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DEVELOPING NEW BLACK SEA PARTNERSHIPS

Shaping the Area for Future EU Enlargement

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POLICY PAPER

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Executive Summary

The Black Sea is important for the EU for many reasons. Geopolitically, the region always was considered to be of a high strategic value, especially regarding the security of Central and Eastern European member states situated along the Black Sea-Danube basin. The Black Sea is a natural bridge connecting Europe with the wider Caspian region and beyond – the Central and South-East Asia. Energy security of the Union increasingly depends on the success of pipeline projects overpassing the South Caucasus, Ukraine, Turkey and littoral EU member states. The wider region itself is a growing market with more than 350 million people and naturally represents a commercial interest too. The region is not homogeneous, nor integrated and numerous challenging threats potentially emerging from the area can strongly affect the EU's security and stability, as well as security and stability of its partners if not adequately addressed.

EU's interests towards the Black Sea region were initially, in the 1990s, predominantly based on developing bilateral projects of cooperation with littoral states. Energy and transport related development projects that the EU supported aimed mainly on securing save transit of goods from Asia to Europe, important for the security of energy supplies from one side and the development of trade with the wider Caspian region from the other. At that time, the region seemed to look quite fragmented and not inspiring enough for developing a comprehensive region-wide policy. The forthcoming completion of the fifth wave of the EU enlargement in the beginning of the new millennia especially planned accession of two Black Sea littoral states – Rumania and Bulgaria, fuelled EUs interest and ambition to play a consolidating role in the region. The EU tried to employ different instruments used for enlargement, pre-accession assistance to Turkey, strategic partnership with Russia and partnerships with South Caucasian states into a region building process in the wider Black Sea. As the region seemed to represent many challenges, including conflicts and security threats, EU's evolvement as a security actor has also increased its ability to play a role in the Black Sea. The European Neighbourhood Policy (2003), the Black Sea Synergy (2007) and further the Eastern Partnership (2009) served as a tool for democratic transformation, internal consolidation of the region and closer cooperation of the regional players with the EU. Aggressive behaviour of Russia (apparent since 2008 and aimed at a revision of national borders and its increased military build-up, threat to use the force, attempting strategic domination and engaging in the geopolitical competition with the West) brought a considerable change in the security environment in and around the Black Sea.

In order to keep its Black Sea policy dimension active, the EU will need to come with more security tools and instruments to increase the resilience of the partner states and make them able to keep their European aspirations, which, supposedly, would not be affordable for the Union acting alone. Joint and stronger coordination of EU-NATO efforts would be required to ensure security in the region and allow application of the transformative power of the Union. The EU will also need to bring more powerful policy instruments, including granting membership perspective to the associated states of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine and support

the forming of trilateral regional cooperation format aimed at their gradual functional integration (ultimately institutional) with the EU.

Apparently, the EU will continue its policy on regional cohesion and peaceful development of the relations between all states of the Black Sea area and the EU and try to keep Black Sea Synergy (BSS) as an instrument of a bottom-up approach for the development of projects of cooperation in areas of mutual interest that still may be relevant for Russia too. In the same time, the efficiency of the BSS as an inclusive instrument may become lower and obsolete. The instruments counted (as they are from different sources) under the BSS (including Cross Broder Cooperation) should increasingly be placed/mentioned within a special facility supporting EaP in particular.

With the increased pressure from Russia, the motivation of the countries to keep their European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations in EU's Black Sea partner countries may tend to decrease. In this regard, the goal of a "political association and deeper economic integration"[1] may not remain sufficient for the elites to keep the public interest high enough. A prospect of an EU membership, in particular, granting the European Perspective to Newly Associated States (NAS)[2] would produce a considerable impact on their population and raise their aspiration and societal resilience. With the European Perspective granted to the three NAS countries, the EU should gradually introduce new financial instruments (specially for EaP countries and detach them from the ENI) or make the mentioned countries beneficiary of IPA II, to ensure adequate support of legal and regulatory reforms aimed at transposing maximum possible number of elements of EU acquis to their national legal environment.

Regional integration in the Black Sea area cannot be considered more as an "all-inclusive" possibility. Eventually, further integration can have only exclusive character. The associated states – Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova – may, in this regard, be supported in creating a regional cooperation format – a Common Economic Area (CEA) – to harmonise their regulatory and legal reform policies and start developing measures to push economic cooperation among themselves. The CEA can establish institutional links with the EU and create an "European Economic Area Plus" (EEA+)[3]. It can also develop special forms of regional cooperation with Turkey, which hopefully remains loyal to the European Integration idea and with Western Balkan EU candidate and potential candidate countries (majority of them in one or another form are engaged in cooperation in the Black Sea area). In this regard, the possibilities of Ukraine and Georgia to join the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA) are to be also explored.[4] The EEA+ would help the mentioned countries to deepen their cooperation with the EU and increase coherence and mutual support in the European Integration related objectives. In order to increase the resilience of the mentioned states

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[1] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council - Eastern Partnership {SEC(2008) 2974} /* COM/2008/0823 final */ available from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52008DC0823&from=EN

[2] Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine (auth.).

[3] European Economic Area is a deep Free Trade arrangement (1992) between EU and three EFTA (Norway, Island and Lichtenstein) countries.

