

### Introduction

The great Black Sea area comprises a wide set of structures of global reach, well beyond its shores, namely the Euro-Atlantic structures of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU), the south Caucasus and central Asia through the Eurasian corridor, the Great Middle East, and Russia. In this area, the final frontier for Euro-Atlantic integration was drawn for a long time, and here also the new security dynamics of the post-September 11 international order are being defined. This reality has made Europe more aware of its security needs and of its strategic objectives in the periphery, namely in the Black Sea region.

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), designed to develop a framework for EU relations with its neighbors, aims to bring stability and development to areas bordering the Union, thus reinforcing European security, as stated in the European Security Strategy. The inclusion of the southern Caucasus countries signalled the understanding inside the Union that stability at the EU's borders is not possible without a policy designed for countries on both sides of the Black Sea. This means that this sea cannot be seen as a final frontier, but as a new centre for security matters in the European periphery. Georgia has acted as a leader in the Caucasus towards the West, particularly since the Rose Revolution, in 2003, not only bringing the south Caucasus into the ENP, but also influencing decisively events in Ukraine in 2004, and consequently in the Black Sea area. Adding to this, the official discourse from Tbilisi stresses a wish to gradually come closer to the Black Sea and step away from a hardly recognizable south Caucasus region.

This paper is set to define in the way in which way Georgia's renewed interest in the Black Sea might work as a catalyst for western attention on the Caucasus, drawing both on regional elements of proximity between the two regions, and on their shared aspirations of embracing a larger community through the ENP and NATO. The renewed international interest in the Black Sea and the enhanced level of cooperation developed in this area can work as a preparatory stage for south Caucasian regional relations and of them with the EU. If regionally there has been little to bring interests together on common goals, the presence of larger regional organisations, like the EU, has created enhanced opportunities for cooperation in the south Caucasus and the Black Sea, setting the stage for stabilization of the eastern shores of the Black Sea. The EU is a player whose interests in the region are getting clearer, and more strategic, deriving from here an important aspect of stabilization processes, dealing with EU relations with other international actors like Russia, Turkey, Iran, the US or the United Nations and OSCE. In this complex setting, this paper aims at addressing the role Georgia and the ENP play in the pursuit of the goals of stabilisation and democratic reform in the Caucasus, as a precious complement to Black Sea stability.

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## Looking for stability in a complex setting: the enlarged Black Sea area

From a traditional geopolitical perspective, the Black Sea is a liquid mass linking Europe and Asia, a region of civilisational exchanges, and cultural meeting point for disputed interests between the “western and the eastern factors”. This interpretation has been questioned with NATO and EU enlargements to this area of former Soviet domain, and with political and social changes operated in the western end of the region, that have disconnected it, to a large extent, from the Asian reality, making it an “European Interior Lake” (Loucas, 2000). All riparian states have developed close links to NATO, either through Partnership for Peace (PfP) instruments, formal accession processes, or actual membership, Turkey being a long time ally of the US, and a major player in the Black Sea region, along with Russia<sup>1</sup>. Russia’s relation with NATO was for a long time strained by fears of being co-opted in the region, and especially during the Balkans and Kosovo crisis, and recently again in the Iraqi US intervention, its relations with NATO/EU member states France, Germany and US were particularly hard (George C. Marshall European Center Report, 2004).<sup>2</sup>

The EU has also moved from being a relatively distant player in the Black Sea area, to being one with direct borders with Russia in the Baltic, and soon with the Caucasus and the Middle East, after Bulgaria and Romania’s accession is completed in 2007, and Turkey is accepted somewhere around 2015. Reflecting this perception, the new EU Neighborhood Policy was designed to include states neighbouring the Union and to promote political and economic development through enhanced integration among regional states and of these with the EU, playing on the strong economic appeal of the European Single Market, on its unchallenged institutional presence and on the centrality the Black Sea has on energy security matters for the EU (Samson & Sepashvili, 2005). This presence has already changed the way the region’s countries perceive their political options; with the Colour revolutions of Georgia and the Ukraine, a movement was created towards democratic choice that had repercussions to different levels, in all the Community of Independent States (CIS).<sup>3</sup>

This dynamic has been perceived in Moscow as a threat to the status quo, particularly hard to handle in military and energy matters<sup>4</sup>. The lack of a constructive

