

## TURKEY'S BLACK SEA VISION AND ITS DYNAMICS

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### Z

Sovyetler Birlięi'nin daęılması sonrasında Karadeniz Blgesi'nin kresel gndemde nemi artmıřtır. Blgede tarihi baęlara ve kıyıdař devletler arasında en uzun kıyı řeridine sahip olan Trkiye, 1936 Montr Boęazlar Szleřmesi uyarınca Boęazlar'ın kontrolne sahip olarak blgesel bir sylem geliřtirmiřtir. Trkiye, blgede blgeselleřme bilincini oluřturmak ve tm kıyıdař devletler arasında ekonomi, politika ve gvenlik alanlarında iřbirlięini geliřtirmek iin aktif bir politika izlemeye bařlamıř ve blgede Karadeniz Ekonomik İřbirlięi rgt (KEİ), Karadeniz Donanma İřbirlięi Grev Grubu (BLACKSEAFOR) ve Karadeniz Uyum Harektı (KUH) gibi eřitli oluřumlar bařlatarak lider rol stlenmiřtir. Trkiye'nin bu abalarının blgeselleřme bilinci oluřturmasına raęmen, Karadeniz Blgesi'nin blgeselleřmesi eřitli nedenlerden dolayı bu zamana kadar mmkn olmamıřtır. Bu nedenler řu Őekilde zetlenebilir: İlk olarak, bu giriřimler blgesel bir anlayıřtan yoksunluęu yansıtılmaktadır ve aslında Trkiye'nin de kendine zg blgesel bir anlayıřı yoktur. Bunun yanısıra, blgeselleřmenin dinamikleri eřitli blgesel, siyasi ve ekonomik kuruluřlara mensup tur ve her biri i ve dıř iliřkilerinde farklı nceliklere sahiptir. Dięer bir ifadeyle, blgeselleřme, kıyıdař devletler tarafından daha ok Batı ile iřbirlięi olarak grlmřtir. Ayrıca Trkiye, terr tehditleri, Orta Doęu durumu gibi kendi gvenlik meseleleriyle ilgilenmek zorundadır. Ve son olarak, Trkiye'nin tarihi rakibi ve blgede dominant g olan Rusya, neredeyse tm blgesel giriřimlerde mevcuttur. Rusya'nın varlıęı, Karadeniz Blgesi'nde blgesel iřbirlięini teřvik etmekten ziyade, oęunlukla rekabete neden olmaktadır. alıřma, blgeselleřme kavramının kısa bir tanımlamasıyla bařlamaktadır. alıřmanın ikinci kısmı, blgede Trk giriřimlerine bir arka plan saęlamak adına Karadeniz Blgesi'nin tarihi sınırlarını izmektedir. Sonrasında, Trkiye'nin giriřimleri ve Rusya ile ikili iliřkilerini kapsayan Trkiye'nin Karadeniz vizyonu tartıřılmıřtır. alıřma, esasen, blgeselleřme aısından Karadeniz'in eksik ynlerine ve Trkiye'nin blgesel giriřimlerinin sınırlarına dikkat ekmekte ve "Trkiye'nin Karadeniz vizyonu

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nedir?” ve “bu vizyonu etkileyen dinamikler nelerdir?” sorularına cevap aramaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bölgeselleşme, Türkiye’nin Karadeniz Vizyonu, KEI, Karadeniz Donanma İşbirliği Görev Grubu, KUH.

