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Why the Black Sea matters for the European Union?
Brief remarks and possible developments

Working Paper

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Abstract:

In the early phase of the EU enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe, the EU never had a policy towards the Black Sea region as such. It was a situation that partially corrected through the Black Sea Synergy (2007) but was later one shadowed by the Eastern Partnership Initiative. The failure of the EU policies and also a perceive lack of interest on behalf of NATO led to a series of regional crises and conflicts that have transformed the area into a sensitive region on the top of the agenda, as the region is of increasing importance.

Currently the region is in the middle of an increasing security crisis (due to the Russian actions, the refugee crisis, the Turkish crisis, etc.) which affects all decision-making processes in the region.

The following paper would try to provide to both a general and specialised audience an update as well as a series of analyses on why the Black Sea matters.

It is in this context that views remain divergent on how the Western world should move forward, either through a strategic region-wide approach or more targeted sectoral policies (neither of which are mutually exclusive).

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1. History never goes away!

"The past is never dead. It's not even past." (William Faulkner)

The Black Sea (*Eúxeinos Póntos,* 'the hospitable sea' in ancient Greek*)* has a millennial background of being a cultures melting pot, a conflict area between numerous civilizations and a hub for regional commerce that affected the entire area, not just the riparian states, but beyond too. It may not have the reputation or the legends associated to the Mediterranean Sea (*Mare Nostrum*) yet we must never forget that the legendary Golden Fleece[i] was to be found in the Black Sea Area, thus the perilous voyage of the Argonauts which brought this region to the attention of the world.

The Greek city states would then later one establish a series of flourishing colonies and commercial outposts along its shores from the 7th century B.C., that would also prosper under the Roman leadership and later on under the Byzantine rule. Later in the 12th and 13th centuries B.C., Genoa and Venice established a series of trading outposts in the area. Black Sea was then a crucial component of the European economy, where the dominant powers tried to maintain a balance through a complicate web of alliances and military interventions.

The decline of the region started in the 15th century when the conquest of Constantinople (1453) and the continuous expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the region closed the Black Sea from outside influences. The Black Sea would be more or less an Ottoman lake until the middle of the 18th century when Russia challenged the *status-quo* and started its expansion around the Black Sea, having as ultimate target the conquest of Constantinople. The result was more than a century of wars as Russia annexed, step by step, the Ottoman possessions on its way toward the Black Sea Straits with the intention to dominate the entire region.

The Black Sea returned all of a sudden on the international agenda with the 1856 – 1859 Crimean War. It mattered because it was after a long time that non-Black Sea powers intervened in the region – with France and England, alongside other European powers, helping Turkey against the Russian Empire. This intervention had lasting effects by restraining the Russian advancement, enhancing the Ottomans dependence on its Western allies and paving the way for the independence of the countries from the Western side of the Black Sea (Romania included) in the second half of the 19th century.

The situation changed after the end of the WWI and the dissolution of the former dominant powers in the region, the Tsarist Empire and the Ottoman Empire. The riparian states from the West side of the Black Sea enjoyed a period of relative calm as the opposing forces were gathering their strengths for challenging the *status-quo*.

A significant event happened and it affected all the parties involved - the signature of the *Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits*[ii] *(1936)* that gives Turkey control over the Bosporus Straits and the Dardanelles and it also regulates the transit of naval warships[iii].

Crimea was once more a subject of fierce battles during WWII, the Black Sea being however a marginal war theatre. During the Cold War most of the Black Sea states were under Soviet rule with only Turkey as NATO representative (since 1952) in the region. It was a typical Cold War area, with periods of tensions and *détente* as the Soviet Union tried to upgrade the Black Sea fleet into an instrument worthy of its name that would help it in the general framework of the Cold War.

The end of communism and the disappearance of the Soviet Union had, in the first period, as a result the reduction of tension in the Black Sea area as NATO expanded toward the region. Yet the 1990's were only apparently calm as they had the seeds of the tensions to come.

2. Regional cooperation

The first successful regional organization was the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) created following a Turkish initiative at a regional summit in Istanbul on 25 June 1992. After a rocky and uncertain start BSEC acquired international legal identity and became a fully operational regional economic organization, the **Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation**, following the entry into force of its Charter on 1 May 1999. With generous aims, having a "common vision of their regional cooperation as a part of the integration process in Europe, based on human rights and fundamental freedoms, prosperity through economic liberty, social justice, and equal security and stability"[iv].

It was and it is a generous platform that reunites in a Forum for cooperation 12 Member States: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

The BSEC Headquarters - the Permanent International Secretariat of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC PERMIS) - was established in March 1994 in Istanbul[v].

The BSEC has developed during the last decades an entire series of bodies designed to promote its core objectives – a research facility, a parliamentarian assembly, a bank etc. Yet its efficiency seems to be limited, having failed to reach the same level of real life effects like other similar structures around the world.

3. European Union involvement in the region

Up until 2000 the Black Sea area was generally neglected by the European Union[vi] but each new enlargement of the European Union brought with itself new and new neighbours and various challenges.

