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## *Vulnerabilities and Opportunities in the Black Sea region - Romanian perspective -*

Strategic and geopolitical stakes have always been high in the Black Sea region. Regional developments, both positive and negative, continue to affect the vital interests of the countries and peoples situated along the sea shore, sending reverberations well beyond its confines. For countries like Turkey and Romania, linked as they are in a Strategic Partnership, it is important to identify correctly the challenges and opportunities that inevitably arise at a time of unprecedented change. The scientific and academic communities in the two countries have a significant part to play in this regard by sharing conceptual and analytical approaches and seeking adequate responses to the increasingly complicated issues we all have to face.

Viewed from Bucharest, Turkey has been a major regional actor for centuries and, in the past 25 years, has taken the lead in promoting a constructive, future-oriented agenda for the Black Sea region. Turkey's political, economic and military capacity entitles it to play such a role also in the future. Recent regional developments have brought home the notion that Turkey is also a significant actor in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern space. In a statement that reflects the feelings of most Romanians, the President of Romania described Turkey as "indispensable ally for regional stability". This joint paper is intended as a meaningful contribution to the on-going intellectual dialogue designed to further strengthen the excellent bilateral relations between Romania and Turkey.



Black Sea region neighbouring countries

## Historical background

Since ancient and mediaeval times, the Black Sea has been the point of intersection of flourishing civilisations and sometimes bitter rivalries for political supremacy or control over trade and maritime routes. Modern history brought to the fore such fundamental issues as the preservation of the regional balance of power and freedom of navigation. That was the reason for the Crimean War of 1853-1856, when major European countries joined Turkey to frustrate Russia's imperial ambitions in the region.

The legal status of the Black Sea (Turkish) Straits was eventually settled through the Montreux Convention of 1936, one of the few international inter-war agreements still valid today. Its military provisions, while upholding the principle of free navigation and trade, introduced certain restrictions on the tonnage and duration of sojourn for the naval vessels belonging to non-riparian states.

After World War II, during the cold war, the Soviet Union and its satellites controlled most of the Black Sea littoral with the exception of Turkey, a NATO member state. That was a period of relative (and uneasy) stability in the context of strategic stalemate. The dissolution of the USSR (1991), the newly acquired independence of the former Soviet republics and the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO (2004) and the European Union (2007) changed the political picture in and around the Black Sea once more.

For almost two decades, it appeared that the Black Sea region was settling into a new pattern of modern development and constructive cooperation in an increasingly secure environment. NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP, 1994) helped the aspiring candidates and

post-Soviet independent states alike to downsize and modernize their armed forces, introduce civilian controls over the military and security establishments, and enhance inter-operative capabilities.

The European Union followed up with generous offers of assistance for institution building and administrative reform in the complex transition of those countries to market economy and functional democracy with specific financial instruments under the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership. As early as 1992, Turkey came up with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) initiative, which eventually developed into a full-fledged regional organisation under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. The EU responded with the Black Sea Synergy project, which was launched in 2008.

## A change of strategic paradigm

It all started with the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008, which resulted in the de facto incorporation of one-third of Georgia's sovereign territory into the Russian sphere of military control. The reaction of the Euro-Atlantic community – distracted by the on-going operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the onset of the financial-economic crisis – was weak and inconclusive.

This, combined with other internal and external factors, may have encouraged Russia to take a more assertive course by resorting to its growing military power as a primary instrument of foreign policy.

The next, more ominous step was the 'hybrid' penetration and eventual illegal annexation of the Ukrainian province of Crimea, plus active involvement in support of the secessionist enclaves in south-eastern Ukraine.

The significant military participation of a Russian expeditionary force in the Syrian theatre of war and more subtle political and economic demarches in the Western Balkans indicate the existence of a deliberate geostrategic design to assert Russian supremacy in a wider sphere of self-described 'privileged interests'.

All this relies on an unprecedented military build-up, a demonstrated willingness to use force in order to protect its perceived interests, and extensive, purposeful use of propaganda, information warfare and intelligence operations.

