

Partnership in the Making since 1991: Black Sea and Caspian Security Concerns of Turkey and Georgia

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Abstract

Although the geopolitical and geostrategic edifice of the Caucasus had evolved considerably at the beginning of the 1990s, Turkey and Georgia were still two states who had not yet entered into a close relationship - despite being border neighbors. The moves intended for becoming partners nucleated when Caspian oil and gas transfer debates took the center stage well towards the second half of the 1990s. Although energy issues were the baseline for channeling the new partnership, other components of cooperation were later successfully tested on several fronts including, military assistance, ethnic disputes, and Georgia' partnership and their prospective implications on the wider regional dynamics shaping politics in the Caspian and Black Seas. The final analysis is that as long as the security equation in these two sub-regions remains, it goes without saying that the preoccupations of Turkey and Georgia will continue to hint at common policy perceptions.

1. Introduction

As the last watershed event of the past century, the end of the Cold War ushered new dynamics on the former Soviet zones. Two significant spots in this respect were two seas in Russia's south. The new process, i.e. regionalization, affected several areas in Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, giving way to both ambiguous coalitions and clear groupings. The subject matter of this paper, Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions were a mirror image of both trends. Being formerly two border neighbors without any mutual strategic aims due to being on opposite camps for a long time, Turkey and Georgia embarked in an entirely new geopolitical environment whereby they discovered each other on several fronts as of 1990s, but more so after 2003.

Central to the two states' common agenda were energy development issues, burgeoning economic and trade links, security cooperation, and affirmative discourse concerning Euro-Atlantic integration. In this context, this paper examines the dynamics of the two states' partnership and their prospective implications on the wider regional dynamics shaping politics in the Black Sea and the Caspian basins. After an account on the emergence of the two basins as two important subregions, how Turkey and Georgia fit into these regions after 1991 shall be examined, to be followed by areas of cooperation; namely, energy issues, security issues, economic relations, transportation, and Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia and the state of affairs after the war in August 2008. The main argument is that the emergence of the regional relationship schemes was not peculiar to only these two regions in the aftermath of the Cold War; and yet its implications were for Turkey and Georgia, since it rapidly translated itself into a strategic alliance level in such a short time-span as 15 years, something usually uncommon in international relations. The final analysis is that as long as the security equation in these two subregions remains, it goes without saying that the preoccupations of Turkey and Georgia will continue to hint at common policy perceptions, based on a cooperation discourse.



2. The Black Sea and the Caspian Sea after the Cold War

The Black Sea and its basin have traditionally been a locus of mostly competitive but also cooperative dynamics between its littoral states, the regional powers as well as outside powers. Influenced by Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman rule, it lent itself to limited interaction due to the inception of ideological barriers after World War II. During this period, the only littoral state in the Black Sea that belonged to the western camp was Turkey and the Black Sea basin was not subject to cooperative efforts of any kind until the end of the Cold War.

As a consequence, as if to match the scientific fact that almost 90 per cent of deep water in the Black Sea is anoxic, the levels of interaction between the littoral states did not pose a vivid picture at least until 1992, when the first palpable effort taken with a view to transforming the Black Sea basin into a meaningfully cooperative region came about with the proposal of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) during Turgut Özal administration. The emergence of the Black Sea as a region was only a part of the wider regionalization processes after 1991 which was not peculiar to this region only; but of course, the way it gave way to new paradoxes, cooperative and conflictual dynamics in and around its vicinity was unique to itself.

Just as in the case of other newly-emerged regions of the post-Cold War era, the Black Sea region -as a term- gave way to different connotations which denote different conglomeration of states. Throughout this study, the terms (wider) Black Sea region, Black Sea basin, and (wider) Black Sea area shall refer basically to Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, following the depiction of the European Commission in 2007 regarding the region.¹

In such a short time span as twenty years, the Black Sea region was exposed to radical geopolitical transformations due to three important local/global developments: the end of the Cold War, the impact of 9/11 and the brief war of 08/08/2008. Since the first development, the Black Sea region has been a stage for both new enmities and amities. The current state of affairs, especially after the Georgian-Russian war, is still unfolding to confirm that the geopolitical edifice of the region is complex and challenging, with several actors inside and outside, their multiplicity of interests, their bilateral relations with each other as well as the influence of external powers as the USA, Russia, and Turkey.

The Caspian Sea also appeared as an epicenter in the evolving global geopolitics after the disintegration of the USSR. Although the sea was already the subject matter of established legal instruments which date back to as early as 1921 between Iran and the USSR, the discussions over whether it is a sea or lake have dominated the discourse of debates since 1991 due to the increase in the number of its littoral states. The debates have not been finalized although efforts in that direction do exist.

The reason that compelled the littoral states – Azerbaijan, Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan – has been to get the largest possible sector in the sea as a consequence of energy-driven motives which surfaced especially after the signing of the 'Contract of the Century' between Azerbaijan and an international consortium in 1994 that had implications not just for the littoral states but also the larger Caucasian hinterland of the sea. The primary concern here for the littoral states and the larger Eurasian region was “...seeking ways to be the masters of their own resources and to change the terms of their relationship with Moscow” as well as “open[ing] up to the international system” after the Cold War.² In this context, several significant legal documents regarding the status of the sea have been signed by Azerbaijan, Russia and Kazakhstan so far.

