

THE BLACK SEA: NEW ARENA FOR GLOBAL COMPETITION

The provisions of the Montreux Convention have rendered a unique situation in the Black Sea region wherein Access of war vessels of countries which do not have a coast in the Black Sea are very restricted. Today the Black Sea region has become a center of global competition for reasons such as being located at the crossroads of energy transportation routes. This article overviews the policies of both the Black Sea countries and global powers towards the region, highlighting the prevalent problems.

Sinan Ođan*

*Turkish Center for International Relations and Strategic Analysis, Chairman, www.turksam.org

In his book, *Pirates and Emperors*, Noam Chomsky recites a story from St. Augustine's *City of God* about a confrontation between Alexander the Great and a captured pirate: "Alexander the Great asks the pirate: How dare you molest the sea? The pirate replies: 'How dare you molest the sea?' asked Alexander. 'How dare you molest the whole world?' the pirate replied. 'Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; you, doing it with a great navy, are called an emperor.'"¹ The competition over the Black Sea and surrounding regions resembles this story.

Discussions over the Black Sea region in the regional and global agenda started with a statement by Kurt Volker, second in command at the U.S. State Department's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. In his speech in Washington D.C., Volker expressed U.S. desire for NATO to play a role in the Black Sea region, however he also acknowledged that there is disunity among the countries of the region on this matter. Volker said "we don't want to sort of be pushing NATO in against the wishes of any NATO allies, particularly Turkey, so we are talking to countries about how and whether we can do this."² Nevertheless it is evident that the U.S. aims to actively take part in the security cooperation in this region, preferably under the auspices of NATO.

One of the main obstacles in the way of the U.S. ambition to be more active in the Black Sea region are the Montreux provisions. There are various scenarios of amending and dissolving this convention. In the short run, if the U.S. can not enter the Black Sea under its own flag, an alternative "soft passage" under the NATO flag is on the agenda. Kremlin is deeply concerned about such aspirations. Kremlin is also concerned that if this region comes under NATO influence, Crimea will come under Turkish control. Today, competition in this region is not only between the U.S. and Russia; the strategic importance of the region has also led to competition among corporations and other countries of the region.

Ankara is concerned that the U.S. initiative will lead to the reopening of the debates pertaining to the Montreux Convention that had ceded rights to Turkey over the straits. There are still institutions and initiatives responsible for security cooperation in the Black Sea. These are: BlackSeaFor (Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group) and Black Sea Harmony which was initiated by Ankara to fight terrorism. Thus, Ankara argues that additional security forces under NATO are not necessary and that the task of keeping the region secure can be accomplished by the BlackSeaFor- which each of the littoral states is already a member of.³ The duties of this organization include search and rescue operations, humanitarian aid, and environment preservation. In this context, the main aim of the U.S is to carry the "Active Endeavor" - a set of operations under the auspices of NATO in the Mediterranean- to the Black Sea. The purpose of "Active Endeavor", to which Turkey is also included, is to inspect the sea transportation routes and to take action against any suspicious vessels in the region. Turkey single handedly administers this mission in the Black Sea under the 'Black Sea Harmony'. Russia has decided to participate in this mission. This is expected to be formalized during Ahmet Necdet Sezer's visit to Russia.

¹ Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors: International Terrorism in the Real World*, (Claremont Research & Publications Co, 1986) p. 1

² U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2006/62073.htm>.

³ Mevlüt Katık, *Na Cernom More Oboc trayetsya Geopolitičiskoe Soperničestvo*, www.eurasianet.org, 13.03.2006.

Turkey is one of the major military forces in the Black Sea region; involvement of foreign forces in the region and developments that may lead to the revision of the Montreux Convention conflict with Turkish interests. In efforts to get the Montreux Convention annulled, the U.S. is in direct contact with Romania, a signatory state of the agreement that maintains the “right to annul” it.⁴

Russia, like Turkey, does not want such U.S. influence in the region. In contrast, new members of NATO, Bulgaria and Romania, support the United States. Georgia and Ukraine are sympathetic towards the United State’s position. Hence, there is split among the littoral states of the Black Sea about U.S. proposals for the region.

In his speech, Principal Deputy-Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs of the U.S., Volker stated that, “a broader perspective on the Black Sea...is to look at it not just as a security issue, but as a regional issue of strengthening democratic change, political systems, and market economies.”

