

AMBASSADOR'S REMARKS AND PUBLIC EVENTS

Democracy and Security in the Black Sea American Ambassador Ross Wilson ARI Movement's 8th Annual Security Conference

Istanbul, June 29, 2006

It is a great pleasure to be back in Istanbul, and it is an honor to attend my first ARI security conference, which this year is focused, of course, on the Black Sea. I welcome this opportunity to talk about American policy in the region.

Perhaps a starting point is to reflect on the region, which seems to me to be both specific and rather amorphous at the same time. That may seem an odd way to start. Any fool can look at a map and see that the Black Sea is a major body of water that draws together the countries around it. But in recent history, this area has not really acted like a region at all. Real interaction has been sometimes blocked, sometimes it has been an opportunity waiting to happen, but always has been disappointing and less than it should be.

American policy for the region flows from what has been our policy toward Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall: We seek to promote a region that is free, prosperous, peaceful, secure and whole.

Democracy

A common commitment to democratic values was the ideological underpinning of American and Allied policy during the Cold War, and it is the foundation of our approach toward the Black Sea countries today. Turkey and Greece are strong and stable democracies, now joined by Romania and Bulgaria. Georgia and Ukraine have made great progress in building participatory democracies that is symbolized by the 2003 Rose Revolution and the Orange Revolution of 2004-05. Other countries in the region are also building new societies and institutions, and we strongly encourage the further development of the Black Sea's democratic community of nations. At the heart of freedom lie open political systems, free and fair elections, a vibrant and independent media, strong civil society, and mutual respect among the players – that government will act predictably and honestly, and that citizens and their free institutions will obey the law.

At the Black Sea Forum that took place in Bucharest earlier this month, Deputy National Security Adviser Crouch announced that the United States intends to participate in a new public-private partnership called The Black Sea Trust. The Trust would fund programs across the region to strengthen cross-border cooperation, civic participation, democratic

governance, and the rule of law. In partnership with the German Marshall Fund, the Romanian government and other donors, the United States intends to make a significant financial contribution to the initiative this year.

Prosperity

Open and free markets have been the basis of rising European prosperity for sixty years. In the years ahead, market economics, unfettered and open trading and investment regimes, and the effective rule of law to underpin the free marketplace will be essential elements for developing prosperity in the Black Sea region. The rule of law is particularly important in a region where distrust, corruption and inadequate governance remain the legacy of less democratic and open pasts. We look to the development in the region of more honest courts, more predictable decision making, simplified regulatory regimes, and fair treatment of investors, foreign and domestic.

Cooperation on practical projects can be one way to open doors. The broader Black Sea region that we are focusing on today is perhaps the world's largest source of new oil and natural gas resources. Geography makes it and the Black Sea itself a key corridor for delivering energy to the international marketplace. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and South Caucasus gas pipeline are immensely important accomplishments. The proposed Nabucco pipeline that made the newspapers several days ago will be another. These and other pipelines – multiple pipelines – will foster competition, help bolster global energy supplies, and enhance the welfare of producing, transit and consuming countries.

The Turkish Straits are no less important. And not just for oil: some 45,000 ships of various sizes and purposes transit each year. We support shared public-private efforts to assure safe ship transit through the Straits and to develop commercially viable alternative routes for oil that bypass the Bosphorus.

Peace and Stability

Democratic values and prosperity are enhanced everywhere by peace and stability. Perhaps we should be happy about what we do not see in the Black Sea region: It is a very long time since there were naval battles on these waters. Armenia and Azerbaijan are not fighting one another; there is a cease-fire. The Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts, while clearly not stable, are also not hot. But it's not a good thing that these conflicts are merely frozen. They undermine security, prosperity, democracy and freedom in the region. They foster organized crime, smuggling, trade in armaments, drug trafficking and other problems. They ensure that hatred and distrust endure. The rest of the world is marching ahead, and too many people in this region remain mired in outdated conflicts that have more to do with the Soviet Union than the 21st Century.

We attach great importance to the work of our and others' mediators, particularly those tasked by the OSCE, to develop practical, sustainable and fair solutions based on international principles, including the reality of compromise.

