

Why Is There No “Security Complex” in the Black Sea-Caucasus Region?

Consideration of Some Geopolitical Peculiarities of the Region in the Conditions of Post-Bipolarity

Introductory Note

In the field of International Relations and the world of geopolitics, it has long been common to distinguish between geographic and geopolitical regions. The latter are characterized by the role a concrete geographic area plays in the system of international relations, by how politics uses geography, by the kind of political combinations laid out on the concrete geographic “ground”, and by the ensembles of relations that emerge as a result of fundamental historical transformations. In short, the notion of “geographic region” is to a greater extent static, while the notion of “geopolitical region” is dynamic, i.e. it cannot be considered outside the concrete historic context.

In our case, “the Black Sea-Caucasian region” (BCR) is a concept that belongs to the field of geography. It is used to denote the North-Western segment of the so-called “land of the five seas” (which includes the whole of the Near and Middle East). It is a unique corner of the planet in terms of culture and civilization and the meeting-point of the three great Abrahamic religions. The BCR is the most complex mosaic of diverse ethnic groups – a true miniature of the Eurasian world. All these traits were characteristic of the region during the times of the Soviet Union, when Moscow exercised control over most of the Black Sea-Caucasian zone. They remain characteristic of the area today, now that the Soviet Union no longer exists and the BCR includes six independent states, all of which directly border the Black Sea.

The Black Sea-Caucasus zone only became a geopolitical region very recently – after the fall of the USSR and the subsequent dissolution of its enormous sphere of influence. Under the conditions of the post-bipolar world, the Black Sea basin and the South Caucasus began to acquire the traits of a special subsystem within the system of international relations – the area as a whole began to take on the character of an identifiable geopolitical region. This is why, in geopolitical terms, the number of “local” actors is so large, including Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as practically all the Balkan states, all of which are involved in the affairs of the region in one way or another. This group of states is almost identical with the members of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEC).

The BCR is still in the process of being re-established as a geopolitical entity. One of the distinguishing features of this region is the lack of a single

pan-regional “security complex”,¹ in particular, there is no regional organization similar to the OSCE. Moreover, no security discourse even emerged in the BCR, as it did, for example, in the case of the Balkans, where the Balkan Security Pact was adopted in 1999. This means, first of all, that there is no discourse in the expert community and at the level of politically influential organizations in the BCR. However, it is the task of such experts and organizations to create an institutional framework for discussions, to formulate their own understanding of the problems of regional development, to work out a common language for debates and, on this basis, to develop concrete approaches to solve these problems. The end result of this work would be the elaboration of a security pact for the BCR. To be fair, it should be mentioned that since 1999 this question – in respect of the Caucasus – has been raised in the South Caucasus, in the EU, and in Russia. The idea of such a pact has received support in the European Parliament.² Finally, it should not be forgotten that in January 2000, Süleyman Demirel, the Turkish President, also made a similar proposal. This proposal, however, has not resulted in any concrete action.

When we speak about a security complex, what we mean is a special regulatory mechanism. This regulatory mechanism is characterized by a quality of interstate interactions within a specific zone of the world (thus it is important that the states belong to single geographic zone), when the conditions conducive to the emergence of dissension, disputes, and conflicts between the states are reduced to the achievable minimum. At the same time, the complex provides a framework within which a sophisticated, efficient, and effective system of procedures, instruments, and mechanisms for managing crisis and conflict situations exists. This is based on a system of monitoring that uses a scale applicable to situations in all countries of the region, “tied” with one organizational and conceptual “knot”.

As global practice demonstrates, the direct way to create such a security complex is to develop confidence-building measures for the states in question and to establish co-operation between them in a range of areas.

In our case, such a security complex could use the matrix of the BSEC – an international economic organization with general tasks, created in 1992 on the initiative of Turkey – and the Danube Commission – an organization with specific tasks – and could also maybe take into account the infrastructure of the International Black Sea Club. The circle of participants could thus extend beyond the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus. One more condition is obligatory – the inclusion of the EU. The EU is interested in maintaining

1 The concept of a “security complex” is defined by Barry Buzan as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another”, Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, London 1991, p. 90.

