

CAUCASIAN REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

VOL. 2 (3)

SUMMER 2008

**IDENTITIES, INTERESTS AND
THE RESOLUTION OF THE ABKHAZ CONFLICT**

ONDREJ DITRYCH

NABUCCO PIPELINE AND THE TURKMENISTAN CONUNDRUM

MARCO GIULI

**GEOPOLITICS OF CENTRAL ASIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE
IRANIAN FACTOR**

GULI YULDASHEVA

**A CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE “TURBULENT FRONTIERS”
IN THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA**

KHATCHIK DER GHOUKASSIAN

**THE SHADOW OF PAST RIVALRY: LIMITS OF POST-1999 DYNAMISM
IN GRECO-TURKISH RELATIONS**

EDA KUŞKU

**TURKISH AK PARTY’S CENTRAL ASIA AND CAUCASUS POLICIES:
CRITIQUES AND SUGGESTIONS**

ERTAN EFEGİL

**“SOFT ANNEXATION OF ABKHAZIA IS THE GREATEST LEGACY OF
PUTIN TO HIS SUCCESSOR”**

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS DE WAAL,
INSTITUTE OF WAR & PEACE REPORTING IN LONDON

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:

Nasimi Aghayev, LL.M.Eur.

EDITORIAL BOARD:

Dr. Tracey German (King's College London, United Kingdom)

Dr. Andrew Liaropoulos (Institute for European and American Studies, Greece)

Dr. Martin Malek (National Defence Academy, Austria)

Dr. Robin van der Hout (Europa-Institute, University of Saarland, Germany)

Dr. Jason Strakes (Analyst, Research Reachback Center East, United States)

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD:

Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey

Prof. Dr. Hans-Georg Heinrich, University of Vienna, Austria

Prof. Edmund Herzig, Oxford University, UK

Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Kipke, University of Siegen, Germany

Prof. Dr. Robert Legvold, Columbia University, USA

Prof. Dr. Werner Münch, former Prime Minister of Saxony-Anhalt, former Member of the European Parliament, Germany

Prof. Dr. Elkhan Nuriyev, Head of the Centre for Strategic Studies under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Dr. Roy Allison, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

Dr. Michael Emerson, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, Belgium

Dr. Abbas Maleki, Former Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran. Currently, Director of International Institute for Caspian Studies and Chairman of Sharif Research Centre on Public Policy, Tehran, Iran

MANAGING DIRECTOR:

Farhad K. Rustamov

The **Caucasian Review of International Affairs** (CRIA) is a quarterly peer-reviewed free, non-profit and online academic journal registered in Germany. The Review is committed to promote a better understanding of the regional affairs by providing relevant background information and analysis, as far as the Caucasus in general, and the South Caucasus in particular are concerned. The CRIA also welcomes lucid, well-documented papers on all aspects of international affairs, from all political viewpoints. All manuscripts, general correspondence and matters concerning the functioning of CRIA should be addressed to:

Editor-in-Chief

Nasimi Aghayev

E-mail: contact@cria-online.org

CRIA is indexed in the following research databases: Directory of Open Access Journals, World Affairs Online, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Osteuropa, Global Development Network, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek, International Relations and Security Network, Electronic Library Information Navigator – ELIN@NIAS, Genamics JournalSeek, Social Sciences Eastern Europe.

CRIA is also listed in the electronic scholarly journals catalogues of the universities such as Harvard University, Princeton University, Stanford University, Columbia University, Johns Hopkins University, George Mason University, George Washington University, University of California Berkeley, University of Chicago, University of Toronto, McGill University, Humboldt University of Berlin, Hamburg University, University of Munich, etc.

Editorial Assistants: Alexander Jackson, Bahar Baser, Jan Künzl, Elchin Mammadov

Contacts:

Eppsteiner Str 2,
60323 Frankfurt am Main, Germany
Tel: +49 69 138 76 684
E-mail: contact@cria-online.org
Web: www.cria-online.org

ISSN: 1865–6773

© **CRIA** – All rights reserved. Copyright belongs to the CRIA, and written permission to reprint or republish in any form must be sought from the Editor-in-Chief. Articles published in CRIA do not necessarily represent the views of the Editors.

VOL. 2 (3) – SUMMER 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

RESEARCH PAPERS

Identities, Interests and the Resolution of the Abkhaz Conflict (pp. 112-123)

by Ondrej Ditrych

Nabucco Pipeline and the Turkmenistan Conundrum (pp. 124-132)

by Marco Giuli

Geopolitics of Central Asia in the Context of the Iranian Factor (pp. 133-145)

by Guli Yuldasheva

Instability in the New Imperial Periphery: A Conceptual Perspective of the “Turbulent Frontiers” in the Caucasus and Central Asia (pp. 146-155)

by Khatchik Der Ghoukassian

The Shadow of Past Rivalry: Limits of Post-1999 Dynamism in Greco-Turkish Relations (pp. 156-165)

by Eda Kuşku

COMMENT

Turkish AK Party’s Central Asia and Caucasus Policies: Critiques and Suggestions (pp. 166-172)

by Ertan Efeğil

INTERVIEW

“Soft annexation of Abkhazia is the greatest legacy of Putin to his successor”
(pp. 173-177)

Interview with Thomas de Waal, Institute of War & Peace Reporting in London

IDENTITIES, INTERESTS AND THE RESOLUTION OF THE ABKHAZ CONFLICT

Ondrej Ditrych *

Abstract

The recent crisis in Abkhazia reveals a fundamental qualitative change in the conflict in which the balance among three main actors is shifting, and increasingly the conflict plays a more important role in the triangular relations between Georgia, Russia and the West. The search for a new equilibrium in the conflict, one that would be an optimal outcome for the actors involved, will require rethinking the mutually constitutive roles (identities) and interests they want to assume with respect to the conflict and the entire South Caucasus. This is argued to be a matter of the 'first order' with respect to conflict resolution in Abkhazia, with confidence-building measures and political status questions representing only a 'second order'. For Tbilisi and Sukhumi, such a process may involve resigning the discourse of sovereignty; for Russia, pondering the costs and benefits of the current 'hard power' approach; and for Western actors, delimiting their interests towards the region and recognizing the power they possess vis-a-vis Russia's current weakness.

Keywords: *Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia, identity, interests, narratives.*

Introduction

It seems to have become a commonplace in Western scholarship to start any study about the conflicts in the North and South Caucasus with the mythopoetical narrative of the dissolution of the USSR, accompanied by the emergence of ethnic nationalism founded on ancient hatreds, Soviet policy of *nacionalnost*, and/or economic and political grievances imposed by the dominant groups. As the linear antecedents in the narrative, they are inevitably rendered as causes of the consequent ethnopolitical conflicts, or its most contemporary manifestation in the *long durée* of struggle for the survival of minorities. As the narrative unreels, they are then succeeded by an essentially sanitized ("scientific") account of the ensuing violence citing statistics of dead, dispossessed and displaced, and the subsequent – in the case of South Caucasus – "freezing" of the conflicts, the development of contested state sovereignty due to the presence of three quasistates,

* **Ondrej Ditrych** is a Ph.D. candidate in international relations at Institute of Political Studies at Charles University in Prague. This article was written during his Fulbright research fellowship at Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University.

and resulting instability fomented by the malignant Kremlin. The ancient history of the region underlining its unique position between the East and the West (asserting its geopolitical importance), records of shifting political allegiances to ephemeral local political units (underlining the ancient character of the indigenous ethnic rivalry), and the infamous list of foreign *conquistadors* including Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Tatars, Persians, and finally Russians (again, emphasizing the region's importance, and eternalizing the great power struggle over the precious piece of geopolitical chessboard) is perhaps mentioned too.

The point is not that these myths are *false*. Myths, at least as conceived by Poststructuralist theory, escape the criterion of truth as the correspondence to reality while bearing immense importance for producing and reproducing identity, collective psychological (pathological, as may be) states, and dominant theoretical paradigms (e.g. Realism in IR Theory). Instead of perhaps a more typical introduction, the aim of the previous lines is to point to the serialized and standardized character of many academic and journalistic narratives related to the conflict in the South Caucasus, including that of Abkhazia,¹ which is the proper subject of this article, and suggest that by – consciously or inadvertently – reifying a certain version of the past and thus producing and reproducing structures of knowledge, alternatives for the present and the future may be severely limited.

More specifically, the limits contained in the structural narratives of ethnic security dilemmas, associated with the imperial decay,² occurrence of violence in the conditions of anarchy,³ or in the grand narratives of geopolitical conflict over the Caucasus⁴ – all reminiscent of the eternal and unchangeable laws of history – reduce human (individual and collective) agency to the role of mere spectator to historical processes that transcend it. Whereas the conflicts may have arisen precisely as a result of the action of an emerging or incumbent political elite, one reflecting constraining structural conditions and existing ethnosymbolic narratives, yet also one acting freely and rationally to gain, sustain and expand political power through mass mobilization against the external enemy by employing discourses of danger and Utopian "normal states" (e.g. of independence in quasistates, "restored sovereignty over the occupied territory" for the newly

¹ Dissenting narratives do exist, disseminated e.g. by prof. George Hewitt. His plain bias towards the Abkhaz side of the conflict, of whose language he is an imminent Western scholar – for example, he described the situation before the outbreak of the war in the early 1990s in the following emotive terms: "Yet another sacrifice on the depressing altar known as the territorial integrity of states was in line for the sacrificial dagger" (B.G. Hewitt, „Abkhazia: A Problem of Identity and Ownership,“ in John F.R. Wright et al., Eds., „Transcaucasian Boundaries“, London: UCL Press, 1996, p. 216) – is however likely attributable to what Valey Tishkov (paraphrasing Fredrik Barth) called the "problem of sympathetic anthropology" (Tishkov, Valery, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Former USSR: The Use and Misuse of Typologies and Data," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 36, no. 5, Sept. 1999, pp. 571-591). For a recent article by Hewitt on political issues in Abkhazia, see "Abkhazia: Land in Limbo," *Opendemocracy.net*, 10 Sept. 2006, http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-caucasus/abkhazia_future_3983.jsp.

² Posen, Barry, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 27-47 (1993).

³ Waltz, Kenneth, „Theory of International Politics“, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979, p. 102; or in more recent formulation, Mearsheimer, John, „The Tragedy of Great Power Politics“, New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.

⁴ E.g. in one of the most comprehensive and meticulous recent Western studies on the subject, Cornell, Svante, „Small Nations and Great Powers“, London, 2003.

independent republics, and erstwhile political influence in the Caucasus for Russia) that serve to discipline the populaces.⁵

This article aims at a critical analysis of the recent political development related, yet not spatially delimited to, Abkhazia. This development may be termed "escalation" of the conflict with Georgia, but for reasons detailed below I will rather speak of "crisis". Therefore, I intend not to provide the archaeology of the present myths suggested and criticized above; neither do I, however, intend to harness and present new facts about the conflict and the present situation on which considerable amount of ink has been spilled. Rather, this article aims to provide a more "abstract" critical perspective in reflecting the recent events and thus aspire at contributing to the current debate on the issue.

The Present Crisis: Overview

A cursory review of the events that caused an intensification of hostile relations between the major actors involved in the Abkhaz conflict is presented prior to their analysis. The key events in this development have been the declaration of independence by Kosovo on February 17, 2008 and its international ramifications, Russia's decision to suspend sanctions against the Abkhaz Republic⁶ imposed by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the establishment of formal relations between Russia and the Abkhaz 'Republic', reinforcements of the formally CIS peacekeeping mission in Abkhazia, and escalation of the military tension between the Abkhaz 'Republic' and Georgia.

Russia declared not to abide by the sanctions imposed on Sukhumi in 1996 by CIS Heads of State,⁷ which forbid economic and military cooperation and establishment of formal relations with the *de facto* government, on March 6, following the Russia's presidential election in which Dmitri Medvedev received ca. 90% of votes by participating citizens of the separatist republics with Russian passports.⁸ (The decision, which to great extent represented only a formal confirmation of the *status quo*, paralleled – and possibly halted – Tbilisi's overtures to ease the trade blockade of Abkhazia.) The next day, both *de facto* governments (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) pleaded to the Russian Duma to recognize their independence in view of the "Kosovo precedent".⁹

⁵ Campbell, David, „Writing Security“, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999; Constantinou, Costas, „States of Political Discourse“ in: „Words, Regimes, Seditions“, London, 2004

⁶ Referring to "Abkhaz Republic" in this article is not intended to implicitly acknowledge legitimacy of the separatist *de facto* government. Also, a distinction is maintained between Abkhaz Republic (*de facto* administration of the territory of the former Abkhaz SSR with the exception of Upper Kodori) and Abkhazia as a strictly geographical referent.

⁷ The *CIS Head of State Declaration* (19 Jan. 1996) cited "Abkhazia's destructive behavior" as the reason for imposing the sanctions, mainly as related to the (then) absence of conditions for the return of Mingrelian IDPs. Cf. <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17293>.

⁸ An estimated 80% Abkhaz citizens hold also Russian passports, as compared to 85-90% South Ossetians.

⁹ The Duma then recommended to the Russian government to ensure protection of Russian citizens inhabiting the separatist territories, including by reinforcement of the peacekeeping contingents. It also proposed opening

During NATO's Bucharest summit on April 2-4, Ukraine and Georgia were not, as had been expected for some time due to Russian pressure and consequent reluctance of some member states, awarded Membership Action Plans (MAPs). Instead, the final declaration read that the two countries, now enjoying Intensified Dialogue with NATO, "will [eventually] become members."¹⁰ While Georgia's government tried to recast the failure into a diplomatic victory, it was the Kremlin, who warned that the membership for the two countries could "jeopardise European security" (Medvedev) and "threaten democracy" (Putin)¹¹, that could be content with the lack of NATO consensus.¹²

Prior to the summit, Mikheil Saakashvili's government presented a peace proposal to the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities (who refused its delivery from the hands of UNOMIG (the United Nations Mission in Georgia), denouncing it as a shallow rhetoric), including articles on broad autonomy, free economic zones, representation for the republic at governmental level, veto power of the autonomous government on key issues related to the autonomy, and the position of the Vice-President to be established and held by an ethnic Abkhaz.¹³ The two parties later exchanged notes on the proposal; on May 12, Georgia's Ambassador to the UN (and former chief negotiator with Abkhazia) Irakli Alasania visited Sukhumi; and finally, news of the talks between Abkhazia and Georgia in Sweden on June 15-17, 2008 were announced by EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana.¹⁴ However, there was a fundamental incompatibility on which confidence building measures (CBMs) were obtained. Georgia focused mainly on the return of IDPs, while Abkhazia stressed (international) security guarantees, demilitarization of the Kodori Gorge, and the establishment of a sea and train connection with Turkey. Moreover, the relations between Georgia and Abkhazia/Russia had undergone a severe crisis by that time.¹⁵

The UN Secretary General report presented to the UN Security Council before the semi-annual resolution on the status of the conflict in Abkhazia and extension of the UNOMIG monitoring

representations with the *de facto* governments to strengthen economic relations (*RIA Novosti*, 21 March 2008). As the account of following events shows, the Kremlin followed recommendations of this non-binding resolution very closely.

¹⁰ „Bucharest Summit Declaration“, 3 Apr. 2008, http://www.summitbucharest.ro/en/doc_201.html. The summit of NATO Foreign Ministers to be held in December was empowered to decide on awarding the MAPs.

¹¹ „Putin in NATO Summit Spotlight“, BBC News, 2 Apr. 2008.

¹² It is difficult to comprehend how could the declaration be interpreted by International Crisis Group as "arguably a stronger political message than inclusion in MAP would have been." „Georgia and Russia: Clashing over Abkhazia“, Europe Report No. 193, Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2008, pp. 14-15.

¹³ The proposal reflected to a considerable degree the criteria of consociational democracy set by Arend Lijphart – segmental autonomy, segmental veto power, executive coalition on the state level and proportional representation in the state institutions. See Lijphart, Arend, „Democracy in Plural Societies“, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977.

¹⁴ *Eastweek*, no. 131, 25 June 2008.

¹⁵ In retaliation to what it interpreted as hostile Russia's moves, Georgia *inter alia* suspended bilateral talks about Russia's WTO membership. Yet it is worth mentioning that amidst the crisis in Abkhazia, both countries resumed air and sea transport service between the both countries on March 25, 2008 (after a 1 ½ year break enforced by Russia following an "espionage affair" of her diplomats stationed in Tbilisi).

mission status at the beginning of April still evaluated the situation as "generally calm."¹⁶ Yet by the middle of the month, it sharply deteriorated after Russia's decision to establish legal relations with Abkhazian authorities through Russia's government representation in Sukhumi,¹⁷ a decision criticized by the U.S., NATO and European Union (EU).

Furthermore, it was immediately followed by Abkhazia's accusations of Georgia's military manoeuvres along the ceasefire line and the destruction of a Georgian aerial surveillance vehicle flying over Abkhazia (April 20, 2008). While the Abkhazia initially claimed that it was shot down by its 9K37-Buk missile (or alternatively, an armed version of its L-39 Albatros) – and that in fact it was already a second eliminated vehicle of the kind (it would later claim at least six others) – the incident caused a diplomatic confrontation between Georgia and Russia, as the former released video footage and radar records allegedly confirming that the vehicle was destroyed by a MiG-29 fighter which took off from the Gudauta base in Abkhazia, formally stationed by the CIS peacekeeping force, and following the incident retired to Russia. This was later confirmed by a UNOMIG report that however stated that Georgian surveillance flights constituted "military activities" which contradicted the Moscow Agreement (1994) and may have been interpreted by the other party as a prelude to invasion.¹⁸ Russia denied any involvement, and interestingly, Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin suggested that the incident could have been staged by Tbilisi in cooperation with a NATO member in possession of MiG-29s, which pointed in the direction of either Lithuania or Poland, the most vocal critics of recent Russian policies in the South Caucasus and elsewhere.¹⁹

On April 29, Moscow reported it was enforcing the peacekeeping regiment in Abkhazia – citing the deployment of 1,500 Georgian army troops in Kodori (not confirmed by UNOMIG report released on May 8, 2008)²⁰ in preparation of an armed offensive – again instigating international criticism for increasing tension in the conflict zone. The Russian government denied the claims and maintained that the number of troops was still below the CIS agreed levels. It was later detailed that 400 paratroopers, 30 BMD-2 armed vehicles deployable from air, aerial defense systems and artillery units were included in the transfer, and among the units were possibly Russian special forces composed of Chechen troops (the Chechen "Abkhaz Battalion", led by the Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, is remembered among Georgians for its brutality unleashed against the Mingrelian civilian population, which added symbolic power to the news). President Saakashvili related this to Russian efforts to "change the world order" and the conquest of the then independent Georgia by the Bolshevik Russia in 1921, "followed by the invasion of Poland,

¹⁶ S/2008/219, 2 Apr. 2008, retrieved from <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/sgrep08.htm>

¹⁷ The representation (identical to one opened in Tskhinvali) also started providing consular services. The decision took the form of Vladimir Putin's executive decree, which moreover commanded the government to compile a list of legal documents issued by Abkhazia that Russia would consider valid. Furthermore, legal persons registered with the de facto governments in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali would now be recognized as such also in Russian Federation.

¹⁸ *Report of UNOMIG on the Incident of 20 April*, www.unomig.org/data/other/080526_unomig_report.pdf.

¹⁹ Quoted by Lenta.ru, 30 Apr. 2008.

²⁰ Cf. http://unomig.org/data/file/979/PR_2008_90_eng.pdf. According to ICG, Senaki base in Samegrelo, as well as the units in Kodori, were put on a combat alert. *Georgia and Russia*, op.cit. 5.

occupation of the Baltic countries and the bloody war in Finland."²¹ As the tension mounted and Russian and Abkhaz media speculated about the possibility of Georgia's offensive, Abkhazia proposed to Moscow that it would host Russian troops in exchange for security guarantees (an unidentified number of Russia's "advisers" that are not elements of the CIS operation already operate in Abkhazia).²²

On May 15, 2008, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution (although a great majority of the member states abstained), proposed by Georgia, that recognized the right of Mingrelian IDPs to return to Abkhazia and condemned the acquisition of property in Abkhazia by foreign (implicitly Russian) persons.²³ The next day, Georgia's forces detained several Russian peacekeepers in the border town of Zugdidi, producing a fierce response from Russia. Georgia also protested against the deployment of unarmed Russian Railway Troops from Russia (reported by Russian Ministry of Defense on May 31, 2008) which the latter claimed to be a humanitarian enterprise to rebuild Abkhaz infrastructure destroyed in the 1990s,²⁴ while the former interpreted it as a reinforcement of the opposing party and preparation for an armed invasion; the presence of units in Abkhazia (and not a formal part of the CIS peacekeeping contingent) was criticized by NATO Secretary General as an infringement upon Georgia's sovereignty.²⁵

In June, the tension among the political representatives decreased somewhat; however often manipulative broadcasting spreading fear of the enemy's invasion (Abkhazia) or Russia's annexation of Abkhazia (Georgia) continued. Interestingly, *Kommersant* reported on June 27, 2008 that a deal was a matter of negotiations between Russia and Georgia under whose provisions Tbilisi's sovereignty would be restored in the whole of Abkhazia, while the region would be divided into "spheres of influence". Both parties immediately refused to have engaged in discussing such a scenario. The hostile rhetoric finally intensified at the end of the month after a series of four explosions in Sukhumi and Gagra on June 29-30, 2008 as Abkhazia blamed the "terrorist acts" on Tbilisi, allegedly trying to sabotage the local tourist industry.²⁶ In response, it restricted the movement of persons across the Inguri river between Gali and Samegrelo. (Georgia's government suggested, in turn, that the explosions were the result of a power struggle amongst Abkhaz organized crime structures.²⁷)

²¹ President Saakashvili's speech at a meeting with EU Foreign Ministers in Tbilisi, 13 May 2008. Retrieved from UNOMIG <http://unomig.org/media/headlines/?id=10605&y=2008&m=05&d=13>.

²² Civil.ge, 6 May 2008.

²³ For a press statement outlining the preceding debate see <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2008/ga10708.doc.htm>.

²⁴ Specifically, this included the railroad track between Sukhumi and Ochamchire, and two bridges across Mokva and Kodori rivers. See *Eastweek*, no. 128, 4 June 2008.

²⁵ See Press Release 2008(076), 3 June 2008, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-076e.html>.

²⁶ Kavkaz-uzel.ru, 30 June 2008, <http://eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/engnews/id/1224573.html>.

²⁷ Civil.ge, 30 June 2008.

