

From the Desk of the Editor

Every year, TPQ's summer issue runs in parallel with the ARI Movement's annual international security conference. The conference, held at the end of June in Istanbul, focused on "Democratization and Security in the Black Sea Region" in partnership with the German Marshall Fund. Various issues were brought to light in a lively mixture of stimulating debates and presentations. It was evident from the wide range of views expressed among participants that the Black Sea Region is one of the areas where global strategic and economic competition intersect today. Whether the Region exists only geographically, or whether it is also a region in the sense of shared interests and identity, is still open to debate.

The Black Sea Region, both geographically and strategically, encompasses an area beyond the littoral states of the Sea. The Sea itself is an important transit route for energy, but also, potentially, for ships associated with organized crime and other threats. Turkish officials argue that the Black Sea is small and that Turkey, along with any littoral states that wish to do so, could easily secure it. Extending NATO's presence to the Sea is controversial – due to, expectedly, Russia's, and, more surprisingly, Turkey's objection. Russia and Turkey are moving closer on other fronts as well.

Frozen conflicts are a source of instability in the region. The mechanisms to solve these conflicts have not produced significant progress in over a decade. The political capital of the heads of state involved, has not allowed for proactive initiatives for their resolution, and competition among involved third parties is not conducive to establishing a lasting peace.

For almost 15 years, the Organization for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) has been where countries in the Black Sea Region have met to discuss relevant issues, especially regarding economic ties. As institutionalized as it is, however, BSEC apparently does not satisfy all of its members' expectations. The smaller countries feel dominated, the budget does not allow for substantial initiatives, and the vision which BSEC was meant to serve, has been lost over the years in light of the changing global and regional dynamics. This is not to say that BSEC is doomed to fade further. If the EU chooses to use the BSEC mechanism as a counterpart in dealing with the region, and if the member states are willing to imbue BSEC with political capital and resources, it could feasibly be revitalized. Turkey intends to play a leading role in such a progression during its upcoming chairmanship of BSEC. On the other hand, with the U.S. strengthening bilateral relations along common interests with some of the littoral States, and with the establishment of the Black Sea Forum (which might serve some ends BSEC has not), it may be too late to rebuild the credibility and promise of BSEC again.

As of 2007, the EU is set to become a littoral power, as Bulgaria and Romania become full EU members. The EU's methods of fostering better governance and the use of soft power to induce "European" paradigms can offer much needed changes in mentality to the region. The EU has something to offer all parties in the Black Sea Region. However the very qualities that make the EU seem more benevolent than its alternatives also bring along its relative passivity and eventual ineffectiveness. The absence of a united EU foreign policy dims the promise of its role in the region.

One of the main priorities of European states with regard to the Black Sea is the establishment of routes to secure energy resources. Diversification of sources is critical for European energy security. Russia is currently seen to be leveraging energy related power in the region for political and strategic power in an effort to dominate the market. Turkey's added value for the

EU might very well be its ability to provide the EU with a much needed energy diversification option.

For the past year, popular support for the EU in Turkey has been diminishing. A feeling that the EU will eventually turn Turkey down drives this trend - mostly due to rhetoric stemming from EU member states and domestic circles. Recently, to save face, domestic political positioning seems to be formulated in such a way as to not rely on success in EU relations. The feeling of exclusion from the EU may be leading Turkish politicians to project the image of having other options and not needing the Union in order to enjoy a bright future as a regional power.

The relationship between Ankara and Washington has also been on shaky grounds, due to the Iraq War, the general disagreement with Washington's actions in the Middle East, and their perceived disregard of Turkey's interests. When Ankara warned Washington the Iraq intervention would open a Pandora's box in the region, Washington nevertheless pursued its plans. Moreover, instead of primarily targeting the PKK terrorists in northern Iraq, Washington focused on combatting the primary sources of threats to American success in Iraq. Turkey, like Russia, has the instincts of an imperial past- the hint that they may be being bullied sets off alarm signals. Turkey and Russia, after years of being on opposite camps, may now find themselves in situations of mutual sympathy.

The outlook put forth by the government in Turkey prioritizes building trust with its neighbors. The logic for this policy stems partially from the potential problems Turkey might encounter, and has historically experienced, with its neighbors. At times, these confrontations are underestimated - conveniently so, according to the nationalist Turkish perspective - by western allies. However, the effects of prioritizing bilateral neighborly relations over calculations based on larger global dynamics and alliances is yet to be seen.

Viewed from the West, another - perhaps premature- perspective can be gleaned: a Turkey that does not want NATO in the Black Sea because it will bother Russia, a Turkey that does not support democratization efforts in order not to upset the leaders of neighboring states, a Turkey that does not prioritize the energy security of western countries in its calculations while making energy deals, can hardly claim to be a natural extension of a value-based western bloc. Have the fine balances of Turkey's foreign policy tradition been upset by politicians or do those that fear so have ulterior motives? Such issues need to be debated openly and with intellectual integrity.

Countries of the Former Soviet Union, based on their years of experience dealing with Russia's political elite, are concerned that Russia might take advantage of its deepening relationship with Turkey in a way that would be costly both for the independence of the smaller regional states and for Turkey's long term interests. While Georgia, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania appear firmly intent to pursue western links, a cautious stance among western powers towards Russia has arisen. How Turkey will position itself in this evolving political duality is a question high on the agenda of policy-makers throughout the world.

The current Turkish government came to power riding the global and domestic waves of support for liberal democratization. It is ironic that in strengthening relationships with regional countries, intolerant regimes have not been distinguished from those striving to adopt the values of, and develop partnerships with, liberal democracies. Has Machievelli's realism

taken over or does the Government calculate that it can engage with shady forces and turn them miraculously into fair players?

Turkey can play a key role in the progression of neighboring societies towards more 'European' values. A clear stance by Turkey, backed with concrete policies, will make a difference. Being on the side of the free market in energy agreements, being proactive in the resolution of frozen conflicts, taking a position against repression, setting an example by discussing policy options with domestic interest groups in light of a larger vision, and being accountable for the initiatives that fall within this roadmap are just some of the ways Turkey can play a positive role. But perhaps the strongest contribution Turkey can make to the Region is indirect: by continuing consistently down the path of reforms related to their EU membership drive and extending the values and discipline imbued by this process to foreign policy decisions.

Perhaps Turkey's policy in the Region is planned with a long term, comprehensive vision. However, only to the extent that it is articulated as such to relevant domestic actors and counterparts abroad, will it generate the needed support for its eventual success.

This issue of TPQ offers food for thought on these topics, with the intention of generating new ideas, encouraging more transparent policy formulation, and stimulating a healthy clash of opinions.

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