

“Why the Black Sea Area Is Important Now
– Towards an Extension of Japan’s Diplomatic Horizon”

Professor Shigeo Mutsushika
Graduate School of International Relations,
Director, Wider Europe Research Center,
University of Shizuoka

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

As a host of this event, I’d like to thank you for attending this symposium today. I’m delighted to be able to host such a wonderful symposium on the Black Sea area in Shizuoka with the participation of distinguished experts on the area from abroad as well as from Japan. Indeed, your kindly visiting Japan is an encouragement to the Japanese people who have experienced serious difficulties since the earthquake of March 11th.

It is said that the world is now living through another “20 years crisis”. Why another? Because we had a serious “20 year crisis” in the inter-war period, which resulted in the Second World War. There are several similarities between the inter-war world and the current world. We are facing severe world financial and economic crises. The status quo powers such as the US, the EU and Japan have become more and more inward-looking in concentrating on their internal affairs, while the revisionist powers have become more assertive. The confrontation between these two forces can be seen in the debate on the sanctions against Syria in the Security Council of the United Nations. In addition, the current world hegemon America faces a serious challenge in the rising dragon of China, just as Britain faced the challenge of Germany before the First World War and in 1930’s. We now find ourselves living in a similarly changing world. Furthermore, in addition to the new challenges of post-cold war international society, such as cyber attacks, old issues have also been revived in our globalized world. These old issues in a new bottle include nationalism, even chauvinism, minority issues, territorial disputes, and competition over scarce resources.

Indeed the Black Sea area and the Asia-Pacific region have their own distinctive characteristics, but at the same time, these two regions are

interconnected in the same changing world with the old issues in a new bottle. That's why we have chosen the title of the symposium "The Black Sea Area in a Changing world: Old Issues in a New Bottle. As the hosts of this meeting, we would be delighted if our symposium on the Black Sea area were to become a first step towards thinking about the settlement of shared issues between the Black Sea area and Japan.

I'm a little worried, however, that the Japanese people in the audience may think it strange that we have organized the symposium based on the Black Sea area, and not on the Asia-Pacific region. So, let me explain the reasons why we've chosen the Black Sea area as the subject of this symposium. The first reason is that the geo-strategic importance of the Black Sea area has increased in recent years, and it has become a focal point of international politics. The second reason is that relations between Asia and Europe have been progressing rapidly, and we have a strong sense that the Japanese diplomatic horizon should be extended from the restricted Asia-Pacific area to Europe through Eurasia. But needless to say, the alliance with the US remains the first priority for Japan.

Now let me speak about the first factor - the increased geo-strategic importance of the Black Sea area. The Black Sea area has four distinctive geo-political characteristics - 1) "Between the Powers", 2) among unstable regions - the Balkans, the Middle East, and Central Asia, 3) a horizontal line connecting the NATO's military operations in Libya, the Mediterranean, the Balkans and Afghanistan, and 4) energy transport corridor from the Caspian region and Central Asia to Europe.

The first characteristic of the Black Sea region is that it is situated "between the powers". Historically, this geo-political characteristic has caused a struggle for power among the big powers over the area. As a result, the region has experienced three types of international relations. Either it becomes a vacuum of power where no big country dominates, or it is divided by the big powers, or the strongest power dominates it monopolistically.

This is a map of Eastern Europe and the Black Sea area under the Vienna regime in the 19th century. The region was divided and ruled by four empires - German, Austria-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman, while more than fifteen

nations existed there without their own state. One of these Empires, the Ottoman Empire, began to decline in the middle of the 17th century, which led Austria and Russia to try to increase their influence in Ottoman territory. And Britain and France intervened in the struggle to strengthen the Ottoman Empire. Britain and France had their own national interests in North Africa and the Middle East, so they disliked the increased influence of Russia in the Black Sea area, and wanted to keep the existing balance of power there. These two factors – the declining the Ottoman Empire and the increased interests of big powers in the Black Sea area – together with a third factor – increased nationalism of the Balkan nations – constituted the so-called Eastern question. The Black Sea region became such an important geo-strategic area that the Eastern question contributed to the destruction of the Vienna Regime created in the Vienna conference of 1815, which led to the First World War.

The strategic importance of the Black Sea area was maintained during the Cold War period as well. The two military blocs - NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization – confronted each other in the Black Sea area. Greece and Turkey - members of NATO – faced the communist countries - the Soviet Union, Rumania, and Bulgaria. But once the Cold War had ended, the big powers had less interest in the Black Sea area. Europe, the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union and the Middle East faced their own serious challenges, and none of them except for Turkey could devote themselves to the Black Sea area. Turkey was afraid that it might lose its strategic importance in the newly created Post-Cold War world. So Turkey took the initiative to create the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), through which Turkey attempted to demonstrate its continuing strategic importance to the Western powers in the Post-Cold war world. Needless to say, Turkey's objective was also to make more stable and peaceful the Black Sea area that was in transition. This point will be discussed in detail by professor Gum Kut in Session two.

