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The Re-emergence of Russian Geopolitical Power in the Black and Caspian Seas Region: Implications for Turkey and the Wider Power Balances

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EGF Extended Commentary

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Abstract

Exerting influence in the wider Black and Caspian Seas region is becoming a crucial element in the present Russian geopolitical strategy. Energy and Security are two of Moscow's primary concerns relating to the region. This is clearly evident in the Russo-Ukrainian agreements of late April this year, which resulted in a 25 year extension of the Russian navy's lease on its base in the port of Sevastopol in return for a 30% reduction in Russian gas exports to Ukraine. Although they are likely to open up longer-term investment opportunities for Russian business, such agreements seem to have little commercial value for Russia in the short term, and are a reflection of Moscow's willingness to "invest in geopolitics". This strategy has implications for other actors competing for influence in the region, including Turkey, the EU, the United States as well as international energy companies. Increasingly, such actors will have to be aware of the operational instruments which Moscow has been deploying as part of its geopolitical strategy in the region, which include 1/ inserting itself into the domestic political affairs of its post-Soviet neighbours; 2/ simultaneously acting as crisis mediator/peacekeeper and fostering regional tension to provoke further crisis; 3/ behaving as the regional "strong man" in the name of protecting Russian minorities; 4/ strengthening energy ties with other former-Soviet Republics in the region 5/ bilateral commercial deals with select Western corporate partners and governments. Deployment of such instruments will ensure that Moscow's approach to regional geopolitics will remain purposefully unpredictable, full of intrigue and will invariably continue to take other regional actors by surprise – resulting in an increasingly challenging policy environment in the foreseeable future

Energy and security: Russia's new obsession with the wider Black Sea region Revived by the economic recovery it has witnessed in recent years, and not necessarily weakened by the global financial crisis, Russia is demonstrating itself to be an increasingly assertive (political and economic) force in the wider-Black and Caspian Seas (BCS) basin. Exerting influence in the BCS region is a crucial element in the Russian geopolitical strategy, given the region's importance both as an energy producer as well as its vitality as a primary corridor for the transit of oil and gas to international markets. Whilst seeking to control the region's energy supply routes and opening up its domestic markets to commercial opportunities for the major Russian corporations remains Moscow's overarching objective, the region is likewise Russia's "soft underbelly" from a security perspective. Russia remains highly sensitive to any efforts by the BCS regional states (particularly those amongst the former-Soviet Republics) to develop concerted (political) ties with Western partners (particularly with reference to military expansion of the NATO alliance) and remains vigilant towards harder security threats emanating from the region to the Russian North Caucasus, particularly those relating to separatism and Islamic extremism.

Energy, and Security, therefore, are two of Russia's primary concerns when it comes to Moscow's strategy making towards the BCS region, which is reflected by the salience of these two issues in Russian diplomacy with the regional states both through bilateral and multilateral channels. Moscow's newly signed agreements with Kiev, which the two parties spontaneously announced in Kharkov (Ukraine) towards the end of April, secured a long term extension on the inter-state agreement (between Russia and Ukraine) allowing the Russian Black Sea fleet to remain based in the strategic Black Sea port city of Sevastopol, in Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. The agreement, which envisages that Russian naval power will remain based in Sevastopol for a further 25 years after the present agreement expires in 2017, involved a significant energy component in that Moscow granted Kiev a 30% discount on future gas deliveries in return for the naval concession in Sevastopol harbour.