No other region is more illustrative of this trend toward changing the status quo – which Russia now deems to be unsatisfactory – than the Black Sea. The rapid transformation of Crimea into a military stronghold, a sort of land-based aircraft carrier or anti-access area denial zone (A2/AD) was accompanied by an unprecedented growth in the numbers and modern capabilities of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

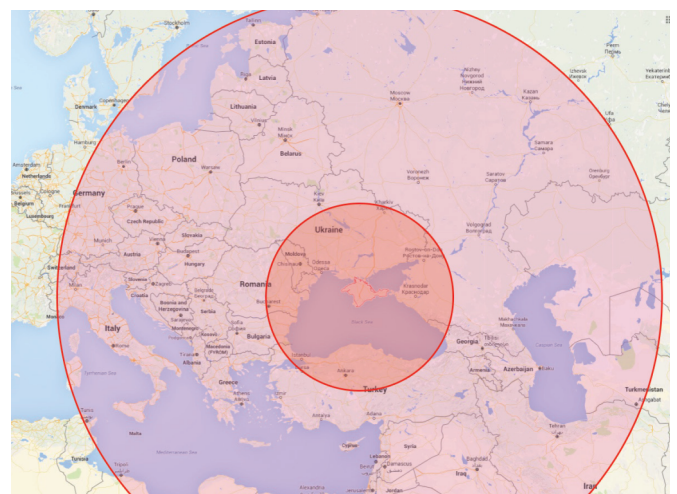
Prior to the occupation of Crimea, the Russian Black Sea navy had 26 surface vessels, 2 submarines, 22 fixed-wing aircraft and 37 helicopters.

These were outmatched by the naval forces of the NATO countries: Turkey (44 surface ships, 13 submersibles) plus the outdated and poorly armed navies of Romania (3 frigates, 4 corvettes, 4 missile patrol boats) and Bulgaria (4 frigates, 2 corvettes, 3 missile boats).

This is no longer the case. In the meantime, Russia confiscated 70 per cent of the Ukrainian navy and added new capabilities, so that, by the end of 2015, it had 41 surface vessels and 9 submarines in the Black Sea.

According to procurement plans, by 2020, the Russian Black Sea fleet will add 20 new missile corvettes and other craft. Air cover is now provided by 74 aircraft and 61 helicopters, plus 2 regiments of surface to air missiles.

Offensive capabilities are supplemented by land-based and sea-borne Kalibr missiles which have southern Italy, southern Germany and the whole of Central Europe within range. Some of those weapons, including cruise missiles, can be fitted with nuclear warheads.



**Range Kalibr cruise missile and Iskander ballistic missile**

There have been so many surprises of late in the wider Black Sea space that any attempt to fathom what is likely to happen next is a thankless exercise. Still, here are some hypothetical developments which, though improbable, may yet come to pass, at least in theory.

One of them could be serious tensions over maritime space resulting from the incorporation of Crimea by Russia. In the absence of formal, legal delimitation of the territorial waters and air space, continental shelf and exclusive economic zones in the Black Sea, Russia has proceeded with unilateral imposition of its claims by force and confiscation of assets.

Under international law and accepted practice, the least that may happen is a series of very costly litigations and arbitration cases. It is now obvious that the strategic balance in the Black Sea region has shifted and is likely to become dangerous.

Recent developments have shown that the ramifications of this new situation can (and do) spread to wider areas such as the Levant and the Greater Middle East as well as, potentially, to the Balkans.

When faced with apparently intractable problems, we are witnessing a temptation to resort to military force as a substitute to rational political dialogue and reasonable accommodation of mutual legitimate interests within the principles, rules and accepted practice of international relations. This is the first and, probably, the most serious vulnerability in terms of regional stability and security.



New exclusive economic zone delimitation in the Black Sea before and after the occupation of Crimea, the Russian vision

## The nature of 'frozen' conflicts

The second, and related, vulnerability arises from the so-called 'frozen' or protracted conflicts in the Black Sea region. It is not a mere coincidence that all those conflicts are located in the territories of newly independent republics that emerged after the dissolution of the USSR. They include Nagorno-Karabakh (with an inter-state component between Armenia and Azerbaijan), the Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, now self-proclaimed but unrecognized 'independent' states under Russian military control, and Transnistria, a break-away part of the sovereign territory of the Republic of Moldova, where a Russian garrison is unlawfully stationed.