While energy was one indispensable factor that shaped the future of Caspian security parlance, the domestic political, social and economic developments in the former Soviet Union (FSU) republics as littoral states of the Caspian Sea also influenced the regional security milieu. Therefore, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, it was important that whether the changes in the process of state-building in these states would be aggressive or pluralist-oriented regimes in the ensuing years.³

The region was also implied in environmental debates regarding the transfer of energy resources from the Caspian via the Black Sea and the impacts of this on the Turkish Straits due to the high density of traffic which has been brought to decreased levels after the operationalization of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline in the mid-2000s.⁴ Another definitional issue about the Caspian basin that has come to forth after the collapse of the USSR was the future role to be played by external powers such as Russia which had the largest stretch of the sea during the Cold War, as well as those of the USA and Turkey.

2.1. How Does Turkey Fit in the post-Cold War Black Sea and Caspian basins?

Amidst the regionalization trend of the post-Cold War era, the Black Sea appeared as a new intersection point in the three major regional projects articulated by the major powers in global politics. These included Russia's Near Abroad Policy (NAP), the Greater Middle Eastern project of the USA, and the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), all including the Black Sea.⁵ Against this backdrop, it would be almost impossible to expect Turkey to remain on the sidelines regarding the Black Sea affairs and simply act with just an observer capacity. Accordingly, one of the six novel regional cooperative organizations formed after 1991 was brought to life as the BSEC⁶, spearheaded by Turkey, masterminded by a senior Turkish diplomat, Şükrü Elekdağ, during the Özal administration.

Turkey was no stranger to the Black Sea as it had been an Ottoman lake for a long period during the Ottoman Empire which translated itself into a Russian/Soviet zone of influence with the Cold War. Subsequently, Turkey devised the BSEC with primarily economic motives than political considerations initially. Two main objectives embedded in the creation of the BSEC were to design a leading role for Turkey to be followed by the FSU republics that are littoral states and secure other regional alternatives if the EU rejected Turkey once again which would be almost tantamount to totally closing the doors on Turkey. Such economy-driven cooperative scheme was furthered by strategic endeavors such as the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR) and the Black Sea Harmony Initiative and other local projects, aiming at transforming the region into peace-bound one.⁷

As the first most important effort, “the BSEC was the product of Turkey's post-Cold War, regionalist drive to locate itself at the center of the Black Sea region, in response to the pan-Europeanization of the regional political economy.”⁸ It is widely accepted that the organization was quite 'interesting' as it came in face of constant conflicts plaguing the bilateral relationships of member states: Turkey and Greece, Turkey and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, Moldova and Russia. In this sense, it was noteworthy that the cooperation efforts emanated from the region itself and not imposed or engineered from outside in essence.⁹ Some years ahead in its lifetime, at least well through late 1990s, the approaches of certain states such as Russia and Greece changed to signal affirmation of the significance of the BSEC when some distinctive regional issues came to forth in the political dynamics of the region.¹⁰

Since its inception as an organization, the BSEC has been successful at functioning as a platform to facilitate the economic transition of the economies of the FSU republics and influenced these states to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). During its chairmanship in 2007, Turkey preferred to underscore the following objectives in the short-term: promoting more internal reforms in the member states with the final goal of more liberalization in this sector, reinforcing BSEC-EU relations, and appealing to all littoral states to become participants of Black Sea Harmony.¹¹

Although the more pronounced driving motive was economic concerns, the strategic dimension in the BSEC could not go unnoticed. This came at a time when 9/11 attacks gave a new direction to world politics, and subsequent proposals in 2006 that NATO should be engaged in enhanced activities in the Black Sea, which were not welcome by Turkey and Russia. While the former was in favor of the maintenance of the status quo in the Black Sea as per the Montreux Convention; given the examples of friction between NATO and Russia over the Baltic states, Ukraine and Transcaucasian republics, the latter opposed increased US influence in the Black Sea.

Significantly however, the 2008 war in the Caucasus once again caused the US to show willingness to increase the NATO presence in the region. On the other hand, two extensions of Turkey's security concerns in the Black Sea have already been brought to pass as the BLACKSEAFOR in 2001 and the Black Sea Harmony in 2004.¹²

The most significant cooperative platform in the Black Sea after the Cold War was the BSEC on both economic and strategic fronts. Compared to its initial *lancement*, it has made some way towards reinforcing its organizational network between the member states and acknowledgment by the EU. The fact that it was spearheaded by Turkey is telling and exemplary of the role that Turkey assumed regarding Black Sea cooperation. Although most arguments point to a common conclusion that it could not develop a substantial institutional structure, it has started a process in which there is no going back.

Turkey's concerns about the Caspian Sea have commanded no less attention since the breakup of the USSR. Turkey's newly evolving interest towards the Caspian Sea has been substantially dictated by a combination of political, economic and environmental concerns. Although most of what has been written to date on the issue has tended to focus on the energy dimension as the primary concern for Turkey in the Caspian basin, other objectives required equal attention. Just as the starting momentum for a Black Sea cooperation framework was initially economic, that regarding the Caspian basin was more or less similar. However, some years ahead, it boiled down to encompass a broader agenda.