[4] Moldova is already member.

towards security threats, the EU should increase its cooperation with NAS on Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP), especially establishing permanent consultations and exchange on issues of fighting and defend against hybrid threats, terrorism, propaganda, cyber-attacks etc. Cooperation between the defence and security structures has to become a priority. It would be possible under the EU Joint Action to establish a regional hybrid security centre, possibly in Batumi, Georgia or Odessa, Ukraine and together with the research to establish a training course for officials of NAS. Keeping multilateral track of EaP and continuing engagement of all six partner countries in cooperation is essential. However, taking into consideration the obvious differences in levels of European ambition among EaP partner states, it is necessary to introduce an additional format for cooperation between the EU and NAS. This could be a special format like EaP+, which was already debated within the EU institutions. This format would work on deepening regional cooperation among NAS and the EU.[5]

Without effective solutions for the expanding security gap in the Black Sea area, it would be difficult to count on the definite success of the EaP or any other policy in the region. EU, despite its raising ambitions as a security actor, will not be able in the foreseeable future to become a security provider in the Black Sea. In the same time the EU and NATO, acting in synergy, could provide all (soft and hard) means for safeguarding the peace and security of their Black Sea partners. One of the forms of such cooperation could be the establishment of a joint EU-NATO fund for safeguarding security in the region. It can be used to finance joint projects on increasing defence and security capabilities of partner states through joint planning and conducting capacity building trainings and exercises of defence and security personnel and equipping and transferring arms and technology/know-how to the NAS countries. As the cooperation on testing hybrid threats has become a priority for both organisations, NATO and EU could expand this cooperation to the Black Sea region too, by involving Black Sea partners in the activities and projects proposed at the NATO Warsaw Summit with a view of "building the defence and security capability of the partners in the East and South".[6]

Raising EU's ambition of a security actor

EU as a security actor emerged since 2003. Maastricht (1992) and the Amsterdam (1997) treaties paved the way for EU's new role by establishing foreign policy instruments like common position, joint action, introducing Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP, CSDP later), High Representative for EU's CFSP, the Institute of special representatives, developing legal and operational capacity for peace operations, establishing cooperation framework with NATO, etc. Still, in the 1990s and few years beyond, the differences in views of leading European powers have impeded the development of a consolidated approach towards the security policy within the Union. As

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[5] See: GOGOLASHVILI, Kakha. 2017. *Georgia-EU Relations and Future Perspectives*. GCSD. P.22. Available from: http://www.gcsd.org.ge/uploads/tinymce/documents/EU-Georgia%20Relations%20and%20Future%20Perspectives.pdf
[6] See: Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Available from: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21481/nato-eu-declaration-8-july-en-final.pdf

Anders Wivel argued, in 2005 still "...Germany's continued eagerness to portray itself as a civilian, rather than military, power until recently prevented the kind of Franco-German initiatives that have driven the integration process in other issue areas. In the Gulf War, the early phases of the war in Bosnia, and... in regard to Iraq, the incompatibility of general approaches and interests was translated into concrete policy differences blocking effective action".[7]

In 2003 a decisive move was done, when the EU's first ever Security Strategy, still modestly, but with determination pronounced a vision how the Union should collectively oppose external threats.

Obviously, the EU as a soft power was much advanced for that time. The treaty-based instruments - enlargement policy, association agreements (AA) and partnership and cooperation agreements (PCA) – have extended EU's transformative action far beyond its borders.

The emergence and activation of the EU's security policy coincided with the end of the fifth wave of EU's enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Similarly, in 2003 the EU adopted qualitatively new foreign policy approach by engaging with the rest of Eastern European and the South Mediterranean states (through its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)) in closer cooperation. The policy aimed at their Europeanization without a promise of membership and therefore without an "effective transformative capacity of enlargement process".[8] Engagement of the Union in the Western Balkans (not a subject of the analysis under this paper) since 2003 (Conclusion of EU Thessaloniki Council) did contain a promise of membership, but without setting any dates and deadlines.[9] In any case, the promotion of good governance, rule of law, establishment of better conditions for trade and sectoral cooperation, with very weak commitments on cooperation in the security field, indicated still timid ambitions of the EU as a global or regional security player. Promotion of the security and stability beyond the borders of the Union at this time was in EU vision practically still associated mainly with building foundations for the prosperity, economic sustainability, democracy and the rule of law.

The EU Security Strategy of 2003 stated in this regard that "The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states. Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order."[10] The Security Strategy in 2003 did not contain any tangible perspective of its engagement in

[7] WIVEL, Anders. 2005. *The Security Challenge of Small EU Member States: Interests, Identity and the Development of the EU as a Security Actor*. Blackwell Publishing. p. 394. Available from: http://ams.hi.is/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/TheSecurityChallengeWivel.pdf

[8] ERDOĞAN, Seven. 2015. *Black Sea Extroversion at European and International Level*. p.4. available from: http://icbss.org/media/1327_original.pdf

[9] See: Presidency Conclusions. Thessaloniki European Council. June 2003. Available from: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20847/76279.pdf

[10] European Security Strategy. 2003. p.15. available from: https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/european-security-strategy-secure-europe-better-world

EU-led peacekeeping operations in the South Caucasus or in the Black Sea area, amid mentioning the interest in acting in the South Caucasus (among other neighbouring regions), but with the aim of just "extending benefits of economic and political cooperation." [11] No-mentioning of the Black Sea region could be found throughout the text. The hope for reinforcing a strategic partnership with Russia, based on respect of common values, was allegedly considered a sufficient reason for not stepping deeper in the conflicts throughout the Black Sea area, including participation in the peacekeeping operations in Moldova, Georgia or Azerbaijan (Nagorno Karabakh). The peacebuilding action in the mentioned parts of the wider Black Sea region was limited to the provision of numerous rehabilitation programs and financing confidence building projects.

The policy change occurred in 2008 when the EU decided to stop then Russian aggression against Georgia and negotiated a ceasefire agreement between the states in war. The following EU moves – the adoption of joint actions on allocation of the EU (civilian) Monitoring Mission (EUMM), the appointment of the EU Special Representative (EUSR) in Georgia and the establishment of international Geneva Talks – have played a decisive role in the advancement of EU's CFSP and CSDP activities in the region. Later, when the conflict broke in Ukraine with consecutive annexation of its territory by Russia and her incursion into the Eastern regions of the country, EU has already been acting as a full-fledged security actor and started taking appropriate measures to settle the conflict and to pressure the aggressor (unfortunately with no tangible results up to this stage) to withdraw.

