

**Developing a New Euro-Atlantic Strategy
for the Black Sea Region:
Istanbul Paper #2**

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Foreward

The idea for this strategy paper grew out of a conversation with Romanian Foreign Minister Mircea Geoana in the spring of 2003. The Prague NATO summit had taken place a few months earlier and Alliance leaders had embraced the idea of a “Big Bang” enlargement involving seven countries stretching from the three Baltic states in the north to Romania and Bulgaria on the Black Sea in the south. In parallel, the European Union was preparing for an equally historic and ambitious round of enlargement that would encompass ten countries. It was the fulfillment of a dream that emerged a decade earlier when the leaders of new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe had set their sights on anchoring themselves to the West by becoming full members of the Euro-Atlantic community and joining both the EU and NATO.

What was next? Was the vision of Europe “whole and free” now complete? Was it time for the West, and the EU in particular, to “pause” and consolidate itself? Or should it now turn its attention to those young and fragile democracies lying further East and reach out to help them anchor themselves in the Euro-Atlantic community as well? How serious was a country like Ukraine about transforming itself into a credible Western partner and possible future ally? With Romania and Bulgaria joining Alliance and eventually the European Union, as well as the prospect of long-standing NATO ally Turkey becoming a member of the EU as well, was it time to think about developing a Western outreach strategy for the wider Black Sea region?

We debated the moral and political responsibility of the United State and Europe in general, and the specific especially of those Central and East European countries now entering the EU and NATO, to help the West think through these issues. Foreign Minister Geoana made an eloquent and persuasive case that his generation of leaders from Central and Eastern Europe had a unique chance and responsibility to help ensure that Euro-Atlantic integration was not artificially halted and that these countries were not forgotten. Although the ‘revolution of roses’ in Georgia had not yet taken place, he underscored that there was a new generation of leaders emerging in the region who shared western values and aspirations and that it was time for the West to develop a strategy to work with them.

Inspired by this and subsequent conversations that also included senior Bulgarian officials, GMF decided that there was a critical need to form a working group of both scholars and practitioners from across Europe and the region to brainstorm about such a strategy. The goal was to try to sketch out the contours of what a bold and ambitious approach to help anchor the countries of the Black Sea region to the West could and should look like. From the outset, we were joined by the Romanian and Bulgarian Ministries of Foreign Affairs as key partners as well as some of GMF’s key NGO partners in those two countries.

Brainstorming sessions were held in the fall of 2003 and spring of 2004. The first was held in Bucharest in November 2003 in cooperation with the Romanian Academic Society and the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A second seminar was held in Sofia in early February 2004 jointly with the Institute for Regional and International Studies, the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria and the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Security as well as the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense. A third and final session was held in Bratislava, hosted by the Bratislava Office of GMF together with the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The participants in the project are listed at the end of this report. They were drawn from both sides of the Atlantic as well as the wider Black sea region and reflect a diversity of backgrounds and experiences. They came from the world of NGO’s and think tanks as well as the corridors of politics and diplomacy. They participated in their private capacities as thinkers and individuals

who care deeply about the issues debated in this report. Their institutional affiliations are for identification purposes only. While the report reflects and draws on many of the views expressed, they were not asked to sign this report.

The results are contained in this Report of the working group. It seeks to lay out a rationale for why the United States and Europe need to pay more attention to the wider Black Sea region. It attempts to capture the center of gravity of these discussions and sketch out a strategic framework for new Euro-Atlantic strategy for the region. While it is authored by Ronald Asmus who served as the Director of this project, it reflects the thinking of the working group and is an attempt to summarize the discussions that took place. In parallel to this report, GMF is also publishing a separate book entitled “A New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region” which contains a number of the brainstorming essays written for these meetings. In many cases, the arguments presented in this paper are developed in further detail there. Together these publications provide a comprehensive overview of the work undertaken. We hope that they will also spark further thought and debate on a future strategy toward the wider Black Sea region.



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I. Introduction

A series of historically unprecedented events have brought the attention of the West to the wider Black Sea region—that area including the littoral states of the Black Sea, Moldova, and the Southern Caucasus countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. An area that has heretofore been neglected by the Euro-Atlantic community is now starting to move from the periphery to the center of Western attention.

Why has the West heretofore lacked such a strategy for the Black Sea region in the past and what has changed to make one so critical now? Four main factors explain the past lack of interest.

First, in many ways the Black Sea region has been the Bermuda Triangle of Western strategic studies in recent decades. Lying at the crossroads of European, Eurasian, and Middle Eastern security spaces, it has been largely ignored by mainstream experts in each of these faculties. Geographically located at the edge of each region, the Black Sea has not been at the center of attention of any of them. When it came to Europe, our priority was with the arc of countries extending from the Baltic to the Balkan states. When it came to the former Soviet Union, we were focused on building a new cooperative relationship with Moscow. And apart from the Israeli-Arab conflict, the attention of western Middle Eastern policy usually ceased at Turkey's southern border.

Second, given the crowded agenda of the Euro-Atlantic community since the collapse of communism 15 years ago, there was little time or political energy left to address the Black Sea region. The task of anchoring and integrating Central and Eastern Europe, stopping the Balkan wars, and putting those countries back on a path towards European integration—and, finally, trying to establish a new and cooperative post-Cold War relationship with Moscow—were full-time preoccupations. If one looked at the list of priorities of an American Secretary of State or European foreign minister in the 1990's, rightly or wrongly, the Black Sea rarely broke through into the top tier of concerns. The exception was, of course, Turkey, which fought a lonely political battle to get the West to pay more attention to the region. Almost by default, our considerable interest in the safe and stable flow of energy through the region ended up driving our policy—as opposed to some overarching vision of the place of these countries in the Euro-Atlantic community.

Third, at that time there was also little push from the region for a closer relationship with the West. No Lech Walesa or Vaclav Havel emerged in the 1990s to capture our attention or pound at our door. The countries of the region, different and with widely varying aspirations, were preoccupied with their own problems and at times engaged in civil war and their own armed conflicts. Any thought of joining the West in the foreseeable future seemed unrealistic or even utopian — in their eyes as well as ours. In the West, there is always a tendency to ignore or neglect problems for which one has no immediate answer or prospect for success: the “too hard to handle” category. Henry Kissinger is reported to have said that a secretary of state should not tackle an issue without at least a 90 percent likelihood of success. The problems of the wider Black Sea region were often seen as failing to meet that standard.

Fourth, the Black Sea has been a kind of civilizational black hole in the Western historical consciousness. We suffer not only from a lack of familiarity with the region, its people, its problems, its rich culture, and its contribution to the spread of Western civilization, but also from a kind of historical amnesia. For some, “Europe” meant Western Europe; for others, it extended to the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea — but in the case of the latter, only to its western and southern edges. For many in the West, Ukraine and the Southern Caucasus still seem far-away lands of which we knew little and, rightly or wrongly, care less. Others are still too afraid to even think about venturing into what Moscow today claims to be its “near abroad” and natural sphere of influence if not domination — not realizing or recognizing the many of the deepest roots of what is now considered Western and European civilization can be traced back to the cultures and countries that lived on the Black Sea throughout history.

