page 2

NATO-First? Why the Alliance has to lead to a new Wider Black Sea strategy

By Ronald D. Asmus, Executive Director, Brussels Transatlantic Center, The German Marshall Fund of the United States; and F. Stephen Larrabee, Corporate Chair, European Security, RAND

The United States and Europe today are debating the prospect of a further wave of enlargement to the Wider Black Sea region. The Rose and Orange Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine have given impetus to this debate as they have focused attention on how best to consolidate the democratic transitions in this region. One key issue in this emerging debate is whether NATO or the EU should lead the effort to anchor to the West the new democracies around the Black Sea.

This debate is not new. The West faced a similar issue in the early 1990s as it debated enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. Then, as now, policy analysts and political leaders debated whether NATO or the EU should take the lead in anchoring these countries to the West. One school argued that what Central and Eastern Europe needed most was economic prosperity and social stability, not military security. The EU, they contended, was best placed to provide the required economic and social stability. Moreover, they argued that EU-led expansion was less likely to alienate Russia. Therefore the EU, not NATO, this school asserted, should take the lead.

A second school maintained NATO should go first. This school argued that the core problem the region faced was the lack of any meaningful security structure. Providing a security umbrella was necessary to facilitate internal reforms and build economic and social stability. Only then would the central European countries have the determination and self-confidence to successfully carry out needed reforms. NATO had to take the security issue off the table, which would make it easier for the European Union to enlarge.

NATO also meant involving American leadership, which could provide the strength and cohesion to manage Russian concerns. EU requirements, this school contended,

Continued on page 4

Black Sea Paper Series

ESDP – A Driver for an Increased European Responsibility for Black Sea Regional Security?

Continued from page 1

NATO-Russia Council will result in substantial progress between NATO and Russia, NATO as a concept of integration and regional cooperation has a disadvantage – it more deepens more the rifts of Russia-West rivalries and competition than it offers a prospect of cooperation.

On the other hand, during the German EU presidency the European Union introduced a broad package of a European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) that offered a complete set of political measures to improve the cooperation of this region internally and with the European Union, including political areas such as energy, trade, transportation, environment, social policy, dialogue, and reform, which come close to a gradual adoption of the “*acquis communautaire*.” With the exception of Russia, this improved ENP completes the already existing action plans of the European Union with the non-EU countries of this region. Although the ENP does not express any prospect of EU membership and it seems unlikely that the European Union will offer such a perspective in the near future, it should be emphasized that according to the EU treaty every European country has the right to become a member of the European Union.

In contrast to NATO, all non-EU states of the region, with the exception of Russia and, perhaps Georgia, stronger domestic wish in favor of EU membership exists. The positive of the European Union and its ENP not to be a provider of hard security, which is appreciated by the regional countries in Russia’s neighborhood, is at the same time a negative. The ENP lacks, by its *raison d’être*, the concept and the integration mechanisms, how to offer “hard security” to the region, and how to transform and integrate the military sector in these countries in and to Western standards of democratic governance and transparency, unlike what NATO is able to offer. The question is, whether the European Union has something to offer with the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) that is of interest for the states of the region too. To answer this question the EU’s security concept, contrasting it with the United States’, must be looked at deeper.

The EU’s security concept is based off the European Security Strategy (ESS) from December 2003, which

corresponds to the principal objectives and risk perceptions in the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) from March 2006. Differences arise only in translating and instrumentalizing the strategies, namely in the relevant political-strategic approaches, and in the instruments and capabilities for crisis management. The ESS strives for a “secure Europe in a better world,” which requires a long-term process and does not yet know a concrete victory in a specific war or a fixed final point in time when this goal will be met. For the political translation of the ESS, the European Union focuses primarily on multilateral cooperation, diplomacy, and preventive measures to solve international conflicts. The EU strategy doesn’t provide preemption as an acceptable security policy approach, which stands in contrast to the NSS. Prevention is understood by the European Union rather as an overall policy approach, which isn’t aimed at the symptoms of violence exclusively, but at the origins of violence in a broader social, cultural, and economic sense in the form of “preventive engagement.” Effective multilateralism by cooperation with international organizations is the fundamental leading principle of the ESS. Military actions are of subordinated relevance in the ESS.

That is reflected in the EU anti-terror strategy. Its concept complies with all measures to fight the roots of terrorism, including protection of all political, legal, and financial measures. Military measures are, above all, considered as a support of civil means and as a protection of EU operations. In this context the cooperation with international organizations and third states in every step is underscored. This logic reflects a guideline, which could apply as well in a more active European Union dealing with the “frozen conflicts” in Georgia.