#### **ABSTRACT**

Following the decline of the Soviet Union, the Black Sea Region has increased in significance on the global agenda. Turkey, having historic ties and the longest coastline among littoral states in the region, has developed a regional discourse, as it has control of the Straits in the region in accordance with the Montreux Convention of 1936. It has started to pursue an active policy to create consciousness of regionalism in the region and to enhance cooperation among all littoral states in the fields of economy, politics, and security; and it has undertaken a leading role in initiating various formations in the region, such as Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR), and the Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH). While all these Turkish efforts in relation to the region have created some consciousness of regionalism, it has not been possible to regionalize the Black Sea Region thus far, for various reasons. These reasons can be summarized as follows: First of all, Turkish initiatives reflect the lack of regional conception, and in fact Turkey itself does not have a distinctive regional conception. On the other hand, the drivers of regionalism belong to various regional, political, and economic organizations, and they each have different priorities in their internal and external affairs. In other words, regionalism is mainly seen by littoral states in terms of cooperation with the West. Furthermore, Turkey has had to deal with its other security issues, such as terrorist threats, the Middle East context, etc. And lastly, Russia, as a historic rival of Turkey and a dominant power in the region, exists in almost all regional initiatives. The existence of Russia mostly leads to rivalry rather than the promotion of regional cooperation in the Black Sea Region. This study begins with a brief definitional discussion of the concept of regionalism. The second part of the study bounds the Black Sea Region with its history to provide the background to Turkish regionalism in the region. Then, Turkey’s Black Sea vision is discussed, including its initiatives and bilateral relations with Russia. The study mainly points out the shortcomings of the Black Sea with regard to regionalism and the limitations of Turkey’s regional initiatives, and seeks answers to the questions “what is Turkey’s Black Sea vision?” and “which dynamics affect that vision?”

**Keywords:** Regionalism, Turkey’s Black Sea Vision, BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR, OBSH.

The Black Sea was one of the most isolated seas until the 1990s in consequence of the Straits’ *sui generis* regime. Since the 1990s, the region has been affected by several alterations. The Cold War ended; the USSR collapsed and its disintegration caused a power vacuum to occur and the “frozen-problems” rise in the region; and the 9/11 terrorist attacks caused the interest in the region of the US and other powers (such as the European Union)

to rise. Following these developments, the Black Sea Region started to become prominent on the global agenda as one of the primary areas that have witnessed power struggles. The region gained strategic significance as it contains alternative routes for transportation of the Caspian, Central Asian, and Middle Eastern hydrocarbon resources to EU countries. In addition, it became important to the US for securing the east-west energy corridor which links Europe to Caspian-area resources. For these reasons, the region has witnessed a number of regional projects by the great powers since the fall of the USSR: the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of the EU, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Enlargement Policy of the US, and the Near-Abroad Policy (NAP) of the Russian Federation (Aydın, 2012, p.49).

Throughout the Cold War the superpowers provided stability in the region; in the post-Cold War era, managing the region became more difficult and complicated because of the fall of bipolarity in the early 1990s, which resulted in the emergence of newly independent states around the region. Since then and following the collapse of the USSR, the Black Sea Region came to the fore with the rise of regional conflicts on the one hand, and the opportunities for transportation of energy resources to the West on the other. These opportunities shaped the most popular discourse of Turkish foreign policy in the early 1990s. From that date forward, Turkey came up with various efforts to encourage the littoral states to cooperate. In other words, Turkey started to play a leading part in the region with several regional initiatives.

The Black Sea is regarded by Turkey as a Turkish inland sea -entry and exit take place via Straits controlled by Turkey- and the country provides security in the Black Sea Region accordingly. The permanent and smooth implementation of the Montreux Convention of 1936, or in other words the maintenance of the status quo, is the primary dimension of the maritime security domain in Turkey's Black Sea discourse (Petriashvili, 2015, p.112).

In this paper, first of all, the concept of regionalism will be considered; then, the Black Sea Region will be described along with its historical background. In the second part of the study, Turkish regionalism in the Black Sea will be analysed through consideration of its discourse parameters; regional initiatives such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR), and the Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH); and last but not least its bilateral relations with Russia.

### **The Rise of a New Concept in International Relations: Regionalism**

Regionalism is seen as a pattern of international cooperation in international relations (Börzel, 2011, p.8). It is at present a popular phenomenon and plays an important role in international relations. It organizes states that have different policies into cooperation and integration (Gochhayat, 2014, pp.23-24).

The concept of regionalism began as a new trend in the literature of the international relations discipline after the end of the Second World War. Before discussing what regionalism is, the question “what is a region?” should be answered. A “region” is generally defined as a group of countries located in the same geographic space (Mansfield and Solingen, 2010, p.146). The region can be created or re-created, formally or informally, by countries, or more specifically by politicians. Thus, it can be seen that the notion of the region exists as a historical rather than a geographical concept (Hettne, 1999, pp.3-5).