The EU Global Security Strategy adopted in 2016 reflects the position of a more assertive Europe, with higher ambition and supports the idea the EU "...to be able to deter, respond to, and protect itself against external threats." [12] Moreover, it states that the EU should be defending the European and International order, including with hard power means. The new strategy makes a full acknowledgement that Russia is a source of danger for this order, as it violates borders of sovereign states.[13]

The new strategy also puts a stronger emphasis on security and stability of the EU neighbours and stresses the necessity to support the solidifying of their resilience ability. Resilience is viewed as an integral result of achievements in different fields including economic growth with a diversification of production and trade and social cohesion, including improvement of human capital and the labour mobility. It requires an adequate level of prosperity, established democracy and good governance which secure political stability in the country. Indeed, to cope with external threats of any type, an adequate level of defence, including proper capacities and participation in wider security arrangements, is needed. With this regards the new strategy (unlike the old one) points to the "...strategic dialogue with a view to paving the way for these countries' (neighbours) further involvement in Common Security and Defence Policy."[14]

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[11]Ibid p. 9

[12] A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. 2016. p 33. Available from: https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs_review_web.pdf

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid. p.25

The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of states, the inviolability of borders and peaceful settlement of disputes are key elements of the European security order as stated in the new Strategy and the EU will stand united in upholding international law, democracy, human rights, cooperation and each country's right to choose its future freely. On top, the strategy points to the protracted conflicts in the wider Black Sea region, which challenge the European security order at its core.

Three conclusions may be drawn:

- EU is growing as a security actor and has the ambition to defend the European security order;
- Shared security with its neighbours is now considered essential for the stability of the Union itself;
- EU attaches importance to the stability and development of the Black sea region.

EU and NATO reinforcing cooperation on security.

Despite the above-mentioned attempts for the EU to develop a strong security and defence policy it is able alone to deploy enough instruments to help the partner countries to withstand the growing security challenges in the Black Sea area. From one side, the EU is becoming intensively engaged in the area, but from another side, it lacks instruments to guarantee stable and secure environment for the uninterrupted realisation of its policy goals.

Eventually, NATO remains the main guarantor of the security of the EU and it is the sole actor that could defend European interest in any region, the EU's neighbourhood first of all. Not incidentally, NATO has its own agenda regarding the Black Sea and takes steps towards increasing the defence capacity of its partner states (Ukraine and Georgia). The NATO Warsaw Summit (2016) declaration outlined the importance of reacting to numerous security threats in the Black Sea area, mainly coming from Russia's takeover of the Crimean Peninsula and following intensive military build-up.

Being present in the Black Sea by the three littoral member states, NATO seemingly has enough military power not to be preoccupied with the territorial defence of the mentioned allies. Indeed, the new geopolitical reality reveals that, modernised after the Crimea takeover, the Russian military capabilities at place [including enhanced air based, added advanced vessels equipped by "Kalibr cruise missiles, and new anti-aircraft and anti-ships missiles,"[15] three new frigates and 30 new vessels of various sizes (and many more planned for 2020)] is able to cause serious threat to any military fleet in the sea and especially to EU's partner countries like Georgia and Ukraine. "These trends have allowed Russia to essentially make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for NATO to get into the Black Sea to defend the NATO allies and

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[15] KONARZEWSKA, Natalia. 2016. *A new balance of power in the Black Sea?* The CACI Analyst. Available from: https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13393-a-new-balance-of-power-in-the-black-sea?.html

partners without substantial losses of ships, planes, and men," [16] Moreover, Russia's establishment in Syria can affect the access of the greater NATO naval forces to the "Turkish" straits if the situation requires such an operation to be conducted. Charles Frattini and Genevieve Casagrande argued that as "Russia's military has deployed approximately 15 naval vessels as part of a permanent Mediterranean Task Force (MTF) as of July 5, 2017 (in Tartus, Syria) …it will continue to utilize the MTF to expand Russian military influence along the Mediterranean basin, while simultaneously increasing the risk to US freedom of manoeuvre in the Middle East and North Africa."[17]

This implies obvious obstacles for the allies' vessels to access the Turkish straits too, in case of the necessity to defend Black Sea partner states against Russian aggression. Despite the attempts by NATO countries to overcome the limitations of the Montreux convention (1936) and to secure a sufficient presence in the Black Sea through rotation since spring 2014, Russia's increased naval capability and deployment of more tactical middle and long-range missiles in Crimea, military presence in the occupied regions of Georgia – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – seriously question the ability of the alliance to withstand in the case of a proxy war in the area. In addition, it is already a well-established vision in the North Atlantic community that the security of partner states is an important element of the security of the Alliance itself. Reasonably, NATO is interested to deepen cooperation with its partner states of Ukraine and Georgia (allegedly Moldova in the future too) and increase their military capabilities and resilience. Regarding the membership of these countries in NATO, it could provide additional terrestrial possibilities for the NATO allies (military bases, naval ports, logistics and infrastructure), but their acceptance to the Alliance at this stage could also contain a risk of possible intervention or another type of provocation from the side of Russia. The above-mentioned objectives of the NATO fully match EU's policies, but there is very few in common that EU and NATO do together in the region. Recent interest of the EU to strengthen its security and defence policy among others, raised the issue of increased cooperation between the two blocks. After the adoption of the Global Security Strategy (2016), the EU and NATO adopted a text of joint declaration at the NATO Warsaw Summit (July 8, 2016) as one of the directions of cooperation between organisations announces the aim of building "… the defence and security capacity and foster the resilience of our (NATO's and EU's) partners in the East and South in a complementary way through specific projects in a variety of areas for individual recipient countries, including by strengthening maritime capacity."[18] Attached to the declaration is a "Common sets of new proposals" which as a first topic focuses on the development of joint projects and activities to counteract hybrid threats. Based on this new

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[16] See: Robert Coalson. 2016. *News Analysis: Russian Buildup Focuses Concerns Around the Black Sea*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Available from:
https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-black-sea-military-buildup-turkey/27569877.html
[17] FRATTINI III, Charles and CASAGRANDE, Genevieve. 2017. *Russia's Mediterranean Threat to NATO*. Institute for the Study of War. Available from:
http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2017/07/russias-med-threat-to-nato.html
[18] See: Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization available from:
https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm

approach it could be expected that the NATO and EU will in the future promote joint activities in the Black Sea partner countries.

