

# **Regionalism, Sub-regionalism and Security in the Black Sea Region Research Summary**

*Adrian Pop*

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## **TOPIC OF RESEARCH**

**T**aking as case studies the elites' perceptions in Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine, the research has focused on the relationship between regionalism and security in the Black Sea area. Its aims have been to evaluate the conflict mitigating and

security enhancement potential of the Black Sea regional cooperation, its main achievements and shortcomings, and to suggest possible areas of action for its future development in order to strengthen regional security and stability in the area.

## **RELEVANCE AND CONTRIBUTION TO FIELD**

The choosing of Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine as case studies was done taking into consideration several reasons. First, Romania and Bulgaria are in the same "basket" in terms of Euro-Atlantic and European integration: invited to start accession talks for joining NATO in November 2002, the two countries have prospects of EU accession in 2007. Thus, they make good comparison cases of how Black Sea regional cooperation have worked for them. Second, Ukraine has constantly pursued a balancing act in terms of its foreign policy orientations, oscillating between stating its willingness to join both the EU and NATO and deepening its participation in the CIS structures (the CIS Anti-Terrorism Centre, the CIS Free Trade Zone, etc), between offsetting the US (the "Kolchuga" scandal) and making gestures of benevolence towards Washington, DC, hinting a desire to be helpful within internal and geopolitical constrains (the dispatch of a NBC battalion to Kuwait, and the

participation of Ukraine in the stabilization force in Iraq). Third, Ukraine is considered to be a key component of the neighborhood of both enlarged NATO and future enlarged EU.

Focusing on the Black Sea regional cooperation as a foreign policy tool of building new bridges towards Ukraine, which is an important strategy of both NATO and EU, the project contributes to the ongoing efforts of exploring creative ways of dissipating potential new divisive lines. In addition to this, the results of project are likely to advance the awareness of the positive impact Black Sea regional cooperation has in the area of energy security, especially in view of the prevailing importance of the Caspian-Black Sea transit corridor. Furthermore, various experts have pinpointed to the need of the countries lying in the Black Sea region to take a common approach to deterring terrorism, drugs and small and light weapons (SALW) smuggling, as well as illegal migration and trafficking of

human beings. The project advocates the role of multilateral regional cooperation in devising and deploying effective tools in deterring transnational security threats. Last but not least, by assessing the elites' perceptions in Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine on the perceived degree of experiencing a common sense of the Black Sea region, the descriptive and normative aspects of regional and sub-regional cooperation in the area, the main factors favoring and obstructing Black Sea

cooperation, the regional initiatives with the most significant security impact, the relationship between the regional cooperation and the European and Euro-Atlantic processes, the national interests in participating in the Black Sea regional cooperation and the most talked about aspects of it, the research addresses the paramount important issue of the variables that explain the efficiency of various Black Sea groupings.

### **SUMMARY OF APPROACH AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research has combined quantitative and qualitative methods, using the questionnaire and the in-depth face-to-face interview as sociological techniques. It has focused on significant data gathering meant to grasp the elites' perception in Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine on the Black Sea regional cooperation and its security impact in the region.

After reviewing the initial draft of the questionnaire's content, the four collaborators of the project have agreed on a final draft of it. An estimate target group of thirty individuals to be addressed during the survey in each of the three countries was agreed upon, too. The respondents were selected to encompass diverse expertise, including security and defense, foreign affairs, intelligence, and energy and infrastructure development.

The target group was identified on the basis of the professional experience and expertise of the respondents on issues related to the Black Sea area, particularly in the area of security, defense and cooperation. Hence, it comprised of governmental staff from various ministries, National Security and Defense Councils, Presidential Administrations, secret services and municipal authorities; high-ranking governmental officials; members and staff of the Parliaments; scholars from civilian and military academic institutions; researchers from think tanks; risk assessment experts from private firms; and journalists specialized on international affairs.

