**BLACK SEA SECURITY – PRESENCE AND FUTURE**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I’ll start by mentioning three points will be in the core of the understanding the Black sea security.

First point is that the current security threats and risks will persist in the future. The second point is that the regional mechanisms are insufficient to cope with regional risks and threats and NATO and EU, as well as other international organizations should play bigger role. Third point is that new emerging risks and threats arising from outside the Black sea will negatively affect the region.

Black sea is considered both by NATO and EU as a region of strategic importance. This region is external border of the two organizations, crossroad between Europe and Asia. It is also important from economic point of view and because its energy resources or transit routes of such.

Relations between NATO and EU and the Black sea Region will depend on the policies pursued by individual countries, as well of the overall situation in the region. The main interest of NATO and EU is the stability of the region, cooperation and risk reduction.

I’ll not stop on the issue of the enlargement of NATO and EU because it is not an issue today. You all know that enlargement policy of the Alliance was one of the essential policies. This policy is aimed, among other things, at the democratization of the countries, security sector reform, settlement of disputes especially with neighboring countries and others. Countries that aspired membership had to implement these reforms before the accession. This happened with Bulgaria and Romania for example. Such a policy of accession led Ukraine and Georgia. But membership requires a strong public consensus and political will. After recent elections in Ukraine and Georgia and the subsequent change of government’s policies regarding the possible membership are changed. On one hand, this calmed to some extent Russia, but reduced the role and influence of NATO. The Alliance has to modify its policy regarding the regional security in the Black sea and to come with different programs of cooperation.

The European Union plays a major role through its neighborhood policy. In general, the role of the EU remains unchanged. Parliament last year decided which asked the European Commission to develop a comprehensive strategy for the Black Sea region, to cover all parameters and the importance of this region for the European Union.

Once again, security situation in the region will be essential for its cooperation with NATO and EU. Let me stop on the threats and risks for the region.

Security environment in the Black Sea-Caspian region is undergoing a dynamic transformation. What is important for the region is that after the armed conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008, we can say that today the probability of a regional armed conflict between countries is low. This is because neither party is interested to make aggression and conduct large-scale military action, which would be reflected in increased international isolation.

Two groups of factors are important for the security of the region. These are internal factors and external factors.

As internal factors we can mention policies and priorities of individual countries, bilateral and multilateral relations between states from the region. External factors include all those who can influence the region, but which arise out of it and I’ll stop particularly on the consequences of the events of the Arab Spring and the Middle East.

There are still major differences in the positions of individual countries in various fields, especially in regard to territorial disputes, which affect security. But that does not prevent development of cooperation in various fields, perhaps most strongly in the economic and commercial fields.

The presence of unresolved territorial disputes and frozen conflicts is a constant source of threat. Unresolved status of Transdnistria, and the controversial status of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh are the main sources of tension and instability. These conflicts stem from the collapse of the Soviet Union, but have a different political basis, which is why their solution depends on many factors. However, there are certain common features. First is the role of Russia. Russia recognizes new status of these territories, which is not done by the international community. In some regions are located Russian troops and the population is granted Russian citizenship. The resolution of these conflicts cannot happen without the will and the active role of Russia. The fact is that the postponement of resolution raises new problems to integration.

Unresolved problems negatively affect bilateral relations. I’ll mention disputes between Russia and Ukraine on the border in the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait and over Sevastopol. Russia-Georgia dispute over the breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia and Moldova have unresolved issues regarding the Transnistrian Republic. Turkey and Armenia have no diplomatic relations yet. Armenia and Azerbaijan have a major problem resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh and many other outstanding bilateral issues that can escalate and negatively affect regional security.

What can be said about the conflicts and disputes is that they cannot be solved soon. Also, there are no established regional mechanisms that lead to a decisive breakthrough in the positive direction. Regional cooperation is fragmented and inefficient. This is because countries' priorities are different, they are at different levels of development of political and economic systems, and there is serious distrust between countries. This in turn prevents of development of a common strategy for the region's future, despite the great potential that exists. And here NATO and EU could play bigger role.

Other factors that threaten security are asymmetric risks and threats, including the most serious long-term threat which is terrorism. We've seen a variety of acts of terrorism in the region and unfortunately prerequisites for such action exist and will exist in the future. Prerequisites for terrorist acts are existing regional nationalism, religious extremism, separatism, organized crime, unresolved conflicts. I will return to this question later and give some more information about a terrorist act carried out in Bulgaria in July 2012 in Burgas.

Besides the terrorism, another factor is organized crime. There is favorable environment for such types of illegal activities: administrative and judicial systems in some countries, the lack of effective border control, and high level of corruption. Next I would put the existence of WMD in the territory of some countries, the difficulties they experienced with its destruction and preservation. The possession of such weapons by terrorists may have unpredicted consequences not only for the region but also for international security. A separate problem is the presence of large quantities of small arms, which are outside the control of the states.

