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Contrasting understandings of security around the Black Sea:

Managing complexity in the Wider Europe

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Abstract
This paper deals with current attempts to integrate the Black Sea region in the European continent wider security architecture, focusing on the various understandings of security put forward by different actors. On the one hand it looks into the Euro-Atlantic (European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) perspective and its efforts to develop an area of peace and security in the European Union's neighbourhood, through processes of institutional cooperation and financial assistance. On the other hand, understandings of security arising from the Black sea region reflect concurrent priorities and underlying rationales thus remaining highly divergent and hard to mainstream. It is argued that the Euro-Atlantic community has defined its security needs through the "othering" of the neighbours and consequently portraying them either as the threat itself or as a semi-periphery whose function is to protect the EU. The paper then takes the case of the South Caucasus to show how local perceptions of current security needs do not always match those of the Euro-Atlantic community and demand a more flexible approach where other regional actors can be included.

Placing the Black Sea in a Euro-Atlantic system of colective security?

The Black Sea region is widely recognised as strategic to European security (Adams *et al.*, 2002), as well as to the definition of the European Union's (EU) identity in a global context. The importance of the Wider Europe for stability inside and around the EU made its enlargements and foreign policy and defence instruments central in Europe's security, despite their limited ability to provide security guarantees to the Eastern European neighbours (Stefanova, 2005: 58). Therefore, in articulation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the EU managed to be increasingly engaged with Black Sea countries in the framework of Turkey's accession process and long-term NATO membership; with enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania in January 2007; through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), including Black Sea states like Ukraine and Georgia; and naturally through relations with Russia which remains a central if difficult partner in assuring stability in this region. Nevertheless, the EU maintained a low profile in a disputed and pivotal region focusing rather on the stabilisation of the Balkans and the preparation of the 2004 enlargement. Since September 11th – and in the face of a more active US – the so-called neighbourhood, and the Black Sea increased its strategic relevance for the Euro-Atlantic community, leading to an extended process of enlargement both in the EU and NATO to secure sustainable reforms and strategic allies (Aydin, 2004).

Understandings and security rationales developing around the Black Sea are becoming markedly more "Euro-Atlantic", but remain, nevertheless disputed. Through NATO and the EU's structural foreign policy approaches (Keukeleire, 2001), regional governments have been presented alternative options for political and security development, away from years of imposed isolation and regional suspicion, as well as a wider framework within which regional relations can develop. Despite the limited and inconsistent political engagement to provide security projection beyond its borders, the EU remains a strategic partner for the Black Sea region, as an anchor of development. Similarly, the Black Sea region remains a crucial area to assure security and stability in the European continent, but also a point of power projection (Lesser, 2007: 20) towards the Middle East and Eurasian landmass and its energy reserves, and therefore largely disputed.

To a certain extent the EU seems trapped between "normative Europe", diffusing its principles and values through its relations with neighbours, looking to

shape regional and global environments through cooperative models; and the realisation that Europe's security – as it is shaped in a post-Cold War context – must face not only the economic and political challenges of regional integration but also the risks associated with globally changing relational and societal patterns, ethno-national violence and the protection of strategic interests. The EU's neighbourhood has been described as a buffer zone, protecting the EU from crime and conflicts as well as providing a first point of diffusion and management of complexities in its periphery (Marchetti, 2006). This perception is supported by a growing concern among EU member states and actors about migration controls and homeland security, criminal networks and illicit activities impacting on the political, social and economic system of the EU. Such a stand, when combined with EU's reluctance to maintain an open door policy (contraire to NATO, for instance) and to clarify the final objective of the ENP, can be severely criticized as a neo-imperialist and top-down imposed system in Europe, where EU partners and neighbours to the East and South have little ability to shape institutions and decisions at the EU level. A negative identity of the Union arises as *Fortress Europe*, looking to protect its core, closed and reflecting on itself while asking its neighbours to bear the pressures of globalization, inherited conflicts and tensions (Stefanova, 2005: 62-3). The results of such a protective posture seem to point to increased misperceptions among neighbours and partners as to their role and the prospective rewards and advantages they can derive from the EU by taking on such role (Wallace, 2003: 26-7).