U.S. Ambassador to Ankara Ross Wilson claimed that the U.S. has rights over the Black Sea and stated that “...the Montreux is pretty clear. We have rights over the Black Sea because it is considered to be of international waters and we want to benefit from these rights.”⁵ Wilson stated that Turkey and the U.S. have common interests in the region. Drawing attention to the mutual efforts of Ankara and Washington in economic issues and in combating terrorism, drug and human trafficking, Wilson, referring to the “Mediterranean Common Initiative”, stated that the U.S. wanted to act under the framework of this common initiative, and that they had no such request from Turkey as to allow the entering of the U.S. Navy into the Black Sea. Nevertheless, it is reported that the U.S. has proposed this to NATO. Wilson emphasized that the Montreux is explicit about the mobilization of military forces in the Black Sea; and said that this sea is considered “international waters”. Wilson stated that the Montreux Convention allowed for certain rights over the Black Sea and that the U.S. wanted to benefit from their rights originating from the international water status of the Sea.

In response to Wilson’s statement, Russia’s Ambassador to Ankara, Petr Stegnyy, said, ‘there is not need to pick a fight if there is none’. According to Stegnyy Montreux was born out of centuries of competition, reflected the balance of interests efficiently and had a well working mechanism. He said that the debate over the amendment of the agreement was pointless. The ambassador further stated, “Montreux is compatible with today’s conditions.”⁶ Moreover, Stegnyy argued that it was pointless to talk of NATO presence in the Black Sea since three of the Black Sea countries were already NATO members.

⁴ The ‘Active Endeavor’ operation in the Mediterranean was founded with U.S. initiative after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. It is under the NATO umbrella and its members comprise U.S. Turkey, England, Italy, Germany, Holland and Spain. During the operations conducted by the war vessels of these countries commercial and private sea vessels can be searched if found suspicious of being a part of terrorist activity, illegally transporting arms, and other such unlawful activities.

⁵ The U.S. claims rights over the Black Sea based upon the following agreements: 1951 NATO agreement; 1954 U.S. special privileges agreement. 29 March 1980 Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) its annexes and amendments; 16 March 1987, the extension of the DCA and the annex regarding the rights granted over Konya; 12 August 1996 the implementation agreement; 1996 protocol regarding rights granted in Konya.

⁶ Petr Stegnyy: *Montrö Tartışması Yersiz*, http://www.turkey.mid.ru/text_t125.html.

During the Cold War years, the Black Sea was almost like the USSR's inland sea (excluding the Turkish Black Sea coast), but today the USSR's heir, the Russian Federation, can only reach the sea through the coast of Novorossiisk and the shallow shores of Azak. Before its fall, the USSR navy resided in Sevastopol, Odessa, Donuzlav, and Poti harbors. Furthermore the navy had facilities in Nikolayev and Kerç. Today the Russian Federation has lost almost all its bases on the Black Sea; their only remaining ports are in Novorossiisk and Sevastopol.⁷

The actors striving to be active in the Black Sea region may be assessed under the following headings:⁸

- 1) Global powers: the United States., the European Union, and Russia
- 2) Regional powers: Turkey, Ukraine, Romania. These actors have difficulty in formulating policies independent of global actors thus they have to work in coordination with them.
- 3) International organizations: NATO, EU, OSCE, GUAM, Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC)

The United States of America:

After the September 11 attack, the U.S. interests in the region took a new shape under the umbrella of the "war against terror". According to the National Security Strategy of 2002, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea regions are not only considered important because of the oil reserves, but also because of the routes that open gates to Indian and South East Asian markets. The U.S. military presence from Afghanistan to Georgia enhances U.S. influence in the region. The primary U.S. aim is to tilt the balance of power to its advantage and undermine Russia's economic, political, and military influence in the region. Another important aim is to integrate the states that emerged after the collapse of the USSR into the Euro-Atlantic bloc. As a result, the emergence of the U.S. and its allies as the dominating geopolitical powers in the region is shifting the regional balance of power.

The significance of the Black Sea for the U.S is as in the following:

- Through the Black Sea, the U.S. can control Russia's Achilles "soft spot", the Northern Caucasus, and can engage in various forms of provocation.
- The U.S. existence in the region may boost Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova's confidence and courage, leading them to raise their voices against Russia.
- The Black Sea is an important passage in the transfer of energy resources from the Caucasus-Caspian-Central Asia line to Western markets. Not only may the foreign powers that are active in the region become influential in shaping the energy policies of the countries of this line, they may also dictate energy policies of the region as a whole, which is one of Russia's main export channels for oil and natural gas. In this context, the location of the Black Sea, lying in the center of the East-West, North-South energy corridors, and the manifestation of

⁷ Vladimir Ivanov, *Sivastopol Yerine Başka Yer Aranıyor [Replacement Sought for Sivastopol]... Rusya Deniz Kuvvetleri, Novorossiysk Yakınında Deniz Üssü İnşaatına Başlıyor*, [Russian Naval Forces to Start the Construction of New Naval Base near Novorossiysk] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18 Feb. 2005.

