Geopolitical and Geostrategic dimensions within the Black Sea Basin

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ABSTRACT
A conflicted area in which the Russian and Ottoman Empires fought over in the past, now represents an important bet not just economical but also political under the conditions in which the European Union wishes to become a worldwide power, USA to maintain its hegemony and The Russian Federation being a come-back power after the year 2000. Other arguments for this can be brought by the extension of the eastern frontier of NATO, by the economical interests of the European Union in Caucasus (oil and natural gases), by the greater importance of the geostrategic position for the great “players” such as USA, especially after September 11, but also by the conflict areas from Afghanistan and Iraq.

KEY WORDS
Black Sea, energetic security, conflict area, strategic interests, perspective

JEL CODES
F00

1. Introduction
Considered to be, even since the early ages, as a turning point for the Middle Age commerce, a link between the Orient and Occident by its Silk Road, the Black Sea has represented a transit area for the economical, political and strategic interests in the region.

2. Historical Aspects
Geopolitically, until the Great French Revolution, the supremacy of the Black Sea was disputed between two great powers: The Ottoman and the Russian Empires. Between those two powers a series of treaties were signed, treaties in which Russia obtained the right of free navigation within the sea and even the control over some straits, like Kerci Strait. The issue of the domination on the Black Sea became important to the great powers like Germany, France, Great Britain too. They, although wanted to be very influential in the area at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, managed to obtain only the right to free navigation without having the right to military ships in the area. The fight continued between the great European powers and the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire being under the protection of Russia, the Black Sea becoming an important stake in the middle of the 19th century. The power of the two empires was fenced by the imposition of some clauses and the interdiction of keeping military ships in the area.

An important consequence of the changing of power at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th in the Black Sea area was the first step to a modern reconstruction of this European zone. So, after the First World War, the Black Sea has become a sea for everyone on which each winner state of the war had an influence and, the end of the Cold War, found the
region in the middle of a redefining and restructuring process of the relations between the states of this region.

3. Nowadays and Perspective Issues

The states within the Black Sea basin, considered to be the main players of this economic and security area are either the ex-soviet states or countries that are partners with NATO and EU, as the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria or even Turkey. A passage for the American army to the war zones as Afghanistan and Iraq, the role of the Black Sea has become more and more important, especially after the terrorist attacks from September 11, and, nowadays, we can say about this area that tends to become the focus of global politics. The special economical importance derives from the connection that it realizes between an area rich in natural resources of oil and natural gases as the Caspian Sea and an area that is a big consumer of energy as Europe; so, whoever has control over this area, has control over the energy.

The Russian Federation

Confronted with the crisis provoked by the lost of the global power status, in the same time with the evolutions from the Yugoslavian areas and the involvement of USA in the region, Moscow has dropped its requirements of political hegemony in South-East Europe. The opportunities of the Russian Federation are now to reconstruct the society in the same time with the diversification of the partnerships that it has with USA and EU and of the relations with the countries of the Far East. The partnership that Russia has with NATO aims the fight against terrorism, the border criminality and the proliferation of the nuclear weapons. With EU Russia has strengthened the entirety relations and has succeeded to increase the bilateral rapports with the countries from the region without taking into consideration of the juridical and economical regulations of EU, managing even to have strategic positions in the East-European markets, mainly in transportation, oil and natural gases distribution but also to strengthen the influence in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine by speculating the Russian people requests from these countries. The actions of the Russian Federation are based on the absolute energetic supremacy.

Ukraine

Country that lays over an important area in Eastern Europe has special relations with EU, has requested the accession to NATO and that belongs to the European Economic Area. Internally Ukraine is confronted with numerous political and religion tensions and externally has disagreements with the Russian Federation over the Crimea Peninsula. From the point of view of the external commerce, Kiev controls the oil and natural gases transit of the Russian Federation towards the West.

The tradition of some close relations to Germany has survived the communist regime, also the rivalries with Poland and Russia survived, rivalries over the control of the transit between the East and the West. The accession of Ukraine in the cooperation structures of the Black Sea and the connection to the oil transit from Caucasus and the Caspian Sea represents an opportunity for EU and USA. Nevertheless Russia still tries to regain its influence in Ukraine.

Turkey, a country with a remarkable strategic positioning, situated in the South-East of the Balkan Peninsula and in Asia Minor, ensures the connection between South-East Europe,
Caucasus, Central Asia and Middle East. An important NATO point due to its man power but also the military one, Turkey remains a serious candidate state to EU, until it will meet all the criteria regarding democracy and human rights.

