European Security and Defence Forum Workshop

A New European Security Architecture?

Search for regional accountability and ownership in the shared neighbourhood: Can a Turkish-Russian partnership coordinated with EU actions open new perspectives for peacebuilding in the South Caucasus?

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11 November 2010

This paper was presented at the European Security and Defence Forum (ESDF) organized by Chatham House. Chatham House is not responsible for the content of this paper.

In the early 1990s, the days of Turkey sharing a land border with the USSR ended and it discovered its Caucasian neighbours. For the first time in several centuries (with the exception of 1918-1920), Turkey and Russia have no land frontier. However celebrations of the fall of the Soviet Union had been short lived. The newly rediscovered Caucasian borderlands transformed the Turkish-Soviet border in an area of instability and brought the risk of a direct confrontation with Russia, reminding of the recurrent Turkish-Russian wars of the past century. Turkey had to accommodate during the 90’s with not only its old function of flank state but also with that of the new frontline country within NATO.

The post Cold War contacts between Turkey and Russia took place in the context of the escalation of the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh (1988-1994). Nevertheless in the 1990s, Moscow and Ankara were extremely cautious so as to prevent a spillover of their tension in the Caucasus to the rest of their bilateral relations, as tensions did not involve Russia and Turkey themselves so much, as the countries situated between them. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan did not affect the Turkish-Russian bilateral cooperation despite the support given by Russia to Armenia and the mobilization of the Turkish society and political class for the Azerbaijani cause.

The efforts and gestures of goodwill of Turkish and Russian governments aiming at overcoming mutual mistrust and suspicion, were supported by increasing business interactions harbinger a new area of cooperation. In an effort to increased cooperation, in June 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin attended the first summit meeting of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) that took place in Istanbul. In five hundred years of bilateral diplomatic relations, it was the very first time that a Russian head of state visited Turkey. However despite the willingness of Turkish and Russian governments to open a new page in the bilateral relations and eliminate the traces of century old enmities the confrontational mentality continued to prevail and guided the strategic thinking on the Turkish-Caucasian borderland in the 90’s. In the early 90’s, the post Cold War regional context was providing the ground for arguments about the “inborn” hostility allegedly existing between the two peoples.
The main elements of the Russian southern Caucasus policy were determined as reinforcing southern CIS border adjoining Turkey. The Russian military doctrine, adopted on November, 2nd 1993, implicitly assumed that the borders of the Russian security zone corresponded with those of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). As a matter of fact, in the early 90’s, Turkey emerges as the new front line state within NATO. It was assumed that a new Cold War with Moscow would likely take the form of friction on Russia’s Southern periphery rather than a more direct confrontation in Europe. Ankara was concerned to be left to face such “flank risks” alone. Turkey’s initial lack of enthusiasm for NATO enlargement was due to Ankara’s fear that such an enlargement might provoke Moscow to try to expand its military presence in the Caucasus. The security challenges were perceived as being harder, more direct and more likely to involve the use of force in the eastern Mediterranean, especially on Turkey’s borders.

The strengthening of the bilateral Turkish-Russian links will help to overcome the remaining tensions in the 2000’s. The crisis triggered by the August 2008 war in Georgia will be a good litmus test. Turkey will progressively overcome the legacy of the Cold War in its relationships with Russia: increased interactions verging towards interdependence will provide the key. The historical reconciliation process between Turkey and Russia should generate the same degree of enthusiasm as did the French – German reconciliation process. The advanced many-faceted partnership that was promoted by the Russian and Turkish governments is based on the good understanding that progressively helped overcome a long history of continuous conflict between the two countries, full of negative images that amalgamated into a knot of suspicion, resentment, fear of each other, and a legacy of haunting minds. The Turkish – Russian reconciliation process is all the more exciting since it involves civilian actors, business communities, and tourism.
RUSSIA MAIN PARTNER IN STABILIZING THE CAUCASUS FOR ANKARA