⁸ *Black Sea Regional Profile: The Security Situation and the Region Building Opportunities*, Institute For Security And International Studies, Sofia, p. 2.

the region as a considerable alternative to the reserves of the increasingly instable Middle East have exhorted both the U.S. and the EU to establish good relations with the region.

- The Black Sea is a region which is considered by Iran as a channel for oil and natural gas exports. Hence active U.S. involvement in the region provides the U.S. with the opportunity to manipulate Iranian energy policies. At the same time, geographical proximity may render Iran an easy target for the aircrafts that could take off from the bases or aircraft carries in the region.
- In addition to Iran, The Black Sea may also be crucial for putting pressure on Middle Eastern states like Iraq and Syria and for the realization of the Greater Middle East Project.
- The region is strategically important for the war against terror, which started in Afghanistan.
- The Black Sea region provides feasible opportunities for the containment of Russia.
- Certain Black Sea countries are inside the EU enlargement process and in this respect a “Wider Europe-Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors” program carries importance for EU politics in the region.
- NATO has included the region in the Partnership Program for Peace (PfP).
- The strategic position of the Black Sea may enable the mobilization of the warships and bases in and around this region, that in effect, could be used to conduct intelligence operations against Russia.

The U.S. has formulated a six-fold strategy for the region⁹:

- To accelerate the development of democracy in the region: Through this, security and stability in the region shall be maintained and U.S. interests will not be threatened. This development shall protect the EU, with its enlargement mission towards the East and, the U.S. , that maintains military presence in the region.
- Institutions should be improved and modernized: NATO and OSCE could be instrumental for the preservation of interests in the region. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that there is a general lack of institutionalization in the region. GUAM and BSEC remain inadequate. The U.S. needs the existence of institutional structures in the region to protect its interests.
- Turkey and Russia should be persuaded in the region: Through this, the U.S. will persuade its potential competitors in the region with a peaceful and friendly attitude and direct the region in light of its interests.
- Frozen conflicts should be of higher priority: Attention should be directed to conflicts in Transnistria Moldova, Nagorno Karabagh, Southern Ossetya, and Abkhazia. Russian aims of creating turbulence in these regions for its own interests and using the conflicts to exert pressure on regional powers should be prevented.

⁹ Ronald D. Asmus, *The Black Sea and The Frontiers of Freedom*, Policy Review, p.4.

- The democratization programs of the U.S. and EU should be made compatible with each other: The democratization projects of the two powers in this region should be on the same platform. Their purpose is to precipitate economic development of democracies and bolster democratic institutionalization capacities.
- Ukraine should be focused on: The U.S. sees the coup in Ukraine as a positive development for the region. The U.S. should pay attention to the developments in the post-coup era in Ukraine because this country could act as a model to the countries of the region and pull them closer to the west.

The Russian Federation:

After September 11 the military intervention in Afghanistan and later Iraq no longer qualified as a dimension of an ‘international war against terror’ but became an international restructuring process. While the U.S. attempts to establish the ‘Great Middle East Project’ that encompasses a vast territory from North Africa to Pakistan, former Soviet heir Russia has developed a new ‘Foreign Policy Concept’ in the region under Vladimir Putin - who has gained strength due to the rising oil prices.

September 11 and events that followed caused great changes in the foreign policy and the security doctrine of the Russian Federation that challenge traditional and conventional limits of change. Realizing that Russia was no longer a superpower, or at least did not have economic faculties and infrastructure to meet the demands of being a superpower, Vladimir Putin withdrew Russia from the global arena and aimed at transforming it into an active regional power. Within this framework, Russia set new policies for integration with the West and had closer relations with the U.S. This decision, based on both political and economic reasons, showed that Russia abandoned its global claims, at least for some time.¹⁰ However, global developments and the rise of oil prices, which immensely relieved Russia, once again made Russia an active player in the region.

Putin, with a firm administrative grip, has started to reconsider relations with the states of the former Soviet Union; relations which had started deteriorating during the Yeltsin times. However, new foreign policy horizons have risen in the post-9/11 era and Russia started developing closer ties with the West under the new geopolitical setting.