The illegally annexed Crimea and the Russia-sponsored separatist enclaves of Donetsk and Lugansk in Ukraine also fit that category.

In all those cases, what is 'frozen' today can become easily 'unfrozen' tomorrow, quickly degenerating into open military confrontation. Whenever such conflicts occurred, Russia promptly stepped in to stop hostilities for a while without addressing their root causes and typically introducing a 'temporary' peace-keeping force which never intended to leave the scene, thus securing a permanent Russian military presence. The experience of the past two decades has confirmed that Russian strategic planners are able to turn those conflicts on and off at will depending on Moscow's political and military interests at the moment. Whenever similar tensions arise in parts of the Russian Federation, they are dealt with and terminated ruthlessly; they are never 'frozen'. The perverse effects of such practices are seen in the political and societal weakening of the target states, exacerbation of internal divisions, economic stagnation and aid-dependence which may last for generations.



Frozen Conflicts in the Black Sea Area

## What about opportunities?

The fact that we have to concentrate on redressing the strategic balance and restoring the primacy of the unanimously agreed principles and norms of international law in and around the Black Sea should not obscure the perennial need to keep the channels of communication open and to engage in constructive debates on realistic ways to move things forward both bilaterally and in a multilateral, regional format.

The positive experience of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and other regional projects and initiatives should not be allowed to wither and die away no matter how unpropitious the political circumstances may be. While standing firm on our common principles and defending our respective legitimate national interests, we in the scientific and expert community have the ability and the duty to be flexible and realistic in our judgment, to be pragmatic and business-like in the solutions we offer for consideration to the decision makers, to be bold in our quest for positive outcomes and humble about our expectations.

As we prepare to face the consequences of a further deterioration in regional and international affairs, we must also be prepared for a possible upturn to the better.

Even though the prospect may look dim for the moment, we must never quit thinking about collaborative projects that would benefit our nations and the region as a whole. Global problems such as mitigating the effects of climate change, access to resources and energy, sustainable growth and secure jobs, environment protection, reliability of the financial system, cross-border infrastructure,

elimination of poverty and ignorance, harnessing the promises of modern technology and many others will not simply go away if we busy ourselves with strategic and defence matters exclusively. The same applies to shared global threats such as international terrorism and organized crime, trafficking of drugs and people, illegal migration, pandemics, etc.

For these reasons we divided our final section into two parts: one dealing with security challenges and the other with opportunities for constructive collaboration.

## Conclusions and recommendations

**A.** Regional and international security. In line with the decisions of the Warsaw NATO Summit 2016, which re-affirmed the importance of the Black Sea region in the Alliance's overall defence posture in terms of dissuasion and deterrence, it makes sense to consider a set of follow-up steps such as:

- To develop a contingency plan for the southern tier of the Alliance's Eastern Flank in relative symmetry with the northern tier (Baltic), with due regard to the limitations imposed by the Montreux Convention;
- To enhance the capabilities of littoral NATO member states for the protection of their maritime and air space by deploying advanced air and coastal defence systems, possibly also by undertaking joint air patrols with other allied air forces according to the Baltic model;
- To envisage a multilateral framework for joint training and exercises of the naval forces of NATO littoral states;

- To explore the possibility of initiating a NATO-Russia practical dialogue for agreed confidence-building measure and avoidance of naval or air incidents in the Black Sea space which may otherwise lead to unwanted tension or escalation.

**B. Renewed efforts for constructive regional cooperation:**

- To proceed with a thorough examination of the existing formats for regional cooperation (in particular BSEC and EU Black Sea Synergy) with a view to ascertaining which particular areas or sectors can be realistically activated in the current political circumstances;

- To develop new 'soft security' instruments at regional level in such areas as border and customs controls, law enforcement, migration, etc.

- To encourage closer cooperation with those littoral states that have partnerships with NATO and/or association agreements with the EU (Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine);

- To use fully and more actively the potential of the Romania-Turkey Strategic Partnership for the further development of bilateral relations and possible joint action in regional and international affairs.

