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Turkey and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

Abstract

As it has been discussed by many prominent strategists, the Republic of Turkey is situated in a highly critical position in terms of geopolitics. Being a bridge between the East and the West and a bustling centre of trade and a strategic economic and political nexus between regions of the world, the power vacuum emerged with the end of the Cold War highly jeopardised the stability of Turkey. Therefore, in the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, regional economic cooperation in Turkish neighbourhood became a high level agenda for Turkey's foreign policy decision makers. Within this very scope so as to increase intercourse in terms of economy, science, trade, education, technology, politics and culture as well as to minimise future conflicts in the Turkish periphery, Ankara strictly engaged in similar international collaboration projects like the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

Key words: Black Sea, geopolitics, conflicts, Soviet Union, economy, Turkey.

JEL codes: F5

Introduction

Throughout the history, the Black Sea region has insistentlly been a cradle of various civilisations where diverse nations both from Europe and Asia belonging to different religions, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds merged. The region has always borne a highly strategic position in terms of geopolitics with its direct influence on world politics. Furthermore, thanks to the highly advanced trade connection of the region giving access to Asia, Europe, and Caucasus, as well as its crucial commerce network, the Black Sea region played a vital role in international politics. As a natural consequence of these very facts, the region has evidenced constant struggles among regional and global powers in order to achieve world hegemony.

Following the end of the Cold War, as a result of Turkey's initiative, the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) has been established in order to foster interaction and create harmony among the member states along with the perspective to ensure peace, stability and encouraging good neighbourhood prospects in the Black Sea region¹.

¹ Z. Baran, *Turkey and the Wider Black Sea Region*, in: Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott (eds.), *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives*, Washington, D.C., Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2008, p. 1.

The main idea of creating a similar imitative by the Republic of Turkey was basically to propose a new paradigm for the neighbours of the Black Sea region that used to take part in different poles during the Cold War, thus gather them under the same roof creating a structure inspiring economic cooperation in order to prevent future conflicts in the fragile region. Moreover, the official charter of the Cooperation states that “the desire of their countries and peoples for constructive and fruitful collaboration in wide ranging fields of economic activity with the aim of turning the BSEC”².

“The seismic geopolitical shifts that have taken place since the end of the Cold War and the panoply of threats that have ridden in on the most recent wave of globalisation have led many to challenge the way”³ states appreciated the security concept. The collapse period of Soviet Union, the fall of Iron Curtain along with the eruption of the Gulf War have led many states to put forth a need to rethink and revise the concept of international security⁴.

Besides, the very search for security and stability turned out to be a more crucial issue for states neighbouring to the former Soviet Union. Thus, the Republic of Turkey following the end of Cold War launched a regional initiative “contributing to the restoration of regional peace and stability through the development of stronger economic ties and vested interests among countries around the Black Sea”⁵.

It was the initiative of Ankara to gather states having border at the Black Sea and broaden it after the collapse of the iron curtain. The main motivation of Ankara was to create an atmosphere of cooperation based on economy so as to prevent future conflict prospects in the Black Sea region⁶. In addition to that, Turkey, basically aimed to increase its economic influence in the post-Soviet region while easing its access to raw materials and energy resources. Initially the main objective of the BSEC was to create a “free trade zone” in the Black Sea region, yet afterwards it was adapted to an economic cooperation project.

The main objective of this paper is to shed light to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation with a special focus on its establishment and development process as well as to discuss the role of the Republic of Turkey as the mastermind of the Organisation. Within the frames of the paper, the scope and aim of the BSEC, its organisational structure will be focused to a great extent. Eventually, the BSEC members and their relations to the Organisation will be analysed while Ankara’s objectives to initialise a similar project will be studied.

² <http://www.pabsec.org/pabsec/aksisnet/file/BSEC%20CHARTER.pdf>

³ N. Anderson, *Re-defining” International Security: Bringing Intent Back In*, The Josef Korbel Journal of Advanced International Studies - Summer 2012, Volume 4, p. 27.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ *First BSEC Tax Forum Organized by Turkey*, Black Sea News, No. 26, December 2012, http://icbss.org/media/947_original.pdf (accessed 22 December 2013).

