

BLACK SEA: A GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE OF THE EASTERN BORDER OF THE EURO-ATLANTIC STRUCTURES

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Abstract

The Black Sea is a crossing space between worlds, different cultures and global interests. Political, economic and social shifts occurred over time within the states in the area, with major consequences in the game of power and in exercising control in the game. The new realities of the international political scene have highlighted the crucial nature of the Black Sea Region for European security, being known as the new eastern frontier of Europe. The full European security can not be achieved as long as the Black Sea area remains unstable

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The Wider Black Sea region is an area of joint action for global actors such as European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, United Nation Organization, The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, United States of America, Russia etc. This is because in the process of redefining the strategic - political issues of this area are involved explicitly or not, directly or not, players with a global vocation. The Black Sea is a crossing space between worlds, different cultures and global interests. Political, economic and social shifts occurred over time within the states in the area, with major consequences in the game of power and in exercising control in the game.

The geopolitical and geostrategic interests of riparian countries, the interests of the main players in the top hierarchy of the world (USA, Russia, China, Japan, India, and EU countries), the huge economic potential, the military and demographic role of this area as link between Central Asia and the Middle East, are evident. The new realities of the international political scene have highlighted the crucial nature of the Black Sea Region for European security, being known as the new eastern frontier of Europe. The full European security can not be achieved as long as the Black Sea area remains unstable.

Including Romania and Bulgaria, NATO placed the Black Sea littoral countries in a position of parity number (three to three), and NATO involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq means a significant shift to the east area of operations for the Alliance. Also, plans for redeployment phases of U.S. bases in Western Europe were added. Partnership for Peace under NATO had a profound impact throughout the region, starting a reform process of the armed forces and internal security agencies.

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Also, the enlargement of European Union has favored the rise of a new strategic factor in the region. Approval of the conceptual framework of the EU's relations with neighboring countries in East, aimed in the first instance the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Moldova, is a clear indication of rising European interest to the Black Sea as a natural bridge to the vital energy sources from Central Asia and the Middle East. Another important element of the role that EU plays in the region is taking the main responsibility in the Balkans through the stabilization and association agreement. This process could be a model for a similar process for the South Caucasus.

Security in the region must reflect the new status of the Russian Federation and Ukraine as a partner with NATO, EU and U.S., facilitating constructive approach within the framework of multiple problems (fighting against unconventional or asymmetric threats, military body reform, energy security) with direct implications. An analysis of the security environment in the region also involves analysis of "frozen conflicts" in the area, as well as those in Abkhazia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian Federation is still very active in the area, both by exerting a direct influence and by its potential actions in the geopolitics of energy field. Strategic configuration of the region has changed through the existence of Ukraine, Georgia and other states that had resulted from the dissolution of the former USSR, as state actors, with their own interests. On short and medium term, the concerns of the European Union and the U.S. will be focused on ensuring the stability of transatlantic relations.

From a military perspective, there is no reason to say that the region is not stable. Naval forces don't have the traditional role of territorial defense. These structures are rather involved in military actions to counter the asymmetric risk. The evolution of strategic relationship between east and west and the economic opening promoted by the enlargement of European Union and NATO require a clarification of the concept for the EU's eastern border, being an complementary area for the states that currently are not included in the integration project - Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, respectively those adjacent states - Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Central Asian states.

The objectives of EU and Euro-Atlantic area are: to strengthen the regional cooperation strategy, which includes the entire eastern area to Central Asia; to set up a European strategy for Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan; to establish and strengthen the infrastructure; to renew the European programs for telecommunications and IT, transport (TRACECA), energy (INOGATE); to strengthen the regional projects by joining PfP related projects; to assimilate the best practices of cross-border and sub-regional cooperation, already experimented with the support of the Stability Pact; to support a regional program of environmental protection and sustainable development in the Black Sea Area and to extend the opportunities to improve cooperation with Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, and with Turkey and Israel, through Caucasus, from Georgia.

Being a EU and NATO member, Romania has a geostrategic position and has opened relations with countries in the region that lead to the establishment of a strategy that includes the following priorities: to support the process of strengthening a good governance, to support the development of effective administration of the borders, to eliminate trade barriers and to strengthen relations in the regional free trade and to resolve the minority issues and territorial disputes, based on national commitments undertaken.

The defining element that reflects the geopolitics of the extended Black Sea Area is that this region lies at the confluence of three major geopolitical regions: the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Asia Minor, and close to the hot zone of the Middle East, while being a segment of the southern border of the Russian Federation and the northern limit of the southern flank of NATO. Black Sea is the gateway out to Ocean for Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and the Transcaucasian countries, not forgetting to mention that it lies on the route proposed for transporting the Caspian and central Asian oil to western European consumers.

The region is rich of marine and submarine resources; it is the shortest way for Russia to the south and east area, providing commercial and tourist facilities, having a large number of ports, being therefore a good environment for the economic, cultural and military activities. The Wider Black Sea Region is an area of 350 million consumers, with an important demographic and economic potential. That is why the region is so attractive for the traditional global actors.