Substantially, the economic aspect of Turkey's interest towards the Caspian involved energy issues. Given the growing household and industrial demand for natural gas as well as the substantial gas infrastructure installed during the 1980s, Turkey was compelled to secure gas imports from as many secure sources as possible. Combined with the efforts of transferring energy resources from the Caspian Sea in the 1990s, Turkey found itself in comprehensive energy deals to carry gas from the Caspian to the West which fit best its energy needs. In this respect, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) project spoke for itself as being the most important outcome of this process so far.

Turkey's Caspian Sea policies also involved environmental concerns which were political rather than economic. Expressly put, Turkey supported the BTC as it would decrease the tanker traffic through the Turkish Straits and the ecological risks this implied – which led to some tension with its northern neighbor, Russia. Consequently, the Burgas-Alexandropoulos pipeline was proposed as an alternative route, to carry gas to the West.

While still on Russian factor, it should be stated that Turkey minded a subtle balance between its policies towards the Caspian Sea and its relationship with Russia. It valued cooperation with Russia in spite of the serious divides in their policies towards the projected pipelines and increased NATO and US presence in the Black Sea, to cite two examples.¹³ Nevertheless, the two states' relations ended up dominated by pragmatic concerns which augmented the trade levels, improved tourism links, newly discovered business sectors such as construction, textile, and jewelry.

Just as Turkey's policy preferences regarding the Black Sea basin were put through a test after 1991, those concerning the Caspian also had to stand to challenges in view of economic, political and other interests. The question how Turkey explored the newly emerging geopolitics in these two basins pointed to a new relationship with a rather new partner in the northeast, Georgia -- and how Turkey and Georgia fit in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea politics in the new regionalization current.

3. How Does Georgia Fit in the post-Cold War Black Sea and Caspian basins?

Georgia's perceptions toward the Black Sea were also conditioned by political and economic concerns after the Cold War. In the wider foreign policy context, Georgia leaned towards Russia until 2004, seeing it as the guarantor of its security and future ally. However, there was also the perception that no major regional player would bring ultimate security to the Caucasus due to the longstanding inner conflicts of the region.

Accordingly, as a new security mechanism was produced, Georgian foreign policy witnessed a two-fold impact: 1) “an inner Caucasian dialogue [was] under way since security of no particular Caucasian country [could] be perceived separately from other Caucasian countries and 2) the importance of direct contacts with West [was] growing as they allow the Caucasian nations to avoid traditional rivalry between great regional powers and focus more on their own interests”.¹⁴

It was upon such background that Georgia tried to simultaneously improve its relations with immediate neighbors, regional players and great powers on an equal scale. Its Black Sea engagement was shaped following such an approach, maintaining the idea that the Black Sea should not be dominated by any certain state(s)' interests but should be viewed as a 'playing field' of all the regional countries. As such, the BSEC was acknowledged by Georgia as a platform in which all states were equally represented.¹⁵

Although there are occasional examples in the relevant literature stating that it is difficult to analyze the meaning of the Black Sea region for Georgia,¹⁶ in fact the country's policies towards the region have been given a clear contour that prioritizes regional stability. The foreign policy strategy document of Georgia for 2006 – 2009 period mentions that it is of utmost importance to counter regional threats by strengthening international participation and preventing new threats in the Black Sea. In this regard, the document lays out the solution of problems between Azerbaijan and Armenia as a prerequisite for future regional cooperation and seems to be eager to assume a role of 'connecting bridge' between these two states for dialogue. In this connection, active participation in the BSEC along with combating global terrorism, proliferation of mass destruction weapons, arms, human and drug trafficking as well as illegal migration are topics of concern for Georgia in regional security that includes the Black Sea. The Black Sea dimension of European and Euro-Atlantic structures is considered to be a topic to be devoted particular attention as it includes issues of direct interest for Georgia, such as democratic development, good governance and stable market economy.¹⁷

The second leg in Georgia's Black Sea perceptions is the economic motives. After long years of centralized economy which disrupted links with the West and South, the East-West transport corridor stood as the most important project for Georgia since it meant the country's full integration to world economy. Accordingly, through the Georgian perspective, the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) and the development of pan-European transfer routes in which Georgia has a strategic location in the Black Sea zone of the Pan-European Transport Area (PETRA) has been prioritized right from the beginning.¹⁸

Georgia views economic growth, stable development, enhancing opportunities for Georgia's business and energy policies as inextricably linked with promoting regional projects which include the Black Sea region as well as the Caucasus. To this end, the major concern for the country is to reach qualitatively new levels of transnational projects for increasing employment levels and competitiveness.¹⁹

Combined, the above considerations point out to an established awareness on the part of Georgian policymakers that the Black Sea, as the immediate vicinity of the country, stands as an area that promises more cooperative than conflictual dynamics for the littoral states. Notwithstanding, the picture posed after the August 2008 war had an undeniable impact on the relationship between Georgia and Russia on many fronts, including the overall cooperation efforts which also cover the Black Sea region.

If the Black Sea region was one important foreign policy issue, the Caspian Sea issues were no less important for Georgia. The main reason for this was that the emerging energy politics in the Caspian basin coincided a time when Georgian foreign policy sought to foster Georgia's position in regional affairs. The global energy companies soon discovered the potential of the region to carry oil and gas to the West, which subsequently had a complimentary effect on Georgia: the country had a favorable location as a transit state.