The Present Crisis: Analysis

I suggested in the introduction that instead of speaking of "escalation" of the conflict, it may be more useful to frame recent events as "crisis". The reason why the concept of escalation is ill-fitting is that it assumes a linear perspective of the conflict, an increase in relevant quantifiable variables such as "tension" (however hard it may be to define) or violence. Even if this perspective is retained, the recent development is at best only a continuation of a "grand escalation" that started in 2006 with Georgia's "police operation" to eliminate the fiefdom of Emzar Kvitsiani and his militia *Monadire* in the Kodori Gorge, which resulted in breaking the negotiations on the *Key to the Future* peace plan proposed by Tbilisi (a plan not dissimilar to the one presented by Saakashvili in March 2008).²⁸ More significantly, since "escalation" indicates a change in *quantity*, it may not capture the dynamic of the conflict, which, as it is suggested, has come to change in *quality*. And while the end of this transformation is yet to be seen, the term "crisis" (κρίσις) seems more productive in relation to its original Greek meaning as a decisive moment in the history of disease.

The recent development in the conflict indicates changing balances in the relationship between three main actors (Georgia, Abkhazia, and Russia); a consequent "revolutionary" move to change the nature of their relationship by Georgia; and increasingly also involvement – albeit to some extent involuntary – of the European Union, NATO and the U.S., actors which may with some degree of simplification be subsumed under the term the "West". The triangular relations between Georgia, Russia and the West play an increasingly dominant role in the conflict; a point that seems to have escaped Mr. Solana who in a recent statement in Tbilisi expressed the opinion that "this conflict should be solved fundamentally by the two sides [Georgia and Abkhazia]."²⁹

The importance of the Russia-West relationship for the developments in Abkhazia is illustrated by the impact that Kosovo's independence, sponsored by major Western powers, has had on the conflict.³⁰ Both Russia's rhetoric before and after the event, and Russia's policy (establishment of formal links) related to Abkhazia not only sought legitimacy, but arguably also were caused to some extent by the position of the Kremlin *vis-a-vis* the West. In other words, more global factors

²⁸ Kvitsiani fled to Abkhazia, suggesting that his allegiances had been divided at best. Beside personal economic gains from illicit trade, there may have been an ethnic explanation to this as Kodori is inhabited primarily by Svans, a people historically not keen to acknowledge Tbilisi's sovereignty. Following the events, "Abkhaz government in exile", previously located in Tbilisi, was moved to a village of Chkalt'a in Kodori as part of Georgia's strategy to increase legitimacy of its position by creating an alternative center of power in Abkhazia (see below). In 2007, two serious military incidents took place to aggravate the tension – on March 11 unmarked helicopters, likely of Russia's army, targeted Kodori with missile fire; on September 20, a skirmish took place between Georgia's and Abkhazia's troops, leaving several dead and injured. UNOMIG reported that the battle occurred most likely on the territory controlled by Abkhazia.

²⁹ Quoted by Civil.ge, 6 June 2008.

³⁰ Whether there exists a "basic similarity in character" between the Kosovo and Abkhazia conflicts is still subject to debate (cf. de Waal, Thomas and Bayran, Zeyno, "Abkhazia-Georgia, Kosovo-Serbia: Parallel Worlds," *Opendemocracy.net*, 2 Feb. 2008, http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-caucasus/abkhazia_serbia_3787.jsp).

than the one spatially delimited to the South Caucasus has likely been behind recent Russian policy of increasing pressure on Georgia *through* Abkhazia. This has been facilitated by the identity of Georgia's current regime as allied with the "West" (standing predominantly for NATO and the U.S.). Interestingly, in the last report on Abkhazia, International Crisis Group (ICG) interpreted this pressure as the result of the loss Russia suffered at the Bucharest summit.³¹ Given that the Kremlin's tactic has been to prevent Georgia and Ukraine's membership in NATO³² it is hard to read the results otherwise than as Russia's geopolitical victory and NATO's yielding to her demands, which in turn may have incited more assertive actions by Moscow at a vulnerable spot, such as Abkhazia.

It is rather a radical shift in the identity of Georgia's regime, now embracing a Utopian vision of a Western liberal state and seeking integration into NATO, that may be identified as a factor behind more assertive Russian policy in the South Caucasus in general, and Abkhazia in particular. The renewed imperial ambitions have finally been coupled with sufficient strength to restore the former sphere of influence penetrated by the "West", Russia's geopoliticians and critical Western academics often claim. Yet it is worth asking whether this recent assertive policy is not instead a sign of *weakness*, rather than strength. Russia notoriously lacks "soft power" beyond its borders (despite the unifying cultural affinity of the former *Soyuz*) and thus may strive to retain, rather than expand, its faltering influence in the South Caucasus only by blackmail, subversion and the rhetoric of threat, which is however a rhetoric of despair.³³ This is an alternative reading – aside from the residual "cold-war thinking" – to former President Putin's assertion that "the appearance of a powerful military bloc [NATO] along our borders would be taken in Russia as a direct threat to the security of my country."³⁴ The claim that NATO would exacerbate the explosive situation in the North Caucasus is not very credible; nor is the notion that Georgia in NATO would contribute to Russia's "encirclement", although this indeed may be a geopolitical view of some conservative *siloviki*. Russia offers nothing but pressure, extortion and "hard power" threats to merely preserve some influence in the former Soviet lands and not to concede defeat to a more "attractive" NATO, EU and the U.S. If this suggestion is true, then it must be noted that the first two miscalculate their potential, while the third is presently unable to effectively spread its influence unilaterally due to the crisis of legitimacy (partly as a result of Iraq war).

Together with the change of identity, Georgia under Saakashvili, while not necessarily advanced in the realization of the vision of a liberal state as far as it claims, or as Tbilisi's friends wish,

³¹ „Georgia and Abkhazia“, op.cit. 2.

³² In both cases it has employed a number of strategies to reach this goal, ranging from fomenting separatism (in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Crimea) to supporting radical political opposition and internal unrest to direct verbal threats of an undefined retaliatory actions aimed at the entire Alliance.

³³ Moscow has employed the tactic of blackmail also *vis-a-vis* her allies in the South Caucasus – Armenia, and notably also Abkhazia, where e.g. by imposing a land and sea blockade on Abkhazia it forced annulling the result of the presidential election in 2004 and their repetition with Kremlin-favoured candidate Raul Khajimba, who lost in the first election to Sergei Bagapsh, running in the second election as Bagapsh's Vice-President.

³⁴ Quoted by Xinxua, 4 Apr. 2008.

strengthened its position in the conundrum of the Abkhaz conflict. This may be interpreted as the result of a comprehensive – if undeclared – strategy which according to Ośrodek Studiów Wschodni's analysis³⁵ includes internationalization of the conflict (i.e. the endeavor of Tbilisi to release itself from the current structural constraints of the peace process by more actively involving the West and persuading the international audience about the dishonest role of Russia in mediating and facilitating conflict resolution);³⁶ constructive measures towards the *de facto* separatist governments (these, however, are more salient in South Ossetia);³⁷ founding of alternative centers of power (in a contest for legitimacy of power over the separatist territories); and building a more capable military.

While success in the first three goals has been limited, it is in the fourth that Georgia's strategy may have succeeded in changing the "frozen" balance. This has been the result of an astronomical increase in defence expenditure, reaching \$906 million in 2007 (7.5% GDP), as compared to \$19 million in 2002.³⁸ It has made efforts in meeting NATO standards and capability to contribute to the alliance operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but it has arguably also substantially increased Georgia's both defensive and offensive potential. In the latest report, ICG even pondered over increasing possibility of a Georgian strike from Kodori to the Abkhaz lowlands in order to secure and hold at least part of Abkhazia's territory and further improve Tbilisi's negotiating position.³⁹ However, such a move would likely cause Russian retaliation in Abkhazia, which even Georgia's modernized military would not be able to withstand. Moreover, it would invite widespread international condemnation and delegitimization of Tbilisi's position in the conflict, and of Saakashvili's regime as such. In effect, it would likely turn into the regime's suicide. Thus, the "offense-defence balance"⁴⁰ seems inclined toward the latter, and any invasion scenario, while not unfathomable, would be the product of irrational decision. The increase of defensive capability, at the same time, may however function as a deterrent for lower-intensity violent conflict scenarios – most likely under the present conditions as Russia also may want to avoid becoming involved in a full-scale war – and thus effectively improve Georgia's position.

³⁵ Strachota, Krzysztof and Bartuzi, Wojciech, „Reintegration or Conquest“, Warsaw, Centre for Eastern Studies, 2008, pp. 58-81.

³⁶ For example, Georgia's Minister for Reintegration (the change of the ministry's name from Ministry for Conflict Resolution in 2008 caused substantial protests by the *de facto* governments) Temuri Yakobashvili claimed on May 28, 2008 that Tbilisi would favour a joint police operation of Georgian and Abkhaz units "trained and managed by an international police force" composed of European states (Civil.ge, 28 May 2008). While Russia securitizes the situation in which CIS peacekeeping contingent leaves Abkhazia, as when the Russian Foreign Ministry warned that withdrawal of the CIS peacekeeping mission in Abkhazia would result in "defrosting the conflict" and spillover of violence around the South Caucasus (Quoted by Kavkaz-uzel.ru, 17 June 2008, <http://eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/engnews/id/1223404.html>), it is increasingly the opinion of other actors that the mission's contribution is questionable.

³⁷ However, the post-conflict reconstruction activities are advanced by Georgia and Russia to support their respective agents, i.e. administrations competing for power and legitimacy in South Ossetia.

³⁸ Strachota and Bartuzi, op.cit. 80.

³⁹ „Georgia and Abkhazia“, op.cit. 8-9.

⁴⁰ Cf. Van Evera, Stephen, "Offense, Defense, and the causes of war“, in: *International Security*, vol. 22, Spring 1998, pp. 5-43.

Tbilisi has utilized this new position, together with increased legitimacy of the regime in Europe and the U.S., mainly for changing the format of the peace process. Therefore, it acts as a "revolutionary" actor which attempts to alter the structural conditions which were the product of the situation after the war in 1992-1993, and thus confirm its strengthened position. At its conception, this structure reflected the interests of each of the (then) main actors – while Georgia conceded to *de facto* sovereignty of Abkhazia when consumed by internal *stasis* (and thus retained at least sovereignty *de iure*), Abkhazia gained substantial effective self-determination, and Russia retained, through pressure that could be exerted against the newly independent states through the separatist republics (including Nagorno Karabakh), at least some of its former influence in the South Caucasus.⁴¹ For each side, however, this was not an optimal outcome of the game. Now it is Georgia that tries to change the equilibrium. Although it has not yet succeeded in modifying the peace process format by including other actors in the peacekeeping operations or negotiations, it has however effectively contributed to the existing impasse, as Tbilisi's *only* interest in this area seems to be to change the structure, rather than to work on a peaceful settlement within its frame.

Abkhazia is excluded from the scheme of triangular relations which are suggested as presently defining the conflict. The Abkhaz seem increasingly aware of the situation in which their *de facto* government continues to be supported by Moscow, yet the Kremlin seems unlikely to bring forward the optimal outcome, i.e. recognize their independence. Instead, they are being used by Russia in a global game that transcends their limited, telluric interests (striving for recognition of their independence), while Russian capital has been devouring attractive Abkhaz assets. Moreover, the likelihood of renewed violent conflict on the territory of Abkhazia grows as the crisis deepens. On the micro level, their situation can be compared to Mingrelians who returned to Gali and now suffer from the irreconcilable demands by the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities which exert control over the territory and Georgia's authorities which require their continuous allegiance.

Identities, Interests and Alternatives

The recent reports by ICG and Ośrodek Studiów Wschodni propose a variety of measures for facilitating a future conflict resolution. They encompass refraining from hostilities, endemic rhetoric and undermining Georgia's sovereignty, enactment of CBMs, easing the blockade of Abkhazia and employing the NATO-Russia Council to mitigate Russia's concerns about NATO expansion;⁴² or focusing on the peace process instead of Georgia's NATO membership aspirations.⁴³ While not contesting the sensibility of these recommendations, I suggest that these represent measures of the "second order". At the crossroads where the conflict in Abkhazia now stands, the questions of the "first order" are those of identities and interests of the four major

⁴¹ „Strachota and Bartuzi“, op.cit. 53.

⁴² „Georgia and Abkhazia“, executive summary.

⁴³ „Strachota and Bartuzi“, op.cit. 83.

actors – Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia and the "West" represented mainly by EU, NATO and the U.S.

Two of these actors (Georgia and Abkhazia) are presently not content with the game outcome. Tbilisi actively attempts to establish a new one. The interests of the third actor, Russia, to preserve influence in the South Caucasus, are arguably founded on an unstable basis, given the lack of her "soft power" and consequent reliance on threats, blackmail and regime subversion. The interests of the fourth remained peripheral (U.S.) or undefined (EU), with a most obvious lack of consensus among the Western states on the role (identity) they should assume in the South Caucasus, and consequently poorly defined interests.⁴⁴ That said, the "West" – willingly or not – is part of the equation by virtue of its relations with Georgia on the regional level, and Russia on the global one.

The search for a new equilibrium in the Abkhazia conflict, one that would be an optimal outcome for the involved actors, will require rethinking the mutually constitutive roles (identities) and interests they want to assume with respect to the conflict, or the entire South Caucasus. For Georgia and Abkhazia, this may involve resigning the discourse of sovereignty that has proven thoroughly detrimental and weakened them in respect to an external power (Russia), as much as the dissemination of the discourses of danger and dehumanizing narratives of the Other. The political elites could find (and they partially do, as Saakashvili's administration shows) the elimination of the corrupt "pathological state" with its networks of organised crime and state weakness as a way to harness popular support, instead of the symbolic discourses of "independence" and "restoring territorial integrity" and point the vision of their populaces to the positive "normal states" of a liberal state, prosperity and regional integration to face the challenges of the global economy.⁴⁵ For Russia, it may mean pondering whether "soft power" and consent are not more effective founding stones of lasting influence, and whether a continuation of the current policy may ultimately not lead to the loss of control even, for example, in a substantial part of the North Caucasus. Finally, for NATO, EU and the U.S. after the Presidential election in November, it should involve first and foremost the very definition of their interests in the region (perhaps defined by energy security concerns and framed by the vision of limited rivalry instead of the Utopian project of a global security community) in whose fate they are – some without realizing it – implicated, and recognize their "soft power" potential.

⁴⁴ This is not to say that EU or NATO are absent from the South Caucasus, or that they, at least on the rhetorical level, do not show interest in it (cf. the latest *U.S.-EU Summit Declaration*, 10 June 2008, http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/June/0610EU_USA_Declaration.html . For example, EU signed Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Georgia in 1999, and later hesitantly included the newly independent countries of the South Caucasus into the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004), utilizing since then ENPI instrument to channel assistance to them. Yet, it has been accused of working "around the conflicts" and apparent lack of consensus obtains there, as much as in NATO, with some member countries (Lithuania, Poland, Sweden) more sincerely interested in the region, as manifested e.g. by the proposed project of EU Eastern Partnership, than others. The EU's policy towards Georgia is summarized at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/georgia/eu_georgia_summary/index_en.htm

⁴⁵ Cf. Friedman, Thomas, „The Lexus and the Olive Tree“, New York, 2000.

The challenges of establishing this new equilibrium are immense. Identities and consequently interests, albeit "mere" ideas, prove very durable and unmalleable,⁴⁶ and the problem of consensus does not obtain only in the EU and NATO, but also in the Kremlin corridors, among the ruling elite in Tbilisi and in Abkhazia, where the Abkhaz negotiate from the position of mere plurality.⁴⁷ Yet it remains to hope that the only peace is not the "perpetual " (i.e. eternal) one described, with the seed of – often unrecognized or disregarded – irony, by Immanuel Kant.

An alternative to the redefinition of identities of the main actors, as the fundamental condition of establishing a new equilibrium in the conflict, is the Neofunctionalist formula of proceeding from below instead. The spillover of common interests at the non-governmental "bottom" has indeed proven an effective mechanism of identity transformation in post-WWII Europe. Yet it is a subject to debate whether this liberal project can flourish in an environment deeply penetrated by the essentially realist discourses of sovereignty, state, danger and power which the South Caucasus presently is. Identities and interests are mutually constitutive, and this venue of transformation should not be neglected. But at the present point, the fundamental change in identity may have to come from above, from the political elites reacting to domestic and international incitements and pressures.

Conclusion

The present crisis in the relations between major actors involved in the Abkhazia conflict demonstrates the need to search for a new equilibrium. This equilibrium may be found only by answering "first order" questions by the actors of their identity and interests. It remains to be seen whether at the end of the journey to the heart of darkness there is Conrad's "The horror! The horror!", or instead a "new thinking".

⁴⁶ Cf. Wendt, Alexander, „Social Theory of International Politics“, Cambridge, 1999

⁴⁷ Identity, Campbell claims, is after all "a negation of multiplicity." Campbell, David, „National Deconstruction“, Minneapolis, 1999, p. 20.

NABUCCO PIPELINE AND THE TURKMENISTAN CONUNDRUM

Marco Giuli*

Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the prospects for Turkmen natural gas participation in the Nabucco pipeline project. Since the Azerbaijani and Iranian resources suffer technical and political setbacks, Turkmenistan's inclusion among the supplying countries is turning out to be essential even if its prospects are probably unsustainable in the long term, when huge amounts of Iranian gas will be needed. However, Turkmenistan could be considered as a "bridging provider" justifying the realization of Nabucco in preparation for a reduction of the international tensions stemming from the Iranian nuclear program. Despite the improved political landscape in Turkmenistan, several obstacles still persist: among them, the commitment of the new leadership to supply Russia and China as well as the weak prospects for the Trans-Caspian pipeline.

Keywords: Turkmenistan, natural gas, Nabucco, Caspian Sea, EU, Russia, Iran

Introduction

The idea to supply gas to Europe from the Caspian basin and the Middle East has been around for a long time. The 31 bcm [billion cubic meters]/year Nabucco project dates back to 2002, and a consortium led by Austrian OMV was established in 2004. The project is strongly supported by the EU and the US as a means to boost competition in the European gas market, by reducing the dependence on Russian gas as well as to emancipate the transition paths of former Soviet countries from their dependence on Russian-controlled gas export routes. The feasibility of the project is often questioned because of uncertainty related to supply.

This paper aims at assessing the role of Turkmenistan's natural gas in enhancing the prospects for Nabucco, by analyzing the drawbacks related to the other actors involved. To reach this aim, the first section will explore the main characteristics of the Turkmen natural gas sector such as the reserves, the production, the export routes, the transport system and the organization of the sector. The second section will be dedicated to the limits of Azerbaijan and Iran in filling the pipeline. The importance of these countries stems from the fact that Azerbaijan is the only safe source so far and Iran was considered as the main potential supplier during the first years of the project. Finally, the third section will focus on the problems and prospects of Turkmenistan's

* *Marco Giuli* resides currently at the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels. He is currently developing research related to EU-Russia energy issues.

participation, by analyzing the doubts arising from the size of the Turkmen reserves and the uncertainties related to the transport facilities.

Turkmenistan: natural gas profile

In order to evaluate the relevance of Turkmenistan gas for the Nabucco project, it is necessary to reach a clear understanding of the real amount of this gas. Turkmenistan had proven natural gas reserves of 2.67 tcm at the end of 2007, ranking the country among the top 11 countries in terms of natural gas reserves with a 1.6% share of global reserves and the second highest after Russia as far as former Soviet Union republics are concerned.¹ In terms of production, Turkmenistan's natural gas output was 62.2 bcm in 2006. In the aftermath of the USSR's collapse in 1991, the production fell from 57 bcm/y in 1992 to 12.4 bcm/y in 1998 due to a pricing dispute with Russia, the only outlet for Turkmen gas given the centralized post-Soviet infrastructural profile. Having dropped throughout the 1990s, natural gas production sharply recovered from 1998 thanks to a Turkmen-Russian long-term agreement, skyrocketing from 12.4 bcm/y to 43.8 bcm/y within two years. Since 2000, output grew steadily at a 6% rate annually. According to the chairman of TurkmenGaz, Yashigeldy Kakayev, the country is planning to double gas production to 120 bcm/y by 2010 and to triple to 240 bcm/y by 2030.² In terms of reserves/production ratio, Turkmenistan performs very poorly in comparison to the other Central Asian republics: with 214 and 70 years of production remaining respectively, underexploited Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan lie far ahead. At the current level of exploitation, Turkmen fields can last about 44 years.

All the major gas fields are located in the Amu'Darya basin, the Murgan basin and the South Caspian basin. Among the operating ones, most of them have begun to show early signs of natural depletion. Furthermore, the fields expected to provide the most of the foreseeable additional output in the near future are likely to produce sour gas with high contents of sulfur and mercaptan which increase the costs of refining as well as the challenges for the companies involved in the resources' development.³

The Turkmen government seems to be willing to develop the offshore fields located in the Caspian shelf. Malaysia's Petronas, as one of the most involved international oil companies (IOCs) in Turkmenistan since the signing of the first 25-year Turkmen Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) in 1996, completed in 2002 the drilling of East Livanov 2A, which is the fourth well in the offshore Block 1 field. According to the company, the well is likely to produce 10 bcm/y for 20 years.⁴ Dragon Oil is involved in the offshore Cheleken field that is supposed to hold 100 bcm gas reserves.⁵ A PSA between the Turkmen government and the Zarit joint

¹ BP, "Statistical Review of World Energy", 2007, pp. 22-24.

² EIA, "Central Asia Brief", (2007), <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Centasia/NaturalGas.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Petronas Media Relations & Information Department, "Petronas Discovers Oil, Gas Offshore Turkmenistan", September 19, 2002, <http://www.petronas.com.my/internet/corp/news.nsf/2b372bb45ff1ab3a48256b42002b19a7/7d585f12898ffda648256c39002e1df8?OpenDocument>.

⁵ Dragon Oil, "Annual Report and Financial Statement 2007", 2007, p. 3.

venture, established in 2002 by the US-registered Russian gas trader Itera, Russian State-owned Rosneft' and ZarubezhNefit' along with TurkmenGaz , is likely to be signed to develop the offshore 29, 30 and 31 Blocks.⁶

The biggest Turkmen gas field is Dauletabad, located in the Amu'Darya basin. Brought into operation in the early 1980s, it currently accounts for 24.47% of the country's proven reserves. Dauletabad is one of the most important fields for the Central Asia-Centre pipeline (CAC), the regional gas grid dating back to Soviet times. This field, hosting 0.7 tcm, is a key factor for the integrity of the current Russian-oriented Central Asian infrastructural profile.