A strategy in the region must regard the special role that the energetic resources of Central Asia and The Middle East have in the Euro-Atlantic security equation. Europe imports about 60% of its resources through the Bosphorus and the English Channel. Analysts forecast that Europe will import over 70% of energy sources from outside the continent in 2020. Black Sea Region and the adjacent area dominate the entire Euro-Asian energy corridor from gas pipelines and trans-Ukrainian oil which supplies markets in northern Europe, until the pipelines Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan pipeline bound for the Mediterranean area. A secure and stable regional environment is favorable for Europe, assuring the access to the energetic resources of the Caspian basin and central Asia.

The Wider Black Sea Region returned to the center of cross-border activity both in a positive meaning (trade, tourism and transportation of energetic resources) and negative meaning (joint point of supply and demand for various illegal products).

From the perspective of terrorism, the states in the region have varying degrees of risk. Thus, the states on the western coast proved that they can have an efficient control of the phenomenon, in terms of prevention and combating. In contrast, the states in the Caucasus area still have a fragile political stability, which could encourage the radicalization of the social movements, can increase the number of terrorist organizations that are affiliated to international networks. The vectors of terrorism are: the enhancement of the ethnic, separatist, Islamic and fundamentalist groups' activities; the radicalization of the autonomist-separatist movements in the Caucasian region (Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, the Chechen nationalist

movement against Russia); the launching of the Islamic fundamentalism that can have a big impact within the poor classes; the presence and involvement of Arab NGOs that support the terrorist groups; the interconnection between terrorist activity and organized crime.

Moreover, the Caucasus and Central Asia are key points for the ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. There are two NATO missions in Afghanistan: one mission in Kabul, ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) and Enduring Freedom in Kandahar region. The air routes to these countries use the strategic airports and the military facilities that are in Central Asia and Caucasus, as the area of transport. These aspects reflect the big importance of The Wider Black Sea Region.

Setting in more military facilities on the western shore of the Black Sea, as those placed in Romania and Bulgaria, has an important role in the war on terrorism. These facilities are operated jointly by U.S. forces and the Romanian/Bulgarian troops and are crucial in the new U.S. strategy of using small bases for shelter, both shelter and reserve troops. This proves the big role and the importance that the Black Sea has in the war against terrorism. We must regard that Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia are the countries from The Wider Black Sea Region that have troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, as part of a coalition. The overflight rights apply to all countries in the region and have functioned, including for Russia.

Organized crime.

The Wider Black Sea Region is a favorable ground for crimes as: drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal immigration, economic and financial crime, money laundering and falsification of documents. The drug trafficking routes that comes from The Golden Crescent (Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan), Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand) and some Central Asian states is passing through the region. The borders of the Caucasian states facilitate the criminal groups through Western Europe. The danger is even greater as they are not only transit countries, but even drug consumers. The increasing of the drug consuming has as an effect a considerable financial involvement of these organizations, and this power is used to corrupt the decision makers. The corruption gaps legislation are issues that not only facilitates the expansion of drug trafficking, but also extend human trafficking to western destinations.

The frozen conflicts

The Moldovan-Transnistrian conflict, the Azero-Armenian conflict, the conflict in Georgia, the conflict in Chechnya. Some authors highlight more other areas and sources of instability for The Wider Black Sea Region: Bosnia and Kosovo, where ethnic and inter-religious tensions remain a risk of conflict and instability. In the ex-Yugoslav territory there are many refugees or displaced people, which allow us to believe that in this area, still, are some elements that can be a source of instability.

Obviously, the settlement of frozen conflicts is the attribute of all states in the region, but their resolution will not be possible without the involvement of the

international community. They represent a major obstacle to the success of any regional or global initiatives that would lead to stabilize the South Caucasus. Any strategy must be preceded by the settlement of these conflicts. The Euro-Atlantic structures have an important role in this process and they must show a high interest and a more responsible involvement in resolving these conflicts.

Even if the risks, the dangers and the threats in the regional security environment exist, Black Sea Region shows a wide range of opportunities for the developing process of creating a space of peace, security and prosperity. By increasing regional military cooperation and by the recent EU step to enhance cooperation between countries bordering the Black Sea, to which Romania, as a member of both organizations, brings a more active contribution, The Wider Black Sea Region will become a pillar of stability, security and sustainable development, will become an area of confluence of economic, political and military security components, having an influence in the Middle East and Central Asian areas, in the aspect of a better management of the risks caused by the frozen conflicts in the region.

In our opinion, the international community must take an approach that includes efforts to persuade the separatist parties that their accomplishments are only temporary and will not be permanent unless they are recognized by the international community. It is also necessary for the OSCE and UN to show more attention on the humanitarian problem (refugees). For Russia is essential to understand that the stability of South Caucasus influence the stability of the North Caucasus.

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