



ROMÂNIA OCCIDENTALĂ

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THE BLACK SEA

**ZONE OF CONFLICT,
OR COOPERATION ?**

Editorial ▪ Interview ▪ Foreign policy and international relations ▪ Events ▪ Correspondence ▪ Historical dossier ▪ Book review ▪ Aspects from the activity of the RDI

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Volume 2, no. 1/2023

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EDITORIAL

Liliana Popescu-Bîrlan

General Director of the RDI

Russia's invasion of Ukraine dominated the previous issue of the Romanian Diplomatic Institute (RDI)'s journal, *România Occidentală*. The current issue is dedicated to evolutions in the Black Sea region in the context marked by that aggression. And, to paraphrase Nicolae Titulescu's words, quoted on the fourth cover of this journal, the Black Sea interests us "at the highest level" because this maritime space, together with the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straights, are "Romania's lungs". Through them, we are connected to the world's markets, and the unbounded transit through this maritime way is the existential condition for our country's development. Putin's war against Ukraine deepens, even more, the meaning of this statement.

The editors have selected analytical texts, interviews and relevant correspondence for the chosen topic, the authors being specialised in the addressed subjects. RDI's researchers, Valentin Țintus Nicolescu, Alexandru-Ionuț Drăgulin and Mihai Constantinescu, have already an important expertise in the fields explored by their texts, which offer details and important analytic perspectives concerning USA's position on the Black Sea (Nicolescu) or the Romanian-Turkish strategic partnership (Drăgulin). Claudiu Codreanu offers an insight into the future, evaluating the potential of the summit, in September 2023, of the Three Seas Initiative from Bucharest. Mihai Constantinescu's correspondence from Brussels is also exploring the future. The European External Action Service launched, in 2022, the European Diplomatic Academy (EUDA), a pilot program that aims to create diplomats and European diplomacy. Being involved in the preparation of the first promotion of EUDA, as part of the organisation team, Mihai Constantinescu explains, from the inside, its importance, including the contribution that it can have to regional stability and prosperity.

As for each issue, the editors invited valuable analysts from outside the RDI to contribute, with their analyses focusing on the generic topic. Claudiu Degeratu uses his significant institutional experience to explore possible deterrence and defence models in the Black Sea region, after the Russian aggression in Ukraine will have ended. George Vișan, a specialised expert in the security field, analyses specific evolutions concerning the naval conflict in the Black Sea. His conclusions highlight the aspects that Romania should consider in designing and implementing a naval security policy. Lucian Dumitrescu compares, with lucidity and offering important details, the strategies of Romania and Türkiye in the Black Sea area. The two NATO allies, bound by a strategic partnership and a tradition of good relations, can contribute together to the stability and prosperity of the region. A perspective from Azerbaijan comes from the Centre for the Analysis of International Relations (CARI) at the ADA University in Baku, under the

auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. The article entitled *Azerbaijan-EU Relations in the Broader Caspian and Black Sea region: Navigating challenges and enhancing cooperation* is authored by CARI's President, Ambassador Farid Shafiyev, along with two collaborators from CARI, Vasif Huseynov and Shahmar Hajiyev.

From the Ukrainian capital, constantly threatened by Russian bombings, we have correspondence signed by Anamaria Veronica Fuduli (Șandor), a career diplomat assigned to the European Union Mission in Kyiv (EUAM-Ukraine). The vibrant text speaks about personal and professional experience and the difficult conditions in which the diplomatic and assistance activities take place in the Ukrainian capital, where war is lived day and night.

The current issue of the *România Occidentală* journal also takes readers to Chisinau. Our colleague, Ileana Racheru, obtained an interview with Oleg Serebrian, the Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration of the Republic of Moldova. The interview briefly explains the challenges that the current administration in Chisinau must face to withstand the constant threats from Moscow and achieve successful European integration.

The study of diplomatic documents is an important activity within the RDI. In this context, our journal's current issue hosts a text signed by historian Valentin-Ioan Fușcan, who analysed Britain's policy when, in March 1915, it concluded a secret agreement with Russia regarding Constantinople and the straits during the First World War. In the current context, marked by a new Russian aggression in the region, reviewing the analysis of that agreement can provide interesting perspectives on the topic of the straits and beyond.

We would also like to highlight Anil Sigdel's review, who is a lecturer at SNSPA (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration). The proposed and analysed item is a valuable book on contemporary international relations titled *The Thucydides Trap: Can the United States and China Avoid War?* (author Graham Allison, translated by Anca Irina Ionescu, Corint Publishing House, Bucharest, 2022). Anil Sigdel's text correctly highlights the unique perspectives proposed by Graham Allison on a globally significant issue that inevitably has a profound impact on the region where Romania is located.

The section "Aspect from the Activity of the RDI" lists the most important events and achievements, both individual and collective, of the institute's employees. The list in this issue, quite extensive, covers the period since the previous one was published in the December 2022 issue of the journal.

HIS EXCELLENCY OLEG SEREBRIAN, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FOR REINTEGRATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, IN DIALOGUE WITH ILEANA RACHERU

Ileana Racheru: In the Romanian public space, there has been a discussion about a possible exclusion of the Russian Federation from the 5+2 negotiation format. You stated in a recent interview, granted to *g4media.ro*, that you would rather support the exclusion of the OSCE? What are the reasons you do not believe it would be desirable to have a format that does not include the Russian Federation?

Oleg Serebrian: I think it was rather an interpretation or an ambiguous expression, but I never intended to assert that the OSCE should be excluded from the negotiation format regarding the Transnistrian settlement. On the contrary, I have stated on every occasion that, currently, the OSCE is the only dialogue platform on the Transnistrian dossier. As for the 5+2 negotiation format, I said that as long as the Russian aggression against Ukraine continues, this cannot be activated. The normalization of relations between Kyiv and Moscow is the *sine qua non* condition for returning to negotiations on this platform.

Ileana Racheru: Is Transnistria a threat to the security of the Republic of Moldova or the Black Sea region? What are Russia's remaining levers of influence and pressure in the separatist territory?

Oleg Serebrian: It is, of course. That is so considering the presence of the Russian troops, the existence of Transnistrian paramilitary forces, the ammunition stocks at Cobasna, and the possibility of using the region for destabilisation operations, either in Ukraine or in the Republic of Moldova.

Ileana Racheru: Does the Republic of Moldova have sufficient institutional capacity, human resources, financial resources, and essential know-how for the reintegration process in order to ensure a viable plan for reintegration? If these do not exist or are very limited, what steps do you have in mind to address the deficit?

Oleg Serebrian: The Transnistrian region represents only 11% of the country's surface and 17% of its population. The economic systems of both banks are already fairly well interconnected. Nor is there a societal breakdown, as is the case in other conflict zones in the Black Sea region. Of course, reintegration would involve some costs, especially

regarding the social insurance budget, but the benefits of restoring the country's territorial integrity would be much greater than the costs.

Ileana Racheru: In your opinion, what elements should a Transnistrian reintegration plan necessarily contain?

Oleg Serebrian: The demilitarisation of the region, a process that would have several stages, one of them being the withdrawal of Russian troops and the liquidation of weapons and ammunition stocks at Cobasna. On this issue, we would need the support of our Western partners. It is clear that these munitions are not transportable, that they must be destroyed *in situ*. We do not have the technical capabilities necessary for an operation of such magnitude. The second stage would involve the liquidation of the so-called Transnistrian army and other paramilitary security structures of Tiraspol. The operation targets a large number of people in the region, who need to obtain civil professions and be integrated into society. It will be, again, a step where we need support from our Western partners. Of course, a reintegration plan takes into account many aspects, from the content of school textbooks, i.e., the reintegration of the educational system, to the very complex and laborious process of extending the banking system of the Republic of Moldova to the Transnistrian region.

Ileana Racheru: You have brought the Eastern Slavonia model into the public debates in the Republic of Moldova. Why do you consider this to be suitable for the reintegration of the Transnistrian region?

Oleg Serebrian: Eastern Slavonia was the only case in post-war history where an unrecognised quasi-state entity was reintegrated peacefully. Otherwise, such situations have been resolved either by recognising their independence after years or even decades of tension (see the cases of East Pakistan, East Timor, South Sudan, Eritrea, etc.), or by their forced integration, *manu militari* (Krainia, Biafra, Tamil Eelam). Solving a conflict that involves an unrecognised state formation is much different from managing a file that simply involves a separatist movement, or a guerrilla group. For this reason, the example of Eastern Slavonia is more interesting for us than the case of South Tyrol or Northern Ireland, since separatism was only at the level of movement/guerrilla in these regions.

Ileana Racheru: How reintegrated is, currently, the territory controlled by the separatist regime? Could you mention the areas in which the reintegration process has advanced considerably and those in which the situation is difficult?

Oleg Serebrian: In recent years, several things have been achieved that were hard to conceive a decade ago. For instance, 90% of the inhabitants of the Transnistrian region are already citizens of the Republic of Moldova. It is, therefore, a very different situation from that in Karabakh, Abkhazia, or South Ossetia. Economically, most businesses in the

region are registered with the Republic of Moldova's Public Services Agency as Moldovan businesses. The situation is the same at the level of sports federations. I believe that sport is the first area where the integration of the two banks has practically occurred. Our short-term task is to accelerate economic integration, including the creation of a customs area.

Ileana Racheru: How could Romania contribute to a potential reintegration plan or even the reintegration process?

Oleg Serebrian: Romania is already helping us quite a lot in our reintegration efforts. I am not just referring to the constant diplomatic support provided by Bucharest, but also to the help we have from the Government of Romania for the schools teaching in Romanian in the Transnistrian region. Without a doubt, increasing the role of the EU in the negotiation process and a possible change in the Union's status in the Transnistrian settlement process will further enhance Romania's political and diplomatic role in our effort to reintegrate the country.

Interview conducted by **Dr. Ileana Racheru**, Director of the Professional Training Department at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute

THE BLACK SEA REGION AFTER MOSCOW'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE. DEFENSE AND DETERRENCE MODELS

Claudiu Degeratu

ABSTRACT: *With the war in Ukraine at the centre of current evolutions in the Black Sea region, the article explores possible future developments after the end of this conflict and tries to anticipate challenges generated by the fact that the perception of this region has changed.*

The article aims to discuss important aspects of future defense and deterrence models in the Black Sea region from a Euro-Atlantic perspective after the end of the war in Ukraine. The approach is important because, regardless of the evolution of the conflict, the immediate consequences will have a specific impact primarily in this geopolitical area. That is why the assessment must start from the assumption that the future security agenda and the defense of a post-conflict Ukraine will become the agenda of the entire region.

The war in Ukraine has entered its second year and, in addition to the immense humanitarian tragedy, it has also sparked a global debate about the future of the international order. At the end of the Cold War, international relations commentators and theorists saw its legacy as a set of structural problems that were complex, but known and therefore manageable. Now, the conflict in Eastern Europe has managed to coagulate a set of multiple challenges which essentially signal a paradigm shift and call for a prospective approach.

Those who anticipated that the new era of strategic competition would go through a peaceful but tense transition, followed by a conflictual stage, were concerned about the geographical location of the next conflict in the Indo-Pacific region. The war in Ukraine confirms the fact that, in the paradigm of strategic competition, the hierarchy of scenarios cannot only take into account China's status as a challenger to the US. In fact, until the emergence of a multipolar system, the risk of war and uncertainty will be higher and will shape future developments. Therefore, the war launched by the Russian Federation is rather a catalyst that accelerates a process of rethinking strategic competition, often defined as a simple hegemon-challenger dyad. Russia's launch of a military offensive, to the detriment of a policy of coexistence with the West, is related to its power decline, but also to the perception that war will be the main instrument shaping the future multipolar system.

The annexation of Crimea (2014) and the subsequent invasion of other territories in Ukraine (2022), both being unilateral aggressive acts, indicate two further aspects. Firstly, the perception is consolidated that Eastern Europe is a zone of initial contestation and competition, and then it moves into conflict. The fact that a declining

power, Russia, and a region, Eastern Europe, are the elements of a strategic equation that does not directly involve either the USA or China, relativizes any tentative hierarchy of strategic priorities. Even under these conditions, the unanimous opinion is that the war triggered in Ukraine has a global impact and affects the majority of actors in the international relations system.

The second aspect is that the current context suggests that we should treat all regions and all actors as being of equal importance, a principle that not only does not simplify problems, but redefines them. Strategic competition does not mean a simplification of the international scene, but an exponential development of challenges that require 360-degree foreign policy and strategic clarity. This principle should also be applied to the Black Sea region. The importance of this space has been promoted for a long time, but recognition came slow and hard. For reasons I will not detail here, the recognition actually came too late, and the effects are visible.

Since the war in Ukraine has brought the Black Sea basin into the spotlight, we need to question the future of the entire region after the conclusion of this conflict and anticipate the challenges arising from the changing perception of this region.

The article aims to discuss important aspects of defence and deterrence from the Euro-Atlantic perspective, following the conclusion of the war in Ukraine. Regardless of the evolution of the conflict, the immediate consequences will have an impact primarily in this region. Therefore, the assessment must start from the assumption that the future security and defence agenda of a post-conflict Ukraine will become an agenda for the entire region. This high level of connectivity can be observed in the cases of the wars in former Yugoslavia and Iraq as well. The regional effects involved significant changes in foreign policy, defence strategies, coalitions, rivalries, and new tensions or conflicts.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE WAR IN UKRAINE

At this moment, the evaluation of the conflict in Ukraine has a dominant dimension shaped by the developments in the field. Consequently, the political, diplomatic, and economic dimensions of the future regional architecture are linked to the way this conflict ends. The topic of Ukraine's reconstruction has likely gained the most traction after military aid aimed at enhancing the defence capacity of the Ukrainian army. Reconstruction seems to be capturing attention, while the issue of peace negotiations has lost the battle for visibility.

At the same time, several trends should be highlighted. The most important among these is related to the growing perception that conventional warfare of high intensity has not disappeared, and there are revisionist countries, such as the Russian Federation, that will resort to strategies and forms of warfare previously deemed obsolete. This new major conventional warfare brings back the issue of territorial defence, and this subject is being rediscovered and showing signs that it will mark a series of changes in military strategies and foreign policies, both for regional actors and on a global scale.

Both the perspective of conventional warfare and the concept of territorial defence will require an accelerated rethinking of solutions regarding the preparedness of nations and states for the era of strategic competition. Until now, preparedness meant focusing on the training of forces and specialised structures to engage in warfare in its modern forms (warfare outside the Euro-Atlantic area, intervention warfare, counterterrorism operations, long-distance operations, or non-warfare operations). However, with the resurgence of the territorial defence paradigm, the concept of preparedness is changing and will encompass multiple dimensions: political, diplomatic, economic, and societal.¹

The second war in Ukraine generates another important trend related to defence spending. After the first war in Ukraine (2014), but especially now, with the outbreak of the Russian invasion in 2022, the issue of defence budgets becomes of vital importance for most countries in the Euro-Atlantic area. The range of issues raised by this new trend is vast, from the challenges of managing accelerated procurement programs to the lack of an industrial base for large-scale production of weapons and ammunition. Simply prioritising this budgetary chapter at the national level has consequences for defence and foreign policy strategies, requiring modifications to ensure the achievement of set objectives. From coalitions for chip production to the race for rare materials, from ensuring a fast acquisition of weapons and ammunition to finding solutions for new supply chains, all such efforts have been accelerated by the war in Ukraine.