2 For more details see: Bruno Coppieters/Michael Emerson/Michel Huysseune/Tamara Kovziridze/Gergana Noutcheva/Nathalie Tocci/Mius Vahl (eds), *Europeanization and conflict resolution: case studies from the European periphery*, Ghent 2004.

peace and stability on its Eastern periphery, and following this objective, it has been lately actively pursuing what it calls its “European Neighbourhood Policy.”

The simplest way to provide security in the region is to “interweave” its states in a system of bilateral agreements and treaties. To bring this about, a network of diplomatic talks between the states of the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus should be developed. The aim should be to achieve a level of relations similar to that currently enjoyed by Russia and Turkey, for example, as illustrated by the Treaty on the Principles of Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation that was signed in May 1992. This establishes high-level political relations and underpins them with a strong economic foundation, such as strong trade links, the interests of Turkish business in the South of Russia, and the unique “Blue Stream” gas pipeline, which came on line in November 2005.

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of its enormous sphere of influence, the reality is that several centres of power have emerged in the BCR that are capable of balancing each other and restraining the ambitions of any actor. If this situation – i.e. the absence of an obvious leader in the region and a state of mutual containment based more on political than military factors – remains in the near future, then it would be quite logical to create an institutional mechanism in the BCR for balancing the national interests of all the states involved in the process. Unfortunately, this has not yet taken place for several reasons, the discussion of which will make up the rest of this contribution.

1. *The lack of a common regional identity.* A common regional identity is essential for determining whether territorial units comprise an integrated territorial formation. This identity emerges, first of all, if there is a shared feeling among the population of a given area that they belong to a single territorial unit: Nations that inhabit a certain region are tied by bonds of an economic, social, and cultural character. They have a long experience of living together and a common historical destiny. They are clearly aware of the fact that this region is their homeland, what the Eurasianist theorist Pyotr Savitsky has called their “*mestorazvitie*” or place of development. Although the nations of the BCR belong to a single geographical region, share to some extent a common historical destiny, and, it appears, have an interest in developing economic, trade, and human relations, nonetheless, they do not form a common territorial space. This region is rather better represented as a complex mosaic in ethno-national, confessional, and linguistic terms. It is no coincidence that the region has always been characterized by a great dynamism (which was, naturally, not always positive). We should not forget that the

limitrophs³ of three great former empires – the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian – are located here.

In this context, it is relevant to recall the following thesis of Samuel Huntington:

Regions are a basis for co-operation among states only to the extent that geography coincides with culture. Divorced from culture, propinquity does not yield commonality and may foster just the reverse. Military alliances and economic associations require co-operation among their members, co-operation depends on trust, and trust most easily springs from common values and culture [...] By and large, single civilization organizations do more things and are more successful than multicivilizational organizations. This is true of both political and security organizations, on the one hand, and economic organizations, on the other.⁴

NATO's success is largely explained by the fact that it consists of states that share common values and a particular philosophy – that of the Euro-Atlantic world. It is thus cultural commonality, in particular, that leads to the economic integration of contiguous states and thence to the creation of a regional security complex. But geographic proximity does not guarantee this. In our case, therefore, the common BCR identity has still to be built, and it is not clear who will take care of this and how.

This is why we think that some authors are rushing to present that which they desire as already extant when they state that the current processes in the BCR are a prelude to the formation of not only a geo-economic, but also a geopolitical space. For example, not so long ago, the Russian researcher Nikolay Kovalsky stated that:

The processes that are playing out throughout this zone have much in common. The differences between certain parts of this macro-region are being smoothed out, and interrelationships between them are increasing, forming an enormous integrated space. In the distant past, this commonality generally had a geological and geographical character, but in reference to the present, the similarities are increasingly based on geopolitical, military-strategic, economic, environmental, and other indicators.⁵

3 In geopolitics, this concept usually refers to the unstable peripheries of imperial systems or “civilizational platforms”. For more information see, for example: Vadim Tsymburski, Geopolitics for the “Eurasian Atlantis”, in: *Pro et Contra*, 4/1999.

4 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, New York 1996, pp. 130-131.

5 Nikolay Kovalsky, *Restrukturizatsiya geopoliticheskogo prostranstva ot Gibraltara do Kaspiya v 90-e godi* [The Restructuring of the Geopolitical Space from Gibraltar to the Caspian in the 1990s], in: *Evropa i Rossiya: problemi yuzhnogo napravleniya. Sredizemnomorye-Chernomorye-Kaspiy* [Europe and Russia: Problems in the South. The Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Caspian Regions], Moscow 1999, pp. 20-21.