As emerging energy policies grew ripe, the factors that elevated the role of Georgia in Caspian energy politics became clearer:

“(1)Transporting oil south to the Persian Gulf through Iran was unacceptable due to the US government restrictions on US companies doing business with Iranian companies,
(2)Relying solely on an existing oil pipeline traveling north through Russia would have given Moscow a monopoly on Caspian oil transport,
(3)Building a main export pipeline (MEP) through Turkey to handle large amounts of Caspian oil promised to be a long and expensive ordeal,
(4)Transporting oil through Georgia presented fewer risks than existing or potential pipelines transiting hotbeds of ethnic tension in Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabagh, and eastern Turkey”.²⁰

These factors were further reinforced by the fact that Georgia did not have a serious bilateral conflict with any of the other south Caucasian states, unlike Azerbaijan and Armenia did. However, the blooming positive prospect for Georgia in respect to its Caspian position, which was confirmed after 1995 following the signing of the Contract of the Century between Azerbaijan and a western consortium, eventually made the country a target for Russia which wanted to retain its former influence in the region, not to mention the hostile attitude about being excluded from the emerging energy politics in the Caspian.²¹ In similar vein, affirmative arguments have maintained that Georgia was the worst and clearest example of Russia's involvement in its Near Abroad Policy (NAP).²²

Since mid-1990s, hypothetical estimates predicted Georgia to be the potential disadvantaged party in the Caspian energy politics in case of a possible ethnic conflict regarding Abkhazia and/or South Ossetia. The only major development that posed a serious risk to the uninterrupted flow of oil and gas from the Caspian was the August 2008 war; and contrary to common fears, it did not have a major impact on energy transfer so far.²³ As things stand, the role of Georgia as the main energy transit state seems likely to remain despite constant disputes with Russia.

4. Blooming Partnership: Turkey and Georgia

4.1. Energy Cooperation

An amalgam of factors structured the future course of relations between Turkey and Georgia amidst the new geopolitical environment. In fact, Turkish foreign policy did not devote much attention to Georgia in early 1990s. The policy parlance regarding Georgia at best reflected Turkey's overall concerns regarding the consolidation of the independences of the FSU republics, which included Georgia, and supporting their territorial integrity.²⁴ While there was not much pronounced emphasis in the foreign policy rhetoric about Georgia, the military distinctly saw the country as a buffer zone with Russia and a strategic point for Turkey's options to reach out to Azerbaijan and Central Asia.²⁵ Nevertheless, the starter that remarkably transformed the dim relationship into an enhanced partnership was energy development issues after mid-1990s. Put differently, had it not been for the energy development cooperation, bilateral relations would not have been at current levels.

The anchor in Turkish-Georgian relations in both the Black Sea and Caspian Sea contexts was the energy factor. When it became clear that Caspian energy resources would be exported to the West; Iranian and Russian route options were ruled out since they implied Iranian, Russian and Armenian control over the strategic energy routes, which led to increased emphasis on the western routes that included Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan, by-passing Armenia despite the long distances the route entailed. Subsequently, the Turkish decision-makers supported the Baku-Supsa route for early oil flow, seeing it as an elementary step towards the BTC pipeline.²⁶

From the Turkish perspective, the BTC meant increased revenues and employment opportunities for

the engineering and construction sectors in Turkey, transit fees for the state budget, increased prospects for Azerbaijan to purchase more Turkish products, and meeting the increasing oil demand in Turkey from a viable route. For Georgia, the BTC would function as a substantial means to strengthen independence, boost the economy with transit fees as well as fostering its position in the region and aligning itself closer with the West.²⁷

Since the operationalization of the pipeline, Georgia has by and large benefited from the project. There were certain assumptions that Georgia would one day suffer from the so-called 'Dutch Disease' which plagued the countries that preferred to focus predominantly on raw material sector which leads to the revaluation of national currency, growth of export prices and decrease in import prices, a phenomenon named after a similar situation experienced in the Netherlands following the discovery of sizeable gas reserves in the 1960s.²⁸ The interlocutors of this hypothesis pointed out to some indications in the Georgian economy showing such signs,²⁹ arguing the main reason for these signs was the BTC pipeline. Nevertheless, even if such an assumption was verified, it should be borne in mind that Georgia's economy has made progress compared to pre-BTC times, with its losses and benefits.

The energy dimension of the cooperation involves electricity purchase as well. Turkey and Georgia currently have an electricity trade of 70 – 80 MW and with a 2010 agreement, this level is planned to be expanded up to 1,000 MW by the year 2015. On the other hand, the two states have come to an agreement to build three hydroelectric power plants located on River Paravani. If the intended schedule works out the way it is planned, the power plants will be completed by 2015.³⁰

So far, the energy pier of this relationship has brought mutual benefits to both states and fostered their position in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea contexts as strategic partners. However, the flourishing collaboration also gave way to the emergence of certain rivals against the BTC: For instance, Iran, in cooperation with Russia, negotiated with Armenia and India for building an alternative route. Similarly, new projects were proposed for the energy demands of Egypt, Greece and Cyprus. Such routes aim at carrying oil from the Middle East, via the Mediterranean Sea and Cyprus to Greece and the Balkans.³¹

Unarguably, the BTC qualified as the concrete outcome of Turkish-Georgian partnership in the Caspian context. And yet, it was not the only one. As mutual geopolitical agendas were shaped, they worked to enlarge the scope of the new bilateral relationship, bearing implications for the Black Sea and Caspian basins. One of them was trade and finance which has indicated a steady rise since 1991.

