



NATO Parliamentary Assembly

SPRING SESSION

ADDRESS

by

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Frameworks and Areas of Cooperation in the Black Sea Region

By Ambassador Lubomir Ivanov, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to NATO

Distinguished Committee members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The timeliness of today's discussion is underpinned by recent and forthcoming events which are a clear proof of the dynamism of the processes taking place in the Black sea region. A couple of days ago the GUAM Summit in Kiyv resulted in the establishment of the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development. On June 5th in Bucharest a regional Summit will take place with the ambitious goal to bring together the regional players, the major relevant international organizations as well as the USA and launch a Black sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership. All this is adding to the background a sense of an intense effort to find the right way forward on the basis of a bold vision for the future of the region.

The Black Sea area recently attracts more and more the attention of the international organizations and fora. This greater awareness of the significance of the Black Sea area for the Euro-Atlantic security is due to several well known factors:

- as NATO and EU enlarge the region turns into Eastern frontier for both organizations, bridging them with Central Asia and wider Middle East – in geographic, political and economic terms. It becomes strategic avant-poste for the Allies in the fight against international terrorism;
- geographic position of the Black Sea region determines its importance also as an energy supply and transportation route. The recent problems with energy prices imposes seriously the need to develop constructive cooperation in this field not only with involvement of regional actors but with engagement and commitment on behalf of the international organizations;
- the region is a scene of serious political transformations. The success of the democratic agendas of the countries in the region needs, alongside the political will of the leaderships, an outside support and assistance;
- the Black Sea region is still marked by lingering security problems such as frozen conflicts and illegal trafficking that could have implications for the whole Euro-Atlantic security.

All these issues demonstrate the complexity of problems, trends and challenges the region is confronted with. Their solution and their management require concerted action of the international community, a common strategy that will encompass the variety of relevant tools to tackle the multiple problems.

Characterizing the region as an area of contrasts, the Rapporteur Mr. Middel defines two equations: contrast between elements of unity and diversity and contrast between the assets and weaknesses of the region. It is true that we witness a variety of political and economic levels as well as different cultural and religious traditions and historical heritage. This sets a complicated pattern when trying to find definition of the region, applying strictly geographical or broader geopolitical criteria. I would stand for a broader understanding of the Black Sea region, including not only the six littoral states but some neighbouring countries as well – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova. They have not only strong political, cultural and economic links with others, but are also a scene of conflicts with direct influence and repercussion on the whole region.

This "equation", as well as the second – assets versus weaknesses – proves once more that the solution is complex and necessitates a multifaceted approach. The attitude of the international organizations, and in particular NATO and EU, should be formed on the basis of strategic arguments, determined by the factors I mentioned in the beginning.

I would touch upon several of them that illustrate eloquently how the international community can contribute to build stability, security and prosperity in the Black Sea region.

First, the recent political developments in the region oriented a number of states towards **closer Euro-Atlantic integration**. Their commitment to fulfill the necessary requirements is inextricably linked to the need to implement crucial reforms across the whole political, security and economic spectrum. At the same time the existing serious economic disparities between the countries in the region pose additional obstacles towards the accomplishment of the reforms. NATO and EU should better focus their assistance. What we need to see is complementarity of efforts and coordinated leading roles according to their comparative strengths and advantages. NATO and EU need to broaden and deepen their political dialogue on the problems related to the region.

The **clear Euro-Atlantic perspective** for the region is one of the solid elements that will strengthen the positions of the democratic leadership and contribute to the progress and irreversibility of the reforms. NATO, through existing partnership tools and the special focus on the Caucasus and Central Asia regions is developing differentiated relations with the partners from the Black Sea region. The development of the relationship with countries like Ukraine and Georgia that stated clearly their wish to join the Alliance is permanently under review and any decision that is to be taken should be carefully balanced between strategic considerations and individual performance.

The **second point** is related to the **solution of the frozen conflicts**. Undoubtedly, the progress in the democratic transformation will have a direct impact on the developments in this area. Recent developments provide a rationale for a cautious optimism. The current political leadership of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova demonstrate an increasingly dedicated approach vis-à-vis the regional problems. The international community should work to encourage and support these countries' initiatives. At the same time, the main international actors should work out a common approach in the efforts to achieve a co-operative attitude from all relevant parties. When necessary, they have to seek ways to apply concerted leverage aimed at furthering the positive momentum.

