

ADVANCING EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

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Subcommittee on European Affairs

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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee: I am grateful for the opportunity to appear and testify in this important hearing on a region that has surged to salience in debates on U.S. foreign and security policy and strategy: the broader Black Sea region, new frontier in the advance of Euro-Atlantic security and democracy. My presentation will succinctly identify the interests of the U.S. and its friends in the region, threats to those interests, and steps the U.S. can take to promote its security and democratic goals together with its friends in the region.

Interests

The Black Sea region forms the hub of an evolving geostrategic and geo-economic system that extends from NATO Europe to Central Asia and Afghanistan, and as such is crucial to U.S.-led antiterrorism efforts. It provides direct strategic access for American and allied forces to bases and theaters of operation in Central Asia and the Middle East. It also provides westbound transit routes for Caspian energy supplies which are key to our European allies' energy balance in the years ahead.

Countries in the Black Sea region rarely if ever experienced security, democracy, or prosperity. Their chance came with the end of Soviet dominance and the enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic community of interests and values.

At present, however, Russian President Vladimir Putin leads a campaign to halt and turn back that process at the former Soviet borders, so as restore a sphere of Russian political, economic,

and military dominance in a large part of the Black Sea region. Threats of force against Georgia, refusal to withdraw Russian troops from that country and from Moldova, overt support for secessionist enclaves in those two countries, fanning of civil confrontation during the presidential campaign in Ukraine, the poison attack on Viktor Yushchenko, are among the recent brutal hallmarks of Mr. Putin's policy in this region. The answer must be a redoubling of democratic institution building within these countries, and anchoring them to Euro-Atlantic institutions. The U.S. is uniquely equipped to lead this effort within the Euro-Atlantic community and in the region itself.

With Romania and Bulgaria now in NATO and set to join the European Union, and with old NATO ally Turkey aiming for EU entry, now is the time to start planning for the Euro-Atlantic integration of countries that have declared that aspiration in the broader Black Sea region: Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan.

Friends and Partners

American and overall Western interests in this region require stable, reform-capable states, in control of their own borders, safe from external military or economic pressures or externally-inspired secessions, secure in their function as energy transit routes, and capable of supporting U.S.-led or NATO coalition operations. Those interests can only be sustained if the region's countries develop good governance, with functioning democratic institutions and political processes resistant to corruption or hostile manipulation, and if they are protected by international law and Western-led security arrangements.

Thus, effective state- and democracy-building and strategic interests are twin sides of a common set of U.S. and Euro-Atlantic interests in the Black Sea region. By the same token, security threats to countries in this region and actions that undermine their sovereignty run counter to those interests.

Within this region, Romania and Bulgaria became providers of security and contributors to coalition operations even before

accession to NATO. Their role is set to grow further as the two countries become hosts to U.S. military installations on the Black Sea littoral. NATO aspirants Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan have acted as de facto allies in providing political backing, guaranteeing air and land passage rights, and fielding peace-support troops for NATO and U.S.-led operations. Georgia and Azerbaijan, active members of the anti-terrorist coalition, have thus graduated from the role of pure consumers of security to that of net consumers and incipient providers of security to the region and beyond.

Tbilisi and Baku regard their participation in the anti-terrorism coalition as synonymous with their national interests. Already before 9/11 they had experienced terrorist threats and attacks in the form of externally inspired coup- and assassination attempts against their leaders and ethnic cleansing. Thus they are vitally interested in combating terrorism in all its forms. For both Georgia and Azerbaijan, participation in the anti-terrorism coalition is also a means to maintain close relations with the U.S., advance the modernization of their security sectors, and earn their credentials as NATO aspirant countries.

Moreover, Georgia and Azerbaijan are on the alert to prevent a spillover of the Russian-Chechen war into their territories and to interdict the passage of any foreign gunmen, their suspected accomplices, or radical Islamist missionaries. With U.S. assistance, Georgia cleaned up the Pankisi Valley in 2002-2003 and holds it under control since then. For its part, Azerbaijan gave radical Islamist organizations no chance to make inroads into the country. Successful development of Azerbaijan as a Muslim secular state is also a shared interest of that country and the West. This goal has good prospects of fulfillment in Azerbaijan's society characterized by religious tolerance and receptiveness to Western models.

The success of pro-democracy movements, known as Rose and Orange Revolutions, in Georgia and Ukraine recently, is seen by many as potentially repeatable in Armenia, but unlikely to be duplicated in Azerbaijan or Moldova. In these two countries, democratization will likely follow an evolutionary path. Last

week, Presidents Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia and Viktor Yushchenko of Ukraine, meeting with Moldova's president Vladimir Voronin, announced their readiness to work with him toward completing Eastern Europe's third wave of democratization -- that in the broader Black Sea region. Mr. Voronin and his team, communists in name only, have reoriented Moldova westward and are resisting what they describe as "Russia's attempts at re-colonization." These presidents along with Ilham Aliiev of Azerbaijan are scheduled to meet again next month in Moldova with a view to revitalizing the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) group of countries.

Security Threats: Old, New, Newest

The region's Western-oriented countries are facing a wide spectrum of threats to their security, mainly from Russia and its local protégés. The overarching goal is to thwart these countries' Euro-Atlantic integration and force them back into a Russian sphere of dominance. The scope, intensity, and systematic application of threats has markedly increased over the last year, as part of President Putin's contribution to the shaping of Russia's conduct. These may be described as old-, new-, and newest-type threats to security.

The "old-type" threats stem from troops and bases stationed unlawfully in other countries, seizures of territories, border changes de facto, ethnic cleansing, and creation of heavily armed proxy statelets. Georgia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan are the targets of such blackmail.

