

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S BLACK SEA POLICY: IN LIGHT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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Abstract

Until recently, the European Union failed to develop a regional policy toward the Black Sea due to the region's geographic distance from its borders. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, however, expanded the Union to the Black Sea coast. Surely enough, European enlargement entailed not only new opportunities but also new threats, security concerns and problems. As such, the situation at hand compelled the EU to formulate a more systematic policy toward the Black Sea. The initial section of this study concentrates on the region's importance for the Union from a strategic, economic and security standpoint while the following part describes new policies and projects that the Union developed by merit of its neighborhood with this important region. The final section questions how effective the EU's policies toward the Black Sea have been with reference to recent developments in the region and recommends policies to increase the Union's influence over the region.

Keywords: European Union, Black Sea, Neighborhood Policy, energy.

Özet

AB, sınırlarına uzak olan Karadeniz bölgesine yönelik yakın geçmişe kadar bölgesel bir politika geliştirmemiştir. 2007 yılında AB'ye üye olan Romanya ve Bulgaristan ile AB Karadeniz'e komşu olmuştur. Şüphesiz Birliğe yeni imkanlar kazandıracak bu genişleme aynı zamanda yeni tehdit, güvenlik kaygıları ve sorunları da beraberinde getirmiştir. Dolayısıyla bu durum AB'yi Karadeniz'e yönelik daha sistemli bir politika üretmeye zorlamıştır. Bu çalışmanın ilk bölümünde bölgenin AB açısından stratejik, ekonomik ve güvenlik açılarından önemi üzerinde durulacak, ikinci bölümde bölgenin önemine ve artık bölgeye komşu olmasına istinaden geliştirilen politikalar, projeler anlatılacaktır. Son bölümde ise Birliğin Karadeniz bölgesine yönelik politikalarının ne derece yeterli olduğu özellikle son gelişmeler doğrultusunda analiz edilmeye çalışılacak ve bölgede önemli bir aktör olmak konusunda AB'nin bundan sonrası için bölge devletlerine yönelik geliştirilmesi gereken politikalar konusunda öneriler sunulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, Karadeniz, Komşuluk Politikası, Enerji.

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The Soviet Union's disintegration reshaped the Black Sea and transformed the region into an area of contestation between global powers (Erol and Şahin, 2013:113). The region owes its significance to its role as a bridge between Europe and Asia, a hub for energy transport, a gateway to Central Asia and the greater Middle East region as well as its proximity to the Caspian energy reserves. Especially in the 2000s, the eastward expansion of NATO and the European Union toward the Southern Caucasus including the Black Sea has added to the region's importance as a viable alternative to the increasingly unstable Middle East which holds 65 percent of the world's oil reserves and 40 percent of all natural gas.

While the EU's May 2004 enlargement added 10 new members to the organization, another enlargement in January 2007 brought Romania and Bulgaria on board to push the borders of Europe to the Black Sea coast. The Union's shifting borders at once left Europe faced with new neighbors and opportunities as well as instability and problems. The Black Sea's stability, security and welfare, therefore became more important for the EU after 2007 --to which a January 2008 report adopted by the European Parliament would attest. The aforementioned report stipulated that the accession of Romania and Bulgaria effectively transformed the Black Sea into domestic waters with new strategic challenges. The Union thus emphasized conflict resolution, economic development and the promotion of democratic institutions. The region's increasing importance to the EU with reference to security concerns, strategic considerations and the future of regional energy supplies and their transport thereby forced the a European leadership to develop a new set of policies.

The Union's policies toward the rest of regional actors broadly fall within two distinct categories: The primary set of policies typically take the form of commercial agreements, energy deals, development aid and humanitarian aid initiatives. Meanwhile, the second group includes Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as the European Security and Defense Policy. The European Defense Strategy, which the EU adopted in 2003, identified international terrorism, the proliferation of WMDs, poor governance and corruption as new security threats. The document also stated that the Union has a responsibility to contribute to stability, democracy and good governance in neighboring countries (European Commission, "European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World," European Commission, Brussels).

Another source of the Black Sea region's importance to the European Union -in addition to security- is energy: According to the International Energy Agency, the EU ranks second after the United States in the list of largest oil and natural gas consumers. (*Belkin, 2011:9*) Despite its vast consumption, however, the Union does not exercise adequate control over energy supplies since its member states account for merely 3.2% of the

