



THE EVOLUTION OF EUROPEAN AND EURO-ATLANTIC POLICY MAKING IN THE WIDER BLACK SEA: EU AND NATO ATTEMPTS AT STRENGTHENING REGIONALISM IN AN AREA OF STRATEGIC INTEREST

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Introduction

Debates about the geopolitical, geo-economic and strategic significance of the wider-Black Sea (WBS) region have become fashionable amongst Western policy makers and the international scholarly community since the end of the Cold War. While the Black Sea represented a “front line” in the stand-off between rival superpower blocks during an age which now seems to have slipped into the bygone days of our youth, the major geopolitical realignments which have taken place in Eurasia during the last two decades have evidently led to our “re-discovery” of one of the world’s most historically significant geostrategic playing fields.

Our new fascination with the Black Sea, however, has hardly been undermined by the *realpolitik* which underpinned Western corporations and governments expanding into the likewise newly rediscovered dominions of the Caspian basin and Central Asian steppe, in the hunt for new markets for trade and investment. Securing access to new energy deposits – an overarching corporate and political objective for Western leaders in the post-Cold War era during times of both high and low oil prices – from the Caspian has, as is now widely appreciated, heightened the strategic significance of the WBS in Western external policy thinking. Ever since the 1990s, such men (and women) have looked at this region as a would-be transport corridor linking upstream resources with downstream consumers. Furthermore, we should also note that Europe has – from an institutional and legal perspective – been enlarging as a result of the post-Cold War realignments and that the Black Sea, due to the inevitability of geography, has now reached Europe’s borders.

While experts east and west may continue to debate the natural constellation of Europe’s borders, with the entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the European Union (EU) on January 1, 2007, there is hardly a debate about the fact that “law-abiding and institutional Europe” has reached the natural boundaries of the Black Sea, raising a host of questions and challenges for policy makers and experts to consider. That being said, such issues have formed the basis of our newly rediscovered fascination with the region, fueling debate as to how to go about addressing the challenges which have arisen from our *realpolitik*-driven choice to engage the WBS and nearby regions.

Although a host of documentation has emerged providing potential road-maps on how to better engage the WBS due to the chain of events mentioned above, current academic debates addressing the Black Sea are exhibiting a rather sanguine position on this topic. Despite the fact that the WBS has firmly entered the “radar screen” in terms of Western geostrategic thinking, there appears to be less optimism in (particularly) Western external policy circles about engaging the region in comparison to several years prior. Increasingly, experts on the region lament the diminishing fortunes of Euro-Atlantic energy policies, which have thus far proven incapable of securing the flow of Caspian gas reserves through WBS corridors to Europe. While two Black Sea littoral states have joined the EU, Brussels-driven “European values, norms and standards” have yet to penetrate throughout the region convincingly. The WBS, instead of emerging as a region where civilizations intersect and international trade thrives, has itself become bogged down in a belt of (so called) “frozen” conflicts. Furthermore, some of these are showing an increasing penchant for unfreezing. This has cast a negative image marred by instability and heightening risk.

Experts also note the “rising power” of the region’s key “local actors” (as well as major littoral states), Russia and Turkey, while arguing that prominent “external actors”, namely the United States and the EU, are seeing their role reduced to mere monitors of the situation, investing limited resources in support of their regional interests. While it can be argued that Russia and Turkey have for centuries served as the “gatekeepers” of power-politics in the WBS, their newfound zest for asserting their power in the region and beyond – particularly in the last decade or so – has resulted in medium-sized littoral countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine, having to re-consider their options in the new geopolitical environment. These trends go further down the power-chain, with smaller local regional actors including Armenia,



Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, which are all directly involved in the “frozen conflicts”, re-balancing their policies against those of the key regional actors, with a view to placing themselves in tune with any potential wave of geopolitical change in the highly fluid and dynamic regional environment.

The manner in which these developments are now playing themselves out has tended to undermine regional cooperation and the construction of institutional regionalism in the WBS. In a region where – due to its strategic significance – a comprehensive regional dialogue and cooperation between all local and external actor-stakeholders is now arguably more necessary than ever, tacit (and occasionally belligerent) *powerpolitik* appears to be winning the order of the day. The “arrival” of Turkey and Russia (although not necessarily in the classic condominium format of the 19th Century) in the region is increasingly a consequence of the “departure” of the United States, and to a lesser extent of the EU, which is embroiled in domestic fiscal uncertainty inside the Eurozone, while Brussels likewise finds itself having to respond to other, apparently more pressing concerns in its immediate external neighbourhood with the coming of the “Arab Spring”. Debates on the WBS now appear to be moving away from topics of regional cooperation and institutional regionalism, to debates about security in the region, and we express concern as to whether it will be a case of *powerpolitik* or more broad based, cooperative security that will come to shape the destiny of the region, looking ahead.

With this in mind, we deemed that a review of present EU and NATO approaches to the WBS would be useful and timely for enhancing the understanding of the prevailing Transatlantic and European policies within the context of other actors engaged in WBS regional cooperation. Bearing in mind that we often tend to approach these forms of regionalism on the basis of our primary consideration of interests, it is hoped that our effort might contribute to enhancing coordination and policy harmonization inclusive of all WBS stakeholders – external, local and regional. We feel that this is a particularly important task at the present time, since there is an evident demand from within the region for greater European and Euro-Atlantic engagement. At the same time, we feel that there is a lack of consensus in Western opinion shaping bodies over any sense of possible road-maps for engagement in the WBS, which is partially due to the under-utilisation of existing institutional dialogue platforms through which the engagement of the key local and regional actors can take place.

We feel that this is a particularly relevant point, given the fact that the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Istanbul-based Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation (BSEC) approaches at the time of this writing. Thus, as a means of examining potential paths towards strengthening cooperative security relations between external and key-WBS players, as well as curtailing tendencies toward re-nationalization of foreign and security policies and preventing a relapse of international relations in the WBS falling into the grip of power politics, we commence with a review of the manner in which European and Euro-Atlantic strategies have evolved towards the region since the end of the Cold War.