The most recently discovered fields are South Yolotan and Osman, in the Murgan basin. Up to now there has been difficulty in reaching some acceptable estimate concerning the new fields' reserves, officially claimed by Turkmengaz as 39.6 bcm. South Yolotan⁷ and Osman attracted Chinese CNPC, which signed a PSA with Turkmenistan to develop these deposits along with the Bagtiyarlyk field in the Amu'Darya basin in order to transport up 30 bcm/y of gas for 30 years to a planned Central Asia-China pipeline beginning in 2009.⁸

As far as exports are concerned, Turkmenistan's performance is impressive in comparison to the other former Soviet republics of the Caspian area. The difference between production and consumption in 2007 freed 43.3 bcm for export, considerably higher than Kazakhstan (3.7 bcm), which suffers from the underdevelopment of its fields; Uzbekistan (12.2 bcm), which despite outstanding level of gas production needs to exploit the most of it to meet domestic requirements because of its growing population; and Azerbaijan (2 bcm), which was a net importer until 2006.⁹ To this extent, Turkmenistan benefits from the high rate of exploitation of its gas and the low domestic demand due to a small population and a poor industrial base. As a result, Russia accounted for 86.6% of Turkmen gas exports in 2006, by importing 37.5 bcm through the CAC. Most of these imports are subsequently sold to Ukraine. The rest (5.8 bcm) reaches Iran through the Korpedzhe-Kurt Kui pipeline. This amount is likely to increase from 2008 but the prospects seem to be poor, given the frequent supply cuts due to pricing disputes. Export revenues stemming from the hydrocarbons sector account for some 80% of the country's total merchandise exports, allowing Turkmenistan to develop a sound public finance stance and a positive current account since 2000.¹⁰ As one can see, Turkmenistan is considerably dependent on energy rent that granted robust economic growth, masking, however, limited improvements in economic reform.

⁶ Oil & Gas Eurasia, "Itera to Sign Offshore PSA in Turkmenistan", 28 April 2008, <http://www.oilandgaseurasia.com/news/p/0/news/2250>.

⁷ At the end of 2006 a CNPC affiliate signed a 3-years drilling contract for 12 wells in South Yolotan. See EIA, "Central Asia Brief"

⁸ CNPC, "CNPC in Turkmenistan", 2007, <http://www.cnpc.com.cn/eng/cnpcworldwide/euro-asia/Turkmenistan/>.

⁹ BP, "Statistical Review of World Energy", pp. 24-27.

¹⁰ World Bank, "Turkmenistan Brief", 2007, http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/TURKMENISTANEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20631627~menuPK:300743~pagePK:141137~p_iPK:141127~theSitePK:300736,00.html.

Turkmenistan is connected to the CAC through two routes. The western branch, running from the Turkmenbashi terminal alongside the Caspian coast, links the South Caspian basin to the Russian Orenburg pipeline meeting the CAC in the Kazakh Baynau terminal. The eastern branch delivers gas from the Amu'Darya and Murgan basins to the Uzbek Urgan hub where Turkmenistan's eastern gas joins the CAC.¹¹ The combined projected capacity of CAC is about 100 bcm/y, currently reduced to 65 bcm/y because of poor maintenance. Capacity is actually underexploited to a rate lower than 65%, with the eastern branch accounting for over 90% of the country's exports on the CAC system. Gazprom is actually planning to upgrade the western branch's 4 bcm/y capacity by building an additional 20 bcm/y-pipeline aimed at restoring the 10 bcm/y Soviet-era capacity by 2010 and raising the flow to 30 bcm/y by 2016-2018.¹² The whole investment is expected to require 1 billion USD.¹³

The only route independent from CAC is the Korpedzhe-Kurt Kui pipeline. Dating back to 1997, this corridor connects South Caspian gas from Turkmenistan to Iran's north-eastern provinces. The total capacity is 13.5 bcm/y, currently underexploited at a rate lower than 50%.

The organization of the hydrocarbon sector in Turkmenistan is highly centralized. The President oversees the sector, and signs PSAs and sales contracts. The State Agency for Management and Use of Hydrocarbon Resources and the Oil and Gas Ministry depend on the President, with the former interacting with foreign investors and the latter controlling the State-owned companies. The companies are Turkmenneft, responsible for the offshore oil production, and TurkmenNefteGaz, responsible for refining, marketing and distribution of oil and gas. These functions were transferred into the Oil and Gas Ministry in 2005. TurkmenGaz is responsible for onshore gas production; TurkmenGeologiya is involved in hydrocarbons exploration; TurkmenNefteGazStroy manages the upstream construction services for the whole sector.¹⁴

Problems and prospects of Azerbaijani and Iranian natural gas contribution to Nabucco

Azerbaijan is considered as the supplier most likely to contribute to the Nabucco pipeline given its geographic position and its infrastructural network, which both make the country independent from the Russian-controlled gas grid. Azerbaijan's reserves are calculated between 1.35 and 2.30 tcm, but the country became a net exporter only in 2007. The most hopes are related to the giant

¹¹ Stern, Johnatan, "The Future of Russian Gas and Gazprom", Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 76.

¹² The agreement has been reached at the presidential level on May 12, 2007. It is part of a broad package including a 25-year gas purchasing contract. See Socor, Vladimir, "Russia Surging Farther Ahead in Race for Central Asian Gas", in: Eurasia Daily Monitor, May 16, 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2372168.

¹³ EIA, "Central Asia Brief".

¹⁴ Denison, Michael, "Turkmenistan and the EU: Contexts and Possibilities for Greater Engagement", in Neil J. Melvin (ed), "Engaging Central Asia: The European Union's New Strategy in the Heart of Eurasia", Brussels, Centre for European Policy Studies, 2008, pp. 81-105.

offshore Shah Deniz¹⁵ field. The first phase, launched in 2006, is about to produce up to 15 bcm/y, but the phase expected to fill Nabucco is the second one. Phase II of Shah Deniz is supposed to produce 8-12 bcm/y by 2013 according to optimistic forecasts,¹⁶ allowing to fill the projected pipeline during the early phase from 2013 to 2018 and then to provide 20 bcm/y.¹⁷ Other assessments expect Shah Deniz to provide only 4-5 bcm to Nabucco during the early period given the growing demand of Georgia and Turkey.¹⁸ In both cases, even by forecasting 20 bcm/y of future supply, Azerbaijan gas alone will be unable to fill the double outlet – the northern branch to Baumgarten and the southern branch to Brindisi thanks to the Turkey-Greece and Greece-Italy interconnectors - of Nabucco. Furthermore, the impressive growth rates of Azerbaijan's domestic gas consumption are turning out to be powerful leverage at Russia's disposal to prevent massive gas outflows from Azerbaijan: by means of technical reasons or pricing quarrels Gazprom is threatening from time to time to cut off gas deliveries to Azerbaijan. In this case, Azerbaijan will be forced to exploit Shah Deniz to cover its own growing requirements to the detriment of its export commitments.¹⁹ Russian willingness to prevent Azerbaijan from exporting its gas westwards is confirmed by the recent Gazprom proposal to buy at European prices all Shah Deniz's future output.²⁰

Iranian outstanding gas reserves were essential to the early prospects for Nabucco. Iran has 28.13 tcm of natural gas reserves, accounting for 15.5% of global and ranking the country the second place in the world after Russia. These resources are both mismanaged and underexploited, so that the huge 105 bcm/y output is not enough to meet the domestic demand. As a result, Iranian gas is totally removed from the international markets with the exception of a small amount (5.60 bcm/y) exported to Turkey.²¹ Several scholars consider Iranian gas as the only source able to meet Nabucco's needs²² to a twofold extent: on the one hand, obviously, the size of the reserves and the high reserves/production ratio. By exporting an additional 30 bcm/y to fill Nabucco, Iranian reserves are expected to last about 205 years. On the other hand, the strategic position

¹⁵ The consortium operating in Shah Deniz is composed by BP (25%), Statoil (25%), Total (10%), LukAgip (10%), NIOC (10%), Socar (10%) and TPAO (9%). See Socar, Vladimir, "Shah Deniz Perspective Structure", 2008, <http://www.nabucco-pipeline.com/project/project-timeline/index.html>.

¹⁶ Norling, Niklas, "The Nabucco Pipeline: Reemerging Momentum in Europe Front Yards", in Cornell, Svante and Nilsson, Niklas (eds), "Europe Energy Security: Gazprom Dominance and Caspian Supply Alternatives", pp. 127-140, Stockholm and Washington, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute – Silk Road Studies Program, 2007.

¹⁷ Nabucco Company Pipeline Study GmbH, (2007), "Project Timeline", <http://www.nabucco-pipeline.com/project/project-timeline/index.html>.

¹⁸ Roginsky, Stanislav and Minina, Olga, (2008), "South Stream and Nabucco: Are They Competitors?", in: Pipeline & Gas Journal, vol. 4:4, 2008, pp. 15-18.

¹⁹ Stern, Johnatan, "The Cut-Throat Energy Politics of Russia and Turkey", in: Europe's World, vol. 5:2, 2007, pp. 125-129.

²⁰ Ekspress, (June 5, 2008), "Iran Discusses Nabucco, BTC Shipments with Azerbaijan", http://www.downstreamtoday.com/News/Articles/200806/Iran_Discussing_Nabucco_BTC_Shipments_11217.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1.

²¹ BP, "Statistical Review of World Energy", pp. 22-27.

²² Mangott, Gerhard and Westphal, Kirsten, "The Relevance of the Wider Black Sea Region to EU and Russian Energy Issues", in Hamilton, Daniel and Mangott, Gerhard (eds), "The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives", pp. 147-176, Washington, Centre for Transatlantic Relations, 2008; Fee, Florence F., "The Russia-Iran Energy Relations", in: Middle East Economic Survey, vol. 59:11, 2007, pp. 12-17.

which makes Iran the most economically viable way to ship Turkmen gas away from Gazprom's control.²³ Unfortunately, Iranian gas exports suffer considerable setbacks as far as the systemic level is concerned. By limiting foreign investments in Iranian hydrocarbons sector to 20 million USD, the US Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) seriously undermines the attractiveness of Iran for western IOCs. Despite the fact that most of the penalties harmed US companies such as ConocoPhillips and no European company has been targeted so far,²⁴ the threat of the sanctions, focused on credit access, prevented companies such as OMV and Shell from undertaking massive investments in development of both Iranian upstream and domestic transport. As a result, given the political climate stemming from the Iranian nuclear issue, it seems to be considerably difficult for the EU to engage Iran in participating in the Nabucco project, whilst avoiding at the same time the emergence of disruptive effects on transatlantic relations. In other words, Nabucco turns out to be undermined by US sanctions more than by Russian attempts to build up alternative routes like Southern Stream. Other commentators are more dismissive about the necessity of Iranian gas. Their main argument is rooted in the poor Iranian infrastructural network, which is under massive strain because of growing domestic demand as well as the lack of investments aimed at upgrading the grid, notably the south-north trunk line which should ship the gas from the giant South Pars offshore field.²⁵ In other words, leaving aside the political consequences caused by Iranian involvement, the question of how Iran ultimately will be able to free up gas for export remains unresolved.

The Turkmenistan factor

Given the inability of Azerbaijan to serve the Nabucco's double outlet and the unlikelihood of Iranian involvement, Turkmenistan turns out to be crucial for the gas pipeline prospect, but both the available resources and the export routes seems to pose very serious challenges.

With Azerbaijan supposed to provide 20 bcm/y, Turkmenistan is expected to deliver the remaining 10 bcm/y. President Berdymuhammedov recently confirmed the country's willingness to commit itself to the west-sponsored routes, on the occasion of talks with EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner²⁶ and the Memorandum of Understanding signed with EU Commissioner for Energy Andris Piebalgs.²⁷ Notwithstanding this, the prospects for extraction remain unclear. While the eastern basins have definitely fallen under Russian and Chinese companies' control, western companies have some room to maneuver in the Caspian shelf, particularly Block 1.²⁸ Unfortunately, even in the case of a massive IOCs' involvement in

²³ Ghorban, Narsi, "By Way of Iran: Caspian's Oil and Gas Outlet", in Amirahmadi, Hooshang (ed), "Caspian Region at a Crossroad", pp. 147-161, Houndmills, MacMillan, 2000.

²⁴ Rivlin, Paul, "Iran's Energy Vulnerability", in: Middle Eastern Review of International Affairs, vol. 10:4, 2006, pp. 103-116.

²⁵ Norling, Niklas, "The Nabucco Pipeline: Reemerging Momentum in Europe Front Yards", pp. 136-138.

²⁶ Financial Times, "Turkmenistan to Cut EU Dependence on Russian Gas", (April 13, 2008), p. 3.

²⁷ Memorandum of Understanding and Co-operation in the Field of Energy between the European Union and Turkmenistan, (May 26, 2008), http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/energy_transport/international/regional/caucasus_central_asia/memorandum/doc/mou_turkmenistan_en.pdf.

²⁸ Denison, Michael, "Turkmenistan and the EU: Contexts and Possibilities for Greater Engagement", p. 94.

the South Caspian basin, Turkmenistan has already committed itself to supply Russia with 80-90 bcm/y for 25 years²⁹ and China with 30 bcm/y for 30 years. Adding a further 20 bcm/y absorbed by domestic consumption, these commitments turn the reserves/production ratio down to 21 years, less than the period established by the aforementioned agreements. As a result, some doubts do not stem from upstream investments, but from the overall reserves' amount.³⁰ IOCs themselves, by experiencing the usual tendency of the Turkmen leadership to overestimate the country's gas reserves in taking commitments during the '90s, are now much more cautious about the potential of the Caspian basin as a source of competition for European market, ranking it at the 3rd or 4th place after Norway, North Africa or Gulf countries such as Qatar. Anyway, in dismissing the Turkmen reserves' capability to fill multiple outlets, it should be taken into account that Ashgabat is becoming very pragmatic. To this extent, western IOCs and governments as well as the EU should pay more attention to frequent pricing disputes among Turkmenistan and Gazprom.³¹ Furthermore, despite the low reserves/production ratio suggesting that Turkmen participation in Nabucco is not sustainable in the long term,³² it could be considered as an option to bolster the prospects for the pipeline whilst waiting for a reduction of the international tensions arising from the Iranian nuclear issue. In other words, Turkmenistan could be expected to be a "transitional provider". However, remarks concerning volumes should not be separated from the important issue of pricing. It should be taken into consideration that as the Russian gas giant promised to raise the prices paid to Turkmenistan to the European level by 2009, Europe is losing its last source of leverage on Ashgabat.³³

As far as transport infrastructure is concerned, the main obstacle to Turkmenistan's participation in Nabucco has to do with the political unreliability of the Iranian corridor, unanimously considered as the most rational way to deliver Turkmen gas westwards. Turkmenistan already exports about 5.5-6 bcm/y to Iran through the aforementioned Korpedzhe-Kurt Kui pipeline. Iran consumes domestically this gas, which allows the Islamic Republic to swap a similar amount to Turkey. Despite the overall capacity of these pipelines, which is about 15-20 bcm/y, the Iranian domestic section needs improvements that are unlikely to be undertaken under the US sanctions.

²⁹ West branch additional pipeline (*Prikaspiyskiy*) is expected to add 20 bcm/y to total Russian imports of Turkmen gas, but the whole intervention, including the East branch will allow Turkmenistan to export to Russia 80 bcm/y according to Gazprom CEO Aleksey Miller and 90 bcm/y according to Energy Ministry Viktor Khristenko. (The Washington Post, "Russia, Central Asia in Crucial Gas Deal" (May 12, 2007), p. 4).

³⁰ Cornell, Svante, "The Trans-Caspian Pipeline and Europe's Energy Security", in Cornell, Svante and Nilsson, Niklas (eds), "Europe Energy Security: Gazprom Dominance and Caspian Supply Alternatives", pp. 141-153, Stockholm and Washington, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute – Silk Road Studies Program, (2007).

³¹ Despite Turkmenistan's gas exports to Russia account for less than 1% of total Russian gas production, they account for 24.4% of Russian gas export, so that the Russian price arbitrage turns out to be an essential tool to allow Gazprom increasing the profitability of its exports in order to keep the internal subsidized consumption sustainable. The domestic factor seems to be dominant in the Russian need to keep the CAC system alive not only as far as price differentials are concerned, but also in preventing the east-west corridor collapsing within Russia. An extensive analysis of these issues is provided by Stern (Stern, Johnatan, "The Future of Russian Gas and Gazprom", pp. 72-79) and Blank (Blank, Stephen, "Infrastructural Policy and National Strategies in Central Asia: the Russian Example", in: Central Asian Survey, vol. 22:3-4, (2004), pp. 225-248).

³² Mandil, Claude, "Sécurité Énergétique et Union Européenne: Proposition pour la Présidence Française", Rapport au Premier Ministre, (21 avril 2008).

³³ Sadegh-Zadeh, Kaweh, "Turkmen Promises", in: Russia Profile, (June 3, 2008), <http://www.russiaprofile.org/page.php?pageid=International&articleid=a1212503907>.

As a result, the only way to connect Turkmenistan's offshore fields to Nabucco is by way of the Caspian Sea. Feasibility studies concerning the Trans-Caspian pipeline (TCP) date back to several years ago. The early version of the project, endorsed by a consortium composed by Enron, Bechtel and General Electric, was strongly supported by the Clinton Administration. Unfortunately, thanks to the discovery of the Shah Deniz field, Azerbaijan began to consider itself as the main source for Nabucco and not only a transit country. This allowed Baku to become more assertive in its relations with Turkmenistan, poisoned by the disagreement about the Caspian Sea's legal status as well as the right to exploit the offshore Kyapaz/Serdar field lying in the middle of the sea. The worsening of relations between the two countries, along with the former Turkmen President Niyazov's concerns about the US' tough stance against Saddam-style dictatorships in the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom, made the 2 billion USD-estimated TCP fall apart.³⁴ From a broader perspective, within the Central Asian context TCP has been the second collapsing West-backed corridor after the Trans-Afghan Pipeline (TAP). Some argue that the main reason for these failures lied in the unpredictable and bizarre behavior of the former Turkmen President³⁵, so that something³⁶ could be achieved with the new leadership.

However, leaving aside Niyazov's choices, it should be taken into account that both corridors relied upon a very uncertain political background hindered by often inconsistent US efforts to isolate Iran, fight Islamic terrorism, reduce world dependence on Middle East hydrocarbons, promote democracy in Central Asia and drive post-Soviet regimes away from Russian influence at the same time. All these factors determined the emergence of an international environment that turned out to be detrimental to a diversification of routes, to the extent that Russian involvement in keeping the current infrastructure alive has been considered less dangerous by Central Asian leaderships for regional stability. In the light of this context, it seems to be difficult to take the *Turkmenbashi* as the only one responsible for the TCP and TAP failures, so that the emergence of a new climate in the Ashgabat leadership is not a guarantee for these projects' revival. There is of course some room for optimism stemming from the improvement of the relations between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan and the completion in 2007 of the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP). These events increase the prospects for TCP.³⁶ But it should be taken into consideration that Berdymammedov is probably making more promises than his country's amount of natural gas can keep. The first to become aware of it seem to be the western IOCs.

Conclusion

Turkmenistan has huge natural gas resources and high levels of production, but these resources need massive western investments to be developed. At the same time, Russia is apparently succeeding in boosting its grip on the Central Asian infrastructural landscape.

³⁴ Soligo, Ronald and Jaffe, Amy Myers, "The Economics of the Pipeline Routes: The Conundrum of Oil Exports from the Caspian Basin", in Kalyuzhnova, Yelena (ed.), "Energy in the Caspian Region: Present and Future", pp. 111-132, Basingstoke, Palgrave (2002).

³⁵ Norling, Niklas, "The Nabucco Pipeline: Reemerging Momentum in Europe Front Yards", p. 128.

³⁶ Ibid.

The Nabucco pipeline needs to rely on Turkmen gas given the position of two other potential suppliers. Azerbaijan is the safest source, but it is still importing gas to satisfy its increasing domestic demand and the gas predictably coming from the giant Shah Deniz field is unlikely to fill the Nabucco's double outlet. As a result, the participation of Azerbaijan alone seems to be unable to justify the huge investments required by the construction of Nabucco. Furthermore, there are strong elements of uncertainty related to the Russian leverage, given that Russia is the only source for Azerbaijani gas imports.

Iran has at its disposal a huge amount of gas reserves, able to challenge the Russian dominance on European markets. Unfortunately, the political climate is preventing western IOCs from undertaking investments aimed at developing the Iranian gas upstream as well as the Iranian domestic grid, given the limited capacity of the south-north corridor.

Turkmenistan's engagement is needed to fill Nabucco in the short and medium terms, but several doubts arise concerning the available resources and the transit corridors. As far as resources are concerned, the EU should consider Turkmenistan gas as a "transitional source" whilst waiting for significant improvement of the political climate around Iran. However, Turkmenistan has committed itself to long-term agreements with Russia and China, with Europe losing its sole attractiveness as Gazprom promised to raise the prices paid to Turkmenistan to the international levels. From a broad political perspective, Russia profited from the need of Berdymammedov to consolidate his power in the light of a regional context potentially sensitive to "destabilizing pressures" coming from the systemic level, within the framework of the US involvement in the "broader Middle East". Furthermore, given the unlikelihood of exporting Turkmen gas to Europe through Iran, Nabucco's prospects seem to be highly dependent on TCP prospects, which are turning out to be poor so far in the aftermath of the previous mid-2000s failure. However, the improvement of Azerbaijani-Turkmen relations, as well as a partnership between Turkmenistan and Russia which is not so stable as it seems, leave some room to maneuver for the EU and western IOCs. As a result, one can consider Turkmenistan's involvement in the Nabucco project weak, but still not dead.

GEOPOLITICS OF CENTRAL ASIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE IRANIAN FACTOR

Guli Yuldasheva*

Abstract

This article examines geopolitical tendencies around Central Asia (CA) in the context of the Iranian factor in international relations. In all political processes in CA interests are underscored by energy security and the struggle of the competing powers for dominance and access to energy resources in the region. Iran's role is shown as both a source of tension in the region and a transit route for CA hydrocarbons. Within this framework the negative impact of the US anti-Iranian strategy on the whole geopolitical situation in the region is revealed. It is argued that without resolving Iranian-American disputes and achieving the adequate balance of interests in the CA between the US and Russia there will not be geopolitical and, hence, economic stability in the region.

Keywords: *Central Asia, Caspian region, Iran, oil-gas pipelines, US, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan*

Introduction

Since the collapse of the former USSR Azerbaijan and the states of the post-Soviet Central Asia (CA) have been regarded first of all through the prism of their rich energy resources. This fact has logically brought their unification under the term "Caspian region", which takes into account both their geographical position in the energy-rich zone of the Caspian Sea, and historical-cultural closeness to each other. The important geographical location of this vast region in relation to the transport and communication networks in the "West-East" and "North-South" directions, concentration of tremendous oil and gas resources here, as well as its vulnerability to the problems of the neighbouring regions of South Asia and the Middle East, have revived the ideas of the Heartland and "Eurasian Balkans" with the emphasis on the specific role and significance of CA in world politics.