Given that Russia and Ukraine (as well as much of Europe) endured three major gas supply disputes between 2006-09, whilst former-Ukrainian president, Victor Yuschenko, repeatedly hinted in parallel at an "early eviction" of the Russian fleet from Sevastopol, the significance of last month's two-tiered-agreements for Moscow's geopolitical outlook in the BCS region should hardly be underestimated. The agreements the two governments signed in Kharkov appear to present little commercial benefit for Russia in the short term, since Ukraine's monthly bill for Russian gas supplies towards the end of 2009 was running at around US$700-800 million, while it costs Moscow under US$100 million per annum in lease fees to Kiev to maintain the Russian naval base in Sevastopol. To the contrary, the agreements are more reflective of Moscow's preferred model of relations with compliant former-Soviet states, where Russia has been prepared to subsidise their national economies with below market rate energy supplies, deliver on transfers of military hardware and promote other forms of politically tied investment/financial aid in return for compliance with the Russian geopolitical outlook.

Although Moscow may envisage longer term commercial benefit stemming from the Kharkov agreements, and while a continued presence of Russian naval power in the Black Sea is unlikely to deter expanding US/NATO military cooperation with truculent former-Soviet Republics like Georgia, such agreements are more reflective of the Kremlin's eager readiness to invest in ensuring that Russian power, as well as Russian pride, remains a force to be reckoned with in the BCS. At the extreme end of Moscow's geopolitical psychology in the BCS is the capability to employ hard power, as was evidenced in the Kremlin's decision to invade Georgia in August of 2008. While there appears to be little evidence of a similar appetite in the Kremlin's position towards Georgia at the time of the present writing, Moscow's readiness to "invest into geopolitics" in the BCS has implications for other non-CIS regional actors, including Turkey, the EU (which now neighbours the Black Sea), the US (which, despite the end of the Cold War, has steadfastly become more active in the region) and the international investor community – energy multinationals being the leading party in this context. It is imperative for these actors to better appreciate the Russian geopolitical outlook for the BCS, as well as the instruments available for Moscow to advance its regional vision, if they themselves are to develop effective strategies in a region which is becoming an increasingly challenging one in which to conduct business and engage in effective diplomacy.

Russia considers much of the BCS region to be part of its sphere of "privileged interest" and growing Russian assertiveness is reflected by a number of operational instruments which Moscow has been deploying as part of its geopolitical strategy in the region. While Moscow's approach to regional geopolitics remains purposefully unpredictable and invariably continues to take its international partners by surprise, other regional actors need to be increasingly aware of such instruments when planning policy or contemplating business in the BCS region. These include the following:

- **Inserting itself into the domestic political affairs of its (often much smaller) neighbours amongst the former Soviet Republics in order to achieve political gain (or in certain cases, regime change**). This has been a long-endorsed instrument which Moscow has employed with some vigour, which is evident in overly explicit Russian backing for selected candidates in national presidential elections (Ukraine: support for Victor Yanukovich in 2004-05); mediating in domestic political crisis (Georgia: Tbilisi's conflict with the governor of the unruly Ajaria region in 2004); or offering shelter for deposed rulers in revolutionary situations (Kyrgyzstan: sheltering deposed Kyrgyz president, Askar Akayev, after his fall from power in Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip Revolution" in 2005). While it is possible to argue that political intervention of this nature may hold some legitimacy given Russia's generally accepted role of a "regional policeman", the consequences are usually such that Russia's neighbours either fall more dependant on Moscow politically (Kyrgyzstan), or, in the event of rejection of the dependency relationship, tend to provoke Moscow's ire (Ukraine, Georgia). In either scenario, an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty over the stability of a particular government tends to result, which is not particularly good news for foreign investment.

- **Simultaneously acting as crisis mediator/peacekeeper and fostering regional tension to provoke further crisis**. This is quite evident in Russia's parallel policies towards Georgia and Armenia. In the case of the former, Russia has aimed to
- destabilise Georgia by lending support to anti-Tbilisi separatists in the break-away republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which Moscow has officially recognised as independent states. Georgia (Tbilisi) fought violent wars against separatists in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, creating "frozen conflicts" which are yet to be resolved and which have demanded continuous deployment of peace keepers from Russia as well as the international community. While Moscow has been an active contributor to the peace keeping forces in the disputed zones, it has also been arming the separatists and there are even suggestions that Russian peace keepers ultimately provided a "smokescreen" for Russia's invasion of Georgia proper in August 2008. Similarly, Russia has also been a major source of mediation in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Ngorno-Karabakh territory (over which the two countries fought a bloody war in 1992-93). More than a decade of mediation, however, has hardly ended the conflict and skirmishes between the heavily armed Armenian and Azeri militaries in the Karabakh continue to take place on a routine basis. This has left Armenia (a country with a very powerful and wealthy Diaspora in the West) highly dependant on Moscow for its very survival, opening the way for Russian investment to dominate Armenia's comparatively small yet attractive domestic market.