4.2. Trade and Finance

Trade between the two states initially worked at the level of the so-called 'suitcase trade' in early 1990s. Georgia, as a natural consequence of geographical proximity, turned towards Turkey for strengthening its liberal market. The trade volume which was \$17,9 million in 1992 has reached \$1,059 million by 2010. Georgia's main exports are iron metals, copper and scrap metals and gold. Its main imports are oil and gas, automotive, and pharmaceutical products. Turkey is at the top in Georgia's export and import list. The legal framework of trade relations have been developed in 1992 with the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation, and was followed by other relevant agreements such the Agreement on the Prevention of Double Taxation and Free Trade Agreement in 2007.³²

Turkey-Georgia Business Council started functioning in 1992 and has held several meetings to date. Joint Economic Commission has also been carrying out scheduled meetings starting in 1997. By 2008, the number of Turkish firms in Georgia was over 100.³³ However, the underdeveloped banking system in Georgia and inadequate banking legislation are among the ongoing shortcomings slowing down trade activities, something also common in almost every formerly Communist states. With a view to improving the economic relations, the Central Bank of Turkey stated back in the 1990s that banking system should be improved for accurate flow of information and communication in this trade and financial sectors. The banking transactions

between two states were given a start with correspondence relations between Turkish Halk Bank and Morbank-Batumi, Commercial Bank of Eurasia-Tbilisi, and TBC Bank-Tbilisi. Ziraat Bank also has branch in Tbilisi.³⁴

The trade levels have been indicating a steady rise since 1992, and particularly after 2003. However, the need for taking them to further levels is obvious. The renewal of Sarp Border Gate will enable facilitated passage of goods and people, which will make trade activities easier than before as it will allow for only one control at the gate, which resembles the French-Swiss border gate practices. The trade levels are expected to increase when this is put into effect.³⁵

4.3. Security and Military Cooperation

The reasons that led Georgia to give particular impetus to security reinforcement are directly linked with the perceived threat from Russia, the need to secure territorial integrity in face of internal conflicts in the country and in its immediate vicinity, the willingness to align itself with the US-led NATO and in this connection with Turkey as the major regional actor, and as a natural extension of its increased role in energy issues. Read together, these motives fit well with the promotion of a strong security relationship in both the Black Sea and Caspian Sea basins.

A stronger and secure Georgia also fits the US interests, in the context of which the US allocated around \$20 million per annum for the modernization of Georgian border troops since 1997. As the state that has been extending considerable assistance and support to Georgian military, Turkey signed an agreement with Georgia for the modernization of Marneuli Military Airport in October 2000. The airport was opened in January 2001. In the same month, the two states signed Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement which covers an array of issues ranging from weapon production to purchase of helicopters, in addition to assistance to Georgian army in its participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program since 1997.³⁶ Turkey gave military assistance to 11th Motorized Unit, Kojori (Gocoli) Military Training Center, Lilo Military Training Center, Marneuli Military Airport, and Military Academia. The military assistance reached \$5,5 million in 1998, \$2,6 million in 1999, \$4 million in 1999, and \$2,5 million in 2001. The decrease in the amount of assistance in 2001 was due to the economic crisis in Turkey.

As Turkish-Georgian military cooperation intensified, Georgia left the CIS Collective Security Agreement in April 1999. However, the Putin administration signed separate security agreements with Georgia (and Azerbaijan) with a view to keeping the two states in its sphere in the Caucasus and not to let NATO troops be deployed at the bases it evacuated in Georgia. In the aftermath of 9/11 attacks, military cooperation between Turkey and Georgia was taken further following negotiations between former FM İsmail Cem and his counterpart Irakli Menagarishvili in Ankara in October 2001. The outcome of these negotiations came in the form of two decisions; the two states agreed to cooperate on security matters through collaboration between Turkey, US, Georgia and Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan.³⁷

The improving military relations was a necessity following the 9/11 attacks in the US and US inclination to strengthen military links with cooperative states in the Black Sea and Caspian basins. Affirming such a point of view, Turkey and Georgia agreed to sign a protocol on holding joint military program in 2004, with a prospect of Turkey to give \$3-4 million military assistance to Georgia's defense expenditure in the same year. In such a positive military relationship context, the Georgian officials stated that whatever government came to power, Turkey and Georgia would remain on good terms and there would be no change in good military relations.³⁸ Most recently, the mutual cooperation was confirmed at the International Defense Industry Fair (IDEF) 2011 arms exhibition in İstanbul by Turkish Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül and his counterpart Bacho Akhalaya.³⁹

The high level of military cooperation between Turkey and Georgia came as a consequence of the changing realities of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions. The main reason that drove Georgia towards Turkey

was the fact that Turkey was the major NATO member in both regions and military cooperation with Turkey fit its future concerns to foster its independent statehood in the coming years. Second, Turkey gave open support to Georgia's territorial integrity since its independence as a natural consequence of the main principles of its foreign policy which attaches utmost importance to the issue. Third, since military cooperation is a substantial means to build confidence in bilateral relations, it was explored to the highest extent possible. Fourth, it was promoted by the US and bolstered even more after 2001. Finally, the high levels of military cooperation were also aimed at fortifying Georgia's territory where the BTC was planned to pass.