Gradual engagement in the Black Sea area.

The Black Sea represents EU's important policy priority for several reasons:

Since the EU has become a littoral actor in the area (when Bulgaria and Rumania joined the EU in 2007) it has become its high interest to actively engage there, solving problems related to the environment, migration, employment and social affairs, economic development and trade, cross-border and internal disputes and instabilities, terrorism and proliferation of weapons, drug and human trafficking, use of natural resources, navigation, military stand of, and other areas. The Black Sea is itself a region with population of more than 350 million and is a growing market. Countries of the region are either rich in energy resources or serve as an energy transit country, important for EU's energy security. It is a transport corridor and a bridge to the Wider Caspian and Central Asia region, rich in many natural resources, including energy; security and stability in the Black Sea has and will have in the future considerable impact on the EU.

The fact that the development and progress on CFSP has its correlation with the activation of the EU's policy in the Black Sea region is well observed in the "Eastern Europe and Central Asia" Working Group presented to the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER) regarding the Establishment of the position of the European Union for the first Cooperation Council with Georgia (Luxembourg, 12 October 1999). The conclusion states the following:

> *"As EU enlargement proceeds and the Black Sea countries will become our new neighbours, our links with the three Caucasian countries and with Georgia in particular will acquire added importance. The peace and stability of the region will become more significant for the security of Europe as a whole. This will be increasingly reflected in the EU's foreign policy agenda. As you know, the CFSP is being further reinforced following the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty and the appointment of Mr. Solana as High Representative."*

> *"Eastern Europe and Central Asia" Working Group. 1999* [19]

Up to the EU's enlargement still few years ahead, the EU was weakly engaged in influencing the political, economic or social processes in the region. Even understanding of the Black Sea as a region was rather vague. In 1997, the EU Council approved a communication which was suggesting focusing on bilateral relations with the Black Sea littoral states rather than with the region as a whole.[20] At the same time, the Communication was positive towards watching the developments in the scope of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) but not looking for membership in the mentioned regional organisation. The attempts from the then BSEC

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[19] "Eastern Europe and Central Asia" Working Group. *Establishment of the position of the European Union for the first Cooperation Council with Georgia.* 01/10/1999. p.4. Available from http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11522-1999-INIT/en/pdf

[20] EC Communication on *Regional cooperation in the Black sea area: state of play, perspectives for EU action encauraging its further development* (Doc. COM (97) 579 Final, Brussels, 14 November 1997)

secretariat to engage in the institutional cooperation with the EU through the offered "Platform for cooperation between BSEC and EU" (1999) was practically disregarded by the European Commission. Until 2005 there were no attempts from the EU side to formalise its relations with the mentioned regional organisation. There was a fragmented view regarding the region, which is now named "Wider Black Sea". From the introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy (2003) until the appearance of the Eastern Partnership (2009), the "Western NIS"[21] – meaning Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine – were seen separately from the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This could be observed in the initial (2003-2007) ENP documents. Within the European Commission, different units were dealing separately with these two groups of countries.

Bilateral relations with the Black Sea littoral states have been developing in different formats and by the use of different instruments. Relations with Turkey have been (and still are) guided by its association (since 1963), membership in the EU-Turkey Customs Union (since 1995) and by the accession process (since 2005). Bulgaria and Romania have also been accession countries from 1998 until 2007, before their eventual membership. Their relations with the EU have been covered by Europe Agreements (since 1994) and Accession Strategies. For all three, the EU accession financial instruments were opened – Phare, Phare CBC, ISPA, CARDS and Interreg.[22] Later, from 2007, the candidate and accession countries (including the Western Balkan) started benefiting from the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). In addition, Turkey was benefiting from MEDA – an instrument deployed for cooperation in the Mediterranean Sea basin.

The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) are the means by which the EU supports reforms in the 'enlargement countries' with financial and technical help. The IPA funds build up the capacities of the countries throughout the accession process, resulting in progressive, positive developments in the region. For the period 2007-2013 IPA had a budget of € 11.5 billion; its successor, IPA II, build on the results already achieved and dedicated € 11.7 billion for the period 2014-2020.

Source European Commission DG NEAR [23]

With Russia and the former Soviet republics of "Eastern Europe and South Caucasus" (as they were called by that times) Partnership and Cooperation agreements (PCA) were shaping wide spectrum of bilateral commitments and aimed at pushing the named states to respect democratic values, establish institutions providing rule of law, conduct trade with the EU according to the WTO rules, softly approximate to the EU acquis in some, most important areas and establish a political dialogue on security and international peace-related topics. For these countries, the main instrument for financial assistance was the Technical Assistance to the

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[21] Newly Independent States
[22] See description of all mentioned instruments at: https://www.danube-region.eu/funding/private-sector-2
[23] Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/overview_en

Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), replaced later (in 2007) by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI, ENI from 2014).

There were several other financial instruments to assist different region-wide programs and projects present in the Danube-Black Sea basin and including Central European, Eastern European and the South-east European countries. TRACECA[24] and INOGATE[25] – two big interstate projects respectively dealing with the development of the transport and energy corridors in the wider Black and Caspian Sea region – funded by EU have also been largely financed from the early 1990s. Plans for the extension of the Pan-European Transport Area (PETrA) towards the Black Sea, support of the Danube-Black Sea Environmental Task Force (DANBLAS) initiative, could be considered a demonstration of the EU's interest in the region. Among others, projects financed out of EU Democracy and Human Rights (EUDHR) program and Stability Instrument to promote the peaceful settlement of conflicts in the region could also be mentioned.

