

SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

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ABSTRACT

The Black Sea has a relevant strategic location: it is positioned at the intersection of Europe and Asia, between the vast Russian territory and the Middle East and it directly connects South-Eastern Europe to Western Europe through the Danube river, but it is also connected with the Mediterranean Sea and currently the NATO and EU expansions have transformed it in a close neighbourhood for the Euro-Atlantic great powers. Also, the Black Sea region is important for the huge diversity of peoples and cultures which characterise riverside countries, a diversity which represents both a source of tension and conflicts and one of cultural richness. Also, one should not forget the economic factor, especially natural resources, which make the Black Sea a region of strategic interest for the Western economic circuits.

KEYWORDS: *straits, sea, riverside countries, strategic position, neighbourhood, cooperation, security, communication*

In the context in which Romania is a riverside country, a member of NATO and the European Union and the region East of the Black Sea is in a process of geopolitical and geostrategic realignment, several questions arise: what will be Romania's role in shaping the future defining lines of the Black Sea region and to what extent can our country influence these changes, so that they prove favourable to us? The answers to these questions should not be trenchant; instead they must be nuanced and argued, so that we may understand the reality beyond appearances.

„Peoples change, country institutions are reshaped, the ideas that dominate mankind are no longer the same, but the great regional problems persist”. These words, written by Nicolae Iorga at the beginning of the previous century, mostly explain why the geopolitical markers, notwithstanding the political, economical or social mutations, revert as true historical constants.

It is obvious the fact that the importance of the Black Sea Region has varied from one epoch to another - if in Antiquity it was a witness to the competition between the great powers of the time, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire and, finally, the Russian Empire, the Cold War period has mostly isolated it from the rest of the world and placed it in obscurity.

The evolution of the global system has determined the refocusing of the international community's attention towards riverside states and the Black Sea itself. For the first time in recent history the region is open towards international cooperation, the current importance that it receives somehow making up for the centuries of isolation¹.

Currently the Black Sea region is undergoing a historical stage which can be described as a parting between some of the riverside countries and their communist legacy,

¹ Grigore Alexandrescu, Alexandra Sarcinschi, *Modalități și posibilități de amplificare a cooperării în zona Mării Negre*

through transition from a closed society and economy towards the values of democracy and free market economy. Some states in the region - Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, are already NATO members and part of the European Union (which is the case of the first two), while others are on their way to meeting the requirements for joining the Union (Turkey's case). On the other hand, Russia, while maintaining its status of a great power, seeks to remain a credible partner of the other great powers and the main regional player. Thus, a question arises: why are the efforts for regional stabilisation and development necessary?

The Black Sea has a relevant strategic location: it is positioned at the intersection of Europe and Asia, between the vast Russian territory and the Middle East and it directly connects South-Eastern Europe to Western Europe through the Danube river, but it is also connected with the Mediterranean Sea and currently the NATO and EU expansions have transformed it in a close neighbourhood for the Euro-Atlantic great powers. Also, the Black Sea region is important for the huge diversity of peoples and cultures which characterise riverside countries, a diversity which represents both a source of tension and conflicts and one of cultural richness. Also, one should not forget the economic factor, especially natural resources, which make the Black Sea a region of strategic interest for the Western economic circuits.

Additionally, there are several reasons which determine the correlation between the Black Sea region, of the six riverside countries – Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine – and faraway regions of the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, in terms of security issues. The most important ones refer to the fact that this region represents a bridge between different international players, each with their own economic, political and strategic interests. In this context the concept of Black Sea regional cooperation represents a useful instrument for describing and explaining the complexity of the dynamic relations manifesting here.

A special contribution to the geostrategic importance of the Black Sea region is brought by the so-called “key positions” of the analysed space, which customise it and provide remarkable values¹:

➤ The Strait system (Bosporus, Dardanelle – connected by the Marmara Sea) allows and ensures navigation from the Black Sea to the Planetary Ocean. Turkey holds a privileged status among the riverside countries, conferred by its control over the Straits, these representing the only maritime transport route in the region. Based on the way they were administered, the Bosporus and Dardanelle, the gateways to and from the Black Sea, have basically determined the freedom of commerce, prosperity and cultural and civilization interferences in this part of the world.

➤ The Crimean Peninsula (belonging to Ukraine), out of which Russia has created an advanced maritime fortress, a genuine aircraft carrier, “well anchored”, with multiple facilities, surrounded by sufficient naval forces, ready for action.