This broad approach for the crisis management of the ESDP with its interconnection of all necessary civil and military capabilities finds broad support in Europe, whereas from a U.S. point of view, the ESDP lacks and neglects the importance of military strength. The planning targets for the ESDP are scenarios of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, and not of the war in Iraq. Even on the basis of these so called “Petersberg tasks,” it was confirmed in 2003 that the European Union has achieved all its necessary operational capabilities, only with some limitations. Politically, the potential to increase national defense budgets of the European Union and establishing the complete set of planned capabilities is rather limited. Cost-saving measures such as burden-sharing and specialization among EU members fails because of the hesitancy of EU member states to waive on their national military sovereignty. Consequentially, the European Union affords

Black Sea Paper Series

the luxury to finance 27 national armed forces with 27 military joint staffs, headquarters, etc. These national hesitations can only be overcome by a further political integration, which is only possible within the European Union, not within NATO.

But in comparison with the United States, the Europeans also possess special strengths in their military capabilities. Even in the view of some U.S. pundits, European armed forces are better trained and prepared to conduct post-conflict and stabilization tasks, even if the U.S. government is drawing its lessons from its war in Iraq. Experiences and successes of European peacekeeping missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, following the NATO-led KFOR operation, in Macedonia, and in the Congo may prove it. A particular strength of EU crisis management is its civil means, mechanisms, and capabilities often described as “soft power” and sometimes snickered at. They supply more than 5,500 policemen, 500 civil servants, and 5,000 experts for emergency management. These capabilities correspond to the rationale of the ESDP that implies conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict management. Meanwhile, it is more broadly acknowledged that the long-term success of crisis management operations depends essentially on the training and use of police forces, from support for building a rule-of-law state, from the development of a civil society, and last but not least, from the economic development of the country concerned.

How can such a concept of crisis and post-conflict management of the ESDP be made useful in the Black Sea region, in particular the frozen conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh? The ambitious ENP concept for the Black Sea region can only succeed if these frozen conflicts manage a solution. If the European Union pursues its ENP seriously, it has to accept greater responsibility for the stabilization and security of this region and engage itself to contribute to conflict management measures. The ESDP offers valid mechanisms for such a contribution. Different from the NATO concept, the European Union considers the military component as primarily supporting the civil intervention. Given the hesitancy of EU member states and the weakness of the ESDP to offer sufficient “hard” military means, the ESDP needs support of its crisis management; third partners like the United States, Canada, Norway, or India, which in worst case scenarios would be able to grant the sufficient military support. Even when this important security policy innovation of the Europeans is not yet taken very seriously in the transatlantic context, the American interest in civil means of intervention has increased during Bush’s second term, even if it hasn’t reached a strategic level.

The civil means of the ESDP with regard to the Black Sea region has so far consisted mainly of an EU observer mission at the Ukrainian-Moldovan border. Fifty observers improve conditions for the solution of the Transnistrian conflict, a civil mission of nine civilian legal experts strengthen the legal structures in Georgia, and there’s a special representative for the South Caucasus. In light of the immediate relevance of frozen conflicts for the security of Europe, the European Union has to increase its engagement within the ESDP significantly. Given the fragility of the states of the region, the opportunities for the European Union to engage appear to be almost unlimited. Upon Ukrainian request, the European Union could offer a substantial border control assistance on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border to dry out the income basis of the Transnistrian separatist regime through the contraband trade. Upon a UN request, the European Union could engage itself in the management of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and even in Abkhazia. Even if Russia might not be in favor of such EU missions, it is more acceptable than a NATO led one. Increased training of the police and the border guards in Georgia seems to be of the utmost importance for improved stability of the country, to mention just a few.

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In view of the many instable regions and severely weakened states, it looks quite probable that the European Union, in spite of the present weaknesses of its ESDP, will be requested as a conflict manager more often in the future because of its civil intervention capabilities. For an unavoidable and useful future on global burden-sharing among transatlantic partners, due to its own direct interest, the European Union has to take on a larger responsibility for the security of its eastern and south-eastern neighborhoods. The ESDP has a lot of instruments to offer. Instead of smiling at them, a smart U.S. policy approach would be to support the ESDP of the European Union in this region to get Europe more engaged, which would be in the interest of the United States as well.