On the other hand, the Wider Europe initiative also devised a clearer political engagement with neighbours to the East, extending the benefits of enlargement to the countries standing on the borders of the new enlarged EU. This meant a new policy framework – the ENP – with increased financial and human resources, and support for political reforms towards accountable institutions and transparent political processes, currently lacking to assure security, stability and integration of countries like Ukraine, Moldova or the three South Caucasian countries into world affairs. This vision sets in motion a different approach, where the EU's structural foreign policy and socialisation mechanisms look to create the conditions for sustainable development outside its borders in line with its democratic and liberal principles. By financing and politically supporting change in its periphery the EU (and the U.S.) could assume a leading role in Eurasia, committed to address the root causes of instability in this region, namely ethno-national conflicts, high levels of corruption and unaccountability, while providing the

framework for socio-economic development, through integration. New energy infra-structures have provided the EU with higher energy security as well as alternative foreign policy choices to the states in the region. This is a more positive image of the EU, open to cooperation and exchange and sharing the burden of stability with its neighbours by allowing further integration as a means to address the common challenges arising in its neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, as the EU reasserts its presence around the Black Sea, relations with other regional powers, namely Russia have grown strained. This was the case with enlargements to Bulgaria and Romania, but most notably with NATO 2004 eastward enlargement and the US and EU open support for the colour revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia. The prospect of having two crucial partners change direction towards a western orientation and political system has made Russian decision makers and strategists keen on refusing cooperative strategies both with NATO and the EU (Baev, 2005: 53). Though the visible results of EU enlargement processes have been remarkable, bringing down divisions in Europe and overcoming the Soviet inheritances in the Baltic countries and in Central and Easter-Europe, the major challenge for the European countries and for the European institutions is to a large extent linked to their ability to managed the strained relations in the US-EU-Russia triangle. As both NATO and the EU become increasingly engaged in out of the area operations, the Black Sea has become a priority for the "re-coupling" of transatlantic relations (Tassinari, 2007: 19-20), and a direct challenge to the role envisioned for and by Russia in building stability in its European neighbourhood.

An example of such divisions and of the risk of escalating rhetoric is US military presence in Romania and Bulgaria, and the prospect of establishing two missile defence systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, which Moscow perceives aimed as unwanted remilitarisation of its "near abroad". Furthermore, the imminent independence of Kosovo strongly supported by the EU and the US has been equated by Russia as setting a precedent justifying similar actions elsewhere in the Balkans and the South Caucasus. On the one hand the European States have been unable to present a convincing justification for the exceptional character of Kosovo, and on the other, Russia seems willing to drag the European states and the US into the complexities of the former-Soviet space, while reinforcing its position as a global power, set to avoid the development of an unilateral world order.

Turkey – a long time Western ally and NATO member – has also been showing signs of growing awareness of its particularities and security needs, namely since the War in Iraq (Katik, 2006: ; Torbakov, 2006). Faced with dramatic changes and dilemmas at home, its external relations have been driven by pragmatism and a growing role in regional affairs. Either through cultural, linguistic and ethnic affinities shared with countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia, or the geographical importance of its territory as a bridge for Middle East energy, Ankara has assumed a leading regional role. The Black Sea Cooperation Organization (BSECO), a Turkish initiative, has become the most important and recognised institutional framework for relations between the EU and the Wider Black Sea countries. Furthermore, relations between Ankara and Washington have lived difficult but not irreversible moments and the evolution of their strategic partnership[1] remains a central feature of the wider Black Sea security.

EU and NATO perspectives on stability in the Wider Black Sea remains anchored in a common system of collective security, complementary in nature. The different nature of these projects bears different levels of pressure on its enlargement and integration movements, helping to explain why NATO has maintained an open door policy and the EU has been more reluctant to do so. Nevertheless both organisations have created alternative options for engagement outside the framework of accession, thus becoming more flexible and capable of responding to the need to provide neighbouring states with support and security guarantees (Cornell *et al.*, 2004: 66). The urgency of developing a consolidated effort to act on this rim of instability must be recognised, if the EU is to be seen as a regional power of global reach, capable of assuming its responsibilities first and foremost in its neighbourhood. The international credibility of the Union and the positive image it established as a normative actor, managed by democratic and accountable rules and institutions has been an important element in its external action, but at a time of growing insecurity and military threat, is the EU capable of avoiding new division lines in Europe and of overcoming a creeping securitarisation of its neighbourly relations?

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[1] For more details see "Shared vision and structured dialogue to advance the Turkish-American strategic partnership", 5th July 2006. Available at http://www.mfa.gov.tr/mfa.

Globally driven, locally shaped: South Caucasus and Black Sea security

This section looks at the impact that security relations and perceptions developing among the three South Caucasian states, and between them and regional actors (including the EU) have on the Black Sea. Not only there is an urgent need to recognise that interdependence exists among Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, but also that it is extended in fluid and dynamic patterns to include other state and non-state actors varying according to the issues at stake (Gachechiladze, 2002: 119). Mapping this interdependence is a first step for regional actors to better assess their interests and design their strategies accordingly. Furthermore, and since external actors also impact on local and regional dynamics, emerging institutional and ideational elements are considered to understand how far local security rationales are changing and adjusting to, for instance, Western views, or if these are creating added levels of incompatibility with alternative sources of regional legitimacy. The internationalisation of regional security (Dungaciu, 2005: 57) is seen among the three South Caucasian states through different perspectives, and given different priorities. To a large extent this is due to the nature of national projects (Parrott, 1997: 8-11), the existence of natural resources or geographic relevant positions for international projects (Strarr, 2007: 24-29), and to the impact of existing conflicts (Lynch, 2004: 97-101).

