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Black Sea (In)security: What Should Ukraine Do for the EU's Regional Policy?

“With Bulgaria and Romania joining the EU just over one year ago, the EU is no longer an external actor in this region. Now we are irrevocably part of the region, with our future security and prosperity intimately bound up in its fortunes”. With this words said by European Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner during the Black Sea Synergy Ministerial Meeting in Kyiv on February 14, 2008 the EU has entered the new stage of regionalism in Europe, already being equipped with the new policy proposed to the entire Black Sea European sub-region.

Formally, this new policy was institutionalized with the adoption of the Black Sea Synergy initiative in 2007 and strengthened by Eastern Partnership in 2008. For the EU, this new stage of regionalism means, that being itself the geopolitical space, it has met the new geopolitical space, interacting and partly integrating it. Thus, the essence of the current EU's Black Sea “regioness” (in Björn Hettne's meaning) combines features both of internal integration and regional governance outside the EU at the same time.

By that, the specifics of the EU relationship to the Black Sea region is rather controversial. The key methodological puzzle for the EU policymakers is as follows: yes, indeed, the EU became part of the Black Sea region, while the Black Sea region did not become part of the EU. That means, that for the EU's CFSP and ESDP it will be hard to deal with regional agendas to correspond EU's priorities fully, because of having no direct jurisdiction over the major part of the region, excluding, of course, territory of Romania and Bulgaria, the EU will have to face the alternative, even contradictive, regional approaches other Black Sea littoral states may have and pursue.

It looks like to be “just part of the Black Sea region” is not quite enough to defend political, security and economic interests of the EU. It means that at the first stage of the EU's geographical penetration into the Black Sea region (where, let me remind, the EU is part of the region, but the region is not part of the EU), the EU must be interested to use as much as possible of those mechanisms of regional governance, which are in EU's disposal at the moment. In this regard, the effectiveness of the Black Sea Synergy and Eastern partnership may become as a top priority for the EU in defending its Black Sea interests.

From that perspective, it is very important to identify the EU's Black Sea Synergy instrument. There is a big attention to the promising Synergy initiative, which is designed to resolve the second part of the geopolitical puzzle for the EU's policymakers towards the region:

how to balance relationship in order to have the Black Sea region as part of the EU to secure peace, stability and economic cooperation for Europe. Recalling already above mentioned thesis on controversial nature of the Black Sea region in combination with the EU, the mission of the Black Sea Synergy may be presented in a look of complementary instrument to the already existing bilateral policies with the countries in the region.

Thus, common interests are keys to the Black Sea region for the EU. The effectiveness of the proposed Synergy will become evident very soon, especially, as highlighted Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU has an intention to go deeper inside the most acute regional agendas and be involved into them: “The time is ripe to focus political attention at the regional level and invigorate ongoing co-operation processes, opening an additional space for cooperation with Russia, Turkey and our eastern ENP partners. I am also hopeful that Black Sea Synergy will contribute to creating a better climate for the solution of the “frozen conflicts” in the region.”

Saying almost nothing about last conflict in Georgia itself, we should be more interested now in those “frozen conflicts” of the region, which are still under control also from the side of the EU in order to make all possible efforts not to activate them. At the same time “frozen conflicts” in the region is the long-term agenda.

The general atmosphere of geopolitical competition in the post-Soviet space with the involvement of the USA, NATO and the EU makes not frozen conflicts, but energy security issues of the Black Sea region as a top problem for all sides involved. And here the Black Sea role of Ukraine may become vital for the EU’s security.

Following this, let us predict that the EU middle-term strategy in the Black Sea region will be partly focused on the Odessa-Brody-Plotsk project. Thus, the principal rationale for the EU is to achieve three main objectives. First and the most challenging: to make clear and confident for itself that this project is so vitally important for the EU, that it will be ready to lobby it in confrontation with Russia to overcome Russia’s resistance and to convince Ukraine to restore averse direction. Second: to find and be ready to spend the necessary funds to stretch the pipeline from Ukrainian Brody to Polish Plotsk. Third: to be ready to concern Ukraine as a long term strategic collaborator with the integrative potential. Will the EU take an advantage and responsibility in a long geopolitical and energy security game in the Black Sea region under such circumstances? The question may remain as a rhetorical one, but vital for all involved parts, especially for Ukraine.

And final remarks. Indeed, the EU has been transforming itself from the status of “outsider” into “inside” actor of the Black Sea Region. For the purpose to become an independent global player and another influential element of the Black Sea system in the light of

current debates over CFSP and Lisbon Treaty, the EU requires a new regional strategy a la “Black Sea dimension” in a look of developed EU’s Black Sea Synergy in order to

- a) embrace “Black Sea” interests of Bulgaria and Romania with the rest in the EU,
- b) strengthen Greek positions in the Wider Black Sea region,
- c) synchronize policy toward Turkey,
- d) track the new EU eastern borders, including visa regime, “soft” security challenges and Transnistria case,
- e) assist or confront the US and NATO strategies towards “hard” security issues in the Black Sea region,
- f) be ready to face and deal with Russian regional “super-power” influence in debating over energy and regional security architecture as a part of European and Trans-Atlantic and
- g) to keep the consequences of the five-day war in South Ossetia and in Georgia under special attention of Brussels for the purpose to block such destructive consequences on the territory of Georgia only.

And, of course, prioritize relations with Ukraine as a part of ENP which is under candidacy expectations in order to have safe Ukraine on the safe side.