world's oil production and 6.9% of natural gas output (BP Statistics, "A Review of World Energy," June 2011). The EU, therefore, remains heavily dependent on foreign energy suppliers: while 33.5% of the EU's oil originates in Russia, another 15.8% comes from Norway. Meanwhile, Libya supplies 9.4% of the Union's oil with Saudi Arabia and Iran providing the rest. Similarly, Russia remains the leading exporter of natural gas to the EU (42%) followed by Norway and Algeria (Egenhower&Legge, 2009:11). Furthermore, a recent study by the European Commission concluded that consumption will increase in coming years to boost the EU's dependence to foreign reserves to 70 percent in 2020 and 90 percent by 2030 (Energy 2020: A Strategy for Competitive, Sustainable and Secure Energy). The *Green Paper*, a collection of the European Commission's recommendations to the European Union energy policies over the short, medium and long term, thus emphasized the need to secure energy resources and develop a more diverse supplier portfolio as part of a common energy policy. (Commission of the European Communities, "Green Paper: A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy"). Considering that Europe's need for energy grows day by day, it becomes more important to access energy reserves in the Caspian through multiple channels as the search for viable alternatives to Middle Eastern suppliers renders the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Caspian region more attractive to international investors (Erol,2012:11). Furthermore, energy security simultaneously grows more important as a crisis between Russia and Ukraine over natural gas added to the Black Sea's strategic importance. As mentioned above, the European Union developed new policies to diversify and secure its energy supply in order to reduce its dependence on Russia for oil and natural gas and to prevent Moscow from exploiting energy as a political trump card. As such, the Black Sea represents a leading channel to transport energy from its eastern coast to the West. In other words, Europe's quest for energy security significantly increased the region's significance and motivated the EU to formulate new policies toward the Black Sea (Koçer, 2007:200-201).

Neighbourhood Policy

On 15 July 1997, member states of the European Union agreed on a new enlargement strategy at the Amsterdam Summit where the European Commission adopted Agenda 2000, an action plan regarding enlargement and other issues that would be relevant to the organization in the twenty-first century. Agenda 2000 set the framework for the EU's steps until 2006. (Agenda 2000 – For a stronger and wider Union. Document drawn up on the basis of COM (97) 2000 final, 13 July 1997. Bulletin of the European Union, Supplement 5/97). In December 2002, Romano Prodi –who served as the President of the European Commission at the time- stated that the EU would take a major step toward enlargement within two years and become neighbors with new countries, and argued that such developments

required the organization to develop a political perspective regarding its new borders to the south and the east. "The Union cannot expand indefinitely in order to promote its values and we must, therefore, develop a policy toward our neighbors," he maintained (Romano Prodi, "A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability," Speech to the Sixth ESCA-World Conference, Brussels, 6 December 2002, p.3).

Consequently, the European Commission drafted a document to address new geographical challenges for the European Union that would stem from the accession of ten new members in 2003. (European Commission, *Wider Europe-Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with Eastern and Southern Neighbors*, COM (2003) 104 final, 11 March 2003). The effort aimed at eliminating political instability, economic problems, conflict and institutional shortcomings. Later the same year, the Commission stipulated that it was crucial for the EU to boost the security of its new neighbors as part of a European security strategy while identifying international terrorism, poor governance and corruption as new security threats to the organization. (European Commission, "European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World," European Commission, Brussels, 12 December 2003). Similarly, the European Neighborhood Policy Strategy Paper –the cornerstone of the Neighborhood Policy- published on 12 May 2004 included Moldova, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia among others in the list of countries covered by this new initiative. (European Neighborhood Policy Strategy Paper, COM (2004), 373 Final, Brussels, 12 May 2004). Meanwhile, the paper regarded the Russian Federation as a crucial part of the neighborhood policy, which necessitated a strategic partnership with Moscow whose content had emerged out of a joint meeting in St. Petersburg in May 2003 –the list included freedom, security, education and energy. As such, it would be correct to associate the Neighborhood Policy with the European Union's enlargement strategy: The aforementioned policy was formulated following the EU's fifth (and most comprehensive) enlargement in 2004 as the organization paid greater attention to remedy 'gaps' between its new member states and new neighbors especially with regard to democratic standards and social welfare. European authorities believed that such measures would reduce the negative repercussions of enlargement to a minimum. (Smith, 2005:763).

The Purpose of Neighborhood Policy

The European Neighborhood Policy that the EU developed in 2004 to cover 16 of its close neighbors aimed at promoting welfare, stability and security in countries with bilateral ties to the Union. The initiative provided a series of advantages that member states enjoyed without necessarily committing to neighboring countries' eventual accession. Neighbor states' willingness to make political, economic and institutional reforms in line

with the EU's values and regulations would qualify them for certain advantages including the free movement of goods, services and people. As such, the neighborhood policy sought to build a trade, energy and transportation network around its borders with the consideration that it would be unable to expand indefinitely (Winrow, 2008:21). The purpose, therefore, was to promote bilateral relations as well as security and cooperation while eliminating borders between an extended Europe and its neighbors for political, economic and cultural cooperation. For this purpose, the Union developed a distinct set of projects for each of its neighbors that would be compatible with their specific needs. In this sense, the neighborhood policy's leading difference from the enlargement policy was that it did not offer full membership to participating countries. Instead, the EU simply offered assistance to its neighbors to implement reforms in key areas. The neighborhood policy, therefore, represented a temporary solution against the backdrop of a heated debate about the future of European enlargement while pulling closer its neighbors in strategically important yet unsafe regions to form a buffer zone around Europe's borders (Erol and Bingöl, 2012: 182). In 2010, the new European Neighborhood Policy thus attributed special importance to sustainable democracy and participatory economic development in addition to free and fair elections, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, the rule of law and preventive measures to curb corruption (Yılmaz, 2013:12).