"New-type" threats are those associated with illegal arms and drugs trafficking, rampant contraband, and organized transnational criminality, all of which use the Russian-protected secessionist enclaves as safe havens and staging areas. Such activities are usually associated with non-state actors, often of a terrorist nature. In the Black Sea region, however, state actors within Russia are often behind these activities, severely undermining the target countries' economies and state institutions.

The “newest-type” threat to security can be seen in Russia’s assault on electoral processes, some months ago in Ukraine’s presidential election and in recent weeks in Moldova’s parliamentary elections (and meanwhile even in loyalist Abkhazia). Using massive financial, mass-media, and covert action means, Russia has sought to influence the outcome of elections or hijack them outright in order to install its favorites in power.

Closely related to this is the export of the Russian model of governance, characterized by a symbiosis of neo-KGB structures, organized crime, state bureaucracy, and government-connected big business. In all of the situations described above, security and democracy are equally at risk.

“Frozen” Conflicts

The Black Sea region is the most conflict-plagued region along the new Euro-Atlantic perimeter. This situation limits the ability of the U.S. to capitalize on the region’s high strategic value. Thirteen years after the USSR’s dissolution, Moscow continues heavily to dominate conflict-management in this region. Russia, largely responsible for sparking or fanning these conflicts, has a vested interest in keeping them smoldering, so as to pressure Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Moldova and thwart their Euro-Atlantic integration. Russia’s policy consists of freezing not the conflicts as such, but rather the negotiating processes, which Russia itself dominates. The U.N. and OSCE, left largely to their own devices, have merely conserved these conflicts.

There are those who suggest that the U.S. should defer to Moscow on this issue, lest Russia’s cooperation with the U.S. in anti-terrorism and anti-WMD-proliferation efforts be jeopardized. This thesis seems to underestimate Russia’s own declared interest in cooperating in such efforts; to overestimate the practical value of Moscow’s contributions; and to ignore

Russia's outright obstruction of U.S. efforts in a number of cases.

Moreover, that thesis would seem to confirm the Kremlin in its dangerous expectation that strategic partnership with the U.S. should entail acceptance of Russian paramountcy on "peacekeeping" and conflict-resolution in the "post-Soviet space." This is an ingredient to sphere-of-influence rebuilding. It is crucial to avoid the perception (let alone the fact) of a Russia-U.S. or Russia-West division of peacekeeping and conflict-management spheres, or an informal partition of countries' territories. Strategic partnerships can not long be sustained with rump countries vulnerable to armed secessionist pressures across uncontrolled external borders.

It is high time to move this issue to the front burner of U.S. security policy. Preferably in synergy with NATO and EU countries, the U.S. is best placed for promoting conflict-settlement solutions that would consolidate the region's states in strategic partnership with the the U.S. Turning the broader Black Sea region into a policy priority need not compete with the priorities assigned to other areas. On the contrary, stabilization of this region would entail incomparably lower risks and incomparably smaller resources compared to the risks and resource commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan, or emergent initiatives in the broader Middle East. The fact is that a secure and stable Black Sea region is necessary for sustaining those U.S.-led operations and initiatives.

CFE Treaty, Istanbul Commitments

Russia has openly repudiated its obligations under the 1999-adapted Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe and Istanbul Commitments (twin parts of a single package) regarding withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgia and Moldova.

The OSCE, custodian of those documents, has cooperated with Russia in eviscerating them. Troop withdrawal deadlines were postponed and then removed altogether; preconditions to

withdrawal were attached where the troop withdrawal was to have been unconditional; excuses were found for retaining some Russian troops in place where the withdrawal was to have been complete; wide verification loopholes were tacitly accepted; heavy weaponry -- coyly designated as "unaccounted-for treaty-limited equipment" by a complacent OSCE -- was transferred from Russia's arsenals into those of the separatist enclaves; the creation of Russian-staffed separatist forces was tolerated; and the requirement of host-country consent (to the stationing of foreign troops) is being flouted. Since 2002, Moscow has rejected the very notion that it had made "commitments" in Istanbul to withdraw its troops from Georgia and Moldova. The OSCE itself all along termed those Russian commitments only "politically binding," as distinct from legally binding; i.e., not binding in practice. All these concessions notwithstanding, the OSCE is no longer able since 2003 even to cite its own 1999 decisions, because Russia has easily vetoed such references in the organization's routine year-end resolutions. Realistically speaking, the Istanbul Commitments are dead.

Since 2004, moreover, Moscow threatens to destroy the OSCE by blocking the adoption of the organization's budget and terminating certain OSCE activities. Russia does not want to kill the OSCE, but rather to harness and use the weakened organization. Under these circumstances, no one can possibly expect the OSCE to resurrect the Istanbul Commitments, let alone ensure compliance with them.

Meanwhile, the U.S. and NATO governments collectively take the position that they would not ratify the adapted CFE Treaty (which Moscow wants ratified) until Russia has complied with the Istanbul Commitments. This form of leverage has, manifestly, proven too weak to induce Russia to withdraw its troops from Georgia and Moldova. Russian officials scoff at calls for troop withdrawal based on the Istanbul documents. It is high time for Georgia and Moldova to go beyond the OSCE to international organizations, and argue the case for Russian troop withdrawal on the basis of national sovereignty and international law. The U.S., along with the Euro-Atlantic community, should place these issues prominent on the agenda

of U.S.-Russia, NATO-Russia, and EU-Russia agendas, and not just at summit time (as has been done occasionally and feebly thus far) but also on a regular basis until this legitimate goal is achieved.