Heywood (2011, p.482) defines regionalism as “the theory or practice of coordinating social, economic or political activities within a geographical region comprising a number of states.” However, there is no clear consensus on the definition of regionalism. The lack of a common definition is due to the fact that it is unclear where one region ends and the next begins (Mansfield and Solingen, 2010, p.146). While regionalism is mainly a process serving to promote political, economic, and/or social cooperation or integration between states in the same region (Heywood, 2011, p.481), it is certainly an ideology, a political project, and also a dynamic process (Gochhayat, 2014, pp.10-12). From this point of view, it can be stated that the establishment of regionalism has some requirements, among which are cooperation for mutual interest or acquisition, geographical proximity, mutual interdependence, and the concept of regional consciousness and identity (i.e. common history-religion-custom, descriptions of the ‘other’, etc.) (Gochhayat, 2014, p.12). However, these requirements change over time, taking on different dimensions or attaining different significance. They are not stationary.

The so-called new regionalism rose in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a result of globalization. Therefore, it can be seen that there is an interaction between regionalism and globalization. Because of that, states have embraced regionalism as a way of managing the effects of globalization (Heywood, 2011, p.488). Globalization, in other words, becomes a driver for regionalism, since regionalism is a reaction of states to the challenges of globalization by increasing economic interdependence (Börzel, 2011, pp.16–18). In addition, there is also a mutual effect between the two levels: regionalism, or more specifically regional organizations, affects state behaviour and policy on the one hand; and states form or join regional organizations to implement their own rules or policies on the other (Mansfield and Solingen, 2010, p.159).

Even if the reality is arguable and complex, there is a popular wisdom on regionalism in which the pre-Cold War and the post-Cold War eras are seen as the two sides of a dividing line between old regionalism and new regionalism (Fawcett, 2012, p.9; Söderbaum, 2003, pp.3-4; Hajizada, 2012, pp.22-25). The new regionalism, rising since the late 1980s especially as a response to globalization, has been expressed in the creation of regional trade blocs, whereas old regionalism had conducted regional cooperation

and integration over a number of political, economic, and security issues (Heywood, 2011, p.480; Hajizada, 2012, pp.22-25).

Regionalism can be classified into three categories: (1) economic regionalism, (2) security regionalism, and (3) political regionalism. In the first type of regionalism, and also the so-called new regionalism of the early 1990s, economic interests and gains are the priority of regional integration among states that are geographically proximate. The second type of regionalism relates to the cooperation of regional states for security reasons, to protect themselves against a common enemy, and/or to gain protection and power over their own region or regional issues when faced with external forces or enemies. In the last category, states attempt to enhance their prestige and diplomatic voice, and strengthen their common values (Heywood, 2011, pp.482-483).

Fawcett (2004, pp.4-10) divided the historical development of regionalism into three waves: (1) regional institutions: the first wave, 1945-1965; (2) regionalism: the second wave, 1965-1985; and (3) regionalism: the third wave, 1985-present (Behr and Jokela, 2011, pp.19-26).

The establishment of regional organizations started after the end of the Second World War (Heywood, 2011, p.480). In the years that the colonial period was ending, newly founded states benefited from regional organizations and used them as a means to have a voice in international politics. Furthermore, regional organizations helped newly founded states to resist the superpowers during the Cold War. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Treaty Organization could be cited in this context (Hasgüler and Uludağ, 2007, pp.307-317 and 329-330).

### **The Black Sea Region: Definition**

The Black Sea is an inland or landlocked sea between Eastern Europe and Western Asia, bordered to the south by Turkey, to the north by Moldova and Ukraine, to the northeast by Russia, to the east by Georgia, and to the west by Bulgaria and Romania. It is connected to the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea by the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles, and to the Sea of Azov by the Kerch Strait, and receives many great rivers such as the Danube, the Dnieper, and the Don.