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<sup>1</sup> Turkey and Greece became NATO members in 1952, Bulgaria and Romania became members in 2004, and Ukraine and Georgia participate in the PfP initiative and have taken steps to apply for formal membership. Russia has a special partnership with NATO, through the NATO-Russia Council.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on NATO-Russia relations see Hunter, Robert E. (2004) “NATO-Russia Relations After September 11” in Hunter, Shireen (ed.) *Strategic Developments in Eurasia after 11 September*; London: Frank Cass; pp. 28-54; and Hunter, Robert E. and Rogov, Sergey M. (2004) *Engaging Russia as Partner and Participant. The Next Stage of NATO-Russia Relations*, Rand Corporation, available at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

<sup>3</sup> A similar movement was initiated in Kyrgyzstan, forcing a change of leadership, although, it is not clear to what extent it can be considered a democratic change. See “Kyrgyzstan: Was ‘Revolution’ a Worthy Successor to Rose and Orange? (Part III)” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* April 8, 2005. In Moldova, President Voronin has officially supported democratic reforms and Moldova’s future accession to Euro-Atlantic structures. See “Moldova Warned Against Turning From Russia” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 24, 2004 and “Moldova, EU Sign Cooperation Plan” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 22, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting assessment of Russian and EU perspectives on their common neighbourhood see: Lynch, Dov (2004) “Russia’s strategic partnership with Europe”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27(2), Spring; pp.99-118; Haukkala, Hiski and Moshes, Arkady (2004) *Beyond the “Big Bang”: The challenges*

approach bringing together regional and global players, like Russia, the EU, and the US has hampered efforts in several areas: the fight against smuggling operations, directed at feeding criminal activities and terrorism, making the domestic, regional and international scenarios highly unstable; the development of a stable and reliable network of energy infrastructures capable of guaranteeing the security of consumers and producers; resolving the regional conflicts and ethnic tensions; and finally, guaranteeing the democratic transition of these countries.

Regional initiatives have been put in place since 1992, including all the coastal states of the Black Sea, most notably the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), revealing great capacity to deal with most pressing issues of the region such as the development of cooperation structures in matters of environmental protection, trade and economic development, tourism, transport, energy, among others in a total of 16 different areas<sup>5</sup>, and the BLACKSEAFOR, an initiative set forth by Ankara to promote regional cooperation, through improved relations in the Black Sea area and thus guarantee peace and stability<sup>6</sup>. Other initiatives like GUAM<sup>7</sup>, the Community of Democratic Choice<sup>8</sup>, the Baltic-Black Sea Region<sup>9</sup>, have tried to set a framework for relations among the enlarged Black Sea area, comprising the Balkans, the south Caucasus, southeast Europe, Russia and the EU. This reality, however, is not only at times unproductive, but also counterproductive, with duplication of objectives, efforts and mistakes.<sup>10</sup>

The Caucasus presents a particularly difficult and intricate situation, gaining importance and visibility, and decisively affecting the definition of Black Sea countries'

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of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy in the East, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Report 9 ([www.upi-fiiia.fi](http://www.upi-fiiia.fi)).

<sup>5</sup> See [www.bsec-organization.org](http://www.bsec-organization.org)

<sup>6</sup> See [www.blacksefor.org](http://www.blacksefor.org)

<sup>7</sup> GUAM stands for Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, which are the countries composing this organization created in 1997 (from 1999 to 2002, Uzbekistan joined the group, forming GUUAM, but the September 11 events allowed Tashkent to develop a bilateral relation with Washington, leading to a declining interest in GUUAM. See "GUUAM Reverts to GUAM as Uzbekistan Suspends Its Membership Prior To Yalta Summit" *Eurasianet* July 18, 2002). This organization is backed by the US, and was created with the overall objective to counterbalance Russia's influence over the CIS, to develop closer relations on matters of energy and security in the Black Sea-Caspian region. See "GUAM leaders pledge to boost regional cooperation" *GivilGeorgia*, April 22, 2005. In May 2006, GUAM leaders gathered in Kyiv and decided to change the name of the organization to Organization for Democratic and Economic Development (ODED) reinforcing the common wish among its member states to fully adhere to Euro-Atlantic values and structures, having discussed the possibility of enlarging the membership to countries like Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Poland. See "GUAM Gets New Life, New Identity" *Eurasianet*, May 24, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> See "Ukraine: Regional Leaders Set Up Community of Democratic Choice" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* December 2, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Makarychev, Andrey S. (2005) "The Baltic-Black Sea Connection: A Region in the Making or a Political Project?" PONARS Policy Memo No. 390, December.