➤ Danube's mouths (maritime Danube) offer Romania a remarkable advantage due to the fact that entrance and exit of ships through Sulina's intricate navigational system is done completely on Romanian soil.

➤ The Continental Plateau connected with the Romanian seashore, which represented a source of debates with Ukraine regarding the problem of its demarcation – a debate that ended with a solution acceptable for both parties, issued by the International Court of Justice from Hague.

➤ Snake Island – recently brought into the focus of international diplomacy, has finally entered on its path towards good neighbourhood.

¹ Simona Frolu, *Securitate prin democratizare în zona Mării Negre*

From all of the above we can draw several conclusions which shape the geopolitical significance of the region:

- The Black Sea is located at the junction of three geopolitical regions of high importance: the Balkan Peninsula, Eastern Europe and Asia Minor and in close proximity to the Middle Eastern hotspot;
- The Black Sea represents the Northern limit of NATO's Southern flank and also a segment of the Russian Federation's Southern border;
- For Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine, and indirectly for Trans-Caucasian countries, the Black Sea is the gateway towards the Planetary Ocean;
- The Black Sea is crossed by the future Caspian and Central Asian oil transport routes towards Western consumers;
- The Black Sea has important marine and submarine resources and it is the only way towards the "hot seas";
- It offers numerous commercial and touristic facilities;
- The Black Sea has an important number of harbours and provides a market for approximately 350 million consumers, which results in an important demographic and economic potential;
- It is a favourable environment for economic, cultural and military cooperation.

A different course of action outlined in Romania's National Security Strategy proposes "*building a climate of security, stability and prosperity in the Black Sea region*"¹, because it is of particular importance for Romania that neighbouring countries maintain peace in the relations with one another and have a predictable behaviour regarding security. At the same time, Romania, as a member of the European Union and NATO, must assume a catalyst role of European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the countries residing in the Black Sea region, and also the responsibility of attracting the attention of the international community to the economic potential of the region, as well as the dangers that can be generated by the lack of security and regional predictability – this region is still dominated by illicit traffic and frozen conflicts artificially sustained². Furthermore, one of Romania's foreign policy priorities for 2007 was implementing the European Neighbourhood Policy, which is not only a vehicle for spreading EU's values and standards in the Eastern regions, but also an instrument for promoting a strategic, comprehensive and flexible approach of the Black Sea region.

The final communiqué from Istanbul emphasised the importance of the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic stability. To this end, as part of the transatlantic decision making process regarding security, Romania will contribute to the development of means by which NATO could sustain the efforts of Black Sea countries of consolidating regional security, as well as democratic evolutions and European aspirations of South-Caucasian countries³.

The "Black Sea Synergy" commission's communiqué recognises the European Union's Black Sea dimension, and Romania, based on its experience with integration processes and existent forms of cooperation, as well as good relations with Black Sea riverside countries, can bring a significant contribution to strengthening an area of stability in the Black Sea region.

¹ Strategia de Securitate Națională a României 2007, Capitolul VI, "*România, vector dinamic al securității și prosperității în regiunea Mării Negre*"

² The Romanian President's speech at the "Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation" conference, București, 23 octombrie 2007

³ Romania's foreign policy, Romania in NATO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs website

As an answer to the Commission's communiqué and the International Relations Committee's request, a report regarding cooperation in the Black Sea region was elaborated. The committee requested concrete proposals regarding the strengthening of regional cooperation, highlighting the importance of involving Russia and Turkey in these processes, and also voiced its approval for doubling the available existent funds of the European Institute for Neighbourhood and Partnership.

The committee emphasised the fact that development of the harbour infrastructure, in relation to the European Union's Harbours at the Black Sea (Burgas, Constanța, Mangalia and Varna), is crucial for capitalising the opportunities of having Union members as Black Sea riverside countries. The same report also specified that this cooperation should not be limited at the economic level, but have as a main objective the creation of a region dominated by stability, democracy and good governance. The Romanian representative at this reunion, held in Strasbourg, has reminded the audience that Romania will be in the first line and will lay down efforts for achieving these goals.

During the first reunion of the Council for General Business and Foreign Relations, that was held in Brussels between January 22nd-23rd 2007, the Romanian minister of foreign affairs has emphasised the necessity to define a bolder Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, thus confirming the European Union's commitment in the region. The pros for putting in effect an official European Union policy for the Black Sea are based on the fact that this region holds the answers to some of the most significant European problems – energy security, diversifying the energy sources, fighting terrorism and illegal traffic, building state law and democratic institutions, as well as expanding towards other markets¹.

