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**The Black Sea region  
in the media**

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## **Abstract**

This report looks at the media coverage of the Black Sea region in the newspapers of Russia, Turkey and Ukraine, as well as at the Black Sea representation in the 'new' social media. By conducting the monitoring of eight newspapers in the abovementioned countries, we aim to identify the degree to which the Black Sea is being perceived as the region in the media discourses of these states; as well as to clarify the media perception of the Black Sea regional cooperation. Moreover, taking into account the growing role of the 'new' social media, the potential role of the 'new' social media tools in promoting regional cooperation is evaluated.

## **Keywords**

Black Sea region, BSEC, 'new' social media, regional cooperation.

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# The Black Sea region in the media

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Over the last two decades the Black Sea region has been attracting researchers, policy-makers and practitioners from all over the world. After the end of the 'Cold War' and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Black Sea is experiencing its second discovery. Since during Cold War times it was considered as the sphere of the predominantly Soviet influence; new international, as well as internal conditions favoured rapid changes in the Black Sea area; starting from the emergence of new states and interstates initiatives to institutional cooperation. This 're-emergence' of the Black Sea region was not left without an attention from the international structures (NATO and the EU) and individual states (USA) from outside the region<sup>2</sup>.

The strategic importance of the region urged countries of the Black Sea area to establish international structures inside the region in order to develop cooperation and represent the region at the international stage in one united voice. Thus, in 1992 eleven countries representing littoral states of the Black Sea, as well as the states of the wider Black Sea region established the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation<sup>3</sup>. Establishing of the BSEC gave an impetus for further developing of institutional network and initiatives in the region. Today, the BSEC itself has four related bodies and affiliated centres working in the region. In addition to this, in the region operate twenty seven other organizations and initiatives.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the widely acknowledged impotence of the Black Sea, reiterated in the joint declarations and internal documents of the BSEC Member States, regional identity of the Black Sea countries remains rather low and ill-shaped<sup>5</sup>. This could be the result of a low institutional efficiency in the Black Sea area. Despite high expectations and ambitious goals declared by the countries in the region (like the creation of a free trade area among the BSEC Member States), the Black Sea institutional cooperation turned out to be largely declarative and highly bureaucratic, thus, making a limited effect on the life of people living across the Black Sea area.

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<sup>2</sup> Although Turkey has been a NATO member since 1952, Black Sea appeared as a region of strategic importance only after the end of the Cold War.

<sup>3</sup> Today, with the accession of Serbia in 2004 BSEC has 12 member states.

<sup>4</sup> A 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region. A Report by the Commission on the Black Sea, 2010, pp. 45-48

<sup>5</sup> C., King, The Wider Black Sea region in the Twenty-First Century in 'The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century', p. 5

Taking into account the region's significance and bearing in mind the rather small level of Black Sea regional identity, this report looks at the media coverage of the Black Sea region in the national media (newspapers) of the three case countries: Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. Bearing in mind that media is retranslating the policy-making process, affects the perception of the problems and affairs<sup>6</sup> as well as even could make an influence on the early stages of policy-definition<sup>7</sup>, this report tries to find out:

- To what extent the Black Sea region is represented in the national media of the three abovementioned countries;
- Whether Black Sea is represented in media as a region;
- Whether Black Sea cooperation is considered a part of national discourse in the media.

Moreover, due to the rapid development of the 'new social media' and its important role in the current political and social life, in the Black Sea region, particularly, we suggest that the new social media could be used as an alternative to the traditional media in active promotion of the Black Sea and strengthening its identity as a region. The report consists of two parts. In the first one we start with the overview of the methodology used for the monitor of the newspapers, then, proceed to the results of the research and explanations for the results. The second part deals with the new social media in the Black Sea region and contains original statistics on the representation of the Black Sea institutions in social media (Facebook and Twitter). Taking into account the big potential of the new social media in the region, we make some general recommendations on the promotion of the Black Sea regional issues using new social media tools.

## **Methodology**

### ***Geographical scope***

For the purposes of this research we choose the three largest Black Sea countries which since the early nineties demonstrated a profound interest in the Black Sea institutional cooperation: Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia, which secured superpower ambitions, was involved almost in all institutional intergovernmental networks in the Black Sea area. On the other hand, the end of the Cold War unleashed Turkish ambitions in the region, and this country took a lead in the Black Sea institutionalization process. In fact, Turkey initiated the establishment of the most institutionalized organization in the region – BSEC in 1992. Ukraine, on its part, undertook

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<sup>6</sup> S., Koch-Baumgarten, K., and Voltmer, (eds.) Public policy and Mass Media. The interplay of mass communication and political decision-making., p. 8

<sup>7</sup> K., Volmer, K., 2007, cited in S., Koch-Baumgarten, and K., Voltmer, (eds.) Public policy and Mass Media, p. 5

efforts to establish itself as another regional actor, paying a special attention to the promotion of democracy in the region<sup>8</sup>.

### ***Newspapers***

The research was conducted on the basis of monitoring the Internet version of eight national newspapers. In Russia – Gazeta.ru, Kommersant (Коммерсант), and The Moscow Times. In Turkey – Hurriyet Daily News and Today's Zaman. In Ukraine – Ukrains'ka Pravda (Ukrainian Truth or Українська Правда), Dzerkalo Tuzhnya (Week's Mirror or Дзеркало Тижня), and Kyiv Post. These newspapers were chosen on the basis of the comprehensive topic's coverage and the wide national audience. In this way, all eight newspapers report on variety of national and international issues and are available throughout the country in electronic version on the Internet. However, not all of them have print version (for example, Gazeta.ru and Ukrains'ka Pravda are on-line daily news resources). In addition to this, print version of 'The Moscow Times' is not available at the newsstands as the rest of Russian daily newspapers and is predominantly oriented at the English-speaking population of Russia.