After largely ignoring the region for the past decade, however, the West is now starting to wake up to the growing importance of the wider Black Sea region and the need for a modern and updated strategy. Several factors are propelling both the United States and Europe to focus their attention on this region and to develop a new and more coherent strategic framework.

The first of these factors is the successful integration of Central and Eastern European countries stretching from the three Baltic states in the north to Romania and Bulgaria on the Western shores of the Black Sea in the south into NATO. This has been matched by parallel and historic expansion of the European Union to ten new members as well. The dual enlargement of the EU and NATO to Central and Eastern Europe conclude the grand project of the 1990's - to try to make Europe's eastern half as democratic, prosperous and secure as the continent's western half.

Strategically, this means that the age-old security problem of the future of those lands lying between Germany and Russia has been resolved through the anchoring and integration of these countries to the West. Germany is firmly embedded in both European and transatlantic structures; and both the EU and NATO have new mechanisms to manage relations with Russia. Thus, the questions that have been at the heart of European security and preoccupied our leaders and strategists for the last century are increasingly resolved. At the same time, the Euro-Atlantic community now must face the question whether and how to reach out to the new democracies lying further to the east and south and help anchor them to this enlarged European and trans-Atlantic framework.

Second, there are also new and more credible voices in these countries articulating their aspirations to anchor themselves and become full members of Euroatlantic institutions. The success of the "Big Bang" enlargement has nurtured hopes in these countries that they, too, can dare to think big and succeed. Three of the countries of the region — Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey — are in NATO and another three — Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan — have declared their desire to join. The emergence of new reformist leaders in the region has given the West new partners to work with. Georgia's 'revolution of roses' has played a particularly important role in demonstrating the will to embrace the radical reforms needed. For the first time there is a country that is matching those aspirations with concrete steps and moving to become a viable candidate for eventual membership into Euro-Atlantic institutions. A visitor to Tbilisi, Georgia today can discover the same kind of determination to take their countries to the West that existed a decade ago in the Baltic states.

Third, the strategic optic of the West has changed in a way that potentially puts this region front and center in our thinking. The terrorist attacks against the United States, Europe and Turkey have served to underscore the new dangers and strategic realities facing our societies in the 21st century. They have highlighted the fact that many of the greatest threats to North America and Europe are now likely to emanate from beyond the continent as opposed to from within in or from Eurasia. In particular, they are centered in the wider Middle East, that region stretching from Morocco to Afghanistan. In addition to providing a critical portion of the world's energy needs, the wider Middle East is the most likely place for the dangerous combination of totalitarian ideologies, state failure, terrorism and access to weapons of mass destruction to occur.

The wider Black Sea region is the Euroatlantic community's great eastern frontier with the wider Middle East. And these countries are a natural partner in any Western strategy dealing with the wider Middle East. They, too, are interested in the progressive transformation of this neighboring region into more free, democratic and stable societies. For the West, the significance of the Black Sea countries and goes well beyond military planning factors, boots on the grounds or even forward bases. Anchoring them to the West and helping to ensure their political and economic stability is critical to our capability of projecting soft power into the broader Middle East as well. A western success in this region can help and teach us many lessons in how to handle the daunting problems of reform and modernization in the wider Middle East.

Last but certainly not least, there is the energy factor. Why should the Euro-Atlantic community be concerned with energy issues in the Black Sea region? In the changed global market after September 2001, the answer is simple: the United States and the Europe share an interest in diversifying their energy supplies away from reliance on Saudi Arabian and Persian Gulf oil. The Black Sea is poised to become a much more important conduit for non-OPEC, non-Gulf oil and natural gas can flow into European markets and beyond. The potential of these sources is considerable. Russia is an energy supplier of growing importance, while Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have significant oil reserves as well. As most of this oil will reach European markets after transiting the Black Sea region, integration of this area into the broader European security and economic environment is important for the long-term energy security strategy of EU and NATO members.

These factors are combining to change the Western optic of the wider Black sea region and to elevate it on the list of Euroatlantic priorities. The countries in the region were previously seen as on the periphery of Europe at a time when the main challenges in European security were focused on the North Central European plain and our relations with Russia. September 11th, Afghanistan and Iraq have made this entire region a focal point of a Western strategic reassessment. With NATO is engaged in Afghanistan, the U.S. and its allies are peacekeeping in Iraq and with Iran one of the top strategic challenges facing the West, the wider Black Sea region is taking on a new significance. It is not only the new borderlands of the Euroatlantic community but part of a strategic space reaching as far as the Persian Gulf that is likely to draw the attention of NATO and the EU and other regional actors in the decades ahead.

The growing recognition that the wider Black Sea region needs to be at the forefront of the Euro-Atlantic agenda has not yet been translated into a coherent strategic rationale and strategy attractive and comprehensible to elites and publics on both sides of the Atlantic. Without such a rationale, however, Europe and the United States will not be able to generate the attention, focus and resources necessary to engage and anchor the countries of the wider Black Sea region to the West, let alone help them transform themselves into full partners and perhaps, over time, full members of the major Euro-Atlantic institutions. That is what now needs to happen.

II. Setting Western Goals

A new Euroatlantic strategy for the wider Black Sea region must start with a discussion of what American and European goals in this region should be. For the reasons laid out above, there is a strong case — moral, political, economic and strategic — for elevating the region as a higher priority on the Euro-Atlantic community's agenda and developing a bolder and more ambitious outreach strategy. But what should the ultimate goal of that strategy and effort be? What are the aspirations of the different countries in the region? How do American and Europeans see their objectives? Is the purpose of such a strategy to simply strengthen these countries internally and to pull them and this region closer to the EU and NATO through expanded cooperation — a looser form of anchoring but with no perspective of eventual membership in our institution? Or should we set the goal even higher — i.e., to not only anchor but to actually transform and integrate this region to the West in a manner similar to what has accomplished for Central and Eastern Europe? Over what timeframe are these goals feasible if at all?

Even raising the issue of the eventual membership of these countries in Euroatlantic institutions, or drawing a parallel between Central and Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region, is highly controversial in many corners of both the EU and NATO today. Having just completed a major round of enlargement of membership, many in both institutions are loath to talk or even think about any future enlargement at all. The EU has just resolved a messy constitutional debate and is still groping to understand how this new enlarged institution will function in practice. NATO must deal with the capabilities gap across the Atlantic and among its European members as well as prepare for very different future missions. In both institutions, “enlargement fatigue” has set in and there are real concerns about their future cohesion and effectiveness.