In the heart of the ongoing geopolitical struggle in the region lies a long-standing Russian-American rivalry over dominance in this region that involves many interested regional actors on both sides. The struggle of leading world powers for geopolitical and geo-economic domination in the Caspian region is explained first of all by their geo-strategic aspirations for leadership in the post-Cold War world order, as well as by necessity to solve various regional and global security problems, many of which are linked with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

* *Dr. Guli Yuldasheva is an Associate Professor of Political Sciences at Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan.*

One of the actual issues within the aforementioned limits is the influence of the present Iranian-American confrontation on the geopolitical development of CA region. Strategic limitations laid on the CA region by this tension have brought at some periods distancing, at others rapprochement with Iran. This relationship created its own economic-political consequences, and this is the subject of this paper.

Distancing from Iran before 2001

The essence of the Iranian foreign policy lies in formation of a multi-polar world order under the aegis of the UN, in which Iran and other Islamic countries will represent one of the poles. At the same time CA is considered in Tehran as a continuation of the region of the Persian Gulf, which is a vitally important zone of Iranian economic interests as a whole¹. In this connection the Islamic Republic traditionally defends the project of energy routes from CA states through its territory as the cheapest and most economically grounded².

However, the Iranian strategy met the following problems on the way to its realization:

1. Socio-economic consequences of the Soviet Union's collapse and differences in political make-up, with an Islamic regime in Iran and secular states in CA; inability of the Iranian economy at present to provide the CA states with high-quality technology and big investments. Besides, there are differences between the Sunni and Shia, Persians and Turks, which present common approaches in some cases and the basis for differences in another;
2. The significant barrier in relations between Iran and the CA states is the problem of determination of the Caspian Sea legal status, where the Iranian position differs from positions of other Caspian states;
3. On the global level the deepening of Iranian-Central Asian relations is hampered by the ongoing tense relations between Iran and the United States. This, as time has shown, proved to be the most important element in the system of Iranian-Central-Asian economic relations.

The US economic sanctions, non-admission of Tehran to the energy projects of the CA region, and formation of a negative image of Iran as a state-sponsor of international terrorism hinder development of full-fledged relations with CA states. On the whole Tehran considers that Washington continues to be hostile to revolutionary Iran, aspires to world leadership, acts against Iranian economic goals in the newly independent states of CA, and leads a propagandist campaign against Iran. Moreover, Tehran considers the US military-technical cooperation with CA states and NATO's movement towards the East³ as an American desire to control and dominate in the Caspian region, as part of the US global efforts to surround and

¹ See, for example: Хатами, Мохаммад,, “Ислам, диалог и гражданское общество”, Москва, РОССПЭН, (2001), pp. 46, 52.

² Бикдели, Али-Реза, „Положение транзита Исламской Республики Иран и стран Центральной Азии“, in: Аму-Дарья, Тегеран, № 12, Лето (2002), pp. 5–29.

³ “New Regional Developments and National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran” (Round-table discussion), in: An Iranian Quarterly Discourse, Vol. 1, Summer (1999), No.1.

isolate Iran. In this sense conflicts in Afghanistan and Palestine are also regarded by the conservative Iranian clergy as an “attack on the whole Moslem world”⁴. Tehran also regards the growing presence of Israel, a US ally, in the CA as a challenge to its regional interests.

The above-stated problems in Iranian relations with CA countries, coupled with US political-diplomatic pressure on them over the Iranian issue brought a certain distancing of the CA states from Iran during the period before September 2001.

Specifically, before the advent of the pro-western cabinet of Mohammed Khatami to power in Iran, Iranian-Uzbek relations were distinguished by certain complexity, insufficient understanding of the cardinal problems of regional and interregional relations. The relations were preconditioned to a great degree by the active participation of Iranian radicals in Tajikistan’s civil war in 1992 and the supposed desire of conservative Tehran to use this war as a spring-board to penetrate into Central Asia. The tension in bilateral relations with Iran did play not a less important role in the orientation of Uzbekistan towards the US during this period.

The influence of the Iranian-American confrontation on CA was revealed most visibly by the fact that the transportation route through the territory of Iran, in spite of its economic attractiveness, did not play a decisive role in external economic strategy of the leading energy states in CA – Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The anti-Iranian sanctions, for instance, restricted joint Iranian-Kazakhstan activity in the oil-gas sphere only to swap operations⁵.

On the other hand, American leadership postponed indefinitely the licence payment for the oil company “Mobil” to participate in exchange operations with Iran, thus complicating the oil export from Turkmenistan⁶. Construction of a main gas pipeline through Iran, involving a consortium headed by the English-Dutch oil concern “Royal-Dutch-Shell”, was virtually frozen due to the American sanctions. Turkmenistan considered this project commercially the most profitable.⁷ It was supposed that the gas would flow from Turkmenistan through Iran to Turkey, and the first sector of the pipeline had been already finished (Korpedje-Kurt-Kuy). In 1999 only 1,5 bln m³ was pumped through the pipeline, in 2000 – 2 bln.c.m. (4 bln.c.m. by plan), for 6 months of 2001 – 2,2 bln.c.m. Execution of the rest of the project was stopped for financial reasons.

In response to this situation Ashgabat and Astana were looking for alternative sources of energy export to world markets. Iranian-US tensions were not only reflected in the flow of capital to the oil-gas sphere of these states, but also stimulated their political manoeuvring within the limits of the Iran-US-Russia triangle and promoted militarization of the Caspian Sea that not only delayed development of the regional economy, but hampered realization of the American plans here as well.

⁴ Dareini, Ali Akbar. “Hard-Line Leader Speaks Out”, in: Associated Press, December 7, 2003.

⁵ Iran.EIU, in: Country Report, London, 1-st Quarter, (1997), p. 21.

⁶ Lelyveld, M., “Turkmenistan: President Refuses to Sign Oil Pipeline Agreement”, in: RFE/RL, November 5, 1998.

⁷ Юданов, Ю., „Центральная Азия – новый фаворит иностранных инвесторов“, in: Мировая экономика и международные отношения, Москва, № 4, 2000, с.103; Каменев, Сергей, „Энергетическая политика и энергетические проекты Туркменистана“, in: Центральная Азия и Кавказ, Швеция, № 4 (28), 2003, с. 136, 137.

These circumstances, alongside the change of power in Tehran in 1997, gradually brought changes in CA states' external priorities, connected with the growth of hopes for the pro-western course of the M. Khatami team and for normalization of Iranian-American relations. A significant role here was played by Tehran's cautious and flexible tactic towards Central Asia.

The growth of cooperation with Iran after 2001

During the period before September 11 various US economic sanctions and financial restrictions against Iran did not bring about any significant breakthrough. Militarization of the Caspian region and the speeding-up of the armament race virtually put the Caspian states on the brink of the so-called "resource" wars, a development that was largely influenced by American-Russian competition in the sphere of energy resources.

The influence of the Iranian-American factor on the development of the CA states adversely affected, first of all, the realization of vitally important pipeline and transport-communication projects, which would provide an exit for the national raw materials and products to the world markets.

The atmosphere of the first months of the Afghan war, supposedly favourable for normalization of Iranian-American relations, induced the Kazakh government at the end of 2001 to revive its efforts of persuading the US of the expediency of the pipeline projects through the territory of Iran⁸.

In spite of the fiasco in the talks held with the US, economic considerations and an officially declared multivector external strategy oriented Astana more and more to the development of energy cooperation with Iran. From the Kazakh point of view, the Iranian transit route is a direct exit to the sea ports, and, hence, a direct route to the customers of the Kazakh oil, and not only one of the most profitable exit ways of the Kazakh oil to the Persian Gulf, but the most realistic intermediate route of raw material supply to the markets of the South Asia and Asian-Pacific states. However, as was stressed in Astana, the process of negotiation and then realization of the agreements between Kazakhstan and Iran was complicated, apart from the technical reasons, by the negative US position on it⁹.

Hesitations in foreign policy preferences of Astana were well illustrated by the trade turnover indicators of Kazakhstan with Iran and Russia. Within the period of the greatest US pressure and low financial investments into Kazakhstan's economy (1994-1999) there was a tendency in Astana towards weakening its relations with Russia and Iran, which was expressed in the lowest trade turnover indexes with these states (see tables in the appendix) in these years. With the reorientation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy priorities and the beginning of the war on terror trade indexes with these states gradually increased.

Turkmenistan is also vitally interested in partnership with Iran in the development of its national gas reserves, taking into account wide possibilities for the Turkmen gas to transit through Iranian territory. For Ashgabat, the Iranian corridor means a possible liquidation of Russian monopoly in the sphere of Turkmen gas export. According to the results of 2004, of

⁸ See, for example: Newspaper „Kazakhstanskaya pravda“, April 10, 2002.

⁹ Жарикбаев, Айбат, „Транзит нефти“, in: Gazeta.kz, February 10, 2004, <http://www.gazeta.kz>.

\$6.4 bln of the general trade turnover of Turkmenistan \$750 mln reflected trade with Iran (compared to \$400 mln. of Iranian trade turnover with Kazakhstan)¹⁰.

Uneven development of Turkmenistan's relations with Russia are illustrated by corresponding indexes of their trade turnover in 1993-2001 (see tables in the appendix) – under steady growth, the import/export balance in bilateral relations was subjected to sharp rises and recessions dependent from the inner and external (the US factor) situations. At the same time trade turnover with Iran was inclined to a stable increase that confirms Ashgabat's course in this direction.

From its own side, the economic expediency of Iran for the Uzbek economy was illustrated by the reorientation of the Uzbek exports, in particular nearly 60% of the cotton export, towards the Iranian port Bender-Abbas¹¹.

However, continuation of western economic pressure on CA and an anti-Iranian US strategy created a favourable ground for preservation of the socio-economic and political instability of the CA region. Economic analysis of the situation in the region of CA testified that “indexes of the direct foreign investment flow per capita are still the lowest among the countries with transitional economy”¹².

At the same time different perceptions of the regional security threats and challenges, as well as of the rates and content of the democratization processes, became a serious obstacle on the way of mutual understanding between the governments of CA and the US. In particular, the traditional American approach connects the problem of Islamic fundamentalism with the problem of human rights and development of democracy in the region. American-Central Asian discrepancies in the ways and methods of solving regional security problems, unsettled problems in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with strengthening of American-Iranian confrontation, distanced the CA states from the US. The closure of the American airbase in Khanabad (Uzbekistan), as well as further consolidation of the Eurasian partnership within the framework of Shanghai Co-operation Organisation and the Eurasian Economic Community (EurASEC), has become the logical outcome for these tendencies. These political steps partly reflect the interests of Tehran, which consider cooperation with Russia as a counterbalance to US policy in CA.

Simultaneously, continuation of the American military presence in CA (Manas base in Kyrgyzstan) and the Caucasus reflected the sharpening of American-Russian competition in the region and general geopolitical tension in CA.

As a result of the reorientations of the CA states towards Moscow, the share of Uzbekistan's external trade turnover with CIS partners increased from 31.7% to 34.4% in nine months of 2003, whilst at the same time the trade indexes for non-CIS countries were reduced – from

¹⁰ Ионова, Е., „Восточный вектор во внешнеэкономической политике стран Центральной Азии“, in: Россия и мусульманский мир, Москва, № 9 (159), 2005, p. 108.

¹¹ Ташимов, Тулкин, „Поворот на Восток, in: Экономическое обозрение“, Ташкент, № 10 (73), 2005, p. 45, 47, 49.

¹² Расулев, А., Алимов, Р., „Структурные преобразования и повышение конкурентоспособности экономики Узбекистана“, in: Общество и экономика, Ташкент, № 6, 2003, p. 202.

68,3% to 65,6%¹³ [14]. Correspondingly economic relations with Moscow and Tehran were consolidating – Russia occupied first place among six leading trade partners of Uzbekistan for 9 months of 2005 – 19.2 % of export (151.9% increase compared to the level of 9 months of 2004) and Iran occupied the third place – 6.8 (125.6%)¹⁴.

Thus, various anti-Iranian restrictions in the oil-gas sphere, as well as continuing instability in Afghanistan and other countries adjacent to CA have altered the external political preferences of majority of CA states in favor of Iran and Russia both owing to economic and political motives that clearly contradict the US interests.

Contemporary tendencies

Present geopolitical situation in CA and the Caucasus continues to be largely defined by the ongoing Russian-American rivalry in the Caspian region. It is obvious that the result of this geopolitical competition is also influenced by CA and EU states, as well as the Iranian position in this process.

Meanwhile there are factors favouring both Russia and the US.

It is clear that Russia will lose nothing if the following tendencies in CA politics are further developed and consolidated:

- Development of multivector diplomacy of CA states under Russian influence;
- Strengthening of the EU energy cooperation with Iran, including active participation of Russia.

Indeed, in spite of the CA states' efforts to diversify their energy routes and increase trade turnover with neighbouring countries, one cannot ignore the dominant role and significance of Russia in their development, due to its geographic, economic and cultural significance.

Russia continues to be the second largest trade partner of Uzbekistan. Trade turnover between the two countries was about \$4 bln in 2007¹⁵. Meanwhile, in February 2008 Turkmenistan once more demonstrated its adherence to Russia, signing a contract on building a 188-km Turkmen gas pipeline with the Russian company Stroigas, whose main shareholder is the Kremlin-controlled Gazprom. It is obvious that the Turkmen leaders take into account all current political and economic obstacles remaining on the way of fulfilling the western-sponsored Trans-Afghan pipeline.

To guarantee its position in the region Russia has recently considerably increased prices on Central Asian gas, bringing them closer to the world levels, a move that may significantly hamper fulfilment of other alternative energy projects from CA.

¹³ „Экономика Узбекистана. Информационно–аналитический обзор. Январь–Сентябрь, 2004“, in: Центр эффективной экономической политики, Ташкент, № 7, декабрь 2004, pp. 56,57.

¹⁴ „Экономика Узбекистана. Информационно–аналитический обзор. Январь–Сентябрь 2005“, in: Центр эффективной экономической политики, Ташкент, № 11, декабрь 2006, p. 55.

¹⁵ „Узбекистан: Ташкент стремится диверсифицировать свои торговые контакты“, in: <http://www.eurasianet.org>, March 19, 2008.

At the same time pragmatic Europe is inclined to involve Russia and China¹⁶ in its Iranian projects, a tendency which contradicts US interests in the region. Iran, Russia and India have also conceived new areas of cooperation that connect northern Europe to the Indian Ocean via Iran and the Russian Federation. Already, Iran is an energy exporter to Europe through Turkey, funneling through Turkmenistan's gas and swapping oil with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.

In these circumstances the US fears that a recent gas deal between Iran and Switzerland may encourage other gas deals between Tehran and Europe. Despite US pressure for tougher sanctions against Iran, Tehran and Bern signed a 25-year supply agreement in March 2008, worth up to \$42 billion¹⁷.

Not surprisingly some experts¹⁸ stress that nowadays the EU has become the most serious economic competitor of the US.

However, there are tendencies in CA, the deepening of which correspond to common Euro-Atlantic interests:

- Development of local CA regionalism;
- Formation of geo-economic zone of cooperation, including Iran, EU and the regions of Persian Gulf and South Asia with a possible extension to CA.

In fact, a series of external factors, preconditioned mainly by the Iranian-American confrontation, necessitated geopolitical self-determination of the CA region. These are the crisis around Iranian nuclear program; the ongoing instability in Afghanistan and Iraq; sharpening of Shiite-Sunni tension in direct vicinity of CA; western strategy of “democratic involvement” in the region of CA; continuation of the policy of economic sanctions in an era of interdependent regional economies; the importance for the states of CA of speeding up, in the interests of security, the processes of economic integration through realization of common transport-pipeline strategies and other big economic projects in the region. It seems that under these conditions restoration of the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation, in that or another form, would best of all correspond to the interests of CA states both at regional and global level¹⁹.

In response to strained geopolitical situation in the region CA states have made during the last months slow but steady movements toward each other, among which Uzbek-Turkmen, Kazakh-Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Kazakh rapprochements should be mentioned. This tendency can be traced if we look at the external trade turnover figures for Uzbekistan during the last two years:

¹⁶ Shell, Repsol, “Wary of Iran Deal: Report”, in: Payvand News, May 3, 2008.

¹⁷ “US Fearful of Iran-Europe Gas Deals”, in: Payvand News, May 3, 2008

¹⁸ Fareed, Zakaria, „Будущее американского великодержавия - II. Америка опрометчиво свыклась с ролью лидера“, in: ИноСМИ, "Foreign Affairs", May 5, 2008.

¹⁹ Юлдашева Г.И., „Ирано-американские отношения на современном этапе и их воздействие на геополитическую ситуацию в Центральной Азии: Автореф. дис. ... докт.полит.наук“, Ташкент: УМЭД, 2006, p. 42.

Table 1: Uzbekistan’s External Trade Turnover with Central Asian States in 2006-2007
 (USD mln)

	Exports		Imports	
	2006	2007	2006	2007
CIS countries – total	2685.5	4273.0	2060.6	2721.8
of which:				
Kazakhstan	304.7	661.7	426.2	532.2
Kyrgyzstan	80.0	137.8	31.7	39.0
Tajikistan	169.9	191.8	16.0	16.0
Turkmenistan	33.7	77.1	13.5	11.2

Source: Figures taken from *Statistical Review of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2007*// Tashkent, 2008. – P. 157.

In spite of the fact that no new official documents have been recently signed on further consolidation of CA integration processes, it is clear that CA leaders have fully realized the need to coordinate more closely in their energy strategy, as well as in other regional problems of security. This can be regarded as a first step on their way to real future integration, which is surely an objective necessity in conditions of a globalizing world, and its threats and challenges to CA states.

Simultaneously, western-sponsored projects, by-passing Russia and including Iran and the Arab states, are being developed. The recent initiative of the Persian Gulf Council on Cooperation about the creation of a “GasOPEC” was immediately supported by Iran, who also examined its possible participation in the European-sponsored projects such as Nabucco and White Stream gas pipelines. According to analysts, these Iranian endeavors can reorient Central Asian energy routes through its territory and form a kind of “gas cartel” with Iran, Azerbaijan and CA. Moreover, Arab gas could be included into Nabucco, White Stream and the Iranian-Turkish pipeline²⁰.

In spite of the strong American opposition to Iranian participation in the Nabucco project, the US tries to balance its position with its European allies. As part of their joint efforts with regards to Iran, the EU and the US have suggested new incentives for Iran to scrap its uranium enrichment program²¹.

In late April 2008 Kazakhstan’s Senate ratified an energy export treaty with Azerbaijan, according which the Kazakh oil is supposed to be transported through the Caspian Sea to Baku to join the Baku-Tbilissi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. The deal is characterized as a “breakthrough” for Kazakhstan, as Astana will likely discover great benefits in reducing its export dependency on Russia.

However, according to a Kazakh expert²², the issue is still open and is being worked on. It will depend on technical capabilities in the oil industry. Besides, the potential construction of a trans-Caspian oil pipeline will likely depend on the performance of the Kazakhstan Caspian Transportation System (KCTS). Anyway current expectations are that the launch of the BTC undersea extension will take place when the troubled Kashagan project comes online, which

²⁰ „Иран может возглавить локальный газовый ОПЕК“, in: ФК-Новости, 11 Март, 2008

²¹ Gollust, D., “Major Powers Make New Incentives Offer to Iran”, in: VOA, London, May 3, 2008

²² Lillis, J., “Kazakhstan: Astana Set to Make and Energy Export Break with Russia”, in: <http://www.eurasianet.org>, May 2, 2008.

is now expected only in 2011. It is worth considering economic assessments of *Citigroup*²³, which point out that adopting decisions on development of the least accessible energy deposits usually affect oil prices negatively, and realization of the projects is delayed due to complexity of the work, technical and financial unpreparedness of the companies, and certain political reasons.

It is clear too that Turkmenistan, another key state for realization of western regional projects, has problems at present which might hinder to some extent its participation in the Nabucco project due to insufficient extraction and energy export infrastructure.

Meanwhile, there is a concern about the Asian Energy Security Grid, formed by Iran, which can dictate its own rules both to Russia and the US. According to experts, Iran is betting on the total "interdependence of Asia and Persian Gulf geo-economic politics"²⁴. Besides, the framework for the \$7.6 billion Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline, also known as the "peace" pipeline, has been established. Nevertheless, it is clear that Iranian regionalization efforts are doomed under great pressure from different international institutions and other actors, primarily great powers that might hamper the realization of this project.

It is within this context, and also taking into account the tough and inflexible Iranian position on the nuclear program and support of Shia guerilla movements in Iraq, that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice says she doubts that new international incentives can persuade Iran to halt what she believes is a drive by Tehran for nuclear weapons. She said the problem is not the lack of incentives, but rather Iranian nuclear policy, which she said appears to be weapons-related, despite Tehran's professions of peaceful intent²⁵. This explains why Washington maintains the option of a military strike against Iran.

The sharpening of the tension around Iran has forced Russia²⁶ to formally join the anti-Iranian sanctions, though economic cooperation with this country has not been suspended as a whole.

The experience of the last years clearly show inadequate and unfruitful conditions in the increasingly globalizing and interrelated world for any competition between regional powers. The present obstacles in the way of regional and global economic cooperation make it extremely important to find common solutions to existing problems on the basis of compromise and consensus.

Meanwhile, under current circumstances, when participation of potential participants of the Nabucco project – Turkmenistan and Iran - is highly problematic due to the above-mentioned reasons and the uncertain future of extension of the BTC pipeline to Kazakhstan, the CA republics are obliged to preserve sufficiently solid economic relations with Russia and try to find ways out of their present difficulties. For instance, Russia and Kazakhstan have recently coordinated a staged doubling of the power of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium until 2012

²³ „Во всем мире падают темпы разработки новых нефтегазовых месторождений“, in: Газета, May 5, 2008

²⁴ Escobar, P., „The Iranian Chessboard. Five Ways to Think about Iran under the Gun“, in: Payvand's Iran News, May 1, 2008

²⁵ Gollust, David, „Rice Doubts Iran Incentives Will Work“, in: VOA, London, May 2, 2008.

²⁶ „Россия присоединилась к санкциям против Ирана предпоследним указом В.Путина“, in: РБК, May 7, 2008

that will allow elaboration of joint approaches to the usage and development of the energy transport routes.

A strong pro-Russian tendency has also been proved by recent *Gallup* polls²⁷. According to these polls 92% of Tajik, 87% of Kazakh and 89% of Kyrgyz population, as well as 50 % of Uzbek population, highly appreciate Russian policy.

Responding to these tendencies, Turkish officials speak publicly for the participation of Russia in the Nabucco project in the hope that this would reconcile the main opponents in the energy sphere²⁸.

Conclusion

The involvement of Iran in the region of CA during recent decades has shown the inadequacy of efforts to limit the export of Islamic fundamentalism from Iranian territory using methods of economic sanctions and political isolation at regional and global levels. This is why the Iranian vector in CA foreign policies will steadily increase due to economic and political considerations, stimulated by de-ideologization of the Iranian foreign policy. It is obvious that this cooperation would strengthen more under new, moderate and flexible Iranian regime.