In Ukraine and Russia we selected both English-language, as well as Ukrainian and Russian language newspapers (in case of Ukraine, Ukrains'ka Pravda and Dzerkalo Tuzhnya have Russian-language version as well) in order to draw on some possible differences in coverage depending on the main audience of the newspapers – English-speakers in these states and the rest of the population. In the case of Turkey, language constrains made an evaluation based on this criterion impossible. In this way, we considered two largest daily English-language newspapers: Hürriyet Daily News and Today's Zaman.

### ***Time span***

Monitoring was being conducted between 1 September 2012 and 31 July 2013. This particular period was chosen due to several reasons. First of all, during this time, two of the three abovementioned countries (Turkey and Ukraine) have been chairing the BSEC – from 1 July to 31 December 2012 and from 1 January to 30 June 2013 consequently. Secondly, within this time span, the 20th anniversary of the regional cooperation and the same anniversary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC were celebrated in 2012 and 2013 consequently. In case of Russian newspapers, we conducted monitoring for a longer period – since 1 June 2011, because of Russian chairmanship in the BSEC.

In this way, we presumed that this period should be saturated by the lavish coverage (news and analytical articles) in national media of these countries due to the planned celebrations and events related with the chairmanship in the BSEC.

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<sup>8</sup> In 1997 Ukraine initiated the establishment of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development

For the purposes of this research while referring to the ‘Black Sea region’ we mean twelve member states of the BSEC (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine). Since BSEC is the most institutionally developed organization established and functioning in terms of post-Cold War world and incorporating all littoral Black Sea states, as well as the representatives of the ‘the wider Black Sea region’, we paid a special attention to the articles covering its activity. In order to find out the role of the BSEC in the regional development, as well as the place of the Black Sea region in national media discourses, we counted the number of times when the BSEC was mentioned in the newspapers. As another indicator of media’s perception of the Black Sea’s ‘regioness’, we paid attention to the usage of terms such as: ‘Black Sea nation’, and ‘Black Sea country’.

In order to evaluate the scope of the media coverage of interstate relations across the region, we also paid attention to the articles on the bilateral relations in the Black Sea region, as well as to the area of cooperation (economy, ecology, and culture). In addition to this, we reviewed articles dedicated to the unilateral initiatives of the three abovementioned countries undertake in the region.

All the data collected was analyzed according to the declared priorities of the regional cooperation agreed by all countries-member states of the BSEC and reiterated in the national foreign policy doctrines and bilateral agreements. Thus, we can demonstrate media’s coverage of the Black Sea regional cooperation and the region itself in these three countries and compare it to the official governmental positions. This analysis allows us to make conclusions on the public perception of the Black Sea area and confirm or disprove assumptions about the ‘weak’ regional identity. Drawing on the results of the research we can also evaluate the potential role of the national media in formation of the more coherent public vision of the Black Sea region, as well as the on the governmental policy towards the area.

### ***The results of monitoring: Russian newspapers***

Name of the newspaper	Bilateral cooperation (all spheres)	BSEC	Black Sea region	Economy	Tourism	Ecology and environment
‘Gazeta.ru’	3	-	-	37	2	1
‘Kommersant’	8	-	1	59	12	1
‘The Moscow Times’	6	-	-	71	1	2

#### *‘Gazeta.ru’*

Topics covered by ‘Gazeta.ru’ evolved predominantly around Russian economic initiatives and activity in the Black Sea, such as oil and gas extraction from the Black Sea shelf, cooperation and concluding new agreements between ‘Rosneft’ and ‘Statoil’, ‘Rosneft’ and



'ExxonMobil'; oil and gas deposits on the Black Sea shelf; the construction of the 'South Stream' pipeline.

Article on ecology (1) dealt with the issues of the sea pollution in the Russian Black Sea waters.

### *'Kommersant'*

Articles on the Black Sea area were addressing the issues of Russian economic interests in the region (46) concentration on the topics of gas and oil extraction; cooperation of Russian oil companies with foreign counterparts in the Black Sea; construction of the 'South Stream' (7); property owned by Russian citizens on the Turkish Black Sea shore.

Articles on tourism (10) were covering the issues of main destinations for vacations among Russians; briefly addressing the problems of tourism on Russian coastal area; mentioning the opening of new Black Sea routes by Russian operators; cruise industry in the Black Sea region, including the expert's opinion on the industry in the area; the cruise tourism potential of the region was evaluated as one of the biggest and most promising in the world.

Article on ecology (1) dealt with the possible implications of the Winter Sochi Olympic Games on the Russian Black Sea area.

The concept of the 'Black Sea region' was mentioned once in the article covering the tourism development in the coastal area of Black Sea countries.

### *The Moscow Times*

In the newspaper we found 63 articles covering Russian economic activity in the region. The articles were addressing the issues of possible trade turnout in the Black Sea; Russian interests concerning the TAP (Trans-Adriatic Pipeline) project, Nabucco and the 'South Stream'; the prospective wheat harvest in the region. While talking about the establishment of a body for project coordination in the Arctic region, a positive example of the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank<sup>9</sup> was mentioned.