4.4. Transportation

Enhanced relations gave way to the need to increase the means of transportation and communication between the two states. Currently, ground transportation between Turkey and Georgia functions through two border gates: Sarp and Türkgözü in Artvin and Ardahan, respectively. The third border gate Çıldır-Aktaş is reportedly almost completed and is scheduled to be opened in 2011. It is expected to boost mutual trade volumes once it is opened. The railway connection between Turkey and Georgia will be established once the Kars-Tbilisi Railway project is finalized by 2012. Within the first year of its completion, the railway is estimated to carry 1,500 thousand passengers and approximately 3 million tons of commodities per year. By 2034, it is expected to carry 3,500 thousand passengers and 16 million tons of commodities.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the Batumi airport is jointly used by the two states since its opening in 2008. Improved transportation links are indicative of enhanced cooperation and hint at more opportunities in the economic sphere for both states and their vicinities.

4.5. Euro-Atlantic Integration

Georgia's relations with the EU began in 1992 and gained new acceleration after the new government took power in 2003. By 1999, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) had already been signed between Georgia and EU, to be followed in 2006 by the endorsement of the ENP which regulates the implementation of the PCA. In addition, a National Indicative Program (NIP) was agreed to, which lays out the prioritized issues in Georgia-EU relations. In this context, the EU has not only been offering certain thematic improvement programs in Georgia but also extended a considerable amount of humanitarian aid for the people who were affected by the war in August 2008 in Georgia. The EU has shown its willingness to be more engaged by holding an international donor's conference in Brussels and the deployment of a civilian monitoring mission in October 2008 in Georgia.⁴¹

The fact that the EU stepped up its efforts since 2003 to be more engaged in Georgia's affairs can be explained by the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria which made the EU border the Black Sea, which it did not before. If the new political environment in Georgia following the Rose revolution in 2003 was one test for the EU to increase its role in mostly reconstruction activities, the August 2008 war was even more so, given the actual war condition and the urgent need to eliminate it. Read together, these compelled the EU to be an influential actor since 2003 in Georgia's affairs; while simultaneously minding the subtle balance with Russia.

Viewed both through the bilateral context and Black Sea and Caspian contexts, Turkey has been fully supportive of improved links between Georgia and the EU as it considers it as an integral component of the wider Black Sea and Caspian basin security framework. An integrated Georgia would not only be a bridge between the EU and the region but also constitute an example of how ENP can be optimally realized.

Georgia's links with NATO were established when the country began to participate in the PfP program that sought to engage the formerly Communist states into the NATO structure. Since then, Georgian military has cooperated with NATO on peace operations in Kosovo between 1999 and 2008 as well as in Kabul. Georgia stands as one of the largest contributors to the ISAF with around 950 military personnel. The Partnership Action Plan on Terrorism (PAP-T) and Operation Active Endeavor are two other platforms that Georgia takes part in

NATO activities. While the former is aimed at fighting against terrorism which involves sharing intelligence, the latter is a similar anti-terrorist operation platform focusing on the Mediterranean Sea.⁴²

Accordingly, Turkey has expressed its will to see Georgia fully integrated in NATO right from the beginning of Georgia's NATO bid process. For Turkey, the inclusion of Georgia in the NATO structures forms an undeniable necessity for the country's mature political development, not to mention the positive impact it would have on the wider Black Sea and Caspian politics. To date, Turkey has collaborated with Georgia on several fronts under the NATO framework and all efforts have proved to be success-bound. Despite occasional criticisms that the US has been using Turkey as a proxy to draw Georgia closer to NATO, in the Black Sea, Caspian Sea (and also Caucasian) security aspects in order not to antagonize Russia, Turkey has so far fulfilled its role quite effectively. Conscious of the fact that military cooperation inspires confidence, Turkey and Georgia are likely to further their NATO cooperation, especially in the political environment after August 2008 war.

5. 08.08.2008 and its Aftermath

The war in Georgia in August 2008 was the most dangerous incident for Black Sea and Caspian Sea security in terms of showing to what extent local ethnic conflicts might escalate to threaten regional security. To remember the pre-war Turkish support to Georgia; Turkey gave political, economic and military support to Georgia since the independence of the country and especially after 2003. During the freezing winter of 2007-2008 when Russia suspended gas deliveries to Georgia, Turkey allocated its own gas share coming from the Shah Deniz gas field to Georgia. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Turkey extended humanitarian aid to Georgia.⁴³ Amidst the chaos that started on 8 August 2008, Turkish diplomacy was put through a test because of the simultaneously enhanced relations with Russia. Although initially the Turkish Foreign Ministry called for an end to the fighting, which upset the Georgian administration, the next day, PM Erdoğan reiterated the same will and called for respecting Georgia's territorial integrity. When Russia announced a ceasefire on 12 August, Turkey welcomed this new development and announced a new initiative named the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform.⁴⁴