At the same time Iran continues to be a potential competitor for the CA states in the sphere of energy resources, which justifies a plurality of energy pipelines from the region.

Nevertheless, the tough Iranian position on the nuclear issue and its inflexibility in solving regional security issues have brought Tehran to the edge of war with the US. Any military action under the above-mentioned circumstances would surely involve all interested political parties, movements and states in Central and South Asia, Caucasus and Middle East, and would have potential for turning into another world war.

As a whole the positive dynamics of the geopolitical processes in the examined region will be dependent on well-defined constructive behaviour by all regional “game” participants, including the US, EU and Russia, Iran, as well as states of CA.

Meanwhile, it is worth to take into account positive changes in Iran as indicating the readiness of Tehran to moderate its position. It seems that with the advent of the new, more monolithic and united conservative cabinet in Tehran, prospects for holding serious talks with the US will grow. Especially if one takes into account the Iranian interest in “sincere cooperation”²⁹ with Russia and the US in the energy sphere and the possible development of new, positive approaches to the situation in the Caspian proceeding from this fact.

Balanced Eurasian-Atlantic cooperation in CA region corresponds to the interests of the CA states, which aspire to a multipolar world order and a collective security system in CA as the sole effective means of providing stability and development in the region. Moreover, constructive cooperation of the two main players in the region – the US and Russia – could

²⁷ Washington ProFile, May 9, 2008

²⁸ „Турция выступает за присоединение России к газовому проекту "Набукко"“, in: Интерфакс, 4 май, 2008.

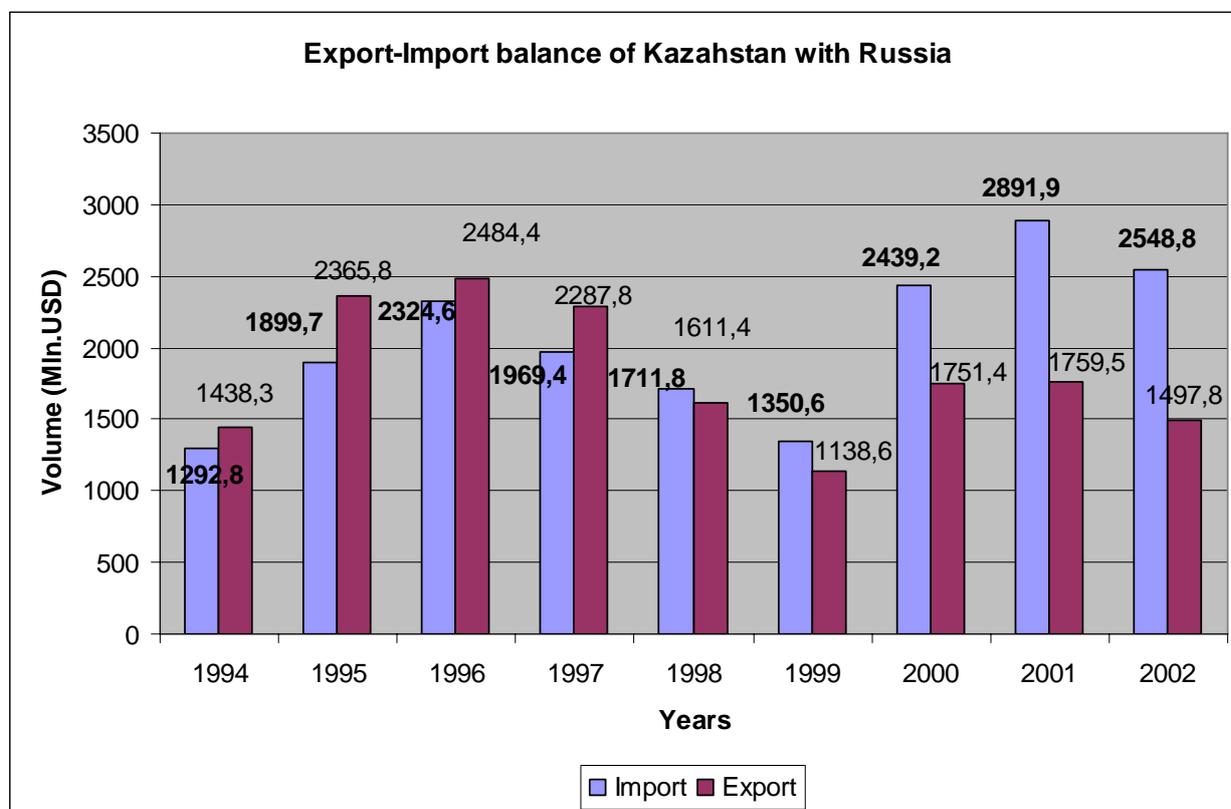
²⁹ Малеки, А., „Остается ли Каспийское море по-прежнему важным для всех игроков?“, in: Аму-Дарья, Тегеран, № 15, осень-зима 2004 г., pp. 28, 42- 43.

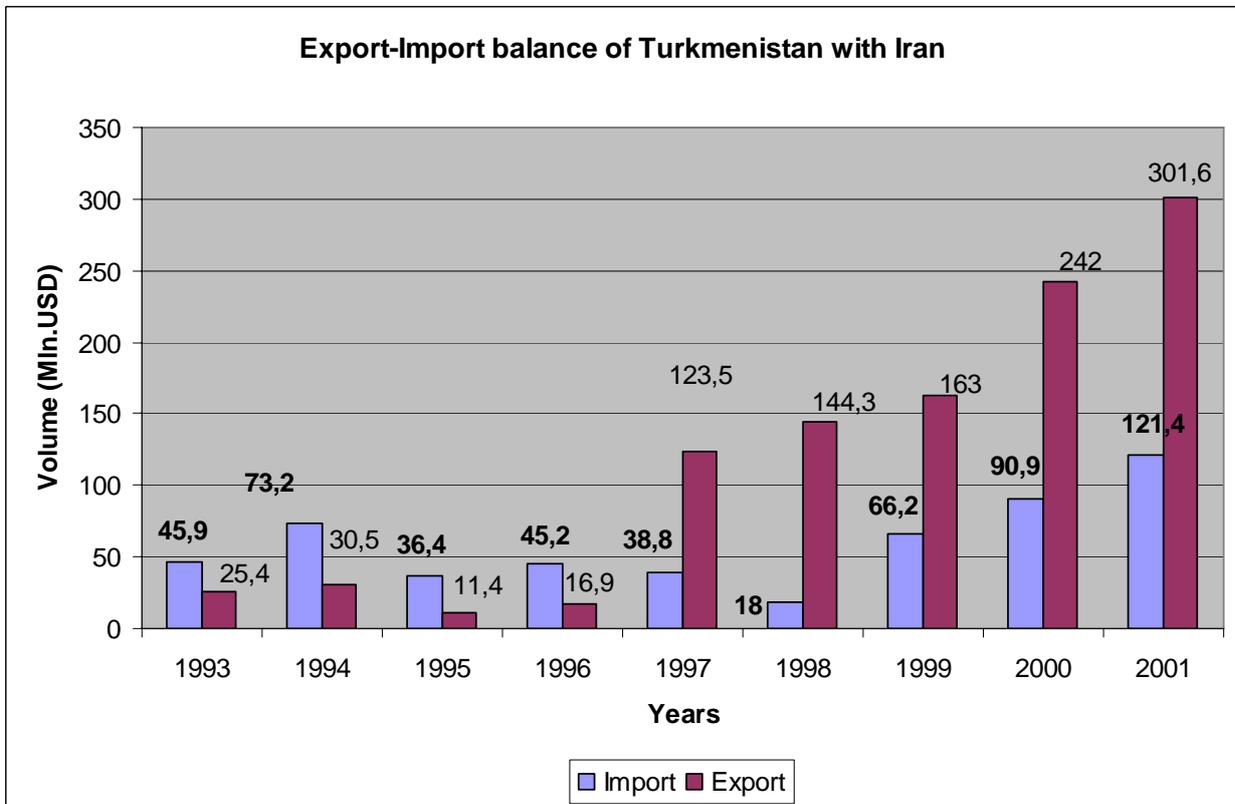
potentially restrict the growth of regional ambitions of Iran and China and serve as the basis of stability for forming a Eurasian system of energy supplies and transport links.

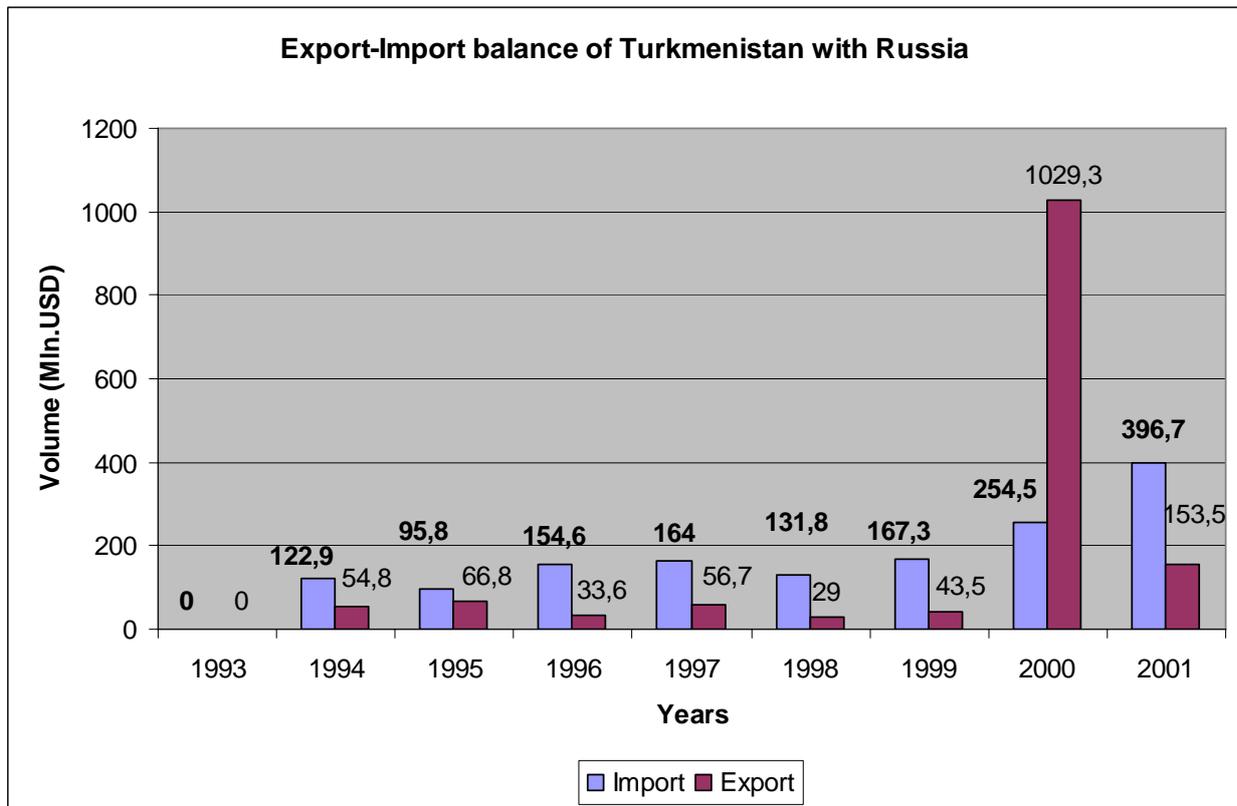
In the new multi-polar architecture of international relations, with various complex mechanisms of restraints and counterbalances Iran, as well as other states with hegemonic intentions, could become a stable, but not dominant, player in CA and the Caucasus.

APPENDIX

Trade Turnover of Kazakhstan (1994-2002) and Turkmenistan (1993-2001) with Russia and Iran*







* *Source:* Figures, presented in these diagrams, taken from “Statistical Yearbook for Asia & the Pacific”, 2003. United Nations/ Nations UNIES.

INSTABILITY IN THE NEW IMPERIAL PERIPHERY: A CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE “TURBULENT FRONTIERS” IN THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

Khatchik Der Ghoukassian*

Abstract

Since the emergence of the United States as the world's only superpower, the Caucasus and Central Asia, traditionally conceived as the Russian “Near Abroad,” have increasingly made their way up the U.S. foreign and security agenda. From debates on NATO expansion to pipeline diplomacy, basing policy, “train and equip” programs, as well as suspected support for ‘color revolutions’, and bilateral cooperation agreements, Washington has tried to mark a presence in these regions. These moves have generated concerns in Russia, where the U.S. expansion to the “Near Abroad” is perceived as a prelude for a new Cold War-style confrontation. Nonetheless, while this “big picture” of a renewed great powers competition holds some truth, it, however, should not hide the importance of local political dynamics, in particular territorial and ethno-nationalist conflicts, as well as clan politics and domestic unrest. Both the international and regional/domestic interplay have mutually conditioning and provocative impacts. This essay proposes a conceptual reflection linking local and global power plays to understand the political dynamics in the Caucasus and Central Asia conceived as a new imperial periphery. The essay aims at a theoretical formulation to explain this dynamic in any geopolitical context characterized as an imperial periphery in the current unipolar systemic structure. It deliberately is not an empirical study of the Caucasus, Central Asia, or the U.S.-Russian relations.

Keywords: ‘Turbulent frontier’, regional security complex, imperial periphery, local-regional level interaction.

Introduction

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence in the international arena of fifteen independent states, which initially became known as the Newly Independent States (NIS), the Eurasian continent entered a phase of geopolitical uncertainty. The Russian Federation, which inherited the status of the former Soviet Union and occupied the same chair in the U.N. Security Council, did not lose time in redefining its foreign and security policy. Following the consensus, in turn, of the new Constitution, which the

* *Dr. Khatchik Der Ghoukassian is a Professor of International Relations at the Universidad de San Andres, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Visiting Professor at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia.*

Duma approved in 1993, the place and the role of Russia in the post-Cold War world was defined in terms of a nuclear world power and a regional power with a special interest in its Near Abroad, a concept that designed the former Soviet space.¹

The Russian special interest in the Near Abroad was argued primarily for security reasons. The rationale of this argument notwithstanding, the ‘hard power’ component of the statement, and strong suspicions of a continuity of centuries-old imperial projection did not make Moscow’s efforts to stabilize the region easy. Even before the fall of the Soviet Union, and while the frozen nationalities question was reemerging from the Caucasus to Central Asia and in the European regions of the multinational state (Carrère d’Encausse 1991), Moscow, and the military in particular, was already intervening in the conflicts. Moreover, when the Yeltsin government launched the initiative of a Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS), Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, among others, showed reluctance and even resistance in joining the project. In fact, even after signing up to it, emergence of the Georgia-Ukraine-Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan-Moldova (GUUAM) alliance in the late 1990s, not mentioning the publicly admitted intention of some of these countries to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), proved how difficult it was for Russia to reassert its position as a regional hegemon.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, hence, the Near Abroad, or the former periphery of the Soviet imperial state structure, developed a proper political dynamic appropriate to the historical process of the emergence of the nation-state, including war, economic transition and institutional building. By the mid-1990s, the initial conflictive phase of defining territorial limits, the primary accumulation of capital and the internal power struggle to dominate the state structures came to completion. While none of the conflicts found its final solution and the emerging power structures were extremely weak, the situation since then has been frozen.

The Near Abroad, hence, has entered a phase of turbulence, which seems more of a domestic than inter-state nature - albeit some aspects of this turbulence, such as the so-called “color revolutions,” projected a power struggle that potentially went beyond the internal logic of the events. The turbulence in the periphery, on the other hand, indicates the irrelevance of the CIS as an institutional structure.

The fall of the Soviet Union opened the way to the expansion of U.S. influence in the Eurasian landscape. Cautiously, during the Bush senior and Clinton administrations, Washington never denied Moscow its right to mark a presence in the former Soviet space, including as a factor of stabilization. Gradually, however, Washington’s interests in the region started to take shape, leading to a competitive phase of U.S.-Russian relations. The reemergence of the Caspian as a new ‘Black Gold’ Eldorado gave birth to a political dynamic of pipeline diplomacy, with Washington pushing for a Mediterranean route to world market for the oil, whereas Moscow remained eager to maintain export routes under its control.

¹ Aron, Leon , “Foreign Policy Doctrine of Postcommunist Russia”, in: Michael Mandelbaum (ed.), “The New Russian Foreign Policy”, Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC. 1998.

Clinton's foreign and security policy, conceptually defined along the guidelines of the Engagement and Expansion doctrine, contemplated the reformulation of NATO's role and its eventual expansion to the East. The Russians never lost the opportunity to express their hostility to this initiative, and perceived it in terms of a zero-sum game. Diplomatic arrangements were eventually made for both issues, which, nevertheless, ended up marking an increasing U.S. presence on the former Soviet territory outside Russia.

The end of the post-Cold War era on September 11, 2001 and the following declaration of the War on Terrorism of the Bush administration strengthened this presence and gave it a military aspect. The Republican administration in the White House soon endorsed a hawkish vision of world affairs and emphasized the military engagement, conceptualized in the so-called Bush Doctrine of preemptive strikes, the cornerstone of the new American Grand Strategy. With a major geopolitical shift of the conflict arena from Europe to the Middle East and Central Asia, Washington developed a basing policy for the war on terrorism, which consists in creating military bases in and close cooperation with countries considered of strategic importance in the war.²

With the creation of military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the waiver of the embargo on US foreign aid to Azerbaijan imposed by section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, and the extension of the Train and Equip program to Georgia, for the first time in its history the United States became a Eurasian power. Moreover, after the military intervention and occupation of Iraq, Washington pushed for the inclusion of former Soviet republics, including Armenia, Russia's strategic ally in the Caucasus, in the forces of the Coalition. Though reluctant, the U.S. nevertheless had emerged as a world empire unique of its kind.³

After September 11, 2001, therefore, the Near Abroad has become a new imperial periphery, albeit structurally different from what it was during the Tsarist and Soviet times. Adopting a realist position, the then-President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, did not object to this new U.S. military presence in the former Soviet periphery. In fact, Moscow looked for close cooperation with Washington in the War on Terrorism. Nonetheless, the U.S.-Russian competition did not come to a close with this cooperation. Quite the opposite: Putin's Realism became ever more present in the cost-benefit calculations in defining the terms of cooperation and those of competition. The U.S.'s more assertive presence in the new imperial periphery has added a novel element to the turbulence. Whereas Washington is more active in its bilateral relations with the peripheral states, it cannot ignore the Russian factor in the making and the breaking of regional balances in Eurasia.

² Johnson, Chalmers, "The Sorrows of Empire. Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic", (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

³ Bacevich, Andrew J., "American Empire. The Reality & Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

This essay focuses on the nature of the instability of the new imperial periphery to frame the interaction of the global and local dynamics. I use the concept of “turbulent frontier”, which John S. Galbraith coined in 1960 to describe the factors that caused the British expansion in the 19th century, to analyze the impact of the U.S.-Russian relations of cooperation and competition on the local processes of the new imperial periphery.⁴ I sustain that while a political confrontation between Washington and Moscow facilitates, if not creates, turbulence, the local processes deeply rooted in the ethno-nationalist confrontation for territorial gains, clan politics, and social exclusion as a consequence of the free market economy transition are factors that independently can maintain and perpetuate the peripheral instability. The main danger of a regional conflict, therefore, is inherent to the political process of the Near Abroad, and not necessarily from a U.S.-Russian confrontation. The current approach of maintaining the status quo of the fragile balance of power in the periphery, and the secret eagerness of using the conflict-prone situation in the dynamics of their cooperative-competitive relations on behalf of Moscow and Washington is highly risky for the future of a region crucial for its geopolitical location and the oil and natural gas reserves.

In the first section I analyze the concept of “turbulent frontier,” and show its utility to understand the situation in the peripheral region of the Caucasus – with extension to Central Asia. Next, I use the Regional Security Complex (RSC) framework to emphasize the importance of a regional approach to the situation in the above-mentioned geographical areas of the former Soviet Union. Then I combine the conceptual tools of both the metaphor of “turbulent frontier” and the theoretical framework of the RSC to analyze the interaction of the local and global dynamics in the making of the peripheral instability. In the conclusion of the essay I offer some venues of the dangers of the current situation.

“Turbulent Frontiers” in the 21st Century

John S. Galbraith’s 1960 essay focuses on the paradox of a British society reluctant to imperial expansion beyond areas commercially profitable, and the historical fact of an expanding British Empire. Avoiding any simple explanation, the historian advances a cautious thesis about “the pull exerted by “turbulent frontiers” adjacent to the area of Imperial authority and in the wide powers exercised by imperial viceroys in an era of primitive communications.”⁵ He describes the conditions in which there is practically no possibility for a centralized decision with respect to any emergency. “Between two and two and a half years usually elapsed before a Governor General of the early nineteenth century received a reply to even his most urgent communications. Consequently he was required to assume vast authority. His supreme task was the maintenance of order within his area; failure to do so was the one unpardonable sin; and in the prosecution of that objective he was often led to take actions which were not authorized by his instructions,

⁴ Galbraith, John S., “The “Turbulent Frontier” as a Factor in British Expansion”, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 2, No. 2, January 1960.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

indeed, in many cases, in direct violation thereof.”⁶ These conditions explain the dynamics of the British expansion to areas that in them might not have been commercially profitable. The expansion, therefore, often confronted the state authorities with the *fait accompli*, though “every war in India was justified in terms of defense; and the ultimate verdict of the home authorities was usually irrelevant as that of the historian.”⁷

Studying this dynamics in other parts of the Empire, Galbraith concludes: “In India, Malaya, and South Africa, governors, charged with the maintenance of order, could not ignore disorder beyond their borders, turbulence which pulled them toward expansion. This influence was not imperative; some governors resisted it, while others, if they did not welcome the opportunities for the extension of British authority, were strongly susceptible to seduction. Seldom did the London government initiate frontier policy, rather, it reacted to the policies of its governors. ... In India, Malaya, and South Africa, British dominion implied expansion, though anti-expansionists sought to avoid acceptance of the corollary. Governors continued to try to eliminate the disorderly frontier expansion by annexations which in turn produced new frontier problems and further expansion. The “turbulent frontier” consequently contributed to the paradox of the nineteenth century empire that “grew in spite of itself”.”⁸

There are two arguments to consider the “turbulent frontier” metaphor as appropriate to the topic it addresses and not applicable nowadays. First, any emergency situation could reach the decision-makers immediately thanks to the advance of communications technology. Second, imperial expansion in terms of territorial annexations is not a feature that characterizes the dynamics of current international power politics, and less still the peculiar nature of the American “Empire.” Nevertheless, if we consider the increasing weight of the U.S. military in the decision-making process, and if we replace “expansion” or “annexation” by “intervention” then the “turbulent frontier” metaphor could be useful to shed light on certain security dynamics in the post-September 11 world.