Articles on the bilateral relations (6) covered primary Russian-Turkish relations in terms of their strategic partnership and supply of Russian gas to Turkey; Turkish-Azeri relations concerning the TANAP project (Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline); Ukrainian-Turkish bilateral relations; and prospects for reviving cooperation between Russia and Georgia.

Article on tourism reviewed several tourist destinations across the Black Sea region, however not addressing the topic in the context of the Black Sea region.

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<sup>9</sup> The Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) is an international financial institution, related body of the BSEC, that supports economic development and regional cooperation by providing trade and project financing. Established in 1997.

Articles on ecology (2) represented environmental problems of the Russian and Georgian Black Sea coast.

Interesting enough, that phrase ‘Black Sea nation’ was used twice while addressing only to Georgia.

### ***Turkish newspapers***

Name of the newspaper	Bilateral cooperation (all spheres)	BSEC	Black Sea Region	Economy	Tourism	Ecology and environment
Hürriyet Daily News	19	38	40	30	1	3
Today's Zaman	31	72	22	28	-	5

### ***Hürriyet Daily News***

Articles on the economy (35), not addressing directly bilateral relations were covering the issues of shale gas extraction in the Black Sea; Nabucco project; cooperation between ‘Exxon Mobile’ and Turkey; Alexandroupolis pipeline project; The South Stream; Ukraine and its endeavors to join the TANAP project; Bulgaria, competition on the steel market between Turkey, Russia and Ukraine.

As one of the projects of interstate cooperation within the region the Black Sea Ring Highway Project – initiative proposed by the BSEC Secretary General Ambassador Leonidas Chrysanthopolous was mentioned, reporting on the current state of the project’s realization.

Bilateral cooperation in the region was covered in 19 articles. Generally, articles addressed issues of Russia-Turkey relations concerning the ‘South Stream’ evaluating the positive dynamics of bilateral cooperation; Turkish – Azeri – Georgian trade cooperation; Russian – Turkish strategic partnership; cooperation between Georgia and Turkey, Azerbaijan and Turkey; boosting economic cooperation between Greece and Turkey; the signing free trade agreement between Ukraine and Turkey.

Ecology and environmental issues of the Black Sea were covered in 3 articles. One of the articles directly addressed the CoCoNET project sponsored by the EU. This project is one of the largest maritime initiatives undertaken in the Black Sea basin aimed at the enhancing of effective environmental management policies in the Black and Mediterranean Seas.

Within the period of monitoring there were 40 references to the Black Sea as a region. They referred to the wheat and hazelnut production, capacity of food production in the Black Sea area, oil extraction in the Black Sea. However, in the most cases, ‘Black Sea region’ was

mentioned in terms of cross-regional partnership between the Black and Caspian Seas countries, and while addressing the cooperation between the Black Sea states within the BSEC. Moreover, the 'Black Sea' is used as hyperlink in the newspaper. Partly, it could be explained due to the Turkish administrative structure, where 'Black Sea region' refers to one of the seven census-defined geographical regions (bölge).

Activities of the BSEC received a substantial coverage in the 'Hürriyet Daily News'. Thus, within the period of monitoring, there were 38 references to the organization and 29 articles addressing the issues of regional cooperation within the BSEC and its related bodies. One of the articles was dedicated to the PABSEC's activities and its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary (in 2013). Another one covered all BSEC's related bodies<sup>10</sup>. During the official celebrations of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary (in 2012) in the newspaper appeared news covering the official meetings and summits, analytical articles depicting the BSEC twenty years heritage and significance to the region, and evaluating the prospects for further cooperation. In addition to this, speeches of the Presidents and Heads of Governments of the BSEC Member States (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Turkey) were published in the newspaper.

Generally, the celebrations of the BSEC 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary attracted a profound attention in the newspaper. Thus, for example a special news section dedicated to the Anniversary was created. This could be explained by the fact that Turkey was taking over the rotating chairmanship at the BSEC on the anniversary year, as well as because this country was the main initiator of the establishment of the BSEC in 1992. Moreover, main celebrations in 2012 were taking place in Istanbul.

### *Today's Zaman*

In Today's Zaman articles concerning the economic issues within the region (28) were addressing the issues of oil exploration and prospective drilling in the Black Sea; Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) and its deal with the 'Shell'; Turkish energy security; Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline; Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP); Nabucco project ; Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP) and Tajikistan's participation in the project; South Stream project. Except for one (on the Turkish energy security which was written in a form of analytical article) articles were reporting on the news related to the abovementioned topics.

Ecology and environmental issues were covered in 5 articles. Four of them were reporting on the deteriorating environmental situation in the Black Sea, and one was dedicated to the Black Sea seabird's project. In the article 'Black Sea in danger of becoming 'dead sea'<sup>11</sup> a comprehensive report on the environmental situation in the whole Black Sea was presented,

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<sup>10</sup> Organization works together with related bodies, affiliated centers:  
<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/organization-works-together-with-related-bodies-affiliated-centers.aspx?pageID=238&nID=24063&NewsCatID=457%D0%95>

<sup>11</sup> 'Black Sea in danger of becoming 'dead sea': <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-279486-black-sea-in-danger-of-becoming-dead-sea.html>

including expert's opinion and enlisting environmental initiatives and projects undertaken in the Black Sea area.

