

Session 5

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Black Sea maritime cooperation in a context of security and environment by Basat Öztürk, Turkish MFA OSCE Preparatory Conference in Helsinki (10-11 September 2007)

The oceans and seas of the world have always been vital with the precious and numerous means they offer for the survival of humankind. Throughout history, trade and economies of the world have prospered in particular with the help of ships transporting goods between port cities. Eventually, in today's globalized life, 99,7 percent of international trade is conducted through maritime transport. With the advance of multimodal transport means, all countries, including those landlocked, are increasingly becoming interested in the development of an efficient, safe and secure navigation on maritime and inland waterways. In parallel, the protection of marine environment has also become a major issue due to pollution caused by growing populations and intensified economic activities. This situation necessitates further cooperation between states, regional and international organizations.

Such cooperation is more crucial in enclosed/semi-enclosed seas, as well as on inland waterways connected to such seas.

In this sense, the Black Sea also shows up as a unique example of well-established and well-functioning cooperation mechanisms. In this presentation, I will try to give an overview of the situation in the Black Sea maritime domain.

Characteristics of the Black Sea

The Black Sea covers an area of 432,000 sq km with a coastline of 4340 km. Created when structural upheavals in [Asia Minor](#) split off the Caspian basin from the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea gradually became isolated. Although it is connected to the Mediterranean Sea through the Turkish Straits, salinity is now less than half that of the world's oceans.

The Dnieper, Dniester, and [Danube](#) rivers are its principal feeders. The Black Sea has two layers of water of different densities. The heavily [saline](#) bottom layer has little movement and contains hydrogen [sulfide](#); it has no marine life. The top layer, much less saline and richer in fish, flows in a counterclockwise direction around the sea.

Even if it is still popular for its resorts, the Black Sea has suffered severe pollution in recent decades.

Cooperation against pollution

Pollution in the Black Sea has spurred surrounding nations to cooperate in instituting environmental safeguards. The unique ecosystem of the Black Sea is burdened by excessive loads of nutrients and hazardous substances from the coastal countries and the rivers that enter it – the most important being the Danube, followed by Dniester and Dnieper. For example, every year, approximately 9 million tones of organic substances, 410 thousand tones of petrochemical elements, heavy metals such as 90 thousand tones of iron, 12 thousand tones of zinc, 6700 tones of manganese, 80 tones of mercury as well as 48 thousand tones of detergents pollute the sea. Other pressures on the Black Sea ecosystems include pesticides, incidental and operational spills from oil vessels and ports, over-fishing and invasions of

exotic species. Pollution inputs and other related factors have radically changed Black Sea ecosystems since the 1960's, seriously threatening biodiversity and human health.

The Black Sea countries with a view to preventing, reducing and controlling pollution in the Black Sea, to protect and preserve the marine environment and also to provide a legal framework for cooperation, signed the “**Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution**” in Bucharest in 1992. The Convention has been in force since the beginning of 1994. The Black Sea Commission is the body responsible for implementing the Convention. The Convention is complemented with three Protocols on:

- the control of land-based sources of pollution
- dumping of waste
- joint action in the case of accidents (Such as oil spills)

In order to reduce and control the pollution of the marine environment resulting from emergency situations, exercises are also conducted due to a framework.

Here, I would like to bring to your attention that only a few days ago Turkey hosted and organized a large scale “search and rescue and marine pollution response exercise” named SULH 2007 Black Sea Delta Exercise with a significant contribution by Turkish and Russian specialized assets and participation from all Black Sea countries as well as observers from other countries (to name few Germany, Sweden, Spain, Italy) and international organizations and agencies (IMO, OSPRI (Oil Spill Preparedness Regional Initiative), OSRL/EARL (Oil Spill Response/East Asia Response Limited), ITOFF (International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation), UK P&I (Insurance Company), Chevron). More than 250 participants registered in this successful exercise.

The Montreux Convention and Turkey's own contribution to a safe and secure navigation

The Black Sea has gained greater significance particularly in the last decade since it has become one of the most important and busiest energy corridors of the world. In numbers, in addition to local maritime traffic, 55 thousand vessels navigate through the Turkish Straits in a year. Around 10.000 of this figure are tankers carrying approximately 145 million tones of hazardous cargo. Such a traffic in a very narrow waterway passing also through the city of İstanbul with 15 million inhabitants requires special attention for maritime security and safety as well as environmental protection.

Cognizant of the increasingly serious situation, Turkey, with the aim to improve maritime security and navigational safety as well as to protect the environment and human life and property in the Turkish Straits, established the Turkish Straits Vessel Traffic Services System in December 2003. TSVTS has been equipped with a state of the art technology and highly qualified staff that provide services to vessels in one of the busiest and most dangerous waterways of the world.

Turkey also plays a crucial role in the implementation of the Montreux Convention, which, since 1936, regulates navigation in the Turkish Straits and constitutes an indispensable element within the framework of not only Turkish security but also the security in the Black Sea and of the riparian States.

In addition to TSVTS, an integrated network of coastal surveillance radar stations equipped with automated identification system (AIS) has been activated since this July, covering relevant maritime areas in the Black Sea. The system is capable of identifying vessels up to 60 NM from the shore. Consequently, maritime situational awareness over the Black Sea has been dramatically improved.