Moreover, the sense of historical connection and solidarity between the United States and Europe on the one hand and the wider Black Sea region on the other is more tenuous. While the countries of the region certainly consider themselves to be European, those feelings are not always reciprocated. The distance between London, Paris and Berlin and Kyiv, Tbilisi and Baku today is not only geographic. Many officials in Brussels and elsewhere question whether these countries are truly European, whether they fully understand what membership entail and whether these countries are capable of ever meeting those standards. When Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians or Azeris talk about joining Europe and the Euroatlantic community, not everyone today takes such talk all that seriously.

The question of membership for any of these countries is also premature in any operational sense, at least for the immediate future. Not only is the West today unable to provide a clear perspective, but the countries we are talking about — Ukraine, Moldova or Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia — are themselves weaker, poorer and less developed than previous candidates. They have a steeper hill to climb than their Central and Eastern European brethren did a decade ago. In some ways they may be more comparable to some of the countries in the Balkans as opposed to Central and Eastern Europe. None of the countries in the wider Black Sea region today has advanced far enough to make a credible case for meeting the qualifications required for either institution.

Last but not least, the question of Russia — the biggest and most powerful Black Sea littoral state — and its views and possible objections to the integration of these countries into Western structures looms even larger than it did with previous rounds of enlargement given that country's proximity and neuralgia about this region, a subject we will return to later in this paper.

It was once said that the West's successful strategy for Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s was based on three ingredients: the creation of a big juicy carrot or incentive in the form of a clear perspective of eventual membership for these countries; the motivation and drive to go West and the willingness to implement difficult reforms that leaders in these countries brought to the table; and a strategy to find a new *modus vivendi* with Russia that defused the danger of a train wreck between the West and Moscow. If one applies that framework, to the wider Black Sea region, it is obvious that the point of departure today is more difficult. The carrot is smaller; the drive to reform and go West is weaker and the Russian factor looms larger.

Acknowledging these realities, however, in no way obviates the need for a new Euro-Atlantic strategy. Indeed, it strengthens the case for the kind of comprehensive and long-term outreach strategy that can, over time, alter these realities. This would include the creation of a new Western vision that embraces these countries and gives them the perspective they need; policies and support that can help them reform and transform themselves into the kinds of societies that can become viable candidates and a new approach toward Russia that transcends old geopolitical habits and patterns.

One also needs a sense of perspective. When listening to the arguments today why the integration of Black Sea countries is not feasible, one cannot escape a sense of *de ja vu*. In the early 1990s, the idea of Central and East European countries joining the EU or NATO also initially evoked fierce opposition. Former French President Francois Mitterrand, for example, initially declared that it would be “decades and decades” before these countries could join the EU. Opposition to enlarging NATO was just as strong. And nowhere was it stronger than in the bureaucracies of these institutions themselves. The first wave of Western outreach proposals all insisted that membership was not on the agenda and offered to create some interim status to pacify these countries.

Those policies and the mindset behind them did not stand the test of time. They were increasingly recognized as inadequate. Policies designed to keep countries out of institutions were transformed into way stations for eventually getting them in. What initially seemed impossible gradually became possible and today is accepted conventional wisdom. What changed this equation were three factors.

The first was the push from the region and in particular the appeal from new democratic leaders who were boldly reforming their countries and societies. When they turned to the West and asked for help in consolidating the same values the Euroatlantic community is committed to building and defending, Western leaders decided they had to respond to a historical imperative — often over the strong objection of many in bureaucracy. Those appeals would not have been credible or gained political traction, however, if they were not backed up by performance and reforms on the ground. One can see the same process starting today in the significant political and psychological impact that Georgia’s ‘revolution of roses’ and President Mikhail Saakashvili have had in nudging Western policy forward toward greater support and engagement with Tbilisi and the region.

A second factor that changed Western thinking in the 1990s was the strategic insight — reinforced by the bloodshed and horror of ethnic wars of the Balkans — that the West was better off acting preventively to stabilize and integrate Central and Eastern Europe and locking in stability in advance than running the risk of new instability emerging at some point down the road. It has often been said that NATO and EU enlargement were one giant act of conflict prevention. In the case of the wider Black Sea region, it is precisely this question that the September 11th, Afghanistan, Iraq and the instability of the broader Middle East have raised in a very different context. Are we not better off today in assertively moving to help consolidate democracy and stability in this region bordering on the wider Middle East rather than running the risk of that instability from that region spreads into the Euro-Atlantic community?

A third factor that changed Western thinking in the 1990s — and which also has a parallel in the current situation — is Europe’s very understanding and definition of itself. The collapse of communism and the USSR in 1989 and 1991 was unexpected. So were the early demands from new democratic leaders in what was then still called Eastern Europe to join the EU and NATO. Such demands challenged and in many ways threatened the then prevailing view in Europe of itself which was essentially defined in “West European” terms. But those demands from the East helped set into motion a rediscovery of an old part of Europe that the Cold War had artificially cut off. It led eventually to a redefinition of Europe that came to embrace those countries in the East stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

That redefinition has found two expressions, cultural and institutional. Culturally, it now seems very old-fashioned to talk about “Western Europe” and “Eastern Europe.” The notion of “Europe” clearly includes Central and Eastern Europe. The notion of “Eastern Europe,” if used at all, now encompasses Ukraine and Belarus as opposed to Poland or the Czech lands. Today the next step in again redefining “Europe” is being played out in the debate over whether Turkey should be invited to join the EU.

And if Ankara is invited to start accession talks and successfully completes them, then one must ask whether a Europe that includes Turkey would say no to Ukrainian aspirations, especially if Kyiv were to get serious about reform and democratization. Is it not possible to imagine another redefinition of our understanding of “Europe” unfolding over the next decade or so in which the inclusion of Turkey, Ukraine and the Southern Caucasus gradually becomes increasingly natural? Might not our current sense of Europe’s limits also seem quite artificial in a decade or so?

The same is true institutionally. The EU and NATO were incapable of adapting and enlarging to new members when those demands were first raised in the early 1990s. But those institutions, too, were driven to adapt to the political and strategic imperatives of a new era. And the reality is that they reinvented themselves in order to be able to enlarge. These institutions are dynamic, not static. The EU today in its current form probably cannot handle Turkey as a new member — let alone Ukraine or the Southern Caucasus. But if the EU decides to enlarge to Turkey, it will have to adapt to meet that challenge, too. It is not today’s EU that will do that, but a reformed institution that has change in order to cope with that challenge. And the same is likely to be true for NATO. As it becomes increasingly involved in regions and missions the founding fathers never conceived of, it will have to reinvent itself yet again to meet new challenges, including new members.

This as a rather long-winded way of appealing for a bit more historic openness and humility when it comes to what is possible over the next decade or two — both in terms of what the countries in the region are capable of becoming as well as the capacity of our own institutions to adapt to new imperatives and strategic circumstances. As Chou En-lai is reported to have responded when asked about his assessment of the French Revolution, it may be too early to tell. The same is true when it comes to what the final place in and the relationship of these countries with the Euroatlantic community will or should be. If the countries of the region succeed in reforming themselves to the point where they qualify for membership, it would be a remarkable success. The problems that would pose are the challenges of success. They are preferable to deal with than the challenges of failure.