The EU’s Eastward Expansion and the Emergence of a European Black Sea Policy Dimension

The EU is a relative newcomer in joining a range of external as well as local actors seeking to project themselves as regional powers in the WBS area. It was not until April 2007 that the European Commission produced its first substantive policy document relating to engagement with the Black Sea on a regional basis, the so called “*Black Sea Synergy: A New Regional Initiative*”.² Although this document was not the

² Commission of the European Communities, “Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative”, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels, 11.04.2007, COM (2007) 160 Final



first EU paper making reference to the Black Sea region in policy terms³, given the fact that its promulgation was almost immediately preceded by the entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the EU (on January 1, 2007), it was immediately identified by experts as the announcement of the Union's new Black Sea policy.⁴ While it can be argued that the Black Sea region started to come "under the radar" of European strategic thinking in terms of energy security, trade links, migration and other key policy areas as of the early 1990s, the entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the Union now meant that the Black Sea and the EU shared a common border, raising a host of new challenges for Brussels. In this context, Black Sea Synergy (BSS) provided Brussels with an initial policy platform from which the Union could engage the region and address the challenges arising from the EU's eastward enlargement

The European Commission's BSS paper spelled out such a wide range of policy areas in which the EU could engage the wider Black Sea (WBS) region that experts referred to the proposals put forward in the document as "highly eclectic, addressing all conceivable topics with the exception of hard security and military affairs".⁵ Indeed, BSS purported to extend cooperation between the EU and the WBS region to topic areas from as wide ranging a perspective as human rights and good governance, to energy security and transport corridors, frozen conflicts and illegal migration, through to maritime policy, fisheries, ecology, employment and social affairs.⁶ While such a diverse policy menu may indeed have been seen as ambitious, it should be noted that BSS itself was not born out of a vacuum. To the contrary, the document rested on the laurels of previous policy initiatives underlying the EU's steadfast expansion eastwards since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War, when new geopolitical realignments began to take place in the WBS region and Eurasia more broadly.

These predominantly related to the incorporation of the Visegrad (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia) and Baltic (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) states into the EU and active engagement of several other category of EU neighbourhood countries (including states involved in EU accession talks, ie, former-Yugoslav republics and Turkey, strategic partner countries, ie, the Russian Federation; and the so-called (Eastern) European Neighbourhood Policy [later Eastern Partnership] partner countries, ie, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan). Thus by the time the BSS initiative was promulgated in 2007, Brussels already had a wide range of existing institutional instruments at its disposal relating to counties in the WBS regional vicinity. BSS would essentially draw from this previous body of documents in order to further project EU policy into the region as we can note with reference to the text of the BSS document itself:

The European Union has already made major efforts to stimulate democratic and economic reforms, to project stability and to support development in the Black Sea area through wide ranging cooperation programmes. Three EU policies are relevant in this context: the pre-accession process in the case of Turkey, the European Neighbourhood Policy (with five eastern ENP partners also being active in Black Sea cooperation) and the Strategic

³ For earlier EU policy documents relating to the Black Sea region see for example, Commission of the European Communities (from herein European Commission), Communication on Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area, 1997, COM (97) 597 final.

⁴ Michael Emerson, "The EU's New Black Sea Policy", in Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott (eds); The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives; Centre for Transatlantic Relations, Washington DC, 2008, p.254.

⁵ Ibid, p.264.

⁶ European Commission, "Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative", op.cit;



Partnership with the Russian Federation. Moreover, the EC has contributed to a whole range of sectoral initiatives of regional relevance.⁷

Brussels made clear in the document that the Union's new Black Sea agenda would "focus on those issues and cooperation sectors which reflect common priorities and where EU presence and support is already significant".⁸ The BSS, as a policy document, would therefore formulate a number of short and medium term tasks predominantly related to these areas. The very fact that BSS entertained a layered, eastward oriented (policy-upon-policy) approach, as opposed to "re-inventing the wheel" (in EU policy terms) is reflected by a number of the document's key provisions. The section of BSS relating to regional engagement in relation to democracy, human rights and good governance, which states...:

The Council of Europe and the OSCE have set standards on human rights and democracy which apply to all Black Sea states.... Black Sea regional organisations have in recent years undertaken commitments to developing effective democratic institutions, promoting good governance and the rule of law. The EU should support these regional initiatives through sharing experience on measures to promote and uphold human rights and democracy, providing training and exchange programmes and stimulating a regional dialogue with civil society.⁹

...makes both implicit and explicit references to EU-endorsed standards and best practices in this area, envisaging their application within WBS regional space. It also implied that existing instruments applicable to EU regional cooperation initiatives, such as, for example, those operating in the Danube, would be extended to the WBS. Similarly, the section of the document referring to energy, which, among other priorities, highlights the fact that:

The Black Sea region is a production and transmission area of strategic importance for EU energy supply security. It offers significant potential for energy supply diversification and it is therefore an important component of the EU's external energy strategy. Energy supply security diversification is in the interest of our partners in the region, as well as the EU.¹⁰

...and thus endorses the fact that the European Commission will "continue" to enhance its (existing) relations with energy producers, transit countries and consumers in a dialogue on energy security. Further, the BSS energy section adds that:

This (energy security) dialogue will promote legal and regulatory harmonization through the Baku Initiative and in the framework of the ENP and the EU-Russia Energy Dialogue. This would be pursued also through the expansion, when appropriate, of the Energy Community Treaty to Moldova, Turkey and Ukraine, also through the Memoranda of Understanding with Azerbaijan and Ukraine, PCA and trade agreements, WTO accession negotiations and, where appropriate, via other bilateral energy agreements. The objective is to provide a clear, transparent and non-discriminatory framework, in line with the EU acquis, for energy production, transport and transit. The EU is also helping the countries of the region to

⁷ Ibid, p.2;

⁸ Ibid, p.3;

⁹ Ibid;

¹⁰ Ibid, p.5;



develop a clearer focus on alternative energy sources and on energy efficiency and energy saving, which will release important energy resources.¹¹

It is worthwhile quoting this section of the BSS document in some length given that it is full of reference to existing EU legal instruments and further institutional arrangements relating to the countries standing in the path of the Union's eastern enlargement. As evident from the section of the BSS text quoted above, these include instruments such as the Energy Community Treaty (which seeks to apply EU internal market energy legislation in Balkan countries and other EU regional neighbours to the east), EU trade agreements, Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (such as those with post-Soviet Black Sea, Caucasus and Caspian countries) and the EU-Russia energy dialogue.