Other Cooperation Mechanisms in the Black Sea

Turkey, lying at the immediate southern part of the Black Sea, having the longest shoreline amongst all the other littoral states has not only taken every measure throughout its Straits but also has attached special importance to a comprehensive and inclusive cooperation in the Black Sea. Turkey's distinctive approach to regional cooperation and development have led to the establishment of multinational-regional structures of cooperation in all related fields. Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), BLACKSEAFOR and Operation Black Sea Harmony deserve special attention in this regard.

Turkey's contribution to the broader Black Sea region can be seen in the foundation of the **Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization**, established in 1992. BSEC has been the first all-inclusive regional organization reflecting a broad and comprehensive geographical vision towards the Black Sea. BSEC has been enlarged to cover a geographical area to include a variety of countries, not only littorals of the Black Sea.

BSEC has mainly engaged in the economic issues in view of the fact that a region in peace and stability can only be maintained by strong economic relations among the member states. Consisting of around 330 million people and an area of 20 million km² with rich oil and natural gas resources, BSEC has a significant potential. It is worth mentioning that BSEC is a full-fledged, regional economic organization with a well-established legal, institutional and procedural framework.

The growing role and importance of the wider Black Sea area necessitates the adaptation of the BSEC to a world of rapid change in order to assume new responsibilities in the years to come. Cognizant of this fact, BSEC has been continuing a process of reform to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Organization, while deepening cooperation in the priority areas of common interest such as environmental protection, trade, transport, energy and combating terrorism, and all forms of organized crime.

In this context, what we need is continued political will and concrete projects like the Motorways of the Sea, Black Sea Ring Highway, stronger maritime transport links between the Black Sea ports, energy cooperation, joint exercises in the maritime domain, which would yield tangible results to improve the quality of the daily lives of the people of the Black Sea region.

New security risks/proper responses

I would like to underline that our approach to Black Sea maritime security is based on two pillars:

First: Full cooperation and coordination among all Black Sea littoral states should be attained.

Second, the maritime security of the region should be complementary to the Euro-Atlantic security system, since maritime security is indivisible.

In this context, BLACKSEAFOR and Operation Black Sea Harmony have been recognized as major security providers in the Black Sea maritime areas.

Originating from a Turkish initiative **BLACKSEAFOR (Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group)** was created in 2001 with the participation of all the littoral states. BLACKSEAFOR aims at contributing to friendship, good relations and mutual understanding in the region through enhancement of cooperation and interoperability among the naval forces of the littoral states. Operations and tasks of BLACKSEAFOR range from counter-terrorism to search and rescue, humanitarian assistance, environmental protection operations, mine-counter measures, goodwill visits and any other task to be agreed by all parties.

All littoral states of the Black Sea have the common understanding that the security in the Black Sea constitutes vital importance for the littoral states and that, therefore, they should take primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and stability in the area through engagement of their common assets and capabilities. BLACKSEAFOR is an available instrument that can be used for the achievement of this objective.

Currently, with a view to better responding to new risks and threats to security, BLACKSEAFOR is undergoing a transformation process.

Operation Black Sea Harmony was launched by Turkey in 2004 initially as a national operation to deter, disrupt and prevent the threat of terrorism and illicit trafficking in WMD, their means of delivery and related materials in the Black Sea. The Operation is open to all Black Sea littoral countries. Russian Federation and Ukraine have already joined the Operation. Missions of Operation Black Sea harmony are to:

- Demonstrate naval presence
- Exchange of information on suspected merchant vessels
- Conduct reconnaissance operations
- Trail-shadow suspected merchant vessels.

The Operation consists of regular patrols with frigates and patrol boats in pre-defined surveillance areas in the Black Sea. Helicopters, submarines, maritime patrol aircraft and coast guard vessels assist in this activity.

Operation Black Sea Harmony is conducted in cooperation with the ongoing NATO Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean.

Another cooperative effort for Black Sea maritime domain security is an initiative also led by Turkey that is based on **the Agreement on Black Sea Coast and Border Guards Cooperation Forum**, signed at the meeting of the littoral coast guard commanders in İstanbul in 2006. This is another concrete project to enhance regional cooperation for maritime security of the littoral coastguards after **BBCIC-Black Sea Border Coordination and Information Center** Initiative which was realized under Bulgarian leadership when the Center was established in Burgaz, Bulgaria in 2003.

Cooperation with other regions and organizations

In conclusion, mechanisms and practical arrangements for cooperation in all fields, particularly those related to environment, economy and security are already in place and functioning in the Black Sea region. There is also political will for further adaptation of these structures to new needs and challenges. The İstanbul summit of BSEC in June 2007 has clearly demonstrated this common vision which also allows for cooperation with other international and regional organizations.

In this context, a feasible strategy towards the Black Sea should focus on complementarity and synergy with existing efforts and mechanisms.

In this vein, we expect also from the OSCE to support established Black Sea regional initiatives and develop its relations with BSEC and other Black Sea fora, including on an institutional basis as appropriate.