It is only possible to agree with the author's final statement with a high degree of reservation, and the same applies to his other statements that the peoples living in this space are drawn together by "their historic memory, which has captured much of what they have experienced together throughout their whole history of existence", and that the geopolitical unity of different segments of the BCR "began to form already during the times of Ancient Greece and Rome".⁶ Should we take such "arguments from history" seriously? Probably not.

2. *Lack of co-operation.* International co-operation is defined as a process of interaction among several actors within the system of international relations during which the use of military force is excluded and political activities are co-ordinated, and all sides tend to search together for ways to realize their common (coinciding) interests. The second reason for the lack of a common security system in the BCR is that, according to this definition, the region is not a zone of co-operation. The co-operation of states on a regional scale requires the fulfilment of the following conditions, among others: a) reciprocity (the states expect to receive obvious benefits from their co-operation and fear that which they would lose if they ceased to co-operate); b) iteration (co-operation takes the form of acts repeated over a longer period of time, which develop into deep interregional ties); c) optimal number of members (the fewer the number of actors, the better the prospects of this co-operation succeeding); d) power asymmetry (interstate co-operation is more likely to occur, and to last, if a strong state is interested in it, or if a certain "condominium" emerges, as in the Franco-German axis that drives the EU, or the Turkish-Russian relationship at the heart of the BSEC).

These conditions are not fulfilled in the BCR either. Even if interstate co-operation takes place, then it only does so in the sphere of "low politics". In this area, the BSEC has achieved the best results so far. However, the situation is far from idyllic. The euphoria of the first years after the creation of the BSEC was followed by a lull in interstate economic co-operation, though attempts have been made to revive the "Black Sea process" in recent years. The number of the participants in the BSEC has increased to twelve with the accession of Serbia, and Macedonia has applied to join. There has been serious discussion of the idea of creating "euroregions" in the BCR – a concept promoted by the European Union as the most effective form of interstate or transborder economic co-operation. Taking into account the increasing significance of the BCR in world affairs, European organizations see a possibility of creating something similar in this region, perhaps on the model of the existing Adriatic Euroregion. The supporters of euroregionalism would also like to use it to strengthen the institutions of democracy, and to provide

6 Ibid.

stability and sustainable development in the young states of the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus.⁷

Nonetheless, the problems remain. The main difficulty is that there is no need for unity among the BSEC states. In fact, their economic systems are not mutually complementary, and they have not made the slightest progress towards specialization and the international division of labour. Moreover, for most of the states of the BCR region, mutual trade with “horizontal partners” does not make up a significant proportion of overall foreign trade (Turkey and Russia are probably the only exceptions here). The foreign trade of countries in the region is predominantly oriented towards partners outside the region, and towards European countries in particular. Naturally, on this economic base, it is difficult to speak of building an architecture of interstate co-operation in the sphere of “high” politics. There is not a trace of this kind of co-operation in the region. The foreign policy vectors of local actors, which are used for the realization of their interests, are directed mostly outward rather than within the region.

There is one further reason why the interests of the states in the BCR do not coincide on their regional ground. It can be explained in terms of the “general laws of geopolitics”. One of the axioms of this discipline states that when a large state is surrounded by states that are small, weak, and/or artificially created and weakly integrated, the relations between these actors can develop according to two models. Either the powerful state conquers its weaker neighbours, enslaves them, and rules over them (at least for a while), or these states put up resistance. In the second case, the small states aim to unite their efforts and – with support from outside – to contain and sap the strength of their more powerful neighbour. The fear of being enslaved induces the weak states to create a containing barrier and to seek outside patronage. This patronage, however, is not provided by the local hegemon (a leading state in the region), but by an outside actor – a great power. The participation in this model of this kind of external actor leads to the emergence of a special (vertically organized) type of interstate relationship, which has the “patron-client” form. At the same time, the relations of local actors are based on a model of “independence” from the powerful neighbour that used to dominate the region, and “dependence” on the strong state outside the region. In other words, the foreign policy orientation of local actors begins to turn away from the region.