As was the case with further sections of the BSS document, the energy section was heavily laden with institutional terminology and language pertaining to the type of rule of law and governance culture which underlies the very foundation of the European Union itself. The EU, after all, is founded on a series of inter-state treaties and its projection of policy, both within the Union and in its immediate neighbourhood, is expressed predominantly on the basis of the treaties themselves. In this context, the BSS policy, as an "EU benchmark proposal" for establishing the "rules of engagement" with the WBS should itself be seen as Brussels' effort at (passively) spreading *Europeanisation* – European rule of law and governance culture – into the newest territories which have come under the scope of the Union's eastward enlargement.

EU Black Sea Policy – Drivers and Limitations

The EU has had, however, good reason in attempting to expand Brussels' version of *Europeanisation* (as some experts have referred to the European rule of law and governance culture) into the WBS, both prior to Bulgaria and Romania having joined the Union, as well as after. While the Black Sea has since the age of antiquity been an area of vital strategic significance and, as a zone of geo-political and geo-economic vitality has courted some of the history's great empires and nations alike, the realignments taking place in Eurasia following the end of the Cold War simply meant that this was a region that the EU could not ignore. The EU had, after all, started to emerge as both a global and independent power during the 1990s, with its integrated common market, powerful domestic economies and abundance of investment grade capital, as well as acute demand for external sources of energy. During the 1990s, the Black Sea presented itself as an important corridor connecting European energy consumers with the energy rich Caspian Sea area to the east of the WBS, which attracted a flood of attention from a host of leading international energy companies.

1. Drivers

Extending the process of *Europeanisation* into the WBS (and for that matter the Caspian) region would assist efforts aimed at securing some of these energy sources for European consumers, underscoring the importance of unhindered supply routes across the Black Sea Westbound. The European Commission's 1997 Communication "on Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area"¹² essentially served as an instrument to support the efforts of EU energy consumers and shippers to secure energy supplies from the region,

¹¹ Ibid;

¹² European Commission, Communication on Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area, 1997, op.cit;



given that its core provisions firmly concentrated on themes closely related to energy security. Of these, the primary elements included:

- The Baku Initiative (a framework which aimed to enhance cooperation in both the energy and transport fields in order to stimulate progressive convergence towards EU principles and legal standards)
- The INOGATE Program (The Interstate Oil and Gas to Europe pipelines, or INOGATE, initiative targeted the Caspian and Black Seas and aimed to improve the security of energy supply through a range of technical assistance programmes)
- Efforts to upgrade energy infrastructure, which included major projects of the time (which were carried out during the 1990s) including the Baku-Supsa and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines as well as the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline. (A number of projects of new energy infrastructure [now “household names” in the industry] were being considered at the time, including the reversal of the Brody-Odessa pipeline and its extension to Plock in Poland, as well as the Constanza-Omisalj-Trieste, Burgas-Vlore and Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipelines).
- The Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Central Asia (TRACECA) programme, which provided technical assistance covering road, rail, aviation and maritime transport connections from Central Asia to Europe.

Other provisions from the Commission’s 1997 Black Sea policy document included measures relating to the environment, conflict resolution, education, research, science and technology – many of the elements that comprised other EU packages relating to the neighbourhood policy, and, as evident from the discussion in the previous pages of this text, proved to be forerunners of Brussels’ more comprehensive efforts to engage the WBS after the EU enlargement extended the Union’s borders to the Black Sea itself.

That being said, it is evident that energy, trade and transport remained as the backbone of Brussels’ interest in the region in the period between the Commission’s 1997 and 2007 documents. This is even more the case today, taking into account the Union’s Caspian energy focus as the focal point of Brussels’ policy of diversification of the energy supply. The EU-endorsed NABUCCO gas pipeline project, conceived in the mid-2000s to bring Caspian gas to Europe via the Caucasus, Turkey and the Balkans, has, in this vein, largely focused on concluding (binding) host-government agreements between the NABUCCO consortium and the countries along the pipeline’s geographical supply chain. This project could be seen, in this context, as a further effort by the EU to secure energy supply through the establishment of European law based governance standards in the Union’s neighbourhood, namely the WBS.

Thus it can be seen that energy, particularly with reference to the EU’s obsession with diversification and supply security, has acted as a key driver for Brussels’ increasing engagement with WBS, while the steady process of *Europeanisation* in the context of the Union’s eastward expansion has provided both an instrumental and legal basis for realising objectives related to security of supply. These trends are only likely to strengthen looking ahead, given most seasoned forecasts alluding to the fact that the EU will become yet further dependant on external sources of energy. This particularly relates to natural gas, which appears to be abundant in the Caspian Sea basin and for which the WBS provides the only feasible corridor to European markets.



2. Limitations

While it seems apparent that the EU has upped the stakes in its political engagement of the WBS since the Union's January 2007 enlargement on the one hand, and as Brussels' concern over diversification of energy supply routes intensifies on the other, EU policy towards the region has never been without its limitations. It would certainly not be untrue to say that with the BSS strategy the EU has added constructive measures by way of a Black Sea dimension to its neighbourhood policy in wake of its eastward enlargement. The European Commission's report on the implementation of the BSS strategy one year after it was adopted asserted that the EU had opened discussion relating to many of the provisions raised in BSS with stakeholders in the region.¹³ Further, the EU convened a high level Summit of Black Sea states in Kiev, Ukraine, in February 2008 as part of the BSS strategy of involving all regional partners and EU members-institutions in the new strategy of engagement for the WBS. These predominantly included the non-EU littoral states of the Black Sea and regional Black Sea bodies such as the Istanbul-based Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation (BSEC), all of which subsequently became referred to as the BSS partners in subsequent documentation.