Romania demonstrated that an important objective of its foreign policy is neighbourliness and regional cooperation, as a result of becoming aware that “a series of political, economical, cultural and security-related problems can be better tackled and solved in a coherent framework, where a certain level of cohesion and common development experience exist. To this end, the regions can offer the perfect environment for establishing certain mechanisms of cooperation, which contribute to the international security climate”².

Thus, in Romania's governing program for 2005-2008 it is mentioned that Romania's Government “*will develop relations of neighbourliness and regional cooperation in the South-East European and Black Sea regions*”³ through:

- Promoting cooperation in South-East Europe;
- Promoting relations with the Republic of Moldova;
- Cooperating in the South-East Europe Process of Cooperation for promoting the process of stabilisation and association initiated by the European Union for the countries in the Western Balkans for establishing a structural connection between EU and SEEPC;
- Promoting a coherent policy for fighting the unconventional security risks by capitalising the mechanisms and resources of the SECI Centre;

¹ Adrian Lungu, “*România cere oficial o politică UE pentru Marea Neagră*”, article published on www.euractiv.ro

² Romania's foreign policy, Regional Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs website <http://www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=5031&idlnk=1&cat=3>

³ Romania's foreign policy, Governing Program, Ministry of Foreign Affairs website <http://www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=2510&idlnk=1&cat=3>

- strengthening the cooperation in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization;
- An increased involvement in the regional energy security policy.

Romania is a member of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SPSEE), „*a political initiative designed to encourage cooperation between the South Eastern Europe countries, as well as supporting the efforts of these countries to become integrated in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures*”¹.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSECO) was founded in 1992 by 11 countries, including Romania. Our country has brought significant contributions to BSECO’s activities by initiating the process of involving the organization in the regional security and stability dimensions, by launching the reform and restructure process of the organization (see the „Declaration of Bucharest – Towards the 15th anniversary of BSECO), by supporting the drafting of an Additional Protocol to the BSECO Accord and a Memorandum of Understanding between BSECO and the Bucharest SECI Centre. Also, Romania has held BSECO’s presidency during November 2005 – April 2006.

Another Romanian initiative was the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership. The Summit in Bucharest on June 5th 2006 marked the first reunion of the Forum. During the Summit, the American President’s counsellor for national security announced the launching of the “Black Sea Trust Fund for Regional Cooperation” program, a long term initiative which marks the beginning of a cooperation between Romania, the United States’ Government and “The German Marshall Fund of the United States – a Memorial to the Marshall Plan”, an American nongovernmental organization which aims to support democracy, regional cooperation for civil development and promotion of good governance in the Black Sea region². This program’s headquarters is in Bucharest, this being a remarkable opportunity for Romania to be seen as a cooperation promoter in the Black Sea region.

To this end, Romania is and must remain an active presence in the regional cooperation processes in the Black Sea area and in the institutions and organizations mentioned above. At the same time, our country must continue to develop new forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order to increase economic connections and regional stability (e.g. the trilateral agreements Romania – Greece; Romania – Bulgaria – Turkey; Romania – Republic of Moldova – Ukraine).

Our country’s integration in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures has a positive impact on regional security and stability, favouring cooperation, understanding, reconciliation, and settling possible historical disputes on a sub-regional level. Romania will continue and will increase its cooperation with other member countries for solving the issues that impact the Black Sea region, an area under scrutiny of NATO and EU officials: economic and social disparities; ethnic and religious conflicts; organised crime; weapons, drugs and human traffic; corruption and human rights.

Together with the other countries in the region, Romania can contribute to stopping inactiveness and non-involvement in reconstruction and stability problems, in

¹ Romania’s foreign policy, Regional Cooperation, Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs website <http://www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=7273&idlnk=1&cat=3>

² Substantiation Note, H.G. nr. 786/17.07.2007 regarding the prior approval for recognising through a judicial decision of the nongovernmental organization “The German Marshall Fund of the United States – a Memorial to the Marshall Plan” from the United States of America and for adopting the required measures

inefficiency of international security institutions. Also, through collaboration and cooperation, it can develop policies and use instruments that will allow tackling in a decisive manner the inter-ethnic and other types of conflicts, applying European standards and promoting with resolve a system of values which will favour the interests of all the nations residing in the Black Sea region.

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