Entering the 21 century, the Black Sea area became strategically significant again. NATO and the EU embarked on their eastern enlargement, filling the vacuum of power created between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea after the end of the Cold War. NATO and the EU reached the western shore of the Black Sea – Rumania and Bulgaria – in 2004 and 2007 respectively. It is natural that the enlargement of the EU and NATO towards the East has caused Russia concern, as

increased influence of the EU and NATO over the Black Sea region could isolate Russia in Wider Europe. That's why Russia has attempted to stop the enlargement of the EU and NATO, and to increase its influence over the area.

So, when the EU and the NATO enlargements were approaching around 2002~2003, the tug of war between the EU, NATO and the US on the one hand, and Russia on the other, intensified around the Black Sea region. As a result, in the Northern and Eastern parts of the area, the debate intensified on which way Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova should go – towards Moscow, or towards Brussels. Some wanted to remain within the Russian sphere of influence, and others wanted to become members of the EU and the NATO. The struggle between these two forces intensified and caused the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004.

These color revolutions alarmed Russia, and Russian foreign and security policy became more assertive, which the speech of president Putin at the Munich Conference on Security in February 2007 showed clearly. When the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008 declared that Ukraine and Georgia would become members of NATO, the tension between Georgia and Russia abruptly increased and reached the War in Georgia in August 2008.

This war was essentially a conflict between the Georgian government and the Osset people over their attempt at building a nation-state within the territory of the Georgian sovereign state. But Russia intervened in the war, as the NATO Bucharest summit declaration made Russia realize that it had to send a clear message to the West that it would categorically stop the enlargement of the NATO to Georgia, even with the use of military force. The Russian message seems to have been well understood by the NATO members. However the relations between the EU, NATO and the US on one hand, and Russia on the other deteriorated severely, to the worst level since the end of the Cold War.

This episode shows that even an internal conflict in a country around the Black Sea area has a serious impact not only on the area, but also on international society. It indicates that the Black Sea area has become a geo-strategic region that is now important enough to determine world politics.

I've talked about the struggle for power among the big powers in the Black Sea area, derived from the geo-political characteristic of being "between the Powers." But this geo-political characteristic has caused also another difficulty in the Black Sea region – the instability and underdevelopment of the countries in the region resulting from the state of permanent war among the powers. This historical instability and underdevelopment, combined with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, has brought the northern and eastern parts of the Black Sea area soft security issues – including human trafficking, organized crime, terrorism, and proliferation.

In addition, new conflicts and even new wars, different from traditional wars between states, have appeared within the space of the former Soviet Union. In contrast to Central and Eastern Europe, which have facilitated reforms in two dimensions – democratization and the market economy – the new independent states of the former Soviet Union have also had a third aspect: nation-state building. And, in this process of nation-state building, 'new conflicts' and new wars have taken root in Transnistria in Moldova, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and in Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. In response, the EU, which has common borders with the Black Sea region, has made efforts to stabilize the region through its European Neighborhood Policy: the ENP, the Black Sea Synergy, and the Eastern Partnership. The case of Transnistria will be discussed by Ambassador John Beyer in Session four.

The second geo-strategic characteristic of the Black Sea region is the fact that the region is situated among other unstable regions - the Balkans, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Ironically, this geo-strategic feature increases the strategic significance of the Black Sea region. So, not only Russia, which has advanced southward to the Balkans historically, but also America, located far from the Black Sea, has found military interests in this region. Russia has military bases at Sevastopol in Ukraine, Novorossiysk in Russia, Gyumri in Armenia, and the Russian army has been stationed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, as well as in Transnistria in Moldova.

On the other hand, the US, besides having a military base in Turkey, concluded agreements with Rumania in 2005 and with Bulgaria 2006 for the use of military bases in both countries, and the US has attempted to give military training

to the Georgian army. In addition, Russia and the US have confronted each other over Missile Defense and the CFE treaty, the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe.

Because of this, the Black Sea region has been a place of competition between the US and Russia for increasing military power, although relations between Russia and America have been substantially improved by the 'reset' policy of the Obama administration, and the new START treaty was concluded last year. This indicates that the Black Sea area is an important strategic area for both Russia and the US.

Thirdly, the Black Sea region is situated between the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and Afghanistan, where NATO has been carrying out military operations – its operation in Libya, operation 'Active Endeavour' in the Mediterranean, 'KFOR' in Kosovo, and 'ISAF' in Afghanistan. That is to say, the Black Sea region is situated right on a horizontal line connecting Libya, the Mediterranean, the Balkans and Afghanistan. So the Black Sea region constitutes a strategically important region for NATO. Therefore, NATO has promoted a policy of strengthening cooperation with the Black Sea non-NATO member states through PfP, PARP, IPAP, Intensified Dialogue for accession to NATO, and both the NATO-Ukraine Committee and the NATO Georgia Committee instead of the MAP – the Membership Action Plan.