- **Behaving as the regional "strong man" in the name of protecting Russian minorities**. While Russia has long made noises to the effect that it would use force to defend its minorities which remain scattered throughout the former-Soviet Republics, little regard was given to such bellicose rhetoric (often cultivated by neo-rightist Duma deputies such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) prior to Moscow's short war with Georgia in August 2008. Russia's invasion and subsequent, short-lived occupation of Georgia, however, laid to rest any doubts of Moscow's readiness in using military force in support of Russian minorities. The instrument of using force in the name of protecting Russian minorities outside of Russia has thus become a tested tool which can be used in coordination with the other (geopolitical) instruments introduced above, or when other instruments fail to produce the desired objective (ie, inability to achieve political gain/regime change by interfering in the domestic political affairs of its neighbours). The impact of this instrument on the region is largely similar to the impact of other geopolitical instruments: regional tension and heightened instability, greater dependence of Moscow politically and the emergence of new business opportunities for Russian corporations.

- **Strengthening energy ties with other former-Soviet BCS region Republics.** This is a vital part of Moscow's geopolitical outlook for the BCS region and comprises of two sub-instruments. The first has been the Russian state's gas holding, Gazprom, buying up slack gas production from Azerbaijan and the Central Asian gas producers in the form of long term gas supply arrangements. While this has come at a price (Moscow has been paying market rates for Central Asian gas instead of buying on the cheap, as has been the case in the past), the result has been a shortfall in the availability of Caspian gas for some of Europe's major gas pipelines (such as the NABUCCO project), which aim to bring Caspian gas to the EU markets and reduce the Continent's dependence on Russian pivotal gas supplies. Moscow's second subinstrument has been ensuring that Caspian energy, where possible, continues to flow through the Russian oil and gas pipeline network, or through supply routes which are endorsed by Moscow, including the planned South Stream gas pipeline (Russia's competitor route to NABUCCO) and the Bourgas-Alexandropolis oil pipeline. The envisaged outcome of such objectives is to consolidate a Russian monopoly over Caspian energy supplies (both in terms of production and transportation to the market), where Russia would become "the gatekeeper" to Caspian energy supplies bound for Europe.

- **Bilateral commercial deals with select Western corporate partners and governments**. Russia has also dangled the carrot of working together on lucrative business contracts in the BCS region to select partners amongst multinational corporations and governments outside of the former-Soviet Republics. These have been most visible in the energy sector, particularly in the case of Gazprom's cooperation with Italian energy holding, ENI, which has become Russia's partner in the South Stream gas pipeline project. ENI has major investments in the Russian energy sector, long term gas supply arrangements with Gazprom and has already built a gas pipeline (with Gazprom) under the Black Sea which is supplying Russian gas to Turkey (ie, the Blue Stream pipeline). The Italian company's actions are widely seen to be undermining the EU-endorsed NABUCCO gas pipeline project, to the chagrin of EU solidarity and Brussels' efforts to foster a unified external policy on energy security. Similarly, Moscow has cultivated a particularly strong energy partnership with Ankara in recent months, further underscoring the already voluminous annual trade turnover which exists between Russia and Turkey. This recently paved the way for the Turkish energy holding, Calik, to sign lucrative energy agreements with Russia's Gazprom, and the Russian state oil company, Rosneft, developing business in a number of the BCS energy sub-strands. These include the possibility of the Russian and Turkish sides building a liquified natural gas (LNG) terminal in Ceyhan (with the overall objective of developing an energy transportation hub in Ceyhan port), commissioning joint contractors to collectively work on the Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline, involvement of Russian companies in building underground gas storage facilities in the Tuz Gölü region, and looking into the possibility of exporting Russian gas to Israel via the planned Blue Stream II gas pipeline.