This axiom of geopolitics can be applied to the contemporary situation in the BCR. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the *Pax Sovietica*, the geopolitical relief of that zone called “Rimland” by Nicholas Spykman in

7 Not so long ago, on 30 March 2006, an international conference on “Inter-regional co-operation in the Black Sea Basin” took place in the Romanian city of Constanta. It was organized by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania. The conference evoked a wide response in the states of the BCR and generated lively debates in the expert community.

his classical work on geopolitics and “tidal lands” by the French researcher Jean Gottman, became visible once again. As a matter of fact, the “Great Limitroph”, which stretches from the Baltic to the Caspian region, with the BCR as one of its important parts, has again re-emerged between the two “grand geopolitical formations” – the weakened, territorially diminished, but still enormous Russia, on the one hand, and unified Europe, on the other. In objective terms, this means for Russia that a new *cordon sanitaire*⁸ is emerging on its western and southern peripheries, and Moscow cannot be happy about this.

3. *Interference of major powers.* In order to speak seriously about the conditions under which the creation of a regional security complex in the BCR could be realized (in addition to the fact that creation of a new supranational structure naturally requires a major effort on the part of all regional actors and careful work on political-legal aspects), one more requirement should be mentioned – the non-interference of major powers in regional affairs. Benevolent attention, advice, and aid are welcome, but interference and, particularly, actions directed against the undertaking should be excluded. Under the current conditions, however, taking the international situation and the increased importance of the BCR into consideration, this is fundamentally impossible. This is the third hurdle to the creation of a security complex in the BCR. It seems unlikely that great powers or the US superpower would want to see the BCR as a unified and well-integrated space and a real centre of power, because, in this case the region (institutionally established as a “security complex”) would exert significant influence on the whole system of interstate relations and, to some extent, even on the conduct of the global centres of power. This would contradict the interests of both the great powers and the transnational corporations and large financial structures of the contemporary West.

Let us not forget that in the BCR today there is much to be divided up, and many claims to be staked. In addition to the division of the “Soviet inheritance” – consisting mostly of economic and military infrastructures – there are at least five main unresolved geo-economic and geopolitical issues

8 Alexander Dugin, the Russian founder of contemporary Eurasianism theory, writes in this context: A “*cordon sanitaire*” is a territory of states and peoples located between two large geopolitical formations. The union of the states in the *cordon sanitaire* or their decision to act as one in the Geopolitical *Grossraum* could become a source of dangerous competition if allied with another great power (earlier this was the UK, today it is the USA). As a rule, the countries of the *cordon sanitaire* are a locus for conflicts between the two continental great powers, their geopolitical independence is therefore *de facto* impossible. They are therefore compelled to search for economic, political, and military support. The policy of a third large geopolitical power in this situation is to make out of the *cordon sanitaire* a zone of tension between the two local great powers, provoking the escalation of a conflict between them by using diplomatic influence on the governments of the ‘intervening’ countries. The most radical variant of the *cordon sanitaire* is a situation where one of the ‘intervening’ countries strives for complete independence from both continental neighbours, which in practice means that it will turn into a colony of the third (more distant) great power.” Alexander Dugin, *Osnovi geopolitiki* [The Foundations of Geopolitics], Moscow 2000, pp. 428-429.

in the BCR that are the subjects of “games”, “haggling”, and “manoeuvres” on the part of the external actors. These issues make the BCR an important segment of the world geopolitical space, they are:

- a) Control over the existing transport corridors along the West-East and North-South axes, and maintenance of their normal functioning to benefit the external players, as well as promotion of preferences in the realization of planned corridors;
- b) Unhindered access (via the Caucasus) to the oil and gas resources of the Caspian Sea and their development;
- c) Organization and maintenance of the uninterrupted transit of the hydrocarbons to Europe (and Asia), via a range of schemes;
- d) Definition of the international legal status of the Caspian Sea and creation of a regime that would enable the Caspian Sea to function as an integrated water-transport system; maintenance of normal functioning of sea and river systems: the Danube water-transport system, the Black Sea Straits, as well as resolution of the disputes around the Azov-Kerch Strait and questions concerning Russian and NATO military fleets in the Black Sea;
- e) Questions regarding the regulation of internal conflicts in the states of the Black Sea region and the Southern Caucasus with the participation of international mediators, and the problem of effective peacemaking in the region in general, as well as determining the fate of the unrecognized states (whether on the model of Kosovo or against it).