The fourth characteristic of the Black Sea region is its geo-economic situation. The Black Sea is situated between Europe and the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, where large oil and gas reserves are located. Therefore, the Black Sea region lies in the energy transport corridor from the Caspian region and Central Asia to Europe. So the region has become a place of competition between Russia and the West in pursuit of an oil and gas transport route.

Russia wants to monopolize this route in order to increase profits, while Europe and the US want to diversify the route in order to assure the stable transportation of cheaper oil and gas. So, in addition to established pipelines, Russia has constructed the Nord Stream and Blue Stream pipelines, and is now attempting to construct the South Stream gas pipeline. On the other hand, the West has constructed the BTC oil pipeline and the BTE gas pipeline, and is now attempting to construct the NABUCCO gas pipeline from the Caspian Sea to Austria through Turkey, Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary.

So, as I have tried to make clear, the geo-strategic importance of the Black Sea area is now greater than ever. That's why we have organized this symposium on the Black Sea area.

But some of you may still be wondering why Japan should be interested in the Black Sea area, an area so far away. You may ask if Japan has any national interest in the Black Sea area. My answer is 'yes'. Why? Firstly, it is because there is no other region that has experienced more radical geo-political transformation than Europe since the end of the Cold War. The Europe that was divided during the Cold War era has become one integrated political entity, and one that plays a very important role in international society. The EU has its own philosophy, values, and rules about international society, different from those of the US, Russia, and China.

Secondly, the recent intensification of relations between Europe and Asia makes it necessary to strengthen the relations between Japan and Europe. The more Japan becomes involved with Europe, the more Japan's voice can be heard in Asia as well. Thirdly, increased relations between Japan and Europe will also contribute to an increased possibility that Japan and Europe will cooperate to promote relations with big countries such as the US, China, and Russia. Strengthening relations with Europe may increase Japan's ability to maneuver in relations with the big powers of the Asia-Pacific region. Needless to say, the alliance with the US is the most crucial factor for Japan. It is evident that the weakened alliance between Japan and the US under the government of the Democratic Party of Japan has made the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region unstable.

Fourthly, such an expansion of Japan's diplomatic horizon to Europe through Eurasia will solve the discrepancy between the Japanese state's objectives and its actual diplomatic actions. Japan has expressed its objective of assuming responsibility for international security in the global arena as a would-be permanent member of the UN Security Council, while its actual diplomacy has mainly been focused on the Asia-Pacific region. If Japan truly wants to become a permanent member of the Security Council, I would argue that it should have its own global perspective and interests, and should expand its diplomatic horizon from the restricted Asia-Pacific region to the world. Strengthening relations with Europe might be a first step for extending Japan's diplomatic horizon.

In addition, Japan's involvement in the Black Sea area would have several advantages. Firstly, Japan's involvement in the area would be welcomed by the countries in the region. This is partly because Japan has no disputed issues with those countries, except for the northern islands issue with Russia, and partly because Japan would be able to contribute to the multilateral diplomacy of the Black Sea states politically and economically. The Black Sea states aim to diversify their foreign relations in order to reduce their dependency on their traditional neighbor states and keep their independence from them. So Japan would be an ideal friend for the Black Sea countries, and the Black Sea countries could be good friends for Japan as it pursues its own foreign policy objectives.

Secondly, there is a lot of room for Japan to cooperate with Europe, the US, and Russia in order to stabilize the Black Sea area. Increasing cooperation with these countries over the Black Sea area would inevitably strengthen Japan's cooperative relations with these countries themselves.

Thirdly, Japan's diplomacy towards the Black Sea area will fill the vacuum that exists between its Eurasian diplomacy and its Balkan diplomacy. Japan embarked on its Eurasian diplomacy under the Hashimoto government, and was actively involved in the reconstruction process in the former Yugoslavia after the end of the Cold War. As a result, a vacuum in Japanese foreign policy appeared around the Black Sea area, which is situated between Central Asia and the Balkans. It is high time for Japan to fill this vacuum, and to realize the geo-political continuity of its foreign policy from the Asia-Pacific region to the Balkans through Eurasia and the Black Sea area.

I hope that I have made clear the necessities, possibilities, and advantages of the horizontal expansion of Japan's foreign policy towards the Black Sea area.

We will be very pleased if this symposium will contribute to the further development of academic study on the Black Sea area, to an increased interest among the Japanese people in the Black Sea area, and to a mutual understanding between the Japanese people and the people of the Black Sea area.

Thank you for your attention.