III. A New Outreach Strategy for the EU and NATO

Irrespective of one's view on what the Euroatlantic community's longer-term objectives should be, there is a critical need for a new outreach strategy toward the countries of the region through the EU and NATO. That strategy can be developed and pursued while we continue to debate the final place or destination of these countries in Euro-Atlantic structures.

What could and should a new bold yet realistic EU and NATO outreach strategy toward the countries of the Black Sea region to the West look like? Today neither the EU nor NATO has a strategy vis-à-vis the wider Black Sea region as a whole. Instead, both institutions deal with different parts of the region differently and through a varied set of bilateral relationships reflecting the strategic priorities of the 1990s. Those relationships now need to be updated and integrated into a more comprehensive and coherent regional approach.

The EU today does not yet border on the Black Sea. While it has just completed a historic round of enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe as well as Malt and Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania are not expected to accede until 2007. Preparing for that step in itself will focus the political mind and attention of the EU on this region in a new way. Should the EU also make a decision to open accession negotiations with Turkey later this year, such a step will further heighten awareness that the EU is in the process of becoming a regional actor and power that will be present on the western and southern shores of the Black Sea.

Other countries in the wider region — Ukraine, Moldova and the Southern Caucasus — are dealt with through the EU's new "European Neighborhood Policy" proposed earlier this year. Although the Southern Caucasus were initially relegated to a footnote in the initial draft of that framework, they have since been rescued from obscurity and will now become part of that policy as well. The result is that, for the moment, the EU de facto has three separate policies toward the region — prospective membership for Bulgaria and Romania; possible membership for Turkey on a lengthier timetable; and the new "Neighborhood Policy" for Ukraine, Moldova and the Southern Caucasus. In addition, Russia has its own special bilateral relationship with the EU which we will turn to later in this paper.

The EU's "Neighborhood Policy" policy as currently conceived, however, also does not have a regional concept for the Black Sea region. Instead, it is seen by many as an alternative to membership for the EU's new borderlands ranging from the northern shores of the Black Sea to the southern shores of the Mediterranean. In some ways it was initially designed as a placebo to avoid promises of eventual accession. Back home, it is intended, at least in part, to reassure current Union members concerned about the impact of the current round of enlargement that this process is not going to continue indefinitely. Although Commission President Romano Prodi made the recommendation last year that the EU offer its neighbors "everything but institutions" — the current plans are far less ambitious.

The EU is also constrained by the fact that a true opening of cooperation in the New Neighborhood framework would also require changes on the EU side in sensitive areas, like agriculture or the movement of people are tied up with the debate over reforming the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as well as concerns over immigration and terrorism. What makes sense in foreign policy terms is not always easy domestically. Thus far, what is on offer is basically limited to more money, the gradual integration into some markets and some still vague promises of greater political dialogue and security cooperation. One challenge for the EU, therefore, is to integrate these different policies into a more coherent approach to the region as a whole. Another is to bridge the divide in its policies toward those countries who are prospective members, those who might be and those who are not — above all in a region that has countries in all three categories.

When it comes to NATO, the Alliance has been present on the Black Sea since the early 1950s. Turkey has been a member of the Atlantic Alliance since 1952 and Bulgaria and Romania acceded earlier this year. When it comes to the perspective of eventual membership, the Alliance's open door policy is more flexible. Unlike the EU, NATO has not a priori excluded any country in the Euro-Atlantic community from eventual membership. Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan have

declared their interest in eventually becoming NATO members. In practical terms qualifying for NATO membership is also easier than it is for the EU in many ways.

But NATO today does not have a coherent policy toward the broader Black Sea region either. It, too, deals with the countries of this region first and foremost through bilateral relationships. In the late 1990s the Alliance created the NATO-Ukraine Commission to reflect Kyiv's important role in European security. That construct was designed to balance the Alliance's parallel NATO-Russia outreach effort, not with the Black Sea in mind. While Moldova and the three southern Caucasus nations have been members of PfP and the EAPC from the beginning, the Alliance's role and activities with them has remained quite limited.

Internally, NATO has grouped the countries of the Southern Caucasus with those of Central Asia. In terms of practical cooperation, NATO still tends to treat the wider Black Sea region as part of a broader region including the Caspian and Central Asia. That view has been driven by the Alliance's most important out of area mission in Afghanistan and the fact that these countries are an important part of the transit route for NATO forces and supplies to the region. As a result, the Black Sea region has been seen as a stepping stone to a specific operational goals — and not as a region that is striving for Euro-Atlantic integration, one that has a special strategic weight or significance in its own right or the next natural step in the goal of building a new Europe whole free and at peace.

If that is the bad news, then the good news is that the EU and NATO today are much better positioned in other ways to develop an ambitious outreach strategy than they were vis-à-vis Central and Eastern Europe a decade ago. While the countries in the wider Black Sea region themselves may be weaker, the Euroatlantic community now has a decade of experience and a new set of policy tools to assist in post-communist transformation that did not exist a decade ago. A decade ago enlargement and outreach were completely new issues that neither institution had prepared for or had any experience in. Today there is a cadre of officials in NATO and the EU who are seasoned veterans in either integrating or being integrated. If the EU and NATO make a decision to launch a bold outreach strategy for the region, the conceptual talent and practical experience for developing and implementing such a strategy exists.

What needs to happen in the case of the EU? First, the candidacies of Romania and Bulgaria need to be brought to a successful conclusion. And the issue of Turkey's EU aspirations needs to have a successful outcome as well. If either of these projects falters, it will be a major setback in delaying the EU's arrival on the Black Sea as well as any effort to establish a broader and more comprehensive policy for the region as a whole. Only an EU that has successfully brought in Bulgaria and Romania and which is on track with Turkey is likely to have the energy and confidence to further step up engagement across the Black Sea to places like the Southern Caucasus. And once Bulgaria and Romania are on the inside, they — as well as Turkey at a later date — will become an important voice and advocate for the EU becoming more engaged in the region

Second, the EU needs to develop a more flexible approach that integrates its policies toward accession candidates, likely accession candidates and countries that may or may not become accession candidates. It needs to do so not only for reasons having to do with the wider Black Sea region but for broader reasons having to do with its New Neighborhood writ large. One way to do so would be to create a new Commissioner for "Enlargement and New Neighborhood" with a brief to handle both accession negotiations and the New Neighborhood Policy. Concentrating both portfolios in the hands of a single person would better enable the EU to develop an integrated and complementary approach for countries whose current prospects for membership and levels of development vary but whose stability and security are all increasingly important.