In this context the question how to **approach Russia's attitude** merits a special attention. NATO, through the NATO-Russia Council, has a framework, although with certain limits, to interact in a positive way by regular political dialogue and practical cooperation. Working with Russia on a course of action that is beneficial for the whole region should be a key element in the relations of the international organizations with this country. Of course, this requires a delicate balancing between the opportunities of the international organizations to come forward with common positions and the individual national interests of the member states.

The existence of frozen conflicts and unsecured borders is a natural breeding ground for international terrorism and criminality, as well as religious and ethnic tensions. The **illegal trafficking** and terrorist activities represent the **third cluster of challenges** that pose a serious threat to security and stability in the Black Sea region and the whole Euro-Atlantic space. This set of challenges also has the potential to negatively affect the security of the energy

corridors crossing the Black Sea region. When looking for ways to counter those risks the existing regional cooperation is judged by some to be sufficient in this respect. Indeed, different regional initiatives exist, but hardly one can imagine that the solution of these problems could be limited only to the efforts of the regional countries. Existing initiatives are not designed as the ultimate response to today's security challenges but rather focus on the development of good-neighbourly relations, confidence-building, civil-military co-operation and exchange of experience.

A meaningful engagement on the part of the major international players is required who, together with the regional countries and in addition to the various regional endeavours under way should undertake joint steps to fight those risks.

Having said that, it should be pointed out that notwithstanding the existing limitations, the broadening of the scope of regional initiatives with involvement of countries outside the Black Sea region creates opportunities for further impetus and quality of cooperation. The Draft Report is mentioning the involvement of the Baltic countries, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic in the recently established Community of the Democratic Choice. I would also refer to possible involvement of Black Sea countries in the initiatives, initially designed for other regional configurations, as is the case of recent accession of Moldova /3.05.2006/ to the Process of Cooperation in the South-Eastern Europe /Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey, Croatia/. The SEDM Process /Southeast Europe Defence Ministerial Process/ is another case in point for fruitful cooperation where alongside the Balkan and Black Sea countries Italy and US are also involved. Recent deployment of SEDM Multinational Force HQ /SEEBRIG HQ/ to ISAF HQ in Kabul demonstrates how a regional initiative could go well beyond its initial purpose and cooperate successfully with a major defence and security organization.

Going back to the engagement of the international organizations in the Black Sea region one could pose the question if NATO's **level of involvement** with the security in the Black Sea is sufficient. NATO has already started this debate, but we still haven't reached a common understanding that the regional cooperation is insufficient to cope with the existing problems. What we need is a reliable assessment of the risks in the region and the threat posed to NATO interests; that should serve as a basis for further discussions on the future NATO's role. NATO can also build on its already established regional approach in South-Eastern Europe and existing NATO sponsored initiatives such as SEEI, resulted later in SEEGROUP, proved to be a successful forum for political and security cooperation.

It is my conviction that a far-sighted approach should bring about the **conclusion that the lasting solution of the problems in the Black Sea region needs a common vision and appropriate involvement** by the international organizations.

There is a clear need for **better coordination** as a number of international organizations and countries from the region are striving to find solutions to the problems and challenges in the Black Sea area.

Regional co-operation in different spheres is developing but **hardly sufficient** to tackle overarching problems that require a broad approach.

What is needed for finding a key to lasting stability and security in the region?

First, the elaboration of a broader approach to security in the Black Sea region to address the whole range of security challenges /from democratization to countering illegal trafficking, terrorism and weapons proliferation/;

Second, the engagement of the major international players who are in a position to make a real difference.

The benefits of this approach are apparent. A greater engagement on the part of the international community with the whole range of security issues would give an **impetus to problem solving** in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and other countries in the Caucasus and help consolidate the reformist trends.

This would also contribute to **overcoming existing apprehensions towards broad international initiatives** in the Black Sea region and would galvanize the efforts to address today's security challenges.

Should **NATO and EU** choose to pursue a common vision and a comprehensive strategic approach vis-à-vis the security issues in the Black Sea region, NATO-EU relations would have a better chance to go beyond the current limited framework and open new cooperation prospects and new opportunities with a direct bearing on European affairs.

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