⁶ T. Aybak, *Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and Turkey: Extending European Integration to the East?*, in: T. Aybak (ed.), *Politics of the Black Sea: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict*, New York, I. B. Tauris & CO. Ltd Publishers, 2001, pp. 31-32.

1. Establishment and Development of BSEC

The first meeting aiming to realise an economic cooperation in the Black Sea region following the fall of the iron curtain was realised in Ankara thanks to initialisation of the Republic of Turkey in 1990⁷. The delegation constituted of representatives from Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova following the two days meeting and discussions officially announced that they agreed on the establishment of “Economic cooperation in the Black Sea region⁸. Following that, in 1991, throughout the meetings held on technocrats’ levels in Bucharest and Sophia and meetings in Moscow held among the proposed member states Foreign Affairs Ministry level, the agreement text of the Black Sea Region Cooperation agreement was finalised⁹.

Officially the Black Sea Economic Cooperation was established on 25th of June 1992 in Istanbul by the Summit Declaration on the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. The Members of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation are mainly constituted of countries located in the Black Sea region or having access to the Black Sea; yet it is not only restricted to this very principle. The founding members of the organisation are the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Bulgaria, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation¹⁰ and the associate members are Greece, Albania and Serbia. In addition to that, Austria, Belarus, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Tunisia, the United States of America, and the European Union hold the observer status¹¹. On the first of May 1999, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation achieved an international identity and turned to a component regional economic organisation¹². The Republic of Cyprus and Montenegro had applied to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation for full membership but their request was refused by Turkey and Greece¹³.

2. Scope and Objectives of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

The essential goal of the BSEC is “promoting democratisation by means of economic cooperation”¹⁴. During its preparation stage, the main objective of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation was basically to create an economy-based cooperation using geographic prox-

⁷ M. Faysal Gokalp, *Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği Bölgesi çerçevesinde Türk deniz ticaret sektörünün gelişme olanakları* (Turkish maritime industry development opportunities in the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone), unpublished MA Thesis, 1993, p. 23.

⁸ Sukru Elekdag, *Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği Bölgesi* (Black Sea Region Economic Cooperation), *İslam Dergisi*, Number 108, İstanbul, 1992, p. 8.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/karadeniz-ekonomik-isbirligi-orgutu-_kei_.tr.mfa

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/TezGoster?key=7d53ed97e31a8bd3a2299a654f557131fad7503890313f4981b8bc325695c59a50a6f6aad6842c56>

imity among the neighbours of the Black Sea region. It was also aimed to bring states in order to realise trade, science, technology-based cooperation following the end of the Cold War. Doing so, it was mainly aimed to develop peace, cooperation and prosperity and a favourable environment for cooperation with countries in the region in the short term and to increase trade in goods and services between the parties. As for the long term, a free movement zone for goods, people and capitals was tried to be ensured so as to boost economic, trade and commercial relationships, while it was aimed to establish a free trade zone among the participating countries. On the other hand, it was also aimed to integrate the Black Sea region to world through an economic interaction while cooperating in terms of environmental issues with the Black Sea region states.

Taking into account the Black Sea Economic Cooperation agreements, the following articles constitute the main scope and objective of the Cooperation:

- To act in spirit of friendship and good neighbourhood
- To strengthen mutual respect, trust, dialogue and cooperation among member states
- To develop and diversify bilateral and multilateral cooperation based on principles of international law
- To improve business environment and to promote individual and collective endeavours of companies in the process of economic cooperation
- To consider specific economic conditions and interests of the member states
- To develop cooperation among the member states in a positive way so as not to prevent their further economic relations with other states
- To encourage other states to take part in the cooperation¹⁵.

3. Structure of the Organisation

The founding documents of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation are the Summit Declaration and the Bosphorus Statement signed on that day by Heads of State¹⁶ and Government of 11 Member States¹⁷. All the structure and administration chart of the Cooperation has been settled accordingly.

The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States constitutes the highest decision-making body of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation¹⁸. The Chairmanship of the BSEC organisation is settled on the six-month basis, due to the fact that the Council

¹⁵ Fatih Koca, *Kırım'ın Ekonomik Özellikleri ve Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliğindeki Önemi* (Economic Characteristics of Crimea and the Importance for Black Sea Economic Cooperation), unpublished MA thesis, 2010, p. 82.