Furthermore, it has been proven that assuming a high level of ambition for defence budgets has caught certain countries in a situation where they are unable to spend the allocated additional funds more rapidly and efficiently. With a pacifist strategic culture, fostered over an extended period of peace, many countries lack the necessary management and internal mechanisms to meet this challenge. The prime example is Germany, a country that experienced a radical shift in its foreign policy towards the Russian Federation in 2022, with an additional military procurement budget of 100 billion euros. However, it faces difficulties in utilising these funds quickly and efficiently.

At the same time, the war in Ukraine has revitalised an important connection - or rather a binomial one - that existed during the Cold War. Shifting the focus to collective defence in the Euro-Atlantic region requires operationalizing a dimension of coercive diplomacy that encompasses political, economic, informational, and other aspects. Allied countries have been compelled to assume this type of diplomacy in a coordinated manner, and its effects are expected to be seen in regional and sector-specific diplomacy as well.² A special component that stands out in this context is digital public diplomacy, which the Russian Federation employs aggressively to promote its objectives.

Another topic is the challenge of managing strategic surprise in the new competitive context. Strategic surprise, both in its nuclear and conventional dimensions, was a significant subject during the East-West confrontation of the last century and held a

¹ Even the concept of resilience will acquire additional meanings, which will be added to approaches in times of peace and crisis.

² "Russia/Belarus: Members Suspend Russia and Belarus from Council of the Baltic Sea States", European External Action Service, access - [https:// www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/russiabelarus-members-suspend-russia-and-belarus-council-baltic-sea-states_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/russiabelarus-members-suspend-russia-and-belarus-council-baltic-sea-states_en) (8 May 2023).

special place in all military strategies of the era. With Moscow's blackmailing threat to resort to tactical nuclear weapons to settle the war in Ukraine and deter allied assistance, the management of strategic surprises is being rekindled in the Euro-Atlantic debate.

Last but not least, this war has highlighted, amidst the emergence of new defence and deterrence objectives undertaken by NATO, that Europe will face a shortage of human resources for defence structures. The lack of soldiers will become chronic due to demographic trends, labour market competition, and changes in the prestige associated with a military career³.

THE FUTURE INTERNATIONAL STATUS OF UKRAINE

Compared to other major conflicts, such as the First and Second World Wars, where post-war political and military order were dominant themes, in the case of Ukraine, the priorities remain focused on ensuring military aid and reconstruction. The concept of Ukraine's reconstruction aligns more closely with the model seen in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, where the European perspective favoured reconstruction from the early stages of the conflict.

Now, there are also contributions related to the war in Ukraine that explicitly address the issue of the country's political and military future. The Rasmussen-Yermak⁴ report has addressed the future strategic profile of Ukraine and the mechanism of security guarantees that could ensure the state's independence and security. While the report does not extensively cover the future relationship between Ukraine and the regional context, it mentions the possibility of expanding the range of security guarantees with additional regional agreements involving countries in the Black Sea region (Türkiye, Romania, Bulgaria).

It should be noted that the Rasmussen-Yermak report proposes the establishment of a defence and security capacity for Ukraine based on three pillars: a developed defence capability in collaboration with international partners, a long-term political and military commitment from the same partners, and Ukraine's integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic security architecture. The document makes an interesting, albeit implicit, distinction between weak guarantees and strong guarantees, emphasising the principle that the package of sanctions should not be conditional on Ukraine assuming a future neutral status. The memory of weak guarantees from the Budapest Memorandum or the Minsk Agreements strongly influenced how the Rasmussen-Yermak report configured the package of international guarantees that Ukraine needs.

The regional dimension of the Black Sea is also present in the report on three levels. It distinguishes the provision of establishing bilateral agreements with Ukraine, the

³"German Military Facing Recruitment Gap, Says Commissioner", Deutsche Welle, 4 February 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-military-facing-recruitment-gap-says-commissioner/a-65206735> (8 May 2023).

⁴ This report reflects the position of the Presidency of Ukraine and was developed together with an international consulting team. "The Kyiv Security Compact: International Security Guarantees for Ukraine: Recommendations" (Working Group on International Security Guarantees for Ukraine, 13 September 2022), https://www.president.gov.ua/storage/jfiles-storage/01/15/89/41fdDec2d72259a561313370cee1be6e_1663050954.pdf (5 June, 2023).

development of assistance programs to enhance Ukrainian defence capabilities, and the adherence of states in the region to the principle of supporting Ukraine politically, economically, and militarily through appropriate measures in case of aggression. From a military perspective, this provision opens up multiple possibilities for the countries providing these international guarantees, going beyond the current stage of assistance. In particular, the chapter dedicated to implementation mechanisms suggests the option of a permanent structure that involves political commitments, allocated resources, and integration in risk assessment, consultation, coordination, and direct military support, all encompassed in an agreement called *The Kyiv Security Compact*.

Beyond this desirable strategic profile for Ukraine that should be developed in the post-conflict period, two questions remain unanswered: How long will the war last? What are the scenarios being considered? Regarding the duration of the war, opinions are divided between those who believe it will last several years and those who foresee a quicker end to hostilities. A prolonged duration of the war harms all parties involved, not just the two belligerents. The prospect of a long-lasting war will increase costs for all those involved even if the political and military commitment of Ukraine's allies is open-ended.

The duration of the war will leave its mark on the strategic landscape throughout Europe, including the Black Sea region. If we are forced to adapt to a long-lasting war, it will entail a greater degree of uncertainty and the need to make decisions that involve multiple changes. We will know where we start and in which direction we are heading, but it will be difficult to anticipate the outcome. How will Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region look after a prolonged war of attrition in Ukraine, and what costs are going to be associated with a new strategic reality in this part of the world? These are complex questions that will require careful consideration and analysis to fully understand the potential consequences and costs.

The dilemma of war duration stems from the analysis identifying alternatives to a prolonged conflict. The hypothesis of heavily involving ourselves in a proxy war to accelerate Russia's defeat by Ukraine is associated with the risks of a direct NATO-Russia confrontation. Initiatives such as providing military aid to Ukraine with offensive systems (fighter jets, long-range missile systems, high-endurance multi-role drones, smart ammunitions, etc.) or establishing a no-fly zone and providing direct military support, all represent different versions of the same hypothesis that a short war is the solution to avoid perpetuating a situation that could significantly drain Western resources in the long term.

We should also be concerned about the implications associated with the European and Euro-Atlantic posture that assumes support for Ukraine until Russia's defeat. This is not only because it involves a political commitment, but also because it requires reflection on how we can fulfil our status as Ukraine's allies. The Ramstein format⁵ attempts to harmonise the various national approaches to providing military aid, but it is evident, even from the first year of the war, that there are ongoing political divergences regarding what victory over Russia should look like.

⁵ The official name in English is: *Ukraine Defense Contact Group*.

Camps have already been formed in this regard. Some advocate for the total defeat of Russia, and others envision a defeated Russia but with the chance for European reconciliation. While it is difficult to describe how a former global nuclear power would appear ready to accept defeat, French President Emmanuel Macron seems prepared to accept Russia as a future post-conflict partner, based on the premise that geography and its status as a nuclear state require us to consider Russia's role⁶. This position of the French leader has generated controversy but has also accelerated the debate on developing a vision for the future of Europe.

The emergence of these issues reflects the need to systematically address the regional impact for countries in the Black Sea region and the options we have regarding the security deficit we face. The main dimensions I have in mind are defence and deterrence. As the sphere of defence is significantly broader and encompasses the strategic issues of deterrence, I would like to clarify that this distinction becomes analytically useful at the regional level.

SECURITY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION - OPTIONS, DILEMMAS, AND SOLUTIONS

Assessing a potential profile of the region should take into account several parameters: the evolution or conclusion of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Ukraine's post-conflict strategy, possible directions of adaptation by NATO, the US, and the EU, the Russian Federation, and changes in the strategy of relevant regional actors (Türkiye, Romania).

The evolution or conclusion of the Russo-Ukrainian war is, due to its complexity, a vast subject⁷ that requires the use of a typology capable of providing a strategic perspective. Generally, a distinction is made between the end of the war and the resolution of the conflict, a distinction that, in the case of the Russo-Ukrainian war, requires some clarifications and observations. The finality of the war, whether voluntary or involuntary, entails the formal cessation of hostilities but not necessarily the resolution of the conflict. The resolution of the conflict is initiated through political and diplomatic means and involves a civilian dimension.

We can assume that the finality of the war in this case will take three forms: the defeat of one party, or a mutual decision to end the phase of military hostilities through ceasefire agreements, or a prolonged armistice. In the first two cases, from a field perspective, we can anticipate the existence of a transition process with varying durations, triggered by the initial official announcement, which will unfold until all conditions are met for ensuring the end of the war. The third form is the maintenance of a low-intensity conflict, mainly positional, involving a frontline secured by military forces. This form will be distinct from the period of hostilities between 2014 and 2022, when the situation in Ukraine was more defined as a frozen conflict. Without discussing the probability and context in which one form or another of ending the war may manifest, a series of effects can be associated with the aforementioned options.

⁶ AFP, *Macron Defends Russia Dialogue to Prepare "Negotiated Peace"*, (France24, 1 September 2022), <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220901-macron-defends-russia-dialogue-to-prepare-negotiated-peace> (8 May, 2023).

⁷ A more recent overview of the literature dedicated to the end of wars is the one written by Joachim Krause "How Do Wars End? A Strategic Perspective", in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 42, no. 7, 2019, 920-945.

From a strategic perspective, the defeat of Ukraine would likely represent the most significant change in Europe and, of course, in the Black Sea region. The regional political implications can take the form of major changes in the strategies of NATO, the US, and the EU, given that Ukraine's failure would be associated with the failure of military support provided by the allied countries. Such an event can rapidly shift NATO's focus towards an enhanced and numerically increased forward defence strategy for the countries on the eastern front. Another immediate effect would concern Türkiye, which would be affected in its regional balancing policy. The failure as a mediator would pose a new challenge for Türkiye in its relations with the Russian Federation, with the consequences affecting its declining influence in areas such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East. In this scenario, internal instability would become a higher potential risk for the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, affecting their long-term development.

The hypothesis of Ukraine's defeat does not imply that a state of peace and stability will characterise an occupied Ukraine and the Black Sea region. The limited capacity of the Russian Federation to administer the civil and economic aspects of a newly hostile zone will become even more complicated and could potentially lead to a scenario of "Lebanonization", or a space with hostile enclaves, where civil resistance may rapidly erode the military control imposed by Moscow.

On the other hand, the scenario of Russia's defeat could lead, for the first time in many years, to a rebalancing of the strategic situation in the Black Sea region, through the loss of Moscow's influence, especially in the northern part. Even in the current conditions of war, it has been observed that Russia has gradually reduced its operational area at sea under the retaliatory actions of the Ukrainian army, which has managed to establish a protected area between Odessa, Snake Island, and the secondary delta area of the Danube on the Ukrainian coastline.

While there is a low probability of a formal end to the war with Russia recognising its defeat, the withdrawal and cessation of Russian military operations on Ukrainian territory could be considered a *de facto* defeat. In this case, the strategic effects will be manifold, impacting various aspects of regional security in the Black Sea. A potential Russian military withdrawal from Crimea, through defeat and demilitarisation, would bring an end to a military presence that began in 1783 and trigger a shift in the regional balance of power in favour of Türkiye. Like any major change, the domino effects will also impact Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The transition will entail significant elements of political instability, similar in magnitude to those experienced by regimes within Russia's sphere of influence during the events of 1989-1991.

As an alternative strategy, the Russian Federation can reignite a series of frozen conflicts, as it is the only way to demonstrate that it still has a say in the region. The prospect of blackmail through new interventions, even if militarily less credible, cannot be entirely excluded.

The prospect of a reduced military presence of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea will influence regional military cooperation. An increase in the importance of strategic partnerships can be anticipated, at the expense of regional cooperation

structures that have long exhausted their potential. At the heart of these concerns about the future of the Black Sea, the status and role of Ukraine and its relations with other actors, particularly Türkiye and Romania, will remain crucial. The consolidation of a Ukraine-Türkiye-Romania trilateral format, based on strategic bilateral partnerships between these actors, should not only enhance regional security but also lay the groundwork for deterrence against Russian actions in NATO's southern flank. In other words, a significant source of risks in this flank stems from the Black Sea, and any reduction in Russian military influence in the Crimean Peninsula would bring more security to the Mediterranean Sea area.

From a political and diplomatic perspective, the process of reconstruction in Ukraine will bring about a series of opportunities for European economic integration and new major projects for the region. The neighbouring countries of Ukraine, therefore, have the prospect of becoming economic anchors for the Eastern neighbourhood and increasing their capacity to promote regional issues on the European agenda. Lessons learned from the grain crisis, energy crisis, disruptions in supply chain logistics, and challenges related to international assistance should gradually drive the adoption of a proactive style of regional economic diplomacy in the Black Sea area.

The last scenario, which is also the most problematic due to its high level of uncertainty, is related to the war entering a slow decline towards a war of attrition that gradually transforms into a low-intensity conflict. With the perspective of building a Western-trained and equipped army, Ukraine will strive to avoid a frozen conflict and continue pursuing its objectives in kinetic terms. Even in the scenario where the Russian military maintains Crimea as a central defensive point and a secondary defensive centre on a limited territory in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, we can expect that the belligerents' first option will be to plan and execute military actions, even if they are only at a tactical level.

From a political perspective, this scenario significantly reduces the chances of mediation efforts and the formal initiation of a peace plan, although temporary ceasefires may still occur. The prospect of an armistice containing an agreed mechanism for indefinite extension may only arise in the context of significant strategic or political leadership changes and with the support of an international initiative that provides clear international status to the belligerents (security guarantees for Ukraine and normalization of relations for the Russian Federation).

The level of regional cooperation in the Black Sea will also be affected, and the pace of adaptation to an unclear situation will lead to a decrease in economic interest due to the "war fatigue" setting in. This state of affairs will result in effects on political commitments, involvement, and a reduction in the number of initiatives. In other words, the prolonged duration of the conflict could lead to stagnation or capping of military aid for Ukraine, as it becomes increasingly costly for Western allies' national economies.

The clear perspective of Moldova's association could potentially be the only success story in the region, providing a stake for European interest in the face of an uncertain future for Ukraine. In another aspect, a direction of coercive diplomacy between the two sides will dominate and consolidate, leading to an increasing decoupling. At the

same time, this scenario of prolonged conflict carries the political risk associated with an extended duration, which could involve changes in the political and leadership configurations in both Moscow and Kyiv, and may stimulate a resurgence of military actions. The political internalization of the conflict will intensify as it prolongs, and extremist political currents in both countries may take advantage of the situation.

MODELS OF DEFENSE AND DETERRENCE IN THE BLACK SEA REGION FROM A EURO-ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

After the Madrid Summit in 2022 and the launch of the new Strategic Concept⁸, the alliance has decided on significant changes to adapt to the new strategic environment. In parallel, the American military presence has represented a strategic pivot towards the eastern border of NATO, through timely and swift political decisions within the alliance and the reinforcement of US forces in the most threatened countries. The signal from the US administration and President Joe Biden has been towards the consolidation of an advanced defence in the Black Sea region through effective military measures and strategic initiatives. This year, the US will have its first official strategy for the Black Sea region, marking the opening of a new and important chapter in shaping regional security.⁹

At the same time, it should be noted that the new strategy is built upon Washington's history of strategic partnerships with Türkiye, Romania, and more recently, Ukraine. Therefore, defence and deterrence in our region will benefit, just like the northern flank, from two NATO and US strategies¹⁰. In terms of deterrence, NATO has decided to shift towards enhancing conventional military deterrence at the eastern border through the balancing of an increased and advanced force. Romania and Bulgaria currently host NATO battle groups and an advanced command system deployed in these countries. The evolving situation at the eastern border has led the alliance to adopt a new NATO force model, consisting of a total of 800,000 troops organised into three echelons with varying response levels.¹¹ This is a clear signal that NATO's military strategy is transitioning towards a concept of gradual and asymmetric conventional deterrence across the entire European scene¹².

