

FOREIGN POLICY ON THE SLOPES OF CAUCASUS

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Abstract: *The past years showed to the world and to the European Union that classical approaches are not enough to be a power breaker in the Caucasian region, where the overlap of history, myth, and cultures creates a unique geopolitical context marked by century old grudges and imaginary or real socio-economical issues. It is clear that concepts like “ring of friends” or Eastern Partnership need a rebranding and an upgrade due to contemporary context changes. Russian expansion, Turkish political shifts, Ukrainian crisis, Iranian ambitions, Kurd issues, energy policies and socio-economical convulsions are defining the new shape of the geographical areas on both side of the Caucasus Mountain. In this context the European leadership needs to rethink the foreign policy approach to the region and to create a new set of actions in this context. This difficult task is needed not only from the perspective of Europe’s energetic security but from the point of regional stability, because Europe and its global development depend on its involvement in the neighboring regions. From this perspective our paper would like to analyze and create a realistic image on the dynamic of the relations of EU with the countries in this region and the perspectives in the contemporary context where the overlapping geopolitical interests are making this region a key one for several future issues.*

Keywords: Wider Black Sea Region; geopolitics; EU foreign policy; Caucasian region, Ukraine

Introduction

After few years of geopolitical uncertainty and political reshape of the region, it seems that the Black Sea and its wider surrounding have managed to enter in the new geopolitical game of the 21st century, where old ambitions and new challenges brought back the *old sea* in the complex equation of contemporary international relations. We can say that the Black Sea and its strategic importance is bigger than ever, more important than it was at the times of ancient Greek metropolises or Roman Empire dominated Europe. From a *sea of trade* and *trade routes* it became a sea of strategic position and energetic transit point shaped by the

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needs and demands of contemporary developed societies. Nevertheless, the Black Sea maintained its cultural and social importance too in the frame of Euro-Asian communication and transit routes as a cultural bridge between *several worlds*. From this perspective the duality of roles in the regional history made its existence so important and difficult to manage by the bordering countries and powers. In this complex historical and geopolitical frame, the Black Sea managed to become the space of several geopolitical overlap of ambitions and political clashes over control and management of power in the region. The Caucasian Region became integrated in the foreign policy agenda of the major power brokers in the context of energetic policies related to the Wider Black Sea Region.

After 2007, accession year of Romania and Bulgaria in the European Union, the Wider Black Sea became more important for the continental union not only from the point of view of a border territory but from the point of view of European Security and Neighborhood Policy, where the energetic security component became dominant after Ukraine's actions (2006 and 2009). This rough attempt to use the energy (gas) as political pressure instrument created a dangerous situation for the European Union, and put in place new plans and mechanism for regional policies and revived the geopolitical game in the region. On the other hand, the rise of Vladimir Putin as the new leader of the Russian Federation (2000) and the drafting of the *Putin Plan/Doctrine* was the first step in the medication of an *old wound* and the starting point for creating a remedy for the "greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century", the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The new direction dictated by the Kremlin is structured on the basis of a regional economical union between former soviet republics, which core mechanism and power base would be the energy policy and the economic growth based on the *petrodollar philosophy*.¹

This new equation of regional power struggle between the west and the east and the two entities (European Union and Russian Federation) must consider and adapt their strategies to other actors of second rank or international non regional players whose presence and interests are more or less important in the geopolitical structure of the Black Sea region and its wider area. For the first instance Turkey and its geopolitical importance cannot and must not be underestimated or ignored, because its presence in the regional power game is not only the key for several geopolitical problems but it represents solutions for current issues of the international community. On the other hand, Turkey and its almost 80 million inhabitants (Muslim or not) represented an important economical and demographic factor in the region from the early centuries of the Ottoman Empire to contemporary period of cold war and post cold war decades when Ankara became the new ally of its old enemy. The *natural bound*² between Turkey and Europe is more real than it seems at the first instance and represents the key for several future

¹ Ibrahim Oweiss's term used for OPEC countries, it can be used in this situation to, regardless of multiple currencies. The only difference may be that in the case of Russia this policy it can be a successful one.