¹⁶ Headquarters Agreement between the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, <http://www.bsecorganization.org/documents/LegalDocuments/statutory/head/Download/HeadQuartersAgreement071115.pdf>

¹⁷ Summit Declaration on the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, 25 June 1992, <http://bsecorganization.org/documents/declarations/summit/reports/istanbul/1992/pdf>

¹⁸ Valeria Kolos, *Period of Administrative Reforms in Selected States of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation: Russia, Turkey and Ukraine*, Unpublished MA thesis, 2012, p. 12.

of Ministers of Foreign Affairs gathers regularly every six months in the capital of the state that is going to conclude its Chairmanship period¹⁹. Ministers of Foreign Affairs constitute the members of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. The Foreign Minister of the Chairman state undertakes the tasks of the Chairman-in-Office²⁰. The Council takes decisions applying the function process of the BSEC and realises the duty of committing on membership and observer status issues²¹.

The Committee of Senior Officials assembles minimum two times in the course of chairmanship period. As a rule, one Committee of Senior Officials occurs before the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs meeting. Eminent officials of the Committee review the activity schedule of the organisation as they prepare evaluations for further implementations of the decision-making process; besides, they are preparing recommendations of the Councils that took place previously. Additionally the Committee realises coordination talks to prepare budget of the organisation²².

As a tradition, the Coordination Meeting is realised held at the beginning of each Chairmanship period. The Chairman-in-Office participates in these events and proposes the fundamental primacies of the Organisation regarding the upcoming six-month period²³. The Steering Committee of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Project Development Fund is in charge of creating synergy in order to increase standards of life quality of the member state population. Currently, the Committee is mainly focused on “agriculture and agro-industry, culture, education, energy, environmental protection, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, tourism, information and communication technologies, science and technology, small and medium enterprises” issues²⁴. Eventually, in order to establish an effective method so as to coordinate and synchronise a non-bureaucratic structure there exist working groups within the frames of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Following are the working groups of BSEC:

BSEC Working Group on Agriculture and Agro-Industry (WGAAI), BSEC Working Group on Banking and Finance (WGBF), BSEC Working Group on Budgetary and Financial Issues (WGBFI), BSEC Working Group on BSEC-EU Interaction (WGBSEC-EU), BSEC Working Group on Combating Crime (WGCC), BSEC Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism (WGCT), BSEC Working Group on Culture (WGC), BSEC Working Group on Customs Matters (WGCM), BSEC Working Group on Education (WGE), BSEC Working Group on Emergency Assistance (WGEA), BSEC Working Group on Energy (WGE), BSEC Working Group on Environmental Protection (WGEP), BSEC Working Group on Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals (WGHP), BSEC Working Group on

¹⁹ BSEC Tenth Anniversary Almanac, Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Istanbul, 2002, p. 138.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ 1 BSEC PDF website, http://www.bsecprojects.com/index.aspx?pageName=basic_information&id=3&parentId=2

Information and Communication Technologies (WGICT), BSEC Working Group on Institutional Renewal and Good Governance (WGIRGG), BSEC Working Group on Organisational Matters (WGOM), BSEC Working Group on Science and Technology (WGST), BSEC Working Group on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (WGSMEs), BSEC Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism (WGCT), BSEC Working Group on Transport (WGT), BSEC Working Group on Trade and Economic Development (WGTED)²⁵.

4. BSEC Countries and Their Relations to Cooperation

4.1. Ukraine

In the course of the post-Cold War period, Ukraine constitutes the most strategic location among the Black Sea region countries. Being the buffer zone between Russian and Europe, Ukraine is an energy hub. Ukraine is a geostrategic player in the Black Sea region taking into account its young and educated population as well as its heavy industry infrastructure²⁶. In addition to that, rich raw material reserves of Ukraine propose a wide range of opportunities for the Black Sea region in terms of economic relations. Eventually, a future European Union integration of Kiev puts another asset for its relations to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation²⁷.

4.2. Romania

Following Ukraine, Romania constitutes the most crucial player in BSEC as a country bordering to the Black Sea. Being a European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation member, Romania in general follows a mild policy toward BSEC and develops its policies in accordance with Brussels and Washington. It would not be an exaggeration to make the conclusion that Romania constitutes the entrance gate of the European Union to the Black Sea and tries to play the role of a leader of the Black Sea region²⁸.