The research sites, covered throughout the 2002-2003 academic year, have included:

– Romania: the Presidential Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry

of Defense, the Ministry of European Integration, the Ministry of Industry and Resources, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Communications, the Parliament, the University of Bucharest, the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, the Faculty of Economics of "Petroleum-Gas" University in Ploiesti, the Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History, the Center for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning, the Civil Society Development Foundation, the PriceWaterhouseCoopers company, ING Romania, the "Evenimentul Zilei" daily, Radio Romania International, and Mediafax News Agency.

– Bulgaria: the Presidential Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications, the Ministry of Regional Development, Sofia municipal authorities, the National Intelligence Service, the University of Sofia, the University of National and World Economy, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the National Defense College "G.S. Rakovski", the National Police Academy, the Institute of Euro-Atlantic Security, the Institute for Regional and International Studies, and the "Capital" weekly.

– Ukraine: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economy and European Integration, the State Committee of Border Control, the National Institute for International Security Problems of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, the Atlantic Council of Ukraine, the National Kyiv Mohyla University, the Center for Independent

Political Research, the Institute of Economic Research and Political Consulting, the Center for Army, Conversion and Disarmament Studies, the National Institute for Strategic Studies, the Razumkov Center/Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies, the Euro-Atlantic Association, the Center for Economic Development, the Civic Center for Anti-Crisis Studies of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, the Center for International Studies of Odessa National University, and the Center for the Study of Social Prospects of Donbass.

After finalizing the data gathering, the results were comparatively studied and corroborated with the ones of the previous

research on Black Sea security cooperation. Then, the research findings were discussed among the four collaborators of the project, namely Professor Daniel Nelson, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Connecticut in New Haven, USA, Marin Lessenski, Program Director with the Institute for Regional and International Studies in Sofia, Bulgaria, Inna Pidluska, President of the Europe XXI Foundation in Kyiv, Ukraine and Professor Adrian Pop, Faculty of Political Sciences, "Dimitrie Cantemir" University in Bucharest, Romania. Finally, the preliminary conclusions were tested again against selected respondents.

### **SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The bulk of respondents in the three countries under consideration consider the sense of regionness in the Black Sea region as being very little in evidence. As for the reasons explaining that situation, various factors were emphasized, including the heterogeneous built-up of the region, the sense of nationalism, rivalry and competition, the little visibility of the Black Sea regional projects, Ukraine's regional diversity, and Bulgaria's predominant identification with the Balkans, not the Black Sea, as well as the predominance of the Balkan/Southeastern European identity, as the preferred and "imposed" regional identity by the West. Although few in absolute figures, the largest number of respondents that have stated that the sense of regionness is non-existent altogether in the Black Sea region, is to be found among Bulgarian ones. The very few Bulgarian respondents who think that the sense of regionness is moderately evident have mostly an economic background (which is consistent with the wide perception of economics being the most important feature of the Black Sea regional cooperation). The variations among different dimensions of regional cooperation and among countries and among different regions of the same country were dealt with only by very few respondents and with different results. The variations among different components of regional cooperation were addressed by only one Bulgarian

correspondent, who thinks that from an economic viewpoint, the sense of regionness is very little in evidence, but from a political one is moderately evident. The variations between the sense of regionness developed in various Black Sea countries at the level of the government and the one existing among the people, at the level of the "man of the street" were dealt with only by a couple of Romanian respondents. The variations among different regions of the same country were addressed by just one Ukrainian correspondent, which pointed to the fact that the self-identification with the Black Sea region is higher among the people from Crimea, Odessa and Mykolayiv regions, as opposed to the one developed in Western Ukraine.