The outcome of the Kiev EU-Black Sea Summit was, in essence, encouraging, in that its joint statements read that "both EU member states and Black Sea Synergy partners are willing to engage in cooperation in the long term". Furthermore, the European Commission's review of implementation of the first year of the BSS strategy noted that further progress in (EU-Black Sea) regional cooperation will require "consistent and active involvement of a growing number of actors, including both EU member states and Black Sea partners".¹⁴ This is, however, where the limitations of the EU's reach start to become evident, as summed up by one analyst in the following comment, which both compliments and questions the nature of EU Black Sea policy *circa* 2008:

(The BSS, as the) beginning of a Black Sea dimension to the EU's neighbourhood policies fills an obvious gap in the EU's vision of the map of wider Europe. The EU is moving towards a certain degree of commonality in its approaches to each of the three enclosed seas of its periphery — the Baltic, the Mediterranean and now the Black Sea. However, the EU seems to be principally motivated in seeing all regions in its neighbourhood (to the furthest degree possible) integrating with its economy and converging (with) its political norms. It is still an unanswered question how far this (strategy) can succeed through neighbourhood policies (particularly those that do not comprise a further widening of the enlargement process).¹⁵

Although this comment was written some four years ago, a convincing response to the penultimate question which it raises remains unanswered to this day. While the EU is increasingly seeking to project *Europeanisation* into the WBS (as implied in the abovementioned comment), one could not be blamed for questioning the degree to which (so called) European political and economic norms have established themselves in the region. This relates to both countries in the WBS which aspire to join the EU (such as Turkey and to a lesser degree Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia), those that do not (such as Russia) and even those which have already joined the Union (ie, Romania and Bulgaria). While BSS raised the level of EU engagement in the WBS, the limitations to the EU's engagement with the region, as well as the projection of the process of *Europeanisation* into the WBS, were apparent following the Kiev EU-Black Sea Summit.

¹³ European Commission, "Report on the First Year of Implementation of the Black Sea Synergy", Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament, Brussels, 19.06.2008 COM (2008) 391 final.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.8;

¹⁵ Michael Emerson, *op.cit*, pp.269.70;



The declarations produced as a result of the Summit were encouraging, in that the EU and the regional stakeholders declared their ready willingness to engage with one another, with the aim of expanding cooperation between the EU and the “WBS partners”. However, while the regional stakeholders at the Summit in principle welcomed a more active EU role in the WBS, it was innately appreciated by all parties that the former’s entry into the region would inevitably result in (what some experts have described as) “competing regionalisms”.¹⁶ This particularly related to BSEC (the major institutional partner at the Kiev Summit), which has evolved as the most established inter-state organisation promoting integration and economic cooperation in the region since its establishment in 1992. While BSS identified BSEC as a key partner and regional stakeholder, the Kiev Summit (and thus the EU’s BSS strategy) was plagued by the question of: to what degree should the BSS outcomes be realised through BSEC?¹⁷ Further, given that the EU has, in recent years, entertained an ambiguous relationship with BSEC’s two leading member states, Turkey and Russia, any sense of realisation of the EU’s Black Sea strategy through BSEC was never going to be a honeymoon.

Educated speculation could (quite safely) assume that a number of EU member states, for their part, have also been sceptical about engaging BSEC too closely in the BSS context due to reservation about geopolitical motivations and national strategic interests of BSEC’s two leading members. Russia after all, hardly endorses the EU’s efforts to employ the WBS as a transportation corridor for Caspian gas imports to Europe, in an effort to diversify EU consumption from Russian gas deliveries. Russia’s position is in stark contrast to that of many European opinion shapers, who advocate a loosening of Moscow’s dominant position as a gas supplier to the Union – depicted by some as an overly burdensome monopoly. Furthermore, while Turkey has been in close contact with European partners during the inter-governmental negotiations process within the framework of the Brussels-driven NABUCCO gas pipeline, Turkey and Azerbaijan have now launched their own gas pipeline project.

This has resulted in a significant restructuring of the NABUCCO project, to the chagrin of its proponents in Brussels and the wider Euro-Atlantic camp. It may yet lead to the death knell of NABUCCO as a whole. Both Russia and Turkey, for whom energy security is a priority of strategic proportions, have occasionally hinted that they would prefer to engage the EU in the WBS through the BSEC framework, but increasingly on pragmatic terms when it comes to energy policy. This approach, however, has not always gone down well in Brussels. Not long after the Kiev EU-Black Sea Summit in February 2008, BSEC convened a Ministerial Summit for its member states (again in Kiev in April 2008) in order to draft a declaration entitled “EU-BSEC Cooperation in the field of energy”. Brussels failed to send a representative to the 3-day meeting, however, despite invitations from arguably the most significant amongst the BSS institutional partner. The Kiev April 2008 BSEC energy ministerial itself, in the absence of the EU, deteriorated from an occasion intended to draft an inter-state declaration on energy cooperation to a slinging match between two BSEC members, namely Armenia and Azerbaijan, where representatives from the latter insisted that “there could be no participation from Baku in any such declaration while Armenia continues to occupy the territory of Azerbaijan”.¹⁸

¹⁶ For a very useful discussion about regionalism, “competing regionalisms” and the evolution of regional trans-national identities in the Black Sea see the chapter by Charles King, “The Wider Black Sea Region in the Twenty-First Century”, pp.1-19, in Hamilton and Mangott, *op.cit*;

¹⁷ Michael Emerson, *op.cit*, p.266;

¹⁸ Source: Author participation in the Kiev April 2008 BSEC energy ministerial meeting.