The short-to-medium term impact of Russia's increasing assertiveness in the BCS basin will be the fact that Russian investments will be in a more advantageous position than their Western counter-initiatives seeking to operate in the region independently. Russian corporates have long held the edge over Western multinationals in the former-Soviet Union and Russia is in fact a primary source of foreign investment for many of these newly independent states. Given the geopolitical instruments that Moscow is deploying in the BCS region at present, this situation is only likely to reinforce itself into the near term. In fact, it is possible to suggest that the physical damage to physical infrastructure in Georgia as a result of the August 2008 war was, although tangible, not large, which was due the control which Russian investors have long exercised over many of Georgia's major economic assets.

This remains particularly evident, once again, in the energy sector. Control over the Enguri hydro power plant for example, Georgia's largest energy production facility, remains in joint Russian-Georgian hands to this day. This is due to the fact that the reservoir for the power plant is located in Georgian-controlled territory while the actual electricity production plant is located on Abkhaz/Russian controlled territory. After the August 2008 war, the Georgian leadership had to make a very difficult political decision in accepting an offer from the Russian company Inter RAO (the subsidiary of the Russian state-owned electrical energy giant, RAO UES) on joint operation of the power plant. While there is a positive history of activities of RAO UES in Georgia, the Russian state-owned company's controlling hand in a key electricity supplier for the entire country is not the best political and economic security outcome for Georgia, nor for foreign investors nonaligned with the Russian geopolitical vision for the region. While there is currently little sign that a repeat of August 2008 is imminent, it appears evident that significant commercial assets and strategic enterprises tied to regimes less compliant to Russian interest than others, are far more likely to be subject to higher than necessary geopolitical risks which will substantially exacerbate the cost of doing business.

An outlook for Russia-Turkey relations

It has already been mentioned above that Moscow has recently cultivated strong ties with Ankara, particularly with respect to the energy partnership, as part of the Russian effort to develop bilateral commercial deals with select corporate partners and governments in the BCS. The increasingly active partnership between Russia and Turkey, however, needs likewise to be considered against the backdrop of Turkey's long standing military integration into Western strategic-military alliances such as NATO, as well as its aspirations of becoming accepted as a fully fledged member of Brussels' enlarged "EU-Club-27". Turkey is also a member of the EU-endorsed NABUCCO consortium, which many in Ankara had hoped would provide a bargaining tool to build momentum towards EU membership. This has not necessarily occurred, however. As an EU membership road map for Ankara presently remains, at best, blurred, and given that the Turkish government, led by Prime Minister Erdogan and the Islamist-leaning AK Party, has pursued a more balanced foreign policy which has focused on improving relations with neighbouring states, Turkey has embraced the prospect of developing closer ties with Russia (and other neighbours with whom friendly relations have been compromised due to Turkey's previous Western leanings).

Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan has begun using a new Turkish approach to foreign policy, called "strategic depth". This approach centers on the notion that Turkey sits between two "geo-cultural basins" comprised of an Islamic Middle East and the (secular-progressive) West (Europe and the U.S.). By playing to both factions, Erdogan intends to make Turkey the preeminent actor in the crossroads between the two camps, extending its influence into the BCS as *the* regional power. Whilst developing closer ties with Russia (and for that matter, Iran), works well with the Turkish electorate, since it acts as a counterweight the West, and to U.S. policy in particular, (which does not retain popularity on the Turkish streets) there is no clear mention of Russia in the "strategic depth" concept – and for good reason. Like most developing nations, Turkey's political elite appreciates that the country's future lies with the West in terms of economic prosperity. EU accession talks, although stalled at present, are likely to remain a key long-term objective for Ankara, and close ties with NATO, despite frustration with Washington's Iraq policy (which has the effect of unsettling Turkey's Kurdish question by empowering the Kurds of northern Iraq), will likewise remain a pillar of Turkey's security policy. Russia's energy supplies have peaked in recent years, and its infrastructure for delivery of those supplies is in a continued state of dilapidation.

