

# READJUSTING THE BLACK SEA AREA

Timofei Bordachev



TIMOFEI BORDACHEV is a Russian political scientist, Director of the Centre for Complex European and International Studies at the Higher School of Economics, and a leading research associate of the Institute of Europe at the Russian Academy of Science. He is also the author of the book *New Strategic Alliance; Russia and Europe In Front of the Challenges of the 21st century: Chances for a 'Big Deal'* (Moscow, 2009).

Bordachev was a participant at the 2009 Yaroslavl International Forum, 'Modern State and Global Security'

There is only one marine space that holds strategic global significance today: the Pacific Ocean. It is linked in equal measure with the United States, a rapidly growing China, and with Russia. All other ocean and marine areas are, at best, of regional importance. **Russia's desire to maintain its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol is primarily a matter of prestige.** For the moment, this region has no military strategic importance.

Assuming that Turkey has no chance of obtaining membership to the European Union in the near

future, a deeper cooperation between the countries of the Black Sea basin becomes all the more attractive for everyone. Such an agreement would be mutually beneficial for Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Georgia, and most certainly for the surrounding member states of the EU and NATO, such as Romania and Bulgaria.

At the moment, however, it is hard to predict just what kind of cooperation is possible. For example, the Mediterranean Alliance offered by Nicola Sarkozy seems largely ineffectual, acting merely to strengthen the diplomatic connections between France and South Mediterranean and North African countries, and bolster any attempts of the EU to somehow influence developments in the Middle East. As a basic, declarative institution, a Black Sea Alliance could emerge tomorrow. More serious developments, however, and further forms of economic interaction will require some time.

Above all, it is important to resist a European-centric outlook that measures the interests of other countries in relation to those of the European Union. Today, the EU is on the edge of almost certain decline, and it is becoming less and less capable of undertaking the role of a global or even regional actor. **Mutual understanding and cooperation between Russia, Ukraine, and Turkey has little to do with the European Union, and depends much more on positive relations between Russia and America.**

After the United States rejected plans to enlarge NATO by extending membership to Georgia and Ukraine, the issue was taken off the table completely. America did not pursue any aims that would limit relations between Russia and the countries of the former USSR, and stability in the Black Sea region has clearly strengthened as a result.

For the last few years, Russia has tended to play a role requiring much more responsibility than mere economic pragmatism. But any **aspiration to take a leading role in the global economy will not be met without some sacrifice on Russia's part.**

New agreements with Ukraine provide much more than just a symbolic victory. Firstly, after ratification, these agreements will become legally binding international documents. Thus, any refusal on either side will quickly become the subject of wide international attention, raising questions of legal responsibility and accountability of the transgressor in a wide international context. This arrangement is certainly much more effective than the more informal and 'school-yard' politik that often prevails, whose motto is: 'if I feel like it, I'll give it to you – if not, I'll take it back.'

Secondly, the agreements signed in Kharkov are evidence that the Ukrainian leadership is adequate and perhaps more realistic in assessing their chances of joining NATO and the European Union. Given the unlikelihood of obtaining membership, Ukraine can no longer afford to conduct its policy from a permanently anti-Russian position. The Kharkov Agreements also prove that Russia and the USA better understand when and where to offer help to each other. There is now a greater understanding of the interests of both sides, and of the mutual readiness to realize actual change.

**At the moment, relations between Russia and the West are warming and entering a period of optimism and active cooperation. There is no longer a need for antagonism and struggle..** The new pragmatic policy of Ukraine will also allow for greater and more successful cooperation between Russia and the EU. ■

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