Security

Peace and stability are the product of policies to promote security. In the 21st Century, traditional security concerns are increasingly becoming a thing of the past. But the Black Sea is a tempting target for terrorists, traffickers in weapons and people, drug smugglers, and the like. Black Sea regional countries, led by Turkey, among others, have focused individually and multilaterally on the need to improve the security of their and the region's waters, ports, and borders.

Our approach to Black Sea security takes two important realities into account. First, the United States is not a littoral state, and that affects what we can do and how we might do it. Second, we have been allied to littoral Turkey for over five decades and to littoral Bulgaria and Romania for not quite ten. NATO has had a presence in the Black Sea since Turkey joined the Alliance in 1952. From our point of view, NATO is and will remain the premier provider of security for the Euro-Atlantic region, which includes the Black Sea. NATO is already playing a role through dialogue mechanisms with non-member littoral states. These include the NATO-Russia Council, the NATO-Ukraine Commission, PfP activities with countries throughout the region, and the intensified dialogue we expect to see with Georgia. Far from seeking to charge into the region, our approach is to work with our Allies and friends, and within the frameworks they find comfortable, to strengthen cooperation and collaboration on security.

No speech on Black Sea security in this great city of Istanbul can fail to mention the Montreux Convention, which is obviously important to Turkey, to the region, to the United States, and to many others. We fully respect the convention. Our Navy vessels transit the Straits under its terms regularly. They visit many Black Sea ports, and these visits are an important channel for building military-to-military relations that are essential to our common security. So are PfP and bilateral exercises. We are not seeking to establish a permanent naval presence in the Black Sea, but we are committed to engaging with our allies and friends to enhance security and cooperation throughout the region.

Integration

A Black Sea region whole and free, as I said at the outset, is a good overarching principle to describe our policy, and the "whole" part requires concerted efforts at integration. Regional integration promotes democratic trends, open market development and prosperity, peace and stability, and security.

Turkey and others have played leadership roles in launching regional security initiatives. BLACKSEAFOR and BLACK SEA HARMONY are the fruits of this work. BLACKSEAFOR has been instrumental as a means to move away from hostility and toward trust, transparency and practical collaboration among the region's navies. Romania's initiative to convene a Black Sea Forum was also an important step forward.

I also noted the importance of energy development and trade, another key integrator. But

as a former trade negotiator, I know that real economic integration means more than cooperative arrangements to transport one commodity. The waters of the Black Sea are the glue that holds the region together. But, sadly, I think, the Black Sea is as much a barrier to trade and investment as it is a highway for trade or a means for real integration. The barriers to trade and investment remain remarkable.

Getting those barriers fixed led countries to establish the Black Sea Economic Cooperation forum (BSEC) in 1992. BSEC is uniquely placed to advance economic prosperity and cooperation in the Black Sea region. The United States is pleased to have recently gained observer status in BSEC, and we are eager to support the work of members to revitalize and reinvigorate it. We welcome the initiative under the current Russian BSEC Chairmanship to focus on results-oriented cooperative activities to address such issues as port security, highway systems, energy and electricity transmission, telecommunications, science, health and infectious diseases, terrorism and organized crime.

As Russia's "results-oriented" mandate is examined further, BSEC may want to look at its counterpart in the Far East, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, to see what strategies have worked there to break down barriers and foster effective integration. For example, APEC's business forum has been particularly productive as a means to focus the work of governments on the things businesses believe impede trade and investment. APEC has very usefully focused on the harmonization and simplification of customs procedures, regulatory and standards issues, law enforcement cooperation, infrastructure, and other policy steps to facilitate imports, exports, cross-border investment and travel by business people, tourists and others among countries in the region.

It is easy to imagine, especially here in beautiful Istanbul, a bright future for the Black Sea. It is certain attainable. Getting there will require hard work by governments, by civic leaders and business, and cooperation on many levels. As countries move to tackle these issues, the United States will play its role. I hope this conference is helpful in focusing attention on some of the issues, congratulations, and good luck.

Thank you.