

Prof. Alla A. Yazkova,

Head of Black Sea – Mediterranean Center (Institute of Europe RAS)

Russia's Interests and Policy in the Wider Black sea Region

The permanent and even increased on the eve of the New Millennium interest to the Wider Black Sea region has had some obvious reasons.

First. the Caspian - Black Sea – Mediterranean area plays an increasing role in the new system of international relations, being closely connected with the Middle East “hot points”. The entire situation became much more tense after the aggravation of Arabo-Israeli conflict and especially sub aspect of the situation in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. Its increased significance acquires also the problem of Caspian oil and gas resources transportation, becoming a field of a many powers competition.

Second. The 1990-2000's have brought extremely deep changes of geopolitical nature, among them the consequences of the USSR and SFRJ disintegration, following appearance of new independent states number, a series of ethno-political conflicts – all the mentioned in conjunction with EU and NATO enlargement. The main regional Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) now includes: all the Balkan countries (with the exception of Macedonia and Montenegro also applying for membership); all the countries of Southern Caucasus; Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Moldova, as well. The above mentioned changes demonstrate an absolutely new situation (as compared with 1990 when the first Union of four Black Sea littoral countries has been created).

Third. The Wider Black Sea area now represent a Large International region of a high importance but for the time being inadequate organized, not to mention an increased number of existent or potential ethno-political conflicts,

absence of normal infrastructure, poverty of the majority population. Owing to the urgent necessity of seeking compromise solution to the open issues and preventing the appearance of new “hot points” it would be necessary to unite all the co interested intellectual, political and business forces for to carry out policy-oriented and practical research.. As potential executive function structure it could be mentioned International Center for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), which was set up in 1996 in Athens. Unfortunately the ICBSS staff is currently limited, therefore it would be useful to establish a permanent multilateral network on the base of existent national research groups.

As for the Moscow Black Sea – Mediterranean Center and of the same title Scientific Council established within the frameworks of the Institute of Europe, theirs activity evoked special interest among our colleagues from the southern regions of Russia. We also cooperate with a number of Russian and foreign universities, officials of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affaires, of the EU and NATO representatives in Moscow. Now we continue our work, the new contacts and directions of cooperation to be established in the next future.

A very important factor of Black Sea research cooperation could become interaction with Russian regional structures. From Russian side it is the Krasnodar region, which could play a significant role not only in economic, but also in scientific cooperation, taking into consideration the Kuban State University (KubSU), participant of a number of large Black Sea projects. It is also worth to mention the increasing role of the Southern Federal University (Rostov), which now cooperate with some of Moscow and foreign institutions, preparing in the spring 2008 a large International Conference sub preliminary title “Greater Black Sea Economic Cooperation: Towards a Partnership of XXI Century”.

Taking into account a geostrategic role of Black Sea region, its economic and political significance, the region is undoubtedly of a great significance for Russia, its economic, sea communications and the main foreign policy directions development. Notwithstanding of Russian coastline reduction in the 1990's Russia dispose a number of important seaports on the Black Sea. Its coastal regions are going to become high-capacity bridges for transportation of all kinds energy resources, including oil, gas, electric power supplies. The Black Sea has always been and remains a Russian gateway to the Mediterranean and to the World Oceans, presenting also a natural security line for Russia. The Wider Black Sea area has currently become an increasing political and economic importance, having both opportunities and challenges.

Development of bilateral relations with the regional Black Sea partners differs from the situation of strategic partnership with Yerevan to the stage of nearly interstate conflict with Tbilisi, *de facto* inexplicable taking into consideration historical background and real importance of Georgia as strategical partner for Russia. The state of Russia's relations with some of Wider Black Sea sub regions, namely with the Southern Caucasus and the Balkans, could be explained by the fact, that majority of sub regional countries are also confronting the similar difficulties of post communist transition under conditions of initially low level of economic development, lack of high technology industries, extremely high level of corruption and organized crime. Besides Russia and Azerbaijan, partially Romania, all of them suffer from the lack of energy resources and raw materials.

During the last decade the Wider Black Sea Region has turned into an geo-economics and geopolitical area of cooperation and confrontation of Russia with the Great International Powers. The future of the Region depends substantially on any changes in the regional context: whether Iran remains unattractive

to international warnings, how Turkey deals with its separatist problems and why the Iraq and Afghan domestic situation turns out. Besides of these external regional factors, situation depends also on stability of the Southern Caucasus and Balkan states governments, especially in their dependence on factors beyond domestic control.

USA has been conducting much more active policy in the region since the late 1990's – especially in the post-11 September 2001 era - viewing the Caspian energy resource in two ways: first, as a contributor to global oil supply diversification and, second, as an effective tool for lowering oil prices. Seems to be also USA intention to strengthen ties with Muslim-majority states, like Azerbaijan, which border on the Middle East, and to promote – by any ways – the western standards of democracy notwithstanding of the local societies readiness to adopt them.

The main external actors in the Region – USA - NATO - European Union - Russia, each of them having its own interests and positions. USA and NATO are interested in the different qualities of the Region: as an alternative source of energy and raw materials; as a base for military force advancement into the great Middle East region; as a buffer zone for the slackening the threats from the South; finally as an area for testing the capacity to spread democracy. The recent actions, legalized the long-term military presence of USA fleet in the Black Sea, worries not only Russia, but also Turkey as a keeper of Montreux convention. On the other hand, active support of the “orange revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine and their rapprochement with NATO meets active opposition from the Russian side.