Galbraith’s metaphor, for instance, is useful to highlight some features of the current U.S.-Latin American relations.⁹ Accordingly, the so-called “new threats” provide an argument to project military intervention where anti-systemic tendencies are perceived. Any “turbulent frontier” where these “new threats” are perceived raises the potential of becoming a pull factor for intervention; hence, peripheral countries need to be wise enough to avoid becoming a “turbulent frontier”, providing an argument for intervention. Moreover, within the U.S. imperial project, the military commanders have increasingly assumed the role of proconsuls; hence, they are often the ones who take the lead in formulating the argument of a threat which invites the U.S. to intervene. This role is particularly visible for military commanders whose responsibility does not extend to a

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 153.

⁸ Ibid., p. 168.

⁹ Tokatlian, Juan Gabriel, “Las relaciones Estados Unidos – América Latina: La sombra del Proconsulado, Cartografías del poder. Hegemonía y respuestas”, Anuario CIP 2005, CIP-Icaria, Barcelona, España. 2005.

geographical area which is crucial for the U.S. national security interest. Latin America is not a strategically vital region for the United States in the current international circumstances. Hence, the decision-makers in Washington tend to delegate more autonomy to SOUTHCOM (Southern Command, tasked with overseeing Latin America) in formulating threat perceptions and making the recommendations.

The new imperial periphery in the Eurasian continent is already a U.S. national security interest. The decision to intervene, open a base, or extend military cooperation is made in Washington, according to short, mid and long-term plans of the U.S. global power projection. The “turbulent frontier” metaphor, however, could also be useful to frame the security dynamics and the interaction of the pull and push factors. Yet, the “local” in the new imperial periphery defines more a regional than a single country situation. The Regional Security Complex (RSC) framework, as I analyze in the next section, helps us in understanding the regional dimension of the “local.”

A Regional Perspective of Security for the Imperial Periphery

Since the end of the Cold War, regional perspectives of International Relations (IR) theory started to address issues such as political relations, social movements and security in a limited geographical extension. These approaches often refer to the process of regionalization of international politics in terms of “regional orders,” “regional complexes,” or “security communities”. The regional approaches in IR theory¹⁰ maintain that the regional level of interaction among political units explain far better the outcome of the process than either traditional theories such as Realism, Liberalism or Marxism, or conjectural and case by case analysis. The former are too broad to capture the complexity of the political phenomenon, whereas the latter fails to see how crucial have become cross-border linkages between units for the understanding of the evolution of each one of them.¹¹

The regional perspective of IR Theory posits the existence of regional subsystems relatively autonomous from the global system. A regional subsystem lies between the general tendencies of the global system and the unit-level inter-state interactions. The distinctive feature of a subsystem is the geographical proximity of the component states, a situation which provides a unique dynamic to their interactions based upon power relations and amity/enmity patterns. A regional subsystem, thus, is defined in terms of a “security complex” as an empirical phenomenon with historical and geographical roots. In theoretical terms, they can be derived from both the state and the system levels.

¹⁰ Hurrell, Andrew, “One world? Many worlds? The place of regions in the study of international society” in: *International Affairs*, vol. 83. n. 1, January 2007.

¹¹ See: Lake, David A. & Morgan, Patrick M., “Regional Orders. Building Security in a New World”, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1997); Solingen, Etel, “Regional Orders at Century’s Dawn. Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy” (Princeton: University Press Princeton, 1998); Helga Hafdenton, Robert O. Keohane & Celeste A. Wallander, “Imperfect Unions. Security Institutions over Time and Space” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Mittelman, James H., “The Globalization Syndrome. Transformation and Resistance” (Princeton: University Press Princeton, 2000)

Looked at from the bottom up, security complexes result from interaction between individual states. They represent the way in which the sphere of concern that any state has about its environment, interacts with the linkages between the intensity of military and political threats, and the shortness of the range over which they are perceived. Because threats operate more potently over short distances, security interactions with neighbors will tend to have first priority. Seen from the top down, security complexes are generated by interaction of anarchy and geography. The political structure of anarchy confronts all states with the security dilemma, but the otherwise seamless web of security interdependence is powerfully mediated by the effect of geography. Unless capabilities for transportation are very unevenly distributed, as they sometimes are, all states will thus tend to be thrust into closer contact with their neighbors rather than those further afield.

Based upon this initial definition of regional complexes, Buzan and Waever deepen the analysis of amity/enmity following the logic of the securitization framework. They define a Regional Security Complex (RSC) “by durable patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of subglobal, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence.”¹² Within this approach, and along with power relations, durable conflicts and long-term historical rivalries, the security dynamics in a RSC also depends on the way actors, mostly but not exclusively states, construct their identity.

The RSC framework specifies four interrelated levels of analysis: (a) the domestic order in terms of stability and vulnerabilities that define its security fears; (b) state-to-state relations; (c) the region’s interaction with neighboring regions, a level that is relatively limited except when major changes of security interdependence are underway; and (d) the role of global powers in the region. These levels in turn define the essential structure of an RSC that embodies four variables: (a) boundary, which differentiates the RSC from its neighbors; (b) anarchic structure, meaning that the RSC should be composed of two or more autonomous units; (c) polarity, or the distribution of power among the units; and (d) social construction, or the definition of patterns of amity and enmity among units. Finally, there are three possible evolutions open to any RSC: (a) maintenance of the status quo; (b) internal transformations in either the distribution of power among interacting units or the patterns of amity/enmity; and (c) external transformations, which occur when the boundaries of an RSC changes by contraction or expansion.

The RSC Theory defines also types of security complexes based upon variations in polarity and in patterns of amity/enmity leading to either standard or centered ones. The former “is broadly Westphalian in form with two or more powers and a predominantly military-security agenda.”¹³ Whereas centered RSCs come in three, and maybe four, main forms. “The first two forms are the special cases in which an RSC is unipolar, but the power concerned is either a great power (e.g., Russia in the C.I.S.) or a superpower (e.g., the United States in North America), rather than just a regional power.”¹⁴ The third

¹² Buzan, Barry and Waever, Ole, “Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security”, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

type of centered RSCs involves “a region integrated by institutions rather than by a single power,”¹⁵ as is the European Union (EU). The distinctive feature of these centered RSCs is its high level of institutionalization and the development of a security community, whereas though competition persists among units, it avoids balance of power behaviors. In its highest level, which in today’s real world empirically does not make much sense, a security community defines a common identity. Buzan and Waever, furthermore, study cases that do not fit within these types, arising from a number of global powers scattered through the system. “The more such powers there are in the system, the less room will be for standard RSCs; the fewer, the more room. Having great powers scattered through the international system creates two possibilities other than centered complexes: *great power regional security complexes*, and *supercomplexes*.”¹⁶ The former is a bi- or multipolar complex with great powers as regional poles, whereas the latter expresses a strong interregional level of security dynamics arising from great power spillover into adjacent regions.

Based upon their detailed conceptualization of the RSC Theory, Buzan and Waever consider the “post-Soviet space” as one of the three parts of the supercomplex of the “Europes” –the other two, according to the authors, being the EU, and the Balkans and Turkey. Within this approach, the whole post-Soviet space is a constellation, with Russia as the great power and the other fourteen former Soviet republics grouped in four different subregions: the three Baltic states –Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia; the three western group of states –Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova; the three South Caucasian republics –Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia; and the five Central Asian states –Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. “For most of the states, security concerns relate mainly to other states in the subcomplex plus Russia. What define the wider RSC, grouping them all together, are the unifying factors, first, of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.) and, second, that a coalition attempting to rein in Russia necessarily cuts across the regions.”¹⁷ Historically, the debate on Russian identity construction evolved in terms of its pro-European or pro-Eurasian orientation; nevertheless, “the global arena is today much more important than Europe for Russia’s attempts both to secure a larger role outside its region and to legitimize its regional empire.”¹⁸ Thus, in addition to the EU, China and Japan and their respective RSCs in Asia are increasingly active in the evolution of the security dynamics in the post-Soviet space.

Interestingly, the authors downplay the role of the United States in this dynamic. “In contrast to most other regions of the world, the one superpower, the USA, plays less of a role in this region, although a question mark has emerged in Central Asia and the Caucasus, mostly due to oil interests and, after September 2001, the war on terrorism.”¹⁹ Even before September 2001, the U.S. impact in the formation of the post-Soviet space

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 397.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 398.

¹⁹ Ibid.

has been notable, let alone in terms of the debates that generated the perspectives of the expansion of NATO. The U.S. impact is much more visible, of course, after September 2001 with the installation of military bases in Central Asia, the “Train and Equip” program in Georgia, the participation of some former Soviet republics in the Coalition forces in Iraq and the support of ‘color revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine. Hence, when considering the security dynamics in the post-Soviet space the role of the United States as the global superpower in the post-Cold War gains much more importance than Buzan and Waever assign to it.

Accordingly, in the next section I analyze the local and global dynamics of two of these subregions that have become a potential battlefield for the war on terrorism: the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The Local and the Global in the Making of Instability in the Near Abroad

The decade following the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, defined the new geopolitical dynamics in the Eurasian heartland. This dynamic consisted of the simultaneous and interactive processes of a transition to market economy and the struggle to reach to a new balance of power in the geographical area where the fragmentation of the imperial structure led to the emergence of fifteen independent states. A widely common path consisting of “shock therapy” privatization and liberalization characterized the process of economic transition of all of the former Soviet republics; the domestic and foreign aspects of the struggle for power to consolidate the national borders, and within them a particular structure of hierarchy and domination, however, have been different across three emerging regional division lines in Europe, Central Asia and the South Caucasus. The former Soviet republics, thus, were grouped regionally; only the Russian Federation remained an intervening actor in the three regions. This regional variation in the political struggle ended up determining the contours of the new structure of the balance of power in the formerly Soviet space of Eurasia; which, in turn, strongly conditioned the development of each of the fifteen independent states, albeit in different forms and grade for each state.

Three features, all present to a lesser or greater degree in the two subregions of the Caucasus and Central Asia, constitute the local aspect of the “turbulent frontier.” These three features are the mobilizing force of ethnonationalism in defining the agenda of territorial conflicts; clan politics defining loyalties along certain social lines, often crossing the national contexts; and social exclusion as a result of the transition to free market. The first characterizes mostly the conflicts in the Caucasian subregion. Nagorno Karabagh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and to a lesser degree even Djavakheti and Adjara, are secessionist conflicts calling for territorial redistribution along ethnonational loyalties. Although the clan politics is not absent in the Caucasus, it is more characteristic to Central Asia, and defines dividing loyalty lines not only within a society, but often crossing the national borders. Ethnonationalism in Central Asia is functional for the

competition for regional hegemony between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The social exclusion, finally, refers to the majority of the population in the subregion, as the implementation of the free market through the so-called shock therapies has led to a tremendous concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a minority. True, for now social exclusion is irrelevant for the “turbulent frontier” because of the fragmentation of even arguably the most ethnically homogenous country in both subregions – Armenia. However, social exclusion gains importance when we consider its direct or indirect impact on other processes, such as mobilization for war, or allegiance to the state. All these three features of the “turbulent frontier” can become a pull factor for intervention. They could either be manipulated from outside to justify intervention, or constitute an argument to invite intervention.

Applying the RSC framework, the three features constituting the “turbulent frontier” intervene in the domestic and state-to-state relations levels to allow us to foresee any interventionist trend. The Caucasian and Central Asian subregions are not autonomous enough for any practical consideration of the third level – interaction between neighboring regions- of analysis. The fourth, however, the role of global powers in the region, is an extremely relevant level of analysis, as it might be both a push and pull factor for intervention. In brief, local and global factors interact in the making of the instability of the new imperial periphery. The metaphor of “turbulent frontier” is helpful to see how the three features of ethnonationalism, clan politics and social exclusion interact to create conflictive situations on the domestic and state-to-state relations levels of the RSC framework. These situations, in turn, create push and pull factors for intervention, which, nonetheless, is decided on the fourth level of analysis in the same framework.

Conclusion: The Dynamics of Instability in the Periphery

The combination of the “turbulent frontier” metaphor in its updated variant with the RSC analytical framework shows a multilevel and dynamic game of balance of power, where it is increasingly difficult to determine how control is maintained. In fact, because of the inherent instability of the new imperial periphery, there perhaps cannot be a long-term balance of power enjoying acceptance, albeit never publicly admitted, by all the concerning parties. Therefore, for the predictable future, and as long as the three features of a “turbulent frontier” remain, there will be constant adjustments of the balance of power relations. This, in turn, leaves open the possibility of intervention of global powers.

THE SHADOW OF PAST RIVALRY: LIMITS OF POST-1999 DYNAMISM IN GRECO-TURKISH RELATIONS

Eda Kuşku*

Abstract

This essay will enquire whether Turkey and Greece could remove their enduring controversies through confidence building measures, mediation and inter-governmental dialogues which were introduced in the post-1999 détente period. The paper will specifically focus on the recent nature of understanding between the two countries and will endeavour to answer the question of whether there is a divergence in the nature of recent cooperative arrangements from those which were concluded in the former periods of détente and each of which were disrupted by succeeding periods of either armed conflict or cold war. The paper contends that the recent nature of Greek-Turkish relations is not problem-free. Yet, the new cooperative environment facilitated by confidence building measures and growing mutual understanding could help resolve the disputes and dispel reservations in the Aegean and Cyprus which have been very central to national security considerations of both Turkey and Greece. From a security perspective, continuation of previous policies towards one another is counterproductive in the post-1999 period. Improvement of a bilateral dialogue under the EU umbrella is detrimental for the defence considerations of both Turkey and Greece.

Keywords: Greece, Turkey, European Union, security, Cyprus, Aegean, rapprochement

Introduction

This essay will enquire whether Turkey and Greece could remove their enduring controversies through confidence building measures, mediation and inter-governmental dialogues which were introduced in the post-1999 détente period.

The paper will specifically focus on the recent nature of understanding between the two countries and will endeavour to answer the question of whether there is a divergence in the nature of recent cooperative arrangements from those which were concluded in former periods of détente, each of which were disrupted by succeeding periods of either armed conflict or cold war.

The analysis, therefore, will initially require a comprehensive description of the issues that led Turkey and Greece to enter the earlier periods of détente and the centrality of those issues to the national security interests of both countries. Thus, the question is: why was it that Turkey

* **Eda Kuşku** is a doctoral candidate at the Sabancı University, İstanbul, Turkey. She specializes in International Relations and Comparative Politics with a specific focus on the European Union and its relations with Turkey.

and Greece could not cooperate in the periods prior to the latest rapprochement? The second part of the analysis will elaborate on the factors that facilitated the recent détente and further reconciliation between Greece and Turkey. The paper will evaluate the impact of new areas of security cooperation as reflections of changing international dynamics, transformations in the impacts of the European Union (EU), changing attitudes of the publics in Greece and Turkey and the political leaders and the interconnection between all these factors.

The ultimate aim will be to assess the correlation between the above mentioned dimensions of the relationship and the national security interests of Greece and Turkey. The related question is whether the recent cooperative environment that was facilitated by the above factors would help resolve the disputes and dispel reservations in the Aegean and Cyprus, which have always been central to national security considerations of Greece and Turkey?

Historical Baggage: Former Controversies and Détente Phases

In the history of their dyadic relationship, Turkey and Greece went through a number of events which made cooperation between the two neighbours fragile and unpromising. Given the shadow of many unresolved past disputes, some observers of Greek-Turkish relations have reservations about the prospects for a continuous and encouraging relationship even under the present accommodating state of affairs.

Going back to their processes of state formation, the record of Turkish-Greek history is full of inconsistencies which originate primarily from the issue of the Greek independence movement, as Greeks were the most resentful for not being independent under the four centuries of Ottoman rule. This inferior position of Greece continued with their defeat in 1919-1922 Greco-Turkish war.

In the period of the 1930s and in the subsequent decades until the 1960s, most historians agree that the two countries were entering a new era in bilateral relations. Leaders of both countries, i.e. Atatürk and Venizelos reached compromise with the practice of ‘population exchange’ under the treaty of Lausanne. This mutually agreed expulsion created a malaise, especially in Greek domestic affairs. The relaxation of tensions between the two governments carried with it the side effect of creating refugee populations in both countries. Although both Greece and Turkey had difficulties in managing their refugee problems, they regarded the population exchange as one of a constructive agreement between the two governments that alleviated Greco-Turkish bilateral relations. In their opinion, it was a positive development in the process of state formation, since the population exchange helped fortify the nation-state construction of Greece and Turkey with their then fairly homogenized and stabilized populations.

Political, economic and security agreements, which were claimed to have been created in the spirit of this Atatürk-Venizelos conciliation, were followed after the World War II by an enhanced relationship with the inclusion of both Turkey and Greece under the ‘western alliance system’. They both became members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to cooperate against the common Soviet threat. In order to reinforce the western security and defence structure, this Greco-Turkish cooperation was encouraged by the US government which had immense leverage over both countries during the early years of the Cold War. Thus, Greece and Turkey were both critical actors in the containment of the Soviet

Union which was the overriding security concern for the US in the emerging bipolar international system.¹ As part of this containment strategy of the US, Turkey and Greece were also the recipients of aid under the Marshall Plan.² Hence, the first half of the 1950s was a continuation of cooperative arrangements under the military establishment of NATO. The existence of past rivalry could not impede the emergence of an understanding at the international level, given the fact that taking the side of the US in the bipolar international balance-of-power structure was to the benefit of both Turkey and Greece. Hence, the convergence of interests under the NATO alliance inaugurated easy-going Greco-Turkish relations. Unfortunately, new confrontations began to emerge during the 1960s and 1970s and the security consensus of the early post-war period began to erode.³ Thus being satellites of the US couldn't prevent Turkey and Greece from starting to diverge from one another once they were pulled into long-lasting controversies in Cyprus and in the Aegean.

A series of events leading to a stalemate in Greco-Turkish relations started as early as 1960, when Cyprus was granted independent status according to an agreement signed between the guarantor powers of Great Britain, Greece, and Turkey. Difficulties in reconciling the dispute between the ethnic communities of Turks and Greeks in the island began to increase as the Cyprus crisis was exacerbated during the 1963-1967 outbreaks of intercommunal violence. The following decade was marked by a number of incidents that added to the intensification of the conflict. Turkish Armed Forces intervened in 1974 and occupied one third of Cyprus, which resulted in the *fait accompli* partitioning of the island. Since then there have been many attempts by the UN (United Nations) and recently by the EU to initiate the process of settling the conflict between the two communities of the island. Despite these efforts, the thirty-five years of unresolved conflict reached a deadlock that gave rise to pessimism among many analysts, and undid their hopes about the success of confidence building measures in redirecting the present day affairs between Greece and Turkey. Details of the Cyprus dispute are beyond the scope of this paper. The importance of the Cyprus conflict for the purpose of this essay is the way in which the crisis in the island has transformed foreign policy making in Greece and Turkey. The ongoing impasse resulted in unilateral and nationalistic foreign policy making in both countries.

During the same period when the Cyprus crisis was growing violent, Turkey undertook a number of unilateral actions to revise the international legal status of the Aegean. In 1973-1974 Turkey took up the matters of Continental Shelf (CS), the Flight Information Region (FIR), and the incompatibility between the 10-mile limit of Greece's air space with the 6-mile limit of its territorial waters.⁴ In 1987, tensions further escalated after Turkey's attempt to conduct underwater research on the Greek Continental Shelf in the Aegean.

As soon as Turkey and Greece began to define themselves within the western state system, in all of their disputes both sides began to expect the support of the West, particularly that of the US.⁵ Later, escalating tensions between Turkey and Greece undermined their preceding security consensus and complicated the relations of both countries with NATO and with the

¹ Koliopoulos, John S, Veremis, Thanos, "Greece, the Modern Sequel: From 1821 to the Present", London, 2004, pp. 302-303.

² Koliopoulos, John S, Veremis, Thanos 2004, pp. 302-303.

³ Aydın, Mustafa, "Contemporary Turkish-Greek Relations: Constraints and Opportunities", in Mustafa Aydın and Kostas Ifantis (eds) "Turkish-Greek Relations: The Security Dilemma in the Aegean", London, 2004, p. 25

⁴ Koliopoulos, John S, Veremis, Thanos 2004, p. 320.

⁵ Aydın, Mustafa, Ifantis, Kostas 2004, p. 26.

US. It is fair to argue that the nature of the alliance between Turkey and Greece and the great powers is also critical in understanding the way in which their dyadic relationship has evolved. The nature of the bilateral relationship between Greece and the US has significantly transformed as US dominance has begun to diminish, and especially after Greece's EU membership in 1981.

Greece first applied for membership to the European Community (EC) in 1959, and Turkey reciprocated immediately. Yet, the military takeover in Greece between the years 1967 and 1974 and the series of events that followed Turkish intervention in Cyprus in 1974 crippled the EC-Turkey and EC-Greece dialogue. In the following period Konstantinos Karamanlis, who was then the Greek Prime Minister, began to execute the so called 'shuttle diplomacy' and reapplied in 1975 for EC membership knowing that the newly established Greek democracy was very fragile and in need of the EC anchor. Conversely, Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit chose to move away from the EC to get his interests recognized. Interplay of a number of other factors such as the civil war in Turkey, economic nationalism and EC opposition of the National Front⁶ made Turkey further deviate from the path to EC membership.

In the aftermath of its accession to the EU, Greek foreign policy gradually moved away from reliance on America and became oriented towards Europe. Turkish foreign policy remained linked to the US throughout the Cold War years, and the US continued to be the key strategic partner for Turkey in the following period. Thus, different orientations in foreign policy making, founded on the attachment of Greece and Turkey to great powers, would in part explain why Turkey and Greece were further moving away from one another towards the end of the Cold War. Mustafa Aydın argues that the foreign policies of Turkey and Greece continue to be shaped mostly by western patronage and influence, with the purpose of maintaining a position within the western state system.⁷ The Cold War legacy was detrimental in the formulation of bilateral foreign policy for Greece and Turkey. Some argue that the escalation of tensions between Greece and Turkey after a series of events during the end of Cold War have led to the re-emergence of earlier distrust. In particular, Greece's threat perceptions were transformed with the declining threat of communism and growing assistance of the European institutions. Greece began to concentrate on the threats to its national security coming from Turkey, although Turkey continuously declared to have no claims beyond its 'Misak-ı Milli' borders.

Some analysts of Greco-Turkish relations argue that transformations in the internal dynamics also had considerable impact on the formulation of the foreign policies of Greece and Turkey towards one another. Greece started to practice democracy under civilian rule in 1974. Its membership to the EC in 1981 facilitated consolidation of the democratic government. In the Turkish case, there were several military interruptions during the Cold War years. These interruptions have created setbacks in Turkey's accession negotiations with the EC and consequently had negative implications for its democratic consolidation. Starting with the 1980s, Greece began to exploit its position in the EU as leverage against Turkey. Compared to the impact of the EU on democratic consolidation in both countries, this strategy of utilizing EU membership in the conduct of foreign policy towards Turkey has been more decisive in altering Greece's inferior position in bilateral relations.

