

ROMANIA AND THE WIDER BLACK SEA REGION

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Introduction

In this short paper we will put into context the Romanian perspective on the wider Black sea region. First of all, we will try to define and understand what is the wider Black Sea region, who are the states which form it, and what sort of cooperation projects are taking place around this area of the globe. This step is elementary in setting the background on which any further analysis could be developed.

Second, we will take the Romanian case and see how this country relates to the Black Sea project. We will observe its own perception of the role it has in dealing with the risks and challenges to security that exist in the region. Finally, we will touch on the opportunities that the location in this region provides for Romania. Also, we will see how the neighbouring states, including the EU could benefit from Romania being a Black Sea country.

Cooperation and definition of the region

Defining the region under examination is surely not a simple undertaking. There are numerous ways to conceive of the Black Sea area. The most straightforward interpretation

would be the one that pinpoints the area around the states that essentially have a littoral to the Black Sea. In this case, the region is concentrated to its lowest dimension and it comprises 6 states: Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, and Turkey. These parties are engaged in a reduced form of naval forces cooperation under BLACKSEAFOR , the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group. The declared aim of the BLACKSEAFOR is to ‘contribute to the further strengthening of friendship, good relations and mutual confidence among the Black Sea littoral states as well as to improve peace and stability in the region, through the enhancement of co-operation and interoperability among the naval forces’¹. Its leadership changes once a year with Ukraine having taken over from Turkey in August 2014².

On the other extreme, the Black Sea region is its largest size when we follow the membership of BSEC. The Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation adds 6 more countries to the previous set by including among its members states like Serbia, Albania, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova, and Armenia. Not only is the composition vaster in this case but the scope as well. It moves beyond military cooperation, and into sectors such as ‘trade and economic development; banking and finance; communications; energy; transport; agriculture and agro-industry; health care and pharmaceuticals; environmental protection; tourism; science and technology; exchange of statistical data and economic information; collaboration between customs and other border authorities; human contacts; combating organized crime, illicit trafficking of drugs, weapons and radioactive materials, all acts of terrorism and illegal migration, or in any other related area, following a decision of the Council’³. Its current chairmanship belongs to Greece until the end of December 2014⁴.

Finally, the version that most appeals to us is the one endorsed by the EU in its Black Sea Synergy, which is an enterprise that runs alongside the already existing EU Strategic Partnership with Russia, the ENP, and the pre-accession strategy with Turkey⁵. This process took off in 2008, in Kiev, with the first meeting of the Ministers of the Foreign Affairs of the

¹ BLACKSEAFOR Agreement, Article IV

² Itar-Tass, August 17, 2014: <http://en.itar-tass.com/russia/699153>

³ BSEC Charter, Chapter II, Article 4

⁴ BSEC Chairmanship: <http://www.bsec-organization.org/CHAIRMANSHIP/Pages/default.aspx>

⁵ Black Sea Synergy- A New Regional Cooperation Initiative (2007), p.3

EU and of the wider Black Sea region, under the hosting of President Viktor Yushchenko of Ukraine⁶. Their effort gave birth to an alternative formal notion of the wider Black Sea region which includes Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Greece (10 states). Their common goal under the Synergy is ‘the development of cooperation within the Black Sea region and also between the region as a whole and the European Union’⁷.



Map of the wider Black Sea region. Source: Annex II of Black Sea Synergy - A New Regional Cooperation Initiative (2007), p.13

Romania and the region

As of 2007, Romania and Bulgaria have been representing the south-eastern border of the EU. This is however, only a limited understanding of the situation. It could be argued that the Black Sea region from a Romanian perspective could be a ‘bridge’, a ‘transit zone’

⁶ Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs (2008), p.1

⁷ Ibidem

between Europe and Asia.⁸ It is fundamentally a twofold approach to the strategic importance of Romania and of this region in general.

Challenges to security

On the one hand, strategists might delegate to this country the role of defensive frontier, in the same manner as the imperial Roman limes⁹. In this sense, it is useful to talk of challenges to security. Momentarily, Romania does not pose any threat to any Black Sea or European country. On the contrary, its integration into the EU and NATO has reduced the potential antagonisms with Hungary, Ukraine, or even Turkey. Nevertheless, as an EU borderland, what happens on the eastern front of Romania is troubling. Separatism, disputed territories, frozen conflicts, transnational organized crime and its relation to terrorism, they are all risks and challenges that ought to be handled first-hand by the states closest to them, meaning the littoral states, among which Romania¹⁰.