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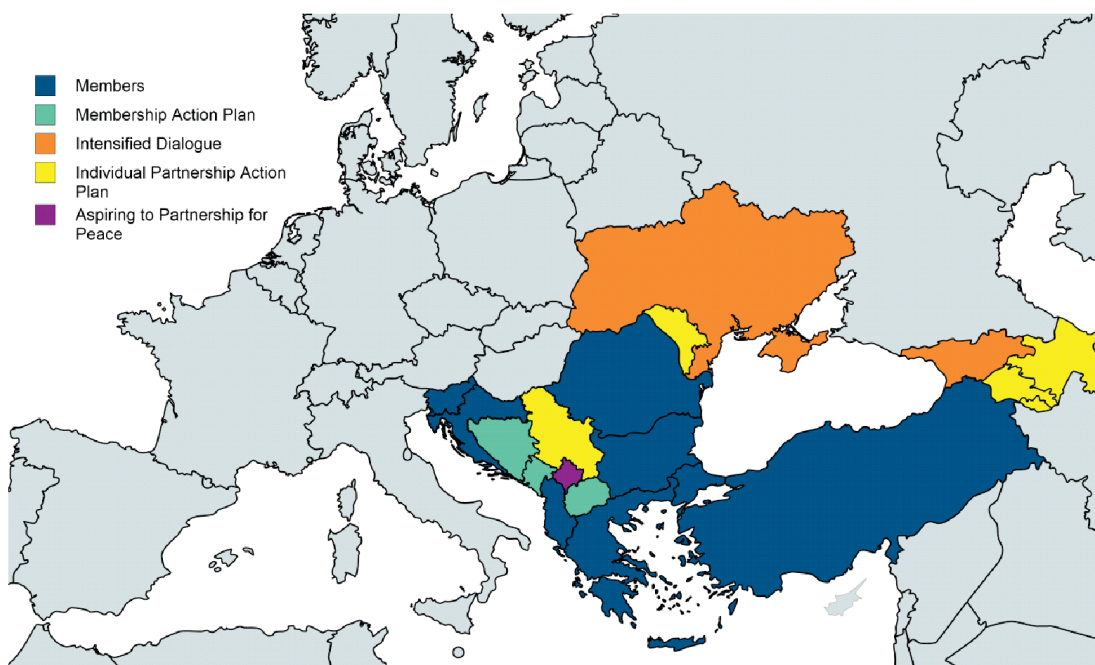
# Vulnerabilities and Opportunities in the Black Sea region - Turkish perspective -

## The importance of the Black Sea

As is known to all of us, in the aftermaths of the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the enlargement of EU and NATO that started from west to east has stretched out to the Black Sea. In 2004, the EU made a move aiming to strengthen the ties with the countries located in the Black Sea region under the scope of a programme Wider Europe Neighbourhood.

The rapprochement initiated by EU for the settlement of the ongoing frozen problems with Black Sea countries has been finalised with an access to the EU membership of the aforementioned countries that fulfilled the-Copenhagen-criteria-like-stipulations – for the sake of a virtue of democratic transformation.

The countries mentioned previously as backyards of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics have now become an EU member. The countries of the Black Sea Region – used to be under hegemony of the Tsardom of Russia and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics nearly for two centuries – have now positioned themselves under the umbrella of NATO.



NATO Dynamics in the Balkans and the Black Sea Area

Subsequent to the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the primary determinant that alerts the Russian Federation - in terms of its security and threat conception - has been a possible recurrence of disintegration experienced at the time of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The ethnic, religious tensions and border conflicts taking place in the region and the Russian Federation have triggered the disintegration fear of the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation has set priority the protection of its borders and unity of the federation, which it considers as a matter of existence and future of the state apparatus.

With a new concept of Foreign Policy introduced in 2000, which classified Russia as a great power and an influential power centre, Russia declared that it would intervene in the ongoing conflicts and tensions in the region and would continue to act as a gendarmerie, and thus its zone of influence would not only cover the Black Sea, but also the neighbouring periphery.

According to the second military doctrine adopted in 2000, Russia considered the region including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as its national security zone and stated that it would take military action against any case in the region, which it deems as a threat for the interests of Russian Federation.

The occupation of Crimea by Russia on 27 February 2014, which was an autonomous republic of Ukraine, and Russia's support for the ongoing separatist movements in the East of Ukraine are the outcomes under the scope of the new Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine of Russia.

