

Black Sea and Russian foreign and security policy

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I.1. Black Sea region proves to represent a very important policy direction for Russia:

- by definition, as for the Black Sea power,
- considering the region geostrategic location and significance (in particular, as a junction of energy interests and challenges),
- as the region, represented by very important addresses of Russian F&SP (Ukraine and Turkey, first of all)
- regarding region’s capabilities and cooperation potential,
 - including trans-border cooperation, especially in interests of development of Krasnodarsky Krai and the South Federal District,
- in the context of existing threats and challenges: both of Black Sea proper (ecology, climate, communications etc.) and Russian national security problems (North Caucasus, in particular).
- weighting the region-related special Russian priorities – the Black Sea Fleet and the 2014 Olympic Games.

I.2. Russia keeps on confirming its positive interest towards a development of regional cooperation and interaction. One can describe such interest by defining its specific characteristics:

First, Russian interests towards Black Sea reflect the above-mentioned significance of the region.

Second, Russia is interested in BSEC Organization as a central regional institutional structure, notwithstanding its relatively limited potential. Moscow consistently strives for so-called non-bloc relationship and cooperation, where it would be an equitable (and powerful) player. And BSEC fits quite well with these criteria. (Yet, Moscow considers such advantages to be rather important for another key regional player, Turkey).

Third, BSEC format lets Russia diminish a degree of politicization of regional relations, while making them oriented at pragmatical, result-oriented cooperation.

- This approach is also reflected in the program of the current Russian Presidency over the Organization.

Forth, considering this, BSEC, paradoxically, possesses an important political advantage in Moscow's eyes: the Organization keeps being a sustained operating channel for dialogue and cooperation even when the Russia's relations with some of its counterparts is aggravating (gas conflicts with Ukraine, not to speak of Russian-Georgian conflict) and when other institutional tracks (including CIS, for example) become clogged or used instrumentally and as battlefields.

Fifth, Russia seeks to form up its relations with regional states in targeted manner, with respect to different priorities and specifics of relations with concrete partner. And once again, BSEC proves its usefulness. (A) Its framework opens the opportunities for development of cooperation among interested partners just in such flexible configuration. (B) Owing to relatively limited BSEC potential, especially political, as well as to Russia's weight there, its foreign and regional policy doesn't experience tangible pressure through this regional forum and preserves its flexibility. (C) At the same time, emphasizing the BSEC as being the main regional structure, Moscow can counterweight competing institutional projects, initiated by the EU, for instance.

Sixth, also the latter factor tacking into account, there appear the visible tension lines within regional politics and institutional structure: as Russia, while being the key regional player, is not inclined to channelize regional cooperation into Euro-Atlantic mainstream, as opposed to its partners. On the other hand, increasing influence of Euro-Atlantic institutions, which whom Russia has serious political differences and problems and common strategic vision lacks, challenge the Russian-Western relations as well.

II. The European security system and main trends in Russian F&SP (also though prism of frozen conflicts factor).