Compared to the previous situation in 2022, where NATO focused on a selective approach to deterrence at the eastern border, focused on ensuring tailored contingency plans for frontline states, we are now discussing a comprehensive and uniform

⁸ "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept: Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid 29 June 2022", NATO, 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/> (8 May 2023).

⁹ "Romney, Shaheen Renew Bipartisan Push to Establish US Strategy Toward Black Sea Region", Mitt Romney - Personal page at US Senate, 15 March 2023, <https://www.romney.senate.gov/romney-shaheen-renew-bipartisan-push-to-establish-u-s-strategy-toward-blacksea-region/> (8 May 2023).

¹⁰ Isac Mihai, "Naumescu: România va fi centrul operațional al noii Strategii a SUA la Marea Neagră", Karadeniz Press, <https://karadenizpress.ro/naumescu-romania-va-fi-centrul-operational-al-noii-strategii-a-sua-la-marea-neagra/> (8 May 2023).

¹¹ NATO, "New NATO Force Model", https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-infographic-new-nato-force-model.pdf (5 August 2023).

¹² Jay Janzen, NATO's Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area, in *Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2023, 91-95.

deterrence model.¹³ Deterrence will have organised objectives based on different criteria, operational domains, geographic and strategic dimensions, as well as regional and national plans. This model developed by NATO includes, for the first time in many years, a regional approach that defines the Black Sea region as one of strategic interest. The difference in terms of deterrence posture is significant. A contingency plan for the Black Sea would involve a low-level rapid reaction force, while a regional plan for the Black Sea can benefit from the new NATO force model with increased intervention capabilities and aligns with the overall defence strategy of the Alliance.

CONCLUSIONS

A synthesis of a Euro-Atlantic model with multiple scenarios for the Black Sea region can be developed based on the analysis presented above (see Figure 1). Some of these measures have already been taken, while others are the author's estimations based on the assumptions of the three post-conflict scenarios in Ukraine.

Figure 1. Models of defense and deterrence associated to post-conflict scenarios for the Black Sea region (source: the author)

	The defeat of Ukraine	The defeat of the Russian Federation	Prolonged low-intensity conflict
NATO	NATO's Concept for the Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area The transition to an advanced defensive posture with NATO forces, at the brigade level, deployed at the eastern border	NATO's Concept for the Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area Involvement in implementing the package of measures to ensure security guarantees Continued partnership with Ukraine and assistance program Institutionalization of the Ramstein Format as a security assistance structure	NATO's Concept for the Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area Continuation of the activities of the Ramstein Format

¹³ Ed Arnold, "New Concepts but Old Problems: NATO's New Strategic Concept", The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 1 July 2023, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/new-concepts-old-problems-natos-new-strategic-concept>.

<p>EU</p>	<p>Adapted or definitively concluded EU partnership program in accordance with the de facto situation on the ground</p> <p>Coercive diplomacy targeting the Russian Federation</p> <p>Intensified assistance for the association of the Republic of Moldova</p>	<p>Accelerated EU association program for Ukraine</p> <p>Reconstruction and development program for Ukraine</p> <p>Assistance program for security and defense sector reform in Ukraine</p> <p>Strengthening EU presence in the Black Sea region</p> <p>Intensified assistance for the association of the Republic of Moldova</p>	<p>Maintaining a defense assistance program</p> <p>Strengthening EU presence in the Black Sea to address the negative effects of the prolonged war</p> <p>Accelerating assistance for the association of the Republic of Moldova</p> <p>Launching a peace initiative</p>
<p>USA</p>	<p>The American strategy for the Black Sea region</p> <p>Developing strategic partnerships with Romania and Türkiye</p> <p>Launching an intensified framework of strategic relations with the Republic of Moldova</p>	<p>The American strategy for the Black Sea region</p> <p>Strengthening the strategic partnership with Ukraine</p> <p>Enhancing the American military presence in the Black Sea region, in Romania and Ukraine</p> <p>Launching an intensified framework of strategic relations with the Republic of Moldova</p>	<p>The American strategy for the Black Sea region</p> <p>Continuation of American military aid for Ukraine</p> <p>Launching a peace plan</p>
<p>Türkiye</p>	<p>Revision of regional policies and relations with the Russian Federation</p> <p>Strengthening partnership with Romania and Bulgaria</p> <p>Launching a new maritime security mission for the Black Sea to balance the increased naval presence of the Russian Federation</p>	<p>Strengthening the strategic partnership with Ukraine</p> <p>Launching a subregional competitive strategy in the Caucasus and Central Asia, capitalising on the decline of the Russian Federation</p>	<p>Maintaining the position of mediator</p> <p>Maintaining an opportunistic strategy towards the conflict situation</p>

Romania	Reviewing regional policies Strengthening strategic partnerships with the US, Poland, Türkiye, and the Republic of Moldova	Reviewing regional policies in the new strategic context Launching the Strategic Partnership with Ukraine Introducing a new package of regionally tailored cooperation initiatives to adapt to the new context Strengthening strategic partnerships with the US, Poland, and Türkiye Enhancing cooperation in defense and security with the Republic of Moldova	Maintaining contributions to the military support provided by NATO, EU, and bilaterally to Ukraine Strengthening strategic partnerships with the US, Poland, and Türkiye Enhancing cooperation in defense and security with the Republic of Moldova
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In conclusion, in assessing various post-conflict scenarios, we have identified a series of challenges that the entire region will face. Firstly, the increased level of uncertainty in all scenarios necessitates a paradigm shift in the engagement and presence of key actors, such as NATO, the US, and the EU in the region. The significant impact on Türkiye's strategic posture in the region is evident in two scenarios: the defeat of Ukraine or Russia. For Romania, the impact stems primarily from implications for its own regional policy, where it must prepare for possible revisions based on the unfolding scenario, as well as the need to strengthen partnerships with the US, Türkiye, and Moldova, regardless of the dominant scenario.

THE BLACK SEA CHALLENGES AND THE AMERICAN STRATEGIC VISION IN THE REGION

Valentin Nicolescu

ABSTRACT: *This article discusses the main provisions of the Black Sea Security Act of 2023 (BSSA), as well as how the document specifically addresses the complex issues raised by the Black Sea region. It is constructed around the following question: to what extent does the BSSA succeed in identifying and responding to the security challenges in the Black Sea region? In order to achieve this, the author first outlines a map of the problems, actors, and interests in the area. Then, in a second step, the author analyses the BSSA, observing how it proposes to address the crises in the region and the problems identified with the mapping exercise above. The conclusions allow then for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the BSSA within the context of the challenges in the Black Sea region, in connection with particularities of the US foreign policy making.*

“What happens in the Black Sea does not stay in the Black Sea”

Bogdan Aurescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs,

3rd of February 2022¹

INTRODUCTION

On July 11-12, 2023, the NATO summit will take place in Vilnius. The choice of the Lithuanian capital as the meeting place of the alliance represents a powerful symbolic message of support for the Eastern flank in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Interestingly, the decision regarding the location of the summit proceedings was made two years ago, indicating that the alliance’s leadership already had such a symbolic objective in mind about the escalating Russian threat in the region after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the buildup of troops and military equipment (medium-range missiles, drones, tanks, aviation, etc.) in the Kaliningrad region since 2018.²

The international situation generated by the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, which de facto started in 2014 with Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, followed by Russian intervention in the eastern regions of Ukraine in the same year and culminating in the invasion in February 2022, has forced NATO to reconsider its strategic directions of action. The alliance has acknowledged that the period of relaxation after the Cold War

¹ Mirela Dădăcuș, “Bogdan Aurescu: What happens in the Black Sea doesn’t stay in the Black Sea. Russia continues to mass troops near Ukraine”, *RFI Romania*, 3 February 2022, <https://www.rfi.ro/social-142148-bogdan-aurescu- ceea-ce-se-intampla-la-marea-neagra-nu-ramane-marea-neagra-rusia> (19 April 2023).

² See Sergey Sukhankin, “Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?”, *The French Institute of International Relations*, Paper no. 124, 23 September 2021, <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/russieneivisions/kaliningrad-post-crimea-russia-bastion-or-weak-link>.

has ended, and the principles adopted in Lisbon in 2010 no longer correspond to the reality on the ground, characterised by the transition to a post-Westphalian vision of the world, defined by two major dimensions - Western technological supremacy, and the apparent absence of equal competitors in the North Atlantic region³. The alliance's strategic vision was increasingly shifting from the Euro-Atlantic space to the Asian and Pacific regions, in line with what was perceived at that time (and still is) as the main threat to the contemporary international order - China, as well as emerging military and economic powers in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Vietnam, North Korea, or India. This orientation continues to concern Western analysts and strategists, but the radical change in the situation in Eastern Europe has forced decision-makers to embark on the long process of strategic positioning in the region.

In 2016, in Warsaw, NATO decided to react to Russia's destabilising presence in the Black Sea region and the deteriorating security environment in the area by organising an advanced military force and suspending any civilian or military cooperation with Russia⁴. Additionally, before 2022, NATO increased its military presence in the region, from the number of patrol missions to organising joint naval exercises. Among the latter, Romania led the Sea Shield exercise in 2019, which involved forces from our country, as well as Bulgaria, Canada, Greece, the Netherlands, and Türkiye. However, although NATO recognises the strategic importance of the region, especially after the Madrid Summit in 2022, the North Atlantic Alliance has yet to formulate a coherent position regarding the Black Sea region. NATO's strategic concept approved in Madrid mentions the Black Sea only twice - once to illustrate the increasing Russian threat in Eastern Europe and the second time to emphasise the strategic importance of the region, alongside the Western Balkans⁵. Beyond the formal support for the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the countries in the region and the promise to intensify efforts to deter Russia's destabilising actions, NATO needs a clearly expressed vision regarding the Black Sea region.

However, NATO is only a political-military alliance, and its means of intervention are structurally limited by its nature. Another type of authority is needed to maximise decision-making effects in the region, namely an integrated mix that would involve regional/continental political and economic entities (such as the European Union, OSCE) combined with the proactive presence (not just militarily) of the United States, capable of legitimising and implementing partner decisions in the Black Sea basin. To this regard, a better understanding of the contexts, challenges, and intimate motivations of the actors in the region is necessary, which in turn can provide a stable basis for interaction, engagement, and management of potential security threats in the area.

From this perspective, the American vision regarding the Black Sea region is crucial for the success of any type of collective decision or action aimed at regional security in the context of Russia's escalating aggression in Ukraine. Unfortunately, however,

³ See Alessandro Marrone, "The Equilibrium of the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept", in *The International Spectator*, 46 (2011): 3, 93-111; David S Yost, "NATO's evolving purposes and the next Strategic Concept", in *International Affairs*, 86 (2010): 2, 489-522.

⁴ NATO Press Release, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016", access - NATO - Official text: Warsaw Summit Communiqué issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2016), 09-Jul.-2016 (19.04.2023).

⁵ "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept", Pagina oficială a NATO, access - 290622-strategic-concept.pdf (nato.int) (19.04.2023).

until this moment, Washington has not expressed a clear position regarding the region, fact acknowledged by American decision-makers who, after February 2022, initiated a bipartisan legislative project in the upper chamber of Congress to address the issue – The Black Sea Security Act of 2023 (BSSA).

In the following pages, the main provisions of the BSSA are discussed, and also the way in which it specifically addresses the complex issues raised by the Black Sea region, in an attempt to answer the following question: To what extent does the BSSA succeeds in identifying and responding to the security challenges in the Black Sea region? In order to achieve this, I will first attempt to outline a map of the problems, actors, and interests in the area and, in a second step, to take a brief look at the BSSA, observing how it proposes to manage the crisis in the region.

THE BLACK SEA, THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS: ACTORS, INTERESTS, CHALLENGES

The Black Sea region is not limited to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict but is marked by the highest number of active and frozen conflicts in the entire North Atlantic space. Like the entire Eastern region of the European continent, the Black Sea represents, from a historical perspective, a space of mobility, of cultural, economic, and political intersections, dominated by entities of diverse and usually transient or unstable nature, with fluid borders, plural and overlapping identities, in a dynamic that is not easily comprehensible at first glance. Currently, the region reflects this tumultuous historical experience, offering to the analyst the image of a heterogeneous space that brings together a mix of ethnicities, cultures, and civilizations, overlaid with political constructs that are often fragile, characterised by highly contradictory interests and diverse economies.

At first glance, the states in the region seem to have nothing in common other than their proximity, which condemns them to interact. From this perspective, the Black Sea area is a region only in name, in search of a common denominator capable of playing the foundational role of ensuring political and economic coherence through cooperation. At the same time, as noted in a recent strategic document by the Centre for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), the Black Sea is a frontier space where not only the West and Russia intersect but also four major forces – democracy in its western part, Russian military aggression in the north, Chinese financial aggression in the east, and the instability of the Middle East in the south, literally being the frontier between liberal democracy and autocracy⁶. In the following pages I will attempt to identify the main challenges posed by the region and how they filter through the prism of the dynamics of interests and interactions among the actors in the area.

Frozen conflicts and phantom states. The post-Soviet era has brought new state actors onto the map – Georgia, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, The Republic of Azerbaijan, etc. – but, at the same time, it has reignited latent conflicts whose origins go beyond the scope and dimensions of this article. From Transnistria to South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, tensions previously suppressed with varying degrees

⁶ Ben Hodges, "The Black Sea... or a Black Hole?", Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), 21 January 2021, <https://cepa.org/article/the-blacksea-or-a-black-hole/> (19.04.2023).

of success by the Soviet (and earlier Tsarist) colossus have resurfaced strongly, also delineating the political fault lines of the region. The zones of instability and conflict are widely known – Transnistria in the Republic of Moldova, South Ossetia-Alania and Abkhazia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh in Azerbaijan, to which we can add the interesting cases of the resolved conflicts in Gagauziya in Moldavia⁷ or Adjara in Georgia (indicating that these conflict fault lines are not condemned to perpetuity, as we might be tempted to believe). Each of them has a history that can be traced back to an open military conflict occurring in the first half of the 1990s⁸ and which resulted in the emergence of unrecognised or limitedly recognised political entities by the international community, classified in the literature as so-called phantom states⁹. These entities largely represent the cause of the “frozen” conflicts in the region and the current polarisation between the states that emerged after 1991, which has become one of the defining characteristics of the security environment in the Black Sea area, discouraging a coherent vision of regional security that is shared by most actors.

The separatist and unrecognised – or partially recognised – political entities represent an important variable in the stability equation in the region. Any future plan for managing security in the Black Sea will need to consider models for addressing the challenges posed by these entities, most likely through a vision that integrates dialogue between the parties with the promotion of economic integration that generates common prosperity, as well as the strengthening of democratic-pluralistic institutions and practices.