<sup>10</sup> Recent examples of this can be seen in the tentative to establish the Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialogue, with its inaugural meeting scheduled for Bucharest on June 4-6, unattended by Russia's President, for considering it redundant and ineffective. Most analysts agree that this refusal also stated a position from Moscow, that it will not endorse any institutional developments it has not complete control over. See "Black Sea Forum Seeking its Rationale" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 3 (111), June 8, 2006 and "Moscow, Ankara reluctant to welcome new Black Sea Forum" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 3 (112), June 9, 2006.

political choices. The so-called “frozen conflicts” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the Chechen conflict inside the Russian Federation, are major obstacles to development and their resolution is recognized as a precondition for the building of security.<sup>11</sup> The content of this settlement, however, reveals the differences regarding politico-economic and strategic options and the overlapping interests of these countries regarding the area’s energetic resources (Freire and Cierco, 2005). The development of a much spoken Eurasian corridor is slowly taking shape, through initiatives promoted by the EU, like TRACECA and INGOGATE, and more recently the Neighbourhood Policy, or the US Silk Road Strategy Act, of 1999, fostering conditions for trade and energetic relations to develop (Kutelia, 2001; 80). The producer countries of the Caspian basin and the transit countries of the Caucasus have developed its resources, allowing the EU to realize its Energy Strategy of source diversification, and infrastructure security. To this objective, Turkey and US support for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline represented an alternative to Russian dominated energy infrastructures towards the West, enhancing Ankara’s strategic importance as an energy hub, and of the Caucasus as a transit route for energy out of the Caspian towards western markets in Europe and the US<sup>12</sup>. The opportunity for democratic transformation and economic development in the Black Sea area, can thus be reinforced if a common choice is taken towards Euro-Atlantic structures, something not all clear in the South Caucasus context, but much more visible in the Black Sea. How the Caucasus can be stabilized in order to fulfil its potential, and how can the ENP help in this objective, are central questions in this reflection.

### **ENP dynamics in the South Caucasus and its effects on the Black Sea**

The EU’s presence in the south Caucasus dates back to the break up of the Soviet Union, through a stabilization approach directed mostly to guarantee humanitarian aid and technical assistance. The Union’s strategy for the south Caucasus countries was marked, first and foremost by the “Russia first” strategy and by the conflicts that emerged in the region upon independence; its objectives were to create a platform for dialogue on political and economic issues, and to foster regional

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<sup>11</sup> For an interesting assessment of the links between corruption and conflict in the south Caucasus, see Natalia Mirimanova and Diana Klein (eds) (2006) “Corruption and conflict in the south Caucasus” *International Alert*, February.

<sup>12</sup> The Caspian alternative has been gathering support inside the EU, however the terrestrial routes for energy out of the Caspian cross some of the most sensitive territories in the EU’s neighborhood, namely the secessionist territories inside Georgia, the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Turkish Kurdistan, or the conflict ridden Chechnya and Dagestan in the Russian Federation, making the pipelines susceptible of being targets of subnational or terrorist attacks, disrupting energy flows and thus destabilising producing and consumer countries. See Sokolsky, Richard and Lesser, Ian (2001) “Threats to western energy supplies: scenarios and implications” in Sokolsky, Richard, et al. *Persian Gulf Security: Improving Allied Military Contributions*; Rand Project Air Force, pp. 7-28 available at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org). Another matter of concern is related to economic distortions (The Dutch Disease) and dependency on oil revenues, leading to the creation of politically protected interests, and corruption on governmental levels, something widely criticised in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan. See Radjy, Tim (2005) *Geopolitical analysis of the Eurasian corridor*; ISN available at [www.isn.ethz.ch](http://www.isn.ethz.ch), as well as the use of energy revenues to build up military strength that would allow Georgia and Azerbaijan to resort to violence in trying to resolve the conflicts of the south Caucasus. See Rettman, Andrew (2006) “EU neighbours drifting into war, Brussels warns” Brussels: EU Observer 29 of August, available at [www.euobserver.com](http://www.euobserver.com).

cooperation. This second objective, remains to this day, highly unattained, since the root causes of regional instability are still unaddressed.<sup>13</sup> The development of civilian and military capabilities for external action within the EU, and the expansion of its legal and institutional boundaries eastwards were prompted by a set of perceived changes in the international context, most notably the end of the Soviet Union, the September 11 attacks and the global war on terror, as well as events in its periphery, of particular relevance here, the “Rose” and “Orange” Revolutions. These prompted the Union’s attention and further awareness of the southern Caucasus and Black Sea as areas of strategic relevance in political, economic and security terms, a realization that was consubstantiated by the southern Caucasus countries inclusion in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP).