This would also keep together the considerable expertise the EU has gathered on post-communist transformation processes and the capability to apply them to the Black Sea region. That expertise should now be augmented by bringing in key staff from new EU members from Central and Eastern Europe whose own insights and experience may be especially relevant for these countries. When it comes to assisting Ukraine or Georgia, a Latvian or Hungarian may be better positioned to help these countries find ways to meet EU standards. As soon as possible, the EU should assign new member experts to help lead its programs in these areas. To reassure members that this is not creating a slippery slope to automatic membership, the EU should build in clear political

firewalls to underscore that it still controls decisions on whether and when to upgrade countries to accession candidates.

Third, the EU should consider a more tailored and flexible approach when it comes to its famous *acquis communautaire*. Simply put, it needs more flexibility to address countries with membership perspectives and those who don't but who are nonetheless part of a common agenda. The broader Black Sea region with its mix of countries with different aspirations and levels of development but common security challenges and problems is the region where the EU most needs this flexibility. A new generation of tailored tools is needed to engage a spectrum of countries whose membership prospects may not be clear but where the EU's interest in guiding and promoting real reform is and where, perhaps down the road, they may move into the candidate queue.

To do this, the EU could consider tailoring or prioritizing the *acquis* to meet the needs of countries such as Ukraine, Moldova or the Southern Caucasus who obviously have much further to go in terms of political and economic development than countries like Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. For them, the EU's current *acquis communautaire* — the gold standard required for actual membership — may be a bridge too far for the time being. After all, it is designed to manage advanced, industrialized economies, not to guide reform in less developed ones. Even new EU member-states in Central and Eastern Europe are struggling to implement and enforce many of its parts.

But the EU could develop the equivalent of silver or bronze standards for countries that have a longer reform path to go but whose success or progress are still vital to EU interests. One way to do this would be a more focused *acquis* tailored to meet the top reform priorities of these countries while delaying more stringent requirements in other areas for later. For those Black Sea countries capable of meeting that gold standard today — Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey — the current *acquis* is fine. But for those who have much further to go, the EU might identify higher-priority areas of the *acquis* tailored to their needs. These more tailored and specific standards should also draw on the experiences gathered from the mistakes the EU made in Central and Eastern Europe.

Third, one area of the *acquis* that needs to be broadened centers on political and governance issues as well as minority rights. A regular complaint of applicant countries is that the EU has never spelled out in detail the criteria for meeting political conditions such as rule of law, human rights, minorities or combating corruption. This gives the EU flexibility in deciding when a country is ready to start negotiations. However, they can also limit the EU's leverage in guiding countries trying to comply with these standards. Their generality can also make it easy for authoritarian leaders to pretend they are meeting them when they are not. More detailed guidance could assist reformers and democracy advocates working to meet European standards. This is especially important among countries in a region struggling to overcome deep-seated "frozen conflicts" and where the problems of governance — ranging from building democracy to fighting corruption — exist on a considerable scale.

Fourth, the EU needs to rethink how to better use leverage and conditionality for a longer and step-by-step process of guiding reform for some countries in the wider Black Sea region. As opposed to a 100 or 200 meter sprint, both sides need to think more in terms of a much longer race, perhaps a marathon. Precisely because the EU today cannot or will not offer a clear perspective of membership, it needs to devise "way stations" which measure specific progress toward specific goals — and then reward them. This would allow the EU to respond positively to modest but important reform progress in these countries without always demanding they meet the gold standard. The EU should set out its conditions and benchmarks for each stage in a more transparent manner in order to motivate reformers

To accomplish this, the EU needs to be able to send a consistent message from all of its institutions — the Commission and the Council — as well as member states.

The gap between the technocratic approach of the Commission, which gives out the money and trade concessions, and the political approach of the Council, which does the diplomacy, needs to be better bridged to provide tougher but more consistent conditionality. Countries need to know

that they will enter step-by-step into a closer relationship with the EU as they meet various benchmarks, and that the rewards will be denied or withdrawn if they lapse back into bad habits.

NATO faces many of the same kinds of challenges but with several important differences. One is that the scope of change it seeks to encourage is clearly more circumscribed than the EU. To be sure, joining the Alliance is also a political process. And both individual NATO members as well as the Alliance as a whole often insisted that a candidate member in Central and Eastern Europe address political problems and issues before they be considered for membership. This will undoubtedly be true for the countries of the wider Black Sea region as well. Nevertheless, it is also clear the transformation required to become an EU member is broader and deeper. Turkey has been a NATO member for more than fifty years and is still trying to meet the criteria for starting accession negotiations for the European Union.

From the beginning of the 1990s, NATO has built its outreach programs in a manner that blurs the divide between a country seeking eventual membership and one simply seeking closer ties. The goal of allowing partner countries to have “everything but a seat at the table” was embraced early on and has guided Alliance thinking in dealing with partners ever since. The Alliance’s open door policy is conceptually open-ended and excludes no Euroatlantic country a priori. The distinction between candidate countries and partners is less politically charged and less relevant in terms of practical cooperation. Countries can more easily graduate from one category to the next in a step-by-step fashion. Sweden and Finland do not aspire to join the Alliance but they very close relationships with it.

As mentioned above, NATO, too lacks a coherent strategy treating the wider Black Sea region as a whole even though it now has three members — Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey — bordering on the Black Sea. A first step in creating that regional approach would be to delink the Southern Caucasus from Central Asia and consider them part of a wider Black Sea strategic entity. Politically, such a step would signal that the Alliance is viewing these countries as the outer edge of Europe. Practically, it would bring them together with more advanced NATO allies and partners — many of them potential role models in terms of transformation. In the early 1990s Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and later Bratislava banded together to create the Visegrad group to work together to qualify for Alliance membership. Later the Vilnius group was formed to bring together the countries from the Baltic to the Black Sea to cooperate for the second round of enlargement. Today we need to bring the countries of the wider Black Sea region together in a new constellation to pursue their objectives.

NATO today has two set of tools at its disposal to help craft a bold and ambitious outreach strategy. In NATO-speak they are known as IPAP and PAP. Both were designed as part of new generation of outreach tools specifically designed to assist those countries who did not yet qualify for the Membership Action Plan [MAP] but who wanted to more deeply anchor themselves to and expand cooperation with the Alliance. In addition, these tools were supposed to draw on the lessons of the past decade and be smarter and better at helping these countries overcome the hurdles to defense reform and domestic change. Agreed to at the Prague summit, they enable NATO to provide both a bilateral as well as a regional forum for political dialogue; an instrument to help generate pressure for necessary domestic reforms; and a vehicle for advice and assistance on defense and security issues.

The bilateral tool is the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). It is the vehicle for expanding NATO’s bilateral cooperation with these countries individually. IPAP is not MAP and is not intended to recognize or codify the membership aspiration of participating nations. But just as MAP was the result of the lessons learned for helping countries get ready for membership, IPAP was developed as a program to help countries get ready for and graduate to MAP. In that sense, it is a pre-MAP program that can be used to create the foundation for MAP and eventual membership. It can also raise the political visibility of a participating Partner, place its problems and concerns on NATO’s agenda, and help generate NATO reaction.

