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The Black Sea Region: New Challenges and Opportunities for Regional Cooperation

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Panel II: The State of Affairs: Views from the Region

Part II.2 Analyses from Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan

Turkey

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Yesterday evening we concluded the first panel with a discussion on Turkey and now we start today's first panel with Turkey and Turkish foreign policy. The questions cited in the program are the main markers of this presentation.

The first question is Turkey's role in the Black Sea region. Again yesterday, it was mentioned that Turkey is one of the key actors in the Black Sea region. This is an undisputable fact. It is neither efficient nor reliable to establish any comprehensive regional organization in the region, without the participation or cooperation of Turkey. Turkish decision makers are well aware of this and Turkey's current policy and priority is to promote regional stability and cooperation.

Currently, we see a more ambitious Turkey in her environment. Turkish activism is outstanding not only in the Black Sea region, but also in all the regions that Turkey belongs. Turkey attempts to follow robust and assertive policies in all of those regions. At this point I need to clarify that when I speak about Turkey's environment or neighbourhood, I am referring to the Black Sea, Balkans, Mediterranean, Caucasus, Middle East, Caspian and the Eurasian regions. All of these regions are Turkey's neighbourhoods and Turkey connects each and every region to the other. This makes Turkey's interests more diverse and more complicated. As a result, issues and territories that had formerly been seen as lying beyond Turkey's geostrategic orbit currently came to be viewed as falling within the sphere of Turkey's responsibility. Today, Turkish decision makers are aware of Turkey's responsibility in all those regions not only politically and strategically but also morally. I may say that Turkey's self-perception is changing.

This changing perception brings us to the second question mentioned in the conference program: "key issues in foreign and security policy". As its top priority, I may say that Ankara wants to stabilize its volatile strategic neighbourhood, and make sure that negative developments in the severely explosive regions do not affect domestic and regional stability. Among other neighbouring regions, the Black Sea and within this region the Caucasus has a specific priority. This region is a strategic corridor connecting Turkey to the energy rich Caspian and Central Asian regions on the one hand, and to Europe on the other. From this perspective, guaranteeing the security of energy flows and ensuring regional security and stability are the main priorities for Turkey.

Particularly after the Georgian-Russian war of August 2008, Ankara has been pursuing a two-dimensional goal: to reach a major breakthrough in the settlement of regional conflicts and to secure alternative energy transportation routes.

At this point, as an answer to the third question cited in the conference program –views and visions for sustainable regional development/cooperation that Turkey has-, I may give examples of some Turkish regional initiatives. Turkey considers regional cooperation as the only option to find solutions to the existing regional problems. Turkish proposal is inclusive of *all* the regional elements. Participation of each and every regional actor is a must for viable regional cooperation. The latest result of this Turkish approach is the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. This proposal might be a blueprint for an enduring regional security regime. Some parties both inside and outside of Turkey underestimate this initiative. Nevertheless, it is a promising and original attempt. For the first time, a

regional actor, that is Turkey, offers all the other regional parties in conflict to discuss the issues on the table among themselves and to come up with some concrete solutions. When we remember that Turkey itself is a party of at least a couple of those regional problems, Turkey's constructive step becomes more noteworthy. Turkish-Armenian "normalization processes" or "the road map" is the result of this viewpoint, and this progress triggered improvements in other frozen conflicts and pushed the parties to seeking solutions. If all those negotiations between Turkey and Armenia as well as between Armenia-Azerbaijan can be crafted with Turkish facilitation, the whole geopolitical and geo-economic equation within the Black Sea region in general and the Caucasus in particular can be radically altered. At this point, I need to emphasize that this Platform initiative is by no means an anti-Western Turkish-Russian axis.

The fact is that, Turkish-Russian relations now reached the level of "multidimensional strategic partnership". This level of relationship is in fact good for regional stability and security. On the whole Turkish-Russian cooperation and competition go hand in hand within the Black Sea as well as across all the Eurasian regions. Nevertheless, when we consider Turkey's energy dependency and the volume of trade between the two countries, which has already reached \$38 billion annually (it equals to the volume of trade between Germany and Russia), this rapprochement is vital for Turkey. Turkish approach intends to see the full side of the half-full glass in Turkish-Russian relations. Thus, Turkish position is geared towards setting up all comprehensive regional initiatives for cooperation and stability in the region. Western organizations and states are the facilitators of these regional cooperation initiatives.

The other question on the agenda is "what are the limits and the obstacles in front of regional cooperation?" From Turkey's viewpoint, as I mentioned before, participation and cooperation of *all* regional actors are essential. As a facilitator in the region, what limits Turkey is a more difficult question to answer. Currently Turkey is the 17th largest global economy, a member of the G-20, and a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Turkey tries to play an active role all over the world, from Pakistan/Afghanistan to Iraq and etc. More importantly the interests of Turkey and the West largely coincide in all those areas that Turkey operates. Political, economic and security needs and expectations are the same.

The question is Turkey's ability to pursue an ambitious or active policy to reach out to all those interests. Given the sheer number of problems, enormity of the tasks, complexity of the regions, scrambled nature of conflicts, and all of these coupled with Ankara's limited resources, Turkey needs Western cooperation. All those mentioned topics constitute the obstacles that lie in front of Turkey. Despite the existence of these limitations, however, Turkey needs to follow up a coherent and effective foreign policy in its neighbourhood.

So as an answer to the last question on our agenda, the future of all those existing regional organizations and initiatives, from BSEC to Black Sea Harmony and Blackseafor, are very important for Turkey. Turkey invested in those regional initiatives enormously and sees those initiatives as the future of regional stability, security and cooperation. The West also has an important role in sustaining those initiatives. The EU's initiatives specific to those regions, Black sea Synergy and

Eastern Partnership, thus welcomed by Turkey. Turkey can play a constructive role in the implementation of those projects and the EU needs well-equipped, trustful partner in the region. All of t It needs to be mentioned that Turkey sees its future in the Western world, as it did so in the past. As a last point, I would like to bring to your attention what most Turks think or feel today: Firstly, decision makers in Turkey, very much in line with the Turkish public opinion, do not want to see anyone taking Turkey for granted. Secondly, Turkey would continue cooperating with the West, but wherever possible it will seek to engage partners on its own terms. After taking these sensibilities into account, the EU is an important but not an indispensable partner in order to confirm Turkey's European identity. It should rather be viewed as a useful partner contributing to Turkey's regional stature. Turkey needs to cooperate with its allies – most notably with the EU and the US – and will have to develop its financial, administrative, institutional and technical capacity to develop sustainable regional initiatives efficiently. Within this context, Turkey has to be part of common European policy outlook and the EU must allocate essential sources to fight with regional problems together with Turkey.