There is a wide consensus among the respondents that the content of cooperation covers economic, security, political, and environmental aspects. As to the prevalent aspects of it, the majority of respondents in all three countries think that it has primarily economic features. In Romania and Ukraine, respondents tend to ascribe the second place to the cooperation in the area of security, whereas in Bulgaria they seem to opt for the political-oriented cooperation, underlining the regional political activism of the new political elite throughout the region. As a rule, respondents coming from the economic

milieus tend to emphasize the economic dimension of it, whereas respondents from the security and political milieus manifest the opposite tendency, to emphasize the security and political aspects of it. As for the normative aspect of regional cooperation in the area, the overwhelming part of respondents in the three countries considers that it should have primarily an economic content. The second option for what the Black Sea regional cooperation should consist of is security in Romania and Bulgaria, whereas the Ukrainian respondents seem to vacillate between security and environmental preservation in this respect.

In relation to the three principal factors conducive to regional cooperation in the area, the answers were extremely diverse. In Romania the most consensual factors have proved to be the joint interest in the exploitation of natural resources, especially energy ones (oil and gas) in the Black Sea-Caspian Sea area, and the (rather vaguely defined) common economic interests. Other Romanian respondents opt for economic factors at large, particularly the joint interest in the implementation of market oriented policies and projects, in liberalization and privatization and fostering a more attractive environment for investment, whereas other consider that security factors/common security interests are playing the conducive roles. For Bulgarian respondents the three main factors are the geographical proximity and the geostrategic location, the shared security interest in combating "new threats", and the prospect of EU membership. Ukrainian respondents tend to think the transit potential of energy resources as the most conducive factor, followed by (nondescript) common economic interests, and environmental concerns.

Among the three top factors obstructing regional cooperation, as far as Romania is concerned, the most frequent cited are, in order, the economic backwardness/lack of financial resources, the historical legacy, the lack of economic cohesion of the region, and the different political goals and strategic orientations of the countries of the region. Under the heading of other than the top three obstructing factors, only the cultural and

religious differences and organized crime are cited more frequently. Bulgarian respondents consider the economic backwardness/lack of financial resources and the instability triggered by the conflicts and ethnic tensions in the region as the most obstructing factors, to be followed closely by corruption and organized crime. Ukrainian respondents deem the different political goals and strategic orientations to be the most obstructing factor, to be followed by the economic rivalry, and the unstable political situation in the member-states. Under the heading of other factors that hinder regional cooperation, Russia's ambitions to dominate and its involvement in the settlement of interethnic conflicts in the region, the weakness of organizational support for multilateral cooperation, and the conflicting (nondescript) interests of the member-states are mentioned more frequently in Ukraine.

Asked to mention the three major regional initiatives that have had an impact on the security environment of the area, the bulk of the respondents in all three countries have cited the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) organization as having the biggest impact. Second to BSEC, as a major initiative with a significant security impact in the region is considered to be the Black Sea Naval Task Group (BlackSeaFor) in Romania, and GUUAM (Georgia-Uzbekistan-Ukraine-Armenia-Moldova) grouping in Ukraine, whereas in the case of Bulgaria, for the second place are vying BlackSeaFor, SECI, the NATO/PfP cooperation, and the Multinational Peace Force South East Europe/South East European Brigade (MPFSEE/SEEBrig). The third position is ascribed to GUUAM in Romania, BlackSeaFor in Ukraine, and to the trilateral cooperation between Bulgaria, Romania and Greece, and Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, respectively, in Bulgaria.

Notice is to be made that asked to define how they view GUUAM grouping, the vast majority of Ukrainian correspondents have stated that is an economic association of a group of countries around the Eurasian transport route, only one declaring that is a military-political union of countries intended

to deepen contacts with NATO. Thus, the majority of Ukrainian experts believe that the main national interest of Ukraine in GUUAM lies in the creation of the Eurasian Oil Transport Corridor (EAOTC) as an extension of the Baku-Supsa pipeline across Ukraine's territory, using Odessa-Brody oil pipeline and Pivdennyi oil terminal. In contrast, Romanian and Bulgarian respondents are inclined to underline another aspect of GUUAM, namely the political opposition to Russia's influence within the CIS.