Georgian leaders, coming to power after the Rose Revolution made accession to NATO and integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures their priority, based on the notion that national independence and sovereignty could be better guaranteed within this framework. A record of Russian interference in the secessionist conflicts in Georgia (Rivera, 2003: 95) made bilateral relations between Moscow and Tbilisi reach its lowest point since independence. Democracy became part of Georgia's regional identity linking it to the west and marking the underlying difference between its political system and Russia's. Despite the obvious connection between security in Georgia and in the Russian North Caucasus, Russia was regarded as an obstacle to regional security by refusing to promote the change of the current *status quo* in the secessionist conflicts and by opposing the energy and transport corridors crossing Georgian territory. This is one of the most vivid examples of how the western institutions are perceived through radically different views than Russia: the interference in domestic affairs in the former-Soviet countries has placed Moscow in an unprecedented counterproductive position, driving former allies away.

Armenia has been generally described as Russia's last ally in the South Caucasus: it is part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Common Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), maintains considerable Russian military presence in its territory and shares with Moscow extensive financial, economic and political links (Freire and Simão, 2007a). The ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan over the province of Nagorno Karabakh has isolated Armenia regionally and the lack of land connection to Russia has made it dependent on Georgia for trade, energy and human flows. In that regard European integration offered in the framework of the ENP, as well as participation in NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative are assurances that western partners assist authorities in Yerevan to internationalise the Armenian economy and are receptive to its attempts to normalise relations with Turkey. So, incentives for internationalisation of regional security exist in Armenia, though less diverted towards an exclusively western orientation: Iran has long been an important partner, the large Armenian diaspora throughout the world, and strong cultural links to the Middle East make its options more varied in geographical terms, than Georgia's. The Black Sea stands as yet another regional framework for Armenia to exercise its complementarity foreign policy; this reflects the perception that security can only be achieved by bringing together all possible parts in supporting Yerevan's perspectives on regional conflict resolution and economic development.

This idea that external engagement in regional affairs might help change the current balance in the South Caucasus has been less marked in Azerbaijan. Baku has been known since the begging of the 20th century as an important point in the energy network of Eurasia, and therefore the isolation experienced in the Soviet period was overcome by the interest of international actors, helping to forge a greater sense of independence towards Moscow. Its strategic importance has been recognised by the US and the EU, including it in all relevant regional initiatives. Azerbaijan is part of the Neighbourhood Policy of the EU, even if it does not hold direct borders with EU members, takes part in the PfP and has been evidencing a clear interest in a role of regional leader, making use of its revenues to support new energy and transport regional initiatives. This strategic importance has been used by Azerbaijani leaders as an opportunity to alter, what is perceived as a disadvantageous status in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict (Freire and Simão, 2007b). Even if with limited impact in conflict resolution, such a stand shows an increasing internationalisation of the security matters in the region. Perceptions on Azeri security are closely connected to a wide variety of

issues (religious extremism, drug trafficking routes, armed conflict or democratic accountability) as well as to a wide range of areas from Central Asia, to the Middle East and Russia, demanding a hard balance of interest and views.

It becomes clear that among this "region" there are divergent departing points, making EU and NATO relations with these countries highly complex and interdependent. This is why the South Caucasus has been often perceived as a security complex (Buzan, 1991: 190), whose security concerns impact on relational patterns within the region and outside it. According to Buzan's formulation these "empirical phenomena" derive as much from interactions among individual states as they do from the anarchical system: on the one hand geography links events in one state to the next; and on the other security interdependence is shaped by anarchy (Buzan, 1991: 191). A vivid example of such interdependence are the "frozen conflicts" active in the South Caucasus. They affect first and foremost the national security of the states within which they are located, but they both influence and depend on neighbours, regional and world powers which have identified interests in that particular region. Acting as patron-states, Russia, Turkey or the US are an integral part of the Caucasian security complex, maintaining a mutual security relationship with the Caucasian states.

The divergent approaches to security meeting in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea bear pressure on local actors and shape domestic perceptions. Looking at the former-Soviet space as an area of particular importance for its security, Russia does not seem ready to accept the consequences of increasing "multi-level interactions, played out trough regional and sub-regional linkages" within the EU's new security neighbourhood (Allison;Light and White, 2006: 85). The expansion of Euro-Atlantic integration mechanisms to the CIS is considered a priority concern for Russian security and its plans of global affirmation (Putin, October 16, 2002: ; Rivera, 2003: 93). In that sense, the links developed between Ukraine and Georgia, namely through the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC) or GUAM, represent concerning intrusions of western influence that, though welcomed by these states, represent a dynamic away from Russian influence. The contradicting understandings of security between Russia and these two very important Black Sea countries are an example of the difficulties of elaborating a regional concept of cooperative security, capable of presenting an alternative to the concept of sphere of influence.