Resource Politics and Communication Routes. Resource politics in the Black Sea region has become, in recent decades, a field of study by itself, producing a vast body of literature (including in Romania) that generically focuses on the transportation of raw materials from producing states to consumer states in the West and the associated policies. However, this type of literature has proven to be relatively blind to how resource scarcity or abundance affects the domestic political environment and external interactions of states in the region. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, I will not attempt to recapitulate the discussions already addressed in the specialised literature but rather to integrate them into a broader picture that primarily focuses on exploring the gaps mentioned above. The limited space of this article does not allow for a detailed examination of the political and economic situation of all actors in the region, so I will choose to concentrate, as an epitomic example, on how the new situation in the Black Sea basin recalibrates the positions of Azerbaijan and Armenia and how it affects their relationships with other regional actors. Furthermore, I will outline the effects of the Russo-Ukrainian crisis on the security and freedom of navigation and communication

⁷ Marcin Kosienkowski, “The Gagauz Republic: An Autonomism-Driven De Facto State”, in *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2017, 292-313.

⁸ Dov Lynch, “Separatist States and Post-Soviet Conflicts”, in *International Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2002, 832; see also Carol Weaver, *The Politics of the Black Sea Region. EU Neighbourhood, Conflict Zone or Future Security Community?*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013, cap. 6.

⁹ Daniel Byman, Charles King, “The Mystery of Phantom States”, in *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2012, 45; Dahlia Scheindlin, “Phantom Referendums in Phantom States: Meaningless Farce or a Bridge to Reality?”, in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2012, 65, 67; see also Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

routes in the Black Sea, and finally, discuss the emergence of China as a relevant actor in the area.

The Russo-Ukrainian conflict has caused significant disruptions in the East-to-West transportation of energy resources, first by the relatively rapid disconnection of Western European states from Russian gas and then by the interruption of gas transit through Ukraine¹⁰. In practice, the indefinite closure of Streams 1 and 2, coupled with the cessation of any gas transportation through Ukraine, has transformed the Black Sea into one of the most important transport (and production) spaces for natural gas to Europe, particularly through the Southern Gas Corridor, which passes through Azerbaijan, Georgia, Türkiye, Greece, and Albania, ultimately reaching Italy via the Adriatic Sea.

Perhaps the biggest beneficiary of this new situation is Azerbaijan, a fact confirmed by the visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson to Baku in July 2022. During the visit, a strategic partnership was signed, with the EU committing to purchase at least 20 million cubic metres of natural gas by 2027.¹¹ At the same time, Azerbaijan aims to capitalise politically on its new position in the European energy market. In April 2023, President Ilham Aliyev visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a strategic partnership was signed with the three Bosnian co-presidents, Željka Cvijanović, Denis Bećirović, and Željko Komšić. This confirms Azerbaijan's increasingly active presence in the Balkans, intensifying its contacts not only with Bosnia but also with Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia, and Romania, as evidenced by President Aliyev's diplomatic tour in the second half of 2022.

However, friendly relations with Aliyev's authoritarian regime necessarily imply alignment with Azerbaijan's position on the conflict with Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh, illustrating how regional polarisation is expanding and negatively impacting the process of de-escalating relations in the region. While Azerbaijan is clearly in a winning position following the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian crisis in 2022, Armenia finds itself at the opposite pole, increasingly isolated as a result of its close relationship with Russia,

¹⁰ Gazprom and Naftogaz signed an agreement in 2019, following the direct involvement in negotiations of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Vladimir Zelensky, regarding the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine for the period of 2020-2024. The signing of the agreement was seen at the time as a true success, not only economically but especially politically, given that it represented the first official cooperation between the two countries after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. At the same time, it should be noted that throughout the period from 1991 to 2014, Ukraine was the main transit route to the EU, with as much as 90% of the gas produced in Russia passing through Ukraine. See Simon Pirani, Jack Sharples (2020). "The Russia-Ukraine gas transit deal: opening a new chapter", Energy Insight, The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/publications/the-russia-ukraine-gas-transit-deal-opening-a-new-chapter/>, respectively Simon Pirani, Jack Sharples, Katja Yafimava, Vitaly Yermakov, "Implications of the Russia-Ukraine gas transit deal for alternative pipeline routes and the Ukrainian and European markets", Insight 65, The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2020, Implications of the Russia-Ukraine gas transit deal for alternative pipeline routes and the Ukrainian and European markets - Oxford Institute for Energy Studies (oxfordenergy.org)(7.05.2023).

¹¹ "EU agrees deal with Azerbaijan to double gas exports by 2027", Euronews, 18 July 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/myeurope/2022/07/18/von-der-leyen-heads-to-azerbaijan-to-secure-new-gas-import-deal> (7.05.2022). See also European Commission – Press release "EU and Azerbaijan enhance bilateral relations, including energy cooperation", 18 July 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-azerbaijan-enhance-bilateral-relations-includingenergy-cooperation-2022-07-18_en (7.05.2023).

which is the main security provider for the Armenian state, particularly after the 44-day conflict with Azerbaijan in September–October 2020¹².

In general, the prolongation of the war in Ukraine has led to a decrease in Russia's involvement in the Caucasus, while Armenia's economic dependence on the Russia-dominated Eurasian Economic Community deeply affects an already weak economy. The economic imbalance between the two countries does not bode well for regional political-military relations, while the intensification of economic and military cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, under the slogan of "one nation, two countries," only exacerbates the power imbalance in the Caucasus, with significant implications for other actors in the Black Sea basin.

The situation presented above, of the Russo-Armenian-Azerbaijani relationship, exemplifies the patterns of political-economic interaction among the states in the Black Sea basin, whether we are referring to the Russo-Georgian-Turkish¹³ relationship or the Moldovan-Transnistrian-Russian relationship. These tense relationships further shape interactions with NATO and EU states in the region, amplifying the uncertainty and lack of predictability that characterise the region.

Additionally, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine harms transportation and communication routes in the region. The repeated travel restrictions imposed by Russia in certain areas of the Black Sea, which it controls, have had a significantly impacted the freedom of navigation and, consequently, the regional and international trade. For example, the crisis in grain transportation has increased the risk of food insecurity globally.¹⁴ On the other hand, Ukraine is also attempting to respond to Russia's attempts to choke off maritime transport lines connecting ports in southern Ukraine with the rest of the world by targeting Russian port infrastructure. To this respect, it is worth mentioning the drone attack on the port of Taman on May 3rd, 2023, which led, among other things, to the suspension of railway transportation of petroleum products from Kazakhstan.

Furthermore, the policy of restrictions is compounded by the presence of minefields placed by both warring parties, which directly threaten the commercial transportation of grains, oil, and petroleum products. In this regard, Vice Admiral Mihai Panait, the Chief of the Romanian Naval Forces' General Staff, during a discussion on the Black Sea region organised by the Yorktown Institute and the New Strategy Center in the United States last autumn, emphasised the necessity of modernizing the Romanian minehunter fleet to ensure the protection of commercial shipping lanes in the region¹⁵. Until now, the

¹² James J. Coyle, *Russia's Interventions in Ethnic Conflicts: The Case of Armenia and Azerbaijan*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021, p. 92 ff.

¹³ See, for example, Andreow Weiss, Yana Zabanova, "Georgia and Abkhazia Caught between Türkiye and Russia", German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Comments 54, December 2016, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2016C54_wis_zbv.pdf (9.05.2023).

¹⁴ See The World Bank, "Food Security Update", 20 April 2023, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/40ebbf38f5a6b68bfc11e5273e1405d4-0090012022/related/Food-Security-Update-LXXXIII-April-20-2023.pdf>, (7.05.2023); "One year on – the global impact of the war in Ukraine", World Trade Organization, March 2023, https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/oneyukr_e.pdf (7.05.2023).

¹⁵ Heather Mongilio, "Romanian Navy Needs Minehunters to Keep Black Sea Safe for Ships, Navy Chief Says", US Naval Institute News, 3 October 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/10/03/romanian-navy-needs-minehunters-to-keep-black-sea-safe-for-ships-navychief-says> (9.05.2023).

combined efforts of Romania, Bulgaria, Türkiye, and Ukraine have struggled to ensure navigation security in the area.

In recent years, another relevant actor has emerged in the equation of resource politics and transportation routes in the Black Sea: China. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is undoubtedly one of the most important foreign policies and economic initiatives through which Beijing seeks to leverage economic investments as a way to maximise political influence¹⁶. China intervenes in the region through direct investments that target either the development of commercial and transportation infrastructure in regional countries or the acquisition of significant economic actors in the regional market.

Regarding infrastructure investments, it can be observed that China has initiated or announced such projects in all the states in the region in recent years (with the notable exception of Romania), taking advantage of Russia's weakened position due to the war in Ukraine. In fact, some of the Black Sea riparian countries consider the BRI a useful instrument to counter Russian dominance¹⁷, which inclines them towards cooperating with Beijing. However, could Chinese involvement in the Black Sea stimulate regional cooperation and increase stability and security in the region?

Initially, the institutional model proposed by China to promote the BRI in the Central and Eastern European region (the so-called 14+1, after the withdrawal of the Baltic countries in 2021 and 2022) shows that China's vision is not that of a multilateral platform among equals. Instead, it is a form of "multilateral bilateralism," with China at the center and partner countries around it, with limited or non-existent cooperation among them¹⁸. This model excessively favours Chinese power in its relationship with partners, at the expense of genuine dialogue and cooperation. Consequently, replicating this model at the level of countries in the Black Sea basin is unlikely to have positive effects in terms of enhancing regional cooperation. On the contrary, unequal and diverse relationships (based on the political agenda of various actors) will generate uneven development and likely deepen existing divisions.

Nevertheless, although somewhat limited for now by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, China's active infiltration into the Black Sea region will become increasingly significant in the future and will undoubtedly require proactive measures from both the EU and the United States.

Competition for regional hegemony. Overlaying this situation is the resurgence of Russia's hegemonic aspirations after the end of the Yeltsin era. The Putinist political project seeks to revive Russian imperial expansionism in a new formula that combines the Tsarist and Soviet experiences into a new ideological mix, reaffirming Russian exceptionalism as a civilisational, cultural, and political model. The effects of this policy

¹⁶ See Yevgen Sautin, "China's Black Sea Ambitions", in *Black Sea Strategy Papers*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Washington D.C., December 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/12/chinas-black-sea-ambitions/> (8.05.2023).

¹⁷ Deborah Sanders, "Can China promote stability in the Black Sea Region?", in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, 415-436.

¹⁸ Dimitar Lilkov, "The Belt and Road Initiative in the Black Sea Region", in Alexandra Martin (ed.), *China in the Broader Black Sea Region*, Brussels: GLOBSEC, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, 2021, 2.

are clearly identifiable on the ground, from the encouragement of Duginist Eurasianism as a supporting element of the political concept of the “Russian world” (*Ruskii Mir*), to the reinvention of the concept of democracy in the good Soviet and authoritarian-Tsarist tradition – now not as popular democracy but as sovereign democracy – and to military interventions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine. What needs to be noted here is that post-Soviet Russia has built its dominance in the region by using the aforementioned conflict fault lines as levers for controlling and aligning regional actors. The most important element of this strategy is the use of phantom states as justifications for intervention, whether direct military, diplomatic, or economic. From this perspective, countering Russia’s hegemony in the Black Sea region cannot be dissociated, as mentioned above, from the direct approach by the West to the issue of unrecognised states and the conflict fault lines they mark.

At the same time, any discussion of the political situation in the Black Sea cannot ignore Turkish hegemonic interests and aspirations in the region. Türkiye seems to be repeating the Russian model. It attempts an approach that, on the one hand, seems to take advantage of the conflicts and tensions in the area to bring various political entities closer (as is the case with Abkhazia or, more visibly, Azerbaijan) and, on the other hand, resorts to soft power strategies with similar objectives in the extended Black Sea region (particularly in Dagestan) and Central Asia. However, while Russia emphasises the use of military power to assert its hegemony, Türkiye operates much more subtly, combining the political-diplomatic dimension with the economic and cultural dimensions.

From this perspective, Türkiye has adopted a very assertive position in the region, challenging Russia’s hegemonic claims in the Black Sea in general and in the Caucasus in particular. A brief overview reveals two major dimensions of Ankara’s project. The first is the military dimension – increasing arms sales to Azerbaijan¹⁹ (directly threatening Russian quasi-monopoly in the region, as confirmed by the provision of Bayraktar TB-2²⁰ drones to the Ukrainian army), and sending a military mission during the conflict with Armenia. On the other hand, Türkiye’s invasion of northern Syria in August 2016 is similarly seen as an active challenge to Russia’s expansionist tendencies without the assistance of the United States or European states.²¹

The second dimension is the intertwining of economic and cultural policies, amalgamated into a concept of Turkish soft power, synthesised in the “Global Turkic Vision – 2040,” a strategic document adopted in November 2021 by the member states of the Turkic Council during the organisation’s summit in Istanbul²². Furthermore, Türkiye consistently and significantly invests in the institutional development of the Turkic

¹⁹ Ece Toksabay, “Turkish arms sales to Azerbaijan surged before Nagorno-Karabakh fighting”, Reuters, 14 October 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/armenia-azerbaijan-turkiye-arms-int-idUSKBN26Z230> (8.05.2023).

²⁰ Jomana Karadsheh, “Turkish drones have become a symbol of the Ukrainian resistance”, CNN, 11 April 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/11/middleeast/mideast-summary-04-11-2022-intl/index.html> (8.05.2023).

²¹ Omer Ozkizilcik, “The ‘Turkish Model’ is resonating in Eastern Europe, and Moscow is worried”, TRT World, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/the-turkish-model-is-resonating-in-eastern-europe-and-moscow-is-worried-47191> (8.05.2023).

²² Pelin Musabay Baki, “Turkic World Vision – 2040: A Step Forward for the Resilience of Turkic Cooperation”, in *Perceptions*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2022, 26-52.

Council and its cooperative mechanisms under its umbrella, such as the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSÖY), the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-speaking Countries (TÜRKPAA), the International Turkic Academy, the Turkic Heritage Foundation, and the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye. The main idea behind these efforts is to “strengthen our international power while consolidating unity among ourselves without forgetting our roots,” as stated by the Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu²³. In this regard, Türkiye’s discordant position among Western allies must be understood and addressed accordingly, aiming at the negotiated integration of Türkiye into the concert of actions of Western democracies, with a focus on enhancing stability, security, and predictability in the Black Sea region.

THE AMERICAN SECURITY VISION IN THE REGION

The future of the region fundamentally depends on the involvement of the United States in countering Russia’s hegemonic project, fruitful dialogue with relevant allies in the region, such as Türkiye, balancing China’s economic involvement, and enhancing the political, economic, and security environment. Enhancement can be achieved by empowering partners in the region to interact constructively, mediating or creating spaces for dialogue and rapprochement that facilitate political cooperation among historically conflicting actors.

The United States is relevant both as the most important actor in the North Atlantic Alliance, and as a globally dominant power with specific interests. From this latter perspective, the status of the Black Sea as a geopolitical space for the US must be nuanced. Traditionally, after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, it has been a secondary area of interest. Until now, there is no official document dedicated to managing the region’s issues that clearly expresses the American vision, both in terms of assessing the specific challenges the region poses and from the perspective of the strategies of action that could be considered.