The major enlargement with 12 states carried out in 2004 and 2007 led the EU to think more systematically about re-ordering its relations with neighbours in the South and the East. This concerned above all the group of states with no prospects in the long term – see North Africa – or for the foreseeable future – see Eastern Europe – of EU membership. Since 2003–2004 the EU has created a uniform political frame-work under the title 'European Neighbourhood Policy' (ENP), within which it wishes to organize its relations with six Eastern European countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and ten Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian Autonomous Territories, Syria, Tunisia)[vii].

This mechanism, can be seen either as a sign of pessimism and reservation as regards the EU capacity to expand and promote its values can also be interpreted as an innovative way to ensure the promotion of promoting peace, democracy and stability in its neighbourhood.

The Black Sea area represents thus for the European Union both an area of great opportunities as well as of great challenges. A series of researchers, such as Tomescu-Hatto, have underlined what are the main objectives of the European Union in the Black Sea area.

The first one is "the development of democracy, respect for human rights and good governance. One of the major interests of the European Union is to promote democracy in its own neighbourhood."

Secondly, the European Union has a profound interest in maintaining the regional stability and in containing the frozen and not so frozen conflicts from the area as "is not only an important crossroad of civilization, but also a bridge between Europe and more distant and troubled areas. This vast region of highly political and economic vulnerability has faced important challenges of *hard security* since the end of the Cold War."

Thirdly, the European Union pushed the riparian states to fight against organized crime and terrorism, both seen as major threats, as the European Union stability is in stark contrast with the areas of conflict and instability found in some of the countries bordering the Black Sea but also in Central Asia and in the Middle East.

Energy security is also one of the driven factors behind the European Union need to secure the region. Since 2006 the European Union has started an active campaign to secure its

energy security and the Black Sea area plays a major role, both as a transit hub but also as a production area.

Finally, the fifth reason is more political and resides in the EU ability to stand up on its own as a mature and world recognized actor on the international stage, able of influencing the countries in the region.

"If the EU wants to assert itself as a foreign policy actor, it needs to negotiate difficult matters of *hard security* with Moscow, without jeopardizing its geo-strategic interests. The WBSR is both a challenge and opportunity for the EU to act within its neighbourhood and evaluate its instruments of cooperation, stabilization, and democratization, including the ENP and the bilateral Action Plans, which tend to be regarded as strictly soft security tools."[viii].

A) The European Union Neighbourhood Policy

Ever since 2003 the European Union (EU) has developed a new working instrument called the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in order to have a close working relationship with its Southern and Eastern neighbours in order "to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration". It was and still supposed to be based "on common interests and on values — democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and social cohesion".

It was designed back then as a quid *pro quo* foreign affairs instrument designed to create a win-win situation for all the parties involved. "The EU should aim to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood – a 'ring of friends' - with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations" and in return "Russia, the countries of the Western NIS and the Southern Mediterranean should be offered the prospect of a stake in the EU's Internal Market and further integration and liberalization to promote the free movement of – persons, goods, services and capital (four freedoms)." [ix]

Figure 1. EU cooperation with its neighbours (2013)
Source : http://enpi-info.eu/medportal/publications//682/ENP-Map

Keeping it short we may say that through the ENP "the EU looked for a coherent approach of relations with Eastern and Southern neighbours, with the objective of building a large area of prosperity, stability and security for all. It's about a privileged relationship, based on mutual commitment to shared values (democracy, human rights, rule of law, market economy principles, sustainable development). ENP remains distinct from the EU enlargement process, although it does not prejudice, for European neighbours how their relations with the EU may develop in the future." [x]

For Romania, as a frontier country, the ENP was first of all a big promise of stability in an uncertain and unstable region. It was seen as complementary to NATO's hard power security umbrella, an EU funded soft power umbrella of prosperity and stability.

"Romania has a manifest interest in fostering, in the EU neighbourhood, a common space of stability, security and progress, in deepening relations between the EU and its Eastern and Southern neighbours, based on common interest and values." [xi]

Unfortunately since 2003 a lot of water has passed under the bridge and mostly it was a muddy one, since the continuing deteriorating security perspectives in the East and South and the ongoing flux of migrants have succeeded in turning even the most pessimistic scenarios into positive ones, looking in retrospect.

Table 1. Difference between the intended and actual results of the ENP

What we hoped to achieve	What we've got in the field
• local actors took action to initiate reforms to obtain rule of law, social justice, and increased accountability	• conflict • rising extremism and terrorism • human rights violations and other challenges to international law • economic upheaval • major refugee flows

Source: *JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy* (2015), available online at http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/2015/151118_joint-communication_review-of-the-enp_en.pdf Last visited on 1 August 2016.