Like all NATO outreach programs, IPAP is what might be called an enabler. It’s success at the end of the day depends on the participating nation’s own input and performance. It is their reform plans that NATO supports, collectively as well as individually. The IPAP concept includes the idea of “mentoring”: an invitation to willing Allies and capable Partners to take the lead in

guiding an IPAP country through the maze of defense and larger reform, either focusing on a specific issue, or on a broader range of reform objectives. If the countries in the region embraced a wider Black Sea strategy, a network of current NATO members could step forward with mentoring projects, helping nations in need, fostering stability in the region, and assisting in the construction of a Black Sea identity and community within NATO.

The second key program the Alliance has at its disposal is the Partnership Action Plan or PAP. It is a mechanism that allows a subset of NATO countries — members and non-members alike — with a special interest in the wider Black Sea region to come together with non-NATO countries to cooperate in a regional context. In many ways, PAP is tailor made for a wider Black Sea region outreach strategy. It would allow, for example, the United States and Turkey to join forces with new NATO members Bulgaria and Romania to work together with the Southern Caucasus on a defense program — with or without Russia. A large project of regional proportions may not be immediately feasible and would require careful preparation and time anyway. However, specific issues might be identified within the vast field of NATO's interest, which could pioneer regional cooperation in a NATO context.

To date, PAP has largely lay dormant. The only plan launched thus far is the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T) which involves nearly all of the EAPC countries. However, one could develop PAP — B for the Black Sea that would tailor defense cooperation and programs to regional needs and issues. Finally, the Istanbul NATO Summit will launch another PAP-initiative — the Partnership Action Plan on Defense Institution Building (PAP-DIB) — a program designed to help organize multilateral cooperation among Allies and Partners in support of democratic defense reform. Again, Black Sea countries and their supporters can work together through this mechanism as well. Finally, through its South Eastern Europe Initiative, NATO has, for a number of years, facilitated efforts by nations in this region to harmonize security perceptions and develop related regional cooperation. A number of “Black Sea countries” have worked together in this context, including in SEECAP and SEEGROUP. This experience, if reckoned valuable, might help others undertake similar efforts in the Black Sea region.

Today, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have already joined IPAP. Ukraine has been engaged in a similar, ambitious exercise with the Alliance: the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan. All these nations, along with all Allies and other Partners, have subscribed to PAP-T and PAP-DIB. Combining cooperation on reform for countries of the region in the context of IPAP and PAP-DIB, with regional security efforts pursued through PAP-T and other possible initiatives, could help develop a Black Sea identity as part of NATO's strategic and political outlook. If supported politically and fed by the progress achieved in transforming the region, these efforts might, in time, lead to a viable and operational policy for integration for those who aspire to it, and to a system of regional security cooperation in a NATO context, which could also offer an appropriate role for Russia. The instruments seem to be in place. It is now — as with everything in NATO — up to member states to decide whether using them in pursuit of a wider Black Sea project would serve their interests and needs.

IV. Frozen Conflicts, Russia and Regional Cooperation

A new Euro-Atlantic strategy must also make the resolution of the so-called “frozen conflicts” in the wider Black Sea region a top priority. There are three in the region: in Moldova (Trans-Dniester), Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In reality, these conflicts are anything but frozen but very much alive. They are festering wounds that absorb political energy and drain economic resources from countries that are already weak and poor. They inhibit the process of state building as well as the development of a more democratic society. They generate corruption and organized crime. They are a major source of instability within these countries and in the region more broadly.

Overcoming them is a precondition for putting these countries on a firm course of reform and anchoring them to the West. A strategy to do so will require a much more proactive Euro-Atlantic role. To be sure, the West has been and remains involved in diplomatic efforts to resolve these conflicts. But rarely have either the United States or Europe made them a top priority, invested major political capital or been prepared to assume risk or responsibility to help resolve them. Nor have we sought to use the prospect of closer relations with the Euroatlantic community as an incentive to move to resolution of such conflicts. While the roots of these conflicts are often deep and involve historical grievances, outside actors have also contributed to their lack of resolution, in particular Russia. This is another reason why outside Western involvement is critical.

The Russian Federation is a major player in the wider Black Sea region. This region has been an important part of the Russia and Soviet empires and Moscow considers the region part of its de facto sphere of influence. As the largest littoral Black sea country in the region, its legitimate interests will have to be taken into account in any Euroatlantic strategy. The question is what are legitimate and illegitimate Russian interests? Nowhere is that issue more important than when it come to the question of how to resolve these “frozen conflicts.” Russia currently plays a direct or indirect role in each of them.

It certainly would be a mistake to attribute these conflicts to Russia. Each of them has its own complicated genesis and history. And one doesn't have to look far to find local actors who bear their share of responsibility or blame for these conflicts. Throughout the rich history of the region ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts have often been “solved” though the use of force and intimidation — often followed by deportations. Unraveling the maze of historical grievances can be challenging. Outside powers have often tried to dominate the region through the use of local proxies or by pursuing a strategy of divide and conquer.

Today is no exception. For most of the last decade Moscow has also sought to maintain its influence in the region and over these countries by what might be termed “controlled instability” and by using the “frozen conflicts.” It foments and then manages the conflicts, which casts Russia in the dual role of party to and arbiter of the conflicts. In this way, the resolution of the conflict is only possible on terms ensuring Moscow's influence if not dominance. “Controlled instability” has its parallel in the establishment of a Russian model of governance in the breakaway enclaves where authoritarian leaders, security services and organized crime are all too often intertwined in break-away statelets in Trans-Dniester, Abkhaz and South Ossetia.

The resolution of these “frozen conflicts” requires either a change in Russian behavior or a reduction in Russian influence. None of these countries are capable of resolving these conflicts by themselves. Thus, the point of departure for a new Euroatlantic strategy must be to recognize that stepped-up Western engagement in the region and with Russia is a precondition for progress. Heretofore the goal of settling these disputes has never been a high priority item on the U.S.-Russia or EU-Russia bilateral agendas. After 9/11, and especially after Iraq, this goal has received only sporadic attention in Washington and has been relegated to the back burner in both NATO and the EU. Even while Western interest in the wider Black Sea region has grown, the main Euro-Atlantic actors have thus far stopped short of pushing Russia on these conflicts so as to avoid a falling-out with Moscow.

The Euro-Atlantic community basically has two choices for how to attempt to influence Moscow's thinking. It can try to convince Russia that it is in its own interests to change course, and that its own longer-term influence and interests are no longer served by the perpetuation of rogue mini-regimes and, thus, the conflicts. Or it can try to reduce the sources of Russia's current kingmaker role and increase the leverage it can bring to bear. The two choices can also be combined in a strategy that seeks to do the former while making it clear that lack of progress will lead to the latter.