⁶ "National Front" was the name of the coalition government established by the leader of Justice Party Süleyman Demirel.

⁷ Aydın, Mustafa, Ifantis, Kostas (2004), p. 26.

After the 1987 dispute over the Aegean continental shelf delimitations, the two sides tried to solve the disagreement through confidence building measures with the process initiated by the meeting of Prime Ministers Papandreou and Özal in Davos, Switzerland, in February 1988.⁸ A new *détente* phase was entered with this *modus vivendi*. *Détente* was momentary, given the reluctance of the successive Turkish and Greek governments to improve the Özal-Papandreou programme which was calling for developing relations in low-key politics. As Greek threat perceptions were transforming, similarly the way Turkey perceived its western neighbour has evolved through a growing confidence in Turkish military potency. Greece, on the other hand, was gradually becoming a soft power, largely due to its EU membership. The presence of NATO took care of the Hobbesian tendency of world politics in Europe and enabled the European states to focus more on European Economic Community (EEC) integration.⁹ Turkey, however, continued to improve its military capabilities with regard to threats to its security from the terrorist networks in the eastern regions and other threats coming from its troubled eastern and southern neighbourhoods. Hence, an asymmetry in terms of military power became increasingly visible, which further escalated the Greek perception of Turkey as threat to its national security. Furthermore, issues in the Aegean remained unresolved and confidence building measures initiated after the 1988 process seemed futile, as the Imia/Kardak crisis of 1996 demonstrated. The crisis brought Greece and Turkey to the brink of a war and tensions were reduced only after the phone calls by the US president and after the involvement of the general secretary of the NATO. All of these events demonstrate the fragility of the *détente* processes prior to 1999.

Is There a Break with the Past? Factors that Facilitate Recent *Détente*

Ups and downs in their bilateral relations make it obvious that it would be hard to break the deep-rooted conflictual cycle of interaction between Greece and Turkey. Nevertheless, some analysts argue that the post-1999 period seems to be distinct from the former periods of *détente*, on account of factors that recently facilitated an engagement between Greece and Turkey. Although most issues remain unresolved and without settlement, the process of the latest *détente* began to evolve into what we can call a *rapprochement*. However, the potential for the continuation of the recent engagement strategy of both Greece and Turkey towards one another in creating a lasting peace is fundamentally linked to their national security concerns. The critical question is whether the recent cooperative arrangements are more important to national security interests of Turkey and Greece than the continuation of the *status quo* in existing disputes that would best serve their interests.

Before all else one has to analyse the factors that have contributed to a fundamental change in Greco-Turkish relations in the aftermath of 1999 and which relatively sedated the burden of the past. Ahmet Evin argues that among many factors precipitating the latest *rapprochement*, some analysts mistakenly set too high a value on mutual sympathy that emerged on both sides after the earthquakes in Greece and Turkey.¹⁰ Since the Imia/Kardak crisis Greek-Turkish relations gradually deteriorated and the worsening of relations reached a culmination point

⁸ Koliopoulos, John S, Veremis, Thanos (2004), p. 321.

⁹ Müftüler-Bac, Meltem, “The European Union and its Common Defense and Security Policy”, Yannis A Stivachtis (eds.), in *State of the European Union*, London, Ashgate press (2007), p. 4

¹⁰ Evin, Ahmet, “The Future of Greek-Turkish Relations, in: Southeast European and Black Sea Studies”, vol. 5: 3, (2005), p. 396.

when it came to light that the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) leader Abdullah Öcalan was hiding in the Greek Embassy in Kenya.¹¹ PKK terrorism has been one of the main determinants of Turkish foreign policy since it constitutes the central threat to Turkey's security. Hence, the capture of the leader of this terrorist organization had interesting repercussions, in terms of revolutionizing the foreign policy making of both countries towards one another. The capture of Öcalan was a critical achievement for Turkey and it was, on the other hand, a shame for Greece. Three ministers resigned from the Greek cabinet and George Papandreou became the new foreign minister.

Changes in the Attitudes of the Political Leaders

In order to circumvent the emotional upset of the Öcalan crisis and its repercussions on mutual trust, the foreign minister of Turkey İsmail Cem sent a letter to Papandreou in May 1999 in which he outlined his views about improving bilateral relations and stated Turkey's stance towards terrorist organizations. He argued that Turkey and Greece should reach an agreement on how to combat terrorism, and he suggested that the settlement of this issue would help both sides to approach existing disputes with more trust.¹² Such an approach was echoed positively in Greece. Papandreou responded that Greece was gratified about Turkey's adherence to improvement of bilateral relations and that Greece was equally sincere in achieving results, and in this regard the two neighbours would cooperate on issues of culture, tourism, environment, crime, economy and ecological problems.¹³ Agreements in such issues of low-key politics are instrumental in increasing the soft power of both sides, and in augmenting economic prosperity in Greece and Turkey. Cooperative arrangements in low-key politics issues were also expected to diminish the mutual threat perception.

It is more advantageous for both sides to have stable and friendly neighbours than to exclude and contain the 'other'. Thus, the current availability of new options in the conduct of foreign policy – that is, the pursuit of confidence building measures - thanks to the efforts by foreign ministers of both sides has helped to transform the other's 'enemy identity' and would create longstanding attitudinal change. The fundamental implication of this change was that neither Greece nor Turkey considers any more that cooperation with the other side is the same as granting concessions on non-negotiable issues.

This attitudinal change also demonstrated itself in the flourishing personal relationship between the recent prime ministers of Greece and Turkey. Political dialogue between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kostas Karamanlis was positive from the start of their terms in office; especially on account of the positive environment created by Greek support for Turkey's campaign to start its EU accession negotiations at the Helsinki summit of 1999. Greek and Turkish diplomats also hold regular sessions in Athens and Ankara on a range of long-running disputes over sovereignty in the Aegean.¹⁴ However, on old thorny issues it is unrealistic to expect any revolutionary progress. Nevertheless, the EU membership prospects of Turkey, and Greece's changing position due to its integration in the EU, may provide a framework for settlement of some disputes over the Aegean - such as territorial waters - and would

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Aksu, Fuat, "Türk-Yunan İlişkilerinde Güvenlik ve Güven Arttırma Çabaları", in Cem Karadeli (eds) "Soğuk Savaş Sonrasında Avrupa ve Türkiye", pp. 242-275. Ankara: Ayraç Yayınları (2003)

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ "Mr Erdoğan's Greek Friend", in: Economist, vol. 372: 8388, (2004), p. 4.

encourage a step by step engagement and would lead eventually to opening to discussion of the old issues of contention.

Transformations in the impacts of the EU

As part of their national security interest and as a reflection of strategic foreign policy making, both Greece and Turkey have been committed to remain under the Western umbrella. However, as Bahar Rumelili argues, the EU failed to produce positive effect on Greek-Turkish relations until 1999.¹⁵ Although both Turkey and Greece were part of the Western alliance from the 1950s onwards, the EU was inadequate in providing a framework for the two neighbours to reconcile their disputes. It was rather the individual efforts of Greece and Turkey to prevent the other side from complicating the relationship with the EU. One example of this was the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Summit in Davos which led to a short period of détente between Greece and Turkey after 1988. Rumelili argues that this pursuit of Turkey to engage in dialogue with Greece and subsequent improvement in bilateral relations was necessary to prevent the Greek veto on Turkey's application for membership in the European Community (EC).¹⁶ However, such initiatives prior to 1999 were limited in achieving lasting results and were only temporary tactical moves.

Recently, Greece has endeavoured to catch up with EU integration and Turkey is seeking EU membership, and making very strong efforts to conclude its accession negotiations. The EU has stated that it will not grant any membership to countries who have unresolved border disputes. Hence, Turkey is truly sensitive about the fact that its road to EU membership depends on resolution of its disputes with Greece and with the Republic of Cyprus, which became a member of the EU in 2004. Europeanization of their foreign policies, and long term strategic commitment to the EU, are among the fundamental changes that have impacted Greco-Turkish relations in the aftermath of 1999. With the lifting of its longstanding veto on granting Turkey candidate status in the Helsinki summit of December 1999, Greece showed an essential break with its past foreign policy making towards Turkey. "...The Helsinki council decisions have also established the peaceful resolution of outstanding border disputes as a community principle and urged the candidate states 'to make every effort' to resolve any outstanding disputes, and if these efforts fail, to bring the dispute before the International Court of Justice."¹⁷ As Ahmet Evin observes, a stable Turkey totally absorbed in Europe also became part of Greece's long-term strategic objectives.¹⁸

Thus, Greece's support of Turkey's EU membership and its modernization efforts stems mainly from the new articulation of Greece's national security interest in line with EU objectives - that is, to enhance democratization in its neighbourhood and stabilization in a wider regional level. Its further integration into the EU made Greece more oriented towards becoming a 'soft security power', through achievements in the areas of economy and low-key political areas such as culture. Hence, a policy of engagement began to supersede the policy of deterrence towards Turkey. Despite Greece's future target of incorporating Turkey into the

¹⁵ Rumelili, Bahar, "The European Union's Impact on the Greek-Turkish Conflict", in: "EU Border Conflicts Studies", University of Birmingham, Occasional Paper 6, (2004), p. 5.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 7

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 9

¹⁸ Evin, Ahmet, (2005), p. 398.

EU, Greek reservations about the disputes over the Aegean and Cyprus will carry on shaping Turkey's recent membership negotiations with the EU.

Continuing Issues of Contention

The issue of the Cyprus dispute between Greece and Turkey ranks first in encumbering Turkey's negotiation process with the EU. At the Council meeting on General Affairs in December, 2007, it was decided to suspend the opening and closure of negotiations on eight chapters with Turkey until Turkey fulfils its commitments towards Cyprus. Turkey was asked by the EU to open its harbours and ports to trade with the Greek Cypriots as part of Turkey's Customs Union liabilities and obligations. Turkey rebuffed this dictate of the EU and stated that it would not open its harbours and ports unless the isolation of the northern Cypriots is lifted. With reference to the EU commitments following the Referendum on the Annan Plan on April 24, 2004, Turkey demanded the EU first fulfil its responsibilities for the advancement of the economic position of the Turkish Cypriots, before demanding that Turkey open its harbours and ports to the Republic of Cyprus. Such incidents have led to a continuous war of attrition between Turkey and the EU as Turkey still pursues tactical moves in order to achieve its national security interests. Some speculate whether these links between the Cyprus problem and Turkey's negotiation process with the EU will force Turkey to take further steps in the resolution of the Cyprus dispute, if it seriously wants to become a member of the union. Hence, it can be argued that disputes between Greece, the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey have been Europeanized, to the disadvantage of Turkey, with the accession of Greece to the EU in 1981 and then the accession of the Cyprus Republic in 2004. This state of affairs makes Greek-Turkish understanding harder to maintain. Unless a new system that will guarantee the security of Turkish Cypriots is established, withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island will be viewed as a security threat by the Turkish Cypriots. Yet, reduction of the size of the Turkish military presence in the island through new security arrangements would constitute a win-win situation for all the parties involved. The nature of the recent dialogue between Karamanlis and Erdoğan gives the impression that they will not let Cyprus cast a shadow over the further promotion and pursuance of measures that facilitate the rapprochement.

Do the domestic publics play any role?

Many observers are indecisive about the effects of changing dynamics in the domestic environments of Greece and Turkey, that is to say the effects of changing public demands on the long term commitment of governments to the process of rapprochement. If the measures taken by the two sides to deepen rapprochement are instrumental in the achievement of long-standing foreign policy objectives, then it would be unthinkable that Greece and Turkey will resort to their previous foreign policies of deterrence. Nevertheless, the bellicosity of public opinion has been increased significantly with the habit of emotional responses in the instances of past disputes. Some argue that as the easily broken détente such as the 'Davos process' suggests, many initiatives to start a dialogue between Turkey and Greece were abandoned because of the lack of public support. I argue instead that it was not the volatile public opinion on both sides which brought the détente processes to a halt, but rather the non-existence of foreign policy objectives that would help maintain friendly relations between Greece and Turkey. Thus, the post-1999 redefinition of security interests on both sides evidently leaves no room for concerns about the influence of public opinion on the exacerbation of disputes.

As previously discussed in this paper, some observers erroneously argued that the earthquakes changed the public opinions in Greece and Turkey and created an aura of compassion for the populace of the other side of the Aegean. This paper argues that, rather than the ‘seismic diplomacy’, it was the emergence of clear security interests that led both sides to realize the importance of achieving deepened cooperation in the post-1999 period.

Redefinition of security interests

Recently, Greece has a clear interest in the progress of its integration into the EU, and Turkey is looking for membership in the Union. Hence, as noted above, the disputes between Greece and Turkey gradually became Europeanized. The EU impact on Greco-Turkish bilateral relations, details of which have already been discussed, stands as the most central aspect of both sides’ security considerations and will observably continue to determine the future of Greco-Turkish relations. The formation of common identities under the EU umbrella, and more importantly the effects of this development on the convergence of the foreign policy interests of Greece and Turkey, are positive for the continuation of recent rapprochement.

Turkey historically has numerous geopolitical concerns, whereas Greece has conventionally been preoccupied with its relations with Turkey.¹⁹ Since both Turkey and Greece became embedded in the EU, their strategic interests began to converge. However, as Ian Lesser argues, traditional issues of bilateral conflict may rise all over again if Turkish-EU relations collapse.²⁰ Conventional politics will continue to constitute the main determinant of the future bilateral dialogue between Greece and Turkey. Yet, opening of new channels of communication, especially through economic cooperation, would prevent any comprehensive deterioration of bilateral relations. Especially after 1999, positive effects of confidence-building measures began to be felt and were expanded through a set of initiatives. Foreign ministers Dora Bakoyannis and Abdullah Gül agreed on specific measures for further strengthening of relations in June, 2006.²¹ They agreed that cooperation should continue between the two countries in the energy, economic and banking sectors. Abdullah Gül, later the Turkish President, has routinely said that "The glass of water in Greek-Turkish relations is more than half full and we will try to fill it."²²

More importantly, Greece and Turkey recently began to engage in high level military contacts as part of new confidence-building measures. As part of this initiative, Dora Bakoyannis stated that the armed forces of the two neighbours will expand military visits, conduct joint missions in NATO-disaster assistance efforts and overseas peacekeeping duties.²³ This military exchange and cooperation is an essential component of both countries’ national security interests. Such developments are helpful in incrementally furthering the rapprochement between Turkey and Greece.

¹⁹ Lesser, Ian O., “Greece’s New Geopolitical Environment”, in: *Journal of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies*, vol. 5: 3, (2005), p. 349.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 350

²¹ “Greek, Turkish FMs Discuss Confidence Building Measures”, source: Athens News Agency, accessible through the Official Website of Embassy of Greece in Washington, DC (2006)

²² “Greek, Turkish FMs Discuss Confidence Building Measures”, (2006), source: Athens News Agency, accessible through the Official Website of Embassy of Greece in Washington, DC

²³ “Yunanistan ve Türkiye Askeri Bağları Arttıracak”, (2007), accessible through the official website of Stratejik Boyut

Greek-Turkish ties were also bolstered when in October, 2007 leaders of the two countries opened a pipeline project that will carry natural gas from Central Asia to western Europe, connecting Azerbaijan and Italy by 2012.²⁴ The pipeline project also serves the security interests of both countries, and once initiated it will become harder for Turkey and Greece to step back from this area of cooperation.

A 50 % increase in trade volume between Greece and Turkey in 2007 is a clear indicator of the strengthening of bilateral relations on economic issues.²⁵ The recent foreign minister of Turkey Ali Babacan has stated that "In certain sectors such as energy and banking, Greece has become our No. 1 partner."²⁶

Conclusions: Is Lasting Peace Possible?

The recent nature of the bilateral relationship between Greece and Turkey is different from the previous state of affairs on account of a multiplicity of factors. Orientation towards cooperation, and the gradual abolition of strategic competition in a number of areas, suggests that the security interests of Greece and Turkey are converging. The realist theory of international relations assumes that as rational strategic actors Turkey and Greece consider their foreign policy alternatives and choose among these alternatives after evaluation of each of their options in a cost-benefit analysis. According to realism, Turkey or Greece would not follow any policy that would minimize their strategic interests. Common policies in an ever expanding issue agenda are adopted since all of these issues serve the security interests of both Turkey and Greece. Every successful step in these issues of low-key politics and flourishing economic cooperation contribute to cooperation in issues of high-level politics, as the enhancing high level military contacts have shown. During his visit to Selanik for the meeting of Balkan countries' Chiefs of Armed Forces, Yaşar Büyükanıt, Chief of Turkish Armed Forces, stated that "No one would presume that the countries who fight one another will finally establish the EU. Some day we will also overcome these problems."²⁷

Yet, Turkey has broader national security considerations about the issues of Cyprus and the Aegean. These unresolved conflicts have the potential to lead to a deterioration of relations and continue to pose threats to the continuation of engagement strategies by Turkey and Greece. Stalemate in the Cyprus dispute also negatively impacts Turkey's EU membership negotiations. Any frustration in Turkey's relations with the EU would not have direct implications on Greco-Turkish relations, but would lead to redefinition of the strategic interests and strategies of Turkey and hence would weaken Turkey's orientation towards a rapprochement with Greece.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Yunanistan ve Türkiye Askeri Bağları Arttıracak", (2007), accessible through the official website of Stratejik Boyut

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Şık, Barkın, "Türk Yunan İlişkisine AB'yi Örnek Gösterdi", (2007), accessible through <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/04/20/siyaset/axsiy02.html>

TURKISH AK PARTY'S CENTRAL ASIA AND CAUCASUS POLICIES: CRITIQUES AND SUGGESTIONS

COMMENT BY

Ertan Efegil*

Abstract

The AK Party's approaches to Central Asia and Caucasus are similar to those of previous governments. For the AK Party, Central Asia, and especially Eurasian geopolitics, are strategically very important; therefore, they have desired to improve Turkey's existing relations with the regional states and strongly supported inter-regional projects, such as the Baku-Tbilis-Erzurum natural gas pipeline, Baku-Tbilis-Kars railway and the Nabucco pipeline. For that reason, Turkish officials have paid various official visits to the regional states. With the assistance of these projects, the officials believe that regional integration attempts will be strengthened and welfare, stability and development will dominate regional affairs. But the Turkish policy makers have had to change their perspective about the region in favor of existing regional conditions, and they have formulated more realistic and rational policies, including a focus on more concrete projects.

Keywords: AK Party, Central Asia, Caucasus, Turkish Model, Energy.

Introduction

After the collapse of former Soviet Union, Turkish policy makers assumed that Turkey had lost its strategic importance in the eyes of the Western countries, especially the United States¹; therefore, by having close relations with the newly independent Central Asian Turkic republics and Azerbaijan based on the understanding of “big brotherhood”, Turkey could again regain its strategic importance to its Western allies.² In that regard, Turkish policy makers shaped Turkey's

* **Dr. Ertan Efegil** is an Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations of İstanbul Arel University. He worked as academician at International Turkmen-Turkish University, Turkmenistan, 1998 – 1999; Eastern Mediterranean University, Department of International Relations, 1999 – 2004; and lastly Beykent University Department of International Relations, 2004 – 2008. He published several essays and books on Central Asia, Cyprus Question, Turkish Foreign Policy and Foreign Policy Making.

¹ Baharçipek, Abdülkadir, “Soğuk Savaş'ın Sona Ermesinin Türk Dış Politikası üzerindeki Etkileri (The Effects of End of the Cold War upon the Turkish Foreign Policy)”, in İdris Bal (ed.) “21. Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikası”, pp. 57-74. Ankara: Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 2004

² Bal, İdris, “Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Türk Dış Politikası İçin Türk Cumhuriyetlerinin Önemi (Importance of the Turkic Republics for the Turkish Foreign Policy After the Cold War)”, in İdris Bal (ed.) 21. Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikası,

Central Asia policy based on the slogan of “Turkish World from the Chinese Wall to the Adriatic Sea”, and following that mentality, they defined the following points as Turkey’s foreign policy objectives regarding Central Asia and Caucasus: reshaping the regional economies, providing direct support to the nation-building and state-building efforts of the regional states, even being a model, and helping them integrate into the world system. In the course of time, they have clearly understood that these objectives were not realistic in view of the regional conditions.³ Distracted by domestic political crises and Turkey’s membership negotiations to the EU, they again slowly lost their attention to the region as well as the regional affairs.

In 1997, when the European Union rejected Turkey’s application for full membership, Turkish officials, especially the nationalist groups and retired military officials, immediately rediscovered the Eastern Bloc option, consisting of China, Russia, Iran, Caucasian and Central Asia states, including India and Mongolia, within the framework of the concept of Eurasianism. But in reality that approach was not made operational, due to the *sui generis* conditions of the region and regional states.⁴ In 1999, after the EU’s Helsinki decision about Turkey’s application to full membership, Turkey again put that proposal on a shelf. But after 2002, the AK Party government decided to pursue a more active foreign policy toward the region within the framework of its new understanding, called the strategic depth.

This study briefly puts forward the AK Party’s foreign policy objectives regarding Central Asia and Azerbaijan, as well as its concrete attempts. Secondly, its Central Asia policy will also be analyzed from a critical perspective. The paper argues that the AK Party’s policy is similar to the approaches of previous governments and thus its policy is unworkable as far as the region’s existing conditions and Turkey’s abilities are concerned. In this connection, Turkey should pursue such a policy that would view the regional states and Turkey as equal partners, address the needs and demands of the regional states, and take into account the attitudes and concerns of other. This new policy should contain more realistic objectives and project more concrete attempts.

Background of Turkey’s Central Asia Policy

In 1987 Turkey applied to the European Community for full membership. But in 1989 that application was rejected by the Commission. Turkish officials were shocked. At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet Union immediately after the military coup d’etat in August 1990 forced Turkey to think about its strategic position in world politics. As mentioned above, Turkey now

pp. 365-378. Ankara: Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 2004; Erol, Mehmet Seyfettin, “AB ve Türkiye’nin Avrasya Politikası” (EU and Turkey’s Eurasia Policies), in: Demokrasi Platformu, vol. 1:4, (Fall 2005), pp. 173-202.

³ Aydın, Mustafa, “Türkiye’nin Orta Asya Politikaları” (Turkey’s Central Asia Policies), in Mustafa Aydın and Çağrı Erhan (eds.) “Beş Deniz Havzasında Türkiye”, Ankara, 2006, pp. 3 -32; Aydın, Mustafa, “Türkiye’nin Orta Asya – Kafkaslar Politikası” (Turkey’s Central Asia – Caucasus Policy), in Aydın, Mustafa (ed.) “Küresel Politikada Orta Asya (Avrasya Üçlemesi I)”, Ankara, 2005, pp. 101-148.