B) Black Sea Synergy[xii]

The 2007 EU enlargement with Romania and Bulgaria brought the Union to the shores of the Black Sea, in a region still unknown, where it had little experience. It is in that context that the Black Sea Synergy was born. It was complementary to ENP "that would focus political attention at the regional level and invigorate ongoing cooperation processes. The primary task of Black Sea Synergy would therefore be the development of cooperation within the Black Sea region and also between the region as a whole and the European Union. "

Seen as complimentary to the ENP, the Black Sea Synergy would focus "on those issues and cooperation sectors which reflect common priorities and where the EU presence and support is already significant"[xiii], such as energy, transport, democracy etc.

Unfortunately, it had a limited effect due to the lack of political support from the main actors. "The evolution of Black Sea Synergy thus reflects **the difficult security and socio-economic circumstances in the region as well as the often competing policies of regional stakeholders**. BSS's limited progress does not come as a surprise as regional cooperation, not to mention integration, around the Black Sea has not taken off in any forms (trade-economic, security or social) despite the plurality of institutions and formats. However, the BSS's meagre achievements so far also stem from its low prioritization within the EU. Overall, BSS has lacked political support and strong commitment from EU actors, especially EU Black Sea Member States."[xiv]

C) The Eastern Partnership

Given the Black Sea Synergy shortcomings and the need for a revised policy in May 2009 was launched the Eastern Partnership at the Prague Summit as the Eastern section of the

ENP. It covered all the EU Member States and six eastern European partners: **Armenia**, **Azerbaijan**, **Belarus**, **Georgia**, **Moldova and Ukraine.**

It is based on a commitment to the principles of international law and fundamental values - democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also encompasses support for a market economy, sustainable development and good governance[xv].

Yet in the years that followed the continuous Russian involvement brought a lot of the initial hopes to a halt and resulted in a series of withdraws from the initial agreements and to the Ukrainian conflict.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis of the EU involvement in the Black Sea

Strengths	Weaknesses
The policy tools of the EU – well-developed and various (see above) Experience of successive enlargements	ENP is a poor substitute of the EU enlargement that is maybe the single most powerful force to support reforms Limited financial resources allocated to the region Mutually exclusive policies – either EU is ready or not, that excludes the cooperation with other regional actors such as Russia Lack of a EU unified approach to the region – various member states have various responses to the current challenges
Opportunities	**Threats**
The Black Sea countries are willing to cooperate with the European Union Black Sea provides a chance for the EU to diversify its energy supply sources and transport routes	Two competing visions regarding the cooperation in the Black Sea area – one centered on the European Union and the other round Russia While the costs for the reforms demanded by the European Union to the Black Sea countries are high the incentives the Union offers are often perceived as insufficient

Source: Based upon Seven Erdogan, *Black Sea Extroversion at European and International Level*, ICBSS Policy Brief no. 31, December 2015. Available online at https://blacksea-horizon.eu/object/document/384 Last visited on 22 June 2018.

A regional success story – the Black Sea NGO Forum

A successful regional cooperation is the already traditional Black Sea NGO Forum that "was launched in 2008 by FOND (Federation of Romanian NGOs for Development). The Forum is organized with the support of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission, in the framework of the Black Sea Synergy. The Forum aims to increase the level of dialogue and cooperation among NGOs in the wider Black Sea Region, strengthening the NGOs capacity to influence regional and national policies and to increase the number and quality of regional partnerships and projects".

The Forum is focused on good practices in various fields and since 2008 it brought together more than 900 participants, thus becoming one of the best regional example of good practices[xvi].

D. The Three Seas Initiative (3SI)

Although technically not an EU initiative the Three Seas Initiative can, in this author opinion, be counted amidst the EU relevant initiatives as it reunites 12 EU Member States thus being solely an "EU club" whose national interests have to submit also to the EU influence and rules in bringing forward this project.

Born as a Polish – Croatian initiative in 2015 this regional project "was founded on a simple observation that the development of strong infrastructural and economic ties between Central and Eastern European states and Western Europe did not go hand in hand with the intra-regional integration which require additional attention."[xvii].

The key meetings so far have been the **Dubrovnik Summit from 25 – 26 August 2016** where the 3SI was defined as "an informal platform for securing political support and decisive action on specific cross-border and macro-regional projects of strategic importance to the States involved in energy, transportation, digital communication and economic sectors in Central and Eastern Europe".[xviii]

Figure 2. The Three Seas Initiative Member States

Source: Kamil Calus, Horia Ciurtin, Gheorghe Magheru (authors) & Izel Selin (editor*), The emergence of a European project. Three Summits for the Three Seas Initiatives*, Policy Paper, June 2018, p. 4, New Strategy Centre and OSW (Centre for Eastern Studies), available online at https://newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NSC_OSW_3SI_policy_paper.pdf Last visited on 22 June 2018.

Another relevant Summit was the Warsaw Summit from July 2017, where also took part the US President Donald Trump, which bolstered the popularity of the event. The Summit ended with a Joint Declaration that underlined the key priorities of the cooperation format:

- ✓ "enhanced transportation connections of our region to develop and further integrate into the trans-European transport (TEN-T) network,
- ✓ implementation of the Union's Energy policy objectives,
- ✓ promote business character of joint economic projects,
- ✓ full synergy with the EU policies".[xix]

What is to be noticed here is the fact that the Statement emphasised the EU aspects, portraying the Initiative as a "tool" for enhancing the EU presence in the area, thus justifying in my opinion its inclusion in the EU related instruments for the Black Sea.