² One example of this geographical and symbolist bound could be the city of Tarsus, former capital of Roman Cilicia province (Turkey) birthplace of Saint Paul the apostle, and the meeting place of Marc Anthony and Cleopatra during the campaign against Julius Cesar.

European projects in the region, but the religious and social differences may cloud the judgment regarding this common future in the eyes of several political leaders. It is possible that Turkey may never be accepted as full member of the European Union, but the necessity of a clear strategic treaty is in the best interest of both sides that are competing in the wider Black Sea geopolitical game.

The situation of Ukraine, former soviet republic and main responsible for the 2006-2009 European gas crises, is uncertain from several points of view. Its pro European regime was replaced by a more moderate and pro Russian leadership which managed to promote a new *Modus Vivendi* with the Kremlin, creating disarray among the European nations. The European Foreign and Security Policy was put on full alert and the search for options in the energy supply field managed to define the new agenda of the Union, at least for the next 10 years. On the other hand, Kiev's foreign policy shift was not a total surprise, and the *détente* with Russia was predictable and a possible European integration represented an option for only half of the country and for a minority of the politicians. Ukraine's effort to collaborate with the European Union in the light of a possible integration was only a temporary path for Kiev, which was blocked by the rebirth of Russian geopolitical ambitions and the EU last enlargements fiasco.

At the moment of Vilnius summit in November 2013, the gap between the EU and pro-Russian regime of Ukraine became clear and visible for all the international community. The carrot offered by Moscow to Kiev was not only tempting from energetic and international security, it was an answer for the EU's attempt to fulfill its aim of ring of friends and influence in the former *soviet empire*. It was clear that not all the Ukrainians filed the same way toward the western political order, mainly because of the close relations with Moscow and its opposition was more dangerous than anything in the public's eye. Pro-Europe or anti-Europe here or there we must acknowledge the fact that Ukraine and its people are more close to the Russian Federation idea of regional development and internal political order than to the European political order promoted by the Union.

Despite old historical grudges and mass murders in the last century interwar decades the soviet regime managed to split the country on ethnic bases more than we believe or want to believe. It is clear for the eye whom wants to see that Moscow will not want, and Kiev will not be able, to broke this vicious tie in the current territorial formula and with the maintaining the territorial status quo of the region. By now it is clear that the Russian Federation is ready to play a dangerous game in the region, based on the old principle promoted from the early years of the Russian Empire that *might is right*. The 2014 spring events in Kiev and the Russian intervention in Crimea was not only a grave interference in internal politics of a struggling country, but represented a dangerous precedent for the international juridical regime. By ignoring the 1994 Budapest treaty and international conventions, Moscow managed to create not only a hazardous situation in the region but opened a dangerous door for the future of international system and created a precedent for the separatist Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova.



In this light the Ukrainian factor of the Black Sea geopolitical equation must be followed from the perspective of Russian actions and its foreign policy plans, nevertheless it is clear now that President Putin is using its momentum to achieve what President Yeltsin lost in the previous years: greater power status (with small economical output, mainly based on energy export), regional control over former soviet republic and a place at the table of global decisions. On the other hand it is not clear that this Khrushchev type of *shoe diplomacy* will work for the contemporary world, where the interdependence of many dimension of daily life is not susceptible to instability.

In the light of 2014 spring events, the future of the Caucasian region become more interesting than it was in the last 20 years. After the Five day War of 2008 and the aggression over Georgian territories, the stability of the region was put under pressure Tbilisi became a target of Russian intervention based on claims over separatist regions of Ossetia and Abkhazia, and managed to escape from a full scaled occupation thanks to Moscow's good will and mercy.