The EU's Black Sea Policy as an Afterthought

Now that some five years have passed since the European Commission published the BSS Communication, heralding Brussels' contribution towards a Black Sea strategy, scope for projection of EU policy into the region remains in flux. BSS has helped clarify the fact that the EU has "put its hand on the table" and declared the intention to participate as an actor in one of wider Europe's most important spaces of geopolitical and geo-economic competition. However, the projection of the process of *Europeanisation* in the WBS is at risk of getting bogged down in the hard-nosed geopolitical realities which have dominated the history of the Black Sea for centuries. Worse still, from Brussels' perspective, EU policy in the region is under threat from being swept aside altogether by fast-moving events taking place on the ground in the region, which have become yet more pronounced since the EU's adoption of BSS. These include regional energy policy dynamics (including Russia-endorsed gas pipeline projects such as "South Stream" and Turkish-Russian as well as Turkish-Azerbaijani energy "axes of convenience"), competing "regionalisms" (regional economic and security integration projects driven by the dominant local actors in the WBS) and security challenges (including the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 or the risk of relapse of Armenia's conflagration with Azerbaijan, which could have ramifications well beyond the WBS itself).

The EU, which is traditionally a slow decision making body politic, has increasingly found itself in a position of having to react to events rather than showing leadership in the WBS. By its own account, the EU has referred to the Black Sea as a "complex environment" and Brussels has yet to convince the BSS partners and wider-regional stakeholders of its capacity to act decisively. Despite all of its good intentions, backed by occasional doling out of technical and development aid handouts, Brussels has yet to demonstrate its continued ability to effectively project soft power in the region. The ongoing Eurozone crisis will hardly lend itself positively to this state of affairs. Furthermore, with the coming of the Arab Spring in early 2011, Brussels has found itself having to "react" to other complex environments on the European periphery and is currently looking to develop a new crisis-response strategy for dealing with the Middle East and North Africa. As decision makers in the EU institutions start to debate Brussels' so called "more for more" strategy towards the Arab world,¹⁹ the European Commission's BSS Communication of April 2007 currently appears to be little more than just an afterthought.

Why Does the Wider Black Sea Matter for NATO?

As was the case with EU policy towards the WBS, NATO articulation of strategy towards the region likewise started attaining greater visibility levels during the second decade of the post-Cold War era. In particular, the September 11th (2001) terrorist attacks on New York rammed home the view amongst top-level Western decision makers that the greatest threats to Euro-Atlantic security were likely to emanate from beyond the European continent, particularly from the Greater Middle East. This threat perception pushed the WBS area into a more central role within Western foreign and security policy thinking. At the same time, the lack of a coherent strategy aimed at integrating the WBS, as a "re-discovered" geopolitical domain, drove European and American strategic thinkers towards the development of such strategies. Ron Asmus and Bruce Jackson, for example, made a compelling "strategic and moral case" for an integrated Euro-Atlantic strategy for the WBS in their 2004 article on "The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom".²⁰

¹⁹ As explained by Ana Gomes, Member of the European Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs and Rapporteur for Libya, in remarks made during a conference "Europe and the Arab Spring: Responding to the Changing Arab Order", Bibliotheque Solvay, Brussels, May 31, 2012.

²⁰ Ron Asmus and Bruce Jackson, "The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom" in "A New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region", German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2004.



The strategic case was built upon the need to complete the task of consolidating peace and stability within Europe, and to project stability into the Greater Middle East under the auspices and strong drive of Western engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq. The moral case was based upon the West's obligation to undo the damage produced by the Cold War through outreach to Black Sea countries, with a view to building a united and free Europe through integration and partnerships. Asmus and Jackson called on NATO to take advantage of the upcoming Istanbul summit (28-29 June 2004) in order to recognise the strategic stake the alliance had in the WBS, and to launch a program of outreach, as well as bilateral and regional cooperation.²¹

It should be noted that Black Sea littoral states are already either members (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey), or Partners of NATO (Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia). Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova are not littoral states, but geopolitically they belong to this region since developments in those countries are important for Black Sea regional stability and security. All of these countries participate in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and the Partnership for Peace, the key NATO partnership frameworks offered to non-member countries of Eastern Europe. However, while a regional approach has long been part of NATO's partnership programs, NATO's projects or cooperation programs have not been known to focus exclusively on the WBS.

NATO has always been an Alliance defending the common values of member states, not only their territories. After 1990, with the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council/Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (since 1997), and the Partnership for Peace, NATO added a new dimension to its grand strategy: promoting its core values beyond the borders of member states. This policy was pursued in Central Europe, with the first post-Cold War enlargement of NATO taking place in South East Europe, as well as by engagement in crisis management in the Balkans and by enlarging to include new members from the region. NATO also expanded into the Baltic region by accepting Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia as new member states. Furthermore, the (so called) Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003) and the Orange revolution in Ukraine (2004-05) opened new opportunities for extending the Euro-Atlantic integration process to the Northern and Eastern coasts of the Black Sea.

The Black Sea region is surrounded by a belt of "unresolved (often referred to as frozen) conflicts". In each of these conflicts brutal warfare and ethnic cleansing has occurred and could reoccur. Trans-national crime has found safe heavens in most of these places destabilizing the governments of the region, threatening Europe with illicit traffic, and ultimately posing a threat to the Euro-Atlantic community by its capability to traffic weapons and technologies to terrorist organizations. "Frozen conflicts" and organised crime emanating from within the WBS vicinity pose a challenge to Euro-Atlantic security and NATO's core values and interests.

The dynamics of the so called "unresolved conflicts" over Georgia's break-away regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh undermine scope for regional cooperation in the WBS, including NATO's practical support to regional security cooperation initiatives. Furthermore, the WBS is a "lynchpin for a wider region and a corner stone in the strategic outlook of many Eurasian actors"²². Stability in the WBS is essential for all stakeholders from Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East, due primarily to the significance of the region as a transportation corridor for international energy supplies. The Black Sea region lies at the core of the main transport routes for

²¹ Ibid.

²² Marat Terterov, Andrej Kreutz and George Niculescu, "The Changing Dynamics of the Wider Black Sea in Regional Security and External Relations", from http://www.gpf-europe.com/upload/iblock/283/wider_black_sea_security_report_final_banner.pdf



Caspian energy reserves, which are becoming increasingly important for European energy security. Thus a range of geopolitical and security issues arising within the framework of regional re-alignment in Eastern Europe and the WBS in the post-Cold War era, have resulted in a scenario where a basis for NATO strategic thinking towards the Black Sea has re-emerged.