Turkey's turn towards the East explains the concept of strategic depth by establishing itself as a dominant factor in the second camp of an Islamic Middle East. Russia does not fit into this, and Turkish action towards Moscow has been even handed at best. The lack of mutual mistrust that purveyed the relationship between the two former-empires until recently shouldn't be discounted as an end to suspicion on both sides, but rather a more practical approach which the two powers have adopted due to present geopolitical requirements. The entire region's stability hinges on several pivotal areas of cooperation between the two, particularly the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia is heavily reliant on Russian aid and can be influenced by Moscow. The same can be stated, albeit to a lesser degree, of Turkey's relationship with Azerbaijan.

Commitment from both Turkey and Russia, as well as active cooperation between them, will be required to end that conflict, and ultimately solve the Caucasian Energy Circle problem that encompasses all of them. On the other hand, if Russia again invades or destabilises Georgia to the point where Tbilisi pulls out of EU-endorsed southern energy corridor projects, Turkey may be compelled to reopen its border with Armenia, which could lead to a backlash in relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan. This situation is a direct threat to Turkey's unique ability to break the Russian dominance on energy supplies to Europe, and could raise tensions between the Russia and Turkey.

While energy factors are (both) a source of concern as well as underlying partnership between Moscow and Ankara, Russia also has security issues to consider when cultivating the Turkey relationship. After the end of the war with Georgia in August 2008, officials in Moscow were shocked to learn that the Turkish military (the TSK) would soon begin shipping military supplies to Georgia. Russia also must deal with the threat of Islamic extremists that could emanate from Turkey or at the very least be sponsored by groups within its borders. It has yet to be seen, but jihadists may again return to breakaway regions in the Caucuses as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down, with Moscow fearing a repeat of the horrific wars in Chechnya of the 1990s. Russia's north Caucasus neighbourhood already remains highly volatile, with frequent incidence of terrorist attacks occurring, most of which are associated with an insurgency led by Caucasus Islamic radicals. In this sense, it would not be in the Kremlin's interest to see the Turkish state depart from its nationalist-secular political basis, with its pragmatic Western leanings, and embrace an Islamic political orientation (which some argue that Ankara, under AK Party leadership, is already doing).

Russia realises that Turkey aims to be a regional player in the BCS region and that it will not be a lesser partner in a relationship with Moscow in the long run, as Russia's preference with other BCS former-Soviet republics such as Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and, if recent events are any indication, possibly Ukraine. Western policy makers, however, will have to appreciate that diplomatic overtures from Ankara to Moscow, and vice-versa, are likely to remain inevitable into the medium term, which itself is a reflection of both the complex and competitive nature of geopolitics in the BCS. Turkey's recent assertion that Azerbaijan will no longer be able to fully meet the gas supply volumes required by NABUCCO, led some in Ankara to call for invitations of Russian participation in the project. Russia ultimately declined, but the offer itself, if taken at face value, is significant. Ultimately, the current Moscow-Ankara relationship is one of convenience: the two nations must cooperate due to each other's vested interests in the entire region, which predominantly encompass Caspian and Eurasian energy supplies and particularly their transportation to international markets. But, as astute Western policy makers should realise, "this is not a marriage made in heaven" and the situation is far more fluid than it is static. As already implied above, several factors emerging out of the BCS regional geopolitical jigsaw puzzle could have a dampening effect on present levels of cordialities between Turkey and Russia, causing either or both parties to alter the course of their present engagement.