Following September 11, Russia has become a state which has witnessed one of the most radical foreign policy shifts on a global level. Putin has taken important political decisions, which were domestically risky, and has given the U.S. full support in the war against terrorism. Kremlin, which was swaying between Western and Eurasian politics, has been drawn closer to the West and has thus turned towards an alliance with the U.S. The Russian honeymoon with the U.S. has been evidenced by the opening of U.S. bases in Central Asian countries. However, the rise of anti-Western sentiments in Russia coupled with Russia’s disappointment with the results of drawing closer to the U.S. has led to the questioning of the support given to the U.S. and has directed Russia to follow a more diverse foreign policy and to consider other alternatives.

¹⁰ Sinan Oğan, *Türk-Rus İlişkilerinde 11 Eylül Yansımaları [Reflections of September 11 over Turkish-Russian Affairs]*, 15 Feb., 2002, www.turksam.org.

U.S. activities in the region, namely the opening of bases in Central Asia, providing military and technical aid to Georgia (a country strategically important for the transfer of Caspian oil), are in conflict with Russia's "near abroad" politics and has thus led the latter to accelerate its search for alternative politics. Although the U.S. presence in Central Asia conflicts with Russian interests, President Putin has not been very vocal about this issue as to not damage relations with the West. However, increased U.S. activity in Central Asia, the Black Sea and the Caucasus, along with increased support to Georgia, has deeply catalyzed Russian concerns. Russia has formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and has started competing with the U.S. in the region. The extension of the same competition into the Black Sea, a region which is also crucial for Russia since many of its energy transportation lines reside on it, has increased the strategic importance of this region.

The priority of Russia is to maintain political, economic and military domination in the region; Russia wants to control the politics of the Black Sea and Caucasus states in line with its own interests and restrict Turkish, U.S. and EU activities in the region.¹¹

The European Union:

The EU interest in the region is parallel to the EU enlargement process. With the accession of central and eastern European countries to the EU, the EU has become a neighbor of the Black Sea. In the future, with the Bulgarian and Romanian membership in 2007 and the prospective membership of Turkey, the EU may become an active power in the Black Sea region. Consequently, the EU perspective in the Black Sea will clarify. Since the EU will be neighboring the Black Sea, the issues of this region will be dealt with through the 'European Neighborhood Policy' framework. European Neighborhood Policy aims for the recognition of sovereignty and independence, resolution of conflicts, recognition of human rights and democratic foundations, and implementation of economic reforms.¹² The Black Sea region resides on the energy routes and this is especially important for the EU, since it provides its energy requirements from external sources. Security and stability are important in the Black Sea region because, as mentioned above, the EU will become a neighbor of this region in 2007. Especially in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe, EU officials want to prevent immigration from the East to the West through the Black Sea route. However it should be noted that the rejection of the EU Constitution diverted attention away from this region.

As aforementioned, EU countries are dependent on foreign oil, thus any development that might lead to the delay or obstruction of energy transfer to the EU should be hindered. In addition, environmental factors have created a link between the Black Sea and the EU. The membership of Romania and Bulgaria will probably be consolidated in 2008 whereupon EU will have a coast on the Black Sea and responsibilities, such as protection of sea shores, lack of water, and the fight against radioactive waste will come to the fore. Furthermore, the passage of oil tankers from the Black Sea will have to abide by the EU security standards. EU affiliation with the region is also necessary in order to control the potential immigration from the instable and relatively underdeveloped countries of this region to Europe.¹³

¹¹ Stephen Blank, *Time for a Transatlantic Initiative*, New Europe Review, p. 5.

¹² Rouben Shugarian, "From The Near Abroad To The New Neighborhood: The South Caucasus On The Way To Europe", A New Euro – Atlantic Strategy For the Black Sea Region, VYV Public Relations, Bratislava, 2004, p. 50

¹³ Mustafa Aydın, *Europe's Next Shore: the Black Sea Region after EU Enlargement*, The European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2004, pp. 13-14.

Littoral States:

Turkey, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, and Georgia have different policies and expectations regarding the Black Sea. However, their expectations converge when it comes to regional stability and security conditions, sustainable development, and the security of transportation routes. The U.S. and Western interests in Black Sea can be listed as regional stability, openness to reforms, and secure energy routes. Consequently, the U.S. bases in Romania and Bulgaria brought these countries up to an important position. Also it is known that Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia support the West under the GUAM framework. Countries which get into close relations with the West obtain more secure conditions and get economic funds, and obtain consideration by courtesy of NATO. And the way for countries in the region to get closer to the West is through carrying out Western-motivated democratization reforms. These states, ignoring their internal dynamics and assuming a jacobian attitude, are exposed to an artificial and imported form of change. They believe that through democratization and sustainability they can distance themselves from Russia and get under Western influence. Their military and civil society are not completely dependent on political administration - a condition which legitimizes the government changes in the region. The support that is required for the democratic reform process is provided by the West; thus, states in the region become more dependent on the West. However, as can be observed in the Ukraine example, dependence on Russia for energy and other economic affairs complicates the situation.