In addition to the European Neighborhood Policy, other significant projects aiming to promote bilateral relations with the Black Sea region include TRACECA, INOGATE and SYNERGY.

TRACECA, launched in 1993, aims at facilitating the countries' access to world markets by developing a transport and transit corridor. It is in fact the revitalisation of the ancient Silk Road. In 1998, within the TRACECA framework, 12 states signed a multilateral treaty in Baku, regulating international transportation of people and goods (United States Energy Information Administration, "Caspian Sea region", December 1998) See *also*, <http://www.traceca.org>). For the countries within the program, the TRACECA Project provides an alternative to the traditional and widely used Moscow route (Lynch, 2003: 22) and hence bears strategic importance to present an alternative transportation route to Europe. Moreover, agreement was reached for the transportation of heavy-duty material through the TRACECA route and it was emphasised that this corridor is the shortest, fastest and cheapest route from Asia to Europe.

INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) launched in 1995, aimed to create a favourable environment for attracting private investment in the field of oil and gas and facilitating their transportation through the provision of technical infrastructure (INOGATE Newsletter, No:3, Brussels, February 1999, p.1-2). At its first summit in 1999, an

Umbrella Agreement was signed on the development of hydrocarbon transportation Networks between the Caspian Basin and Europe across the Black Sea region. The agreement allows countries not covered by EU's TACIS programme to join infrastructure projects, and has so far been signed by 21 countries, including all the BSEC members except Russia. A secretariat for INOGATE was set up in Kyiv in November 2000 (Mustafa Aydın, "Europe's next shore: The Black Sea region after EU enlargement", Occasional Paper no.53).

The Black Sea Synergy

This new initiative highlights the importance of the Black Sea region for the EU. The primary tack of Black Sea synergy would be the development of cooperation within the Black Sea region and also the region as a whole and the EU. The Black Sea Synergy works to complement the Union's ongoing support for stability and reforms around the Black Sea while supporting the EU's regional cooperation frameworks including the Northern Dimension and the Mediterranean Partnership. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and Neighborhood Policy, argued:

"With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania the EU has become part of the Black Sea region. Today, we have delivered on a promise made last December to develop a regional dimension to the ENP. The time is ripe to focus political attention at the regional level and invigorate ongoing cooperation processes, opening an additional space for cooperation with Russia, Turkey and our eastern ENP partners. I am also hopeful that Black Sea Synergy will contribute to creating a better climate for the solution of the "frozen conflicts" in the region."

Meanwhile, the Black Sea Synergy represented a concrete effort on behalf of the European Union to strengthen relations with the region. Comprising part of the neighborhood policy, the initiative seeks to promote economic, cultural and political ties as well as to resolve common problems between Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia –countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Northern Caucasus on the Black Sea coast. It aims to contribute to democracy and economic development in target countries, promote stability and development, implement joint projects in the region and to prevent conflict. Specifically, the initiative focuses on transportation, energy and the environment in addition to education, health and fighting crime. (<http://eeas.europa.eu>) The Synergy's primary weakness, however, is that though the Commission mentions frozen conflicts among the cooperation areas within the Black Sea Synergy framework, it stil refrains from directly involving in these persistent problems and assuming a conflict resolution role. Instead, the EU's role is limited to facilitating the implementation of confidence building

measures (Commission of the European Communities, 11 April 2007, Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative).

Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership project launched on 7 May 2009 at the Eastern Partnership Summit that brought together EU representatives and leaders from partner countries (8435/09 Press 78). The initiative aimed at communicating with Azerbaijan, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine at a deeper level while promoting stability and welfare in partner countries as well as strengthening multilateral cooperation among them. As such, the EU seeks to expand the European Neighborhood Policy eastward to Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus, and to balance eastward expansion with Mediterranean Unity and Transatlantic Cooperation policies.

