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# *A view of the Wider Black Sea Region from Armenia*

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The Wider Black Sea Region viewed from Armenia is a region full of contradictions, because it is full of problems and opportunities. Of the six<sup>1</sup> littoral states, three are engaged in internal armed conflicts: Georgia has Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Turkey has the PKK, and Russia has the Chechen and other militants in the North Caucasus. Tensions are dominant in Russian-Georgian and Russian-Ukrainian relations. Historically, around the Black Sea, Turkey and Russia have been rivals. Four of the remaining six<sup>2</sup> non-littoral member states in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation have their share of conflicts: Armenia and Azerbaijan are in conflict over the Mountainous Karabakh region, Moldova does not have control over Transdniester, Serbia is being forced by the West to relinquish Kosovo. Furthermore, Turkey has blockaded Armenia, it has border disputes with Greece, and is engaged in cross-border military incursions into Northern Iraq. All in all, not a very stable nor a secure region.

However, this insecurity and instability in the region has not stopped it from being perceived as a viable transport and energy transfer corridor between the EU on the one hand, and the Caspian Basin and Central Asia on the other. This perception is based not only on economic, but at least equally on political and strategic considerations. Especially in the energy sector, by-passing Russian influence or at least Russia is the main strategic consideration.

Again, viewed from Armenia, these developments are full of contradictions, because several initiatives based on the concept of this perception, instead of integrating the region, have become tools to further political interests by a couple of states in the region. Cases in point are the TRACECA<sup>3</sup>, the INOGATE<sup>4</sup> and the BTC<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Turkey

<sup>2</sup> Greece, Albania, Serbia, Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan

<sup>3</sup> TRACECA. the Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia or the "New Silk Road". TRACECA is an ambitious interstate programme aimed at supporting the political and economic development in Black Sea Region, Caucasus and Central Asia by means of improvement of the international transport. The programme objectives were formulated in 1993 at the Conference in Brussels ( Brussels Declaration, 1993 ) by the European Commission and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to support their integration into the international economy by improving and enhancing trade and transport. In the period from 1996 to 1998 Ukraine and Moldova also joined this programme. In 2000 Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey officially applied to the European Commission

Regarding the blockades imposed on Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan and their obstructionist attitude regarding other cooperation possibilities, Armenia has often complained about Turkey's and Azerbaijan's refusal to abide by the general understanding of the TRACECA agreement, pointing out that such refusal also damages regional cooperation and impedes the implementation of EU-sponsored regional projects, including TRACECA. Furthermore, Armenia has stressed that Turkey's closure of its border with Armenia has resulted in a gap in operating rail links from Turkey through Armenia to Georgia. In Armenia's view, within the TRACECA route, this constitutes the only missing link from Europe to Asia. For Armenia, it is obvious that the region's high potential cannot be fully utilized if attempts are made to isolate one of its constituents; such attempts are doomed to failure and will adversely affect all concerned in the region.

Armenia's disappointment with what it viewed as the EU's non-assertive response to the obstructionist attitude of Azerbaijan and Turkey towards these EU initiatives, was further deepened by the exclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from the EU's initial Wider Europe and the New Neighbors Initiative in 2003. Since then, the three states have been included in the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy and each has signed an individual Action Plan with the EU. Continuing active cooperation in the TRACECA programme and "in the context of INOGATE" is part of Armenia's Action Plan.

The EU's European Neighbourhood Policy has yet another welcome change of approach to the South Caucasus: it appreciates the uniqueness of each of the three recognized states in the South Caucasus.

Within the Wider Black Sea Region, the Kosovo case is an issue closely followed from Armenia. It appears, that the West in general, and the EU specifically, has adopted yet another double standard. In Armenia, it is incomprehensible when European officials tell their audiences in Yerevan, that Kosovo can not be a precedent for Mountainous Karabakh. Time and again, Armenia has said that it believes that conflicts are all different and each must be decided on its own merits. On the other hand, Armenia has stressed, that a Kosovo decision cannot and should not result in the creation of obstacles to self-determination for others in order to pre-empt the accusation of precedence. Such a reverse reaction - to prevent or pre-empt others from achieving well-earned self-determination - is unacceptable for Armenia.

Also unacceptable for Armenia is the warmongering of Azerbaijan. It is unacceptable because Armenia and Azerbaijan are engaged in negotiations to peacefully settle the Karabakh conflict. The reaction, rather the lack of a reaction, by the OSCE, NATO and the EU to this warmongering is also incomprehensible in Armenia.