The EU’s neighborhood policy, first crafted by a Communication from the European Commission about an enlarged Europe in March 2003, and further consolidated in July the same year,<sup>14</sup> offers cooperation in three main areas: a political, human, civil and cultural dimension; a security one; and sustainable economic and social development, with the aim at establishing a “friendship ring” in the EU’s borders. In May 2004, a Strategy Paper was approved defining closer collaboration between the Union and its neighbors, and included the drafting of Country Reports with a bilateral character, and according to the most pressing needs of each of these countries, reflecting the political, economic, social and institutional situation in these countries as a basis for the definition of the Action Plans. These “suited to fit” Action Plans aim at bridging the differences between needs and capabilities, establishing concrete and simultaneously ambitious targets in distinct areas for integrated development of each of these partners, particularly in the process of politico-economic and democratic transition. “The EU wishes to see reinforced, credible and sustained commitment towards democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and progress towards the development of a market economy”. The Paper adds emphasis to strengthening the rule of law and promoting conflict settlement, along with an explicit reference to the issue of energy “as the southern Caucasus is an important region both for the production (the Caspian basin) and the transit of energy”.<sup>15</sup>

For long the civilian nature of this normative actor was seen as its weakness, with the weight of historical dependence on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United States as Europe’s security umbrella, preventing it from having a stronger stance on political-military and defense issues. However, not only was the civilian and normative character of the EU not erased, it was understood as a fundamental asset in the Union’s dealings with its periphery, building on the EU’s soft security approach. This includes supporting reforms towards democratic transition and stabilization, along with enhanced power through new deployment and involvement capabilities, conferring on the Union a stronger stance to act and respond in areas directly connected to its

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<sup>13</sup> As noted in a Communication from the Commission on EU relations with the South Caucasus under the PCA of June 1999 and the Joint Luxemburg Declaration by the EU and the Heads of State of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

<sup>14</sup> Communication from the Commission *Wider Europe Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors*, COM (2003) 104, 11 March 2003; Communication from the Commission *Paving the Way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM (2003) 393, 1 July 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Communication from the Commission *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, COM (2004) 373 final, 12 May 2004, pp. 10-11 and 17.

security. The Union's involvement in the southern Caucasus is also an example of this proactive approach (Freire and Simão, 2006).

So far, the definition of the Action Plans for the three south Caucasus countries has not been completed, denoting the difficulties inherent to the development of a coherent approach to the region, and most of the priorities accorded in the countries' assessment reports, namely conflict prevention and conflict resolution, as well as political and economic development through closer collaboration with EU structures, have not been achieved. The appointment of a new EU Special Representative for the south Caucasus, Ambassador Peter Semneby, was an attempt to renew the mandate, enlarging it while bringing a younger and more energetic figure to the area.<sup>16</sup> Six months after his nomination, main issues related to conflict resolution have become more complex and intricate, as the window of opportunity opened by elections in the south Caucasus in 2003 closes down. Although much was expected to happen at the last G8 summit in St. Petersburg, in this matter, the Caucasian conflicts relapsed to second line, and are not expected to have a high profile stance in the medium term, with issues on the international agenda like the Israel-Lebanese war, the Iranian question, and the North Korean nuclear program taking central stage.<sup>17</sup>

Despite difficulties in guaranteeing a managed democratic transition for the south Caucasus, a lot has been achieved, resulting in important dynamics across the Black Sea. The inclusion of the south Caucasus countries in the ENP brought governments under international scrutiny and defined the EU's role in the region. The political and security vacuum left in the Black Sea region after the collapse of the USSR is still to be filled, and it is not clear to what extent the presence of forces like the US, the EU, Russia and Turkey can help find solutions, or on the contrary raise levels of competition for power (SIPRI, 2003). Some level of regional cooperation and integration has resulted from EU membership perspective, especially if it is seen as a step towards integration into Euro-Atlantic structures (Ram, 2001).