After its independence, Ukraine tried to remain the strong post-Soviet military force and the sea port of the region. Its drive to be part of the West but at the same time its dependency on Russian energy puts Ukraine in a difficult position.¹⁴ Romania plays an active role in the region through its participation in bilateral agreements. Romania also strives to get additional economic income from the Caspian and Constante-Trieste oil pipeline by transferring to the West. Bulgaria generally supports EU and U.S. interests in the Black Sea but demonstrates a more reluctant attitude than Romania.

Turkey, with the strongest fleet in the Black Sea after the breakup of USSR, is the dominant military power in the Bosphorus and Dardanelles and has taken major responsibilities in order to maintain security in the region.¹⁵ Although Turkey should hold a central place in the discussions over the security of the Black Sea, its opinion on such issues are not commonly included. There is an expectation for Turkey, as a member of NATO and candidate of the EU-membership, to agree with the EU and the U.S. demands in the Black Sea. Terrorism in the Black Sea, illegal trafficking and security issues regarding the oil tankers that pass through straits concern Turkey more than any other country.

The Montreux Convention, signed in 1936, is, along with the Lausanne Treaty, a main document establishing the borders of the sovereign Turkish Republic. With the Montreux Convention, access to the Black Sea was determined in favor of littoral states. Most importantly, access of non-littoral countries' war vessels is prevented. In terms of public vessels' access, limitations are applied, such as weight and time restrictions. In order to bring the NATO forces in the Black

¹⁴ Ognyan Michev, "Transatlantic Strategy For Black Sea Stabilization And Integration", Ronald D. Asmus (ed.), *A New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region*, Washington; The German Marshall Fund of the U.S., 2004, p.92

¹⁵ Ardan Zentürk, "Amerika ile Krizin Asıl Nedeni" (The Principle Reason of the Turkish-American Crisis), *Star* daily newspaper, 28.02.2005.

Sea, the U.S. is well aware that changes need to be made on the Montreux Convention. Amendments on Montreux threaten Turkish interests and have the potential of diminishing the leverage of Turkey in the Black Sea that was earned after the Turkish war of independence.¹⁶ In this regard, Russia supports Turkey. In his visit to Ankara, Vladimir Putin expressed Russia's stance over this issue by stating: "Russia, like Turkey, opposes overriding the Montreux Convention and allowing foreign forces into the Black Sea...Currently, we are protecting the Black Sea together."¹⁷

The Black Sea Oriented International Foundations:

Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC): BSEC is a regional collaboration organization which was established after the collapse of USSR with the initiative of Turgut Özal, former President of Turkey, in order to foster economic cooperation among countries in the Black Sea region. However in time, due to regional and global developments, the intended function of BSEC has diminished and today its function does not exceed one of counseling. Turkey played a leading role in the establishment of BSEC and plays an important role in the working and functioning of the organization. BSEC consists of 19 million km² area, which has borders with the Japanese Sea in the east, the Baltic Sea in the west, Polar Sea in the north, and the Mediterranean Sea in the south. BSEC has an annual trade capacity of 309 billion dollars; consumer and producer population of 327 million. Also this area has the second largest oil and natural gas resources, just behind the Gulf region.

BSEC is an organization which was established in 1992 with Turkey's leadership and it is important that Turkey will be holding the presidency for six months between May 1 and October 31, 2007. In 2007, BSEC will celebrate its 15th anniversary with chief executives of states in a summit in Turkey. New decisions to pep up this organization and new policies to prevent foreign powers from entering the region are going to be necessary.¹⁸

In addition to BSEC, the countries of the region, the EU and UN collaborated to form the Black Sea Environmental Program in 1993. Also in 1993, the EU supported the establishment of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia. Interstate Oil Gas Transport to Europe is another regional program that was established in 1995 through EU sponsorship. However, the EU, with its expanding structure and its "European Neighborhood Policies" which are developed to control the consequences of this expansion, aims to pursue large-scale conventions, agreements, and programs that can encompass the pre-existing ones and former partnerships.

Black Sea Collaboration Task Group: BLACKSEAFOR was established on April 2, 2001 with Turkey's leadership, in order to strengthen collaboration, peace and stability in the region among littoral states. The duties of BLACKSEAFOR can be summarized as: search and rescue operations, humanitarian aid operations, mine countermeasures (MCM), environmental protection operations, goodwill visits, and other tasks determined by other member countries.