One other perspective on the interdependence of security among the Caucasian states and the Black Sea is naturally linked to energy and trade flows. Interestingly

enough these seem to run along the same lines of the "democratic flow". The existence of the so-called Baltic-Black-Caspian seas axis, supporting democratic changes and Euro-Atlantic integration, could be closely linked to the need to assure stability and energy security in the Wider Europe. These perspectives are profoundly shaped both by western interests and local security relations, if we attain to the importance of Ukraine, Georgia or Azerbaijan to energy diversification and security in the EU, and their stated western orientation. Nevertheless, cooperative security does not necessarily provide the answers to security challenges in the wider Black Sea region, as the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (as well as the railroad linking Baku to Kars in Turkey) seem to prove. The exclusion of Armenia from both projects, as a way to further isolate the country that currently occupies part of Azerbaijan's territory, reveals a pragmatic assessment of the short-term possibilities of cooperation, and a limited view of the possible long-term impact of such choices on regional security. So, Armenia is not perceived regionally as an indispensable element to security, though it is paradoxically regarded as the main obstacle to regional integration and development.

A former Armenian Minister of National Security, David Shahnazarian remarked in a 2005 presentation the following:

"Establishment of irrevocable democracy, rule of law, free market economy relations and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms has not assumed yet key significance in the South Caucasian countries. As a result all pressing problems of the region are intensifying further, it still continues to remain politically and economically unstable [….]. Which are the main problems threatening the stability and regional security in the South Caucasus? I would like to single main of them: Opposite foreign policy vectors of the South Caucasian states… Harmonization, synchronization and coordination of foreign policy priorities of all three states are the only means that can prevent the South Caucasus from developing into the hotbed of geopolitical clashes." (Shahnazarian, 2005)

These opposing foreign policy vectors could lead to important clashes in the Wider Europe, especially in the face of US difficulties in assuring a successful Great Middle East strategy. From this perspective, the South Caucasus gains added relevance to influence both the Black Sea region to the West, Central Asia to the East, Russia to the North and the Middle East to the South (Priego, 2007: 11) and becomes more attractive for strategic reasons. The developments in the EU will be critically felt in the Black Sea, and could reveal either a strong and engaged block, namely in security terms

(Lesser, 2007: 36) in the face of international changes. A comprehensive approach to security might nevertheless be compromised if incentives to partner states are not relevant and if they are not offered security guarantees. In the short-term these are some of the challenges that the European leaders might have to assume both within NATO and the EU[2] if the necessary conditions for Euro-Atlantic integration to reach the eastern coast of the Black Sea are to be created.

Mainstreaming alternative notions of security

This paper tried to assess divergent security understandings converging in the Black Sea area in a context of change and increasing competition. It argued that EU, US and NATO perceptions of security around the Black Sea, despite important differences, provide a common framework for western engagement with the region. This engagement is fundamentally driven by the perception that stability in the European continent can only be achieved by engaging with the states of the former-Soviet space to the East (as well as with the southern neighbours); and by an attempt to create an alternative approach to security within EU's external action. Transformative diplomacy, looking to establish a "ring of well governed states" is certainly distant from the interventionist and militarist approaches so far common in the region.

The necessary changes to current security perceptions and contexts around the Black Sea will result from the choices of local actors as much as from external actors' impact on regional dynamics. Further Euro-Atlantic integration – perhaps to full EU and NATO membership – will extend the EU's cooperative model of relations further a field and, even if with a more diffused effect, will socialise domestic and regional politics in the region according to EU values and principles. However, should western engagement be erratic and inconsistent, further instability can arise from the dispute for influence with Russia, but also eventually with China, or other non-state actors active in the region.

By managing to develop the necessary tools to engage in conditionality and expansion of its governance system, through a stronger centralised authority and relevant military capabilities, the EU could expect some impact in the South Caucasus

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[2] As the US becomes increasingly disengaged from security concerns in Europe and from NATO, the EU develops a higher stance in assuring security in the European continent. See for instance the argument at Kupchan, Charles A. (2003) "The Rise of Europe, America's Changing Internationalism, and the End of U.S. Primacy." *Political Science Quarterly*, 118 (N.º 2, Summer), pp:205-31.

and the Black Sea. But it should also develop a strategic understanding of its role in the 21st century, capable of justifying the development of new means and instruments, and of defining its global role. Again, management of relations with the US and Russia will remain crucial for stability around the EU.

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