The August 2008 between Georgia and Russia put under strain the bilateral relation and shed light to the cost of the return of the Cold War. Increased interactions verging towards interdependence indeed increased the cost of a conflict that would oppose Turkey to Russia. Turkey was concerned with a potential escalation between the former Cold War rivals. The idea that it might have to choose between the USA and Russia placed Turkey in a highly uncomfortable position. Immediately after the conflict in South Ossetia, Moscow pressured Ankara over the passage of US navy, which were supposedly delivering ‘humanitarian aid’ to Georgia, through the Bosphorus. The Russians were concerned that these ships, which included a guided-missile destroyer, could be transferring military equipment. Russians persistently contacted Turkey through multiple diplomatic channels to make sure that Turkey, the controlling country, upholds the Montreux Convention.1

The Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP), announced by Turkey in the context of the August 2008 war characterized by an increasing polarisation and harsh rhetoric between Russia and most of the NATO countries, allowed the channels of communication and dialogue with Russia to remain open. This move reflected Ankara’s awareness that Russia remained the main partner in the challenging task of stabilizing the Caucasus, position which will be endorsed a couple of months later by NATO. Remarkably the Turkish leadership chose Moscow as the venue where the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform’s blueprint was first unveiled.

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1 According to the Montreux Convention no more than nine warships of non-Black Sea states, with a total tonnage of 45,000 tons, could be present at any one time in the Black Sea, and these ships must leave within 21 days. One of the least discussed but rather significant factors in the Black Sea/Caucasus debate is the significance attributed to the Montreux Convention by Turkey. In effect since 1936, the Convention governs the passage of ships from the Turkish Straits. Besides the Lausanne Treaty the Montreux Convention is one of the founding agreements that established the Turkish Republic. Its significance vis-à-vis the Straits regime and the confirmation about their Turkish character. It constitutes a challenge because renegotiating the Convention could open a Pandora’s box as all littoral states have a myriad of interests that they wish to be addressed.
FROM INTERDEPENDENCE TOWARDS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Together with the intensification of economic, trade and energy cooperation, the AK Party government has majored on the diplomatic traffic between Ankara and Moscow. Putin’s visit in December 2004 marked a monumental event in itself as he was the first Russian head of state that visited Turkey in the last 32 years. During this visit a Joint Declaration on the Deepening of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership was agreed on, which referred to a wide range of common interests, specifically accentuated the increasing confidence and trust, and noted that both countries were the Eurasian powers with shared interest in and definition of security and stability. This traffic topped in 2005 when the then President Putin and Prime Minister Erdogan met four times, including a seven-hour private meeting in Russian city of Sochi. No longer suspicious of Turkey’s purported Pan-Turkic ambitions, in February 2009 Moscow allowed Turkish President Abdullah Gül to make an official visit to the Russian republic of Tatarstan.

Turkey’s trade volume with Russia represented 90 percent of its exchanges with the CIS countries. The Russian market has been a valuable outlet for the Anatolian small and medium enterprises which were not competitive enough to enter the European Union (EU) market. By 2008, Russia was Turkey’s largest trading partner, with a total trade volume of about $38 billion. The total value of projects undertaken by Turkish construction companies in Russia so far has topped $30 billion, corresponding to about one-fourth of all projects carried out by Turkish contractors around the world. Efforts underway have constantly aimed at strengthening transportation, not only of products but also services and people between the two countries. The two countries have agreed on a visa free regime in 2010.

Energy field is a significant field of cooperation and is developing into a comprehensive regional strategy. Russia plays a critical role in Turkey’s energy supply security as it provides around 68% of its natural gas supply and 50% of crude oil imports. In natural gas, Turkey is Gazprom’s second largest market after the EU. Russia is Turkey’s single largest supplier of natural gas. Turkey has signed six gas agreements, three of them have been signed by the Russian Federation. Russia is Turkey’s largest supplier in natural gas; taking into account the annual 14 bcm Russian gas supply.