4.3. Bulgaria

On the one hand, Bulgaria as its state policy endeavours to continue its historical relations with Russia while, on the other hand, being a new European Union member is in search

²⁵ BSEC Tenth Anniversary Almanac, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Istanbul, 2002, p. 13.

²⁶ Serdar Sahin, *Türkiyenin öncülük ettiği ekonomik birleşmeler: KEİ, ECO ve D-8 örnekleri* (Economic integrations led by Turkey: BSEC, ECO and D-8 samples), Unpublished MA Thesis, 2012, p. 55, ibidem.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Serdar Sahin, op. cit., p. 56.

of adapting to the new conjuncture. Due to the historical antagonism with Turkey, at the initial phase of the BSEC project, Bulgaria performed resistance; yet in the following period, Sofia participated actively to all projects²⁹.

4.4. Moldova

Moldova does not have a direct access to the Black Sea; yet, through the river road, it has an access to the Black Sea. Being a former USSR member, in general terms Moldova has tight relations with Russia in terms of economics, besides Chisinau highly dependent to Russia in energy issues³⁰. Due to the Transnistria resolution proposal of Russia, Moldova initialised a firmer prospect with the European Union and follows a more constructive role model in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

4.5. Southern Caucasus

Georgia has a direct access to the Black Sea. Being pressed by Russia in the post-Cold War period along with increasing ethnic tension in its territory, Tbilisi plays an important role in BSEC. Being an energy hub between the Caspian energy basin and Western industry, BSEC constitutes a crucial place in the Georgian external policy perspective. In addition to that, so as to provide balance against Russia, Georgia supports Turkey-based policies seeking its future membership both in NATO and the EU.

Azerbaijan and Armenia do not have a direct access to the Black Sea; yet Turkey, in order to engage the South Caucasus region as well as to contribute to the Karabakh Conflict via economic cooperation pushed both states to take part in BSEC. Armenia seeking its future between Russia and West engaged to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in a positive way and hosted BSEC Foreign Affairs Ministry summit in 2009³¹. Azerbaijan, engaged to the Cooperation with the encouragement of Ankara and takes over the presidency after Armenia. Seeking all methods to release its occupied territories Baku tries all methods and is a part of the organisation since its establishment.

5. Republic of Turkey's Relation with the BSEC

In general terms it is assumed that the foundation of BSEC mostly related to conjuncture changes that took place following the end of the Cold War. Nonetheless, apart from the end of the Cold War, effects of globalisation, Turkey's spoiled relations with the European Union

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Ibidem.

in the 1980-1990 period and increase of regionalisation, US hegemony in the bipolar world, and personality of Turgut Özal (former President of Turkey) should be taken into account³².

Particularly following the end of the Cold War, the globalisation process gradually has commenced to influence all countries both in negative and positive meaning, and Turkey has not turned out to be an exception. In terms of the economic aspect of international relations, the globalisation process affected the Republic of Turkey to a great extent and pushed Turkey to either establish international economic organisations or to participate in the existing ones. Contrariwise, economic cooperation in terms of regionalisation as well became significant following the end of the Cold War³³.

On the other hand, the Republic of Turkey, particularly within the framework of a newly emerged multi-polar, following the end of the Cold War performs a tendency of concentrating on regionalisation as it is surrounded by ethnic or religious conflicts. It is an undeniable reality that in this period Turkey's deteriorating relations with the European Union, due to human rights violation and Kurdish issue, encouraged the Turkish foreign policy makers to engage in a similar regional project strictly. Though BSEC was not proposed as an alternative against the EU for the Turkish foreign policy decision makers, the regional integration issue has not only interpreted solely as geographical proximity, but aspect of culture, history and political harmony has also been taken into account so as to boost Turkey's influence in a broader sense³⁴.