Black Sea Paper Series

NATO-First? Why the Alliance has to lead to a new Wider Black Sea strategy

Continued from page 1

would take longer and would be easier to meet if NATO went first. The West could not afford to wait for the European Union. NATO had to begin the process before the window of opportunity to anchor these new democracies to the West closed. At the end of the day, the United States and Europe came to a compromise. NATO did a de facto move in anchoring Central and Eastern Europe to the West, with a first wave of enlargement initiated at the Madrid Summit in 1997, and a second wave launched at the Prague Summit in November 2002. However, the NATO and EU enlargement processes were closely coordinated and harmonized so that they dovetailed, resulting in the historic “big bang” wave of EU enlargement from the Baltic to the Black Sea in May 2004.

The new context

Today, the Euroatlantic community faces a similar dilemma as it debates a possible new wave of enlargement to the Wider Black Sea region. Which organization should take the lead, NATO or the EU? Or should both enlargements occur simultaneously? There are a number of important differences between the situation in the early 1990s and today.

First, Russia today is stronger and more nationalistic. At the time of the first enlargement debate Russia was weak and seeking closer ties to the West. Today, buoyed by rising energy prices, it is in a more self-confident and assertive mood and less interested in close cooperation with the West. This makes the task of integrating the countries in the Black Sea region more difficult. Moreover, Russia’s economic leverage is greater today than it was a decade ago. Countries like Ukraine and Georgia were part of the Soviet Union and have a much longer history of dependence on Russia than the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Second, the strategic attention and priorities of the United States have shifted. In the 1990s, Washington was still heavily focused on the need to build a new post-Cold War security structure in Europe and to lock in peace and security across the continent. Today, the situation is quite different. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the United States faces new challenges emanating from the wider Middle East and Asia. Moreover, America’s political standing and leadership have been badly damaged by the

war in Iraq.

Third, the European Union is very different as well. Today it has a far more developed set of foreign policy ambitions and tools. In the early 1990s, a common foreign and security policy was more an idea than reality. Today the European Union has a European Security Strategy as well as a set of new instruments that can allow it to play a much more active leadership role. At the same time, however, it faces much greater popular opposition to enlargement than was the case in the 1990s. And with 27 members – 10 of them from the East – internal divisions are deeper and achieving consensus on sensitive issues has become much more difficult.

Fourth, while a number of European members of the EU and NATO had reservations about enlargement in the 1990s, few doubted that the countries of Central Europe were “European.” Today, many Europeans are not entirely convinced that countries such as Georgia and Ukraine are really European countries. As a result, the question of Europe’s “identity” and its geographic borders play a much more important role in the enlargement debate today than they did in the early 1990s.

In short, the context in which the enlargement debate about the Black Sea region is taking place is quite different than in the 1990s.

Why a NATO-first strategy still makes sense

In spite of these differences, there are still some powerful reasons why any future enlargement to the Wider Black Sea region – if it is to happen – will in all likelihood have to be led by NATO.

First, the Wider Black Sea region today actually enjoys far less security and stability than Central and Eastern Europe did in the early to mid-1990s. If one believes in the theory that underpinned NATO enlargement – i.e. the notion that a security umbrella is critical to consolidating a democratic transition – then the Black Sea region may be a textbook case of where a security umbrella is needed. If anything, there is an even greater need to extend a security umbrella over the countries in Black Sea region in order to give them the self-confidence and space to consolidate their internal reforms and to anchor them to the West.

Second, while the European Union has certainly come a long way in terms of developing a coherent foreign and security policy, it does not have an effective one when it

Black Sea Paper Series

comes to the Black Sea region and there is – unfortunately – little prospect of it developing one any time soon. The Euroatlantic community cannot afford to let its strategic interests be determined solely by the European Union whose criteria for membership require aspirants to meet some 80,000 pages of regulations. This criteria may take decades to meet.

While the European Union is in many ways stronger, it is also increasingly divided – on its future borders, on the utility of enlargement as well as on how to manage relations with Russia. There is little precedent in the EU’s history of it being able to tackle such a strategic challenge on its own. While the enlargement to Austria, Finland, and Sweden in the 1990s took place without any NATO role, these countries were already mature democracies and the strategic setting was completely different.

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Insisting that the European Union should take the lead on enlargement into the Black Sea region means that enlargement to the region is more than likely not going to occur. Public opinion in Europe is increasingly skeptical if not opposed, to further EU enlargement. That is unlikely to change in the near future. In addition, the countries in the Black Sea region are far weaker and poorer than the aspirants from Central and Eastern Europe were in the early 1990s. Thus the accession process is likely to take much longer – at least another decade, probably much longer. In the meantime, any number of developments could occur

which could derail the enlargement process.