The 2018 Summit is supposed to take place in September in Bucharest, Romania and is expected to focus on three main areas: energy; transport infrastructure and digitalization – in an

effort to better promote the regional cooperation and development while acting as a support for the EU and the region as whole.

4. From frozen conflicts to the Crimea imbroglio and the militarisation of the Black Sea

The frozen conflicts are surprisingly numerous in the Black Sea area and they take place in the territories of the republics of Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Republic of Moldova (Transnistria) and since 2014 Ukraine (the so-called 'people's republics' of Donetsk and Lugansk).

We are dealing with internal conflicts with ethnical, economic or political causes that escalated into military confrontations. We have here the Russian presence who in most of the cases "steps in and secures a ceasefire or some other form of interim arrangement that stops the actual hostilities for a while but leaves the root causes undisturbed. Often this arrangement is accompanied by the Russian military presence as 'peacekeepers' for additional leverage in pursuit of long-term geopolitical advantage".[xx]

These regions act as a significant leverage for the Russian interests as they are in a grey area from the political and legal point of view. They also present the risk of nuclear proliferation.

"A concern articulated in national progress reports prepared for the March 31-April 1 summit by several Eurasian governments was how corrosive the region's ethnic and border disputes are to global nuclear security. The chaotic conditions that accompany such conflicts can make it easier for terrorists and criminal groups to get their hands on, and transport, nuclear or radioactive materials that can subsequently be used in a terror operation."[xxi]

Figure 3. The Black Sea frozen conflicts

Source: Sergiu Celac, Seth Cropsey, Dan Dungaciu, Iulian Fota & Cosmin Ionita, *Why the Black Sea Matters*, Policy Paper, June 2016, New Strategy Centre and Hudson Institute, available online at https://hudson.org/research/12759-why-the-black-sea-matters Last visited on 22 June 2018.

5. The Black Sea militarisation

Ever since the beginning of 2000 Russia has started to exercise an increase military presence in the Black Sea area. It was the beginning of a resurgence of power politics that would be clearly expressed starting with February 2007 when at the Munich Security Conference the Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that the NATO enlargement affects Russia's interest and therefore needs to be tackle. "I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?"[xxii].

It was an open statement on the fact that Russia was back in the game and that the Black Sea would see its effects: "In conclusion I would like to note the following. We very often - and personally, I very often - hear appeals by our partners, including our European partners, to the effect that Russia should play an increasingly active role in world affairs. In connection with this I would allow myself to make one small remark. It is hardly necessary to incite us to do so.

Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy."[xxiii]

After the Georgian war of 2008 the Russian forces started a beef up of their maritime capabilities in the region and the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 offered Russia a privileged position in the region and well beyond. The reshaping and refitting of the military bases in the province began to military challenge NATO and reshape the security landscape.

"Russian control over Crimea gives the Kremlin freedom to develop and modernize the Black Sea Fleet and project power beyond the confines of the region. Russia now has two military objectives: first, the transformation of the Black Sea Fleet into a "fortress fleet", capable of carrying out A2/AD operations and, second, to develop the fleet so that it can support naval operations in the Mediterranean."[xxiv].

NUMERICAL COMPARISON BETWEEN THE SIZES OF RUSSIAN MILITARY DEPLOYMENTS IN CRIMEA IN EARLY 2014 AND EARLY 2016

	Prior to the split of the former USSR Navy's Black Sea Fleet (May 1997)	Prior to the annexation of Crimea (January 2014)	Following the annexation of Crimea (March 2016)	Russia's long-term plans through 2020-25
	70000	12500	23800	43000
	258	–	30	100
	742	92	603	1150
	229	24	173	400
	170	22	74	150
	115	37	61	95
	6	–	16	50
	105	26	30	33
	4	2	4	7

Figure 4. Numerical comparison between the sizes of Russian military deployments in Crimea in early 2014 and early 2016

Source: *Militarization of Occupied Crimea – A Threat To Global Security*, available online at https://defence-ua.com/index.php/en/publications/defense-express-publications/914-militarization-of-occupied-crimea-a-threat-to-global-security Last visited on 22 June 2018..

6. Romanian 'counteraction' to the Black Sea militarisation. The Black sea Flotilla[xxv]

Following the annexation of Crimea, the question of naval power in the Black Sea become a relevant one once more. Thus, in January 2016 the Cioloş government launch the initiative to create a naval group in the Black Sea – the **Black Sea Flotilla.**

Then Defence Minister Mihnea Motoc announced on January 31st 2016 that Romania was taking the first steps to negotiate with NATO the set-up of a regular multinational naval patrol in the Black Sea. "The possibility of creating such a fleet might be discussed at the next NATO summit in July"[xxvi].

This concept received a strong support from president Klaus Iohannis who, on 3 March 2016, spoke about the need to "initiate the procedures for the creation of a multinational naval group"[xxvii].