However, the developments since 2014 have imposed a reassessment of this situation by the US, both as a member of NATO, and as a global actor. The escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in 2022 forced the subject onto the agenda through the military and financial support provided by the US to Ukraine. However, it has not yet resulted in the necessary strategic clarification of the US position regarding the Black Sea region. Therefore, following the hearings in the Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, its chairwoman, Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen, together with Republican Senator Mitt Romney, submitted a legislative proposal in July 2022 aimed at guiding the US administration in developing a strategy for the region²⁴. In mid-March 2023, the proposal was mirrored in the House of Representatives by The Black

²³ Deniz Ünver, "Turkic World on Rise: The Summit of the Organization of Turkic States", Center for Eurasian Studies, Blog entry no. 75/2021, 2, <https://avim.org.tr/Blog/TURKIC-WORLD-ON-RISE-THE-SUMMIT-OF-THEORGANIZATION-OF-TURKIC-STATES-06-12-2021> (8.05.2023).

²⁴ Alexander Ward, Matt Berg, Lawrence Ukenye, "ShaheentoAdmin: GetMeTheBlackSeaStrategy", in *Politico*, 21 March 2023, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/03/21/shaheen-to-admin-get-me-the-black-sea-strategy-00088048> (30.04.2023).

Sea Security Act of 2023, a legislative project designed to reflect the one submitted by Shaheen and Romney in the Senate²⁵.

Although strongly polarised, the American political spectrum has proven to be extremely coherent over time regarding its foreign and security policy, with bipartisan consensus on the overall vision and major directions of action. It is, therefore, important to note that, at first glance, despite political animosities, the two major American parties can still cooperate and produce bipartisan initiatives - noting here that, similar to the Shaheen/Romney Act, the project introduced in the lower Chamber is initiated by members of both parties. However, premature celebration should be avoided.

The Republican Party is currently deeply divided between the MAGA faction (Make America Great Again) of former President Trump and the old-school Republicans, known as Reagan Republicans or Never-Trumpers, whom Trump dubbed RINOs ("Republicans in Name Only"). The fact that Mitt Romney and his Democratic colleague jointly submitted the project regarding the Black Sea region does not guarantee its adoption, unfortunately. Romney is an open opponent of Trump, with very weak support within his own party. However, the Senate is not the major issue (where the Democrats managed to maintain a fragile majority after the midterm elections last year), but the House of Representatives.

The situation there is somewhat more complicated, as the constituent factions of the Republican Party are engaged in a veritable civil war that affects not only the domestic affairs of the United States, but also its foreign policy. Representative of this is the case of Kevin McCarthy, the Republican Speaker of the House, who, despite having a fragile majority in the House, could only secure his position after a very complicated negotiation process with the MAGA wing of the party, which propelled him into history as one of the few House leaders who failed to obtain his mandate in the first vote. Furthermore, McCarthy has so far failed to convince the public that he truly holds the reins of the Republicans, if the MAGA faction, despite being in the minority, manages to filter his decisions as speaker and, implicitly, shape the party's agenda in the House.

But what does this so-called civil war within the Republican Party represent? In fact, it is the confrontation of two irreconcilable political positions, which should be interpreted as a warning signal for decision-makers in Bucharest and the region. On the one hand, we have the "traditional" Republicans, such as Mitt Romney, who, like their Democratic colleagues, understand that regional and global threats directly affect American interests not only in terms of security but also in maintaining the international legal order established after World War II. This faction understands that global and regional threats need to be addressed and resolved where they arise, in order to prevent them from ultimately affecting the American state at home. From this perspective, the "traditional" Republicans work in a bipartisan manner, as we have seen in the case of the bill mentioned before, to provide the US with the necessary tools to deal with various emerging challenges in the international relations system.

²⁵ ***, "Turner, Keating Introduce Bill on Black Sea Security", US House of Representatives - Page of Rep. Mike Turner, 16 March 2023, [https://turner.house.gov/2023/3/turner-keatingintroduce-bill-on-black-sea-security\(30.04.2023\)](https://turner.house.gov/2023/3/turner-keatingintroduce-bill-on-black-sea-security(30.04.2023)).

Of the other part, lawmakers representing the MAGA faction, such as Marjorie Taylor Greene, Lauren Boebert, or Matt Gaetz, have a populist anti-system discourse that emphasises, in terms of American foreign policy, a form of pacifist isolationism that can also be found – surprisingly for some – on the other side of the political spectrum, among progressive left figures like Bernie Sanders, Pramila Jayapal, or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. In the case of the far-right MAGA, it views classical republicanism as a corrupt form of conservatism that prioritises the interests of major corporations in the military-industrial complex, to the detriment of ordinary Americans' interests. MAGA brings a somewhat paranoid vision of the international environment, in which the United States is a "besieged fortress" by more or less imaginary enemies – Muslims, migrants, Chinese espionage, global Jewish elite conspiracies (represented by the iconic image of George Soros), and so on.²⁶

In this logic, US involvement in NATO is also viewed with suspicion by the American far right, with the alliance's European partners being seen as free riders who benefit from the US's military preeminence without fulfilling their obligations²⁷. As a result, MAGA challenges the need for American global leadership in security matters and maintaining the international order, playing the isolationist card once again. Consequently, MAGA condemns the material and financial support provided by the US to Ukraine in the conflict with Russia. In February 2023, Matt Gaetz, on behalf of the MAGA lawmakers, submitted a resolution in the House of Representatives entitled "Ukraine Fatigue Resolution," explicitly calling for the cessation of any military and financial aid to Ukraine.²⁸ Representative Paul Gosar summarised MAGA's positions on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, stating: "Ukraine is not our friend, and Russia is not our enemy."²⁹ Tensions between the two factions within the Republican Party are also reverberating in the American public sphere, where isolationist positions are becoming increasingly prominent in the media, exerting significant influence on the electorate³⁰.

Therefore, at first glance, given the complicated political arithmetic in the American legislature generated by the conflict within the Republican Party, the chances of passing the legislative project regarding the strategy in the Black Sea region do not seem very high. However, the involvement of Joe Biden will likely tip the balance in the end, as the US president is recognised for his negotiation skills and compromise acquired over decades in the Senate.

²⁶ Jack Holland, Ben Fermor, "The Discursive Hegemony of Trump's Jacksonian Populism: Race, Class and Gender in Constructions and Contestations of US National Identity, 2016-2018", in *Politics*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2020, 64-79; Julia Hell, George Steinmetz, "A Period of 'Wild and Fierce Fanaticism': Populism, Theo-Political Militarism, and the Crisis of US Hegemony", in *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2017, 376.

²⁷ See Joyce P. Kaufman, "The US Perspective on NATO under Trump: Lessons of the Past and Prospects for the Future", in *International Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 2, 2017, 251-266; James Sperling, Mark Webber, "Trump's Foreign Policy and NATO: Exit and Voice", in *Review of International Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2019, 511-526.

²⁸ House of Representatives Resolution 113, 9 February 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/118/bills/hres/113/BILLS-118hres113ih.pdf> (30.04.2023).

²⁹ Republican Paul Gosar, Twitter post, 20 February 2023, 11:54 pm, <https://twitter.com/RepGosar/status/1627788864256372736?s=20>.

³⁰ See Telhami Shibley, "Americans show signs of impatience with Ukraine War", Brookings Institute, 28 April 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2023/04/28/americans-show-signs-of-impatience-withukraine-war/> (30.04.2023).

What does the Black Sea Security Act propose concretely, and what would be its impact on the region? On the one hand, it assesses the situation from an American perspective, and on the other hand, it proposes policies aimed at stabilising the region and countering existing security threats to outline the general lines of a security and development strategy dedicated to the region. The assessment of the situation includes several essential points:

- Recognition of the Black Sea region as an area of Russian aggression, emphasising that the coastal states play a critical role in countering Russian hegemonic actions and contributing to NATO's collective security. At the same time, it recognises Russia's expansionist actions in the Black Sea and its attempt to gain unrestricted access to the Mediterranean Sea as threats to US security and NATO states in the region, justifying countermeasures from the American side and the alliance.
- It acknowledges the need for a permanent naval presence of NATO in the Black Sea, organised on rotational principles. Among other things, this presence will aim to ensure transportation corridors for grains, thus seeking to significantly reduce food insecurity that can have critical national security implications for the US and its allies and partners globally.
- It considers close cooperation with the EU necessary to coordinate a strategy to support democratic initiatives and economic prosperity in the region. It mentions that countries in the Black Sea region with historical and economic ties to Russia expect the US and the EU to counterbalance Russian dominance through an active and positive economic presence. As a result, the document emphasises that it is in the direct interest of the US to support and strengthen economic ties with the countries in the region, identifying several broad areas of potential cooperation: energy, climate, and transportation infrastructure. The authors of the legislative project believe that improving ties between the US and the countries in the Black Sea region can lead to a strong strategic partnership and enhance regional stability and security.
- The important role played by Türkiye, alongside the US, in managing the food crisis through the negotiation of two-grain transportation agreements from Ukraine, is acknowledged. However, Türkiye's stance regarding the ratification of Finland and Sweden's NATO membership candidacies is seen as undermining the power of the North Atlantic Alliance and compromising its ability to respond coherently and collectively to Russian aggression.
- The document views China as a destabilising factor in the region through its economic policies, and countering them is deemed essential to achieve the objective of integrating the Black Sea region into Western economies and improving regional stability.³¹

The evaluation made by American legislators appears to be both limited and superficial, managing to cover only partially the complex mosaic of interests and

³¹ "Black Sea Security Act of 2023", US Senate, 15 March 2023, p. 1-5, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/804/text> (30.04.2023).

challenges posed by the region. However, it opens the door to a potential in-depth strategic analysis, reflected later in specific policies aimed at precisely managing the issues in the region with Euro-Atlantic partners, whether from NATO or the EU.

What should be emphasised here is, on the one hand, the identification of the Chinese threat as a component of the stability equation in the region, and, on the other hand, the highlighting of Türkiye's separate voice and the impact this position has on NATO cohesion. At the same time, it is extremely interesting to note the issue not included in the legislative project, which is probably the most significant problem facing the states in the region: the issue of phantom states such as Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, or Abkhazia. As mentioned above, these internationally unrecognised political entities are one of the main instruments through which Russian hegemonic pressure is exerted in the region. They create political, military, and economic dependencies (e.g., Armenia) or use various regional actors as bargaining chips in Russia's dominance equations. Active US involvement in the broader issue of revisionism and separatism in the Black Sea region is a crucial element in ensuring stability and security by countering Russian ambitions there.

Under the policy category, American legislators identify a series of priorities through which the challenges in the region can be coherently addressed:

- Deterrence of Russia's escalation in the area and preservation of freedom of navigation in the Black Sea. This includes preventing the conflict from spreading in Europe by establishing a permanent naval force together with NATO and its allies. The force would be ensured on a rotational principle, respecting the provisions of the Montreux Convention (1936) regarding the presence of fleets from countries outside the region in the Black Sea.
- Providing the countries in the region with economic alternatives to China's coercive options, which have a destabilising role and erode the economic integration of Black Sea states. From this perspective, American legislators believe that the most appropriate response is twofold: increasing American presence and increasing direct American investments in the economies of the countries in the region.
- The support of the United States for the efforts of the countries in the region to strengthen their democratic institutions and practices, combat corruption, and approach and integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community.
- Supporting cooperation and development projects of the countries in the region, particularly the Three Seas Initiative (TSI), which aims at transportation, energy, and digital infrastructure from the Baltic to the Adriatic and the Black Sea.³²

The strategic objectives of the United States are stated clearly and distinctly:

- Efficient provision of security assistance to regional partners, prioritising assistance that strengthens specific defense capabilities for hybrid conflicts³³ and improving interoperability with NATO forces;

³² *Idem*, p. 5-7.

³³ See Ofer Fridman, Vitaly Kabernik, James C. Pearce (eds), *Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare. New Labels, Old Politics*, Boulder&London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019, 9-24; 107-170; Ofer Fridman, *Russian; "Hybrid Warfare". Resurgence and Politicisation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

- Strengthening US support for the energy security of the region by integrating it with European energy security and encouraging energy diversification, thus reducing the dependence of the countries in the region on Russia;
- Reducing the impact of Russian and Chinese economic pressure on the countries in the region and identifying new direct investment opportunities from the US and friendly states, as well as increasing high-level interactions between the US and its regional partners, aiming to stimulate economic growth, finance high-quality infrastructure, and strengthen trade relations based on enhanced high-level economic cooperation³⁴.

Beyond this type of statement of generic principles and visions, strategic directions and objectives, the legislation proposed by Shaheen and Romney also offers – most importantly – a plan of action in four major dimensions: *security*, *economic prosperity*, *democratic resilience*, and *regional connectivity*. The first of these aims to develop a competent analysis to determine whether it is desirable to implement a US initiative with NATO partners to enhance coordination, presence, and regional involvement among the Black Sea states, coupled with a strategy to increase security assistance for Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia.³⁵ Therefore, the planned course of action is designed with cautious steps that do not involve immediate action but rather the conduct of risk and opportunity assessments and analyses. Based on these assessments, concrete actions can be taken in the future. The same logic is applied to the opportunity for NATO maritime presence in the Black Sea, the development of a strategy to counter Russian disinformation, and the promotion of greater freedom of navigation and economic access to the Black Sea.

The other three dimensions are approached similarly – the development of strategies and assessments, followed by decision-making. In practical terms, this means that if the legislative project were to be adopted this year, the first concrete measures could only become visible towards the end of the following year, precisely during the election period. At that time, it is most likely that political discourse and ideological confrontations between the two parties will be at their peak, and the issue of the Black Sea may become a “hot potato” that the American political class will try to avoid as much as possible during the election race.

CONCLUSIONS

Does BSSA-2023 manage to respond coherently to the challenges in the Black Sea region? Yes and no. Firstly, it identifies a significant part of these challenges synthetically but correctly, considering that they need to be procedurally managed through a series of steps that involve conducting strategic studies to explore the specific issues in-depth. These studies would be followed by political actions aimed at addressing each issue, either through direct American involvement or through coordinated measures with European

³⁴ “Black Sea Security Act of 2023”, US Senate, 15 March 2023, p. 7-8, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/804/text> (30.04.2023).

³⁵ *Idem*, p. 9

partners. Secondly, American legislators integrate the Black Sea region into a broader logic of a global chessboard, as Zbigniew Brzezinski would portray it, in which not only regional actors but also direct competitors to American hegemony, such as China, are involved.

This broad vision allows for the development of policies aimed at the countries in the region from an integrative perspective, which could generate effective actions to address the problems and aspirations of the states with access to the Black Sea in their true magnitude, while simultaneously stimulating their regional and global integration processes. Thirdly, the dimensions on which the initiators of BSSA base the strategic vision of the US for the Black Sea - security, economic prosperity, democratic resilience, and regional connectivity - can become real pillars of reconstructing the security environment in the region, potentially with a profound impact in the medium and long term.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, BSSA does not address the proverbial “elephant in the room” - the issue of unrecognised or partially recognised states and the frozen conflicts in the region. This omission, whether deliberate or not, represents the Achilles’ heel of the entire political framework assumed by the American strategy in the region, which can be used to assess its potential success. The absence of this issue from the text of the legislative project reveals a lack of understanding of the realities in the region, realities that reflect historical experiences that have shaped identities, aspirations, and expectations that cannot be resolved solely through the stimulation of dialogue and democratization. They require an adequate and often extensive understanding of the processes and mechanisms that have generated them.