Bilateral relations of the Black Sea states were addressed in 31 articles. Among them dominated articles reporting on the bilateral visits of the Heads of States (visit of Romanian Foreign Minister to Turkey; visit of Turkish President to Russia and Ukraine). Obviously, almost all articles were reporting on the Turkish relations with countries across the region. However, a number of them covered bilateral relations of Black Sea countries, but not Turkey. For example, Russian-Azerbaijani, Russian – Georgian, Azerbaijani-Georgian relations, as well as Ukrainians relations with Russia and the EU were covered in a number of posts in the Today's Zaman.

It is worth mentioning that the BSEC was not mentioned in the articles addressing bilateral cooperation, especially when bilateral ties were not saturated with active economic interaction (as, for example, in Russian-Turkish relations). On the other hand, the BSEC was a point of reference when the cooperation between the states was not so active (Turkey and Moldova, for example).

Within the period of monitoring, the BSEC was mentioned 72 times. There were articles addressing the Organization's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, ministerial meetings and projects undertaken by the BSEC Member States. Three articles were dedicated to the eroding significance of the BSEC in the region, as well as contained analysis of its work and recommendations for the perspective revival of institutional cooperation<sup>12</sup>. BSEC related bodies (PABSEC and the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank) were mentioned in the contexts of BSEC cooperation.

In several articles BSEC was addressed as the 'Turkish initiative'<sup>13</sup>, stressing the leading role this country played in the Black Sea institutional development.

Three articles addressed the EU's initiatives in the Black Sea area, mainly the Black Sea Synergy<sup>14</sup> briefly mentioning the existing projects, however, not evaluating their impact on the region.

'Black Sea region' was mentioned in publications 22 times during the monitoring period. Predominantly, 'Black Sea region' was mentioned in the articles dedicated to the BSEC cooperation. In other cases, we could hardly find the reference to the Black Sea as a region.

### ***Ukrainian newspapers***

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, 'Looking at the geopolitics of the Black Sea from Trabzon': [http://www.todayszaman.com/columnistDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=286045](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnistDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=286045)

<sup>13</sup> BSEC foreign ministerial meeting to be hosted by Turkey: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-301093-bsec-foreign-ministerial-meeting-to-be-hosted-by-turkey.html>

<sup>14</sup> EU's regional cooperation initiative 'Black Sea Synergy' was launched in 2007.

Name of the newspaper	Bilateral cooperation (all spheres)	BSEC	Black Sea region	Economy	Tourism	Ecology and Environment
'Ukrajins'ka pravda'	4	4	1	24	-	3
'Dzerkalo Tyzhnya'	5	2	1	39	2	4
'Kyiv Post'	31	3	17	51	6	1

### *'Ukrajins'ka pravda'*

Articles addressing economy issues in the Black Sea (24) were covering the next topics: corruption in Ukrainian government concerning the drilling equipment in the Black Sea; the 'Blue Stream' pipeline and Russian pipeline Black Sea projects in general; increase in governmental purchases of the drilling equipment for the Black Sea shale gas extraction; Russian plans of pipeline construction and Russian - Ukrainian relations; gas and oil fields in the Black Sea; Ukrainian plans for gas and oil extraction from the Black Sea shelf.

Articles on bilateral cooperation (4) addressed the next topics: the delimitation of the Azov Sea and the bilateral (Russian-Ukrainian) usage of the Kerch-Yenikal's'ky canal; Turkish – Russian energy cooperation in terms of the signing of 'South Stream' agreement.

Articles addressing ecology and environment (3) were depicting problems with a local pollution of the Black Sea near such cities as Odessa and Yalta.

In a blogs of the newspaper we could find a post of Ukrainian minister of foreign affairs Mr. Kozhara who is calling 'to take a closer look at the South'<sup>15</sup>, meaning the Black Sea area. The Minister considers the possibility of strengthening cooperation in the Black Sea region, where he sees great prospects for Ukraine. It remains only one article (although blog-style) where we can find some analysis of the Black Sea regional cooperation outlined in non-academic language. In this blog post we find the only reference to the Black Sea as a region in terms of its 'wider' scope, taking into account all twelve BSEC Member States. The BSEC itself was mentioned four times in articles on the start of Ukrainian Chairmanship in the BSEC in January 2013.

### *'Dzerkalo Tyzhnya'*

Articles on the economy thematic (32) were addressing the issues of Russian 'South stream' project and its financing; the court's decision on right for oil extraction on the Black Sea shelf; 'South Stream' and interests of the EU and Ukraine concerning the Russian project; the signing the agreement with the Exxon Mobil on the oil and gas extraction on the Black Sea

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<sup>15</sup> The Black Sea: the view from Mykhailivska Street:  
<http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/kozhara/51651f6205011/>

shelf; Ukrainian gas fields in the Black Sea; the implications of the construction of the 'South Stream' for Russian – Ukrainian relations; the EU's possible role in preventing the 'South Stream' construction; the energy independence of Ukraine and its perspective gas fields in the Black Sea; the Ukrainian effort to attract investors to its Black Sea shelf; Romanian gas and oil exploration in the Black Sea; Ukrainian diplomatic efforts to prevent the 'South Stream' construction; Ukraine's interest in construction of the Transcaspien gas pipeline.

Bilateral relations in the Black Sea area were covered in 5 articles: on the Ankara's reaction on the construction of the LNG terminal by Ukraine on the Black Sea coast; the delimitation of the Azov Sea between Ukraine and Russia; the role of Ukrainian gas transit capacities in terms of 'South Stream' construction. Additionally, we found 44 articles addressing the Ukrainian – Russian agreement on the status of the Russian Black Sea in Crimea.

