Implications and Role of the European Union in the Black Sea Region

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ABSTRACT  Black Sea region’s strategic importance for the EU was recognized in 2007, in the context of Romania’s and Bulgaria’s accession to EU, becoming a part of the enlarged European Union. Given the direct impact of EU affairs upon the development of the region, strategically located at the junction of Europe, Middle East and Central Asia, EU has become aware of the need to examine opportunities to become more involved in the area.

KEY WORDS  European Union, Black Sea, strategy, development

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1. Introduction

Black Sea region is a strategic bridge linking Europe with Caspian, Central Asia and the Middle East, and Southeast Asia and China, characterized by close ties and great potential, but also diversity and rivalries

This region comprises the EU member states Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, candidate country Turkey and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and the Russian Federation as a strategic partner.

(Source: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_ro.pdf)

Figure no. 1 The Black Sea Countries
Black Sea region is strategically important for the EU as the Black Sea is a part of the EU and hencing common challenges and opportunities for the EU and the countries in this region sharing a common need to ensure peace, democracy, security, stability, regional cooperation and sustainable prosperity in the Black Sea. For that is needed a more coherent, sustainable and strategic approach.

Black Sea region requires active and long-term solutions to regional challenges and transnational facing such as [1]:
- prolonged conflicts
- displaced populations
- bilateral disputes
- closed borders
- strategic rivalries leading to militarization and proliferation
- poor governance
- damage to the democratic regime
- cross-border crime and trafficking
- border and circulation management
- damage to maritime security and safety

Representing an important strategic area in the strategic security of the EU, a strategy is considered necessary, ensuring sustainable development in the area and ensuring the cooperation in energy, transport and environment sectors. This can be achieved by establishing a common legal framework at regional level.

EU makes certain recommendations regarding future development of this area [1]:
- further liberalization of trade and increasing intraregional trade;
- creating an area of opportunity and economic prosperity for the local and regional trading partners;
- combating fraud and corruption, in order to increase the attractiveness of the region for investors;
- emphasizes the importance of cooperation in tourism and development of ports and coastlines;
- support EU maritime policy aimed at socio-economic development of regions encouraging objective to promote social development and a strong civil society;
- further work on the dialogue on visa facilitation with countries in the region

Black Sea regional constellation has changed considerably in recent years and will continue to evolve. In these circumstances, the new EU regional cooperation initiative would usefully complement the wide range of activities currently carried out at the bilateral and sectorial levels.

On January 1, 2007, two Black Sea littoral states, Bulgaria and Romania joined the European Union. More than ever, prosperity, stability and security of our neighbours around the Black Sea are of immediate concern for the EU.

The region is an expanding market with high growth potential and an important hub for energy and transport flows. However, it is also a region with unresolved frozen conflicts, with many environmental problems and insufficient border controls thus encouraging illegal migration and organized crime. Despite the significant positive developments in recent years, there still remain in the pace of economic reforms and the quality of governance between countries in the region. A dynamic regional response to the issues can greatly benefit the citizens of the countries.
concerned and may also contribute to the prosperity, stability and security in Europe. The EU has already made major efforts to foster democratic and economic reforms to promote stability and to support development in the wider Black Sea cooperation programs. Three EU policies are relevant in this context: the process of accession for Turkey, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Strategic Partnership with the Russian Federation.

Black Sea region offers opportunities and challenges that require coordinated action at the regional level. These include key sectors such as energy, transport, environment, movement and security. Enhanced regional cooperation is not to deal directly with long-standing conflicts in the region but could lead to greater mutual trust and, over time, could help remove some obstacles. Given the confluence of cultures in the Black Sea region, greater regional cooperation could have beneficial effects beyond the region.

In terms of international relations theory to benefit from economic advantages, the Black Sea countries should take into account the following aspects [2]:
- control of the sea bed;
- control of maritime routes;
- control of maritime passages (straits);
- Bosphorus and Dardanelles that make the connection with the Mediterranean Sea.

The main vulnerability of the region consists of differences between the countries composing it. It is not only about cultural and political diversity that characterizes the Black Sea and Balkans, but especially about the different development stages of the countries from the analysis.

These differences may potentiate the failure of states to cooperate, with negative impacts on the European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

In general, vulnerability is specific to the states in transition from totalitarianism to democracy [2]:
- most countries in the region belonging to the Communist bloc, whose collapse has thrown in a "vacuum" geostrategic, in which they tried to escape by starting a difficult process of transition both internally and externally.
- failure to complete this process in any of the areas of society (economic, political, social).
- economic analysis shows that, at least in the eastern Black Sea and Balkan area, quality of life for residents is far below the level reached during the existence of the Soviet Union.
- wide ethnic, cultural and religious variety.
- lack of a coherent legal framework necessary to combat corruption.
- lack of a coherent legal framework to combat organized crime, trafficking in drugs and human being.
- some countries have not finalized the options vis-à-vis the European and Euro-Atlantic integration.
- co-existence of games of interest aimed at the establishment of Russian hegemony in the region and European integration.
- dependence on energy resources supplied by Russian Federation.

Black Sea region has been hit hard by the global financial crisis, which resulted in abrupt termination of a period of growth of 6% per year on average, and also of the flow of foreign capital necessary to continue the economic development of coastal States of the region. This situation should be addressed by strengthening financial and banking regulations, improve credibility and
fiscal transparency, combating tax fraud, tax evasion and corruption, foster regional cooperation and increase coordination between regional organizations, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC).[3]

European Neighbourhood Policy covers relations with the European Union countries in Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova), the Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Palestinian Authority) and South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), countries which are not considered eligible for membership of the Union, even if they belong to all European cultural family or traditional ties with it.[4]

The main instruments of this policy is cooperation and economic integration, development aid, assistance in the construction of democracy and rule of law, dialogue, consultation and policy focus, and general partnership or in different areas. The main purpose is to avoid the exclusion of these countries in the European economy and create new dividing lines in Europe.

Two fundamental concepts are promoted in the EU context [1]:
1. "democratic security" (that the development of democracy - national and international - exclude war between states that adopt the system of organization).
2. "security through development" (according to which stability and security of states increases with higher levels of economic development).

2. Conclusions

Integration of the Black Sea area in the European Union has many benefits for neighboring countries and beyond. Cooperation in areas such as security, energy, environment, communication is important and must be made to ensure the coherent development of this region, consistent with Community policies and principles. Funding to achieve harmonization of these policies and objectives is essential in this respect.

References