In the meantime, the Black Sea is the gateway opening to the Warm Seas. Unlike the other seas enclaving Russia, the Black Sea does not get frozen and the marine traffic is not interrupted even during the winter time.

Since the rivers Dnieper and Dniester - the strategic waterways of Russia - are suitable to commercial transportation, they have used to play a crucial role in Russia's access to the Black Sea throughout the history.

For the Western World the Black Sea is a way shortcut to Russia. The Black Sea plays a vital role in any transfer of power upon Russia, as well. In this regard, the Carpathian Mountains of Romania and the Caucasus Mountains will compose an obstacle for a ground offensive against Russia from the south.

Thus, the Black Sea constitutes, in real meaning, a zone most suitable for an offensive against Russia. Subsequent to the evolvment of political crisis between Ukraine and Russia into a natural gas crisis, the significance of the Black Sea has skyrocketed by means of the developing importance of energy security in the world.

Through oil and natural gas pipelines, the Black Sea manifests itself as a secure energy corridor from east to west for a tanker shipping. The energy resources - deemed as an alternative to those in the Middle East - are considered to be located in the Black Sea.

Therefore, the existence of vast energy sources is of great importance, besides the geopolitical significance stemming from the geographic settlement. The Black Sea, in the meantime, has already been positioned in the international politics as a security corridor.

If the Black Sea that composes as small as one tenth of the oceans and seas of the world facilitates a security corridor today, the Montreux Convention regarding the Regime of the Turkish Straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles) has the lion's share in it.

With the introduction of the Montreux Convention, the Black Sea has become excluded from the conflicts of the global geopolitics. Moreover, the absolute control of territorial waters by any maritime or extraterritorial forces has been impeded through the Montreux Convention.

In whatever manner, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, subsequent to the World War II, ensured its absolute dominance in the Black Sea region – excluding the Turkish Straits – by means of the Warsaw Pact that includes Bulgaria and Romania.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics then started to put pressure on Turkey with the aim of controlling the whole straits – namely endeavouring to expand its sphere of influence beyond the Black Sea. Pursuant to the inclusion of Turkey into NATO, Turkey strived to facilitate its national security over this alliance and made NATO a neighbour to the Black Sea.

The influence of Russia has been weakened with the Warsaw Pact and the dissolution of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; the USA has reinforced its power base in the Black Sea Region through the inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania into NATO. Besides, the Montreux Convention has hindered the USA from developing a sustainable status quo in the region. According to the convention, the warships of the extraterritorial states may stay in the Black Sea up to 21 days at the time of peace.

Thereby, the extraterritorial powers may not establish a permanent marine base on the coast of the Black Sea. Only the littoral states are entitled to have such right. Even if they do not have the right to establish a marine base, they may found an air or ground base.

For that reason, the geopolitical struggle executed on the Black Sea aims at reducing the influence of Russia. Apart from this, Russia strives to block the inclusion of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova – as the former countries of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – into the western alliance as it considers this development as threat to its own security; as can be seen in the war with Georgia in 2008, during the military operation carried out to Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea.

The shift of balance of power in the Black Sea leads to security concerns among the region states, whereas the security concern turns to a security dilemma. A countries' striving for a global power is perceived as a threat by another country, thus result in armament or strengthening the alliance of the related one to prevent this endeavour.

This continues reciprocally as the security dilemma comes out in chain reaction. The transformation of geopolitics in the region leads to the shift of balance of power and escalation of threat perception among the related states. This situation triggers some polarisations among the states of region, as well.

## ***The concerns of the Russian Federation related to the Black Sea***

The Russian Federation is uncomfortable with the interest shown by the USA, EU and NATO to the Black Sea.

The marine dimension of the Black Sea was revealed in particular by means of the Europe-Atlantic based global political and economic developments and the Cold War Concept declared during the meeting of NATO defence ministers held on July 8-9, 2016 in Warsaw.

Even though the existence of a permanent NATO Navy Force in the Black Sea, which bothers Russia, was on the question, the issue was adjourned to a further date ahead for now. The Russian Federation is in favour of an approach that is to shed light on the future through the maintenance of balance and stability parallel to the past experiences and lessons drawn in the Black Sea.

Although the colourful revolutions and provoked armed conflicts have taken place in the Black Sea in recent years, the Black Sea remains to be the Security Corridor.