On the other hand, the other two Caucasian republics - Armenia and Azerbaijan- are creating for themselves a dangerous situation not only from the perspective of the Nagorno-Karabakh region but from the point of view of future development which is strictly related to their loyalty to Moscow, nevertheless this relation isolate them in the eye of their neighbors and western countries. For these republics the luxury of independence from Russia is not an option but the way that their approach the collaboration with Moscow represents the key of their survival and welfare in the coming decades.

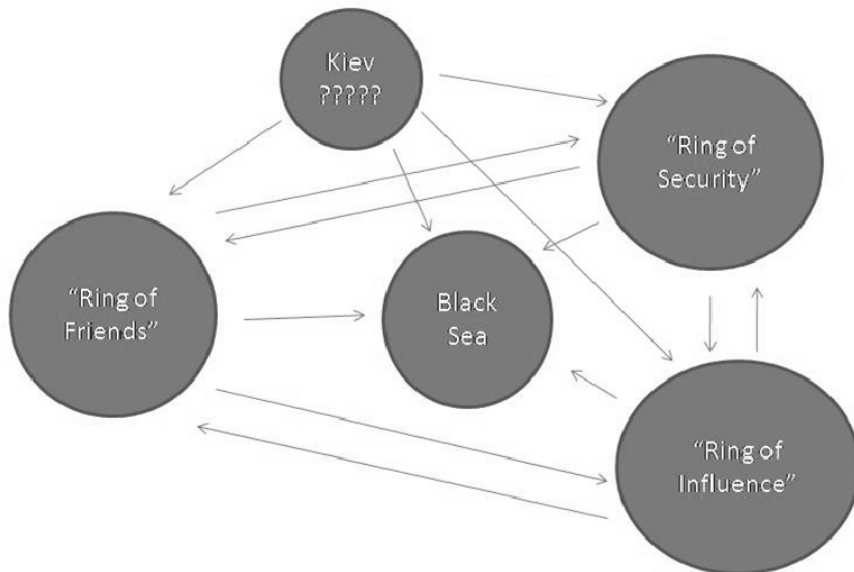
1. Geopolitical overlap and clash: “the War of Rings”

By 2012 the Black Sea and the Caucasian Region re-entered in the Eurasian geopolitical game, the old *heartland* where the major actors- Russian Federation, European Union, Turkey, United States and NATO- became a vital point not only from military perspective but from economical and energetic too. It is not clear that the current contexts is shaped by the military needs or by economic needs or both of them at the same time, or the major actors are seeing the importance of the Black Sea in the same way. In this geopolitical convergence the international player's ambitions and projects for the region created a multi –polar overlap and sometimes a clash at geopolitical level. This type of overlap and clash was never so intense in the region, where generally one power (“Greece” and Roman Empire in the antiquity, Byzantine empire and the Soviet Union in modern times) or maximum two powers (Russian and Ottoman empire) played the geopolitical game with full speed and capacity with the aid of extra regional states (United Kingdom, France, Kingdom of Sardinia etc).

Today the Russian Federation's *ring of security*, European Union's *ring of friends*, Turkey's *ring of influence* and Ukraine's uncertain position are shaping the new geopolitical map of the region where the external actors like the United States, Egypt, and NATO are involved at several levels and interest domains.

In the eye of the Russian Federation, the Black Sea and Caucasian Regions are vital borderland of the former empire and current federation, which under the Putin Doctrine must be an active part of the consolidation and reconstruction of the former soviet state under and around Russia. In this context, the steps of Kremlin can be understood more clearly and the aggressiveness of the undertaken actions represents most likely a soft reaction to the current situations in the Wider Black Sea than a classical Russian hard power show off.