This is a geographical definition of the Black Sea Region. However, two common definitions exist: a narrow one and a broad one. According to the narrow definition, the region includes only the Black Sea littoral states - Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine. According to the broad definition, on the other hand, the so-called Wider Black Sea Region is defined as the geographical region through which the Danube, Dnieper, and Don rivers pass and where they empty into the Black Sea. It forms the centre of Eurasia, which encompasses the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Anatolia, and the Caucasus. It includes the twelve BSEC members -Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine (Manoli, 2011, p.1).

The expression of the Black Sea Region is not only a matter of geography but is also related to politics, economics, and security, as the notion of the Wider Black Sea Region is clearly a political output of the systematic power struggle focused on the region.

### **The Black Sea Region: Historical Background**

Turkey has the longest seaboard among all the littoral states and has a commanding jurisdictional lead over the Straits in the region by virtue of the Montreux Convention of 1936 (Kiniklioğlu, 2006, p.55).

Historically, there was a discourse in which the inland Black Sea was known as the “Turkish Lake,” between 1453 and 1809, because Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) had full control over the Straits from the date of the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 until the Ottoman Empire’s position weakened vis-à-vis Russia and Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After this period, control over the Straits was bilateral at first, later becoming multilateral (Kiniklioğlu, 2006, p.55). The Straits regime was changed several times during this process, and the last and extant step of these changes was the Montreux Convention of 1936. Thanks to the Montreux Convention the Black Sea then stayed off the global agenda and remained relatively steady until the disintegration of the USSR.

Since the end of the Cold War, the Black Sea has been back on the global agenda. Following the demise of the USSR, ethnic-oriented frozen conflicts (in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria) reappeared across the region and Russia started to play a dominant role again owing to its “Near-Abroad Policy”<sup>1</sup> (Ozdamar, 2010, p.352-358; Tuysuzoglu, 2014, p.92). Following the 9/11 attacks, the region started to become a focus of American and European interests. Now, the Black Sea Region has become an energy-oriented game-board in the international arena (Kiniklioğlu, 2006, p.56).

### **Turkish Regionalism in the Black Sea: The Pillars of Turkey’s Vision**

Turkey’s geographical position, as a neighbouring country to the former USSR, has had a vital meaning for the West. The notion of Turkey as a “bridge between East and West” became popular in the discourse of both Turkey and NATO during the Cold War period. During this period, Turkey provided security and balance against the USSR (the Eastern Bloc) in the region as it was the only littoral state on the Black Sea among NATO members (the Western Bloc). While Turkey, as a NATO member, managed to preserve the Western Alliance’s interests in the region, the other countries surrounding the Black Sea were involved in the Eastern Bloc. Thus, Turkey’s Black Sea

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<sup>1</sup> The “Near-Abroad Policy” was formed in 1993. “Near-abroad” mainly refers to the former Soviet space. After the dissolution of the USSR, countries of the former USSR were identified as the “near-abroad” in the new Russian policy in order to maintain its own control over these countries, as Russia views these countries as its strategic sphere of influence.

policy was characterized by its links with the Western Bloc in the Cold War period (Aydm, 2012, p.52).

By the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the USSR directly affected the geopolitics of the region, as a power vacuum occurred there. Since that time, Turkey, as a traditional rival to the USSR, has pursued an active policy with a sense of leadership and has appeared as a rising regional power.

Turkey initially tried to take advantage of the power vacuum through BSEC. In the post-Cold War period, Turkey's policy spheres in the region have been reflected in regional organizations such as BSEC (1992) and BLACKSEAFOR (1998), operations such as OBSH (2004), and the implementation of policy preferences related to energy transmission lines.

The Black Sea has a different meaning for Turkey than it does for the other littoral states. The reason for this is that the Straits controlling entry to and exit from the Black Sea are located within the boundaries of Turkey, and Turkey assumed international responsibility for energy security, frozen-conflicts, and other security-related issues in the Black Sea Region with the Montreux Convention (Petriashvili, 2015, p.106). Likewise, the importance of Turkey's geopolitics in the Black Sea is directly associated with Turkey's *sui generis* right to control the Black Sea through the Straits. Accordingly, "Maintaining control over the Turkish Straits is a key aspect of Turkey's Black Sea policy" (Baran, 2008, p.90). The unchanging policy toward the Straits in Turkey's geopolitics makes it one of the most prominent countries involved in Black Sea geopolitical discourse in the region.