Third, U.S. engagement and leadership remain essential for any enlargement to the Black Sea region to succeed. Indeed, given Russia’s greater influence and leverage in the region – not to mention its geostrategic ambitions – the engagement of the United States will be even more important than it was in the 1990s.

Moreover, as Ivan Krastev’s excellent paper in this series argues, one cannot assume that the EU and Russia will be natural or easy partners around the wider Black Sea. Indeed, the clash between a post-modern EU, with its emphasis on democratic reform, human rights, and rule of law, and a more nationalistic, assertive Russia determined to preserve – and even expand – its influence in the Black Sea region could be quite profound and make EU engagement in the Black Sea area much more difficult than many advocates of an EU-first strategy assume.

The Russian factor

The strongest objection to a NATO-first strategy in the Black Sea region is the potential impact on relations with Russia. Critics point out that integration of countries in the Black Sea area could provoke a confrontation with Russia. Again this risk is not new. The West faced a similar dilemma during the debate over the accession of the countries of Central Europe in the 1990s. The difference is that Russia is today more powerful than in the 1990s and has even stronger historical and strategic interests in the Black Sea region.

But this is an argument for prudence and careful diplomacy, not for strategic capitulation. Western statesmen need to consider Russia’s strategic interests in the Black Sea region, but Russia cannot be given veto power over Western policy or droit over the right of independent and sovereign nations to choose membership in structures that they believe enhance their security. This has been a key principle of Western policy and should remain so. Nor should they be excluded from membership simply because at one time they were part of the Soviet Union.

In short, Western leaders need to combine firmness with flexibility. But they should not delude themselves into believing that they can avoid geostrategic problems by substituting soft power for hard power or using the European Union as the tip of the Western effort to expand stability and security eastward. We need prudence and careful diplomacy, not strategic capitulation.

Black Sea Paper Series

Conclusion

In the early 1990s, the United States concluded – reluctantly – that Washington and NATO would have to lead the effort to anchor the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe to the West. A similar debate is starting to unfold today with regard to the Wider Black Sea region. While many of the parameters have changed, one factor has not – the need to combine U.S. and European leadership and resources to help consolidate democratic breakthroughs in Eurasia and the wider Black Sea region.

For the reasons outlined above, such a strategy is more likely to be successful if NATO enlarges first. This is not to say that the European Union is not important. Indeed, in many ways, it is even more important than it was in the 1990s, given the economic and social needs of the countries in the Black Sea region. But the European Union today still lacks the internal political cohesion and political muscle to tackle a task of this magnitude by itself. Thus, at the end of the day, NATO and the European Union will have to work closely together if stability and security are to be extended into the Black Sea region. NATO outreach and eventual membership – in cases where the aspirants meet the criteria for membership – can help to create an over-arching security umbrella and structure that would give the countries of the Black Sea region the time, confidence, and space to continue consolidating reforms and improve their qualifications for their EU membership as well.

In pursuing this strategy, the West should be sensitive to Russia's legitimate interests in the Black Sea region. But Russia cannot be given droit over the security of the countries in the region. Artificial red lines and spheres of influence are out-moded legacies of a by-gone era and cannot be the basis for creating security and stability in the 21st century. On this point, the West needs to remain firm.

About GMF

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) is a nonpartisan American public policy and grant-making institution dedicated to promoting greater cooperation and understanding between the United States and Europe. GMF does this by supporting individuals and institutions working on transatlantic issues, by convening leaders to discuss the most pressing transatlantic themes, and by examining ways in which transatlantic cooperation can address a variety of global policy challenges. In addition, GMF supports a number of initiatives to strengthen democracies. Founded in 1972 through a gift from Germany as a permanent memorial to Marshall Plan assistance, GMF maintains a strong presence on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to its headquarters in Washington, DC, GMF has seven offices in Europe: Berlin, Bratislava, Paris, Brussels, Belgrade, Ankara, and Bucharest. For more information, visit www.gmfus.org.

About BST

In order to promote regional cooperation and good governance in the wider Black Sea region, GMF started the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (BST). A public-private partnership modeled on the successful Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD), BST works in collaboration with a range of donors to provide grants to indigenous organizations working to foster and strengthen regional cooperation, civil society, and democratic foundations. BST will be operated as a 10-year initiative, though GMF remains open to considering a longer-term effort. For more information, contact BlackSeaTrust@gmfus.org.