BSEC has been practically the only inclusive format of cooperation between the countries in the wider Black Sea region and the EU has finally become an observer in the organisation in 2007. Participation in the BSEC activities was politically correct decision as this organisation has grown to have 12 members, 17 observers and 14 sectoral dialogue partners.

> *"Today, BSEC, consisting of 12 member states, has 17 Observers and 17 Sectoral Dialogue Partners. Its institutional structure includes a Permanent International Secretariat and four Related Bodies, namely, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC), the BSEC Business Council (BSEC BC), the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)."*

Panagiota Manoli, 2014 [26]

Regarding other formats, P. Manoli argued in 2014 that "Schemes such as the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BlackSeaFor), Operation Black Sea Harmony, Black Sea Coast and Border Guards Cooperation Forum, and the Black Sea Commission testify to sea born cooperation among the littoral countries."[27] Indeed all of the mentioned forms of cooperation were designed as all (littoral states) inclusive initiatives and have practically failed after the Crimea annexation by the Russian Federation.

It is also notable that until that time there was a very low interest towards the BSEC, despite the fact that its member state, Greece, was an active member. Greek reports to the EU Council on the developments inside and around BSEC were the only occasions when this topic was brought to the attention of the EU's institution. The majority of EU's official documents in the 1990s and 2000s (until 2007) were dedicated to fishery and environmental problems. TRACECA and INOGATE – the major EU projects on development of transport roots for goods

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[24] Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
[25] Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe, completed in 2016.
[26] MANOLI, Panagiota. 2014. Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea: Building an inclusive, innovative, and integrated region. Commissioned Paper for the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, University of the Aegean. Available from:
https://www.bstdb.org/publications/Regional_Cooperation_in_the_Black_Sea.pdf
[27] Ibid, p.15

and energy – had little impact on the extension of EU's core values and governance in the area. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) played a role in preparing the partner countries in the wider Black Sea for further rapprochement and deeper cooperation with the EU.

Relations with Turkey, which in 1999 has become an EU candidate country, were not contributing much to the raise of real interest of the EU in the Black Sea, save exploring the opportunity of developing energy and transport links with the South Caucasus and the Caspian region. Even less the EU's strategic partnership with Russia - a country with no interest in developing the Black Sea regional potential and no motivation to see EU actively involved in deploying its modernisation tools to the neighbourhood, could have contributed to raising the role of the EU in the area.

With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the EU in 2007 became a littoral actor in the Black Sea that motivated it to take part in the regional cooperation, contributing to the consolidation of the region, increasing cooperation on issues of collective interests, addressing challenges and developing a positive agenda for establishing peace and increasing the security.

Engaging through Eastern Europe

While before the enlargement, all former communist states in Europe have been considered a part of Eastern Europe, those out of them, which received EU Membership perspective were defined as a Central and Eastern Europe countries in the mid-90s. The Balkans have been redefined to Southern East Europe (somehow including Turkey too) and the rest of the former Soviet territories placed in the geographic and political (since the accession of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia to CoE) Europe have been named Eastern Europe (EE). Below, we use this term in the mentioned meaning.

As stated above, the EU's intention to draw close links with the whole region of EE has never included the possibility of their integration, but of a "closer cooperation". The fifth wave of enlargement approaching in 2003 brought debates on the EU's post-enlargement policy towards the new neighbours, with a view of ensuring the Union's security and stability while bordering the area with low respect of the rule of law, lack of prosperity and weak governance capacity. This became especially relevant in relation to the EE. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) launched in 2003 (including the South Caucasus in 2004) was designed to lower the developmental gap between EU and the mentioned region.[28]

Using well examined operational tools, borrowed/copied from the enlargement process, the European Commission shaped the ENP in a way involving the action plans – solid midterm reform programs and annual reports to monitor and adjust ongoing changes. The instrumental difference with still effective PCAs was evident – while the old institutional framework was setting legal obligations, the new approach was providing for concrete reforms in all spheres, with concrete objectives, tasks and deadlines. Transformation without any membership perspective seemed only to be a viable exercise due to the immense attractiveness of the EU

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[28] The author intentionally disregards specking on Southern Neighbors of the EU.

itself, the high motivation of the elites and the public demand in partner countries. Means of socialisation, prevailing over the conditionality and the lack of "carrots" at the initial stage of this policy, has lowered chances for rapid and adequate changes in the partner countries. Another weakness of the ENP was its "egalitarian" and unified approach to the two very diverse regions of Eastern Europe and Southern Mediterranean. Despite of the principle of "differentiation" being introduced from the beginning by ENP, in reality, placing countries with different levels of development and aspiration in one basket was negatively affecting motivation of the "best performers".

With the geopolitical view, the Neighbourhood Policy could be qualified as an attempt to unify EU's Wider Mediterranean and Black Sea ambition in one initiative, which could not bring expected success because of fundamental differences and week cultural, economic, historical and political ties between the two regions. It soon became to demand more differentiation between the policy objectives, methods and instruments to be used for southern Mediterranean region from one side and the Black Sea countries of the Eastern Europe (for Eastern European states more precisely as Belarus cannot be named a Black Sea country) from the other.

In few years from the initiation of the ENP there were several attempts from the side of EU institutions and particular member states to promote something different for the six former Soviet states. Among such initiatives was the "ENP Plus" (2006) proposed to the EU Council (as a non-paper) by then German Presidency.[29] This initiative was about a separate policy towards the Eastern European states. In particular, deeper engagement with the former Soviet republics of Eastern Europe, with the aim of their faster transformation and further economic integration with the EU. The idea was widely debated by the EU think-tanks and epistemic community (Emerson, Noutcheva, Popescu).[30] The initiative, if accepted, would practically embrace the countries of the Wider Black Sea plus Belarus. The proposal was not shared by some member states and has been embodied into the national German bilateral policy towards the EE countries.