The Bulgarian Foreign Minister Daniel Mitov, while in Brussels, said Bulgaria was exploring the options to take part in a joint standing maritime group of NATO in the Black Sea. "Bulgaria will do everything to boost its defensive guarantees and capabilities in the Black Sea"[xxviii].

On 1 June 2016, within the framework of the Sofia Summit of the South East Europe Cooperation Process, the Romanian and Bulgarian prime-ministers also talked about the NATO Warsaw Summit from 8 July and implicitly about the Romanian proposition.

Yet surprisingly when Romania's president visited Bulgaria, on 15 – 16 June 2016, we received a negative response from the Bulgarian counterparts. The Bulgarian prime-minister, Boiko Borisov, out of domestic policies rationale, stated a contrary opinion saying that he did not want the Black Sea to become an area of military conflict.

Under these circumstances the Romanian president seemed to back up by denying any plan to create a Black Sea fleet and thus reducing the project to mere common exercises of the naval forces of the three allied countries. Thus, this project turned up to be, at least in the public opinion perception, similar to a famous Radio Yerevan joke:

"Question to Radio Yerevan: "Is it correct that Grigori Grigorievich Grigoriev won a luxury car at the All-Union Championship in Moscow?"

Radio Yerevan answered: "In principle, yes. But first of all it was not Grigori Grigorievich Grigoriev, but Vassili Vassilievich Vassiliev; second, it was not at the All-Union Championship in Moscow, but at a Collective Farm Sports Festival in Smolensk; third, it was not a car, but a bicycle; and fourth he didn't win it, but rather it was stolen from him."[xxix]

This project was then perceived as a failure of the Romanian negotiating team who seem to have more or less taken as granted the Bulgarian and Turkish approval. Moreover, this project appeared to be promoted rather late, without an active diplomatic promotion campaign, without the support of all the engaged actors and somehow on a rather discreet note and not as public and vocal like in the case of the Poles and Baltic peoples that promote their interests both in a regional and international context.

However, the Black Sea security situation was addressed at the NATO Summit in Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016, who proven the continuous interest granted to the region.

"41. We will also develop tailored forward presence in the southeast part of the Alliance territory. Appropriate measures, tailored to the Black Sea region and including the Romanian initiative to establish a multinational framework brigade to help improve integrated training of Allied units under Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast, will contribute to the Alliance's strengthened deterrence and defence posture, situational awareness, and peacetime demonstration of NATO's intent to operate without constraint. It will also provide a strong signal of support to regional security. Options for a strengthened NATO air and maritime presence will be assessed."[xxx]

Bulgarian Perspective

Strengthening the NATO Black Sea Flank – a Point of View of Bulgaria

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The recent debate on strengthening the NATO Black Sea flank attracted considerable public attention in Bulgaria as well and opened again the discussion about country's role and commitments as member of NATO. However, in order to gain a better understanding on Bulgaria's position, several background facts are worth considering.

"Always with Germany, never against Russia". The basic principle of the Bulgarian foreign policy under Tsar Boris III in the first years of the World War II seems to be still valid nowadays, though modified to "Never against Russia, never against the European Union/NATO". This explains the general approach of several Bulgarian governments in a row, which attempt to strike the balance between country's EU and NATO commitments and the legacy of the past[xxxi].

Unlike other former communist countries, according opinion polls, Russia enjoys a relatively good image in Bulgaria, which to a great extent is due to a purely historic reason – Russia's role in the liberation of Bulgaria and the reestablishment of the Bulgarian

statehood in the late 19th century as a follow-up on the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). This replicates into a feeling of long-lasting gratitude among many Bulgarians, which together with the Orthodox Church, is still perceived as an important basis for the relations between both countries. In recent these bilateral relations have been heavily dominated by the energy topic. Bulgaria is dependent on Russian imports for 90% of its gas supplies; operates a Russian-type nuclear power plant; and has another nuclear plant in the pipeline (initially started with Russian companies but without definite plans for the continuation of its construction).

Other background fact of paramount importance for the Bulgarian position regarding a stronger engagement of NATO in the Black Sea region is the recent confrontation between Russia and Bulgaria's South-eastern neighbour – Turkey. According to the latest census in 2011 the Turkish minority totals app. 10% of country's populations, thus forming the second largest ethnic group in Bulgaria. This demographic pattern has a political repercussion – Turkish and Muslim constituencies in Bulgaria traditionally support the Movement for Freedoms and Rights, a centrist political party, which despite being currently in opposition, has been always a major player on the domestic political scene.

In conclusion, when trying to understand Bulgarian positions regarding power shifts in the wider Black Sea area, one should consider the multi-layered landscape that determines the main policy directions of the country and its specific room for manoeuvre. In the most recent debate on fortifying the presence of NATO in the Black Sea, it is obvious that the official positions of Bulgaria will be impacted by the above-mentioned facts as well as by the intention of the Bulgarian government not to take part in an ongoing confrontation between countries in the region. This does not exclude the participation of Bulgaria in strengthening the NATO Black Sea flank provided that such a policy direction emerges as a common initiative under the umbrella of NATO and not as a proposal from one or another country in the region.