The West can increase its role and influence in resolving these conflicts in several ways. One is to think about changing the formats and mechanisms in which these issues are currently handled. At the moment these formats are heavily stacked in favor of Russia and its local proxies. They often serve to freeze the status quo rather than overcoming it. They are relics of the early post-Soviet era when the West was less willing to assert its own interests in the region. If the current mechanisms continue to produce stalemate and no real chance of a resolution, it may be time to consider changing them to new formats that are more flexible and likely to produce results.

In the case of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the prospect of greater Western engagement and the creation of a new and clear perspective of closer ties with the Euroatlantic community can help create new incentives and open up opportunities for progress. Both Yerevan and Baku must realize that a resolution of this conflict is needed for significant process in their ties with the West. In the case of Trans-Dniester, Ossetia and Abkhazia, such a prospect of closer ties with the West is unlikely to help much since these pro-Moscow statelets are interested only in their own survival and know full well that any move westward will mean their demise. There the conversation that needs to take place is with Moscow without whose support they are unlikely to survive.

Third, the West should be prepared to provide peacekeeping forces and monitors through either NATO or the EU if such forces are needed to resolve these conflicts. Thirteen years after the collapse of the USSR, there is no reason why Moscow's de facto monopoly on peacekeeping the region should continue, especially when one considers that such forces may have done more to prolong the conflicts rather than resolve them. At a time when NATO is peacekeeping in Afghanistan and considering a military role in Iraq, peacekeeping in the Southern Caucasus should be relatively non-controversial. In reality, Russian "peacekeeping" troops contribute very little to buttressing the ceasefires in Trans-Dniester, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But their presence does add to the breakaway authorities' sense of impunity and consequent political intransigence toward conflict resolution efforts. If the Euro-Atlantic community has a major interest in the region, then it cannot abstain from assuming direct responsibilities for peace-support and conflict-resolution.

Fourth, the West needs to shift away from a strategy of simply angling for a deal, however elusive, with the rogue-statelet authorities. Instead, it should start to create the option of trying to resolve these conflicts by transforming those actors who are part of the problem. A more comprehensive approach must include promoting democratization in the breakaway areas as a critical dimension in settling these conflicts. Promoting a democratic opening in these areas should become a top priority in any Euro-Atlantic strategy in the region. This should include support for civil society and an independent media that can help foster political pluralism. It must also include efforts to weed out politically affiliated organized crime in the secessionist areas, and to eventually disband the rogue statelets' security services which are frequently intertwined with organized crime and corruption.

How the Euroatlantic community tries to tackle the frozen conflicts cannot be divorced from the larger question of the West's overall relationship with and approach to Russia. And that approach is also undergoing review — for reasons distinct from the issue of the wider Black Sea region. Since the early 1990s, Western policy has been premised on the assumption that Russia — if only gradually and in fits and starts — was moving in the right direction domestically and interested in pursuing a cooperative relationship with the West. In spite of many setbacks on this or that front, people basically believed that Russia was moving in a positive and upward direction.

Today a growing number of people are questioning those assumptions. Instead of viewing Russia as a country moving in the right direction with some setbacks, they are increasingly concluding that Russia is a country moving in the wrong directions with some successes. This shift in

Western thinking on Russia policy is being driven by the trend toward anti-democratic and autocratic rule in Moscow and what is seen as a newer and more neo-imperial policy towards Moscow's immediate neighborhood. While it is too early to predict the outcome of this debate, it is plausible and indeed likely that some revisions and shifts in Western thinking and policy vis-à-vis Moscow are down the road.

Even if the Euroatlantic community and Russia remain on a cooperative course, we will face the dilemma that a strategy aimed at further extending democracy and stability in the wider Black Sea region will in all likelihood be seen as hostile by many Russians. NATO and EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe has not created the new threat on Russia's western border many Russian leaders and commentators predicted. On the contrary, it has probably created a more enduring peace and degree of security in the region than at any time in recent history. Moreover, since September 11th the United States and its allies have probably done more to reduce the threat to Russia on its southern border by the successful war against the Taliban and a NATO-led peace keeping mission there.

Nevertheless, the political reality is that these facts and arguments won't necessarily get you very far politically in Russia today. One doesn't need to be Clausewitz to expect that Moscow today is again likely to reject a Western integrationist approach and be nervous if not antagonistic vis-à-vis any major Euroatlantic effort to anchor the wider Black Sea region to the West. And once again the West will have to reject such zero-sum geopolitical thinking and instead be prepared to defend its own approach.

The West basically has three strategic choices when it comes to how to best approach Moscow in this context. The first is to move to create new facts on the ground and try to draw the countries in the wider Black Sea region closer to Euroatlantic institutions as quickly as possible and irrespective of Russian opposition. In effect, the West would seek to create facts on the ground and let Russia adapt to them rather than trying to negotiate with Russia. This is what might be called 'the Nike strategy' based on the motto of "Just do it." This strategy assumes that it is all but impossible to overcome Russian reservations through persuasion and it is better to create new realities, let Russia adjust, and then pick up and build a new relationship. Once Moscow accepts this new reality its view will change somewhat and it will become more accommodating.

But there are several problems and potential downsides with this strategy. One is that it runs the risk of scaring off allies as well as eliciting an unnecessarily harsh overreaction in Moscow. Moreover, the West is likely to need Russian cooperation for resolving the key "frozen conflicts" discussed above and this approach may make that more difficult. While some in the region would undoubtedly welcome it as the most effective way of dealing with Moscow, it runs against the grain of current US and European preferences for how to deal with Moscow.

A second option is to adopt a strategy of what might be called cooperative engagement whereby the West would actively try to overcome Russian reservations and opposition before proceed with reaching out and anchoring these countries. Moscow would be a full partner in an effort to create a stable security framework in the region, but Western actions would depend heavily on Russian consent. The basic premise of this strategy would be that any Western strategy would ultimately have to have Russian agreement and support to be successful.

Such an approach would certainly avoid a train wreck with Russia and convince Moscow that its concerns were taken seriously. It might even facilitate some cooperation with Moscow in other areas. But it would be widely opposed in the region as it would make Western policy hostage to Russian concerns. It also gives Moscow a clear incentive to stall. The track record of the last decade suggests that Moscow only became serious about engaging with the Euroatlantic community once it became convinced that it could no longer stop us from moving forward and that it had no option but to engage to try to limit the consequences.

A third and final option is for the West to pursue the same kind of dual track strategy employed during the 1990s when NATO and the EU reached out to Central and Eastern Europe. This strategy would treat Russia as a potential partner, but would not give Russia a veto over Western policy. It would seek to engage Russia in the creation of a stable security framework in the Black Sea region and would seek to manage the integration of the Black Sea region into Western structures in coop-

eration with Russia if possible, without it if necessary. Seeking to construct a parallel, cooperative relationship should not be seen as an effort to somehow buy off or appease Moscow in some crude fashion. Instead, it would be an effort to address what we would consider to be legitimate Russian concerns while rejecting those we consider illegitimate.