As an example, returning to the discussion about the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the logic of democratization and prosperity could prove to be counterproductive, given that Azerbaijan - which is currently one of the main partners of the West and Türkiye in the region - is an authoritarian petrostate, ruled for over three decades by an authoritarian political dynasty. It has no intention of allowing the emergence of democratic processes and cultures within its own borders, hence the expectation that Western financial efforts will be “siphoned off” into the existing venal system rather than combating it. At the same time, Armenia, which is a democracy - albeit fragile - but which can certainly benefit from the aforementioned policies, finds itself in an uncomfortable position of quasi-alignment with Russia (and Iran) and may interpret Western involvement in the region not as an opportunity but as a direct threat. It can be predicted that Yerevan will most likely reject Western initiatives aimed at stability and prosperity in the area.

Nevertheless, the formal adoption of a strategic and security vision by the United States regarding the Black Sea region is itself a lengthy process that requires successive modelling and reshaping until a satisfying formula is reached. This translates into a historic opportunity for the actors in the region to intervene, through specific means such as lobbying or conventional diplomacy, to influence American policy in the region’s sensitive areas.

RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE: THE NAVAL WAR IN THE BLACK SEA

George Vişan

ABSTRACT: *The article examines the naval developments in the Black Sea region amidst the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the implications for Romania. It argues that neither Russia nor Ukraine have achieved their strategic goals, and Russia has gradually lost its naval initiative in the Black Sea throughout the conflict. The article also highlights the security, political, and economic impact on Romania of the war-related developments. It emphasises the need for Romania to pursue a naval policy in the Black Sea to safeguard its regional interests.*

The article adopts an inductive analytical approach and concludes with recommendations for Romania, emphasising the necessity for Bucharest to formulate a naval policy for the Black Sea.

The large-scale aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has a significant naval component. For the first time since World War II, the Black Sea has become the theatre of a high-intensity interstate war. While the Black Sea witnessed confrontations in 2014 (the annexation of Crimea) and 2008 (the aggression against Georgia), the scale of the conflict in 2022 is unprecedented.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the maritime developments in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war that affects the Black Sea region and its impact on Romania. The text evaluates the impact of the Russian aggression from the perspective of the international order, briefly presenting the stakes of the conflict. It examines the course of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the Black Sea, highlighting the naval developments in this war and their implications for regional and national security. The military developments in the Black Sea indicate that both parties have only partially achieved their military objectives, but despite its material and technological superiority, the Russian Federation has lost the naval initiative. The article argues that although Romania was not the target of the Russian aggression, it is affected in terms of security, politics, and economy by Moscow's war against Kyiv. To promote its interests in the Black Sea region, Romania needs to formulate a naval policy for this area.

The first part of the article analyses the nature of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the second part evaluates the balance of power in the Black Sea between Russian and Ukrainian forces, and the third part assesses the impact on Romania. Part four analyses and lists Bucharest's strategic and economic interests in the region, while the fifth evaluates Romania's maritime military situation in the Black Sea, and the sixth examines the main naval military developments in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian

war. The general conclusions regarding the naval aspect of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are followed by conclusions from Romania's perspective, along with the lessons that Bucharest needs to draw and apply from the war.

REGIONAL WAR WITH GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

The war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2022 represents the second stage of aggression initiated in February 2014. It is the natural consequence of the annexation of Crimea and the attempts to annex the Donetsk and Luhansk provinces. The Russian aggression is not only an attack on the sovereignty of an independent state, but also an assault on the international order based on norms and rules. The Kremlin is a revisionist power that perceives the current international order as being against its interests and benefiting only Western powers, such as the US, EU, and their partners.

The objectives pursued by the Russian Federation in relation to Ukraine are absolute and revisionist: the "denazification" and demilitarisation of Ukraine and the annexation of significant parts of Ukrainian territory. Translating these objectives is straightforward. "Denazification," an initially absurd idea, actually represents the replacement of the democratically elected political regime with a Moscow-loyal leadership and the purging of pro-Western elements from the Ukrainian elite. The demilitarisation of Kyiv practically means reducing Ukrainian defence capabilities and imposing their complete dependence on Moscow. Furthermore, the demilitarisation of Ukraine, according to Russian propaganda, implies a forced neutralisation and the abandonment by Kyiv of any ambitions for Euro-Atlantic integration. The territorial annexations, disguised as integration within the Russian Federation of territories where "compatriots" who speak the Russian language reside, aim to undermine Ukraine's territorial integrity and viability as a political entity within the international system. Of particular interest to the Kremlin's plans is the control of Ukraine's coasts and the establishment of a land connection between Russian territory and Crimea, as the Kerch Strait bridge represents an insufficient link.

How does a regional war affect the international order? The potential success of the Russian Federation's aggression would lead to the collapse of the rules-based order. Force would become a legitimate means of promoting national interests in the international arena, replacing diplomatic dialogue and dispute settlement through international law. Recognised state borders would become vulnerable to potential arbitrary changes through force. Ultimately, beyond the publicly declared objectives of the Russian Federation to justify its aggression against Ukraine, the Kremlin seeks to overturn the international order dominated by the US and generate a new, "multipolar" international order. The defining characteristic of this new, Moscow-led international order would be the arbitrary use of force and the absence of universal norms.

AN UNEQUAL CONFRONTATION

The Russian Navy participated in hostilities against Ukraine from the first day of the war, enjoying overwhelming technical and numerical superiority over its neighbour's

naval forces. The Ukrainian Navy has not fully recovered from the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. Since 2014, Kyiv's naval efforts have focused on developing a light naval force, known as the "mosquito fleet," to protect Ukraine's coasts and territorial waters.¹ This coastal navy was intended to fulfil its missions with fast and heavily armed ships, naval mines, and coastal defence systems.

Kyiv received assistance from the United States² and the United Kingdom in rebuilding its naval capabilities, with donated patrol vessels and common training missions³. Between 2014 and 2022, Ukraine developed the R-360 Neptun coastal defence system, managing to keep its development status a secret from Russian intelligence services. Ukraine ordered two corvettes from Türkiye's Ada class and, after the outbreak of the war in 2022, the United Kingdom donated two mine hunters from the Sandown class.

In the eight years since the annexation of Crimea, Russia has managed to tilt the military balance in the Black Sea in its favour, at least on paper. Russian military superiority in the Black Sea, until the 2022 invasion, was based on a sophisticated anti-access network consisting of long-range air defence systems (S-400 Triumph and S-300 PMU) and supersonic anti-ship missiles (P-800 Oniks/SS-N-6 Strobile and Kalibr), which could be launched from coastal defence systems, fighter aircraft, surface ships, and submarines. The sustained military effort by the Kremlin has created a vulnerability on NATO's Eastern Flank.

The naval and air bases in the Crimean Peninsula have been modernised to project military force beyond the Black Sea area, into the eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North Africa. This was highlighted by Russia's intervention in Syria in 2015 and its discreet presence in Libya. The Russian Black Sea Fleet has been reinforced with three frigates of the Admiral Grigorovich class, six state-of-the-art Kilo-class submarines, and smaller patrol vessels. Since 2018, missile-carrying ships of the Karakurt class equipped with supersonic anti-ship missiles for maritime control missions have been under construction in Crimean shipyards.⁴ The Russian Aerospace Forces and Naval Aviation have increased their presence in the Crimea and deployed modern fighter aircraft.

Although the war was triggered in the area of responsibility of the Black Sea Fleet, the Russian Navy also deployed ships from the Baltic Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla in this area. From the Baltic Sea, the Kremlin brought six landing ships to bases in Crimea and Novorossiysk.⁵ From the Caspian Sea, fast landing craft, missile-carrying ships,

¹ Alya Shandra, "Black Sea mosquito fleet: how the UK will help Ukraine regain its naval footing", in *Euromaidan Press*, 9 October 2020, <https://euromaidanpress.com/2020/10/09/black-sea-mosquito-fleet-how-the-uk-will-help-ukraine-regain-its-naval-footing/>.

² Ben Werner, "Retired US Coast Guard Cutters Arrive in Odessa to Join Ukrainian Navy", in *USNI News*, 21 October 2019, <https://news.usni.org/2019/10/21/retired-u-s-coast-guard-cutters-arrive-in-odessa-to-join-ukrainian-navy>.

³ Reuters, "Britain to lead training programme for Ukrainian navy", 18 August 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-ukraine-idUKKCN25E2EF>.

⁴ TASS, "Crimean Shipyard floats out advanced missile corvette for Russian Navy", 21 September 2021, <https://tass.com/defense/1340759>.

⁵ H.I. Sutton, "Russian Warships and Submarine Now Entering Black Sea Towards Ukraine", in *Naval News*, 8 February 2022, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/02/6-russian-warships-and-submarine-now-entering-black-seatowards-ukraine/>.

and gunboats were transferred, utilising the Volga-Don Canal for transportation⁶. The involvement of the Caspian Flotilla was not limited to the deployment of ships; Kalibr-system cruise missiles were launched against military and civilian targets from there.

In addition, in the eastern Mediterranean, warships belonging to the Pacific Fleet and the Northern Fleet have been deployed to deter potential NATO intervention and support the naval effort against Ukraine. Among them were two cruisers of the Slava class, *Marshal Ustinov* and *Varyag*, sister ships of the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, the cruiser *Moskva*.⁷ This presence was logistically supported by the Russian naval base in Tartus, and the Russian Aerospace Forces provided air cover from Hmeimim, both being Russian bases in Syria.

Before the aggression against Ukraine, the Kremlin deployed Su-24M *Fencer* attack aircraft in Syria, and to strengthen its naval presence, it deployed conventionally powered submarines from the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea. In addition to military vessels, the Russian Federation has used and continues to use commercial ships owned by the Ministry of Defence to transport military equipment from Syria to bases in the Black Sea in support of the aggression.

The concentration of forces against Ukraine in the Black Sea was not limited to naval means alone. The Russian Aerospace Forces and Naval Aviation based in Crimea made significant contributions to the aggression. Russian multi-role fighter aircraft provided air cover for the Black Sea Fleet, while strike aircraft such as the Su-24M *Fencer* and Su-34 *Fullback* were the main means of deep strike against Ukrainian targets. Furthermore, the Russian Strategic Aviation played an important role. Strategic bombers such as the Tupolev Tu-22M3 *Backfire*, Tupolev Tu-95 *Bear*, and Tupolev Tu-160 *Blackjack* supported the Russian military effort in the Black Sea through cruise missile attacks. Some cruise missile attacks against Ukraine were carried out by Russian air forces from the Black Sea.

IMPACT ON ROMANIA

The Russian aggression against Ukraine represents the most serious crisis of security and national defence in Romania's recent history, with a direct impact on the international order. In the event of a potential success by the Russian Federation, in a maximal scenario, it would mean a shared border, the Kremlin's return to the Danube, and the possible transformation of the Republic of Moldova into a Russian satellite hostile to Romania. In the event of a potential "freeze" of the conflict, the Russian-Ukrainian war would become the largest and most serious unresolved conflict in the Black Sea region, leading to a prolonged climate of insecurity. In both situations, the principles of state border inviolability and peaceful dispute resolution between states would be irreversibly compromised. Russia's actions in the Black Sea have not only affected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine but, by instituting an illegal and illegitimate naval

⁶ H.I. Sutton, "Russian Navy's Way Around Türkiye Closing the Bosphorus to Its Warships, Literally", 22 May 2022, [hisutton.com](http://www.hisutton.com), <http://www.hisutton.com/Russian-Navys-Secret-Internal-Waterways.html>.

⁷ Van Lokeren, "Russian forces in the Mediterranean - Wk08/2022", in *Russian Navy - News and Analysis*, 20 February 2022, <https://russianfleetanalysis.blogspot.com/2022/02/russian-forces-in-mediterranean-wk082022.html>.

blockade and compromising freedom of navigation, have also affected the rights and interests of all states in the region. The marine environment of the Black Sea has been affected by the fighting near the coasts of Ukraine and Romania, resulting in the spillage of petroleum products and other chemicals, with a direct impact on the fauna.

Romania was caught off guard by the Russian aggression, while being in the process of modernising its armed forces. This program, started in 2017, aimed to enhance military capabilities by allocating 2% of the GDP to the defence sector. The allocation of 2% for military defence was a direct consequence of Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014. Russian aggression forced yet another increase in budget allocations for the armed forces to 2.5% of the GDP.⁸ From a strategic point of view, Romania's importance in NATO in the Black Sea region has grown. In the military economy of the Eastern Flank, Romania and Poland are the anchor states of the alliance's deterrence strategy against potential Russian aggression. The US is preparing to launch a strategy for the Black Sea, which, on the one hand, emphasises the region's importance for international security and, on the other hand, enhances the credibility of allied deterrence on the Eastern Flank.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine put pressure on port infrastructure, railways, and road transport, which had to cope with the influx of Ukrainian goods using Romania as a transit route to other markets. The impact, in this case, was positive, leading to increased cargo volumes that Romanian ports had to handle. Interconnectivity with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova increased through the reopening of disused transport routes and the opening of new border crossing points. Romania has benefited from international assistance from allies and the EU to cope with the new situation. There have also been some shortcomings, as evidenced by disputes over the impact of Ukrainian grain on Romanian grain prices, or the dispute over the use of the Bystroye Canal as an alternative transport route on the Danube.

ROMANIA'S INTERESTS IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

Romania's interests in the Black Sea can be divided into two categories: politico-strategic and maritime interests. From a strategic perspective, Romania is interested in respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the coastal states in the Black Sea and those in the extended region. Sovereignty entails the freedom to join international organisations or alliances that each state in the region considers to be in their interest. The creation of new diplomatic formations or regional and international organisations is an intrinsic attribute of sovereignty.

Peace and stability represent fundamental interests of any state. For Romania, resolving the "frozen" and protracted conflicts in the Black Sea region is a priority, as they continue to be a source of threats and risks to our country's security. From 1990 until now, the extended Black Sea region has been affected by nine military conflicts

⁸ Ciprian Mailat, "Pe ce cheltuie Ministerul Apărării 2,5% din PIB: Programele și măsurile concrete pentru Armată", in *Curs de Guvernare*, 11 December 2022, <https://cursdegovernare.ro/pe-ce-cheltuie-ministerul-apararii-25-din-pib-pragrameles-i-masurile-concrete-pentru-armata.html>

that remain unresolved to this day. These conflicts pose a continuous source of threats and risks for Romania and the states in the region. Another major interest of Bucharest is the Euro-Atlantic integration of the states in the Black Sea region. Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine should become EU members within a reasonable timeframe, with the Russian invasion happily accelerating the candidacy of these states. NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine remains a distant perspective but should not be abandoned.

A major interest of Romania in the Black Sea region is a greater NATO and US presence due to their stabilisation effect. Romania effectively cooperates with NATO ally states in the Black Sea region (Bulgaria and Türkiye) in various regional formats, but the instability in the region requires an increased presence from NATO and the US. After February 24, 2024, the presence of NATO and the US in Romania and the Black Sea region has increased. The US presence has grown with the deployment of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) on Romanian territory.⁹

Simultaneously, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg have deployed troops to Romania. Paris has assumed the leadership of a battle group and intends to increase its representation to the brigade level. The NATO air policing mission at the 57th Air Base "Mihail Kogălniceanu" has been reinforced, and the US periodically deploys multi-role fighter aircraft to Romania to support local air defence and deter any potential aggression. Romania's air defence is also supported by France, which deployed a Mamba (SAMP-T) anti-aircraft battery equipped with Aster missiles.

Although the presence of NATO and US troops on Romanian territory is significant, the naval representation of the US and other allied states in the Black Sea has disappeared since the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. This is the result of Türkiye closing the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits for naval military traffic of landlocked countries in the Black Sea. Previously, the US and NATO sent warships regularly to the region following the provisions of the 1936 Montreux Convention. However, the Russian invasion has put an end to these naval deployments, affecting both NATO's deterrence capability and the training and readiness of Romania and Bulgaria's naval forces in the absence of joint exercises with allies.