*Source: This was initially published on Mihai Sebe's personal webpage on 8 July 2016 under the title *A regional perspective on Black Sea Flotilla. Sound premises or is just building castles in Spain?* Available online at https://www.europeanpolitics.ro/index.php/2016/07/08/a-regional-perspective-on-black-sea-flotilla-sound-premises-or-is-just-building-castles-in-spain/ Last visited on 22 June 2018.

Ukrainian Perspective*

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Since January this year Romanian and international media reported that the Romanian government has the ambition to create a regular Black Sea flotilla under the NATO auspices in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea. Certainly the initiative has attracted the attention of the other Black Sea littoral states including Ukraine. Romania declared that this issue will be put on the agenda of the NATO's Warsaw summit and alongside with the Poland which is aiming to contribute into the security of the Baltic Sea littoral states, Romania is the one who is going to take the same mission in the Black Sea. This fact reflects the ambition of Bucharest to gain more influence and to cooperate and sometimes compete with Poland in shaping the agenda for the EU in its neighbourhood policy. Also it highlights the personal ambition of President Iohannis to prove that his presidency can be a very important step forward in the development of Romania.

Romania already mentioned that it is favouring the participation of Ukraine and Georgia in the activities of the aforementioned flotilla. That was a friendly step since it proved that Romania is not trying to use the moment for monopolizing its role in the Black Sea but seeks for the broad cooperation with the other interested parties. In this regard, although Georgia does not have the fleet and Ukraine has limited capacities in this field, the potential of the Ukrainian and Georgian coast guard and the ports that Ukraine and Georgia obtain at the Black Sea can be a significant contribution into the activities of the NATO's Black Sea flotilla.

Besides, it is important to note that Russia's seizure of the significant part of Ukrainian fleet has changed the balance of power in the Black Sea and in cent motivate Turkey to ease the implementation of some of provisions of the Montreux Convention although still with some restrictions imposed by Ankara.

Naturally the idea is supported by Georgia and Ukraine. Both countries are intimidated by the increased Russian presence in the Black Sea and seek for some balancing powers, both are limited in their capacities to use the status of the littoral state and the economic potential of their ports and thus will support patrolling by NATO flotilla and both will use the creation of the flotilla for proving their role in NATO's newly invented 28+2 formula.

*Source: This was initially published on Mihai Sebe's personal webpage on 8 July 2016 under the title *A regional perspective on Black Sea Flotilla. Sound premises or is just*

building castles in Spain? Available online at https://www.europeanpolitics.ro/index.php/2016/07/08/a-regional-perspective-on-black-sea-flotilla-sound-premises-or-is-just-building-castles-in-spain/ Last visited on 22 June 2018.

Bucharest 9 (B9)

Similar to the Three Seas Initiative that reunites EU Member States is worth also mentioning the "Bucharest 9" Initiative s launched by Romania, in partnership with Poland, in 2014. It is intended as platform for strengthening dialogue and consultations among nine NATO allies: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary.

One of the most recent meeting of B9 took place in Bucharest, Romania on 12 – 13 March 2018 - BUCHAREST - 9(B9) DEFENCE MINISTER'S MEETING – and analysed " the security architecture on the entire Eastern flank and concrete ways of formulating adapted answers within allied framework", the Black Sea area being in forefront, as well, among other, "ways of consolidating the cooperation among allied states including by ensuring complementation with the other regional formats: European Defense Initiative / EDI Initiative, or the Three Seas Initiative"

* Source: *BUCHAREST - 9(B9) DEFENCE MINISTER'S MEETING*, 12 – 13 March 2018, Ministry of National Defence, Bucharest, Romania. Available online at http://english.mapn.ro/b9defence/ Last visited on 25 June 2018

7. Energy security

The geographical location and the logic of cooperation suggests that Russia and the European Union must have a common interest in creating a safe area for energy and trade in the region. Yet the annexation of Crimea raised a series of troubling questions about the legal status of maritime space and the commercial interests of global companies operating in the Black Sea.

For instance Romanian energy experts such as Eugenia Guşilov expressed in their analyses the assumption that the annexation of Crimea had also as a background the idea to gain access, to control and to exploit energy resources located in the Black and Azov Seas[xxxii].

However, we can be still be optimist if we regard the worldwide trends, as the energy availability tend to become the new normal. Moreover, solutions are being envisaged at the regional level such as:

"The panoply of policies and pro- active measures that are now being considered at a regional level fall into two categories: (i) Upgrading the national systems of energy production, transportation, distribution and use, and (ii) Promoting international cooperation in order to prove added value compared to individual country efforts in those areas where a regional approach is politically feasible and makes economic sense.