The newspaper reposted Mr. Kozhara's blog post on the cooperation in the Black Sea area. Thus, only this post directly addressed regional cooperation in the Black Sea area within the BSEC, as well as mentioning the BSEC.

#### *'Kyiv Post'*

In this newspaper we found 52 articles dedicated to the economic cooperation in the Black Sea area. As in previous newspapers, it addressed unilateral or bilateral initiatives of the regional stakeholders and did not cover activities within the BSEC or other institution in the region. Thus, these articles covered the next topics: the wheat production boost in the Black Sea area; gas and oil extraction from Ukrainian Black Sea shelf; Black Sea oil exploration agreement between the U.S. company 'Vanco' and the Ukrainian government; negotiations on the construction of the 'South Stream'; shale gas deposits in the Ukrainian Black Sea area; Ukrainian tenders on the floating drilling rigs; Ukrainian plans to sign the production-sharing agreement with Chevron; the renovation of the Ukrainian Black Sea ports; Ukrainian objection to the 'South Stream' project; EU's attitude to the 'South Stream' project; the Shah-Deniz Phase-2 and gas supply plans from Azerbaijan to Ukraine; the construction of the LNG-terminal; the bill of pipeline privatization in Ukraine; 'South Stream' and the danger it poses to Ukraine national interests; 'Shevron' and the possible shale gas deal in Ukraine'; Ukraine's agreement with 'Royal Dutch Shell' on shale gas extraction.

Bilateral cooperation in the region was represented in 31 articles. They covered the next topics: conditions of Russian fleet presence in Ukraine; delimitation of the border between Ukraine and Russia; negotiations on the grain pool creation between Russia and Ukraine; Russian-Bulgarian cooperation on the possible oil pipeline construction; Ukrainian-Turkish cooperation in energy sector; Russian gas supply to Turkey; negotiations between Ukraine and Azerbaijan on gas supply; Georgia's initiative to reinvestigate 2008 war loss to Russia; Georgian plans of rebuilding trade ties with Russia; visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Ukraine.

Articles on tourism (6) addressed the issues of the cruising in the Black Sea; Black Sea resorts; Crimea's potential for cruise tourism; the opening of new ferry routes in the Black

Sea; the prospects of Ukrainian tourism industry; Ukrainian plans to expand its tourism industry.

Ecology issues were addressed only in one article on the Yalta's municipal; initiative of turning the city into the cleanest resort on the coast.

Within the monitoring period we found 3 articles mentioning the BSEC, while talking about Ukrainian Presidency in this Organization. At the same time, 'Black Sea region' was mentioned 17 times, however, the term's usage was limited to the Black Sea area's potential in the wheat production.

### **Analysis**

The results of the monitoring demonstrated a rather fragmental coverage of the Black Sea region in Russian, Turkish and Ukrainian newspapers. Moreover, the Black Sea region as an entity was scarcely represented in the news, reportages and analytical articles of the newspapers monitored. However, coverage in Turkish 'Hürriyet Daily News' and 'Today's Zaman' was more region – oriented and focused on the institutional cooperation within the wider Black Sea region.

Despite the fact that the time span chosen for the monitoring was saturated with a plethora of events dedicated to the activities in the region, only Turkish newspapers paid a substantial attention to the Black Sea area, addressing the problems and positive developments of institutional cooperation. Drawing on the results of the monitoring, we could conclude that bilateral cooperation between the Black Sea states and unilateral initiatives in the region received a much more comprehensive coverage and was dominating in the monitored newspapers of the three countries.

Thus, economic issues in the Black Sea region, covered in the newspapers addressed energy cooperation between some countries in the region. Lavish coverage on the pipelines projects in the wider Black Sea region once more underlined the strategic importance of the region in maintaining energy security across the area and beyond<sup>16</sup>. Newspaper coverage on the pipelines, such as 'South Stream', 'Nabucco', 'Blue Stream', demonstrated a strong public interest towards these issues. Even minor news on the negotiation process or construction were accompanied by the expert's analysis and followed by lavish commentaries by the reader's audience. However, energy has never been a uniting factor in the Black Sea region<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, newspapers did not address regional energy cooperation while talking about various pipeline projects in the region, despite the fact that energy has always dominated the agenda of BSEC regional cooperation with the claims of

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<sup>16</sup> Stated in official BSEC documents, such as Declarations on Cooperation in the Field of Energy (2003), Alexandroupolis Declarations (2005) and Statement of Ministers of Energy of the Member states of BSEC (2006), as well as in the EU's initiative in the region: 'Black Sea Synergy-a New Regional Cooperation Initiative' (2007).

<sup>17</sup> C., Fraser, 'BSEC- Lessons from the EU' in '20 years BSEC. Evolution of Institutions, Evolution of Priorities: Interlinks within the Black Sea Region in a New Era', Xenophon Paper №12, October 2012

‘establishing an efficiently operating energy market in the Black Sea region’<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, despite the declared endeavors of mutual cooperation in the energy sector, monitoring showed a profound degree of bilateral distrust (in Russian-Ukrainian relations particularly) in terms of Russian plans to diminish significance of Ukrainian gas transit capacities.