This war was a very important turning-point in the post-Cold War geopolitics in the wider Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions for laying out the interplay between the actors of the region. Not surprisingly, Turkey's support for Georgia was confirmed as their partnership dynamics laid out above stipulated. Beyond that however, it showed how far Turkey would go, i.e., with individual initiatives, such as calling for a stability platform to cover the Caucasus. While the Caucasian proposal was challenged on several aspects because of existence of ethnic conflicts which are difficult to solve, reportedly it came as 'a surprise' to the US Department of State Deputy Undersecretary Matt Bryza who said that he was not informed of such an initiative in advance and that Turkey and the US had mutual interests in the Caucasus—indicating an indirect rebuke at the development.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the proposal was well received in Georgia, while the Russian decision-makers did not prove to be much enthusiastic about it, thinking that there was no need for another regional cooperation platform in the region.⁴⁶

On the one hand, the war and the subsequent Caucasian proposal from Turkey affirmed the nature of the partnership between Turkey and Georgia. On the other hand, it brought up the question whether this proposal could survive and then flourish in the presence of protracted ethnic conflicts in the region. As one scholar has pointed out, for a meaningful cooperation scheme to flourish after the August 2008 war in the wider Black Sea (and Caspian) basin, three dimensions should be given due consideration: normative, definitional and institutional. That is, a widely-agreed concept of Black Sea (and Caspian Sea) security should be developed and boosted with a legally binding document; a comprehensive approach should be developed to replace the military security-focused agenda in the region; and options of institutional models should be explored to encourage the security agenda (whether to strengthen existing institutions such as the BSEC or create new ones).⁴⁷

6. Concluding Remarks

The course of action taken by Turkey and Georgia in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea basin realms so far have been conditioned by complementary, cooperative and prudential steps. As laid out above, ample piers of relationship make it clear that their policy options and choices have been convergent on several themes. Why this has been the case owes much to the need to secure energy routes since mid-1990s, which was also fed by economic, military and other topics already mentioned.

Just as it would be wrong to argue that the partnership is in its infancy, it would also be wrong to maintain the current levels reached are enough progress. On the contrary, the need to further the ties will retain its importance in the light of the deepened divides between the stakeholders in the wider hinterland of the two basins. The capabilities of the EU as the new actor in the two basins remain to be tested following the war in August 2008. Russia as the all-time major actor should not be expected to introduce major shifts in its policy towards the two basins. The US would keep its policy lines of moving with energy-driven motives, and related with this, to show a keen interest in pulling the regional states closer to itself.

The most serious danger to a favorable milieu in the region might come as a renewed crisis over protracted ethnic disputes such as Nagorno-Karabakh and how Turkey and Georgia would contribute to the security and stability in the region in such a scenario. The input record so far by the two states can lead us to maintain that they will advocate the preservation of their credibility as reliable partners. For Turkey, the most challenging would most probably be its vulnerability as the major NATO member on the frontline, which would bear the consequences of any crisis.

The rapid rapprochement between Turkey and Georgia has already passed the elementary stages and in a quite short time has acquired a pace which can be described as rare in international relations. As two new partners and stakeholders in two important basins, in the short- and medium-terms they can be expected to consolidate their multilayered cooperation both during stability and crisis times.

Notes

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2. Ali Karaosmanoğlu, “Turkey’s Objectives in the Caspian Region”, Gennady Chufrin (ed.), *The Security of the Caspian Sea Region* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 151.
3. Gennady Chufrin (ed.), *The Security of the Caspian Sea Region* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 3.
4. Hooshang Amirahmadi, *The Caspian Region at a Crossroad: Challenges of a New Frontier of Energy and Development* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), pp. 3-4.
5. Mustafa Aydın, “Geographical Blessing versus Geographical Curse: Great Power Security Agendas for the Black Sea Region and a Turkish Alternative”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol.9, No.3, September 2009, p.275.
6. Tunç Aybak (ed.), *Politics of the Black Sea: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), p. 4. The other five were Barents European Economic Council (BEAC), Council of Baltic States (CBS), Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA), and Central European Initiative (CEI): *ibid*.
7. Mustafa Aydın, “Geographical Blessing versus Geographical Curse: Great Power Security Agendas for the Black Sea Region and a Turkish Alternative”, p 278.
8. Tunç Aybak (ed.), *Politics of the Black Sea: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict*, p. 4.
9. Mustafa Aydın, “Geographical Blessing versus Geographical Curse: Great Power Security Agendas for the Black Sea Region and a Turkish Alternative”, p. 279.
10. Tunç Aybak (ed.), *Politics of the Black Sea: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict*, p. 5.
11. Mustafa Aydın, “Geographical Blessing versus Geographical Curse: Great Power Security Agendas for the Black Sea Region and a Turkish Alternative”, p. 280.
12. Mustafa Aydın, “Geographical Blessing versus Geographical Curse: Great Power Security Agendas for the Black Sea Region and a Turkish Alternative”, p. 281-282.
13. See Bülent Aras, *The New Geopolitics of Eurasia and Turkey’s Position* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 7-15; Ali Karaosmanoğlu, “Turkey’s Objectives in the Caspian Region”, p. 159.