An appropriate course of action may include such recommendations as: (i) Maintaining an investment-friendly environment conducive to timely development of new resources, (ii) Completing a comprehensive network of interconnectors, (iii) Taking sustained action to improve energy efficiency and moderate energy demand, (iv) Diversifying the energy mix in a sustainable way that is compliant with environmental requirements, (v) Using regional cooperation formats."[xxxiii]

One such example of prospective projects in the energy sector is the so-called BRUA pipeline meant to connect Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria, a European Union-backed natural gas pipeline envisioned to reduce Central Europe's reliance on energy imports.[xxxiv]

8. The Black Sea and the migration routes[xxxv]

The European Union has been seriously affected in 2015 and 2016 the refugee and migrant crisis. An extraordinary pressure was put on the Union as hundreds of thousands of persons poured in, often uncontrolled in the Member States. If the Mediterranean Sea as in the forefront of the crisis the Black Sea played a secondary role so far. The EU border here, represented by Romania and Bulgaria saw very little pressure as most of the smuggling in the region is done through land frontiers given their easier permeability, especially through Ukraine, and the often-difficult weather and sea conditions in the Black Sea.

Table 3. Detections of illegal border-crossing between BCPs. Detections reported by routes and top three nationalities at the external borders

Routes	2014	2015	2016	2017	Share of 2017 total	% change on previous year
Black Sea route	433	68	1	537	0.3	53600
Iraq	90	12	-	495	92	n.a.
Iran	45	9	-	35	6.5	n.a.

Pakistan	**15**	**-**	**-**	**3**	**0.6**	**n.a.**
Other	**283**	**47**	**1**	**4**	**0.7**	**300**

9. New actors in the Black Sea Area

Outside the traditional major players (Russia and Turkey) the Black Sea Area has started to attract the attention of the **United States of America**. During the Cold War the USA were a "quiet" actor in the region, supporting Turkey, a key NATO member, as the region was a secondary theatre of interest. The situation changes in the 1990's as the riparian states who once belonged to the communist sphere began expressing their interest in joining NATO. Step by step the Black Sea began to have an important place in the Washington Agenda[xxxvi] as the ongoing conflicts in Middle East and Central Asia required also the development of a complex logistical network throughout the region.

The 2008 Georgian Crisis and the 2014 annexation of Crimea have put the Black Sea indefinitely on the USA agenda and require a constant attention in order to restore the geostrategic imbalance.

As the entire attention focuses on the military showdown with Russia, **China** is also becoming an important actor in the region through its economic investments. The region is included in the trans-Eurasian "One Belt, One Road" concepts and saw the inauguration in 2015 of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route that connects China to Turkey and Georgia.

"The Trans-Caspian transport route is many things to the many states involved. Transporting goods from Europe to China and back–at the moment crossing through Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (as well as both the Black and Caspian Seas)–is an alternative to the Russian route. The clearest rationale behind the recent focus on the route is political, but that's not the only motivation for the states involved. The trans-Caspian route satisfies several checkboxes: it not only avoids Russia, but it can potentially capitalize on the opening of Iran, and in the end, increased trade options please China."[xxxvii].

10. What about Romania? Final remarks

Romania has had an ambivalent relation with the Black Sea area given its complicated historical past and the presence of major actors that blocked the free trade in the region. One of the important voices during the Interwar period was the Romanian historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu who paid a particular attention to the Black Sea Area. We can thus mention for an abroad audience his 1941-1942 lecture entitled **The Black Sea Issue** at the University of Bucharest where he defined Romania's priorities in the region.

"The historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu identified two 'key positions', respectively decisive geopolitical positions Romania needed to mandatorily include in its strategic assessment: '*1. The Bosphorus entry point and, in general, the strait system which leads the waterway beyond this enclosed sea; and 2. Crimea, which, through its natural ports, its ancient fortresses and the high maritime bastion represented in the Black obviously represents a commanding position over the maritime complex in the area. Whomever holds Crimea can rule the Black Sea. Whomever fails to hold it, cannot rule. It is obvious that this issue is connected to our issues, because, when all comes to all, what else do the straits represent than the extension of the Danube inflows*'. He also added that '*the notion of the safe space implies that we cannot remain indifferent to what is going on in these two key positions of a sea so closely tied to our existence*'. The history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is summarized by Gheorghe I. Brătianu as '*a struggle for the Black Sea between Russia and Europe*'"[xxxviii].

If during the communist period, Romania's Black Sea policy was dominated by the Cold War logic after 1990 we have shaped our policies in accordance with the Euro-Atlantic area general policies while trying to bring on the West agenda the peculiarities of the region (such as the Black Sea Synergy). As stated by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "**The main objectives of Romania in the Black Sea region**, which were announced in a national strategy (2006), aim at creating and strengthening a stable, democratic, prosperous area in the Eastern neighbourhood, but also at opening the Black Sea wider region to the European and Euro-Atlantic values and processes. "The fatigue" of eastward enlargement should be replaced with a new paradigm of cooperation that would amplify the EU potential of influence and drive for change in the region, without excluding the possibility of EU accession."[xxxix].