It is then clear that stability and security in the south Caucasus is not only related to events on the Black Sea area, but also have a direct bearing on how this area develops itself as a strategic economic and security region on the eastern European border. Many of the threats still recognized by the EU as priorities for its safety lay in the drug and human trafficking occurring through the Black Sea, the smuggling of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), the corruption and organized criminality associated with weak states and uncontrolled territories, and the persistence of traditional threats, like the interstate conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh, the breakaway regions inside Georgia and Moldova, or the Chechen conflict (Solana, 2003). It is also important that Brussels and Washington guarantee close collaboration with the partners of the region in order to correct strategies and guarantee that democratic governments supporting closer relations with the Euro-Atlantic structures deliver results, and thus guarantee domestic support for reforms.

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<sup>16</sup> The Finnish diplomat Heikki Talvite was the first EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus, appointed in 2003. Critics of this choice pointed to the fact that the EUSR had a difficult and very large mandate, and was someone who was not seen as having the necessary energy to fulfil expectations. Mullen, Mark (2006) *Personal interview with Transparency International Georgia's Chair of the Board of Directors*, Tbilisi, May 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> See "International attention scant for Georgia's peacekeeper woes", *ReliefWeb*, July 18, 2006.



It is impossible to devise any successful strategy for the Black Sea area, without a stable Caucasus, and as before, again Georgia represents an important bridge linking the two shores (Trapans, 2005). The EU has every interest in fulfilling the expectations created by the Rose revolution, guaranteeing the stability and prosperity of the country, the stability of the energy fluxes and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as well as the development of means to control new security threats emerging. In this light the EU will also be answering important questions, related to the frontiers of Europe, and the EU's capabilities as a security actor, the transatlantic relation and EU's relation with Russia (Lynch, 2006).

### **Building bridges through Tbilisi?**

Georgia gained the status of regional leader with the revolutionary events of November 2003<sup>18</sup>. The popular upheaval that ended Shevardnadze's government promised to rid the country of the corruption, unemployment and economic difficulties that independence had brought, and was supported by most international actors, including the US and the EU. Although today's situation is considerably better, a lot remains to be done in order to move beyond a post-revolutionary period, and to guarantee that solid bases for a stable development are being laid.<sup>19</sup> President Mikhail Saakashvili's young team in government grabbed the opportunity and announced Georgia's western vocation and its wish to enter NATO and the EU, as a national consensus.

Three years after those events, the President's team faces many difficulties with high levels of unemployment, corruption scandals implying government members, and the lack of resolution to the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Energy cuts on the Russian side of the Russian-Georgian border, in early 2006 left the country freezing, and the boycott on Georgian products in Russian markets has left the country's economy in a very harsh situation, leading the Georgian authorities to consider leaving the CIS<sup>20</sup>. Relations with Moscow have grown tense and Tbilisi has tried to balance Russian upper-hand with the internationalization of these crises, calling upon the regional and international contacts it has gathered. Links to Black Sea countries are particularly intensive, as Ukraine and Moldova have been targeted with similar situations of boycott and energy suspension, and also shares the common problem of internal secessionist conflict, in Transdnistria. A rationale has been found to base cooperation upon: keeping Russia away and guaranteeing that the EU, and especially the US, are kept close.<sup>21</sup> Another example is the "New Group of Friends of Georgia", comprising Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland, created in early 2005 with the objective to help Georgia in its reforms towards an easier integration in

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on the revolutionary nature of events in Georgia see Nodia, Ghia (2005) "The dynamics and sustainability of the Rose Revolution" in Emerson, Michael (ed.) *Democratisation in the European Neighbourhood*, Brussels: CEPS, pp. 38- 52.

<sup>19</sup> Monitoring processes of the democratic process in Georgia have shown some worrying trends related to exclusive elite driven processes, lack of independent media, disrespect for Human Rights and fundamental liberties, lack of rule of law guarantees, among others. See IDEA report (2005) "Building Democracy in Georgia. Agenda for debate" May, p 9-15.