14. Erekle Mchedlivi, "The Black Sea in the Foreign Policy of Georgia", Black Sea Region: Priorities and Perspectives for the 21st Century, Conference Materials, Tbilisi, Georgia, 13-14 April 1999, p. 15.
15. *ibid.*, p. 16.
16. For such a view, see Arkady Moshes, "Littoral States and Nation Building Around the Black Sea", Oleksandr Pavliuk and Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, The Black Sea Region: Cooperation and Security Building (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), pp.70-71.
17. "Foreign Policy Strategy 2006 – 2009", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=35, accessed on 14 May 2011, pp. 8-9.
18. Erekle Mchedlivi, "The Black Sea in the Foreign Policy of Georgia", p. 16.
19. "Foreign Policy Strategy 2006 – 2009", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, p. 11.
20. Michael P. Croissant, "Bridge or Barrier for Caspian Oil?" Michael P. Croissant and Bülent Aras (eds.), Oil and Geopolitics in the Caspian Sea Region (Westport: Praeger, 1999), p. 277. For a counter-argument questioning the viability of choosing Georgia as a long term transit route, see Hooman Peimani, The Caspian Pipeline Dilemma: Political Games and Economic Losses (Westport: Praeger, 2001), pp. 50-54.
21. Michael P. Croissant, "Bridge or Barrier for Caspian Oil?", p.278.
22. Alexander Rondeli, "The Coice of Independent Georgia", Gennady Chufirin (ed.), The Security of the Caspian Sea Region (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.202, the author cites J. W. R. Lepingwell, "the Russian Military and Security Policy in the Near Abroad", Survival, Vol.36, No. 14, Fall 1994, p. 75.
23. Morten Anker, et al., The Caspian Region towards 2025 (Delft: Eburon Acedemic Publishers, 2010), p. 18.
24. Emmanuel Karagiannis, "The Turkish-Georgian Partnerhip and the Pipeline Factor", Journal of Southeast Europe and the Balkans, Vol.6, No.1, April 2004, p. 13.
25. Zeyno Baran, "Turkey and the Caucasus", İdris Bal (ed), Turkish Foreign Policy in the Cold War Era (Florida: BrownWalker Press, 2004), p. 279.
26. Emmanuel Karagiannis, "The Turkish-Georgian Partnerhip and the Pipeline Factor", p. 20.
27. Emmanuel Karagiannis, "The Turkish-Georgian Partnerhip and the Pipeline Factor", pp. 20-21.
28. Vladimer Papava, "The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Georgia", http://www.silkroadstudies.org/BTC_5.pdf. accessed on 17 May 2011, pp.90-91.
29. See *ibid*; see also Kamil Ağacan, "Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Türkiye-Gürcistan İlişkileri", İdris Bal (ed), 21. Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikası (Ankara: Nobel, 2004), pp. 439-440.
30. "Electricity Trade between Turkey and Georgia to Reach 1,000 MW", <http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=70022>, World Bulletin, 19 February 2011.
31. Okan Mert, Türkiye'nin Kafkasya Politikası ve Gürcistan (İstanbul: KültürSanat, 2004), pp. 274- 275.
32. "Gürcistan – Ülke Profili", T.C. Başbakanlık Dış Ticaret Müsteşarlığı, <http://www.dtm.gov.tr/dtmadmin/upload/ANL/TurkCumhuriyetDb/Gurcistan.pdf>, accessed on 17 May 2011.
33. Carol Savietz, "Tangled Pipelines: Turkey's Role in Energy Export Plans", Turkish Studies, Vol.10, No.1, March 2009, pp. 101.
34. Okan Mert, Türkiye'nin Kafkasya Politikası ve Gürcistan (İstanbul: KültürSanat, 2004), pp. 255-257.
35. "Türkiye- Gürcistan Arasında Fransa İsviçre Modeli Ticaret Kapısı", 3 May 2009, Cihan News Agency, <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=4772961>.
36. Parviz Hebiboğlu Samedbeyli and Abdullah Yücel Kuruçim, Hidropolitik Boyutunda Azerbaycan-Gürcistan-Türkiye İlişkileri (Ankara: Orun, 2002), pp.204-206.
37. *ibid.*, pp. 210-211.
38. "Georgia, Turkey to Further Develop Friendly Ties", 18 December 2003, <http://www.turks.us/article.php?story=20031218084204803>, accessed on 19 May 2011, Daily World EU News.
39. "Turkish, Georgian Defense Ministers Discuss Military Cooperation", <http://www.news.az/articles/georgia/36302>, accessed 19 May 2011, 13 May 2011, News.Az news.
40. Okan Mert, Türkiye'nin Kafkasya Politikası ve Gürcistan, pp.258-259; "Kars-Tiflis-Bakü Demiryolu Hattı 2012'de Açılacak", Türkiye Demiryolu Platformu RAYTURK, <http://www.rayturk.net/?p=4926>, 15 March 2010, accessed on 19 May 2011.
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42. NATO's Relations with Georgia, Key Areas of Cooperation, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_38988.htm, accessed on 20 May 2011.
43. Carol Savietz, "Tangled Pipelines: Turkey's Role in Energy Export Plans", pp.101-102. The BTC pipeline remained

closed until late August, although the war had ended in five days. The suspension of delivery brought a loss of almost \$300,000 per day for Turkey.

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