The stability of this state has started to depend more and more on USA, EU, IMF, World Bank. Nevertheless, Turkey has been involving in the peacekeeping operations in the Balkans in order to secure the land and maritime routes to supply the West with oil and gas from Iran, Iraq and the Caspian Basin, although the Greek-Turk rivalry is still present in the Balkans, and this rivalry refers to the delimitation of the maritime plateau or to the status of Cyprus from the Mediterranean Sea. Due to the wars in Chechnya and to the Moscow’s attitude towards the Kurds, disagreements are also between Turkey and the Russian Federation.

**Georgia**

Despite the ethnical conflicts, this state continues its path to the market economy, although it is still dependent on energy imports. The country benefits of the IMF and World Bank assistance, and other long-term opportunities for this state would be the development of the international road to transport energy, but also being closer to NATO, EU and USA.

**Romania**

Following the democratic revolution as a member of the European and Euro-Atlantic community, our country has redefined its vision over the Black Sea basin. Our country’s positioning into the security equation of the extended region of the Black Sea is also important for national security. So, our country has interest to be in the neighborhood of stable and democratic countries for those are capable of maintaining peace. Because of this Romania promotes the idea of an Euro Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea, taking into consideration the big efforts of NATO and EU took in the process of stabilization in South-East Europe and the need of a balance that is able to favor the democratic option of the countries and to contribute, efficiently, to the ending of the conflicts in this area.

In this context, a priority for Romania is to harmonize the institutional processes of cooperation which are developing, to prevent the competition and hegemony tendencies and to establish a new path to dialog and cooperation to which all the states and democratic organizations that are interested to be involved. For this, the Black Sea Forum acts for Dialog and Cooperation.

The economical dimension will play a more important part within the process of cooperation at the Black Sea. Romania will deploy an external and external cooperation politics by taking part to economical projects with great impact in consolidation of democracy, security and stability.

**The European Union**

The European Union has been involved in the Black Sea basin by national and regional project financing with the purpose of sustaining the reform processes in the region.

Until now, the EU relations with the countries from this region were based, especially, on the economical and technological traits of the cooperation. During the last few years, Romania has established cooperation relations in many sectors with the states from the Black Sea region, by initiating various programs.
It is very important for EU to strengthen its external and common security politics in order to fight the illegal migration, the gun trade and organized crime. For transforming the security into a priority of the states in the Black Sea region, the politics and frontier control are preferable to military actions.

**NATO**

The NATO interest in Black sea dates from the ‘90s, NATO being one of the first players which were involved in the region, as part of its expansion actions. The more the Alliance expands to the East the more it encounters states that are confronted with risks, both asymmetrical and conventional.

The Black Sea Region is important for the European states members of NATO, due to the fact that it represents a future target of the continuous expansion of the European and Transatlantic companies. In the same time, Black Sea is a gate through which the Caspian energetic sources come to Europe and USA. The Black Sea seems surrounded by potentially unstable sources, even more when the crossing of the maximum security areas surrounding the Aegean Sea is essential for all the states of the Black Sea who’s commercial and navy ships have to arrive in the Mediterranean Sea. Russia and Ukraine are confronted with territory and frontier limits disagreements and the long war from Chechnya has encouraged the gun running within the region and has created a center for terrorist actions. Armenia is arguing for the much disputed Nagorno-Karabah territory, Azerbaijan tries to extent its own energetic industry. Abkazia, North Ossetia - Alania and the Republic of Transnistria proclaim their independence and even the choose their own territory with the help of the Russian troupes.

The NATO expansion has to be accompanied by a shift change if the stability is wanted where it is needed. Many of the main concerns of Europe, as drugs, guns and human trafficking, illegal migration, terrorism and the potentially nuclear threat can be subjected only by the inclusion of the Black Sea region within NATO, moreover, the above mentioned areas are of great interest for NATO.

**4. Conclusions**

The Black Sea region represent both an opportunity and a risk, being between two strategic axes: The Black Sea - The Mediterranean Sea, respectively the southern flank of NATO, area of strategic importance for the North Atlantic Alliance, damaged mainly by cross-border risks; The Black Sea - Caucasus - The Caspian Sea - a transit space for the energetic resources of Central Asia, influenced by some forms of sub regional instability coming from the Central Asia area.

There can be observed that the Black Sea region is an area that focuses all the interests of the great international players. Here is the battle fought for energy, for whoever has energy has power.

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