⁴ Aça, Mehmet, “Seeking Alliance by Russia and China against USA (NATO) and Its Implications to Turkey”, in Ertan Efeğil (ed.) “Geopolitics of Central Asia in the post – Cold War Era: A Systemic Analysis”, pp. 97 – 118. Haarlem: SOTA Research Centre for Turkestan and Azerbaijan, 2002.

was not the strategic or military buffer zone of the Western world against the Soviet threat. and on the contrary the Western world gave priority to the pro – Western Russian government as well as political and economic reforms in Russia.⁵ Turkey started to occupy a marginal place in Western calculations.

However, that apprehension did not go on for a long time, because Turkey played an active role during the 1990 Gulf Crisis. As a result of this role, Turkey succeeded in displaying itself as a strategically important ally of the Western world. The West began to advocate the idea of the Turkish model as an alternative, for the Central Asian and Caucasian states, from communism or Iranian-style Islamism.⁶ The Turkish model suggested a message to the regional countries about their future political and economic systems.

With the encouragement of the Western countries and their ideological concerns, Turkish officials supported the idea of a Turkish World from the Adriatic Sea to the Chinese Wall. They discussed the establishment of political and economic unions in this geographic space. Naturally Turkey would be the leader of any union, due to its cultural, ethnic, linguistic, historical and religious characteristics. As a model Turkey would be a bridge between the Western world and regional countries and the initiator of integration of these countries to the world community. Also with the assistance of Turkey, they would absorb Western values. In this manner, by acting as a regional leader, Turkey would affect global politics.⁷

AK Party's Foreign Policy Mentality and Central Asia

The existing Turkish government in general terms has two main foreign policy objectives: a) Becoming a full member of the European Union, and b) bolstering security, stability, welfare, friendship and cooperation around Turkey, since it is located at the center of the Balkans, Caucasus, Black Sea, Middle East, Mediterranean, and Central Asia.⁸ In this respect, the AK

⁵ Bal, İdris, “Turkey’s Relations with the West and the Turkic Republics: Rise and Fall of the Turkish Model”, Aldershot, 2000.

⁶ Ataman, Muhittin, “Leadership Change: Ozal Leadership and Restructuring in Turkish Foreign Policy”, in: *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, vol. 1:1, (Spring 2002); Uslu, Nasuh, “The Russian, Caucasian and Central Asian Aspects of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post Cold War Period”, in: *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, vol. 2:3/4, (Fall and Winter 2003); Lesser, Ian O., “Turkey’s Strategic Options”, in: *The International Spectator*, vol XXXIV:1 (January – March 1999); Khosla, I. P., “Turkey: The Search for a Role”, in: *Strategic Analysis: A Monthly Journal of the IDSA*, vol. XXV:3, (June 2001); Hunter, Shireen, “Bridge or Frontier? Turkey’s Post – Cold War Geopolitical Posture”, in: *The International Spectator*, vol. XXXIV:1 (January – March 1999).

⁷ Tosun, Hasan, “AK Parti’nin Kıbrıs Politikası, 2002 – 2005: Türk Dış Politikasında Gelenek ile Değişimin Mücadelesi”, in Nejat Doğan and Mahir Nakip, (eds.) “Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Türk Siyasal Partileri”, pp. 363 – 388. Ankara, 2006.

⁸ Kurt, Süleyman, “Köşk’ten dört ayaklı dış politika stratejisi”, in: *Zaman Newspaper*, December 11, 2007; Ataman, Muhittin, “Soğuk Savaştan Günümüze Türk Dış Politikasında Yeni Eğilimler ve Hedefler”, in Davut Dursun, Burhanettin Duran and Hamza Al (eds.) “Dönüşüm Sürecindeki Türkiye: Aktörler, Alanlar, Sorunlar”, pp. 233-281. İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, (2007); İnat, Kemal and Burhaneddin Duran, *AKP Dış Politikası: Teori ve Uygulama (AKP’s Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice)*, in: *Demokrasi Platformu*, vol. 1:4, (2005), pp. 1-40; Gözen, Ramazan,

Party has supported the development of strategic cooperation at both bilateral and multilateral levels among regional states, and strengthening regional integration attempts in the fields of economy, society, politics, energy and culture. Separately, Turkish officials believe that the regional states have to make serious efforts in democratization, transition to a free market economy, and respect for human rights, as well as in finding peaceful solution to the regional frozen conflicts.⁹ These Turkish encouragements aim to create a mutual dependency among the regional countries, resulting in regional stability, welfare and cooperation.

As far as Central Asia, or in more general terms Eurasian geopolitics, is concerned, the AK Party has pursued similar approaches to those of previous governments. The Party's officials have viewed Eurasia as a geopolitical area, directly affecting the post-Cold War international system, and described the Caspian Sea Basin as the touchstone of Eurasia. Meanwhile Turkey and Azerbaijan have formed the backbone of Eurasian geopolitics.¹⁰ For the Turkish government, the region is strategically important because of its vast energy resources and for the security of energy supply to the world market. By using its geopolitical advantage, located at the center of East – West, North – South and South – North energy corridors, Turkey desires to become an important energy transit country, energy terminal and the fourth energy source of the European Union, after North Sea, Russia and the Middle East.

From this perspective, the AK Party's official foreign policy objectives regarding Central Asia and Azerbaijan can be summarized as follows:

- Developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the fields of energy, economy, commerce, culture, society, politics, etc.
- Assisting them to find a peaceful solution to the frozen regional conflicts.
- Serving as an energy terminal.
- Providing assistance to the regional states in their nation- and state-building processes.
- Helping them develop and maintain close relations with the other countries.¹¹

Turkey therefore desires to refresh its mutual relations, based on economy, literature and culture, with the regional states, and views this process as a historical obligation. For them, the relations have been developed on the basis of concepts of brotherhood, common language, common belief and common (Turkic) race. They mention that “one nation and two state mentality” dominates the relations, based on mutual trust and respect.¹² Consequently the AK Party provides technical

“Türk Dış Politikası’nda Vizyon ve Revizyon” (Vision and Revision in Turkish Foreign Policy), in: Demokrasi Platformu, vol. 1:4, (2005), pp. 41-58.

⁹ Robins, Philip, “Turkish Foreign Policy since 2002: between a ‘post-Islamist’ government and a Kemalist state”, in: International Affairs, vol. 83:1, (2007), pp. 289-304.

¹⁰ Davutoğlu, Ahmet, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007”, in: Insight Turkey, vol. 10:1, (2008), pp. 77-96; Aras, Bulent, “Türkiye’nin Orta Asya Politikası: Köprüden Cazibe Merkezine” (Turkey’s Central Asia Policy: From Bridge to Centre of Attraction), in: Zaman Newspaper, December 7, 2007.

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey, Synopsis of the Turkish Foreign Policy, www.mfa.gov.tr.

¹² “Berdimuhammedov: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Başarılarına Seviniyoruz”, in: Anatolian Agency, December 6, 2007; Nahçıvan Buluşmasından Çifte Mesaj Çıktı, in: Cihan News Agency, June 4, 2008.

assistance, scholarships, training of representatives of civil society, military cooperation and military training to the regional states.

Turkey has advocated the completion of the Baku-Tbilis-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilis-Erzurum natural gas pipeline and Baku-Tbilis-Kars railway project, and invested significant energy for the realization of the construction of Nabucco and South Europe Gas Ring projects. In line with these energy projects, the Hopa seaport has been repaired.

Turkey has also made serious efforts for the establishment of a Turkish–Kazakh Commercial Council, Turkish–Azerbaijan Mixed Economic Commission, and an Intergovernmental Economic Commission between Turkey and Turkmenistan. Recently, President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid official visits to Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. They proposed a most-favored-nation trade agreement with Azerbaijan, suggested that Kazakhstan pump Kazakh oil to the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline, and signed several agreements with Turkmenistan on the subjects of economic cooperation, partnership and cooperation, education, science, youth, sport, family, women and children.¹³

In Turkey’s view, for the exploitation and exportation of the regional natural resources to the world market, multilateral cooperation among the regional and non-regional countries is inevitably necessary. To that end, Turkey has proposed the followings subjects on which to develop the mutual relations.

- Establishment of a Secretariat of Presidential Summits of the Turkish Republics;
- Creation of an institution like OPEC, focused on regional gas suppliers;
- Common alphabet based on the Latin script;
- Joint TV channel;
- Establishment of Academy of Science of the Turkish World, and Science Museum of the Turkish World;
- Publication of books on the common history, literature, culture, and religion of the Turkic states;
- Creation of political and economic union.¹⁴

Evaluation and Conclusion

When the AK Party’s policy toward the region is analyzed, it can be said that its policy is not realistic, due to the fact that this policy does not take into account the regional realities and conditions, and it does not put on the table more concrete proposals. Instead, it mostly supports abstract projects which are usually advocated by the nationalist parties and groups in Turkey. For example, Turkish universities have tried to define a new common Latin alphabet for all Turkish

¹³ “Orta Asya ile köprüler yeniden kuruluyor”, in: Zaman Newspaper, December 7, 2007.

¹⁴ Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan’s speech held at 11. Turkish States and Nations Assembly, Baku, Azerbaijan, November 17, 2007; Suleyman Kurt, “Orta Asya ile 34 harfli, ortak alfabe çalışması başlatılıyor”, in: Zaman Newspaper, December 9, 2007.

people in the world since 1991. For that aim, Marmara University Institute of Turkish Studies organized several international conferences. But so far, it has been unsuccessful. In the meantime, Kazakh officials stated that they did not feel any necessity to immediately adopt a Latin alphabet. Additionally, the Central Asian states have desired to complete their own nation-and state-building processes; therefore, they have pursued more nationalistic policies that reflect their own local values and characteristics. Such things, such as common language, common history, and/or common culture will remove them from their national/local approaches in state, foreign, cultural and social policies; therefore, from the beginning they did not prefer to see Turkey as a model for themselves.

Due to dealing with practically impossible projects and formulating its regional policies based on incorrect perceptions, Turkey has not realized its economic, energy, and commercial interests. Therefore, the AK Party has to pursue more realistic national interests that reflect the demands of the regional states. In the course of time it has to regularly update its interests to account for the changing regional conditions, and determine suitable foreign policy actions which are relevant to Turkey's power and interests.

For instance, the Turkish government should establish independent, private research centers in both Turkey and regional countries in order to collect reliable information about state systems, politics, and social conditions in the regional states as well as regional affairs. In the meantime, Turkey has to encourage foundations and/or state institutions to establish new universities in these countries, and ensure that they are under the direction and management of Turkish professors. Turkish Cultural Centers must become operational in all these states. Some state institutions such as ministries concerned with foreign trade, and some private and/or semi-private foundations, such as Chambers of Business, have to open their own comprehensive departments/bureaus in these states in order to collect information about economic, commercial and political affairs as well as to provide daily, effective data to businessmen and academicians. These bureaus can be under the administrative coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and/or Turkish Cooperation and Development Administration. For example, while analyzing the needs of the region, they may have to determine Kyrgyzstan's need for a water institution and with this information, Turkish universities may be obliged to create such an institution in this country, collectively acting with the Kyrgyz universities. Both upper and lower level Turkish officials have to have close and cooperative relations with their counterparts.

Turkey has to change its perspective toward the region and Turkish officials have to accept that these regional countries are equal partners, and that close relations with the regional states are based on their mutual interests. They have to refrain from sentiments such as those in the following sentences in their speeches: "This project will change history. It will radically reshape the regional economy. It will create a common economic area". These sentences reflect to a great extent the romanticism of the Turkish foreign policy.¹⁵ The Baku-Tbilis-Erzurum natural gas pipeline or the Baku-Tbilis-Kars railway will naturally encourage the regional states to improve mutual economic and commercial relations amongst themselves. This is a natural process. But it

¹⁵ "Erdogan: Modernizasyon çalışmaları, İpek Yolu'nu yeniden canlandıracak", in: Cihan News Agency, December 9, 2007.

does not mean that it will change a historical process. For example, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline has not changed Eurasian geopolitics and/or structure of the international system. Russia and China still, in spite of the US and Turkey's attempts, have a considerable influence upon the regional states.

Turkey has overstated the importance of the projects and/or official visits of the leaders to the regional states. Turkish officials have also exaggerated the Turkish business activities in the region. Turkish firms have not dominated the regional economies, and their activities are not even significantly more noticeable than those of other firms.

Consequently, Turkey has to accept that Azerbaijan, the Central Asian republics and Turkey are equal partners and that relations among them are based on mutual interests. Historical ties can only help them to have close relations, and no more. Historical ties cannot control all of Turkey's relations with other countries and/or vice versa. With this perspective, the AK party has to improve its perceptions about the region according to the actual regional conditions. They should not make speeches that aim at solving fundamental problems of the regional states, which are much bigger issues than Turkey, which lacks enough capability to solve them alone. Simultaneously, the regional states do not see Turkey as a savior, or big brother. In this respect, Turkey has to define more short- and medium-term objectives, and focus on more concrete projects rather than vague ones.

“SOFT ANNEXATION OF ABKHAZIA IS THE GREATEST LEGACY OF PUTIN TO HIS SUCCESSOR”

Interview with Thomas de Waal* Expert on Russia and Caucasus

Conducted by Alexander Jackson for CRIA

Question: *What do you think is the next step in Abkhazia?*

De Waal: One of the main problems in Abkhazia is the high degree of unpredictability on both the Russian and the Georgian sides. I don't believe that anyone wants a war over Abkhazia. However it's a very small territory, and there are a lot of armed men there from both sides. The Russians have recently deployed paratroopers there, ostensibly as peacekeepers, although they obviously have a big offensive capability. And the Georgians have deployed armed men in the only part of Abkhazia under their control, the Upper Kodori Valley.

The risk is that one side may try some kind of military action because they are afraid of the other side doing so; they'll launch what they believe is a pre-emptive strike. The territory is so small that a lot of it could be conquered in half a day, so a few hours of fighting could completely alter the situation. This would lead to the Russian peacekeepers inevitably being drawn in on the Abkhaz side, and we would have a Russian-Georgian war.

Question: *Do you believe that the Georgian administration will be tempted to use military force?*

De Waal: From what I gather, they have a number of options. [Georgian President] Saakashvili is quite indecisive and his mood changes a lot. So the military option is one that they are considering, although I think they have to be aware that it would be fairly suicidal - it would be the end of the international mediation effort in Abkhazia and the UN mission there. Although they would get support from some (mainly East European) countries, it would be pretty disastrous for Georgia. On the other side, I don't see any motives for the Russians or the Abkhaz to attack, unless they believed it was a pre-emptive strike.

* **Thomas De Waal** is a noted journalist, writer and expert on Russia and the Caucasus. He contributes regularly to www.openDemocracy.net, and is co-author of [Chechnya: calamity in the Caucasus](#) (New York, 1998) and author of [Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through peace and war](#) (New York, 2003). He is currently head of the Caucasus Programme at the Institute of War & Peace Reporting in London.

***Question:** What do you think that Russia will do next, regarding its ‘soft annexation’ of Abkhazia?*

De Waal: I think that Russia has, in its own terms, played this situation masterfully. They have used two events (Kosovo’s declaration of independence and promises of NATO membership to Georgia), as cover to claim that they are protecting Abkhazia. They are not recognizing Abkhazia, as the West did with Kosovo - this would leave Russia open to claims of hypocrisy, and would make Abkhazia more independent than it presently is. So I think that Russia has got more or less everything that it wants. This ‘soft annexation’ gives Russia de facto control over Abkhazia, it weakens Georgia and it annoys the West. I think this is possibly Vladimir Putin’s greatest legacy to his successor.

***Question:** Do you think that the Abkhaz themselves have a role to play? Will there come a point where they resent being under Russian influence?*

De Waal: I think this has basically happened already. The Abkhaz are in a rather unenviable position. They have de facto seceded from Georgia and proclaimed independence which no-one recognizes and which no-one will recognize. They are also very suspicious of Russia. Like most people in the Caucasus, they see Russia as having a colonial role which threatens their identity, and yet they’ve had no option but to embrace Russia. Russia has done many things for the Abkhaz – it has opened the border, it has paid pensions, it has provided investment. But the Abkhaz are being swallowed up, and there is no room for manoeuvre.

***Question:** To what extent is Georgia to blame for the situation in Abkhazia? Does President Saakashvili have a real plan for peace?*

De Waal: I think the Georgians do share a large portion of the blame. Saakashvili was elected in 2004 [after the ‘Rose Revolution’] with a huge popular mandate for change. He could have started again with a clean sheet, and put all the blame for what had happened in Abkhazia on his predecessor Eduard Shevardnadze. There was still scope at that point to reach out to the Abkhaz and pull them away from Russia.

But Saakashvili and his administration have maintained the blockade and isolation of Abkhazia, and they’ve continued to talk about ethnic cleansing and have adopted a tone of moral outrage. They have developed a peace plan, but one on which they didn’t really consult with the Abkhaz - it’s a unilateral peace plan, and it looks to the Abkhaz like more of a public-relations statement to the West than a serious effort to engage.

There’s a lot of inconsistency in Georgia, there have been very positive gestures and steps from some people, and then some very belligerent statements from others. The Abkhaz don’t really know what to expect.

***Question:** Is there anything that the West can do in Abkhazia?*

De Waal: There are a number of things they could be doing. They are putting pressure on

the Georgians not to do anything stupid, which is having some results; they're also trying to put pressure on the Russians which, given the mood that Russia is currently in, is having fewer results. One thing they could do is to try opening some sort of presence in Abkhazia which would give the Abkhaz a window onto Europe, perhaps some kind of travel documents which would allow them travel to Europe or an EU office in Abkhazia - anything which would be seen as coming from neither Georgia nor Russia.

Question: Do you think that Armenia and Azerbaijan can draw any lessons from the situation in Abkhazia - does it reflect in any way on Karabakh?

De Waal: I think the two conflicts run in parallel, and I think that the declaration of Kosovo's independence has had an effect on all the conflicts in the region. It means that the separatists - in Abkhazia, Karabakh or South Ossetia - have felt more confident that time is on their side and that history will recognise the realities on the ground. And it has meant that Georgia and Azerbaijan are more worried, and feel that time is working against them. There's a great sense of urgency, and both states have felt the need to work harder to reclaim these territories. Both countries have recently put resolutions to the UN General Assembly reaffirming their territorial integrity; they have felt compelled to do this because they felt that the Kosovo precedent was working against them.

Question: Do you think that with the new administration in Armenia we can expect to see any change in Karabakh?

De Waal: No, I think the opposite. In Armenia there is an ongoing political crisis which saw blood on the streets in early March in Yerevan, with at least ten people killed. So the new president Serzh Sarkisian has now got his work cut out to prove his popular legitimacy in a very difficult situation and claim a mandate, which means that the last thing on his agenda at the moment is Karabakh. He had his first meeting with [Azerbaijani President] Ilham Aliyev in St. Petersburg on June 6th. They have agreed not to take any steps backwards, essentially an agreement that they will resume work on negotiations later this year.

Question: What long-term prospects do you see for Karabakh, and is there a chance that Azerbaijan's increasing oil wealth will lead it towards a military solution?

De Waal: I think the prospects are quite gloomy at the moment. The Azeris are talking more and more about how any resolution of the Karabakh conflict must involve Armenian recognition of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, which is obviously out of the question for Armenia. The most positive scenario is that after Aliyev is re-elected, he will have a new mandate and will want to think about doing a deal; but it's equally likely that he will use this new mandate to think about the military option, which I think would be a disaster. On the Armenian side, Sarkisian comes from Karabakh and is a veteran of the war with Azerbaijan. He is therefore in no hurry to make a big compromise which would be seen as betraying that victory. Both sides continue to believe that time is on their side, and both sides are half-right, and I think that's part of the problem.

Question: More generally, do you see any major changes in the Caucasus in the next year?

De Waal: I think this is a period when things are so delicate that a small event could spiral out of control. Take the Gali region of Abkhazia, the most southern region, which has a Georgian population of 40-50,000 who live there precariously - they are ethnic Georgians but live in Abkhazia, and don't have any real support from the Georgian government. Any armed incident there could escalate - large numbers of people could flee and there could be military interventions. Or look at the Karabakh ceasefire line which is almost 200 miles long and has only five unarmed monitors along it: on March 4th/5th we saw big violations of the ceasefire there.

Question: Do you think that those ceasefire violations were, as has been claimed, engineered by the Armenian defence ministry to draw attention away from the protests in Yerevan?

De Waal: Well, both sides blame the other for starting that particular incident for political reasons, but it may have just been accidental. In spring each side moves to higher ground to reclaim positions where the winter snows have thawed, and during this process an exchange of fire may have started which got out of control.

Question: Do you see any upcoming changes in the North Caucasus: in, for example, Dagestan and Ingushetia?

De Waal: There's a kind of permanent instability now both in Ingushetia and in Dagestan. This is something that President Medvedev may try and resolve, by putting a new leader in Ingushetia, for example. Chechnya is relatively more stable, the process of Chechenisation has more or less worked, by giving the Chechen leadership almost everything they asked for. This stores up problems for the future, but for now has brought much greater peace and stability to Chechnya. So I think that if Moscow could find leaders who they can do the same kind of bargain with in Ingushetia, that might be an answer. This might be something that Mr. Medvedev might be thinking about now that he's President.

Question: Do you think there will be any changes in Russian attitudes towards Georgia under the 'new' Russian administration?

De Waal: I don't think so, in the sense that even if Dmitry Medvedev wanted to have a thaw in relations with Georgia - and it's possible he does - Putin is still there as Prime Minister, and Putin was also extremely active in provoking Georgia in his last months in office, in a way that locked Medvedev into that policy. And even the foreign ministry, which is the most moderate of all the 'power ministries' in Russia, is locked now into that policy. I can't see that the Russians would withdraw their troops from Abkhazia, since that would look like backing down.

Question: Would a new American administration bring a new approach to the region?

De Waal: It obviously depends who wins. John McCain has been to Georgia several times,

he's even been to South Ossetia, and is rather confrontational with respect to Russia. It's difficult to say about Barack Obama, I doubt he knows much about Georgia, but I suspect it'd be more of the same. I do think that all of these conflicts in the South Caucasus could only be solved through some sort of 'grand bargain' between Russia and the United States, which would involve lots of bigger elements such as NATO membership, security guarantees, energy promises and so on. I think that's probably what's needed in order to defuse things; there's too much suspicion at the moment between Russia and the US over these issues.

Question: What are the chances of such a thaw in US-Russian relations?

De Waal: Not good, particularly if McCain comes in, because he's quite hawkish on Russia. Also, it must be said, the Russians are in no mood to back down. For domestic purposes, picking a fight with the US that plays well with the electorate. It's an easy way to secure domestic popularity and to remind people that Russia is a great power.