NATO's Vision and Mandate

A vision on NATO's potential role in the WBS was outlined by Jaroslaw Skonieczka (Director in the NATO International Staff) who placed NATO's prospective enlargement to the centre of (any viable) Western strategy for the Black Sea, while highlighting NATO's capabilities to induce and support transformation by addressing the deficit of democracy and good governance in the regional countries.²³ According to this vision "combining cooperation on reform for the countries of the region in the context of IPAP²⁴ and PAP-DIB²⁵ with regional security efforts pursued through PAP-T²⁶ and other possible initiatives, could help develop a Black Sea identity as part of NATO's strategic and political outlook".²⁷

This enlargement-centred vision of NATO's potential role in the WBS, while hailed by most of NATO's new members, was received reluctantly not only by the regional powers, Russia and Turkey, but also by some European Allies, notably France and Germany. Consequently, in 2006, Jeffrey Simon provided a new academic vision for the re-shaping of NATO's potential role in the WBS into one of "building bridges for regional cooperation, and barriers against asymmetric security threats"²⁸. Taking into account the arguments of those who opposed a bolder NATO role in the WBS, Simon argued that the new forms of regional cooperation should: build upon existing forms of cooperation, rather than trying to supplant them; be tailored to taking advantage of opportunities to mediate or resolve the frozen conflicts; be developed under a bottom-up approach by paying due attention to ensuring regional ownership.²⁹

²³ Jaroslaw Skonieczka, "The Black Sea Region: A Role for NATO?" in on "A New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region", 2004.

²⁴ Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAP) are designed to bring together all the various cooperation mechanisms through which a Partner interacts with the Alliance, sharpening the focus of activities to better support their domestic reform efforts.

²⁵ The Partnership Action Plan on Defense Institution Building (PAP-DIB) reflects Allies' and Partners' common views on modern and democratically responsible defense institutions. It provides an EAPC definition of defense reform and a framework for common reflection and exchange of experience on related problems. It is to help interested Partners to reform and restructure their defense institutions to meet their needs and international commitments.

²⁶ The Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T) provides a framework for cooperation and sharing of expertise in this area through political consultation and practical measures. It is leading to improved intelligence sharing and cooperation in areas such as border security, terrorism-related training and exercises, and the development of capabilities for defense against terrorist attack or for dealing with the consequences of such an attack.

²⁷ Jaroslaw Skonieczka, op.cit;

²⁸ Jeffrey Simon, "Black Sea Regional Security Cooperation: Building Bridges and Barriers" in "Next Steps in Forging an Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea", The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006

²⁹ Ibid;



Furthermore, Simon suggested four areas of practical cooperation: maritime activities, air reconnaissance, coast guard and border defence, and civil protection.³⁰ He recognized that harmonizing NATO's partnership programs with the requirements of regional cooperation mentioned above was only the first step in the process. The EU, Russia and Turkey were also to be engaged, to the largest extent possible, in building bridges and barriers in the Wider Black Sea, while the regional countries were expected to take the lead in concrete practical projects. For example, Romania and Bulgaria could have built a platform for a coordinated border and coastal control system, which was to be subsequently broadened to include other Black Sea countries. Another example would suggest empowering Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine to play leading roles in setting up Black Sea regional cooperation on civil protection.

NATO's mandate in the region has been codified in a series of communiqués issued by Allied Heads of State and Government (HOSG). At the Istanbul summit (2004), HOSG noted "the importance of the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic security"³¹. They also noted that "littoral countries, Allies and Partners, are working together to contribute to further strengthening security and stability in the area"³², and that "our Alliance is prepared to explore means to complement these efforts, building upon existing forms of regional co-operation."³³ At the Riga (2006) and Bucharest (2008) summits, Allied HOSG commended initiatives to strengthen cooperation, security and stability in the Black Sea region, and re-affirmed NATO's continued support to relevant regional efforts. The Lisbon Summit Declaration (November 2010) re-stated the importance of the Black Sea region for the Euro-Atlantic security, welcomed progress in consolidating regional cooperation and ownership, and expressed NATO's readiness to support those efforts based on regional priorities, as well as on dialogue and cooperation among the Black Sea countries and with the Alliance.³⁴

Taking the mandate derived from the aforementioned Summits into account, NATO has sought to extend its support to efforts at building "regionalism" in the Black Sea through encouraging cooperation, security and stability. The Alliance has made use of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) tools and mechanisms to support regional defence and security co-operation by reinforcing its efforts to assist individual Partner Nations to implement comprehensive defence and wider reforms. Regional countries which expressed their NATO membership aspirations, i.e. Georgia and Ukraine, were formally granted candidate status. In addition, regional co-operation has created a better framework for providing international assistance to multinational projects in support of defence reforms.

Further, NATO has taken steps to reinforce efforts to fight global terrorism, proliferation of WMD and organised crime (traffic of small-scale weapons, drugs, and human beings) and illegal immigration, including through offering assistance to regional projects of the Nations from the Black Sea region. In addition, placing the South Caucasus nations into a Black Sea context helped overcome, or at least circumvent, the paralysis of regional co-operation in the South Caucasus itself. Regional co-operation has also contributed significantly to establishing an enhanced security environment subject to a renewed sense of individual responsibility for the notion of common security.