Black Sea Synergy

In 2007, the EU Council approved a Commission Communication "Black Sea Synergy [31] (BSS)." The document outlined EU's explicit interest to address number of problems through more active and well targeted engagement in the cooperation with all big and small regional players in the area. It also marked recognition of the insufficiency of anterior attempts to increase EU's influence in the region through bilateral policies. Regional consolidation and consensus between the states on the necessity of collective actions were one of the tasks. EU's

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[29] See: "Germany and the Eastern Partnership" by Justyna Gotkowska, 2010. Available from: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2010-06-18/germany-and-eastern-partnership
[30] See: European Neighborhood Policy Two Years on: Time indeed for an 'ENP plus. 2007. Available from: https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/book/1479.pdf
[31] See: Brussels, 11.04.2007 COM (2007) 160 final. Ibid. p.2. Available from: http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/pdf/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf

organisational power could only be employed efficiently when other states of the region would agree to acknowledge common interests and develop a strong regional dimension in their national policies. The EU's engagement through the proposed initiative aimed at fostering cooperation within the Black Sea region and "between the region as a whole and the EU."[32] The BSS proposed to consolidate and develop new projects of cooperation in areas of environment, maritime affairs, fisheries, maritime transport, energy, education, civil society, cross-border cooperation and research fields. The Communication attempted to present an inventory of all EU policy and financial instruments, initiatives dealing on the bilateral or regional levels and reorient them as much as possible into the regional cooperation actions aimed to develop coherence among the wider Black Sea states, increase synergy and coordination, which would lead towards increased interconnection, peace and development of the whole area. At that time, the EU still counted on engaging in full-fledge cooperation with Russia on regional issues. In this regards the Communication stated: "Three EU policies are relevant in this context: the pre-accession process in the case of Turkey, the European Neighbourhood Policy (with five eastern ENP partners also being active in Black Sea cooperation) and the Strategic Partnership with the Russian Federation. Moreover, the EC has contributed to a whole range of sectoral initiatives of regional relevance."[33] This expectation also inspired the EUs hope and desire for the BSEC to become a strong platform for deepening and consolidating cooperation in the Black Sea area stressing that "the wide membership of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)[10] and the fact that Russia and Turkey are its founding members is a decisive advantage and could substantially contribute to the success of Black Sea Synergy" [34] . Moreover, EC proposed to become an observer to the organisation (as seven EU member states already were) and eventually achieved the status in 2007. Since 2009, the EU has taken part in the BSEC ministerial meetings and summits.

In 2015, the EC made a review of the progress on the BSS,[35] an assessment of projects in all areas. It showed that in certain fields the consolidation of the common regional action was achieved. Among such were two environmental monitoring projects on strengthening capacities for biological and chemical monitoring of Black Sea water quality. Good examples of cooperation were the Environmental Monitoring of the Black Sea (EMBLAS) initiated in 2012 which involved Russia together with Ukraine and Georgia, the EU-Russia roadmap on energy cooperation that envisages the creation of a pan-European energy market by 2050, the Black Sea NGO Forum where all states including Russia take active role, the Network of National Youth councils, cooperation on fisheries and others. Indeed, in 2014 the European Council invited the Commission to "...re-assess EU-Russia cooperation programs with a view to taking a decision, on a case by case basis, on the suspension of the implementation of EU

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[32] Brussels, 18.11.2015 SWD (2015) 245 final PART 1/2. p. 2. Available from:
https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/2a_EE%20progress%20report%20-%20CSWD%20part%201.pdf
[33]Brussels, 11.04.2007 COM (2007) 160 final. Ibid. p.2. Available from:
http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/pdf/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf
[34] Ibid. p.9
[35] See: Brussels, 18.11.2015 SWD (2015) 245 final PART 1/2. p. 2. available from:
https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/2a_EE%20progress%20report%20-%20CSWD%20part%201.pdf

bilateral and regional cooperation programmes". The above-mentioned decision was obviously made on the basis of growing disagreements with Russia's policies in the region. The occupation of Georgia's regions in 2008 and the annexation of a part of Ukraine in 2014 marked first of major discrepancies on values and interests in the region. The mentioned fact would, consequently, affect the hopes for an effective use of the BSEC for the promotion of constructive regional policy in the Black Sea. The organisation, in which Russia plays a leading role, could not remain an instrument unifying the regional actors. The ICBSS[36] policy brief no. 20 (Japaridze, Manoli, Triantaphyllou, Tsantoulis) argued in 2010 that "The increasing values gap between the EU and Russia can only exacerbate regional insecurity if not properly tackled or assessed."[37] This particular factor and growing competition for the "dominance" in the Black sea area promoted by Russia exactly after the war with Georgia have limited the possibilities of the BSS as a format of all-inclusive cooperation. It seems that BSS will be focused on the promotion and support of projects involving different countries of the Black Sea depending on their interest, but with no proper illusions of reaching a regional cohesion and inclusive integration. In the same time, integration with all those, who show appropriate ambition and aspiration, will continue but not in the scope of BSS.

Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership (EaP), proposed by Sweden and Poland and conceptually shaped by the EC Communication to the Council and the European Parliament (2008)[38], launched in 2009 following the decisions made at the EU's Prague summit, a "secondary protocol" of the EU's Black Sea policy as five out of the six partner states are form the Black Sea region. At the same time, the policy documents made little mentioning of the Black Sea, and there was no Black Sea related common projects implemented trough the Flagship Initiatives or Thematic Platforms of the policy's "multilateral track. "Despite this fact, the policy is definitely increasing EU's presence and influence in the region. The EaP sets considerably higher level and more ambitious framework for regional and bilateral relations with the Eastern European states than any of the previous ones. The format comprises biannual summits and annual ministerial meetings, thematic platforms for multilateral cooperation, proposed bilateral association agreements (with all instruments to conduct deep political dialogue), with deep and comprehensive FTAs (DCFTA), enhanced mobility of citizens and cooperation, participation in EU programs and agencies and close cooperation in practically all sectoral policies.