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2 Turkey has signed agreements with Russia, Iran (10 bcm), Algeria (4 bcm) and Nigeria (1.2 bcm).
across the Balkans and the 16 bcm planned through the Blue Stream\(^3\), over the next decade Russian gas will comprise 70-75\% of Turkey’s domestic consumption. This direct link beneath the Black Sea to Russia has indeed increased Turkey’s energy security. Turkey hasn’t been affected by transit disputes and the direct flow of gas has never been disrupted; as a matter of fact Russia is Turkey’s most reliable supplier (Russia increased even the volume when the gas flow from Iran was suspended). Today, the Blue Stream is expected to contribute to the development of the Ceyhan energy terminal.

Russian Prime Minister Putin’s trip to Turkey on 6 August 2009 resulted in the signing of a number of energy-related agreements. Permission was given for Russia to conduct seismic and environmental studies in Turkey’s exclusive economic zone in the Black Sea within the framework of South Stream. Furthering the energy cooperation based on mutual support to nationally promoted projects was made possible with several other agreements. For instance, the Blue Stream 2 project will involve the expansion and extension of the pipeline network in the Black Sea connecting Russia with Turkey to enable natural gas to be transported to Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus. Russia also expressed interest in providing a throughput guarantee for the planned Samsun–Ceyhan oil pipeline by allowing Russian and Kazakh crude (transiting Russia) to fill the pipeline. Other deals raised the prospects of Gazprom’s involvement in building gas storage depots and power plants in Turkey, and a plant to liquefy natural gas in Ceyhan. Gazprom is also interested in participating in the tenders for the privatization of part of the gas distribution grids in Ankara and Istanbul.

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\(^3\) 1st Blue Stream pipeline completed on March, 1st, 2002
EU IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE POST 2008 CONTEXT

For both the EU and Turkey, the Georgian-South Ossetian/Russian war in August 2008 reconfirmed the pressing need to develop a coherent and efficient approach towards the Black Sea region. The crisis of August 2008 provided the EU with the opportunity to enhance its profile and position itself as a key player in the South Caucasus. The EU had a decisive role in the context of the August war in stopping further Russian advances, keeping open the channel of communication with Russia, negotiating a ceasefire and handling the immediate consequences of the war.

The Georgian-Russian crisis served as a catalyst for pushing forward the Eastern Partnership proposal, initially a Polish one but which became soon in May 2008 a joint Polish-Swedish one. The Extraordinary European Council of 1st September 2008 asked for this work to be accelerated, responding to the need for a clearer signal of EU commitment following the conflict in Georgia and its broader repercussions. The final document of the extraordinary European Council linked the EU’s condemnation of Russia’s behavior to its intention to move ahead with the Eastern Partnership, thus creating the impression that the initiative was directed against Russia. As a result, the Commission officially presented the EU’s vision for expanded cooperation in its Communication on “Eastern Partnership”4 of 3 December 2008.

Russia and the EU’s eastern neighbourhood were high on the EU agenda following the Russian-Georgian conflict over South Ossetia in August 2008, however in fall of that year the financial crisis began to overshadow all other developments. Reduction in oil and gas revenues in Russia seemed to have created an environment more conducive to cooperation with other states and international organisations.

The EU-Russian meeting in Rostov-on-Don on 31 May-1 June 2010 launched a Partnership for Modernisation. A joint statement read: 'the EU and Russia, as long-standing strategic partners in a changing multipolar world, are committed to working together to address common challenges with a balanced and result-oriented approach, based on democracy and the rule of law, both at the national and international level. This new Russian-EU framework for cooperation can be seen as a window of opportunity for enhancing the EU’s contribution to conflict settlement in South Caucasus.

Similarly, the reset strategy in Russian-US relations initiated by the incoming Obama administration opened a period of appeasement in Russia-Western relations succeeding to the period of extreme polarization of August 2008. In parallel, Russia badly affected by the international financial crisis, felt acutely the need for international cooperation and curtail its assertiveness by adopting a more multilateral stance. The Munich Security Conference held in February 2009 launched the new Obama administration’s stance on Russia and security. On 5 March 2009 the meeting of NATO foreign ministers decided to resume the Alliance’s full official relations with Russia. On 5 March 2009 the meeting of foreign ministers of NATO countries decided to resume the Alliance’s full official relations with Russia. On 2 April representatives of NATO member countries declared that they were inclined to think that NATO’s steady expansion to the east since the end of the Cold War would be halted for a period of time, while the bloc turns its attention to improving relations with Russia. On 2 April representatives of NATO member countries declared that they were inclined to think that NATO’s steady expansion to the east since the end of the Cold War would be halted for a period of time, while the bloc turns its attention to improving relations with Russia.