¹⁶ Akşam daily newspaper, "ABD'nin Büyük Karadeniz Projesi Karadeniz ve Boğazların Kontrolü", {USA's Greater Black Sea Project: Controlling Black Sea and the Straits} <http://www.aksam.com.tr>.

¹⁷ Ardan Zentürk, "Amerika ile Krizin Asıl Nedeni" {The Principle Reason of the Turkish-American Crisis}, Star daily newspaper, 28.02.2005.

¹⁸ Turkey, Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, Albania, Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine and Greece are the members of the BSCE. Egypt, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Tunisia, Czech Republic, U.S., Croatia, Belarus are observer states. Austria has applied to be an observer state. The observer status of the U.S. has accepted as a result of U.S.'s long insistence on this matter, on October 2005.

The force can participate in OSCE and UN peacekeeping missions. Turkey also established Black Sea Harmony to support the war against terror.

Partnership for Peace: PfP was established in 1994 and aims to establish dialog and cooperation among the Caucasus and Central Asian states.¹⁹ PfP also targets to increase political and military cooperation in Eurasia. Participant states can take part in pre-determined missions alongside NATO forces. While PfP accelerates the process of candidate countries for NATO-membership, it also helps non-member countries familiarize themselves with and get into closer relations with NATO.

Bases for the U.S from Romania and Bulgaria

The continuation of Moscow's political, economic and military presence in the region, Ukraine's unclear geopolitical orientation, and Turkey's determined political and security politics as evidenced during the 2003 Iraqi Crisis have made Romania, Georgia, and Bulgaria appealing territories for the re-deployment of the U.S. forces. Among these three states, Georgia is the most unstable one, which makes the other two more appealing.

The geo-strategic aims of the U.S. appear to be parallel to those of the new Romanian and Bulgarian elite. These aims, as presented during the application to NATO in 2004 are: to guarantee double edged security against Russian hegemony and to ensure fast integration to the EU.

During her visit, The U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice signed an agreement with Romanian officials to establish American bases in Romania. Now, there are three different U.S. bases, in Babadagh, Mihail Kogalniceanu Airport, and Fetes. Other plans are also on the table, such as forming an Eastern European Task Force and Chiefs of Staff Unit that employs a permanent staff of 100 officers in Mihail Kogalniceanu air base. The Bezmer airbase which is located in the southern border of Bulgaria and Novo Selo function as shooting ranges.²⁰ In both countries the U.S. plans to deploy five thousand soldiers. In addition, Georgia has been trying to remove the Russian air bases on its territory and sign bilateral agreements with the E.U. in a set of efforts to accept U.S. military presence.

For the short run, the U.S. wants naval bases in Romania and Bulgaria on the Black Sea. However in the middle and long run, the U.S. desires to be present in the Trabzon harbor of Turkey and current Russian sea base in Ukraine, Sevastopol naval base. The latter base has been leased to Russia until 2015. However, Ukrain pressured Russia to remove Russian navy forces before the due date. Due to issues like this in Sevastopol, Russia is on the edge of losing it naval bases in the Black Sea and seeks new solutions regarding this issue. Hence, Russia initiated the construction of a large naval base in the Korosondar region, which is literally the only exit to the Black Sea, and is expected to be completed by 2015.

The *Color Revolutions* initiated a new power struggle in the Baltics-Black Sea-Caspian Sea line. In this framework, the U.S. supported the Color Revolutions in two countries sharing the Black

¹⁹ Bilge Buttanrı, *Bölgesel Güç Karadeniz, {Black Sea the Regional Power}* IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2004, p.196

²⁰ Aleksey Bausin, "*Sşa Sozdayut Voennuyu Baz una Çernom More*", <http://www.izvestia.ru/world/article3028035>, 6 December 2005.

Sea border (Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004) in order to establish pro-Western regimes. The U.S. also started working on the establishment of the Union of Democratic States in the Baltics-Black Sea-Caspian Sea line. This attempt is a major threat against the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which was established by Russia.

Russian Plans to Establish New Naval Bases on the Black Sea

Russian president Vladimir Putin signed a governmental decree to build a new naval base for the Russian fleet. With this decree Russia initiated the construction of a naval base for its fleet on the Black Sea; the only base on the Black Sea for the Russian fleet other than the one in Sevastopol which is within the Ukrainian territory. In his speech, Putin explained the importance of the Sevastopol base, and said that Russian troops will not leave the quarters. In his explanation, Putin stressed the importance of the Azak Sea and the Black Sea for Russian Federation and said that Russian Navy has to evaluate different options. Moreover, a Minister of Russian Federation Sergei Ivanov stated in his speech on September 20, 2005 that a Black Sea base would be constructed for the Russian naval forces in the city of Novorossiysk.