It was thought that focusing on much less number of partner states (who are relatively more homogenous in sense of historical development), challenges, type of governance and economic and social development would make it much easier for the EU to use its policy and financial tools, promote reforms, transpose the acquis and Europeanise them. The introduction of this policy aimed to achieve the creation of a space for a differentiated approach towards countries

[36] International Centre for Black Sea Studies
[37] JAPARIDZE, Tedo; MANOLI, Panagiota; TRIANTAPHYLLOU, Dimitrios and TSANTOULIS, Yannis. 2010. *The EU's Ambivalent Relationship with the BSEC: Reflecting on the Past, Mapping out the Future*. ICBSS37 policy brief no. 20. p.22 Available from: http://icbss.org/media/133_original.pdf
[38] See: Brussels, 3.12.2008 COM (2008) 823 final available from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008DC0823&from=en

with different ambitions and levels of progress. This space enabled countries to work with the EU according to their individual agenda and independently from their neighbours and to develop bilateral relations of the scale and quality defined in the policy itself.[39]

Still being part of ENP, EaP allowed division of the EU's policy objectives towards the South Mediterranean from one side and Eastern Europe (practically Black Sea) from the other and paved the way for greater political association and economic integration with the latter, that could, under certain conditions and due in time, become a realm for future EU enlargement. While Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, as EU member states, take part in the policy, the new format excludes Turkey and Russia. Regarding Russia, its exclusion from the EaP derives, firstly, from her own reluctance to join the ENP in 2003. Secondly, Russia's new geopolitical ambitions, its international behaviour and regress in democratic development makes her involvement (save limited engagement in certain sectoral cooperation) incompatible with the aims and spirit of the EaP.

Turkey as an EU candidate country can in the future find a proper role in the cooperation established by the EaP, the issue is still to be discussed and debated. Turkey is an important regional player in the area, with highest trade turnover practically with all littoral states. Indeed, its political role, not fully fitting the EU's strategy in recent years, has become contested. The main complications come from its downgraded interest in joining the EU, stagnation in democratic changes, growing ambition for forging its own influence over neighboring countries, increased criticism of the West (and the EU in particular) and some contradictions on wider regional security issues.

Over the past few years, obvious differences between the aspirations, ambitions, values and achievements of the various countries of Eastern Europe have become apparent in their foreign policy orientations or internal policies. For example, in the case of Belarus, the country has made no consideration for the EU's dictated requirements for political reform, therefore, bilateral co-operation has been practically frozen. For Azerbaijan, the agenda has been changed due to the country's shortcomings in terms of guaranteeing human rights and basic freedoms.[40] Bilateral economic rapprochement with Azerbaijan is also problematic due to the country's reluctance to join the World Trade Organization and experienced problems in democratic governance, which precludes the possibility of the signing of an association agreement with the EU and the creation of a deep and comprehensive free trade area. Still, the Brussels EaP summit in 2017 marked a significant progress in EU's relations with the Black Sea states, which are partners in EaP. Armenia signed the Cooperation and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) despite of her membership in the Russian led Eurasian Economic Union, the model of regional cooperation created to stop expansion of EU's free

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[39] See: GOGOLASHVILI, Kakha. 2017. *Georgia-EU Relations and Future Perspectives*. GCSD. Available from: http://www.gcsd.org.ge/uploads/tinymce/documents/EU-Georgia%20Relations%20and%20Future%20Perspectives.pdf
[40] 'Persecution of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan—European Parliament resolution of 18 September 2014 on the persecution of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan' (2014/2832(RSP)—2016/C 234/01), Available from: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014IP0022&from=EN

trade arrangements to Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region in particular. Azerbaijan started negotiations of a new advanced cooperation agreement with EU. This fact testifies that the EU retains its attractiveness for all Black Sea EaP partners and will continue influence them in the future. Still, these two countries will not be able to Europeanise in a foreseeable future and approach the EU with the same rate as the Newly Associated States of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. The emergence of EaP and its relative success materialised in the Association Agreements signed with the three EaP partner states, extension of visa free regimes to Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine and an increased cooperation of the mentioned countries in many sectoral fields with the EU, including membership in the Energy Community and participation in CSDP operations. These developments raise thoughts about possible reshaping of the EUs Black Sea policy.

The Change

It is well observed that the BSS and Eastern partnership are two complementary policies in the wider Black Sea region. While trough BSS the EU tries to increase regional cooperation and consolidate efforts of all the countries (independent from their political priorities), to treat existing problems and create better conditions for development, the EaP is a constructive project aimed to transform and positively influence those states which have a potential interest in becoming closely integrated with the EU.[41] In many aspects, these two initiatives can cross-cut with each other and be complementary. As a basic idea, both policies should not create any tensions in the region as nobody is forced to cooperate in issues that are not of their interest and no country is forced to make those reforms and changes that it is reluctant to do.

Indeed, the growing gap between EU and Russia, especially apparent in the Black Sea, calls for a reconsideration of this paradigm. Russia's old and new policy is not of a same spirit as that of the EU. While the EU tries to develop an inclusive policy with no damage to anybody, Russia is seeking to establish dominance and a new balance of power.

Lutzkanova argued that "Today two main challenges characterise the security environment (in the Black Sea) – the major discrepancy in military capabilities after the annexation of Crimea, and the future of the new energy and transport corridors connecting Caspian and European markets. These factors form the wider perception of the Black Sea region in every geostrategic and/or continental policy analysis."[42]

When the EU was developing both policies – the BSS and EaP – there were still expectations that Russia may become a reliable partner and will engage in deeper cooperation for the sake of peace and stability in the common neighbourhood. Based on this point, all EU efforts to transform the region were affected by Russia's pressure on Ukraine and Armenia, causing destabilisation of the country in the first case and forcing the country to reject signing the

[41] See: TSANTOULIS, Yannis. 2009. *Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership: Different Centers of Gravity?* Complementarity or Confusing Signals? Policy Brief # 12. Available from: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/104869/PB_12.pdf

[42] LUTZKANOVA, Siyana. 2017. *NATO and EU Strategies for the Black Sea Region: The Challenge of Power Balance in New SecurityEnvironment*. Journal of Shipping and Ocean Engineering 7 (2017) 210-215 p.210.