The Eastern Partnership aims at developing deeper relations between the EU and partner countries by facilitating interaction based on mutual interest to promote welfare and stability. In this respect, the project allows for the development of diverse initiatives in order to accommodate partner countries' unique circumstances. This approach supports the possibility of signing new partnership agreements as well as the promotion of economic integration between the EU and partner countries, the strengthening of cultural ties by gradually allowing for the free movement of individuals, the promotion of energy cooperation and assisting economic and social policies to curb regional variations in partner countries ("Eastern Partnership Multilateral Platforms 2014-2017," <http://eeas.europa.eu>). Briefly put, the Union's Eastern Partnership programme seeks to form stronger relations with strategically important countries that remain unprepared to pursue full membership through neighborhood policies and cooperation.

In this sense, the project reflects the European Union's intentions to promote greater interaction, stronger commercial ties and peace among partner countries by raising political, social and economic standards. Eastern Partnership, however, is intended to work in harmony with the EU-Russia strategic partnership. For instance, Armenia –one of the partner countries in Eastern Partnership- opted to side with Russia shortly before the signing of a partnership agreement with the EU in September 2013. The country also entered into various security agreements with Moscow that entailed long-term commitments. Finally, the Ukrainian government announced that it would not sign an agreement with the European Union, which stemmed from both Kyiv's economic and energy dependence on Russia as well as the Union's failure to meet their demands (Menon, 2013:1). As such, Ukraine's unwillingness to commit to a partnership with the European Union unmistakably added to the failures of Brussels' foreign policy framework. Even though the formation of a pro-Western government

in Ukraine work to Moscow's disadvantage, the Russian response has been to annex Crimea. The aforementioned developments indicate that the EU faces stiff competition in the region.

In 2013, the trade volume between the EU and Ukraine –the leading of the Union's six partners in terms of geographic size, population size and natural resources- improved drastically as Italy, Germany and Poland emerged as the largest exporters within the organization. Newly introduced reforms aimed at further the country's economic integration to Europe even though Ukraine's reluctance to choose between the EU and Russia has compelled Brussels to put such steps on hold. Even though the Ukrainian government decided against a partnership and free trade agreement with the Union while failing to follow through with its NATO membership plans, the country nonetheless remained determined to maintain close cooperation with both organizations. The most recent crisis, however, made it clear that pro-Russian revolts in Crimea and elsewhere are able to hurt domestic stability and prove the EU and NATO's long-standing concerns right. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen's recent statements regarding the Ukrainian crisis also indicate that the organization might reconsider its relations with the Russian government ("Russian Actions Threaten Peace in Europe: NATO's Rasmussen," Reuters, 2 March 2014). While Rasmussen emphasized the need to build stronger relations with Ukraine and called for urgent measures following an emergency meeting with Russian officials, the European Union warned that it considered strong measures against Russia in coming days ("AB'den Rusya'ya sert tavr," Hürriyet, 12 Mart 2014).

Recent developments in Ukraine would indicate that the European Union's Eastern Partnership programme remains likely to face certain difficulties under current circumstances. Even though the project operates at a bilateral level, customs union and economic relations with Russia fail to satisfy the criteria that the EU envisioned and to correspond to proposed agreements to deepen economic relations. The Eastern Partnership programme which also provides active support to non-governmental organizations, might require an update to reconsider bilateral relations with aforementioned governments and promote stability and long-term cooperation in the Black Sea region. In other words, the programme's implementation and potential for long-term success in both regional and bilateral relations might require a series of reforms. As Russia seeks to expand its sphere of influence and become a global actor in a multipolar world by rekindling relations with regional governments and exploiting its energy resources as a trump card, the Union inevitably has to make certain changes to its policies in order to address changes in its environment.

Conclusion

The European Union's policies toward the Black Sea region aim at establishing a network of stable and democratic countries with high welfare standards across its eastern borders. Such efforts include the European Neighborhood Policy, the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership among other initiatives geared toward the aforementioned objectives. However, various governments within the geographic area, an important market for the EU and a key channel to diversify the organization's energy suppliers and transportation, remain primarily interested in full membership. As such, the promise of accession remains the most effective foreign policy instrument at the EU's disposal. The discrepancy between the Union's willingness to offer anything but full membership and regional governments' demands, therefore, would run the risk of alienating partner countries like Ukraine and Armenia who might rather opt for the Russian sphere of influence. Currently, the Union strives to maintain a delicate balance between its ever-decreasing enlargement capacity and its regional partners' expectations without making their counterparts feel left out and frustrated (Rossi, 2004:22). While the European Union's efforts to develop a regional policy regarding the Black Sea represents a major development, it is unlikely that such steps will meet partner countries' demands. Security and stability, the EU's priorities in the region, are also haunted by ongoing conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Nagorno-Karabakh) as well as Russia and Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) while Brussels avoids direct involvement in these affairs by offering assistance to international organizations (Emerson, 2008:255). Furthermore, evidence suggests that the Union's efforts to establish pluralistic democracies based on human rights has proved largely futile in the region. As such, the EU must develop policies to promote social, political and economic transformation if it remains committed to the goal of becoming a serious player in the Black Sea region.

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