³⁰ Ibid;

³¹ "Istanbul Summit Communique", from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_21023.htm

³² Ibid;

³³ Ibid;

³⁴ Lisbon Summit Declaration of 20 November 2010, from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm?mode=pressrelease



'Soft' Rather than 'Hard' Security Cooperation

Historically, the status of the Black Sea Straits (the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles) was tightly linked to the balance of power in Europe.³⁵ When Russia and the Ottoman Turkish Empire established a condominium over the Black Sea, they tended to close the Black Sea to the other European powers. When they were at war, the Straits were open so that European powers could intervene to re-balance the regional distribution of power. While efforts were made by external powers to exert greater influence over the flow of traffic through the Straits, both Russia and Turkey have shown a tendency seeking to limit the presence of non-littoral maritime powers (including NATO Allies' fleets) in the Black Sea. That being said, present day relevance of such limitations have been sometimes questioned (and deemed obsolete), given the completely changed strategic environment in the WBS following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the proliferation of asymmetric security threats in Eurasia-Middle-East, in particular after 9/11. This scenario of threat projection, as already implied earlier in the text, has created a basis for greater NATO strategic thinking towards the WBS, in view of strengthening security and stability in the region.

There have been at least three approaches for NATO's involvement in strengthening security and stability in the Black Sea region which can be summarised as follows:³⁶

1. **the operational approach**, which might have involved using NATO's naval military capabilities to support Black Sea states' efforts to fight against asymmetric threats;
2. **the cooperative security approach**, which envisaged the use of PfP tools and mechanisms to support and/or complement existing forms of regional co-operation; and
3. **the ballistic missile defence approach**, thereby the development of a US/NATO Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system aiming to protect European Allied territories and populations against potential missile attacks. This approach has also acquired a Wider Black Sea dimension due to both the planned installation of key components of that system in Turkey and Romania, and to potential cooperation with Russia and other WBS countries.

1. The Operational Approach

However, whilst the significance of the WBS has elevated in NATO strategic thinking, the Alliance has not demonstrated any concerted ambition to play an operational role in the Black Sea, outside of the naval forces belonging to littoral member states (ie, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria). The operational option of NATO's involvement in Black Sea security was discussed at NATO HQ in the context of assessing the need for extending the Operation Active Endeavour (NATO naval operation involving surveillance, control and escort of ships in the Mediterranean Sea and the straits of Gibraltar) to the Black Sea. However, eventually, no concrete decision of such involvement was reached by consensus among Allies. Occasionally, at the request of littoral member states, NATO has deployed naval groups to the region. However, such "annual visits" were intended to extend the same courtesies to Bulgaria and Romania, as were extended to all Allies. The prevailing argument was stating that the challenges emerging from the Black Sea region, which we have described earlier (including transnational crime; narcotics, arms and people trafficking), are largely non-traditional threats, which could not be dealt with via traditional tools of 'hard' power. Littoral countries would not have had sufficient operational capabilities to successfully deal with such challenges without external intervention. NATO's engagement of the region, therefore, has increasingly resulted in the Alliance

³⁵ Marat Terterov, Andrei Kreutz and George Niculescu, op.cit;

³⁶ George Niculescu, "A NATO Perspective on Strengthening Maritime Security in the Black Sea: Potential Improvements", in "Strengthening Black Sea Maritime Security, International conference, Sofia, 1-3 November 2005".



investing into considerable 'soft security' assets in order to confront non-traditional challenges emanating from this region.

2. The Cooperative Security Approach

A large part of the process of projection of NATO's "soft power" in the WBS has included the expansion of a plethora of existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation programmes with partner countries from the WBS. These programmes have aimed to support domestic reforms, particularly defence reforms, to enhance military interoperability with NATO and to contribute to the fight against terrorism, and against other global security risks. However, there has been no regional dimension to the existing multilateral programmes focused on the Black Sea, nor has NATO established formal relations with any of the Black Sea regional co-operation initiatives.

While NATO has not developed formal cooperation with any of the inter-state Black Sea regional initiatives, the Alliance has developed extensive institutional contact with all of the new states of the former-Soviet Union, mostly on a bilateral basis. When considering such contacts, NATO-Russia cooperation is deemed as having strategic importance for the Euro-Atlantic Area. The NATO-Russia Council is the main framework for dialogue and cooperation on various issues of mutual interest, such as: Afghanistan, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery; counter-piracy; counter-terrorism; disaster response. However, NATO has repeatedly urged Russia to meet its commitments with respect to Georgia in the aftermath of the 2008 war, and has called on the reversal of its decisions on the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

Since the Bucharest summit in 2008, Georgia (like Ukraine) is a recognized candidate for NATO membership without benefiting from set a deadline or a timetable for the eventual signature of the Washington Treaty, and for the subsequent accession process. The NATO-Georgia Commission and the Annual National Program constitute the main frameworks for Georgia's relations with NATO. Stability and successful political and economic reform in Georgia are deemed important to Euro-Atlantic security and the Alliance supports the implementation of democratic, electoral, judicial, as well as security sector and defence reforms in Georgia through a range of cooperation activities.

NATO has a similar policy outlook towards Ukraine. Ukraine's Distinctive Partnership with NATO has involved political dialogue in the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and assistance for reforms and practical cooperation to help Ukraine meet the objectives formulated jointly with NATO in the Annual National Program. Furthermore, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Republic of Moldova have agreed Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAP) with NATO. These documents set out these countries' cooperation priorities with the Alliance, and NATO has provided country-specific advice on reform objectives for each of the three, which have fallen into the general categories of political and security issues; defence and military issues; public information; science and environment; civil emergency planning; and administrative, protective security and resource issues.

3. The Ballistic Missile Defence Approach

It should also be mentioned that recent trends in NATO outlook towards the WBS has included the Black Sea regional anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system. This regional security initiative is envisaged at being a significant component of a larger regional infrastructure that would include ships from Poland, Spain, the



US and the Netherlands being equipped with combat systems capable of detecting and intercepting ballistic missiles. At the November 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, NATO's leaders decided to develop a ballistic missile defence (BMD) capability to pursue its core task of collective defence. To this end, they decided that the scope of the current Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) programme's command, control and communication capabilities will be expanded beyond the capability to protect forces to include European populations and territory. The system of deterrence created through the ABM defence shield would guarantee security and stability in the region and would open new opportunities for cooperation between NATO members and Black Sea countries, including Russia.