Turkey is the pivotal state in the development of a discourse specifically for the Black Sea, and in the permanent implementation of it. Herein, Turkish discourse toward the region took shape based on security and geo-economic dimensions. Turkey focused on the field of military security in the 2000s, after having actively striven for regionalization in the 1990s. The importance of a military component in Turkey's Black Sea discourse is what has led to policies for the Black Sea being based on security. Furthermore, as voiced above, the existence of the Straits has also caused Turkey's discourse to become more security-oriented. When it comes to the geo-economic dimension, Turkey's main purpose in the region is to become a hub for energy and transportation lines.

All in all, Turkey's policies toward the Black Sea have aimed to create multilateral cooperation and stability, increase trade relationships, and maintain maritime security over the region. BLACKSEAFOR and OBSH are evaluated as regional maritime-domain security arrangements. It is noteworthy that the balance of power, or in other words stability, has always been important for Turkey. Therefore, Turkey has focused on maritime security, shaped by the Montreux Convention, and has chosen to defend the status quo in the region (Petriashvili, 2015, p.112).

### **The First Stage of Turkey's Black Sea Regionalism: BSEC**

Turkey has pursued an active policy in the Black Sea Region especially since the collapse of the USSR. BSEC is the primary example of Turkey's active effort in this regard.

BSEC was created in 1992 as a result of a Turkish initiative aimed at increasing regional cooperation mainly in the economic field (Aydın, 2012, p.53). The organization has also aimed at contributing to regional peace and security (Aydın, 2005, p.63). In addition to the littoral states, BSEC includes Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova, and Serbia as member states; and Austria, Belarus, Croatia, Egypt, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Tunisia, the United States, and the Czech Republic as observer states (Aydın, 2005, p.62).

BSEC is the most effective and institutionalized organization and the pioneer of regionalism in the region, as evidenced by its successes in establishing institutions such as the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC (PABSEC), a Permanent Secretariat (PERMIS), the Association of Black Sea Capitals (BSCA), the Business Council (BSECBC), the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) (Aydın, 2004, pp.22-25).

Furthermore, BSEC could be considered a soft power actor, mainly strengthening economic cooperation. In addition, BSEC has contributed to the emergence of regional identity; consequently, its achievements could be seen as regionalism-oriented. In other words, BSEC paved the way for the emergence of a consciousness of regionalism in the region.

On the other hand, BSEC could yet still be seen as a fruitless formation. First, the works initiated by BSEC have been considered Turkey's trump card against the EU, rather than being seen as forming a frame for rational economic cooperation and political security (Davutoğlu, 2007, p.161). Second, the member states of BSEC have various political and economic dimensions; each of them belongs to various regional, political, or economic organizations, and each has different political priorities. They also prioritize other organizations to pursue their own foreign policies. The lack of correlation between BSEC and other powers such as NATO and the US could be seen as another failure. In addition, there is no alternative to BSEC and there are no new functional formations in the region.

All these failures are due not only to the problems in the region but also, clearly, to the fact that the views of different actors vary considerably as to the geographical extent of the Black Sea Region, and this has made it harder for regionalism to take shape there. The Black Sea Region is economically and politically heterogeneous, and therefore the littoral states need to add a Black Sea dimension to their own national and foreign policies (Manoli, 2011, p.6).



### **The Progress of Turkish Regionalism in the Black Sea: BLACKSEAFOR and OBSH**

BLACKSEAFOR was initiated by Turkey in 1998 in order to increase cooperation among military forces in the Black Sea, and was formally established in 2001. It is a naval initiative consisting of only littoral states -Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine-with the aim of fulfilling search and rescue operations in the sea, providing humanitarian assistance, mine clearance activities, environmental protection, and goodwill visits (Karadeniz, 2007, p.108). The strengthening of friendship and good relations among the littoral states and improving peace and stability in the region are also among its aims (Aydın, 2005, p.69).