Figure 1. “War of Rings”



Source: own representation

The short and targeted Georgian intervention (war) in 2008 in support of Abkhazia and South Ossetia³ independence movement was in the light of the current doctrine a two direction message to the region and to the international community, and sent out a signal regarding Moscow’s intentions over the Black Sea-Caspian region. On the other hand the reconstruction of former influence sphere (*ring of security* in the context of historic evolution of the Russian state) and the creation of a buffer zone between the center and neighborhoods are old politics of tsars and Russian leaders, and the curse of the Russian security policy over centuries. In this frame of action the Caucasian states are representing a strategic point for the Kremlin’s foreign policy vision.

³ The action was considered as a provocation by many of the countries and the independence is recognized still by a small number of states: Russia (de facto), Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, and other rough entities like Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh.



The Russian insecurity issue can be understood and in some way legitimate, because we must not forget that today the Russian Federation is practically surrounded by strong competitors like: China (nuclear power) in the east; India, Pakistan (both nuclear powers), Turkey and Iran from the south; European Union from the west and there is the two US strongpoint in Afghanistan and Iraq which cause real threats to Russian security ring. Alexandr Dugin's (*The Principles of Geopolitics. The Geopolitical Future of Russia 1997*) or Genady Zuganov's (*Beyond the Horizon, 1995* and *The Geography of Victory*) radical views are not so radical today and their influence over geopolitical thinking in Russia are signals not only for further development in the strategy of Moscow, but they represent a guaranty that the "convergence" with China, theorized by Brzezinski is far from reality.

In the light of the geopolitical development in the region, the Russian fear and need for control over the Wider Black Sea is understandable but not necessary acceptable or fair from other point of view. By securing the transit right and controlling the natural resources in the region, Russia puts all his hope for development and power reconstruction in the basket of the energy security and supply of peripheral regions with these resources, neglecting again the use of public diplomacy's power in the region of the Black Sea. On the other hand, the lack of imagination (use of modern diplomatic instruments) in the implementation and pacification of Russian foreign policy creates a *déjà vu* in the eye of the European countries and Black Sea region states. The South stream project and the effort to exclude Eastern European countries from the pipeline route raise suspicions not only in the rank of former communist states and in the mind of European leaders. These actions also implemented the idea of a new type of approach to Moscow and to the security policy of the European Union at several high level meetings. By all means the attempt to divide the European Union during the 2006 and 2008 gas crisis was at the time a brilliant move of the Russian foreign policy, but for the middle and long term it created a backlash which damaged the relations and trust between Moscow and other western capitals. Like the 1999 Pristine airport *incident*⁴, where the action meant to be a show of force and statement of power in the region and in the eye of the international community but the effect was the same, wakening of distrust and insecurity toward Russian foreign policy and its intentions.

These actions made clear that the Russia Federation can be considered a strategic partner up to a certain level, and that the building of North stream pipeline does not represent guaranties of any kind. For this reason the Black Sea region as alternative resource route was raised as the first point in the new European energetic policy direction, in the detriment of Russian solution. The South Stream project may be over evaluated from the standing point of available resources but its security is more stable than in case of South Stream project, where the route may be secure but the source can be considered uncertain. The general argument of demand and offer relation may not be applied in the case of Moscow, because there

⁴ On the night of June 12, 1999, Russian paratrooper forces occupied the airport creating a brief stand of situation between NATO and Moscow.

is no guarantee that Russia at a certain point in the future will not use or threaten to use the card of energy in the relation with the European Union.

In opposition with the Russian Federation, the European Union consolidated its position and power on the stage of the international relations by using smart development and economical instrument to create its base of power. The European integration and expansion reached its highpoint in 2007 and with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria ended almost a half of century of struggle for unity under one banner and political structure. But the European Union - as other states - neglected for a long time the Black Sea region and the eastern border of the future union of 27, and developed policies and plans for middle or long terms, taking out of geopolitical context the Russian Federation and its possible *rebirth*. The idea of shielding European borders with a *ring of friends* is probably the most comprehensive instrument of security, but the recent development managed to undermine this effort and move Ukraine –and probably the Moldova Republic in the future – out of Europe’s reach and out from the reach of the instruments promoted by the European Neighborhood Policy. This mistake is explicable by the fact that the EU has focused only around the German view of *Ostpolitik*, never taking in consideration the fact that one day the borders of the union will reach their limits and in that situation a new *entrenchment* politics would be needed for the consolidation of the expanded union.