Because of the diverging interests among the EU member states, the Union’s engagement in South Caucasus has remained limited, and its policy reactive, at the most. The South Caucasus is still one of the weakest links in the EU’s Eastern policy debate. However capitalizing on its last enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania, the EU has now become a direct actor in the Black Sea region. The post-August war situation made clear the need for an increasing engagement of the EU engagement in the region. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty provides a good opportunity to devise an EU strategy towards the South Caucasus.
CAN THE TURKISH-RUSSIAN RAPPROCHEMENT FOSTER A SENSE OF REGIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND OWNERSHIP?

The Action Plan for Cooperation in Eurasia signed on 16 November 2001 by the foreign ministers of Russia and Turkey, Igor Ivanov and Ismail Cem, in New York during the UN General Assembly, created new room for cooperation. In the post 9/11 context, both countries expressed thereby their determination to carry their relations to a level of enhanced constructive partnership, extending to Eurasia and being based on “the shared belief that dialogue and cooperation in Eurasia will positively contribute to bring about peaceful, just and lasting political solutions to disputes in the region.” In accordance to the Eurasia Action Plan, a Russian – Turkish High-Level Joint Working Group (HLJWG) and a Caucasus Task Force were established, bringing together high level officials from the Russian and Turkish ministries of foreign affairs. However the attempt to integrate the Caucasus into the bilateral Turkish-Russian agenda has not yet developed into a substantive joint action.

In the aftermaths of the war, despite the fact that Russia disliked encroachments into its spheres of influence, it recognised the commonality of interests with Turkey and welcomed the initiative by adopting a pragmatic approach and accepting political dynamism on behalf of Turkey in the Caucasus.

In 2003-2004 in the aftermaths of the invasion of Iraq, both Turkey and Russia become wary that the Bush administration’s activism in the Black Sea-South Caucasus region could be a major factor of instability. Turkish opposition to extra-regional penetration of the region was especially explained by two factors. First, that there was no need for NATO to enter the region because existing regional structures were adequate and already in concert with NATO operations. Second, any regional initiative must include Russia, as well. Ankara believed that antagonizing Moscow would destabilize the region. Russia was a key party to the resolution of the frozen conflicts in the region. The sense that stability was tantamount to the preservation of the status quo developed in the Turkish and Russian regional discoursed. This perception of a common understanding between the two countries on the need to shut down South Caucasus to extra-regional intervention gave rise to speculation

by third parties that whether there would be an eventual establishment of a Turkish-Russian condominium therein.

Though the CSCP does not intend to become an alternative to any institution, mechanism or international organization, it develops a functional method of problem solving based on confidence building in the region. These efforts were further officialised with the Joint Declaration signed by the presidents of Turkey and Russia in 13 February 2009:

The Parties [Turkey and Russia], with the understanding that security and stability in the Eurasian geography is directly related with the stability in the South Caucasus region, agree on the necessity to take effective measures for resolving frozen conflicts that constitute potential destabilising elements in the South Caucasus. In this regard, the Parties consider the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform, that was proposed by the Republic of Turkey as a constructive initiative that would be complementary to existing international mechanisms and that would help overcome lack of confidence that they observe that exits among the countries that are parties to the frozen conflicts.6

Both Turkey and Russia have a high stake in stability in the region. However the preservation of the status quo characterized by conflict divided, obstructed communication network and trade embargoes, cannot be the guarantee for stability. The explicit linkage between regional stability and conflict resolution is another innovation. The Caucasus Platform initiative has brought about a new development: for the first time, good Turkish – Russian understanding is used to solve problems stemming from regional conflicts in the common geographic neighbourhood. Regional responsibility and sense of ownership from insiders have been crucially missing in the past. Stability and development can be only achieved by integrating internally the region and opening it up to the world outside. Economic pluralism which will open the markets of the Southern Caucasus countries to international competition will be the key for political stability. The CSCP presents a good opportunity for the Turkish-Russian rapprochement to foster a sense of regional accountability