<sup>20</sup> See "Georgia Near Exit From CIS" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, May 11, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Ukraine has maintained close relations with the south Caucasus countries since independence, looking for a position of regional leadership that could help assure strategic distance from Moscow while stabilizing and bringing new dynamism to the Black Sea region. See Kutelia (2001), op. cit., pp. 82-3.

the Euro-Atlantic structures, and to stabilize the south Caucasus and consequently the eastern shores of the Black Sea.<sup>22</sup>

Since 2004, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were included in the ENP, the EU appointed a Special Representative for the South Caucasus, and a Special Mission on Rule of Law was launched by the Council to help Georgia in its reforms. Mediation efforts to break the frozen status of the conflicts in the south Caucasus have been made, although very little has change in terms of a peaceful resolution, and the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline allowed the south Caucasian countries to guarantee some leverage towards Russia's dominance in the energy realm. This, along with the powerful input of international assistance and political support, has made Georgia an example, followed by the Ukraine, helping them to gather important support from their neighbours of the Black Sea. It is, therefore, not surprising that Georgian leadership has voiced its desire to pursue greater cooperation with western institutions through regional structures based on the Black Sea, than with the South Caucasus. The ENP has proved to be too narrow in its regionalized approach to grasp all the dynamics influencing events in the region of the Great Black Sea, and unable to design solutions needed on both shores. The insistence on dealing with all three countries of the south Caucasus at the same time and at the same pace reveals the limits of the differentiation approach structuring ENP, and the lack of recognition that dynamics in Ukraine and Moldova can have as deep impact in Georgia as can changes in Armenia or Azerbaijan.

Georgia's participation in regional forums based or linked to the Black Sea has been an important impetus for reform and stabilization: the Bulgarian and Romanian neighbours have taken this opportunity to present themselves as spearheads for the EU in the region, and together with the Baltics have used their experiences and their influence in favour of an engagement of the international community in the problems affecting the south Caucasus, and by proxy, all of the Black Sea region; Turkey has served as an important investor and an alternative to Russia (although relations with Armenia are still problematic, there has been an effort to find a solution that will allow commercial and economic relations to be developed); Ukraine and Moldova having a closer border to the EU, and sharing similar patterns of problems as Georgia, are an important link between the south Caucasus and Brussels.

In this state of affairs, Georgia seems to have the important challenge to design strategies of development that can guarantee full use of the instruments made available by the EU, NATO, and the regional organisations it takes part in, and guarantee the most appropriate course of action towards peaceful resolution of the conflicts, economic and political stability, social cohesion and security in all its national territory. As for Armenia and Azerbaijan, the main question is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and until some kind of solution is found to allow for peaceful coexistence, Armenia will suffer the effects of boycott and closed borders, exile of the diaspora and international political isolation. Azerbaijan has a more open set of choices ahead: important energy resources have made a central actor in the Eurasian energy corridor, and has allowed Baku to pursue an international balanced policy.

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<sup>22</sup> "New Group Of Georgia's Friends Founded" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, February 7, 2005. Degutis, Ricardas (2006) *Personal interview with Lithuanian ambassador to Georgia*, Lithuanian Embassy, Tbilisi, May 5<sup>th</sup>.



Recent events in Ukraine, have added new elements to the changing dynamics that have characterized the region since 2003. After a period of enthusiasm over democratic revolutions and regional transformation, Ukraine, which has been a major regional leader, is living a moment of complex decisions. As Viktor Yanukovych's Party of the Regions was the second most voted for parliamentary elections, President Yushchenko was forced to compromise in order to form a government, and guarantee political viability of the country, on what some analysts consider being, paradoxically, the most democratic choice for Ukraine<sup>23</sup>. This new context will put Kyiv towards a rapprochement with Moscow, but to what extent might this compromise the Euro-Atlantic option taken by Kyiv is not clear. The first evidence suggests that it will not be so, leaving the democratic trends felt in the Black Sea area unchanged. However, the type of leadership Ukraine chooses to exert on its neighbors should clearly be based on European values promotion of rule of law, and respect for Human Rights, ensuring economic growth, developing and strengthening individual national capacities for democratic consolidation, supported by regional institutions, with cross border cooperation and energy network development, and solving frozen conflicts. Abandoning a post-Soviet posture and setting an example for neighbors to follow will legitimize its role in the region and legitimize its role as a leader for countries like Georgia in its path towards Euro-Atlantic integration<sup>24</sup>. Surely, personal relations between Presidents in Kyiv and Tbilisi have done well for democracy in the Great Black Sea, but it sets a concerning trend that must now be replaced by transnational ties linking societies, and economies, advancing European like values to East, not just its rhetoric. Georgia will be central to guarantee that the south Caucasus is set towards Euro-Atlantic integration, and will not repeat patterns of authoritarianism, repression, and conflict of the past.