Association Agreement with the EU in the second. Further deployment of the hybrid war tools, namely propaganda, influencing media and civil society and infringements in security structures and cyberspace of sovereign countries in the region marked the active and aggressive resistance of Russia against the EU's Eastern European and the Black Sea wide policy.

The standoff between Russia and the western powers in Syria deepens the gap between the strategic project of the EU and that of its rival and tends towards the formation of a geopolitical split elsewhere, where it is possible. It is clear that the Black Sea is becoming one of the most vulnerable places in this regard. Russia openly intents to gain back its Soviet time's position via stopping Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia drifting further westwards, would it be the accession to NATO or deeper integration with the EU. While it has secured the loyalty of Armenia and a relative neutrality of Azerbaijan, it will intensively continue pressing against EU associated countries, demanding foreign policy priority changes. Extensive modernisation of the Russian army and increased deployments of new units in the occupied territories of Georgia and in the North Caucasus are signs of this determination of Russia. The conflict in Eastern Ukraine seems to form into a long-lasting military confrontation and Crimean Peninsula becoming a military fortress with powerful naval and strategic armament able to threaten any peaceful project in the Black Sea. The region-building attempts that the EU has been promoting up to now seem not to remain relevant. The fragmentation of the Black sea region becomes a reality. Under the mentioned conditions, securitization of any policy in the region is unavoidable. Further attempts to continue the engagement and transformation of the partner countries in the Black Sea region would demand more efforts from the EU to increase their resilience to security threats and will require more of parallel engagement in security cooperation with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

New Enlargement Perspective

Not attempting to explore unrealistic scenarios in this paper, it is still worth to raise questions about a possible future enlargement of the Union. The enlargement in 2003-2007 created some misleading perceptions in the EU, in particular, that regional approach and intensive deployment of financial assistance instruments can lead to a total transformation of the targeted area, including all states. Its enlargement policy in the Western Balkans has slightly downgraded this assertion, but still, a gradual integration of the "ready for" countries approach was adopted. The last EC communication related to the Western Balkans shows the EU's willingness to prepare and absorb the whole region in the coming decade. It is obvious that the expansion of the EU's governance (which not necessarily means enlargement) is a policy for homogenisation, Europeanisation, consolidation and internal integration of the region through the development of connectivity, cooperation frameworks, free trade areas and so on. Despite the Serbia-Kosovo problem, the EU made a progress in approaching this goal in the Western Balkans, which made possible the activation of the question of full-fledged

enlargement in relation to the region recently.[43] The Enlargement in terms of territorial expansion was never an ultimate goal of the EU. Pragmatic reasons for removing barriers for trade and economic integration at previous stages prevailed. The fifth wave of enlargement was dictated by the security challenges and the fear of the reverse of communist domination in the Eastern and Central Europe, but the decision for granting the European Perspective to Western Balkan states was a cost of ensuring a stable and peaceful neighbourhood in the South-East, which could only be achieved through the membership offer. In all cases, the Enlargement process leads towards a democratic transformation and rapid economic development of states subjected to the policy. The establishment of EU governance and the functional integration is the ultimate goal that apparently was thought could be reached by other means too, without a membership offer. Initially PCA's, the ENP and the EaP were proposed to create conditions when the neighbouring states are ready to accept EU governance system and gradually integrate with it functionally, without the eventual membership ambition. This could be a reasonable and realistic possibility, but not in the, in terms of security, gradually declining environment.

As the Black Sea becomes an area of high interest for the EU, geopolitically and for security reasons, further advancement of the process of transformation, Europeanization, liberalisation and establishment of all four (EU) freedoms leading to the functional integration of the countries with the EU can become questionable without a new enlargement policy. Enlargement as the most powerful tool for all mentioned changes becomes necessary to be deployed under two conditions:

- It is of existential importance for the EU to functionally integrate the remaining non-member countries in the Black Sea area as much as possible, especially geopolitically as valuable as Ukraine – a buffer country for all Central and Eastern European member states – and Georgia – a bridge from the Black Sea to the Caspian region.

- The geopolitical split and increased competition for influence in the region demands using maximum efforts to keep countries on the reform track and motivated to "be rather with EU than with others"

Seemingly, both conditions are present, and it may become compulsory for the EU to rethink its old approach and start thinking about future enlargement towards the Black Sea area.

If the EU decides to go show the enlargement ambition towards the Black Sea, it should take into consideration, that there will be no more "whole region taking" this time and that there will be a big rival trying to create problems to the process. In addition, the security threat will always be present and real. Therefore, the EU will need to seriously rethink its approaches to the enlargement policy and securitize the policy as a whole, in the same time concentrating all its efforts on increasing its own security power to carry on with its aims.

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[43] See: EC Communication. *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*. Strasbourg, 6.2.2018 COM (2018) 65 final. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

The involvement of the EU in the Black Sea region was initiated mainly by bilateral energy and transport related development projects. The EU enlargement accepting Romania and Bulgaria fuelled its interest and ambition to consolidate the fragmented region. The EU employed various tools with the Black Sea littoral states. The European Neighbourhood Policy (2003), Black Sea Synergy (2007) and further the Eastern Partnership (2009) served as tools for democratic transformation, an internal constellation of the region and closer cooperation with the EU. Russia's aggressive behaviour brought a considerable change in the security environment of the region recently. To keep its Black Sea policy dimension active, the EU will need to come with more security tools and instruments to increase the resilience of the partner states and make them able to keep their European aspirations. It should do this by coordinated EU-NATO efforts and bringing more powerful policy instruments to Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, aiming at their gradual integration.

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