BLACKSEAFOR is the most important military organization in the Black Sea and is primarily focused on improving naval cooperation among the littoral states. Since 2004, tackling organized crime, terrorist threats, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and trafficking have been included in the organization's scope (Karadeniz, 2007, p.108).

OBSH was initiated by Turkey in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolutions 1373, 1540, and 1566 in March 2004. Russia joined on December 27, 2006, Ukraine signed its participation protocol on January 17, 2006, and Romania joined on March 31, 2009 (Aydın, 2012, p.55).

OBSH can be described as similar to NATO's "Operation Active Endeavour" and is mainly aimed at increasing the ability of the littoral states to deal with security issues, deter terrorist threats and illegal acts in the region, and provide protection for the Turkish Straits (Karadeniz, 2007, p.110; Baran, 2008, p.89; Özarlan, 2012, pp.147-148).

### **Turkey's Black Sea Regionalism and Bilateral Relations with Russia: Current Situation and Implications for the Future**

It is quite obvious that Turkish-Russian bilateral relations play a pivotal and determinative role in the Black Sea Region, and more specifically in Turkey's attempts to promote regionalism there. Russia is the most influential power in the region, and the Black Sea is a top priority for Russia on the grounds that it is the gateway to the warm seas and a buffer zone between Russia and the West. The Black Sea Region also plays a vital role as an (East-West/ Southern) energy corridor, through which oil and natural gas pipelines pass.

Turkey and Russia are the status quo powers of the region. Both countries are interested in preserving the current legal regime of the Straits (the Montreux Convention, as one of the pillars of Turkey's sovereignty) and ensuring maritime security. Moving on from this point, the Black Sea is seen by both Turkey and Russia as their own zone of influence. Related to the enlargement of the West, the Black Sea is a Turkish-Russian lake for both countries. The Western powers are welcome to engage in the region only through the partnership and mediation of the bilateral hegemony there (Minchev, 2006, p.16). Turkey and Russia both want to retain their posi-

ons as the major powers, and so they oppose any foreign presence in the region (Minchev, 2006, p.10). With the membership of Bulgaria and Romania, once the backyards of the USSR, in NATO (2004) and the EU (2007), these countries have positioned themselves under the umbrella of the West, and therefore the presence of the West in the region is now an unavoidable fact; and that means the USA too has reinforced its power in the region. The interest shown in the Black Sea by the USA, NATO, and the EU bothers Russia more particularly. To reduce the Western impact in the region, Russia strives to block the membership of Georgia and Ukraine in the Western Alliance (Minchev, 2006, p.10; See. Polat, 2017; İrge, 2017; Çelikpala, 2010; Yılmaz, 2007; Tufekci, 2016, 2017). And when required, Russia does not hesitate to use hard power, as it already has a hard power-oriented foreign policy (Balcer, 2009, p.81). The war with Georgia which began on August 8, 2008 (the Five-Day War<sup>2</sup>), was clear proof of that.

Georgia could be seen as having a sufficient number of the prerequisites for membership (Minchev, 2006, p.21). And Ukraine, for its size, location, and economic and societal potential, is in a strategic position in the region because the West considers it a counterbalance against Russia (Minchev, 2006, p.19). Crimea (and in particular the port of Sevastopol), which was under the dominion of Ukraine in the post-Soviet era, is one of the two key strategic points for control over the region (the other being the Turkish Straits). Related to the expansion of the West, the Colour Revolutions in the Black Sea region (the Rose Revolution of Georgia in 2003 and the Orange Revolution of Ukraine in 2004), in the name of the democratization process led by the USA, brought anti-Russian leaderships to power. It can be said that the main reason for the Russian-Georgian War was that the Georgian administration, driven by Russia, had changed in favour of Western-oriented policy since the Rose Revolution in the country. Russia responded to Georgia's and Ukraine's implicit efforts to establish close ties with the West by the recognition of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence from Georgia (both in 2008), and the annexation of Crimea (in 2014), officially part of Ukraine. Despite the West's sanctions and embargoes on Russia, in light of Russia's reaction to the developments in the region Turkey avoided taking a firm stand against Russia and proposed multi-lateral cooperation under the name of the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) after the Russian-Georgian War (Üstün, 2016, p.5). During the Ukrainian crisis over the annexation of Crimea, home to Turkish