Looking at the region through the lens of newspapers monitored, the Black Sea is unfolding its economic potential, especially in the field of oil and gas shale extraction, wheat production and transportation, and this process is being accompanied with a profound attention in the media in the three monitored countries. However, institutional instruments (BSEC in particular) are not being mentioned in internal media discourse as a promoter of economic cooperation, despite the declared ‘growing significance of the BSEC’<sup>19</sup>. The Black Sea discourse in national media of Russia and Ukraine did not present the Black Sea as an entity, rather as the field of contrasting visions and interest.

Unlike energy issues in the Black Sea area, tourism regional development (being another milestone of the declared regional cooperation among Black Sea states<sup>20</sup>) was scarcely covered in the newspapers during the monitoring period. As an exception, in the ‘Kommersant’ we found 12 articles describing the Black Sea touristic potential on the regional scale. In others newspapers, we found a limited acknowledgement of the Black Sea’s touristic potential, as well as ‘the increase of interest in the expansion of joint activity’<sup>21</sup> in the region.

Ecology and environment received a particularly small coverage in the newspapers monitored. Taking in account its geographical location and intensive economic activity, the Black Sea region for a long time has been ‘at the centre of environmental concerns’<sup>22</sup>. However, environment and nature of the Black Sea area remained rather out of the newspapers’ agenda. Only one article in ‘Today’s Zaman’ was particularly focused on the danger of the Black Sea to become a ‘dead sea’<sup>23</sup>. All others (19) were addressing the problems of local pollution (in Odessa, Yalta, Sochi) without making a reference to the wider region. Moreover, only one environmental initiative was mentioned in this context: EU-sponsored CoCoNet project. No reference to the BSEC was made, although the Organization has a developed environmental agenda<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Declaration of the Ministers of Energy of the BSEC Member States on the Establishment of an Integrated Black Sea Energy Market, Sofia, Bulgaria, 28 January 2010

<sup>19</sup> From the Ahmed Davutoglu’s speech at the 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the BSEC member states in Istanbul, December 2012

<sup>20</sup> Istanbul Summit Declaration, 1992

<sup>21</sup> Action Plan of the BSEC Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism During the Term-in-office of the Russian Federation as the Country –Coordinator, (1 January 2011-31 December 2012)

<sup>22</sup> Z., Dimadama, A., Timotheou, Greening the Black Sea: Overcoming Inefficiency and Fragmentation through Environmental Governance, p. 4

<sup>23</sup> Black Sea in danger of becoming ‘dead sea’: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-279486-black-sea-in-danger-of-becoming-dead-sea.html>

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, BSEC Action Plan for Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection, 2006



Taking in account that we indicated terms like ‘Black Sea region’, ‘Black Sea nation and ‘Black Sea country’ as indicators of the Black Sea ‘regioness’, and drawing on the results of the monitoring, we could conclude that the idea of the ‘Black Sea region’ presented in the newspapers is different in Russia and Ukraine on the one hand, and Turkey on the other. Thus, in Russian newspapers we found only one reference to the Black Sea region and 19 in Ukrainian. However, in case of Ukrainian ‘Kyiv Post’, reference to the Black Sea region was mentioned in most cases (14) in terms of wheat production, thus, addressing mainly Russia, Turkey and Ukraine which belong to the largest wheat producers in the world<sup>25</sup>. In other cases, ‘Black Sea region’ was mentioned only while reporting on the Ukrainian Chairmanship of the BSEC. Organization itself received a little attention – both in Ukrainian and Russian newspapers we found no article dedicated to the BSEC, even during 2012, a year of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, and periods of their Chairmanship in the BSEC. On the contrary, in Turkish newspapers both the BSEC and the ‘Black Sea region’ were mentioned in a number of articles depicting regional cooperation, potential of the BSEC and the region, and Turkish leading role in stimulating the BSEC’ activity. Moreover, only in Turkish newspapers we found references to the country as the ‘Black Sea state/country’, however only two.

Thus, data collected showed that in media perspective, Turkey is the most region-oriented country among those monitored. This media dynamics follows the long-standing focus of Turkish government, posing Turkey as the regional leader<sup>26</sup>. Being Turkish initiative and, at one time serving even like an alternative to the membership in the EU<sup>27</sup>, BSEC received a substantial coverage in local newspapers. Articles were reporting on rotating chairmanship in the organization, as well as analyzing the organization’s activity. In contrast to the official statements and speeches (which were re-printed in ‘Today’s Zaman’, for example) depicting the strategic role of the organization in the region<sup>28</sup>, author’s opinions were more critical, pointing at the Organization’s inefficiency<sup>29</sup> and calling for the more proactive position. At the same time, the idea of ‘Black Sea region’ expressed in two Turkish newspapers appeared to be more comprehensively covered than in Ukrainian and Russian ones.

In Turkish newspapers we found the reference to the Black Sea region while addressing not only BSEC, but economic potential of the region, environmental situation, as well as bilateral relations (between Turkey and Serbia). However, while addressing relations between Turkey and Russia, Turkey and Greece or Turkey and Armenia) no reference was made either to the BSEC or to the Black Sea region. Thus, regional cooperation in the Black Sea region could

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<sup>25</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,

<sup>26</sup> M., Aydin, O., Fazlioglu, ‘The Turkish Policy Towards the Wider Black Sea Region and its Chairmanship of the BSEC (May-October 2007) in ‘Unfolding the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Views from the Region’, Xenophon Paper No. 2, 2007

<sup>27</sup> M., Emerson, M., Vahl, ‘Europe and the Black Sea – Model Regionalism, Pret-a-porter’, in ‘Europe’s Black Sea Dimension, Centre for European Policy Studies, 2002, p. 10

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the speech of Turkish President Abdullah Gül speech ‘BSEC working for stability, prosperity’: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/bsec-working-for-stability-prosperity.aspx?pageID=238&nID=24054&NewsCatID=457>

<sup>29</sup> ‘Looking at the geopolitics of the Black Sea from Trabzon’: [http://www.todayszaman.com/columnistDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=286045](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnistDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=286045)

serve as the platform for 'mutual understanding' and meetings, but active cooperation, according to the presented media analysis, is associated with bilateral ties.