Another concern viewed from Armenia regarding developments in the Wider Black Sea Region is the formation of the GUAM<sup>6</sup> and the direction it has taken recently. Founded in 1997 by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, the GUAM was named Organization for Democracy and Economic Development in 2006. GUAM has focused on extending an oil pipeline from Brody in Ukraine to the Polish city of Gdansk, which would enable Azerbaijan to pump oil directly to Western Europe, bypassing Russia. Also high on GUAM's agenda are plans to create a multinational peacekeeping

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with a request to join TRACECA programme. Now these countries are also members of TRACECA Programme.

<http://www.traceca-org.org/>

<sup>4</sup> International Oil and Gas Transport to Europe

<sup>5</sup> Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline

<sup>6</sup> The Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM is an international (interstate) regional organization established by the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine at the Kyiv Summit of GUAM on 23 May 2006. <http://www.guam.org.ua>

force that would replace the Russian contingent currently deployed in the regions of Transdniester in Moldova, and of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia. Although the GUAM leaders insist the group is not directed against any other state, the westward-leaning ambitions evident in varying degrees in its members have contributed to its reputation as an anti-Moscow alliance. But this is not what concerns Armenia, even though the fact that GUAM has brought a new division into the region does. What is worrisome for Armenia is the recent efforts by the GUAM member states, apart from Azerbaijan of course, to position themselves negatively in regards to Mountainous Karabakh. First they condemned the presidential elections in the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh; imagine, the champions of the Rose and Orange Revolutions condemning a people for holding democratic elections. Then they try to bring a draft resolution on the “protracted conflicts in the GUAM region”<sup>7</sup>, including the Mountainous Karabakh issue, to the UN General Assembly. Those who condemned the democratic elections in Mountainous Karabakh, in their draft resolution to the UN General Assembly, are calling for “promoting the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the conflict-affected territories of the GUAM states.” Viewed from Armenia, what is worrisome in this case, is that its neighbor to the north, Georgia, which claims that it’s strategic alliances with Azerbaijan and Turkey are not directed against Armenia, has evidently changed its neutral position in the conflict involving two of its neighbors, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and is siding with the latter. There is no reason for Georgia to have adopted such a position, had it not been for the inner politics of GUAM.

Again, viewed from Armenia, yet another, albeit undeclared, concern involving Georgia is the latter’s desire to join NATO. For Armenia, there are unanswered questions as to what effect Georgia’s membership in NATO would have on Armenia’s strategic and military relations with Russia: Would Brussels hinder the transport of military hardware from Russia to Armenia via Georgia? Would Russia, in the face of such difficulties withdraw its military bases from Armenia?

These questions are extremely important for Armenia, because Turkey’s hostile policies towards Armenia are the major security concern for Armenia. Since Armenia gained its independence in 1991, the role Turkey has played in the region has been viewed from Yerevan as being hostile towards Armenia. Despite the best efforts by the administration of Armenia's first president to downplay the Genocide issue and to seek fresh and meaningful diplomatic and economic relations with all its neighbors, Turkey remained fundamentally hostile. In fact, the more appeasing the Armenian government of the time became towards Turkey, the more aggravating the Turkish position became, persistently refusing to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia and on occasion making veiled threats to its security.

Later on, after Turkey’s air and land blockade against Armenia in 1993, a new item was added to the agenda: the conditions to opening of the border. Twice, in 1992 and 1993, Turkey even threatened to use military force, moving troops closer to the Armenian border.

In the meantime, at the beginning of the 1990s, under the influence of pan-Turkic visions, the Turkish public was euphoric about Turkey’s foreign policy opportunities. In June 1992, Turkish president Turgut Ozal declared: "Together with the new states from the Balkans to Central Asia -- states that are Muslim, and mostly Turkish -- we can make our power more effective... If we do not make serious mistakes, the twenty-first century will be the century of the Turks and of Turkey."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> UN GA Sixty-second session, Agenda item 16

Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development  
Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine: draft resolution

<sup>8</sup> *The Turks Today*, Andrew Mango, Pub. by John Murray, 2004, Great Britain, p. 93

In his book *"Caucasus Chronicles: Nation-Building and Diplomacy in Armenia, 1993–1994"*, then Greece's ambassador to Yerevan and current Secretary General in the BSEC PERMIS Leonidas T. Chrysanthopoulos, makes a momentous revelation, describing plans learned from various official sources about a proposed Turkish invasion of Armenia in 1993. According to the Ambassador, during the takeover bid by Russian Parliament Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov and Vice President Alexander Rutskoi in October 1993, Turkey had made a deal with Khasbulatov that Russia withdraw its 10,000 soldiers guarding the Armenia-Turkey border to "allow Turkey to execute incursions of a limited nature into Armenia, using the Kurdish issue as a pretext, and into Georgia, to secure Abkhazia."<sup>9</sup>