The purpose, design, implementation and consequences of having regional ABM defense around the Black Sea are, from NATO's perspective, is predominantly tactical. Therefore, the NATO BMD capability is practically irrelevant against Russian strategic forces, and would in no way threaten Moscow's nuclear potential and deterrence capabilities, at least for the next decade or so. Rather, it aims to defend European states against a potential tactical missile attack from Iran in the context of the current stand-off over Tehran's nuclear program. As is widely appreciated, however, Russia hardly views Iran's nuclear threat in the same terms as do the Western allies and Moscow has generally not been welcoming of such initiatives, which it sees as more of an obstacle to regional security cooperation, rather than something which would encourage it.

Conclusion: the Need for Rational Engagement and “Fine Tuning” (rather than “reinventing”) the Wheel

While it cannot be said that NATO has any specific Black Sea policy (and it could even be debated whether the Alliance is in agreement with respect to any geographical definition of the Black Sea region), the re-emerging (wider) geopolitical debate about the Black Sea has resulted in NATO taking a more nuanced outlook at the region. Since the Istanbul Summit in 2004, the Alliance has repeatedly recognized the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic security and it has pursued a rather vague mandate in order to contribute to regional cooperation. However, NATO has been playing a self-restraining role in the WBS region focusing on "soft security cooperation", as well as on bilateral dialogue and practical cooperation with individual countries, as we have already described above.

Consequently, NATO's influence in the WBS has declined substantially, a trend complemented by other regional developments including the growing influence of Turkey and Russia; the US “looking elsewhere” in terms of its global priorities; an ambivalent attitude from key European countries (namely France and Germany) contributing to NATO's lower regional profile; and the inability (or unwillingness) of the medium and smaller WBS countries to boost NATO's engagement with the region, in spite of the efforts made by some of them, at different stages. These developments are making the strategic and moral case for a Euro-Atlantic multilateral strategy for the Black Sea as developed by Ron Asmus and Bruce Jackson just as valid today as it was close to a decade ago. It is becoming even more relevant taking into account the current geopolitical turmoil in the Middle East and Northern Africa in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and the growing instability in the South Caucasus, which "twenty years after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, [...] is facing the prospects of another geopolitical vacuum"³⁷.

³⁷ The Unresolved Conflicts In The South Caucasus: Implications For European And Eurasian Integration” on: http://gpf-europe.com/upload/iblock/20f/final%20summary_conclusions_caucasus_seminar081211.pdf



The question remains, however, as to how intellectual forces shaping the policies of European and Euro-Atlantic institutions can forge greater consensus in the compilation of a strategy for constructive, coordinated engagement in the WBS. In terms of security policy, lessons learned over the recent years would suggest that a multilateral strategy for the WBS should be built upon a renewed cooperative security approach which has become vital to the integrity, peace and security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Such an approach would be wise to avoid divisive, politicized discussions on the enlargement of existing alliances (to be seen in both directions: Eastward for NATO or Westward and Southward for the Moscow-backed Collective Security Treaty Organisation), on the creation of new institutions (i.e. the EU-Russia Strategic Council), and on new European security treaties.

Rather, it should consider endorsing a revival of the cooperative security approach of the 1990s, assigning and coordinating clearly defined regional roles to the European Union, the United States, Turkey and Russia. Concrete practical regional cooperation may proceed in some of the four areas proposed by Jeff Simon in 2006 (air reconnaissance, coast guard and border defence, and civil protection), as well as in new areas of common interest such as energy security, critical infrastructure protection, combating organised crime and cyber security. Such an approach might be instrumental in the context of current limitations to what the EU could actually do in the region, reduced US interest for the Euro-Atlantic area, the growing regional posture of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, and potential Russian resurgence in the former-Soviet Union.

NATO itself, as a regional actor, might be better placed in the shadow of those four major regional actors, although its potential contribution to the implementation of such an approach towards cooperative security should be welcomed. With this in mind, and with a view to the enhancement of WBS economic regionalism, Brussels may need to raise its profile significantly as a regional “institutional and economic diplomat” alongside the (still visible) United States, as well as Turkey and Russia. This would require no shortage of new found energies, resource and efforts in order to coordinate the positions of EU member states, which is likely to take no shortage of time. Much will depend on developments inside the Union itself, within the Eurozone, as well as upon the attitudes of key EU member states, namely France and Germany. A reshaping of existing EU policy instruments, within the framework of eastbound (Eastern Partnership) and southbound (Union of the Mediterranean) European Neighbourhood Policy, with greater concerted emphasis on the Black Sea, will be critical.

Further, both the EU and NATO may consider a more active dialogue with regional stakeholders, including an upgrading of current levels of policy harmonization and coordination of their actions in the WBS with relevant regional international organizations. This would, in particular, apply to relations with BSEC. Although the main thrust of BSEC’s *raison d’être* remains economic co-operation, and the BSS 2007 paper foresaw greater partnership between the EU and BSEC through the Kiev February 2008 EU-Black Sea Summit, since 9/11 BSEC has paid increased attention to addressing new threats to regional security and stability. Recognising that peace in Europe is dependent on the stability and prosperity of its regions, the BSEC Istanbul Decennial Summit Declaration, issued in June 2002, encouraged the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs to consider ways and means to enhance the contribution of BSEC to strengthening security and stability in the region.

According to its Charter, BSEC is open to developing relations with third parties. It aims to play a major role in the new European architecture by providing the necessary links between the enlarged EU and Eastern Europe, the Caspian region and the Eastern Mediterranean. These are both positive, forward looking principles for enhanced European and Euro-Atlantic cooperation with the WBS. While BSEC, as an organisation, has no shortage of critics, it remains the most developed multilateral organization



in the WBS and, we feel, holds significant potential to become a key regional partner for both the EU and NATO. Much of this potential remains underutilised, however. Greater utilization of BSEC as a regional dialogue platform with the WBS countries, has the capability of providing enhanced levels of ownership of policy formulation at all levels, while providing a more solid framework for regional engagement with external players. The wheel needs to be “fine-tuned”, not “reinvented”. The Black Sea has for millennia attracted the interest of external and local actors and will continue to do so into the future.

End Of EGF Document

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