Mention is to be made also to the fact that quite a few Bulgarian respondents declare that there are no regional initiatives with a significant security impact in the area or that they are not aware of any. Similarly, but at the same time oddly enough in view of the respondent's position, a Deputy Secretary of State from the Romanian MoD considers that there is no, as yet, any major initiative with a significant security impact in the area.

Some Romanian and Bulgarian respondents manifest the tendency to consider different regional initiatives individually and on their own merit, even if they are just parts of a bigger framework. The tendency lays down good premises for an objective evaluation of various regional initiatives in the area. The most obvious case in point is BSEC, where the different institutional achievements of it are dealt with separately, not as parts of the overall framework. Thus, are mentioned, one time each, the following BSEC reunions and documents: the Summit Declaration on BSEC (25 June 1992); the Bucharest Statement of the High Level Meeting of the Heads of State or Government (30 June 1995); the Moscow Declaration of the Heads of State or Government (25 October 1996); the Yalta Summit of the Heads of State or Government (5 June 1998); the BSEC Environment Ministers meeting in Thessaloniki; the BSEC Abolition of Double Taxation (19 October 1998); the Istanbul Summit Declaration (18 November 1999); the BSEC Declaration concerning the fight against organized crime; the institutionalized BSEC-EU dialogue; the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs Declaration against terrorism (25 October

2002); the Agreement among the Governments of the Participating States of the BSEC on Collaboration in Emergency Assistance and Emergency Response to Natural and Man-made Disasters; the implementation of the Recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on money laundering; the setting up of an ad-hoc Study Group between representatives of BSEC Member States and international organizations with a view to elaborating a concept on strengthening security and stability in the Black Sea region; and the proposal to set up a Police Liaison Center.

The respondents in all three countries overwhelmingly consider that the goals of regional cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic integration are complementary. Whereas in the case of Romania and Bulgaria this result was somehow expected, the fact that Ukraine sees the two processes in a strikingly similar way is rather remarkable. Romanian and Bulgarian respondents add that the two goals are not only complementary, but mutually reinforcing, too. Some Bulgarian respondents reckon also that the Euro-Atlantic and European integration of some Black Sea countries will give a boost to the process of regional cooperation.

The majority of Romanian respondents think that their country's major interests in regional cooperation are economic cooperation and development, and regional security and stability, respectively. Bulgarian respondents state as their country's major interests developing energy-related infrastructure projects and fighting organized crime, whereas the Ukrainian ones consider them to be the facilitation of energy transportation projects (especially in relation to GUUAM grouping), and the settlement of regional conflicts. The most locally talked about aspects of regional cooperation seem to be, in Romania, the fighting against asymmetrical/non-conventional threats, and the access to Caspian oil and gas, in Bulgaria, environmental cooperation, trade, and the Black Sea as a transit area for energy resources, tourism and leisure, and in Ukraine, GUUAM, Ukraine's provision with energy

resources, the presence of Russian Black Sea Fleet on the Ukrainian territory, the environmental preservation, and the development of recreation facilities and tourism in the region.

To sum up, from the elites' perceptions point of view, the Black Sea could hardly be conceived as a region. The bulk of the people surveyed are unable to relate the sense of regionness to different dimensions of regional cooperation, various Black Sea countries and different regions of the same country.

The regional and sub-regional cooperation are not viewed as foreign policy priorities. However, their goals are seen as complementary to European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Participation in energy transportation projects and combating organized crime are both major interests of the countries involved in regional cooperation and crucial factors conducive to it.

The factors that hinder the most the Black Sea regional cooperation are the economic backwardness of the member-states and their differences in terms of political and strategic orientations.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) organization is seen as generating the most significant security impact in the region, because its large economic potential and geopolitical importance – it provides the necessary links between the enlarged EU, Eastern Europe, the Caspian region and Eastern Mediterranean. Second to it, although it has become operational only in 2001, BlackSeaFor is perceived as having a (potential) major security impact in the region.