And as senior presidential adviser Libaridian would later contemplate, "Seven years of attempts [by Armenia] to normalize, to rule out preconditions, failed, and the thinking reemerged in Armenia that Turkey is and may be in fact the eternal enemy and Ter-Petrossian was wrong."<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Turkey's non-recognition of the Genocide contributed to the view that Turkey is a threat, and this made, and continues to make Armenia feel it must seek its security in an alliance with Russia.<sup>11</sup>

By linking the normalization of its relations with Armenia to the negotiations over Mountainous Karabakh, Turkey has effectively made its own policy toward Armenia hostage to Azerbaijani intransigence.

In fact, Turkish president Demirel and Azerbaijani president Heydar Aliyev, and their successors, since February 1994, have used the formula "one nation, two states" to describe the bonds joining Turkey and Azerbaijan.<sup>12</sup>

Turkish diplomatic, propaganda and military support to Azerbaijan throughout the Mountainous Karabakh conflict has acquired the proportions and characteristics of a mature military-political alliance between Ankara and Baku.

Turkey's more than fourteen years of blockade against Armenia has not rendered the desired results, Armenia has not been forced to capitulate in the Mountainous Karabakh conflict. Nonetheless, Turkey continues the blockade, solely because Azerbaijan wishes that it do so. In March 2004, Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev warned that Azerbaijan would withdraw from peace talks if Turkey opens its border with Armenia. Turkey's position has emboldened Azerbaijan's warmongering. Thus, by continuing Armenia's blockade, Turkey is delaying the peaceful resolution of the conflict and adding to the risks of destabilizing the whole region. Lifting of the blockade by Turkey would help dissuade Azerbaijan that continuing its negative approach in the negotiations is to its advantage.

In the South Caucasus, as viewed from Yerevan, Turkey continues to pursue a policy aimed at isolating Armenia from regional energy and communications initiatives. Following the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars gas pipelines initiatives, Turkey now is active in trying to realize the Kars-Akhalkalak-Tbilisi-Baku railroad plan. The justification given to this railroad plan is that the Kars-Gyumri railroad between Turkey and Armenia, and consequently Georgia, is closed because of Turkey's blockade of Armenia. It is Turkey that has closed the Kars-Gyumri railroad and it is Turkey that has turned down Armenia's offer to open the Kars-Gyumri-Tbilisi railroad even in one direction,

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<sup>9</sup> *Caucasus Chronicles: Nation-Building and Diplomacy in Armenia, 1993-1994*, Leonidas T. Chrysanthopoulos. Gomidas Institute Books: Princeton and London, 2002. 180 pp.

<sup>10</sup> *The New Thinking Revisited, Gerard Libaridian Speaks at Princeton University*, Ara Sarafian, "Armenian Forum", <http://www.gomidas.org/forum/af2c.htm>

<sup>11</sup> *Brainstorming session with Gerard Libardian*, TESEV News Update, June 2001, <http://www.tesev.org.tr/haziran/jun5.html>

<sup>12</sup> *Turkey's Policies in Transcaucasia*, by Freddy De Pauw, in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, by Bruno Coppieters (ed.), 1996, VUB University Press

just for traffic from Turkey. Turkey's attempts to isolate Armenia from regional initiatives are counterproductive, for they run against integration of the South Caucasus region within itself and in the world. And this counter-integration policy by Turkey is a recipe for long-term instability in the region and consequently to Turkey and the rest of its neighbors.

On the diplomatic front, Turkey is deceitful when it wishes the world would believe that official meetings between Turkish and Armenian officials have given any real results. While Yerevan is considerate not to lose any opportunity for dialogue, Ankara is content with turning every such opportunity into a public relations campaign, void of any substance. Such was the April 2005 letter by the Turkish Prime Minister to the Armenian President. While making that letter public before it had reached Yerevan, Turkey has yet to publicly respond to the counter-offer by Armenia to establish, without pre-conditions, normal relations between the two countries, and in that context, to have an intergovernmental commission to meet "to discuss any and all outstanding issues between our two nations, with the aim of resolving them and coming to an understanding."