Russian newspapers demonstrated the lowest interest to the Black Sea region. None of newspapers monitored reported on the Russian Chairmanship in the BSEC. However, energy cooperation between Turkey and Russia, pipeline projects in the region, as well as Black Sea's potential for oil and gas extraction were extensively covered, although not contributing to the greater public awareness about the Black Sea region and its problems, as well as institutional cooperation in the region.

Like Russian newspapers, Ukrainian press monitored appeared to be rather reluctant in describing issues related to the Black Sea region and the BSEC. In this way, Ukrainian and Russian newspapers demonstrated highly 'bilateral' approach while referring to the Black Sea. Moreover, during the monitoring period we found no reference describing Ukraine or Russia as the 'Black Sea country' or 'Black Sea nation'.

As another characteristic we could identify rather small number of articles addressing the EU's interests and activities in the region. Only three articles covered EU-Black Sea cooperation.

We could hardly find any differences in the Black Sea coverage between English-language and Ukrainian/Russian language newspapers in Ukraine and Russian consequently. However, in both 'Kyiv Post' and 'The Moscow Times' we found more articles covering economic initiatives and cooperation in the Black Sea.

Results of monitoring demonstrated rather weak self-identification of being the 'Black Sea' country presented in media discourse in Russia, Turkey (to less degree) and Ukraine. Despite lavish coverage of economic activities in the area undertaken by three countries, they were predominantly projected in terms of country's individual interests or bilateral cooperation. Thus, the coverage of the Black Sea region (where it was presented) appeared to be fragmental, irregular and stimulated by formal activities (such as celebration of the BSEC 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary) rather than by day-to-day cooperation or organic perception of the Black Sea as a region. At the same time, monitoring showed that BSEC secures the main role as promoter of the Black Sea 'regioness'<sup>30</sup>, as articles addressing the BSEC activities were constantly mentioning the 'Black Sea region'. However, taking into account a scarce attention paid by media to the BSEC, we could not rely on the 'spillover' effect in popularizing idea of Black Sea region by media, especially in Russia and Ukraine. Turkish newspapers, due to the country's geographical location and a self-acclaimed status of regional leader, demonstrated more attention to the regional affairs, however, predominantly, in institutional terms.

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<sup>30</sup> S. A., Andreev , 'The future of European neighbourhood policy and the role of regional cooperation in the Black Sea area, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies', p. 99

## How could we explain such results?

*The low efficiency of institutional cooperation in the region.* The BSEC is suffering from the ‘CIS malaise’ where institutional inefficiency and the lack of political will for stronger cooperation almost nullify strong potential of the Organization. The economic agenda declared in 1992, although serving as a compromise and an attempt for building trust in a highly polarized region, was not strengthened with the political endeavors for regional building. Moreover, the strictly intergovernmental nature of the Organization<sup>31</sup> leaves no room for the development of the ‘Black Sea civil society’ and bottom-up initiatives within the BSEC which could smooth an uneasy process of mutual understanding and contribute to the fostering of the Black Sea’s ‘regioness’. In addition to this, intergovernmental cooperation lacks a strong leadership and, of course, resources to encourage these activities.

All factors mentioned above contributed to the situation when the BSEC turned to be a ‘side-effect’ of European integration<sup>32</sup>, rather than a distinctive form of regional cooperation. Low efficiency of the BSEC directly influences its coverage in national media, and turns it into a media phantom, rather than a permanent point of reference.

*The lack of an academic interest to the region.* Although countries in the region are the subjects of constant academic research, their Black Sea regional perspective remains rather understudied. Black Sea identity of these countries is undermined by much stronger affiliations with historical regions: Balkans, Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Mediterranean or the Middle East. Thus, it contributes to the perception of the Black Sea region as an artificial construct, stimulated only by the governmental efforts within the BSEC.

*The lack of internet-resources on the Black Sea region.* While conducting the monitoring, we discovered that there is a limited number of Internet sources covering the Black Sea region. Except for the official sites of the BSEC and its related bodies, we found only two sites with the current information (news on the wider Black Sea region) on the Black Sea – The Black Sea News and The BSANNA News (The Black Sea Association of National News Agencies). These sites are reposting news from the national news agencies (in case of THE BSANNA News – from all BSEC Member States) in both English and Russian (The BSANNA News publishes information in Ukrainian as well). However, by reposting information on the Black Sea states, these resources do not aim at promoting the Black Sea as a coherent region.

