

The Black Sea's Importance in the Context of EU and NATO Enlargement

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Cooperation among the Southeast European's states and those riparian with the Black Sea is tightly connected and intrinsic influenced by a complex of internal and external factors that comprise not only on-going processes/initiatives but also sub-regionally elements of risks. The Euro Atlantic integration's goal stimulated and promoted regional cooperation, creating all the necessary conditions for positive evolutions for the countries in the region and at continental level.

All six riparian countries with the Black Sea (Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia, Russian Federation, and Ukraine) established a contractual relation with the European Union (EU) or NATO.

Romania and Bulgaria officially applied to the EU in 1995, starting the negotiations in 2000. Turkey signed in 1963 the association agreement and in 1999 was declared the 13th candidate country. In 2002 in Copenhagen, Turkey was ensured that its candidacy would be evaluated again in 2004 pending on the progresses registered on the recommendations issued at the European Council Summit. Russia, Ukraine and Georgia signed the partnership and cooperation agreements with the EU in 1996 and they were implemented in 1999.

Romania and Bulgaria were invited in November 2002 in Prague to become NATO full members. Georgia signed in 1994 along with Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Russia the Partnership for Peace document. Ukraine signed in 1997 a document for the establishment of a special partnership with NATO, and NATO-Russia relation acquired

an improved level of cooperation with the creation of NATO-Russia Council. Furthermore, high-level officials from Ukraine and Georgia recently declared their intentions to become NATO members.

Sub-regional cooperation is a necessary step toward Euro Atlantic integration but it is not an alternative to this process. Those NATO or EU candidate states that have an increased probability to become on a short or medium-term full members have become stabilization catalysts of the regional security environment and promoters of democracy and prosperity in their adjacent area. Therefore, these countries turned out to be active participants in *bi-lateral or multi-lateral* sub-regional cooperation initiatives due to interdependent interests:

- The participation in these initiatives fulfilled NATO and EU's requests for cooperation and good neighboring relations, and was considered as a pre-condition for future membership.
- Certain countries assumed the role of regional security providers and perceived this process of regional cooperation as an opportunity to reveal their accomplishments as functioning democracies and stability pole in a volatile region.
- Certain countries contributed alongside NATO or EU member states to disseminate principles of the domestic reform engendered in the preparing process of becoming members of these two organizations.

Based on these premises certain level of action were highlighted:

- Sub-regional cooperation can become a means of starting or improving to fulfill the multitude of EU's requests including those of legislative harmonization. In this particular way, free trade areas can be created that can lead on medium term to an increased competitiveness of goods.
- Cooperation promotes development, the improvement of the transportation infrastructure, communication, energy, contributes to a flourishing tourism and help to protect the environment. Furthermore, it facilitates the solving of trans-national problems such as: organized crimes, drugs and persons trafficking and illegal immigration.
- Sub-regional cooperation can attract investments and foreign aid through the creation of new opportunities and a stable security environment.

Unfortunately, political-military cooperation was at the beginning slightly drawn backward due to divergent interests expressed by the riparian states but also because of the political and ethnical complexity of the region. During the last years, a series of relevant processes in the economic field such as Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), military field BLACKSEAFOR, internal affairs SECI or for promoting confidence and security building measures in the Black Sea were developed or increased. Every single process proposed improved sub-regional cooperation, some of them being successful some of them failed due to the lack of resources or the perpetuation of bi-lateral or multi-lateral disputes and the lingering of divergent objectives of the riparian states. EU has an important role in developing regional cooperation in the field of stabilization and economic development, integration of certain riparian states and improvement of the transportation infrastructure, alongside NATO, which engaged in cooperation activities among riparian states at PfP and EAPC levels.

NATO member states involvement in the Black Sea area was significantly reduced and the US was maintaining the classical

line of the 6th Fleet involvement through Cyprus Greece, Turkey up to Caucasus and allied priorities aimed at promoting stability in North Africa and the Balkans. At the present there are not military forces dislocated into the Black Sea. Geographically the Black Sea was not considered as being a region *per se* but a nodal point of several regions with different developments such as Caucasus, the Balkans and Middle East.

Politically, the Black Sea area has a dual potential. This potential has on one hand *positive* developments characterized by:

- The amplification of EU-NATO relationship with Ukraine and Russia, thus creating premises for promoting stability in the region;
- The development of the regional cooperation can generate a containment of those areas that have a conflict drive potential (Dniester, Abkhazia);

On the other hand there is a *negative* potential characterized by:

- The persistence of tensioned conditions, latent conflicts determined by separatist movements (Moldova, Caucasus);
- The political instability which determines the dismantling of state authority and organized crime flourishing which spreads to the Western Europe;
- Favorable conditions to development and spreading of international terrorism;

Economically, the Black Sea area has an important but lowly used potential:

- Possible market 350 mil. consumers;
- Goods contractor for foreign trade;
- Significant mineral resources that can be extracted;
- Opportunities to develop the tourism;
- Opportunities for the modernization or privatization of the defense industries of the states in the region, in the process of economic transition;
- Opportunities for developing the capacity of energy infrastructure, which at the present does not cover the regional necessities.

There are several projects developing for the moment in the region regarding:

- The connection with the pan-European transport corridor¹ after the accomplishment of the EU-financed project regarding the construction of the ferry-boat terminal in Batumi port;
- The use of Constanza-Batumi ferry-boat;
- The re-emergence of the "Silk Road" through TRACECA project.

Geo-strategically and militarily, the Black Sea area has a great potential for:

- The enlargement of NATO aerial warning system to the Black Sea and Caucasus area that will improve the

region states' response to their own security risks;

- The use of the Black Sea as a buffer zone for counter-acting the traffic of sensitive materials and armament coming from the CIS area and for the diminution of non-conventional risks impact such as the organized crime and international terrorism;
- The use of the regional infrastructure (Constanza, Varna, Burgas) to project military forces to peace-keeping missions out-of-area;

Conclusions:

The Black Sea region can become a nodal point for economic development than on long term would have an important impact on expanding stability and prosperity to Caucasus and Central Asia.

Connecting the Black Sea to a unique approach of the NATO South flank will contribute to manage in a right framework the new risks and challenges to the Euro-Atlantic security and will create a strategic plank between South-East Europe and Turkey. Furthermore, the region can play an important role in spreading certain successful security assistance forms of cooperation to the Caucasus and Central Asia states. It can also become a transportation passage for aids dedicated to Afghanistan as well as for donations offered under „Train and Equip”

Program initiated by the US for Georgia. In this context, the importance of the Black Sea region will increase due to its port capacities and civilian and military infrastructure it possesses and which can be adapted to ensure the protection/rapid deployment of NATO forces/capabilities in an area expanded to the Caucasus and the Middle East but also for sustaining/rotating the troops stationed in the Balkans.

Romania as a regional player and future NATO member can contribute alongside other actors in the region to design a long term cooperation strategy among partners and allies regarding security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area in the Balkans, Caucasus and the Black Sea.

¹ The 3rd Conference on pan-European transport Helsinki, 23-25 June 1997, defined the Black sea as an area of pan-European transport.