As for the EU, its New Neighborhood Policy, launched now for Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, demonstrates its intention to closer association with the Black Sea countries without their integration into the Union.

The objective interest of Russia could be to gather advantages of Black Sea countries European orientation as additional possibility to cooperate with the EU. The main economic partners of Russia are now Greece, Romania and Bulgaria as the EU members. Both of them occupy a strategic location on the Western side of the Black Sea, but former closely politico-military contacts with Romania and Bulgaria are now loosed by Russia.

There have been a lot of discussions about Russian-American competition or even confrontation in the Wider Black sea region. Concerning Russia's interests and policy there are a number of reasons at work. The Black Sea region have been and remains an important factor of Russian history and historical memory, not to mention Russia's security anxieties connected with Northern Caucasus separatism and terrorism.

According to Alexey Arbatov, during the 1990's Russia has been trying to establish its dominance in the Region through openly support of separatism (as in Georgia), supporting repressive regimes (as Miloshevich administration in Yugoslavia), making use of its military presence (Georgia and Moldova). In the 2000's, as Russia gained in economic and financial potential, it began taking more pragmatic approach and turned its attention to the transit of energy export, investments in natural resources exploration, maintaining only strategically important military presence and taking a strong accent on humanitarian matters, as, for instance, Russian language status¹. It is worth to mention, that new directions of Russian policy aren't without its serious mistakes, such as some of recent episodes of Russian-Georgian confrontation, including the shocking anti-Georgian campaign in Moscow (2006, October).

¹ Alexey Arbatov. Moscow and Munich: A New Framework for Russian Domestic and Foreign Policies// Carnegie Moscow Center, 2007,#3,p. 17.

A special kind of menaces for Southern Caucasus and the Balkans represent so called “frozen conflicts, more political than interethnic confrontation between the separatist districts and their “small metropolis”. The presence of unresolved conflicts put heavy obstacles on the way of respective countries modernization and cooperation between them, not to mention a permanent increasing pressure from outside.

International Community tried to solve the most difficult conflict in the Balkans – the Kosovo case – but it would be unrealistic to imagine that the proposed solutions – including the famous Ahtisaari plan could appease the situation. Moreover, its negative impact on the whole situation in the Wider Black Sea Region could produce the “domino effect”, the growing claims on independence of another “unrecognized districts”. It is more and more obvious, that hasty decision could harm not only Serbia, but European stability as well.

Russia’s position is founded on the presumption, that since the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (June 10, 1999), which reaffirmed “the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (contemporary Serbia)”, the International Community has not formulated another view of the province readiness to assume the full independence. The solution can be found only through a joint legal search for a status based on common adopted precedents, such as associated membership or federacy (not federation!), which provide for asymmetric relations with the mother state, including full self-dependence in internal affairs.

According to Russia’s official position, Kosovo could create a series of precedents, but it is necessary to do our best to found positive solutions on the ground of International Law indications. It is also important to promote in the Wider Black Sea Region all kinds and directions of economic cooperation.

Taking into consideration the general topic of our workshop, I would like to mention the BSEC Organization, which unite Russia with majority of the Wider Black Sea Region countries. According to many experts opinion, BSEC is now the most institutionalized but also insufficient productive organization.. The BSEC's contemporary function is worth to be a topic of a special presentation, it is however necessary to stress its importance as a common platform of regional economic interaction..

Russia's interest regarding its participation in the BSEC project is also related to the geopolitical importance of the region. The Black Sea has always been a Russian gateway to Mediterranean and the World Ocean and also a natural security line. .After 1991 the Russian Federation's possibilities in the Black Sea region substantially diminished, that is one of the important reasons for Russia's more active cooperation with the littoral countries, first of all Georgia and Ukraine.. .

From the very beginning BSEC Organization intended to develop the economic relations among its members, not to provide them security protection. Contemporary situation in the Wider Black Sea Region, complicated by a series of long-term political conflicts, requires, however, gradually transformation of BSEC into a more active framework for discussion various problems, building up a climate of security and mutual trust among the member states. The conclusion would be to create a new model of constructive regionalism, taking into account the real interests of all the local players. Initial ground can provide the BSEC Organization, being in opinion of specialists the most institutionalized, but insufficient active integration structure in the region.

Summing up, it is worth to stress the increasing economic and political importance of the Wider Black Sea Region both for Russia and for regional, european and international structures.. The development of European Union bilateral relations with all the Black Sea countries, the launching of the European Neighborhood Policy and the recent EU enlargement (Bulgaria and Romania) has considerably strengthened EU's positions in the Region, although the focus of European Union policy has been mainly on individual BSEC member states without involving the BSEC institutional framework. The existence of precedents in the EU regional policies, in particular the Mediterranean Partnership and the Northern Dimension with Russia's participation provides a useful experience that could be adapted to the specific needs and possibilities of the Black Sea Region².

The conclusion would be to create a new model of constructive regionalism, taking into account the real interests of all the local players, to cooperate in the areas from energy, ecology, transport and tourism to fighting organized crimes and separatism, building up ties with European structures

As for Russia, it has constantly recognized strategic significance of the Wider Black Sea Region, confirming the importance of the future common efforts towards creating a more stable Black Sea area., as a part of Europe without dividing lines.

² BSEC-EU Interaction: The BSEC Approach. Working Paper, Istanbul, 17 January 2007; Declaration on the occasion of the Fifteenth Anniversary Summit of The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (Istanbul, 25 June 2007).