On the other hand, the fast development of Russian internal affairs (the almost melodramatic change of power between Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin) or that the speedy recovery under Putin’s rule would affect the equation of geopolitical balance or imbalance in the Black Sea region was practically impossible to predict at the beginning of the 21th century. By losing the political battle in the east the European Union primary direction and main geopolitical game shifted into the region of the Black Sea, where the convergence of energy policies and military issues created a high ball situation for the Union and for its closest ally, the USA. Who wishes to influence the *wider Black Sea* region became a target under the Bush administration and in the context of the “war on terrorism” when a secure corridor between Europe and war theaters can be achieved more easily.

On the other hand, the control of the Black Sea region represents the key for the European energy supply, which can guarantee not only the independence from Russian resources but from possible energetic blackmail too. This transit corridor would connect not only the Caspian states to Europe, but it will offer a secure transit route from suppliers like Iraq and Iran. In this context the *Nabucco “idea”* (as generic project or idea not the actual plan) with minor adjustments can represents the alternative for Europe and a nightmare for Russian Federation who would lose some influence in the energy supplying field. One other question is related to the capacity of supplying the flow of resources through the pipeline: in the light of recent development around the Caspian Sea gas reserve reevaluation and possible supplying quantities showed that this natural gas exploitation was clearly over estimated by both sides.

From this point of view the European energy security plan is not a bulletproof plan but it can offer an acceptable comfort for some periods in the near future. This doesn’t mean that the current European energy policy should not be



reviewed as soon as possible and adapted to new perspectives and to an approach to the African energy resources. From the energy policy standing point, the European Union cannot afford to lose the Black Sea geopolitical battle and cannot disregard the other options if it wants an efficient *ring of friend* strategy for the future.

Between the two northern powers stands Turkey with his constructive attitude and several century old habit of having a *ring of influence* around the Anatolian peninsula. Like a wise effendi he waits and participates with caution at the geopolitical game of the Black Sea and its wider region. Turkey knows that its geostrategic position is valuable not only for the European Union but for the United States and for NATO too, and that the question regarding the new energy corridor doesn't gravitate around the *if* but rather around the *when*. The contemporary history and its events defined the way of political thinking in Turkey, although it lost the majority of territorial conquests of the Ottoman Empire; with its 70 million inhabitants and a well-trained army, it represents today a demographic, cultural and economical power in the region which cannot be disregarded when we talk about the Black Sea and the geopolitics of the region. Pan-Turkism may not be the main pillar of Turkey's political philosophy anymore, but the relation with neighbors is defined at some extent by it in a way that creates a cross-border identity of all Turks from the region and drives several foreign policy decisions in the direction of this idea.

Although Ankara's geopolitical aspiration enters in conflict with Russia, a conflict based on the historic reality and ties between Turkey and several Caucasian states and the presence of several military facilities of the Russian Federation in the proximity of the northern borders of the country. The different views of the Azerbaijan-Armenian problem from the Turkish capital and from Moscow are creating tensions at local level and forces Ankara to play the regional stability card from perspective of minorities. The Caspian Sea pipeline projects and their success depend not only on Turkey's attitude toward the initiative, but on the security of the two Caucasian republics used as transit regions for the pipelines. From our standing point the competition over the Caspian Sea pipeline projects is more a superficial issue on the regional agenda than a real problem for Turkey.