The experience of the last decade suggests that an intense policy of engaging Moscow intensely while still protecting Western objectives may be the best way to achieve one's goals while engineering a "soft landing" with Russia and keeping the door open for future cooperation with Moscow. In the case of the first round of NATO enlargement President Yeltsin opted in the final analysis not to oppose enlargement but to create a parallel NAT-Russia cooperative relationship through which its interests could be addressed and protected. When it came to the second round of enlargement, President Putin opted to not even attempt to fight enlargement but instead to further deepen Moscow's relationship with Washington and NATO as the best way to defend Russia's interests. A new Euro-Atlantic strategy for the wider Black Sea region must again seek to convince Russia to make the right strategic choice and to seek to come closer to the West rather than move against it.

An essential part of such a strategy is to convince Moscow that it has more to gain by cooperating with the Euroatlantic community than by opposing it and that the final outcome of enhanced Euroatlantic engagement is going to be the kind of increased stability and security from which it, too, will benefit. To be sure, there will be specific issues that will need to be addressed. The elements of such a package could include a resolution of outstanding arms control and confidence building issues, including on CFE. Such a strategy will have to build on existing regional mechanisms such as the Black Sea Economic Council [is this what BSEC stands for?] or BlackseaFor in order to assure Moscow that it retains a seat at the table in shaping events in the region and on the doorstep.

V. Conclusion

Developing a new Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea region must start with the major democracies of North America and Europe recognizing their own moral and strategic stake in the region. Projecting stability and security in these countries is not only the next logical step in building a Europe whole and free, but the wider Black Sea region is the Euroatlantic community's eastern frontier with the wider Middle East. In spite of the many differences, locking in reform and stability in this region may be as important over the next decade as integrating Central and Eastern Europe into the West was for the previous 1990s.

The European Union has already taken a small but important step by including the South Caucasus in Europe's Neighborhood Policy, informally known as Wider Europe. It is time for NATO to take a parallel step at its Istanbul summit by recognizing the strategic stake it has in this region. Such recognition should be matched by a bold program of outreach and both bilateral and regional cooperation. Anchoring these countries to the West will not be easy or happen overnight. Whether the end result is simple better relations or the full integration of these countries into institutions like the EU and NATO remains to be seen. Once again the West faces the challenge of either working with these countries to export stability or running the risk it will import instability from the area down the road.

As in the past, developing a new Euroatlantic strategy to meet this challenge will require the leadership of a core group of countries on both sides of the Atlantic to help set a new course. Large institutions like the EU or NATO operate by consensus and move slowly and deliberately. To use a shipping parallel, it often takes time to turn the bow of the tanker in a new strategic direction. As was the case with Central and Eastern Europe, a coalition of Western countries can organize themselves to take the lead in working with these countries on both a bilateral and multi-lateral basis — and pull the institutions as a whole behind them. The tools and experience to reach out to these countries already exist. What are needed are the political will and the guidance to tailor such programs to their specific interests and needs.

Finally, North America and Europe, working through the OSCE and the United Nations, must step up to the plate and make a concerted effort to resolve the frozen conflicts from Transneistria to Nagorno-Karabakh that continue to plague the region. The persistence of conflict and occupying forces are destructive cancers eating away at the fabrics of society in this region. In place of economic development, they create criminal enterprise and trafficking. In place of regional security cooperation, they foster the proliferation of arms and a climate of intimidation. Fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is time to make their resolution a top priority, including in our relations with Moscow.

The final and most important factor shaping a new Euroatlantic outreach strategy is the countries of the region themselves. The history of the last decade shows that the West often moves in response to the actions of the countries themselves. Had they not undertaken "shock therapy" and far-reaching reforms on their own, Central and East European countries today might still be stuck in some vague EU associate status or a version of PfP designed as an alternative to NATO membership. And if the countries around the Black Sea region stay on the stagnant path many of them have been on for the past decade, then the EU's New Neighborhood framework or NATO's PAP and IPAP won't make much difference. The onus for change is on the aspirants to make the first serious and palpable reforms, not the other way around.

It is worthwhile to recall the experience of the Baltic states in this regard. They were arguably at a comparable level of development as Georgia and other countries in the wider Black Sea region when the USSR broke up. They, too, carried the cross of being a "former Soviet Republic." They were initially rejected when they first asked the EU to provide a perspective for membership and their NATO aspirations were also deemed "unrealistic." Although they started two years later than the Visegrad countries and from a lower economic base, they embarked on a rigorous set of reforms which within five years allowed them to catch up with the front runners in Central and Eastern Europe as candidates. When one Baltic country started to pull ahead of the other two countries, the others redouble their efforts lest the EU enlarge to one instead of all three states.

Their example shows that nothing is pre-ordained, that performance matters and small countries in Europe can determine their own fate after all.

But the West can both assist in that process as well as help create the foreign policy environment that reinforces such trends and helps put and keep these countries on a path that will bring them closer to the West. In doing so, we would lay the foundation for the third phase in completing the vision of a wider Europe. The first phase of enlargement focused on the anchoring of Poland and the Visegrad countries. The second phase broadened that vision to include the new democracies from the Baltic to the Western edge of the Black Sea. Today the challenge is to extend that vision to potentially include the countries of the wider Black Sea region as well.

The completion of this third phase would be a tremendous advance for the cause of democracy, integration and security in the Euro-Atlantic region. It would also better position the United States and Europe to deal with the challenges of the broader Middle East. The key question is not whether it is desirable but whether it is achievable. That is the challenge we now must face.

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Ministry of Defense, Bulgaria

Borys Tarasyuk,
Chairman of the Committee for European Integration, Parliament of Ukraine

About GMF

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) is an American public policy and grantmaking institution dedicated to promoting greater cooperation and understanding between the United States and Europe.

GMF does this by supporting individuals and institutions working on transatlantic issues, by convening leaders to discuss the most pressing transatlantic themes, and by examining ways in which transatlantic cooperation can address a variety of global policy challenges.

Founded in 1972 through a gift from Germany as a permanent memorial to Marshall Plan assistance, GMF maintains a strong presence on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to its headquarters in Washington, DC, GMF has five offices in Europe: Belgrade, Berlin, Bratislava, Brussels, and Paris.

About TESEV

Established in 1994, the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) is an Istanbul-based, nongovernmental think tank supported by private sector funding from Turkey and abroad.

Since its establishment TESEV expanded its research and agenda range to include a more active interest in international affairs, with a particular focus on Turkey-EU relations and regional economic and security questions.

TESEV focuses on the most important policy questions facing Turkey and the region in the new century. Its areas of work are grouped under three titles: Governance and Transparency, Democratization of Turkey, Foreign Policy and International Relations.