Above all, the situation in this geopolitical zone is today defined by the reorganization of the main directions of transport routes and the growing importance of energy in geopolitics. It is evident that the main developments in the near future will take place in the space between Western Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. This is why it is possible to state that the role of trans-continental communications and especially trade routes in Eurasia will increase. These used to be well-developed, but declined in the early modern period when the focus of global shipping moved from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. This explains the increase in the significance of the BCR as a transit territory.⁹

The BCR has lately seen a growth in the activity of actors representing global centres of power. However, the region is not now being “overlaid” by all the great powers. Russia, which represented the grand political formation that included the bulk of what now makes up the BCR, used to have a mon-

9 For more details, see: Guler Bilen Alkan/Asiman Bairam oglu Nabiev, *Otsenka transponikh linij Chernomorsko-Kaspijskogo basejna i regionalnaya transportnaya politika Turtsii* [Evaluation of the transport lines of the Black and Caspian Seas Basin and Turkey’s regional transport policy], Baku 2004.

opoly on this kind of power. But what do we mean by the “overlying” of the region?¹⁰

This is what occurs when the direct presence of outside powers in a region is strong enough to absolutely suppress the normal operation of security dynamics among local actors. Overlay is usually characterized by the large-scale deployment of the external power’s armed forces in the region (although this is not an indispensable condition), which is followed by economic and ideological penetration. It differs from ordinary interference in regional security affairs by a strong power. Interference usually strengthens regional security dynamics. Overlay, on the contrary, places regional security dynamics in a position of dependence on a larger complex of great power rivalry; it may even completely destroy them. Thus, overlay puts the whole system of interstate relations of regional actors in a wider – global – context. This situation has in fact been characteristic of the Caucasus from time immemorial. As the Russian political scientist Andrei Zubov notes “the Caucasus, that most complex of mosaics, could not but generate wars and civil strife. As a result, all the conflicting sides were subordinated to an external power that was interested in stability and which established order in the Caucasus and tried to maintain this order as much as it could.”¹¹ Over time, the identity of these “establishers” of the regional world order has changed, but their existence has been a constant. For almost two centuries, the Russian Empire acted in this role. It was succeeded by the USSR. At the same time, whenever the external power withdrew or lost interest in these “local” affairs (for whatever reason), there came the “times of troubles”, when chaos reigned in the Caucasus, and civil strife and local wars began. Is this not reminiscent of events in the Caucasus not so very long ago? Was not the emergence of a belt of instability in this geopolitical zone accompanied by the process of weakening of the former powerful “empire of the Kremlin”, and was not the emergence of the internal conflicts in the new independent states of the BCR the result of its sudden breakdown? We think the answer is obvious.

However, times change. New establishers of order have moved to the foreground. The question is, who today can actually afford the luxury – because it does not come cheap – of becoming an establisher of the order in this very complex segment of geopolitical space? It is obvious that only the USA or a combined power – the USA plus NATO, or NATO alone (although there

10 This term is mostly used by Western experts and researchers. In traditional Russian geopolitical research, the notion of “overlay” is practically unknown. Our interpretation of this concept is based on the work of Barry Buzan; cf. Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Hertfordshire 1991.

11 Andrey Zubov, *Budushchee Rossii na Kavkaze v svete istoricheskogo opita* [The Future of Russia in the Caucasus in the Light of Historic Experience], in: *Sotsialno-politicheskaya situatsiya na Kavkaze: istoriya, sovremennost, perspektivi* [The Socio-Political Situation in the Caucasus: History, Current Affairs, Prospects], Moscow 2001, p. 17; cf. also p. 27.

is little difference) – can afford to overlay the BCR. At the same time, serious experts are aware that impediments caused by the following regional players make it difficult to undertake such an enterprise: a) Russia, which is getting stronger and gradually overcoming its systemic crisis; b) the EU, which looks with alarm at Washington’s extraordinary activities and has apprehensions regarding its own energy security; c) Iran, which is positioning itself as a strong regional power; d) China, which is increasingly penetrating (via Central Asia) into the Caspian Sea region and to the Persian Gulf; e) Islamic partisans (“partisan” in the sense defined by the German thinker Carl Schmitt),¹² who maintain their military-political activities in the Caucasus and the Middle East, as well as in Central Asia.