## Conclusion

The geopolitical situation of the Black Sea is one of the most complex challenges of the enlarged EU, now that the Balkans are stabilized. The EU has been, however, reluctant to develop a full Eastern dimension similar to the Northern one, something the countries from the Black Sea and the southeast Europe have strived for. This situation has led to important developments, namely the emergence of regional leaders capable of promoting regional integration, as Turkey has done with BSEC, and Ukraine is trying to do with GUAM/ODED group, or the most recent Community of Democratic Choice. However, recent experience shows clearly that the impulse given by NATO cooperation and the prospect of enhanced relations with the EU is the most important fact driving regional relations in the Black Sea and a major change impulse at home. Sharing common values of Democracy, Human Rights, and liberal economy, the Euro-Atlantic structures represent two sides to the same coin, and can not be pursued separately. It is therefore safe to say that as long as expectations are met at a satisfying level, political leaderships in the Black sea and south Caucasus will find support in Brussels and Washington for transition.

ENP has raised questions related to its attraction capacity, once the membership prospect is not immediate. Time is proving this idea to be false. Most neighbours have sought this opportunity to develop closer relations with the EU despite an uncertain

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<sup>23</sup> See "Uniting Ukraine": A Hard Sell For The Yushchenko-Yanukovych Coalition" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol.3(155) August 10, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Sushko, Oleksandr (2005) "Ukraine's search for a regional foreign policy: one year after the Orange revolution", *PONARS Policy Memo*, N.º 377, pp. 65- 70.

future, and those more reluctant to accept EU's conditions are slowly starting to realise they have more to lose than to gain from insisting on the membership issue.<sup>25</sup> Brussels has already eased its position acknowledging that ENP does not exclude membership at a later stage, although is not designed to prepare countries for that. The political involvement of the EU in the energy crisis between Ukraine and Georgia and Russia, and the renewal of the mandate of the Special Representative for the south Caucasus, show that the EU is ready to influence events in the region to some point. However, without a defined strategy to deal with Russia, central to all the questions affecting the Eastern border of the Union, EU member states will continue to pursue the kind of policies that favour their immediate interests, influencing the way relations are built between the EU and the countries in the region, through strong bilateral ties. Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the Baltic countries or the new member states from Central Europe, all have different relations with the Black Sea region, as well as different levels of influence inside the EU. Therefore it is not clear where the general tendency will lay, especially at a time where the crisis in the Middle East has pulled the spotlights away from the Black Sea and the Caucasus.

Answering the question "Can Georgia bridge the gap between the Black Sea and the south Caucasus?", we can say that Georgia is well positioned to be, once again a success story and an example either for the Caucasus and the Black Sea, taking advantage of the opportunities created by the Rose revolution, ENP and the strategic importance of the Caucasus both in the global war against terrorism and the guarantee of access to strategic energy reserves of the Caspian. Major obstacles to this scenario can be found in the undemocratic shape of domestic Georgian politics and growing discontent, lack of results on conflict settlement, and unwillingness of the EU to get more politically involved in what Russia sees as its "backyard", helping these countries to overcome the difficulties inherent to the transition. In this regard, how the EU deals with Russian assertiveness in Eurasia is crucial: should it decide not to oppose Russian interests it will be perceived as not giving the necessary security conditions for its neighbours' development; if it is not able to design a new strategy to deal with Moscow in a constructive relationship, devising medium and long term options that take into consideration European needs and objectives as well as Russian and those of the neighbours, its wish to be seen as an actor of global capacity will be put into question. However, in the end, the onus is placed on domestic constituencies in the southern Caucasus and Black Sea region countries to take the correct decisions.

## References

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2. COM (2003) 393, Communication from the Commission "Paving the Way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours", 1 July 2003.

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<sup>25</sup> "Former Estonian Premier Assesses Georgia's Prospects" *RFE/RL Caucasus Report* Vol. 9 (20), June 9, 2006

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