Although this statement insinuates that Russia is only after a single naval base in Novorossiysk, observers think otherwise; through a decree about the resolution of diplomatic and military problems in the Azak and Black Sea region, it is said that Putin intends to build bases around the shores of the Azak Sea, islands of the Black Sea and cities of Taganrog, Tuapse, and Gelencik. Sources at the Russian Federation Foreign Ministry express that the plan is confidential. If the claims have validity, then it could be understood that Russia has engaged in a new restructuring phase including the Straits, through the Black Sea and expanding to the Caspian Sea. In fact, with the recent U.S. presence in the region, geopolitical conditions south of Russia have changed. Russia is concerned that the U.S., after Central Asia, will now deploy in the Apsheron Peninsula of Azerbaijan. Russian Senior Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Yuri Baluyevsky had previously talked about Russian concerns about the deployment of U.S. bases in the Apsheron Peninsula. Perhaps this is the reason why the Russian navy in the Caspian Sea is shifting from simple economic and defense activities to combat drills and exercises in pursuit of strategic-military targets.

Frozen Conflicts in the Black Sea Region:

The most significant threats in the Black Sea region are “ethnic conflicts” and “frozen conflicts”. Two overlapping regions of Caucasus and the Black Sea are areas where ethnic conflicts have increased since the collapse of the USSR. The mountainous Karabagh issue between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Abhazya issue in Georgia, and southern Osetya conflict lately resolved, but still remain as hot spots. Besides, Ajaria and Ahiska regions are the major issues that Southern Caucasus deals with at the present.

Another country in the region, Russia, has still been unable to resolve the ethnic Chechen issue and it appears that no such solution will be possible soon. Besides, other Northern Caucasus states live under the constant threat of ethnic conflict. As a recent argument in Russia, there is ongoing debate about unifying the federal states and reducing their numbers, which may eventually lead to new ethnic conflicts.

The Crimean region of Ukraine, an important location for the EU security, may be a prospective area of ethnic conflict. It is also probable that ethnic conflicts come about among the Russians, Crimean Tatars, and Ukrainians in the future. The Crimeans based Russians protests against

military practices of NATO that was planned to occur in Ukraine and Russian Duma fascist party Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Jirinovsky's speech about Crimean reimbursement either to Turkey or Russia, have galvanized the Crimean debate.

Moldova is another hot spot where ethnic conflicts might occur. Separatist movements in the Trans-Dniester region are one of the major problems of the region. Also changes in the country's conditions might bring the Gagauz minorities to the edge of a new conflict. Certainly, problems in the Trans-Dniester region might expand in a way that encompasses the NATO-member Romania that carries the same ethnic origin as Moldova.

Although not highly probable, a possible conflict between Turkey and Greece, and a possible Kurdish state that may emerge in the aftermath of a possible dissolution of Iraq, may initiate a set of large-scale conflicts that encircles the Black Sea region.

The aforementioned scenarios of conflict should be examined by also making note of the direct contact between Muslim minority regions and the Middle East, with its various groups, and the high potential of the U.S. policies to cause significant impact on regional balances.

Aside from these ethnic problems, there are major democratization and legislative problems among the Black Sea countries. In the Georgian example, we see regime changes brought about due to external factors. The U.S. is seen as the primary external actor in the region.

The security of energy routes that pass through this region is another concern for regional states, as well as for the EU, which feeds on energy from these regions. Ethnic conflicts and inter-state competition are prime factors that threaten the security of these energy routes.

Upon observing the factors that threaten regional cooperation and security, and upon assessing these, we see that the states of this region - especially Turkey and Ukraine - play a pivotal role. The geographic and geo-strategic stance of Turkey and Ukraine, and their capability to intervene, makes the close cooperation of these two countries crucial. This however is not sufficient because for the problems in this region reflect on the security concerns of the EU and the interests of the U.S.²¹

The Initiative of the Union of Democratic States in the Baltics -Black Sea- Caspian Sea Region

Georgian President Mihael Saakasvili, who came to power after the "Rose Revolution" at the end of 2003 and Ukrainian President Viktor Yushenko who was elected one year after as a result of the "Orange Revolution", worked in coordination for a union called "The Community of Democratic Choice" (CDC). The initiative came into existence on 22 April 2005 at the meeting of GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) and formulated the slogan: "democracy from the Baltics to the Caspian".