The Russian Federation is uncomfortable with especially the EU's and Far Atlantic's intentions of deepening comprehensive relations with the countries of the Black Sea and their coherent attempts directed to the Black Sea.

Furthermore, the Russian Federation is in favour of the whole and boundless supervision executed by Moscow from Ukraine to Abkhazia all along the Black Sea.

Therefore, it considers the coasts of Black Sea as the absolute necessity of Russian geopolitics. Yet, the said geopolitics is cardinal not only for Russian Federation, but also for the energy security of the whole world.

## ***The concerns of EU and Atlantic related to the Black Sea***

With a new concept of Foreign Policy launched in 2000, which classified Russia as great power and an influential power centre, Russia declared it would intervene in the ongoing conflicts and tensions in the region and would continue to act as a gendarmerie, and thus its zone of influence would not only include the Black Sea, but also the close periphery, as well.

The collective notion of the EU countries and the Atlantic is the concern stemming from the Russia's increasing military weight in the Baltic and North Region.

A fait accompli of Ukraine occurred in the Black Sea is another important factor in the escalation of this disturbance. For that reason, the notion of EU and Atlantic is in favour of a defence measure to be designated for the Black Sea. In other sayings, Russia is in favour of long-term investment against a long-term threat.

European allies get worried about turning back to the Old Cold War days, as well. Therefore, the EU countries are in favour of sanctions to be applied to Russia. In this context, it can be mentioned of consensus of EU. As regards NATO, it guarantees that the facilities founded in EU countries are not directed against Russia.

### *Final Say*

On 15 September 2016, a day prior to his arrival in Turkey, General Valery Gerasimov – Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces said the Turkish Navy's Superiority to the Russian Black Sea Fleet is over.

Certainly, this word having been expressed prior to the official visit to a country sounds impolite, but not a cause for war. Yet, it is a word that needs to be reflected upon. General Valery Gerasimov made another utterances following a military exercise carried out in Caucasia on 9 September 2016.

Several years ago the capability of the fleet was sharply contrasted, in particular, with the Turkish navy, when it was said that Turkey is virtually the master of the Black Sea. Now everything is different.

This change in Russia's stance derives from the enhancement of military capacity despite the financial difficulties it has been faced with.

This change is nothing other than an attempt to ensure the superiority of Russian Federation in accordance with its Eurasian Strategies. For that reason, the significance of NATO membership of the Black Sea's littoral states has not decreased, but increased.

In this context, it is not necessary to have a row with Russia, for this reason. If the good relations are maintained, the economic ties grow stronger; in the event of crisis, solution ways will become available. In consequence of these evaluations, it can be concluded that the Black Sea's littoral states in these territories have to be powerful. In order to achieve this nowadays, the contemporary level of science, technology and justice should be maintained within the course of democracy.

New Strategy Center is a Romanian think tank, non- governmental organization, designed to provide a debating framework on topics of major interest for Romania.

New Strategy Center submits relevant topics both in terms of threats to national security, and opportunities for economic development of the country to the general consideration and debate.

The Balkans and the Black Sea are the main points of interest for New Strategy Center, a large and complementary area with a significant impact on Romanian security.

The defense, the connection between the military modernization and industrial development, the energy security, the technological development, the challenges of the hybrid threats, the public diplomacy and the cyber security are some of other issues on which New Strategy Center is focused on.

**NEW STRATEGY CENTER**

Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation was established as an independent Non-Governmental Organization in 1985 and organizes meetings, seminars, conferences and prepares reports, views and also makes analysis in order to determine solutions to problems of Turkey.

The President of Marmara Group Foundation is Dr. Akkan Suver .

The Mission of Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation is to think about and discuss Turkey's problems such as economy, democracy and security and to share ideas with public opinion by finding rational and scientific solutions.

In this direction, Marmara Group Foundation conducts researches and implements projects with Middle East, Balkans, Eurasian Countries, national and international think-tanks.

## **Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation**

This assessment was coordinated by Ambassador Sergiu Celac, member of the Scientific Council of the New Strategy Center, and Dr. Mustafa Aydin, Board Member of Marmara Group Foundation, Rector of the Kadir Has University.

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