The latest events in Ukraine have fuelled the Russo-phobia in Romania and amplified the level of heated remarks between the two states, especially concerning the current situation of Moldova and its EU/NATO aspirations¹¹. Besides, Romania has recently requested the positioning of more NATO troops on its territory to counter a supposed Russian threat¹². Whether or not Russia is a threat to Romania, and whether or not Romania's relation with the US and NATO is a threat to Russia remains to be discussed. What matters for now is that this lack of friendship among the two states brings instability and insecurity to the Black Sea region project, to Romania, to Russia, and to the EU.

⁸ Tr. Maier G. (2012), p.179

⁹ Ibidem, p.180

¹⁰ Tr. Romania's National Security Strategy (2007), p.33

¹¹ Tr. Digi24.ro (video):

<http://www.digi24.ro/Media/Emisiuni/Digi24/Business+Club/Secvente+emisiune/Romania-Rusia+schimb+dur+de+replici>

¹² Romania-insider.com, May 1 2014: <http://www.romania-insider.com/romania-wants-more-nato-troops-locally-even-permanent-base-russian-threat-is-a-reality-and-we-need-support/120564/>

Strategic location and opportunities

On the other hand, the region offers Romania and through it to the rest of Europe plenty of opportunities. The first thing that comes to mind is energy. Regarding Romania's own production, the country can rely both on a diversified yet limited range of primary energy resources such as fossil fuels and minerals, among which natural gas (sufficient for a future period of 20-40 years), and on a theoretically high potential of developing renewable energy (the costs are still too high)¹³. The EU and other Black Sea countries might have a solid interest in the progress of the country's renewable segment both from the profit perspective and of energy security. A good handling of such foreign investment would benefit Romanian in the same way.

More significantly still, the direct access to the Black Sea brings Romania one more key benefit. After winning in 2009 a territorial dispute with Ukraine regarding the delimitation of its maritime border, Romania found itself in ownership of 70 billion cubic meters of gas and 12 million tons of oil. This was the consequence of the ICJ's verdict to offer this country 80% of the disputed sea floor¹⁴. Additionally, in July 2014 another oil reserve was discovered 60 km from the coastline, with an extraction evaluation of 200.000 tons per year¹⁵. All this, plus the prospective of finding even more reserves in the sea has the ability to put Romania in a better place concerning its own energy security, that of the EU and why not of the Black Sea region.

Lastly, in terms of military or defence, the geostrategic location of Romania is highly valuable. During the War in Afghanistan, the Romanian air base 'Mihail Kogalniceanu' close to the Black Sea has been greatly of use to US forces, especially during the pull-out stage, when it replaced the previous one in Kirghizstan as the new transit point. Around 50.000 US

¹³ Tr. Romania's Energy Strategy for 2007-2020 (updated 2011), p.10

¹⁴ Chifu I., Suliuc A., Nedea B. (2010), p. 78

¹⁵ Tr. Stirileprotv.ro, 16 July 2014: <http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/omv-petrom-a-descoperit-un-nou-zacamant-de-titei-in-marea-neagra.html>

troops and other cargo passed the area in this phase alone¹⁶. In this sense, the country could be vital to the US, NATO or other military configurations in their intention to project force towards the Middle East and Asia¹⁷.

Conclusion

To sum up, the wider Black Sea region has taken the form of cooperation projects militarily, economically and trans-regionally. The region's size varies based on its scope from 6 to 10 and eventually 12 members.

One of these is Romania which lies right between the EU and the 'East'. Therefore, it has the double role of defensive mark and bridge. It faces a lot threats and challenges in terms of both own and EU security.

Nonetheless, its location and access to the Black Sea also offer opportunities and might even offer solutions to some of these risks. Natural resources and geostrategic positioning are advantages that put Romania in a very good place regarding the regional distribution of power.

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¹⁶ Tr. Digi24.ro, 28.02.2014:

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¹⁷ Tr. Maior G. (2012), p.189

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