What needs to be emphasised is the fact that for the first time in years the Romanian Academy has issued a 20 years development strategy. Entitled ***Romania's Development Strategy in the next 20 years (2016-2035)*** this programmatic document issues a series of clear guidelines as regards the actions Romania must undertake, both at the national and international level in order to have a successful development. The main advantage of this type of Strategy is it

general acceptance by all the political forces due to its non-partisan nature. The prestige of the Romanian Academy and its neutrality can thus be guarantee that the guidelines presented here would be taken into consideration by any incoming government and parliament, thus creating a long term Romanian political approach toward the Black Sea.

Regarding Romania's role as an international actor in the Black Sea the academia states the core guidelines for the Romania's policy toward the Black Sea:

- "Valorisation of the partnership with Turkey;
- Securisation and the pacification of the Black Sea area;
- Increase of the maritime significance of Romania;
- Increase of the military maritime significance of Romania at the Black Sea;
- Safe exploitation of Black Sea resources;
- Put on the priority agenda of the Romanian project of the Black Sea synergy; new faces of the policy toward the riparian states; the diversification of the reports with the Caspian world;
- The augmentation of the Danube – Black Sea canal as a part of the river corridor Black Sea – Danube – Black Sea canal – Danube – Danube – Main – Rhin – North Sea canal, a key highway that can generate an important flux of exchanges from the South-East area to the North – West area of the continent, thus becoming the first European internal transportation highway as regards the transport volume;
- Imposition, at European level, of the RoRIS standard of control of the naval traffic on the interior waters, developed alongside the lower trajectory of the Danube by Romania." [xl]

Besides the Grand Strategy designed by the Romanian Academy, Romania has an extraordinary opportunity to put the Black Sea back on the map of the European Union during its Presidency of the European Union Council January – June 2019. Often mention in the official speeches as an area of interest we have had a series of intention statements such: "Romania may bring on the Council agenda the issue of valorisation of the Black Sea potential by crafting the EU Strategy regarding the Black Sea post-2020"[xli]

This is in line with the official Governing Programme 2018 – 2020 which clearly stipulates what the Black Sea means and how we should promote it: "The Black Sea needs to be maintain in the centre of NATO attention, as a strategic area with relevance for the presence and role of this organisation in a region with a complex security equation but also in the centre of EU attention, from the perspective of the role of the Union as 'soft power', with the objective of

promoting some pragmatic cooperation objectives, in areas such as energy, transportation, environment, maritime policy, fishing, education, research that would lead to the economic development of the region".[xlii]

This idea is often repeated by the highest officials, such as the Prime-Minister Viorica Dăncilă who stated that during Romania's Presidency of the EU Council we must ensure that: "It is important to reaffirm and accredit the importance of the Black Sea on the EU agenda, including from the perspective of advancing projects under the Three Seas Initiative or revitalizing the Black Sea Synergy in the future."[xliii]

As concluding remarks one can notice the fact that the Black Sea is more than meets the eye and that the evolutions from this region tend to have from now on a global repercussion affecting more or less the security of the entire Western civilisation. We need to keep a close and effective scrutinisation of all the evolutions of the region, often unpredictable (like the annexation of Crimea) or imperceptible (long term trends of human trafficking and increase poverty). No more the Black Sea must be think separately or ignored but it must be fully integrated into the regional and global strategies as such (a better correlation with the Baltic Sea actions for instance).

The Black Sea has return to the geopolitical map and thus it requires an extensive Western presence in order to calm its unsecure riparian states that are NATO members. Moreover, a special attention must be given to Turkey and to its rule of law as Turkey is a key state in the region[xliv]. The European Union must thus redouble its efforts in attracting Turkey into the European Union orbit and due the necessary steps toward continuing its enlargement in the region with the willing and able states.

This has to be done while taking into consideration Russia's actions into region and trying to find a peaceful and mutually advantageous solution to the protracted conflicts in the Black Sea region. The region has on a medium and long term the prospect of becoming a truly global hub on the New Silk Road and the energy market and these evolutions that would bring economic prosperity and growth for all the riparian states need to be actively encouraged.

Romania as a nation needs to put forward a clear national project with an Eastern policy more adequate to the strategic realities of the region. Moderate policies have to be completed with a truly major policy vision that would interest all the relevant parties. Romania can be a relevant actor in the region, capable of real diplomatic efficiency and able to provide know-how on the intricate politics of the region.

Secondly, we must rediscover the long-lost art of nation building and national defence. We need to build up our defence forces in order to become a tough nut to crack that would

discourage any potential challenge. The maritime forces or the land and air forces have to be developed. Also, valuable infrastructure projects must be realised. By creating a critical transport infrastructure, a solid IT and energy base we can become that real regional hub that we could be given all our advantages (highly skilled working force, natural resources, good geographical location, etc.)

Thirdly we must do everything possible to keep all lines of dialogue open. For that we need to read once more the basics of politics and remember the lessons of the ancient. Cicero spoke about the need of compromise in politics. In politics it is irresponsible to take an unwavering stand when circumstances are always evolving. "It is our vision that must remain constant, not our words." [xlv].

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