As it has been discussed so far by many prominent strategists, the Republic of Turkey situates in a highly critical position in terms of geopolitics. Being a bridge between the East and the West and "a bustling centre of trade and a strategic economic and political nexus between regions of the world", the power vacuum emerged with the end of the Cold War highly jeopardised the stability of Turkey³⁵. Therefore, in the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, regional economic cooperation in the Turkish neighbourhood became a high level agenda for the Turkey's foreign policy decision makers³⁶. Within this very scope so as to increase intercourse in terms of economy, science, trade, education, technology, politics and culture as well as to minimise future conflicts in the Turkish periphery, Ankara strictly engaged to similar international collaboration projects like the Black Sea Economic Cooperation³⁷. On the other hand, Ankara within the framework of bipolar world developed close ties with the United States of America where it supported Washington in Gulf War as

³² Dilek Karakaya, *Turkey and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC):1992-2008 / Türkiye ve Karadeniz Ekonomik İş Birliği Örgütü (KEİÖ):1992-2008*, unpublished MA thesis, 2009, p. 15.

³³ Gamze Kona Güngörmüş, *The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation (BSECO) and Turkey*, in: Kocaeli Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, (2003/1), p. 42.

³⁴ Tunç Aybak, *Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and Turkey: Extending European Integration to the East*, Politics of the Black Sea Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflicts, ed. Tunç Aybak, I. B. Taurish, London, 2001, p. 37.

³⁵ B. Saul Cohen, *The Geopolitics of Turkey's Accession to European Union*, Eurasian Geography and Economics, Volume 4, Issue 8, 2004, pp. 575 – 582.

³⁶ Shah Ruchir, *The Geopolitics of Water and Oil in Turkey*, www.ifri.org/downloads/ruchirpaper_1.pdf

³⁷ Serdar Sayan and Osman Zaim, *The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Project*, The Political Economy of Turkey in the Post-Soviet Era Going West and Looking East, ed. Libby Rittenberg, (Praeger, London, 1998): p. 116.

well as in similar issues. Thus, in a prospect to bring the Caspian energy sources to Western industries and to secure US hegemony in the region, the BSEC was also supported by the United States of America³⁸.

Conclusion

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation constitutes the most institutionalised structure in the Black Sea region. Within the framework of the Organisation, all countries sharing their access to the Black Sea as well as neighbour countries found the chance to cooperate under the same structure. The importance of regionalisation and regional cooperation highly increased in the Turkish foreign policy agenda following the collapse of the Soviet Union, besides it coincided to the period when Turkey's long standing relations with the European Union were severely challenged due to human rights violation and the Kurdish issue.

During the early phases and the development process of the BSEC project, Turkey as an engine of the project was supported not only by the Black Sea region countries but also by Washington and Brussels. Nowadays the Black Sea Economic Cooperation serves as a political platform for the member states where economic, social, environmental issues are discussed. Apart from that BSEC gives an opportunity for member states to collaborate in different issues in terms of education, war against terror, struggle with drugs, regional security. Thus, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation proposes a wide range perspective for its members to develop their regional cooperation that highly contributes to regional stability as well as prosperity.

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³⁸ Mustafa Aydın, *Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea and the Role of Institutions*, Perceptions, (Vol. X, Autumn 2005): p. 57.

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Turcja a współpraca gospodarcza Państw Morza Czarnego (BSEC)

Streszczenie

Jak na to zwraca uwagę wielu wybitnych strategów, Republika Turcji znajduje się w nader krytycznym położeniu z punktu widzenia geopolityki. Będąc pomostem między Wschodem a Zachodem i ruchliwym ośrodkiem handlu oraz strategicznym łącznikiem ekonomicznym i politycznym między regionami świata, Turcja odczuła duże zagrożenie swej stabilności ze strony potężnej próżni, jaka się pojawiła wraz z zakończeniem zimnej wojny. W związku z tym w okresie po upadku Związku Radzieckiego regionalna współpraca gospodarcza w sąsiedztwie Turcji stała się nadrzędnym punktem porządku dziennego dla decydentów polityki zagranicznej Turcji. Wobec tego z myślą o rozwijaniu

stosunków gospodarczych, naukowych, handlowych, w zakresie edukacji, technologii polityki i kultury, jak również o zminimalizowaniu przyszłych konfliktów na obrzeżach Turcji, Ankara aktywnie się włączyła w podobne projekty współpracy międzynarodowej, takie jak Współpraca Gospodarcza Państw Morza Czarnego.

Słowa kluczowe: Morze Czarne, geopolityka, konflikty, Związek Radziecki, gospodarka, Turcja.

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