The USA and the North Atlantic Alliance continue to conduct an active policy in the Balkans, while Russia has practically left the region. The US long ago established its presence in the Caspian region (which was included in the sphere of vital US interests in 1997), and has in the meantime also established its presence in the South Caucasus. The US has also strategically consolidated its positions in Central Asia. Until recently, Washington had not been directly involved in the Black Sea region, but this has since changed. Since August 2004, using the “fight against international terrorism” as a cover for its actions, the United States has started a large scale redeployment of its armed forces in Europe and Asia, moving them closer and closer to the borders of Russia. For example, US military contingents are being moved from Germany to south-eastern Europe, and in the future probably also to the South Caucasus. As a result of agreements with Romania (December 2005) and Bulgaria (April 2006) to establish military bases on their territories, the US also has a direct outlet to the Black Sea basin.

It is obvious that Washington would like to proceed to a harder variant of domination in this strategically important zone. Russia is increasingly opposing this. Moscow seems to have overcome the crisis of its partial break-up (first Tatarstan, then Chechnya). After achieving financial stability and having positioned itself as an “energy superpower”, it has been focusing its policies in two directions simultaneously – at Europe (Germany) and Asia (China). Russia feels more and more comfortable in its “near abroad” and wider neighbourhood. This explains Moscow’s aspiration to restore its influence in the BCR. In which context it must be noted that, although this influ-

12 “Islamic partisan” is a collective term for various kinds of extremist and terrorist organizations and groups in the Arab Muslim world. They are closed groups, with the following typical attributes: a) They act as initiators in the struggle with other actors; b) they act absolutely outside the legal (national as well as international) field; c) they are organized as a “spider’s web” and tend to create networks; d) together with their accomplices in Muslim countries, they conduct irregular military operations (including informational-psychological ops) against “Jews and crusaders” around the world. “Partisans” conduct asymmetrical military operations against the forces of the “Western World order” by delivering sudden pointed blows to their opponents. The logic that underlies these actions is the logic of total war.

ence has diminished during the last fifteen years, it has not disappeared completely.

NATO is active in all three areas: the Caspian region, the South Caucasus and – since the 2004 Istanbul Summit – directly in the Black Sea basin region. According to NATO officials, the Alliance’s policy in these areas complements the Mediterranean Dialogue. It is no coincidence that lately, as the US has been pushing Russia out of the Black Sea region (Transdnistria), it has also been stirring up the NATO ambitions of today’s Ukrainian elite, and has been highly active in Georgia, both militarily and politically in Georgia. In general, Brussels is paying more attention to the South Caucasus. Zbigniew Brzezinski has argued that “the stabilization of the Caucasus may become – as it should – increasingly also a NATO responsibility”.¹³ Nevertheless, we consider it unlikely that a large and powerful actor such as the North Atlantic Alliance could “overlay” the region in practice. This is because it would be necessary for all the BCR states, including Russia, to change the format of their co-operation with the Alliance from the Partnership for Peace (or bilateral relations) to full and equal membership of NATO, and this is unrealistic.

4. *Centrifugal tendencies and heterogeneity.* There is one more important factor hindering the development of a “complex”. Recent events suggest a growing centrifugal tendency in the region. It is increasingly crossed by various axes of interaction (both of co-operation and confrontation). The region is being “stretched” by alliances, coalitions, and bloc-like structures. These are organized by the local actors, who are also engaging the great powers, and acting under their *de facto* political supervision. In other words, the BCR is becoming more and more geopolitically heterogeneous.

The following axes of interaction can be observed in the region: Relations between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan have the form of a partnership (Azerbaijan and Turkey are *de facto* allies). Close co-operation can also be observed between Ankara and Kiev (although Turkey, with the silent consent of Kiev, is active in the Crimea). Russia and Armenia can be considered allies, and their relations are duplicated by the participation of both states in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Relations between Russia and Ukraine have the character of a formal partnership, and Kiev is reluctant to take this relationship to a new level – and sometimes resorts to open Russophobia and anti-Russian acts or rhetoric, such as the violation of gas transit contracts, claims to the Black Sea Fleet, complaints of Russification in the South-East of Ukraine.

