

"Round Table: The Black Sea Region: Security and Stability"

Chairman: MEP Carlos Jose Iturgaiz Angulo

Guest speaker Former Minister of Defence of Romania

Minister Frunzaverde

Addressing the Black Sea neighbouring areas, Minister Frunzaverde said new conditions are emerging in the area surrounding the region, developments impacted by the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia but also the rise of various coalitions and new 21st Century dynamics. The Cold War is gone, but some feel it has been replaced by new conditions in the region. Minister Frunzaverde called them "harsher geopolitics, impacted by suspicions." In his remarks he underlined that Russia essentially didn't and doesn't trust NATO's intentions and moves in the area, particularly regarding the anti-missiles shield program. Russia has moved to unilateral acting, looking at demographic factors and taking advantage of energy strength as well as a military projection into the Black Sea. Russia's interest in having an influence in Ukraine as a bridge into Europe is also manifesting. Terrorism in the North Caucasus and the links to ethnic disputes is a rising factor. Moldova is also an issue important to Russian view of the region. As far as Turkey, its growing political influence and power, and developing economic capacity, elevate it into a strategic importance in the region, particularly if Turkey will play a role in the Syria crisis. Mr Frunzaverde underlined also the importance of Russian military perceptions of the wider Black Sea environment in their calculus for the next few years.

Professor Victor Mizin MGIMO

Professor Mizin started his analysis from the historical legacies in the region, particularly the two past empires, the Ottomans and the Soviet Union. He argued that current Russia look back at the status of empire but in modern shape. The Black Sea area is seen under various lenses including: the rising terrorism in the southern part of Russia; the new expanding fleet in the Black Sea; the rising Russian opposition to a greater NATO; the concerns about US advances in the region, including the US Navy presence in the area; the perception of the Georgia War as a potential threat to Russia's national security; a perception of the Obama Administration as weak; and a general trend of a return to the "Tsarist influence in the region." Professor Mizin believes that Russian influence came back to the region via the confrontation with Georgia and improved relations with Turkey. He noted an increasing Russian interest in better relations with its friends in Ukraine and a stake in Nagorno Karabach and in the Moldova-Romania issue. Russia would explore a "Vietnamization" of the conflict in Chechnya as a way to maintain influence in the area

Ignacio Ibanez Organization of the American States

Mr Ibanez displayed an old map of the Black Sea region signalling the historic parallel with past geopolitical moves. He outlined several threats to security including "spill overs," breeding grounds and effects on the European Union, Russia and Turkey. He focused on North Caucasus Terrorism and its Diaspora funding issues with the criminal activities related to that funding. He then moved to the PKK factor comparing it to FARC and Sendero Luminoso in Latin America and the links to Mexican criminal networks. Mr Ibanez cited also the Jihadist factor in the Caucasus as well as the "narco-corridors" in the area. He then drew attention to the critical infrastructures issues such as nuclear, ports, Olympics, canals and pipeline security. The Black Sea area is a hub of potential targets for terror activities and the challenges are significant. Mr Ibanez made several recommendations including engaging local communities, a better risk assessment, and empowering local players.

Liviu Muresan

Mr Muresan reported about the regional centres fighting organized crimes with the partnership of the FBI, DEA and other services such as Europol. He emphasized the risk assessment process and introduced the notion of American perception of the Black Sea area.

Mr Muresan said the bad news are that many security issues may not be solved in the area in 20 years, but the good news, according to him is that in 20 years the Pacific may emerge as the most critical area of concerns. He enumerated the subjects of projections in the Black Sea area such as environmental matters, energy, food security, resources, and critical infrastructure.

Walid Phares, Co-Secretary General, Transatlantic Parliamentary Group on Counter Terrorism

Professor Walid Phares remarks focused on "Points of Projection of Terrorism and Security Challenges in the Black Sea area." The first set of remarks centred on the various ethnic conflicts ranging from the North Caucasus-Chechnya and Daghestan to Nagorno Karabach, Georgia, and the Kurdish problem in Turkey. Ethnic conflicts not addressed can generate into security issues and attract terror activities. The second set of remarks focused on the southern coast of the Black Sea, particularly Turkey with the three main issues: the old Cyprus problem still lingering; the escalating tensions between the AKP Government and Israel; and the Turkish positions towards the Arab Spring, particularly the Turkish tensions with the Assad regime in Syria, as well as Ankara's relations with Iran and Lebanon.