This absence has been partially compensated by the deployment of US¹⁰ P-8A Poseidon and P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft in the Black Sea, as well as French Atlantic 2 aircraft¹¹. In addition to maritime patrol aircraft, the US and NATO allies conduct research and reconnaissance missions over the Black Sea using RC-135¹²

⁹ Malcolm Cohens-Ashley, "US Army brigades from the 101st Screaming Eagles transfer authority in Romania", in *US Army*, 7 April 2023, https://www.army.mil/article/265582/us_army_brigades_from_the_101st_screaming_eagles_transfer_authority_in_romania.

¹⁰ Loren Thompson, "Russian Aggression Highlights Need to Bolster P-8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Force", in *Forbes*, 5 May 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lorenthompson/2022/05/05/russian-aggression-highlights-need-to-bolster-p-8-poseidon-maritime-patrol-force/?sh=1462563a56d2>.

¹¹ *Ministère des Armées*, "Mer Noire - Un Atlantique 2 engagé dans des missions de surveillance maritime", 18 July 2022, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/actualites/mer-noire-atlantique-2-engage-missions-surveillance-maritime>.

¹² Thomas Newdick, "Malfunctioning Russian Missile May Have Saved RC-135 Spy Plane", in *The Warzone*, 13 April 2023, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/malfunctioning-russian-missile-may-have-saved-rc-135-spy-plane>.

aircraft and long-range and medium-range UAVs (drones) such as the MQ-9 Reaper¹³ and RQ-4 Global Hawk¹⁴. These research operations are important for obtaining real-time maritime domain awareness in the Black Sea during conflicts, to prevent potential escalations and contribute to deterring aggression.

Beyond political and strategic interests, Romania has a series of maritime interests stemming from its position in the Black Sea. The coordinates of these interests are determined by the following variables: the length of the coastline, the maritime area of the exclusive economic zone, port infrastructure, and connections with inland waters, namely the maritime Danube and the river's estuaries. The length of Romania's coastline is 245 km (132 nautical miles), and its maritime space (including the associated exclusive economic zone) covers approximately 30,000 square km. The Romanian coast is economically significant, hosting the ports of Constanta, Agigea, Midia-Navodari, and Mangalia, along with Tulcea on the maritime Danube. These are the main gateways for Romania to the global economy. The ports of Constanta, Mangalia, and Tulcea are also industrial centres, housing shipyards for the construction, repair, and maintenance of civilian and military vessels. The importance and economic potential of Romanian ports in the Black Sea and the maritime Danube have been highlighted by the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

The Black Sea's exclusive economic zone contains natural gas reserves, such as those in the Neptun Deep area, estimated at 80-100 billion cubic metres. These gas reserves are important for helping Romania's and the EU's energy security in the transition to a carbon-neutral economy.¹⁵ In addition to hydrocarbons, the waters of the Black Sea have wind energy potential that could be harnessed in the shift toward a green economy.

The economic cooperation among states in the Black Sea region is another maritime interest of Romania. Georgia and Romania plan to install an undersea power cable connecting the two states, accompanied by a fibre optic cable to facilitate high-speed data exchange¹⁶. Another potential regional project in the near future is a ferry line between the ports of Constanta and Batumi.¹⁷ Other opportunities for economic cooperation are related to the Middle Corridor project, which aims to connect Asian and

¹³ Chris Gordon, "Russian Fighter Collides with American MQ-9 Over Black Sea; Drone Lost", in *Air and Space Forces Magazine*, 14 March 2023, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/russian-fighter-collides-with-american-mq-9-over-black-sea-drone-lost/>.

¹⁴ Gaétan Powis, "USAF continues its air reconnaissance over the Black Sea", in *Air&Cosmos*, 18 March 2023, <https://aircosmosinternational.com/article/usaf-continues-its-air-reconnaissance-over-the-black-sea-3731>.

¹⁵ "EnerMin: Starting this year, Romania will have one billion cubic meters of extra gas", in *Agerpres*, 22 March 2022, <https://www.agerpres.ro/english/2022/03/22/enermin-starting-this-year-romania-will-have-one-billion-cubic-meters-of-extra-gas-889056>. Romania consumes slightly over 11 billion cubic metres of gas annually at current economic and demographic parameters.

¹⁶ Oana Despa, "Cablu electric dintre România și Georgia care ar putea rezolva o parte din problemele energetice ale UE", in *Europa Liberă România*, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/cablu-electric-romania-georgia/32075577.html>.

¹⁷ Adriana Teodoru, "Linia de ferryboat Constanța-Batumi este funcțională", in *Constanța Info*, 12 July 2022, <https://www.constanta.info/2022/07/12/linia-de-ferryboat-constanta-batumi-este-funcionala>.

European markets through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus, and the Black Sea.¹⁸

In addition to the east-west development direction, the Black Sea region is important for Romania within the framework of the Three Seas Initiative, which involves implementing economic and infrastructure projects connecting the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Adriatic Sea. An example of such a project is *Via Carpatia*, which will link Klaipeda in Lithuania to Constanta in Romania and Thessaloniki in Greece.

The realisation of these projects requires, on one hand, peace and stability, and on the other hand, freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, together with modern and adequate means of protection against potential aggression. In practice, these aspects involve better surveillance of Romanian territorial waters and the exclusive economic zone to prevent potential security incidents, as well as an increased presence of Romanian naval vessels to ensure freedom of navigation in the open waters of the Black Sea, especially along major shipping routes. The sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 & 2 pipelines in the Baltic Sea demonstrates that the future of maritime security involves protecting underwater infrastructure (gas pipelines, oil pipelines, submarine communication cables).

THE MILITARY SITUATION OF ROMANIA IN THE BLACK SEA

The Romanian Naval Forces were caught off guard by the second Russian invasion, while embarked on a modernisation program that involves the acquisition of new surface combat vessels (the multifunctional corvette program, started in 2018), the modernization of Type 22R frigates (by including them in the offset program of the multirole corvette acquisition), the modernisation of existing ships, and the initiation of a program in 2018 about anti-ship missile systems for coastal defence.

Of these programs, only the modernisation of currently serving ships and the program for coastal defence anti-ship missile systems were in different stages of implementation at the time of the Russian invasion. However, these two programs are insufficient to ensure freedom of navigation in the Black Sea or to deter potential aggression from the sea. The programs are also inadequate for protecting Romania's interests in the exclusive economic zone.

Maintaining technically and morally worn-out ships in service in the medium and long term is inefficient and cannot effectively deter the enemy in modern naval warfare. Repairing the currently deployed ships, most of which are over 30 years old, does not necessarily mean a real increase in capabilities. Investing in ageing naval platforms, which are at the end of their operational lives, in the hope that they will remain competitively viable in the short term, represents a waste of valuable resources. However, some repair efforts may be justified, as is the case with the vessels of the River Flotilla (artillery-carrying ships) that fulfil specific missions. Regarding the coastal

¹⁸ Tristan Kenderdine and Péter Bucsky, "Middle Corridor – Policy Development and Trade Potential of the Trans-Caspian Transportation Route", in *ADBI Working Paper Series*, May 2021, no. 1268, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/705226/adbi-wp1268.pdf>.

defence system procurement program, the first deliveries are scheduled for 2024.¹⁹ In the meantime, the Naval Forces will continue to operate the Soviet-era mobile installations.

The Naval Forces' mine arsenal has also undergone a regeneration process, with contact mines produced in Romania being revitalised through contracts with the local company *Tohan*.²⁰ However, no procedures have been initiated to replace the Soviet-era mine arsenal with more advanced Western-origin mines.

From 2013 to 2023, the Romanian Naval Forces have only acquired six vessels, all of which are auxiliary: three harbour tugs²¹ and three boats (two hydrographic²² and one riverboat).²³ No combat vessel has been acquired since 2003, when the two Type 22R frigates from the United Kingdom were purchased. Moreover, no military vessel has been built in a Romanian shipyard for the Romanian Naval Forces since the mid-1990s. The multirole corvette acquisition program is currently stalled, as it has been the subject of a legal dispute from 2019 to 2022, and at the time of writing this article, it has not been signed due to financial and administrative reasons. The Ministry of National Defence and the *Naval Group France - Constanta Shipyard* association, initially declared the winner in 2019, have been unable to reach a compromise regarding costs and risk-sharing. The Romanian partner of the French company, Constanta Shipyard, refused to sign the contract, being dissatisfied with the financial conditions.²⁴ The delay in the multirole corvette acquisition program has forced the modernisation of the two Type 22R frigates outside the offset program. As a result, the old propulsion systems of British origin are being replaced with modern ones developed by the National Institute for Research and Development in Turbo Engines (COMOTI).²⁵ Two towed sonars supplied by *Thales* will be installed on these ships to enhance their antisubmarine warfare capabilities.²⁶ However, these modernisation efforts could have been carried out through the offset part of the corvette acquisition program.

¹⁹ Florin Jipa, "Pentagonul a dat în producție rachetele antinavă NSM pentru România. Acestea vor fi produse în Norvegia (61%), SUA (34%) și Germania (2%)", *Monitor of Defence and Security*, 6 January 2023, <https://monitorulapararii.ro/pentagonul-a-dat-in-productie-rachetele-antinava-nsm-pentru-romania-acestea-vor-fi-produse-in-norvegia-61-sua-34-si-germania-2-1-48373>.

²⁰ "Amplă campanie de revitalizare și prelungire a resursei minelor marine de tip MMMCA-1 din dotarea Forțelor Navale Române", *Romanian Navy Historic Ships*, 2 April 2023, <https://rnhs.info/ampla-campanie-de-revitalizare-si-prelungirea-resursei-minelor-marine-de-tip-mmmca-1-din-dotarea-fortelor-navale-romane/>.

²¹ "Remorchere Maritime de Port și Radă 'Vărtosul' (103) și 'Voinicul' (104)", in *Forțele Navale Române*, https://www.navy.ro/despre/organizare/flotila_56/date_remorchere.php.

²² BlueSpace Technology, "BlueSpace Technology livrează șalupa de cercetare hidrografică Ocean 2 către Forțele Navale Române", 22 February 2023, <https://bstech.ro/bluespace-technology-livreaza-salupa-de-cercetare-hidrograficaocean-2-catre-fortele-navale-romane>.

²³ "Forțele Navale dispun de o nouă șalupă pentru protejarea Dunării. Ambarcațiunea rapidă de intervenție a intrat în serviciul Marinei", in *Defense Romania*, 16 July 2022, https://www.defenseromania.ro/fortele-navale-dispun-de-o-nouasalupa-pentru-protejarea-dunarii-ambarcatiunea-rapida-de-interventie-a-intrat-in-serviciul-marinei_617274.html.

²⁴ George Marinescu, "Negociere interminabilă a contractului pentru corvetele destinate Forțelor Navale", in *Bursa*, 17-18 March 2023, <https://www.bursa.ro/negociere-interminabila-a-contractului-pentru-corvetele-destinate-fortelor-navale-80682949>.

²⁵ *Market Watch*, "COMOTI va moderniza turbomotoarele ce echipază navele Forțelor Navale Române", 30 May 2017, http://www.marketwatch.ro/articol/15646/COMOTI_va_moderniza_turbomotoarele_ce_echipeaza_navele_Fortelor_Navale_Romane/.

²⁶ *RNHS*, "Despre stadiul înzestrării Forțelor Navale Române", 14 June 2022, <https://rnhs.info/despre-stadiul-inzestrariifortelor-navale-romane/>.

Russian aggression against Ukraine has brought to the forefront the threat of naval mines to the freedom of navigation. The damage to one of the Romanian Naval Forces' minehunters in September 2022 highlighted both the danger of mines in the Black Sea and the need for more capable vessels for countering mines. Romania had planned to acquire four modern minehunters after joining NATO, but these plans did not materialise. In 2022, the British specialised press announced the potential sale of two decommissioned Sandown-class minehunters from the Royal Navy (*HMS Ramsey* and *HMS Blyth*) to Romania.²⁷ In May 2023, the Romanian Parliament approved the procurement program for minehunters for the Naval Forces, which includes the acquisition and modernisation of the two ships from the United Kingdom.²⁸

Another delay in the Naval Forces' dedicated programs affected the acquisition of second-class UAVs for reconnaissance and information gathering. In 2021, Romania launched a procurement program for seven modern UAV systems (21 in total), one of which was intended for the Naval Forces. However, the procurement procedure had to be cancelled in 2022 and restarted shortly after.²⁹ The contract was awarded at the end of 2022 to a partnership formed by the Israeli company *Elbit* and the *Thales Group*, which will provide *Watchkeeper 450* UAV systems for both the Land Forces and the Naval Forces³⁰.

In 2022, a letter of intent was signed between Romania and France regarding the support for the development of Romanian naval combat capabilities.³¹ As a result of this agreement, the Ministry of National Defence initiated a program for the acquisition of two ASuW (Anti-Surface Warfare)-equipped H215M naval helicopters, and Romania is expected to acquire two (or more) *Scorpène*-class submarines.³² In May 2023, the Romanian Parliament approved the procurement program for the Romanian Naval Forces' "Submarine against Surface and Underwater Threats" program, which includes the direct acquisition of two *Scorpène* attack submarines from the French, state-owned company *Naval Group*.³³

²⁷ "Ex-HMS Ramsey and HMS Blyth have been sold to the Romanian Navy", *Navy Lookout*, 20 October 2022, 9.40 a.m. Tweet.

²⁸ *Digi 24*, "România cumpără două nave britanice la mâna a doua și două submarine franceze. Ce alte achiziții militare urmează a fi făcute", 18 May 2023, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/romania-cumpara-doua-nave-britanice-lamana-a-doua-si-doua-submarine-frantuzesti-ce-alte-achizitii-militare-urmeaza-a-fi-facute-2353029>.

²⁹ "România reia licitația de drone, dar pe repede înainte. În trei luni situația UAV-urilor pentru Armată ar trebui încheiată", in *Defence Romania*, 25 August 2022, https://www.defenseromania.ro/romania-reia-licitatia-de-drone-dar-pe-repedeinainte-in-trei-luni-situatia-uav-urilor-pentru-armata-ar-trebui-incheiata_617856.html

³⁰ "A fost semnat acordul-cadru de furnizare a produsului 'Sistem UAS tactic-operativ clasa II'", National Ministry of Defence - Communiqué no. 497, 20 December 2022.

³¹ Laurent Lagneau, "La France a signé une lettre d'intention pour un 'plan ambitieux' de soutien aux forces navales roumaines", in *Zone Militaire - Opex360.com*, 15 June 2022, <http://www.opex360.com/2022/06/15/la-france-a-signe-unelettre-dintention-pour-un-plan-ambitieux-de-soutien-aux-forces-navales-roumaines>.

³² "România achiziționează două elicoptere Airbus H215M în valoare de 150 de milioane de euro. MApN a cerut 'undă verde' Parlamentului", in *Defence Romania*, 26 October 2022, https://www.defenseromania.ro/romania-achiziționeaza-douaelicoptere-airbus-h215m-in-valoare-de-150-de-milioane-de-euro-mapn-a-cerut-unda-verde-parlamentului_619046.html.

