

The EU and the Black Sea: peace and stability beyond the boundaries?

by Carol Weaver

The European Union has developed from a post World War II peace project whose founders looked far into the future. On that level the Union has been extraordinarily successful with war between member states or civil war seemingly impossible. However, the picture for many of the Union's neighbours in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Northern Africa is not as optimistic so the Union is now involved in maintaining peace and developing stability beyond its borders via the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

Ukraine

If we take the example of Ukraine, having talked to various Ukrainians from different parts of the country, the only common consensus seems to be that the people are hugely disappointed in their leaders since the Orange Revolution of 2004 / 5 and desire a strong government with leaders working together for the benefit of an independent Ukraine. The tents in Kyiv's Independence Square and outside the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) were erected by genuine protesters in 2002 but in 2007 were allegedly stage-managed including many with *pink hearts* for Yulia Tymoshenko.¹

Ukraine's history is full of war and occupation by many empires. The people remember World War II and the huge numbers of Ukrainian deaths. They also remember the suffering of Ukrainians under Stalin and the paradox of mass starvation in a large fertile country. Now they want leaders who will care about the Ukrainian country and people rather than leaders who are more interested in their personal power or their friendships with oligarchs and

¹ Personal communication plus "Orange Revolution's slow dance of death" *Ukrainian Observer* August 2006 (<http://www.ukraine-observer.com/articles/222/895>)

external leaders. It would seem that most Ukrainians have no appetite for fighting especially with regard to civil war.

After independence in 1991, the Ukrainian President Kravchuk was the most powerful person in the country. This continued after the 1996 constitution but since recent constitutional amendments more power has been conceded to parliament with the presidency in charge of maintaining the constitution as well as representing the country overseas, whilst the premier has more power internally. The events of spring 2007 involved the president trying to dissolve parliament, the PM threatening to unseat the president, the army being called onto the streets of Kyiv by the president, and the PM sending in the police to stop them. Many Ukrainians believe that this was a personal power struggle involving sabre-rattling but were nevertheless concerned about events and possible security risks including:

1. Possible civil war as leaders (Yushchenko, Yanukovich, Tymoshenko) were influenced in three directions – EU, Russia and US.

2. A Cold War resurgence as Russia tried to exert its influence in CIS countries in the light of the old *iron curtain* seemingly moving eastwards. (Russia is unhappy about US / EU influence around the Black Sea area, as well as the proposed US nuclear shield.)

3. Instability in its neighbourhood. Russia is already established in the Eastern part of Moldova (the self proclaimed and unrecognised Transnistria Moldovan Republic) and rents Sebastapol for its Black Sea Fleet; there is a tussle for control of the Moldovan government; there are problems in Belarus too, another land neighbour, whilst, over the Black Sea, Georgia has two split off regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both desirous of independence.

So can the EU's assistance with democratic consolidation help to strengthen Ukraine and other ENP members? Can the ESDP be a way forward rather than NATO? And can the EU help with "frozen conflict" areas? Again using Ukraine as an example, its current ENP action plan, firstly agreed by the EU and Ukraine, then adopted on 21 February 2005 for a period of three years, says that the EU and Ukraine will promote stability and security in the region as well as working together to help ensure that no new dividing lines are drawn in Europe. There will also be shared responsibility in conflict prevention and conflict resolution including working towards solving the issue

of Transnistria in Moldova. Ukraine is invited to align itself with EU positions on regional and international issues, possibly participating in ESDP operations, whilst the EU promotes an international order based on “effective multilateralism”.

Black Sea

In 2007, after the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the EU issued a paper on its *Black Sea Synergy* policy, the main task of which is to develop cooperation within the Black Sea area as well as between the area and the EU. This differs from the ENP which only issues bilateral agreements. There are many cooperation areas involved including democracy, human rights, border management, energy and security. According to the document, the border management will build on the success of the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM). The security issues will include involvement in the frozen conflicts of the region.

The Black Sea region is a strategic area for the US, which has said that there needs to be an “aggressive pursuit” of democratic reform in the region. It also wants military access to the Black Sea waters.² Meanwhile Russia could also be a threat to the peace of the region by supporting separatist regimes especially in the areas of Abkhazia, Transnistria and South Ossetia. Russian passports have been given to many citizens in these areas causing a “creeping annexation” of Moldovan and Georgian territories with forced displacement of non-Russians.³ Many of Russia’s former partners have now joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) or the ENP.

Further afield is the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan (both members of the ENP) over the area known as Nagorno-Karabakh.

² M. Bryza, “The Policy of the United States toward the Black Sea Region” in R. Asmus (ed.) *Next Steps in forging a Euroatlantic strategy for the wider Black Sea* (Washington: German Marshall Fund of the US, 2006) p. 39

³ J. Himmelreich, “Translating Western Strategy into Policy in the Wider Black Sea Region” in Asmus (ed), p. 48

Can the EU help?

1. In 2001 the EU commission prepared a checklist for the root causes of conflict showing early warning indicators. The list includes checks and balances on the legitimacy of the state: levels of corruption and organised crime: the rule of law: the strength of the judicial system: unlawful state violence: civilian power being in control of the security forces: respect for human rights: media control: economic management: social and regional inequalities: and the geopolitical situation. So can the Union help with the resolution of local disputes such as the *frozen conflicts* in Transnistria, Abkhazia or South Ossetia?
2. The ESDP could alleviate the situation if it is more consolidated in the future by the Lisbon Treaty. If the proposed US IBMS were to go ahead, perhaps the EU could demand greater control of those parts on European territory? Or maybe there could be a European system instead with both Russia and US participation. The WEU has said that there are concerns about the risk of a new arms race following the decision to deploy new elements of the American missile defence system in Europe.
3. With regard to its neighbours, the EU's approach is generally of the softly, softly variety and the Commission has said that the intention is to move slowly one step at a time in a non-threatening way. This is often achieved by bureaucrats "just looking at a few little details" including human rights, border controls or access to resources. The EU is also very involved with trade and aid, and helping poorer countries with financial assistance should not be underestimated. East versus West thinking in East Central Europe needs to stop, whilst at the same time domination by hegemonic superpowers needs to be avoided. This is not an easy task and the EU must avoid becoming one itself.
4. The conclusions of the Black Sea Synergy document are that whilst the EU's presence on the Black Sea presents opportunities, it is necessary to bring increased stability and prosperity to the area. EU cooperation and engagement in the region will contribute to this aim.

Ukraine has, so far, progressed better than many other CIS countries after independence and is working towards the ENP's all but institutions offer, possibly hoping for eventual EU membership. In my opinion, it is essential that enlargement should continue even if this is only on a one-by-one basis over a period of many years. It is often said that enlargement is the EU's best foreign policy and it has always been a part of the EU's foreign policy. The EU needs to remain a soft power, possibly a soft superpower, without becoming a superstate. Fluid borders will help to maintain this situation. If the world wants to move beyond its state-centred realist anarchy to a more peaceful condition then supranational institutions and the rule of international law would seem to be the way forward. The European Union is currently the best example of this. The EU is still a peace project taking small steps at a time so that, whilst it might often be viewed as weak, great achievements can be made. The wider Black Sea region is home to several unstable countries and is strategic for both the US and Russia so difficult times may be ahead. The EU could be the Black Sea region's best friend.

"In an ever-changing, complex and unstable world, the EU will be called on to spread peace and stability beyond its borders." (Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and ENP, 2007) ⁴

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⁴ "The Next 50 Years" http://europa.eu/50/future/index_en.htm (viewed on 22/8/07)