Armenia can not be in a rush to attain normal relations with Turkey, because doing so would denote submission to Turkey's preconditions, which amount to capitulation. The only real hope Armenia is left with for normal relations with Turkey is the transformation Turkey has to go through during its accession talks with the European Union. As the Turkish Prime Minister has said: "Turkey, as is natural in such a process, needs to transform itself. We need to begin with transforming the Turkish mindset."<sup>13</sup> Hoping for actions to replace words, Armenia's response could only be: "Until now Turkey has pursued a hostile policy towards us. As for what its policy will be in the future, let us wait and see."<sup>14</sup>

Thus the role of the European Union in reshaping the security environment in the region through transforming one of its prospective members, namely Turkey, is substantial. If the main political reason for Turkey's membership in the EU is to avoid the clash of civilizations, it is incumbent upon the EU collectively and the EU members individually not to overlook Turkey's wreckful role in the South Caucasus while negotiating for its accession to the EU. Undoubtedly, peace, security and stability in its Neighbourhood states is in the interests of the EU.

Without coming to terms with the dark pages of its own history, with its historical responsibility and obligations, without normalizing its relations with all of its neighbors, Turkey's membership in the EU would threaten the very fabric of the EU and cause instability in the Wider Black Sea Region.

The EU is the only international organization with the capability to help Turkey meet the challenges of its transformation. Turkey's membership in NATO could not prevent it from invading 36% of the territory of Cyprus. Turkey's membership in the Council of Europe has not been enough to make Turkey respect the rights of its national minorities, to curb its violations of human rights and freedom of speech. Turkey's membership in the OSCE has only been manipulated by it to obstruct the peaceful settlement of conflicts. So, the last chance, the last hope for Turkey's transformation, as viewed from Armenia, is the EU; actually, it is the process of Turkey's new relationship with the EU, through which Turkey is, if ever, to be transformed.

While some would find it fantastic that there are those in Armenia who are of the opinion that according to international law Armenia is a Black Sea littoral state, based upon US President Wilson's arbitration of 1920 drawing the border between Armenia and Turkey, few could argue that

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<sup>13</sup> *'Turkey will shine in a few years'*, Monday, October 10, 2005, Turkish Daily News  
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=25493>

<sup>14</sup> *Sarkisian Denies Link Between Karabakh, Russian Troops In Armenia*, Friday October 7, 2005, RFE/RL  
<http://www.azatutyun.am/armeniareport/report/en/2005/10/66C7CB8C-ACE5-4640-881E-705755C1C0E7.asp>

practically Armenia is not a Black Sea state because of its heavy dependence on Georgia's Black Sea ports. Hence, Armenia's inclusion in the Organization of the BSEC is seen as being very natural. After fifteen years of existence, the BSEC and its institutions have already proven their viability, despite the differences among the member states. Viewed from Armenia, the economic disparities amongst the BSEC members, the political hesitations caused by historical and other experiences, are no reason to avoid cooperation. And in the words of Armenia's Foreign Minister, "On the contrary, they are the rationale and motivation for enabling, encouraging, supporting cooperation – albeit slowly and in stages. [...] None of us, here, in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation are here by invitation. We are here because we are here, in this neighborhood, in this region. And, here, in this region, we have transport systems that need to be united, not divided, energy systems that need to be shared not isolated, banking systems that need resources added, not subtracted, education systems that need to be broadened, not secluded, societies that need to be inclusive, not exclusive. To accomplish this, it is our shared purpose and overlapping interests that must prevail over our sometimes deep-seated differences. As we plan to upgrade and refurbish water systems, we cannot allow existing rail lines to sit idle. As we work to ensure proper conditions for capital flow, we cannot prevent people flow. As we develop projects to share agricultural know-how, we cannot block trade across borders."<sup>15</sup> Thus, viewed from Armenia, the BSEC is an important organization which has been able to mitigate some differences among its members, but has not been able to completely overcome them. On the one hand, the possible intensification of competition over increasing or blocking divergent influences in the region by NATO, the USA, the EU and Russia, and on the other hand, the increase of Turkey's influence in the region because of this competition, are both reasons for concern for Armenia.

For this viewer from Armenia, increased EU involvement in the region, but a halt on any further militarization of the Black Sea and the Wider Black Sea Region is a recipe for more cooperation and stability and security.

Furthermore, more active cooperation with Georgia on a wide range of issues of mutual concern and interest, at times with the assistance of the EU, as well as relentless pursuit of its commitments towards economic integration and a deepening of political cooperation with the EU is what Armenia should have as a priority in its foreign policy, which can only be based upon its effective implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms.

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<sup>15</sup> Statement by Vartan Oskanian, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the BSEC XVI Ministerial Meeting, Belgrade, Serbia, April 19, 2007