The often overlooked Turkish relationship with Ukraine

Turkey's relationship with Ukraine, and indeed, the prospect of a Turkey-Ukraine Black Sea partnership of greater strategic resonance, is rarely given adequate attention in geopolitical discussions relating to the BCS region. Nor is there much discussion of the manner in which a Kiev-Ankara bilateral relationship should (or could) pan out. Yet both countries are major Black Sea powers, remain friendly neighbors and are united by their shared positions on the Black Sea. Both nations have a number of similar foreign policy priorities with respect to energy and security, where it would be myopic for Russia or other regional BCS actors to ignore the potential of stronger ties between the two countries. In this context, while there are a number of proponents (in Kiev in particular) of a policy thesis where a closer Kiev-Ankara relationship should be established in order to form the basis of a strong regional alliance, there is little doubt that any semblance of a more consolidated Ukrainian-Turkish partnership should be carefully managed by both sides.

Ukraine in particular, with its new government, would be wise to consider a fresher regional policy approach to include Turkey, demonstrating greater flexibility and regional leadership in the Black Sea area. This new method will enhance Ukraine's ability to seek out new international partners, expand collaboration with energy carrier suppliers, and establish stronger regional ties inclusive of middle powers in Eurasia-Middle East, whilst adding much needed foreign investment into the country's economy. The implementation of greater regional leadership will breathe life into current Ukrainian foreign policy, which is at best stagnant and in dire need of urgent reform in order for the country to respond to modern day challenges. This approach will allow Ukraine to draw closer to both its eastern and western partners, brining the country's national interests in line with new strategic partnerships, regional energy trends and environmental safety. In this sense Ukraine would be wise to determine its key partners in the Eurasian geopolitical arena and establish clear priorities in dealing with them.

Without doubt, Turkey should become one of the most important regional partners for Ukraine in any concerted effort the country makes to identify scope for new strategic relationships. Turkey is one of the leading military and economic powers in the BCS region, with one of the largest militaries in NATO (1.12 million men), which can play the role of a major security and stability source in the area. Turkey's unique geopolitical position, (comparatively) stable government, and economic potential are all positive aspects that make a stronger partnership important for Ukraine. Turkish markets are a promising attraction for Ukrainian industrial and agricultural goods, which could be significantly more profitable than current European markets. Turkey is the second largest consumer of Ukrainian exports, surpassed only by Russia. Commodity turnover between Ukraine and Turkey was $US3.079 billion in 2009, and it has the greatest positive balance among all its foreign trade partners at $US1.174 billion. In early 2010, Ukrainian-Turkish collaboration in agro-industry, construction, transport, energy, business, cultural and humanitarian issues all signified increased levels of cooperation between the two Black Sea nations.

All of these factors strongly suggest that policy makers in both countries, but in Ukraine in particular, should look to strengthen the scope for greater levels of political and economic cooperation between Kiev and Ankara. From a Ukrainian perspective, the following elements should be considered in the development of stronger ties between Kiev and Ankara, and it is foreseen that Ukraine should:

1) **Cancel visa requirements for Turkish citizens:** The governments of both countries prepared an agreement on mutual simplification of the visa regime. However, this has not been a priority for either country, and Kiev should take the first step towards outright normalization of the visa situation.

2) **Increase security cooperation with Turkey in the Black Sea region:** Both nations should define and follow an independent policy not subject to third party nations. This

may also aid in addressing the issue of the visa regulations towards Turkish citizens, by agreeing to cooperate in the fight against international terrorism. Ukraine and Turkey could also move further by initiating and sponsoring security and strengthening peace processes in the region. To smooth this transition and bolster agreements which are already in place (including that of the Organisation of Black Sea Economic Cooperation), renewal and adjustment talks should be started immediately.