2. Ukraine. The key of regional power games

The great unknown in the geopolitical development of the Black Sea is represented by Ukraine and its dual behavior, one that is searching the path to Europe and the other one wants to return to the old center of power. Recent development in the domestic politics of the country shows that Kiev is turning slowly to the direction of Moscow, adopting a neutral stance toward the European Union and the collaboration with its western neighbors. On the other hand, the internal political fight between pro Europeans and pro Russian factions managed to divide the society and the country in a way that can jeopardize the democratic structure of the country. This dual behavior is defined by the country geographical position and mainly by the new direction adopted by former President Viktor Yanukovich who maintained the

strategic collaboration with NATO but signed a treaty with Russia. Therefore, Kiev received a generous multiyear discounted gas contract in exchange for new lease period (until 2042) of naval bases in the Crimea by the Russian Federation.

Through this, Ukraine assured a clear presence of the federation's navy in the Black Sea, and managed to warm up the relations with Moscow, this deal became void and null in the spring of 2014, when the Russian Federation (in an unprecedented step) managed to occupy the Crimean Peninsula in not more than a week, making a de facto permanent military presence in the region. This step of Russia can be analyzed as one normal action in the foreign policy effort to create a ring of security around itself, but in the light of the new aircraft carrier policy of the Russian Navy this step may be regarded as a warning for the Black Sea regions geopolitics. In this context the actions of Kiev are watched with more attention not only by the European Union or NATO, but by other Asian states, which were left speechless by President Putin's quick action and had no reaction or could not react in front of these events. It is clear that the Ukrainian "conflict" in the heartland it's planed to the next step in de redefinition of regional influence and the drawing of border between the two Eurasian powers.

The unclear pillar of the issue is the limit and border which will satisfy Moscow and the new Russian geopolitical plan, because in case of other aggression like the Crimea peninsula annexation the danger of another *Munich phenomenon* will represent a permanent danger in the region and at the border of the Russian Federation. Putting aside the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the Ukrainian opposition's action from the fall of 2013 to the spring of 2014 and the lobby around Julia Timoshenko case, the government needs to stabilize itself and create a strong political structure in Kiev which commitment toward a neutral stance between the east and west would be a short term solution for the crisis.

On the long term, the issue of Ukraine and the Black Sea region lies in the hand of the western chancelleries and in their reaction toward Russian attempts of expansion in the border region of Europe. The idea of ring of friend or ring of security are overlapping each other and it may be impossible for Ukraine to maintain a straight stance toward one of the actors involved, whitout a risk of upsetting the other. But in this equation the real danger is represented by the Russian Federation and its aggressive politics based on the use of armed forces to achieve their foreign policy targets. On the other hand, the critics of the EU could say that Moscow is using the same methods that European states used during the *Arab Spring* when they planed the interventions in North African countries. Maybe the two situations can be compared but it is clear that the EU is more reticent to use the hard power than the Russian Federation, especially in the area targeted by the politics of the *ring of friends*. In this case Moscow's attitude toward its border territories is more like based on the principle of direct domination and no need for negotiation whit opponents. Stalin is dead but his spirit and political domination based on ethnical factors is more present in the Russian political agenda then it was in the last 20 years.

On the other hand it is not clear what will happens with Ukraine if Russia decide to take over the eastern regions, as it was declared by several politicians, non-official channels and mass media. In any case, the Kremlin is taking a big risk at