The role of Upper Prut and Lower Danube Euro-regions in Black Sea regional and sub-regional cooperation is ignored as if non-existent altogether.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In view of the paramount importance of the Black Sea-Caspian Sea geoeconomic and geopolitical axis, two main areas of future research in the field would be worth exploring. The first one would be to extend the empirical study of elites' perceptions on the Black Sea regional cooperation in riparian Black Sea countries other than Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine, namely in the Russian Federation, Turkey, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova. The second one would be to further explore how the Black Sea regional groupings, on the

one hand, and the ones established within the CIS (the Union of Russia and Belarus, the Central Asian Economic Community, the Eurasian Economic Community, GUUAM) on the other, relate among themselves and with each other. These two types of approaches are likely to make finer distinctions in relation with issues such as the Black Sea sense of regionness, factors hindering regional cooperation, and the positive and negative overlapping between various groupings, and third parties dialogue in the region.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND CORPORATE COMMUNITIES**

In view of the possible new dividing lines triggered by NATO and EU enlargement processes, the joint interest of the Black Sea countries and the Euro-Atlantic community at large in securing stability and security in the Black Sea-Caspian Sea region, the imperative of deepening economic ties and implementing critical transport projects between the countries of the region, and the proliferation of transnational security threats, the multilateral

regional cooperation in the Black Sea area should be ascribed a greater role within the new Euro-Atlantic security architecture in the making.

Multilateral regional cooperation in the Black Sea region should be an instrument for carrying out tasks that cannot be accomplished within the framework of bilateral contacts and are complementary to the ones promoted by European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The current tension between NATO and EU integration and regional cooperation in the Black Sea region should be overcome. To that effect, NATO and EU should make clearer to the Black Sea countries that a good record of cooperation at the regional level increases their chances for integration.

The Black Sea regional projects should be given more visibility in international, regional and national political arenas and mass media.

The promotion of Black Sea regional cooperation should be based on a discriminatory strategy, focused on those regional initiatives that have proved to be more successful than other.

In view of the fact that the bulk of experts in the three countries consider that the regional cooperation in the Black Sea currently has and it should continue to have primarily economic features, priority should be given to projects that promote market oriented policies, liberalization and privatization, a more attractive environment for investment, and business-to-business cooperation among companies in the region.

In the area of security, priority should have those programs and projects targeted towards accelerating the riparian states' integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures and determining the areas for consultation, decision and action in order to efficiently prevent and counter the "new" security risks and threats in the area, in particular the ones that devise criteria and methods for correct monitoring and assessment of cross-border crime.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) should become a tool not an alternative for the promotion of EU norms and policies in the area. Based on that, the EU should more actively support the BSEC projects. Thus, a balanced and mutually

beneficial cooperation could and should evolve between BSEC and the EU.

BSEC should continue to promote the open regionalism formula, in order not to transform itself into a trade block with preferential treatment. Priority should be given to the following areas: higher energy efficiency and wider introduction of energy saving technologies; the establishment of regional infrastructure networks aimed at facilitating intra Black Sea region trade flows, linking BSEC region's telecommunication infrastructure to the trans-European telecommunications networks; giving a boost to the innovation activity in the BSEC region; associating the private sector in developing the use of information and communications technologies in the BSEC region; an increased attention devoted to the BSEC vocational training; devising special programs relevant to the transition of the BSEC region into a knowledge based society; and stimulating the tourism and leisure activities in the BSEC region.

Taking into consideration the geopolitical and strategic role of the Black Sea in the post 9/11 security environment, the security enhancement potential of BlackSeaFor, as well as the fact that as for now, the joint task naval force could be used only in UN-mandated and OSCE-led operations, NATO and EU should take into consideration the possible future use of BlackSeaFor in search and rescue, mine clearing, humanitarian assistance and environmental protection operations under their aegis.

Due to the fact that the number of experts working on Black Sea regional cooperation or feel competent to speak about it has proved to be rather limited, more effort should be put in introducing its specifics in the curricula of civilian and military academic institutions.