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<sup>31</sup> A 2020 vision for the Black Sea Region, A Report by the Commission on the Black Sea, p. 37

<sup>32</sup> Aydin, ‘Regional cooperation in the Black Sea and the role of institutions’, p. 59

## The Black Sea region and the 'new' social media

*Results of the monitoring*<sup>33</sup>

Name of the institution	'Likes' on FB	Followers on Twitter
BSEC	149	No account
ICBSS	1860	125
PABSEC	No account	No account
Black Sea Trade and Development Bank	25	No account
UNDP Black Sea	55	6
Black Sea Universities Network	104	No account
Black Sea News	228	No account
Black Sea Trust For Regional Cooperation	578	No account
Black Sea NGO Forum	406	42
BSANNA News	125	21

While having concluded that 'traditional' media in Russia, Turkey and Ukraine have shown no profound interest in the Black Sea regional cooperation, we aim at complementing the monitoring looking at the representation of the Black Sea in the 'new' social media.

Here, we use the next definition of the 'new' social media – 'media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media use Web-based technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogues'<sup>34</sup>.

After the events of the Arab Spring, protests in Russia (2011-2012) and, recently, in Turkey, social media were transformed from a mere instrument of communication into an important mobilization tool. In most cases, social media were not solely the re-translators of official news, but served as the alternative and more reliable sources of information. In less than three years social media turned to be an important element of civil society, communication between the government and its citizens and a platform for the grass-root as well as nation and world initiatives.

The Black Sea region has demonstrated a strong receptivity of social media trends. As Markku Lonkila argues, during the 2011 Moscow protests, social media (Live Journal and Facebook and Twitter mainly) were 'functioning both as an alternative arena for public debate and as a tool for mobilizing the protests'<sup>35</sup>. Following the recent protests in Turkey, Heather Grabbe even stated that 'Turkey's Twitter generation is its European future'<sup>36</sup>. Thus,

<sup>33</sup> As for 19 August, 2013

<sup>34</sup> M., Corstjens, A., Umblijs, 'The power of evil : the damage of negative social media strongly outweigh positive contributions', Journal of advertising research, Volume 52, №4, p. 433

<sup>35</sup> M., Lonkila, The Role of Social Media in the Moscow Opposition Demonstrations in December 2011, FIIA Briefing Paper 98, February 2012, p. 2

<sup>36</sup> H., Grabbe, 'Turkey's Twitter Generation ISs Its European Future': <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/turkey-s-twitter-generation-its-european-future>

social media has proven its potential for people's mobilization and active civil engagement. Bearing this in mind, we could presume that social media tools could effectively serve as the alternative platform for the promotion of the Black Sea as a region and, at the same time, filling in the gap of missing civil society component in regional cooperation.

In his case study of social media usage in developing an effective citizen engagement at the local level, Thomas Bryer suggests next strategies:

- adversarial engagement, defined as using the social media space to provide equal opportunity, without censorship, to all positions and interests on an issue;
- information exchange, defined as using the social media space to provide regular updates using text and visual media to communicate the status of project planning or program development and implementation;
- collaborative engagement, defined as using the social media space to provide stakeholders and citizens with an equal opportunity to contribute ideas, raise questions, and have project leaders, policy makers, and others respond to those ideas and questions<sup>37</sup>.

For the purposes we outlined above, social media tools could be used in all three ways for networking, ideas exchange and promotion of regional initiatives, both governmental and non-governmental. Looking at the results of monitoring, we could conclude that the Black Sea regional institutions and regional initiatives are underrepresented in the social media, ignoring the audience of 61, 33 million users only on the Facebook<sup>38</sup>, and not taking into account other social media tools which are popular in the region, such as Twitter (Turkey) and Live Journal (Russia).

Blog-style information (supported by all kinds of institutions working in the area) on the Black Sea region will compensate the lack of media coverage of the Black Sea in traditional media. Moreover, it could serve as the interactive platform for communication between regional policy-makers, researchers and civil society activists, and, in this way, compensate solely intergovernmental approach which is prevailing in the BSEC. At this moment, the International Centre for Black Sea Studies, related body of the BSEC and its official think-tank, is taking steps in this direction being actively engaged in a number of social networks and promoting civil society engagement in the regional institutional cooperation.

Addressing regional problems with the means of new social media could stimulate the region's 're-discovery' by researches, civil society activists, policy-makers and those interested in the region. Moreover, taking into account, the accessibility and a proven mobilizing potential of social media, it could contribute to the development of greater Black Sea identity and 'regiosness'.

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<sup>37</sup> T., Bryer, *Designing Social Media Strategies for Effective Citizen Engagement. A Case Example and Model*, National Civic Review, 2013, Volume 102, Issue, pp. 46-49

<sup>38</sup> Socialbakers: [www.socialbakers.com](http://www.socialbakers.com)

## Conclusions

The results of monitoring have demonstrated a limited interest in national media of Russia, Turkey and Ukraine towards the Black Sea in terms of regional cooperation. In the media discourses of abovementioned countries the Black Sea was presented fragmentally, looking at the bilateral relations and depicting contesting interests in the area, especially in the spheres of energy. Being largely presented as the part of internal politics, the concept of the Black Sea as a region was largely ignored by newspapers in abovementioned countries. Thus, the results presented demonstrated that media coverage of the Black Sea is largely retranslating the policy-making process in the area, rather than making impact on the problem-definition (security and environmental challenges of the region were in most cases ignored by the media). Taking into account that the institutional stalemate of the BSEC and low efficiency of other regional initiatives could not contribute to the development of the common Black Sea identity, we conclude that national media has a limited impact on fostering the Black Sea 'regioness' as well.

However, due to the growing popularity and potential of the 'new' social media in the region, it could serve as the new platform for popularizing the Black Sea region and reinvigorating the civil society engagement into the regional cooperation.

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