Recently, the USA has become more active in providing patronage to the region. In particular, Washington acts as patron to the states that effectively form the Ankara-Tbilisi-Baku axis. It is also interested in the development of GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova). It is evident

13 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership*, New York 2004, p. 100.

that this “consultative forum” (which has existed since 1997) has been reviving its engines. GUAM’s originators did not hide their intention of creating an alternative to the “pro-Russian belt” of unrecognized republics in the Black Sea Region (Transdniestria) and the South Caucasus (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh). Unofficially, these territories are sometimes referred to as the “CIS-2”.

A very interesting situation is taking shape in the BCR. On the one hand, Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria are NATO members. Georgia and Azerbaijan have applied for membership. Kiev’s NATO ambitions, which have been stirred up by Brussels, are growing. Moldova’s political elite has similar ambitions, and they, together with the Ukrainian leadership, are imposing the blockade of Transdniestria, apparently fulfilling “orders” they received from abroad. On the other hand, there is Russia. Of course, Russia continues its work within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council (formerly the “format of twenty”), but it does not see this consultative mechanism as very useful.¹⁴

It should not be forgotten that Russia is the leading state in the CSTO, which, as already mentioned, includes Moscow’s strategic ally Armenia. This is a *de facto* Eurasian regional security system, or at least it is seen this way in Moscow, Minsk, and Astana. Moreover, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova are formally members of the CIS – an organization, which to be honest, is not very efficient. Moscow’s critics, and Georgia in particular, skillfully use this circumstance.

This practical confrontation is duplicated in the economic sphere in the rivalry between GUAM and EURASEC, the Eurasian Economic Community, a single market, headed by Russia, of which Armenia and, more recently, Uzbekistan are members. In this context, certain important developments are becoming obvious. EURASEC’s political weight and influence is growing. This is indicated by its recent absorption (in February 2006) of the Central Asian Co-operation Organization. Also recently, a high-level agreement has been reached to create a customs union between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. The door remains open for Ukraine.

These developments naturally alarm Washington, GUAM’s *de facto* “curator”. It is no coincidence that a new and clearly anti-Russian alliance – the Commonwealth of Democratic Choice (whose members include Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, and Georgia) – decided to “help” GUAM. This organization has since been renamed the “Community of Democratic Choice”, and the number of participants has increased. Poland is increasingly showing its interest in acting as a “local patron of the Baltic-Black Sea Alliance”. The ambitions of the Polish leaders are stirred up by the possibility of strength-

14 We can draw this conclusion from the last informal summit of the NATO-Russia Council, at the end of April 2006 in Sofia. The creation of joint Russian-NATO rapid reaction units to fight terrorism and the fulfilment of the condition of “operational compatibility” necessary for this co-operation have so far been nothing but talk.

ening their presence in the re-emerged “Great Limitroph”. The Kremlin, however, will hardly be satisfied with this prospect.

Concluding Remarks

If we consider the necessity of true stabilization, democratization, and sustainable development of the states of the Black Sea region and South Caucasus to be an axiom, then the optimal development scenario would seem to be the following one: creation of a supranational institution at the level of “high politics” within the BCR, i.e. creation of an international security organization – a kind of mini-OSCE. This should be based on the strong foundation of the BSEC. Only this scenario would satisfy the real needs and expectations of the peoples that live in this unique part of the world, although the elites who represent these peoples in the sphere of international relations often have diametrically opposite views and interests. This would be a great opportunity to create a single geopolitical space in this part of Eurasia and to build a common “Black Sea-Caucasian home”.

The current reality, however, is different: Great powers and other global actors are “stretching” the BCR in directions that benefit them. Unfortunately, the region has not become a closely integrated segment of geopolitical space. A sophisticated system of bilateral and multilateral interactions between neighbouring states has not developed here. Instead, the region remains a “loose cluster”, where external actors position themselves as those who can establish order, but are largely unconcerned about the true interests of local states. At present, therefore, there are no good reasons to exclude the Black Sea-Caucasian segment from the “arch of instability” stretching from Kosovo to Xinjiang. In the near future at least, the situation in this zone will not change. A new belt of instability is in the process of being formed.