moral level (legal morality was never an issue for Moscow), because this type of action could have a backlash in the future when territorial guaranties would be vouched by Russia but distrusted by other states. In many dimensions this issue is like the *poison apple of Snow White*, it's wrapped in a tempting package but visible only for the eyes that can or want to see. Many nationalist movements and populist leaders over the Eurasian continent may see in this movement an opportunity to achieve their agendas and to pursuit the ideal of independence from states, without thinking of the consequences.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy suggested in the last weeks that dismantling of Ukraine by giving its territory to several nearby states that had in the past some territorial claims would be an ideal solution for the problem. Yes, Zhirinovskiy may not be one of the official spokesperson for the Russian foreign policy, but his ideas are in concordance with the line promoted by the Kremlin during the last century (or at least in the post Lenin years). But returning to the real issue of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the Ukrainian state, it is clear that the Russian Federation will play the card of victimization and illegality outcry to justify his actions and to maintain the illusion of some legality in the eye of the international community and international laws. On the other hand, there is the public opinion (ex. Romanian public opinion) that considers the Putin administration has the right to do his game in the former soviet region and that NATO and its allies are incapables to make something to stop it. The sad truth is that they have right but not from their simple point of view, mostly because they do not understand the complexity of the issue. NATO cannot and will not start a war or take any aggressive steps toward Russia, because this would mean the starting of a new war. The Kremlin is aware of this and forces the hand of western allies. The argument that the Budapest memorandum is null and void due to the lack of power of former president Yeltsin is based on a false argument, because in 2014 the Tuzla island settlement act signed by the more powerful president Putin was declared null and void to.

This breach of international agreement is more dangerous than ever, and opens the way for an aggressive Russian retaking of former soviet territories and maybe an aggressive building of the Russian Federation idea about the new Eurasian union. This course of action in its roots has nothing dangerous only their breaking ground principles may put up a dangerous situation in the future. Russian imagined economic area cannot be a real match to the European Union and for the United States, because it's main base is the energy policy and the petrodollar politics. Let's assume for a moment that the economic area is created and is fully functional (which in some measure is true at this moment): there is no guarantee that this structure will respect in the future the agreements and treaties signed by its main member or that the Russian Federation will not use the energy blackmail to achieve its targets. From this point of view, the situation in Ukraine may decide the fate of further international policies on the Eurasian continent and it may draw the new border between the west and east.

President Putin is playing his card very aggressively at this moment, because in the long run this could be his countries only choice and he knows that a lost game will affect not only his internal power base but the external prestige to. In this equation, the

role of China or more likely his absence in the great question make interesting the whole Ukrainian crisis. This should not be a surprise to us, because the Chinese foreign policy is marked by a more pragmatic and cynic policy line than in the case of other great powers. The game of Eurasian mammoths is not his concern yet and he is waiting to see the development of Ukraine status and in case of unfavorable outcome to protect and preserve the foreign policy line adopted in the last decade. Moreover the Chinese-Russian energy related ties guides Beijing toward a more neutral stance from several objective reasons and from because China has no clear alternatives as have the European Union or the USA.

Conclusions

It is clear for now that the Black Sea and its wider region have entered in the new geopolitics game of the 21th century and that Mackinder's *heartland* theory did not lose its actuality from the modern geopolitical point. But the reshaping of contemporary needs and issues shifted the essence from the classic view to a new set of rules, where the energy policies took the place of the classical military centered visions, and possible geopolitical framework in the region must be based on the mutual agreement about boundaries and influence spheres. Under the Lisbon treaty the EU has the opportunity to promote its aims in a way that was never at its disposal, where the *legal entity status* of the union with the *President* and *High Representative* can create a real common foreign policy which can shift the balance of power in the Black Sea region in its favor. On the other hand, Putin's Russia had made clear steps to rebuild the former soviet states influence not only in the region but in the world too, for this reason the Black Sea region is considered a strategic one from several point of view.

A geopolitical victory can be used as a launch pad for further actions at border regions and it can be a strong diplomatic advantage in any further negotiation with the EU or Turkey. For this reason, the overlap of geopolitical visions must create equilibrium between Russia and Brussels, a satisfied Europe with a secure corridor and an untarnished Russian reputation can be the key for the stability of the regional and the basis of a much needed strategic collaboration between the two powers. In this puzzle the role of Turkey is mostly clear, only the how represents an issue, whether with or without EU membership Ankara must be involved in the regional decisions as a strategic official partner of the union. From this position Turkey can be used as a bridge to the Middle East or be a contact region between several cultural territories and it can be a first player in the construction of southern component of Europe's ring of friend around the Mediterranean Sea.

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