Conflicts have created large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons who still live in very miserable conditions and this is prerequisite for humanitarian crisis and criminal activities. Given the closed nature of the Black Sea, we have to pay more attention to ecology and the possibility of ecological disaster. An environmental disaster would have unimaginable consequences on economy and tourism.

There will be security factors with short term influence on security. An interesting security factor is Olympic Games in 2014 in Sochi. Russia, as the most powerful player in the region is interested in good organization of the games and will have to ensure the safety of its citizens and foreign participants. The main problem would be activities of terrorist groups, which might compromise Russia as a host of the games. Russia will aim to establish tough security measures will seek for reinforced security cooperation with NATO and other countries. This will push Russia to be more open for security cooperation.

Before moving to external factors, I’d like to give you more information about the terrorist act in Bulgaria, perpetuated last summer.

About 40 of the Israeli tourists were boarding a bus that was supposed to take them from airport to the Sunny Beach resort. At this moment the vehicle was blown up by suicide bombing attack. Aside from the five tourists and the Bulgarian bus driver, who were killed on the spot, another 31 Israelis and a representative of the Bulgarian tour company were wounded in the explosion.

Bulgaria had not witnessed any terrorist attacks on its territory since a series of bombing incidents in the mid-1980 carried out mainly by local ethnic Turks against the communist regime's assimilation campaign, as part of the so-called Revival Process. Last month Bulgarian government announced the results of the investigation. It was mentioned that the probe uncovered "obvious links" to Lebanon and Hezbollah. I have to mention that from the very beginning Israel and US has blamed Hezbollah - and Iran - for the bombing.

Where is the issue here? Since the bombing, Israel and the US have pressed European Union states to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, which would stop it access to funding and other financial assets from Europe.

European countries are still divided. Some, including Britain and the Netherlands, might support such a move, other countries, such as France, oppose it. The French argue that proscribing it as an illegal terrorist organization could destabilize Lebanon and its current coalition government, of which Hezbollah is part.

Now I will focus on external factors and in particular the implications of the Arab Spring and the situation in the Middle East on security in the Black Sea area. I think we should pay more attention to the events in these regions because risks are immediate and real. However, risks are not the only to the Black Sea region, but for international security as a whole.

The main source of tension in the Middle East and North Africa is crisis in Syria, which is exacerbated by the tendency to slide into total civil war. Until now parties in the conflict have varying success in which the outcome is largely dependent on external support. The regime of Bashar al-Assad relies heavily on government forces. We see a reduction in the efficiency of their operations and logistic difficulties likely to continue in the future. There is an evidence of movement of chemical weapons, but no indications of an intention for their use, which cannot be said about the future, especially if Bashar will have no other means. Opposition achieved success at the tactical level, but it should be borne in mind that there is no single opposition, but rather several opposing the government groups. In some regions controlled by rebels has been an intensification of the influence of radical and extremist groups.

As a result of hostilities there is worsening of humanitarian situation. Soon we will have a totally ruined country with disrupted communications and electricity. Already more than 70,000 are killed and there are several hundred of thousand refugees in neighboring countries. Some of them are reaching countries from the European Union. More than 2.5 million people need humanitarian aid. The development of the crisis poses challenges to neighboring countries mainly associated with deterioration of the security environment and possibly provoking religious and ethnic tensions. At this stage there are no clear signs of possible resolution and it is obvious that the hostilities will continue for a long time.

So far, the main risks for the Black Sea region and the states are associated with the flow of refugees, increased traffic of arms and drugs, and the ability to use weapons against any country, including weapons of mass destruction. As you know, NATO deployed Patriot missiles on the territory of Turkey. European Union is engaged in the humanitarian assistance.

Another country which has a large impact on the region is Egypt. Morse’s government is under constant pressure to solve existing problems. Real threat is of islamisation of the country and the spread of Islamic extremism. Because of the problems Egypt is losing its balancing role in the region. All this takes place in a time of exceptionally severe financial and economic crisis, which forced Morse to seek emergency assistance from the U.S and other countries and organizations. It is believed that anti-government protests were driven by the desire of the Muslim Brotherhood to control all branches of state and the desire to change the Constitution and introduce sharia. Political and economic crisis threatens the integrity of the state.

Complex situation in Libya remains. There is still no new constitution. Political instability is large and there is a real danger of dividing the country. The most serious problem remains uncontrolled areas of the country where conditions are favorable for the proliferation of weapons and drugs and the activities of criminal groups. With the overthrow of Gaddafi, many of the weapons of the army felled into the hands of insurgents and are uncontrolled. This creates a favorable environment for terrorist organizations.

The entire region of North Africa is unstable with weak state, which encourages international organized crime, which has links with the Black Sea region.

As we see challenges to the Black sea region are serious. To cope with them close security cooperation is needed and NATO and EU can play bigger role to have better security environment.