3) **Kiev should promote greater openness to increased Turkish investment in the Ukrainian economy**: As of 1 January 2010, Turkish investment in Ukraine stood at $156.2 million. In addition to this, there are over 540 enterprises and businesses operating within Ukraine that stem from Turkish assets. The preparation of the upcoming Euro 2012 football tournament could be a jumping off point for increased investment in Ukraine, specifically for Turkish interests. Furthermore, special attention should be paid to opportunities to cooperate in free economic zones inside Turkey proper. Many nations operating in such zones have an annual goods turnover surpassing $US10 billion and Turkish legislation only mandates a small fee ($US50,000) for legal entities to establish operations in the free zones themselves.

4) **Focus on humanitarian issues**: An example of this would be to develop mechanisms for increased collaboration with Turkey over the status of Crimean Tatars who are returning to Ukraine in increasing numbers and are a key point of humanitarian relations in which both countries retain a vested interest. In the educational sector, an effort should be made to send Ukrainian students to study at higher educational institutions in Turkey in addition to the training of specialists in all business and government sectors. Cooperation and interaction in both areas will go far in cementing a closer relationship with both nations

5) **Political dialogue:** In order for closer ties to flourish, evidence of political will must come from the top of the political hierarchies of both countries. Mutual visits by both presidents and prime ministers from each nation will go a long way in establishing

personal relationships at the top echelons of power as well as providing positive media coverage of visiting dignitaries.

Russian Black Sea policy will remain interventionist

An increasingly competitive geopolitical environment in the BCS basin is creating a highly unpredictable environment in which to conduct policy planning or effectively carry out major investment projects in this region as we enter the third decade of post-Cold War uni-multipolarity. That being said, it does appear that Russia is placing greater resources into ensuring that its stake in the region's geopolitical chessboard is respected by all the major and minor regional actors alike. Indeed, it appears increasingly evident that Russia will be seeking to consolidate upon, if not expand, its geopolitical presence in the BCS in the years to come. No longer the military power it once was in Soviet times, the Russian state's overarching concern at present appears to be expanding regional business ties and ensuring security through the process of security energy – predominantly the energy supply routes running through the BCS region.

Furthermore, this mechanism appears to be the most effective tool that Russia has for dealing with the West, particularly given the fact that Moscow feels that the West has been slowly encroaching on its spheres of influence in the region through the various Euro-Atlantic initiatives. This perception has caused a reactive Russian foreign policy trajectory in the region, with Moscow becoming increasingly bellicose to regimes (Ukraine under Viktor Yushchenko and Georgia) that do not adhere to the Kremlin's geopolitical worldview. Despite a more Moscow-friendly regime evidently in power in states such as Ukraine at present, Russia's foreign policy towards its ex-Soviet neighbours will most certainly remain interventionist, which is only likely to reinforce the levels of instability which exists in the region at present.

Russia-Turkey ties should not be overestimated

In this context of (some level of) geopolitical realignment in the BCS basin, Turkey's eastward oriented foreign policy shift, as well as the notion of a more strategic partnership between Moscow and Ankara, should be viewed against the backdrop of the country's long standing relationship with Europe and the United States. Ankara's new foreign policy model of "strategic depth" intends to establish Turkey as regional player in both the Middle East and Europe. Concerns of Turkey's eastward shift in the West should be alleviated, however, by deeper appreciation of this concept, in which partnerships with regional actors like Russia and Iran are merely a practical way of increasing stability, not a wholesale withdrawal from the policies of recent decades that were essentially pro-Western. While Turkey will continue to develop cooperation with the West despite the geopolitical fluidities taking place in the BCS, it is clearly in the West's interest to refer to Turkey as a key actor in the region and major partner in the area for the West. Strategies to the contrary are only likely to drive countries like Turkey and Russia, and indeed, Turkey and Ukraine closer together, which will in turn undermine the West's expanding interests in this strategically vital region.

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