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and ownership and develop into a problem-solving approach in the South Caucasus.
EU AND TURKEY: OVERLAPPING NEIGHBOURHOODS

The neighbourhoods of the EU and Turkey are increasingly overlapping. This is particularly true for the Black Sea region, where countries are full-fledged partners in the ENP. The new European neighbours are indeed the old neighbours of Turkey. This fact will not be altered, whether Turkey is included in the Union in the future or not. The enlargement of the ENP to the South Caucasus might be perceived as the very beginning of the Europeanization process of one of Turkey’s Eastern external borders. Further development in the ENP should by no means create dividing lines between the EU partner countries and the candidate country, Turkey. The proximity factor points to the need to integrate beyond Turkey’s own borders. The sub-regional integration has to acknowledge the role of Turkey. Besides its traditional cultural links to the region, Turkey has been a major investor into the economies of the EU and ENP Black Sea countries.

The Black Sea region can be defined as the overlapping Turkey/EU neighbourhood. The EU-Turkey accession process can enhance Turkey’s capacity to contribute to stability, security and prosperity in her region, and at the same time help the EU to become a fully fledged foreign policy player. Only the linkage between Turkey’s EU accession process and the ENP would transform the latter into a sound strategy, thereby contribute to the development of more coherent and effective European external relations, and make it an efficient tool supporting sub-regional integration. From this stems the need to analyze the possibilities and ways of linking Turkey-EU relations with the further development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union.

Regardless of its definitive status within the EU, a close and sustainable integration and inclusion of Turkey into the EU is a major priority as a geostrategic project within international governance of the south eastern border of the EU. According to the Commission Staff Working Document from 6 October 2004 titled ‘Issues Arising from Turkey’s Membership Perspective’, the extension of the EU’s borders to countries ‘which are presently a source of tensions’ with Turkey’s accession will bring problems of the region higher onto the agenda of the EU’s external relations. Accession of Turkey to the Union is expected to be challenging both for the EU and Turkey. However, if well managed, it would offer important opportunities for both.

The Lisbon Treaty aims at strengthening the EU as a single international actor. The treaty provides new means of action to the Union and could make
the ENP more credible. It reinforces the political dimension of EU external action and could lead to a more complete ENP by enhancing connecting the Actions Plans of the ENP with the CFSP and ESDP. The Lisbon Treaty inserts a new article 7A stating that the EU shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good-neighbourliness founded on the values of the Union and characterized by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation. The new Union has a single legal personality. There is indeed a need to look at the possibilities and mechanisms to build a closer relationship between the EU and Turkey in foreign and security policy matters within the framework the institutional changes set out in the Lisbon Treaty for Europe’s external relations.
A COORDINATED EU-TURKEY-RUSSIA APPROACH IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

It would be misleading to consider that Turkey in its relationship with Russia has been trying to redefine its ties with the EU and the USA. Neither Turkey nor Russia can afford to forget the South Caucasus. As neighbouring countries, they have a high stake in projecting stability over their borders. A coordinated approach between the EU, Turkey and Russia would increase the potential for conflict prevention in the region. The Black Sea is partially internal to the EU, which results in shared challenges and opportunities for the EU and the countries of the region.

The fact that the security environment is getting larger is calling for a grand strategy design. However most of the conflicts are regional if not local. It is therefore important that the security discussions be connected with dynamics on the ground. A Turkish-Russian rapprochement in the Black Sea-South Caucasus region oriented toward solving problems is likely to contribute to the overcoming of the impasse on the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. The Treaty had been signed in Paris, on 19 November 1990, and has still been the unique legal invention in terms of conventional weapons control. However, Russia suspended its implementation of the CFE treaty in December 2007 in protest against the delay in the ratification of the adapted Treaty. Its ratification could well contribute to the restoration of the confidence-building measures envisioned by the Treaty which have highly damaged by the August 2008 war.