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<sup>2</sup> The "Five-Day War" refers to the Russian-Georgian War on August 8-12, 2008, an open conflict between Georgian, Russian and South Ossetian forces, and the first full-scale conflict between Russia and its former satellite country. The main issue that defined the legal background to this conflict was the implementation by Russia of its Near-Abroad Policy. As Georgia tended to gravitate toward the West, mostly as a result of the Colour Revolutions led by the West for its own eastward enlargement, and the hot-spots of South Ossetia and Abkhazia were the regions of Georgia where ethnic conflicts and discriminations had tended to arise, Russia used these ethnic-based problems for its own regional enlargement. In the aftermath of the Five-Day War, on 26 August, 2008, Russia formally recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

ethnic minority Tatars, Turkey again abstained from disturbing its bilateral relations with Russia, while on the other hand seeking to emphasize the importance of Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political unity (Erol, 2014, p.10; Üstün, 2016, p.7).

In the light of the above developments, the West's attempts to spread democracy and freedom are considered by Turkey and Russia to be expansionist policies that will further damage their interests in the region by encouraging even more chaos (Hill and Taşpınar, 2006, p.87). Therefore, they have developed closer ties in the region through BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR, and OBSH; they endeavour to observe the Montreux Convention; they are both opposed to the enlargement of the West; both countries are uncomfortable with too much involvement of external powers in the Black Sea Region; and they, particularly Turkey, want the countries of the region to be primarily responsible for their own security.

Indeed, Turkish-Russian relations have been influenced by pragmatic external economic interests in recent years. Despite the existence of conflicting issues, they have managed to settle their differences by focusing on energy-oriented economic relations. Yet, although Turkey is a significant economic partner of Russia and vice versa, it is impossible to see a balance in the bilateral economic relations because of Turkey's dependence on Russian natural gas. Russia is an important natural gas supplier for Turkey, and the Blue Stream natural gas pipeline project, providing Turkey with Russian natural gas through the bottom of the Black Sea, which was put into operation in 2005, has further increased Turkey's dependence on Russia (Tanrısever, 2012, p.15). Turkey has needed to look for ways to diversify its suppliers by getting involved in alternative energy projects in order to lessen its dependence on Russia.

The two countries have different views on the transportation of Caspian oil and natural gas, as Turkey sees itself as an energy transit country, while Russia is uncomfortable with this view. Turkey characterizes itself as an energy transit country (an energy bridge) because it stands between major oil-producing areas in the Middle East and Caspian Sea regions on the one hand, and consumer markets in Europe on the other; therefore, Turkey wants to be an energy hub by transporting Caspian oil and natural gas to Europe. In accordance with its energy-oriented aims, with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Crude Oil Pipeline, which was put into operation in 2006, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) Natural Gas Pipeline, in 2007, Turkey has succeeded in reducing its dependence on Russia and Russia's influence over Azerbaijan's energy resources. Despite Russian insistence on using the Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipeline, the BTC pipeline represents the first independent alternative to the Russian route for the export of oil from the region, in which the Turkish initiative, supported by the USA, was to break the Russian monopoly over the region's transportation. Furthermore, the construction of the Caspian Sea pipeline (the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline/TAP or the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline/ TANAP), the Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline (Russian

and Kazakh oil), and the Turkish Stream (Blue Stream II, carrying Russian gas to the Middle East and southeast Europe) would even further increase the role of Turkey as an energy transit country. On the other hand, the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant project for generating electricity could relatively increase Turkey's energy dependence on Russia (Tanrısever, 2012, p.16; Balcer, 2012, p.9).