Then Georgian and Ukrainian leaders, who support the democratization and freedom of former Soviet republics and call for a new regional alliance, declared in a meeting in Borjomi-Georgia

²¹ Sinan Ogan, "Büyük Ortadoğu Projesi ve AB Güvenliği Çerçevesinde Karadeniz Bölgesinde Tehdit Algılamaları", {Greater Middle East Project and Security Perceptions in the context of EU Security} Paper presented in Ukraine on June 2004 at the Conference of "EU Security within the Framework of the Black Sea."

that they will work for the establishment of a union of “Community of Democratic Choice”. The Union would help foster democracy, security, stability and peace in Europe.

In the words of Putin, the “Community of Independent States, founded for the velvet disengagement of the former Soviet States” could be considered a response to Shanghai Cooperation Organization led by China, that challenges the U.S. in Central Asia. In fact, establishing a pro-Western alternative of unification is not a new idea. Indeed, GUAM was established by the U.S. in order to limit Russian influence in the region. Initially, GUAM had only four members. Then, Uzbekistan officially joined the Union in 2002. However, due to its inactivity, Uzbekistan was expelled from the group in May 5, 2005. In a meeting in Kiev that took place on December 2005, Ukraine, Georgia, Letonia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Romania signed the declaration of Community of Democratic Choice that founded the Union. The second meeting of this union was held in Tbilisi on March 2006, and finally, the Baltic and Black Sea leaders summit was held in Lithuania in May 2006 with Dick Cheney’s participation. The primary aim of the Union is to contain Russian influence and bring pro-Baltic states together.

Conclusion

The provisions of the Montreux Convention²² have rendered a unique situation in the Black Sea region wherein access of war vessels of non-littoral states in the Black Sea is strictly restricted. The Black Sea has become a venue of global competition, particularly between the East and West because it lies at the crossroads of energy transportation routes and gives littoral states important control over the sea. At the heart of the Black Sea politics, there is the Montreaux Convention and the provisions that limit the tonnage and number of vessels allowed for the non-littoral states. The changing geopolitics of the Black Sea and the increasing number of initiatives for amending Montreaux are being contained by Turkish-Russian cooperation.²³ Through the Montreux Convention, Turkey obtained control over the Dardanelles and Bosphorous Straits, becoming an important actor in the security of the region.²⁴ Turkey argues that amending the Montreux Convention will upset stability and political balances, create polarity between Russia and NATO, and diminish Turkish dominance in the region, ultimately harming Turkey’s interests.²⁵

Turkey does not want debates about the amendment of the Montreux and is clear about not giving concessions on this matter. This has led the U.S. to suspend its plans over this region. However, it should be noted that though the U.S. suspended its plans, the first chance that arises for it to pursue its ambitions will almost certainly be used. The U.S. initiatives that threaten Turkish dominance in the region and the resulting Turkish-Russian cooperation is a development

²² The passage of vessels through the Turkish Straits have been bound by the 1936 Montreux Convention. The Montreux is a special special agreement and is described as *sui generis* in legal terminology. The agreement comprises 29 articles and rules the passage of commercial ships, war vessels and air crafts.

²³ Russian actions showed opposition to the Montreaux in the past because due to its increased energy exports, its tankers were slowed down in the Black Sea. However, with the evident U.S. interest in the region, Russia stopped such actions and by-passed its tanker-based energy export and increased its exports through pipelines. In this respect, there is competition between the Bulgaria-Greece pipeline and the Samsun-Ceyhan line.

²⁴ *Lozan Antlaşması, Montreux Sözleşmesi ve Paris Barış Sözleşmesi*, [Lausanne Treats, Montreux Convention and Paris Peace Accord] Harp Akademileri Basımevi, İstanbul 1987, p. 111.

²⁵ Retired Admiral Tanju Erdem, “ABD, Karadeniz’de Varlık Göstermek İstiyor”, [U.S. wants to demonstrate presence in the Black Sea] Cumhuriyet Strateji, 17 April 2006.

worth focusing on. One of the motives behind the U.S. declaration that it would not enter the Black Sea 'for the time being' is to prevent deeper cooperation between Turkey and Russia.

In addition to the above mentioned players, the Armenians see the sea as a route to the outside world and the Greeks have accelerated their Greek-Pontus dealings. Within this framework, it is noticed that in the Turkish coast of the Black Sea there are efforts to implant terrorist groups and terrorist operation attempts. The increased possibility and hope of finding oil on the Turkish Black Sea coast is another important development in the region. Within this framework the growing interest of Israel and certain Western powers in the region should not be overlooked.