The EU could, on the one hand, take the lead and include the CSCP in the context of ENP, possibly in the framework of the BSEC-EU interaction and in coordination with the EU-Russia dialogue. It has every reason to welcome the Turkish initiative for a CSCP and the concrete steps taken towards the normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations, as stated by Commissioner Olli Rehn at the Bosphorous Conference in October 2008. The EU has the know-how and the funds to support specific projects, such as networks of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think tanks as confidence building

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8 "Turkey has the potential to play a vital role in advancing regional cooperation in the Caucasus, and I was glad to see the Turkish government proposing initiatives [...],” Olli Rehn, “Turkey and the EU: a win-win game” (keynote speech of Commission for Enlargement Olli Rehn to open the Bosphorus Conference, CER/British Council/TESEV, Istanbul, 10 October 2008), http://www.cer.org.uk/articles/speech_rehn_bosphorus_10oct2008.html.
measures to sustain political and civic dialogue. Two years after the announcement of the CSCP, the principles, decision-making mechanisms and structure of the CSCP still remain to be worked out. Innovative and pragmatic confidence-building mechanisms should help to address the disputes between Russia and Georgia, and Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia. Abkhazia and South Ossetia may also be included.

The momentum in the process of the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations - supported explicitly by the Russian government - has been over the last two years (2008-2010) the major source of legitimacy for the CSCP. However today as the Turkish-Armenian normalization process seems in a vacuum as a result of the interference of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with the bilateral agenda, there is more urgent need to reboost the concept of the CSCP as a framework for cooperation and coordinated action between Turkey and Russia on issues related to the South Caucasus. The normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations has the capacity of fostering new dynamics in the settlement of the Karabakh conflict, the most intractable conflict and among the biggest obstacles to region-wide cooperation. At this stage, the interruption of the Turkish-Armenian bilateral relations will dissipate the international attention focused on the region and decrease the chances to reach in a foreseeable future any settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Ending the isolation, opening up Abkhazia and integrating the Black Sea region should be also a priority. Linkage with political issues blurs the overall positive impact of opening communications links. Georgia has a stake in a policy of pro-active engagement with Abkhazia. Past efforts at isolating Abkhazia politically and economically had not gotten Georgia any further in negotiations. However, even during the period characterized by the cooperative stance of Russian Federation and the administration of high damage, the sanctions didn’t bring any tangible policy outcome. The insistence on retaining the sanctions as a bargaining chip for progress on refugee and IDP return and is ousting completely Abkhazia from the Georgian economic and social sphere. The maritime blockade becomes a symbolical way of defending its territorial integrity which as a matter of fact lets to Abkhazia only one vector of movement. Turkey can play a major role in overcoming the isolation of Abkhazia. However it is unthinkable that Turkey unilaterally decides to resume the direct transportation links with Abkhazia while the Georgian coastguard is keeping on detaining Turkish ships. The connection has to be legalized, or at least formalized.
The opening of the ferry link between Trabzon and Sukhumi will be indeed a confidence building measure for the settlement of the conflict. Abkhazians will start looking southward, towards Turkey. Turkish-Georgian borderland is fully open to human and trade interactions. The Sarpi village once divided by the security fence of the Cold War, is being reunified through intense cross-border cooperation. Adjaria is integrating with the Turkish Black Sea coast. The closed village of Gogno is hosting dinners between Turkish and Georgian business partners. Inspired by the European experience, Turkish and Georgian authorities have been working at making the border dividing them meaningless. Turks and Georgians can visit each other without visa. Georgia is currently the only former Soviet country to have waived the visa requirement for Turkish citizens. The Batumi airport, which was built and is being managed by the Turkish company TAV is being used for domestic flight connections of Turkish Airlines between Istanbul, Hopa and Artvin. Turkish citizens can board the Istanbul-Batumi flight with their identity card. The practices at the Geneva airport have been transferred to Batumi. The Sarpi border crossing will also start functioning under Swiss standards with a unique customs point. The pragmatism and willingness to cooperate behind the move aiming at transcending the common border should guide Georgian and Turkish efforts to resume the ferry link.