Turkey is certainly a major power in the region and also a natural bridge between Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and Europe, but not a leading player (Balcer, 2009, p.79-80). Although the rapprochement can be clearly seen between Turkey and Russia with recent developments in the Black Sea, admittedly it is a geopolitical reality that Turkey remains a competitor to Russia and the historical characterization of their relations is predominantly one of rivalry. Therefore, Turkey should counterbalance its relations with Russia by including and evaluating Russian policies toward the region in order to form regional policies, and should pursue attempts to balance with Western policies as well. It should also consider that no regional initiatives can succeed without Russia. In other words, it should seek to maintain good relations with both Russia and the West, and attend to the need to balance the significance of Turkish-Russian and Turkish-Western relations. In addition, Turkey should seek to further develop its relations with the other Black Sea countries within the frame of regional cooperation without creating any problems with Russia, and should develop its energy cooperation with the Caspian and the Middle Eastern countries. Above all, Turkey can indeed realize its aims in the region if it succeeds in resolving its major internal security problems (Balcer, 2012, p.14).

### **Conclusion**

Turkey started to create a Black Sea vision following the disintegration of the USSR in the 1990s and, from that date forward, has tried to play a leading role in the region. For this reason, Turkey first initiated BSEC in order to increase cooperation among the littoral states and enhance security, stability, and peace in the region. BLACKSEAFOR and OBSH are other initiatives of Turkey that concern the security arrangements in the Black Sea maritime domain.

The Black Sea Region eternally means a great deal to Turkey. The fact that the region is so vitally important for Turkey, and vice versa, can be explained by three juxtaposed pivotal factors, as follows: First and foremost, it is a matter of *location*. To clarify, Turkey has the longest shoreline among all the littoral countries; the Straits (Bosphorus and Dardanelles, known as the Turkish Straits) controlling entry to and exit from the Black Sea are located within the boundaries of Turkey, and Turkey has *sui generis* jurisdiction over them in accordance with the Montreux Convention of 1936. Furthermore, Turkey has a bridge-position between the East and the West, and a crossroads position between Europe and Asia, and even Africa. Accordingly, Turkey is geographically located on the transition path of

75 percent of the known energy resources in the world. That is, Turkey is located at the crossroads of the regions with about three-quarters of the world's oil and natural gas reserves. Second, Turkey has a *dominant historical and geopolitical background* across the region. To clarify, Turkey has ethnic-ties with the Turkic States as the regions surrounding the Black Sea in general and with Azerbaijan in particular. Last but not least, Turkey is a *secondary power* after Russia in the region. To clarify, there are six littoral states in the region, each of which represents some degree of power. They are Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, and Turkey. It is possible to say that, excluding Russia, of the other five Turkey has the relative size, economic power, and political influence to shape the region.

In light of the facts mentioned above, it is worthy of note that Turkey always has to determine its Black Sea vision with an eye to the aforementioned reasonable grounds. At this juncture, Turkey's Black Sea vision could be briefly summarized as development-, cooperation-, stability-, and peace-oriented initiatives. Moving on from this, Turkey gives itself the leading role across the region. In demonstrating this, the most prominent factor is Turkey's endeavours to set up energy-oriented projects in order to provide the transition flow from the East to the West, and to reduce its dependence on Russia and Russian regional monopoly.

It would not be wrong to claim that the states in the region are not as much interested in this topic as Turkey, whereas Turkey tries to pursue an active policy by taking a leading role. In a manner, BSEC became effective for regional discourses that strengthen Turkey's Black Sea vision and contributed to creating a regional consciousness in the Black Sea Region. However, regionalism is mainly seen by the newer states as cooperation with the West. Even as regionalism took hold as a discourse, in practice it could not take form at the desired level throughout the 1990s.

In sum, regionalism throughout the Black Sea Region has been an ineffective concept up to now because it has not yet been possible to activate the drivers of regionalism in the region. The Russian Federation, as the successor to the USSR, is still a dominant power in the region. Therefore, it can be stated that Turkey's regionalism discourses, policies, and even initiatives in the Black Sea Region have not been able to show success yet, and the Black Sea Region can be considered a non-regionalized region, with only Turkey (playing a leading role but a secondary power in the region vis-à-vis Russia) and Russia having the main control or influence over the region.

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