³³ Victor Cozmei, "Achiziția anului în Armată: România va cumpăra două submarine Scorpène de la Naval Group pentru circa 2 miliarde de euro", *Hotnews.ro*, 18 May 2023, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-defense-26274683-achizitia-anuluiarmata-romania-cumpara-doua-submarine-scorpene-naval-group-pentru-circa-2-miliarde-euro.htm>.

These new procurement programs raise several questions. The acquisition of helicopters for the Romanian Naval Forces' Helicopter Group 256 is a welcome measure. Coupled with the modernisation of the existing three IAR-330 Puma Naval helicopters, this will enhance Romania's naval aviation capabilities.³⁴ Naval helicopters dedicated to surface target warfare are useful for coastal and exclusive economic zone surveillance and, most importantly, for countering surface targets attempting to operate or launch raids in these areas. Naval helicopters are also excellent platforms for countering fast attack craft, a prevalent type of surface combatant in the fleets of all Black Sea countries.

Why was the acquisition of naval helicopters specifically for the anti-surface warfare (ASuW) mission preferred instead of multirole naval helicopters capable of performing anti-submarine warfare (ASW), ASuW, reconnaissance, surveillance, and search and rescue missions? Such an acquisition could be justified based on the limitations of the current *Puma Naval* helicopters in anti-submarine warfare, as they are not equipped with deployable sonars. Another issue raised by this program launched for the Romanian Naval Forces is the relatively insufficient number of helicopters, only two. Ideally, to ensure at least one helicopter in active service, a minimum order of three helicopters would be needed: one available for missions, another for training, and the last one for maintenance. Additionally, Romania currently has three frigates capable of accommodating helicopters.

The letter of intent agreed with the French state also includes the procurement of two Scorpène-class submarines. The acquisition of submarines has been a goal of the Romanian Naval Forces for at least a decade. In this case, as well, the number of combat assets raises questions. Why two and not three submarines? The logic is the same as for helicopters: one submarine on patrol, one in transit to base, and one undergoing maintenance or conducting training missions. The Ministry of National Defence has submitted a request to Parliament for approval of the attack submarine program without specifying the number of submarines to be ordered.

The second issue with this procurement program is related to the potential supplier of the submarines, which is still the *Naval Group*. Although they won the procurement procedure for the multirole corvettes, the leadership of this group has not yet signed the contract. Directly awarding the submarine program to a supplier that repeatedly fails to commit to a binding offer sends an unfortunate message that Romania would be conveying to international military suppliers. Furthermore, if the contract for the corvettes is eventually signed, the French state-owned company *Naval Group* would become responsible for Romania's most important naval procurement programs: the multirole corvette acquisition program, the modernisation of the two Type-22R frigates, and the submarine program. This would place the French company in a dominant position, potentially generating risks for the Romanian state.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine caught Romania unprepared for modern naval warfare. The current situation is historically reminiscent of the arrival of the

³⁴ Dora Vulcan, "Firma israeliană Elbit Systems a obținut patru contracte de la Armata Română", in *Europa Liberă România*, 14 March, 2023, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/elbit-armata-romana-contract/32318400.html>.

Russian battleship *Potemkin* in the harbour of Constanta in 1905, or the situation during World War I when the Romanian navy lacked the means to effectively defend the Romanian coasts and interests in the Black Sea. However, the overall situation is improved by Romania's membership in NATO and the EU and the presence of US and allied troops on Romanian territory.

Key Developments of the Naval War in the Black Sea: Occupation of Snake Island (February 24, 2022).

This military action marked the beginning of the naval war in the Black Sea. A Russian naval group consisting of the missile cruiser *Moskva* and two patrol ships demanded the surrender of the island. The refusal of the Ukrainian defenders was resolute and has already entered history. The Russian ships bombarded Snake Island and landed troops, capturing 80 Ukrainian soldiers. The bombardment destroyed the radar station on the island but did not cause any loss of life among the Ukrainian military personnel. The occupation of Snake Island on February 24 also marked the beginning of a relatively long campaign for control over this strategically important position in the northwestern sector of the Black Sea. The rock of Snake Island theoretically allows for surveillance and control over the coasts of Ukraine and the port of Odessa, as well as over the Danube Delta. The importance of controlling the island was evident when two Russian military vessels sailed in the Romanian exclusive economic zone near the *Uranus* and *Ana* offshore drilling platforms³⁵. The subsequent campaign demonstrated that the position of Snake Island is vulnerable to artillery fire, tactical missile strikes, and combat aviation if it is not protected and integrated into an air defence network. The lack of water makes the island dependent on the mainland, necessitating a functional, permanent logistics chain.

■ **The blockade of the Ukrainian coasts.** It began on the first day of the war, Moscow intending to cut off Ukraine's access to maritime communication routes and the global market. As a result, Kyiv would only have access to the global market through land routes, with the ultimate objective of the Russian Federation being to economically strangle the aggressed country. However, the Russian fleet did not launch a sustained attack on Ukrainian naval traffic in the Black Sea, or on port facilities. Considering Russia's naval superiority in the region and the naval weaponry systems it possessed at that time, maritime traffic to and from Ukraine could have easily been halted by sinking one or two commercial vessels. The naval blockade imposed by the Russian fleet represents the military evolution of this conflict with the greatest global impact. Ukraine is one of the main suppliers of cereals and agricultural products to African and Middle Eastern countries. From the perspective of states dependent on assistance from the UN World Food Programme, the Russian blockade posed a risk to their stability. After the blockade was initiated, Ukrainian cereals reached the global market through third-

³⁵ Bianca Chirilă, "Nave de fabricație rusească în apele românești ale Mării Negre. Explicațiile Ministerului Apărării", *Euronews Romania*, 15 June 2022, <https://www.euronews.ro/articole/foto-nave-de-fabricatie-ruseasca-in-apele-romanesti-ale-mariei-negre>.

party states (Poland and Romania). The Danube proved to be the most practical bypass route, and Constanta was the port through which the blockade could be circumvented. The Baltic route through Poland relies on railways and roads to transport cereals to Baltic ports and is less efficient than the maritime route via the Danube and Constanta. The naval blockade allowed Russia not only to block access to the global market for Ukrainian cereals, products, and other goods, but also facilitated Russian illegal smuggling of “expropriated” cereals from the occupied territories.³⁶ Russian commercial vessels, some belonging to entities under international sanctions, were able to enter and leave the Black Sea loaded with grains or other Ukrainian products bound for Syrian ports or other parts of the world, where Russian vessels continued to have access.³⁷

■ **The closure of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits for military traffic (February 28, 2022).** The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, announced on February 28, 2022, the closure of the straits for military vessels belonging to countries with a coastline on the Black Sea or from outside this region.³⁸ The effect is that both military vessels belonging to the Russian Federation and those belonging to Ukraine cannot use the straits. In the case of the aggressor, this aspect prevented the reinforcement of the naval force in the Black Sea with at least two missile-carrying cruisers of the Slava class and two destroyers of the Udaloy class. On the other hand, Ukrainian warships are unable to transit the straits, and the victim of aggression must receive assistance from other states. The prohibition, based on a broad and generous interpretation of the 1936 Montreux Convention, has prevented the transit of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits to and from the Black Sea by NATO member states’ vessels.³⁹ A visible NATO naval presence in the Black Sea, even under the provisions of the Montreux Convention, could have potentially served as a counterbalance to the Russian blockade of the Ukrainian coasts. Furthermore, it would have reduced the danger posed by naval mines. Türkiye relaxed the restriction in 2023, allowing the Romanian frigate King Ferdinand to transit to the Mediterranean Sea to participate in an international mission.⁴⁰ Türkiye’s stance on the Russian-Ukrainian war is ambivalent, reflecting its complex relationship with the Russian Federation, which alternates between

³⁶ Michael Biesecker, Sarah EL Deeb and Beatrice Dupuy, “Russia Smuggling Ukrainian grain to help pay for Putin’s war”, Associated Press, 3 October 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-business-lebanon-syria-87c3b6fea3f4c326003123b21aa78099>; Jared Malsin and Benoit Faucon, “Ukraine Says Russia Is Using Cargo Ships to Ferry Weapons to the Black Sea”, in *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-says-russia-is-using-cargo-ships-to-ferry-weapons-to-the-black-sea-11662065663>.

³⁷ Roland Oliphant, “Revealed: How Russian ships are turning off trackers in the Black Sea to sell Ukraine’s stolen grain”, in *The Telegraph*, 1 July 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/07/01/revealed-how-russian-ships-turningtrackers-black-sea-sell-ukraines/>.

³⁸ Heather Mongilio, “Türkiye Closes Bosphorus, Dardanelles Straits to Warships”, in *USNI News*, 28 February 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/02/28/Türkiye-closes-bosphorus-dardanelles-straits-to-warships>.

³⁹ Cornell Overfield, “Türkiye Must Close the Turkish Straits Only to Russian and Ukrainian Warships”, *Lawfare Blog*, 5 March 2022, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/Türkiye-must-close-turkish-straits-only-russian-and-ukrainian-warships>.

⁴⁰ *Forțele Navale Române*, “Forțele Navale Române participă la Operația EUNAVFOR MED ‘IRINI’”, Romanian Naval Forces Communique no. 29, 6 May 2023, <https://www.navy.ro/comunicat.php?id=702>.

cooperation and rivalry. Towards Ukraine, Ankara has provided support through the sale of Bayraktar UAVs and President Erdoğan issued statements calling for Russia to return Crimea and respect Ukraine's territorial integrity.⁴¹

■ **The Black Sea Grain Initiative (July 27, 2022)** represents the trilateral agreement concluded between Ukraine, the Russian Federation, and Türkiye in Istanbul, under the auspices of the United Nations. It allows for the export of cereals and chemical fertilisers to countries that depend on cereals provided by the UN World Food Programme, or on cheap grain and fertiliser exports from Ukraine.⁴² The exports are conducted through three Ukrainian Black Sea ports: Odessa, Chornomorsk, and Yuzhny (Pivdennyi). Vessels transporting cereals or fertilisers must undergo inspection by a commission based in Istanbul, which verifies the respective shipments to ensure they do not contain arms. Thus, Russia, for the first time, has representatives in a body that controls traffic through the straits. Moreover, the BSGI is an inefficient alternative to the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea for Ukrainian commercial vessels, or for vessels transporting goods to and from Ukrainian Black Sea ports. The Russian Federation regularly threatens to withdraw from this agreement and obstructs the inspection of vessels serving these routes in order to obtain concessions in the agricultural sector, even though Russian grain and fertiliser exports are not subject to an embargo. The agreement was extended for an additional two months (60 days) as of May 18, 2023.⁴³

■ **The mine war.** Both the Russian Federation and Ukraine have deployed maritime mines in the Black Sea. Ukraine has mined the waters off its coast to protect against a potential Russian amphibious assault targeting Odessa or other ports. The Russian Federation has likely created protective barriers around Crimea. So far, only contact mines have been observed and disarmed, with approximately 70 being disarmed or neutralised by Romania, Ukraine, Türkiye, and Bulgaria.⁴⁴ In addition to contact mines, both Ukrainian and Russian naval forces have probably deployed influence mines (acoustic mines, magnetic mines), but there is no confirmed data or estimates regarding them. Mines pose a significant threat to freedom of navigation. The Black Sea is where modern naval mines were first used during the Crimean War (1853-1856) and in all global conflicts combatants have utilized this type of weapon in this maritime space.

■ **Ballistic missile attack on the port of Berdiansk (March 24, 2022).** The port city of Berdiansk is the second Ukrainian port on the Sea of Azov, and Russian forces

⁴¹ Diyar Güldoğan, "Return of Crimea to Ukraine a requirement of international law: Turkish president", Anadolu Agency, 23 August 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/return-of-crimea-to-ukraine-a-requirement-of-international-law-turkish-president/2667680>.

⁴² United Nations, "Beacon on the Black Sea", <https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative>.

⁴³ Al Jazeera, "Russia agrees to renew Ukraine Black Sea grain deal for 60 days", 17 May 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/17/black-sea-grain-deal-renewed-for-60-days-following-talks>.

⁴⁴ "Vizită de lucru a ministrului apărării naționale la garnizoana Constanța", National Ministry of Defence: Press release no. 177, 11 May 2023, https://www.mapn.ro/cpresa/17936_vizita-de-lucru-a-ministrului-apararii-na%C8%9Bionale-lagarnizoana-constan%C8%9Ba.

captured it on February 26, 2022, almost without a fight. On March 24, Ukrainian forces launched a high-precision attack on the port of Berdiansk using a *Tochka-U* operational-tactical missile, which sank the amphibious logistics ship *Saratov* of the Alligator class and damaged two other amphibious ships of the Ropucha class (*Cezar Kurnikov* and *Novocherkassk*).⁴⁵ The attack compromised the use of the Berdiansk port as a logistical centre for supporting Russian operations in southern Ukraine and demonstrated the vulnerability of Russian military ships near Ukrainian coasts, even when under Russian control. Moreover, the Ukrainian attack affected the amphibious assault capabilities of the Russian Navy deployed in the Black Sea, deterring potential amphibious operations in other parts of Ukraine.

- **Sinking of the missile cruiser *Moskva* (April 14, 2022).** The sinking of the cruiser *Moskva* (formerly *Slava*), the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, represented the most significant naval military development in the Black Sea since the end of World War II. *Moskva* is the largest military ship sunk in combat globally since 1982 when, during the Falklands War, the Argentine cruiser *Belgrano* was sunk in the South Atlantic by the nuclear-powered attack submarine *HMS Conqueror*.⁴⁶ The flagship of the Black Sea Fleet played an important role in the blockade of the Ukrainian coasts and provided long-range anti-aircraft defence for Russian surface ships operating in the northern and northwestern Black Sea. The *Fort-M* anti-aircraft system on board the *Moskva*, equipped with *S-300F Fort* missiles, could hit airborne targets at very high altitudes within a range of 150 km. In addition to this function, the ship's 16 anti-ship missiles could sink any combat ship in the Black Sea and even target installations on shores. The status of flagship also entailed a key role in the command and control of operations conducted by the Black Sea Fleet. On the night of April 13-14, 2022, the cruiser *Moskva* was hit by two anti-ship missiles *R-360 Neptun*, launched by Ukrainian coastal defence systems from a distance of approximately 150 km (80 NM), while the Russian ship was patrolling between Crimea and Snake Island, in the vicinity of the Ukrainian coasts.⁴⁷ The attack was facilitated by the unprofessional manner in which the cruiser's patrols were planned. It used predictable routes, and the attack was further aided by up-to-date and precise intelligence provided by US intelligence services.⁴⁸ The ship was abandoned and sank on April 14. The number of Russian sailors who lost their lives is not known, but it is estimated that around 200-300 men onboard died.

⁴⁵ Yaroslava Trofimov and Daniel Michaels, "Ukraine Strikes Russian Navy as War Enters Second Month", in *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 March 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-strikes-russian-navy-in-berdyansk-as-war-enterssecond-month-11648119468>.

⁴⁶ If we take into consideration the fact that *Moskva* was a relatively modern ship, while the cruiser *Belgrano* was a "veteran" of the Second World War, the loss of the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet becomes much more significant.

⁴⁷ Thomas Newdick, "Sunken Moskva Could Be the Biggest Naval Combat Loss in 40 Years", in *The Warzone*, 14 April 2022, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/sinking-a-warship-is-a-truly-rare-event-in-modern-naval-warfare>.

⁴⁸ Ken Dilanian, Courtney Kube and Carol E. Lee, "US intel helped Ukraine sink Russian flagship Moskva, officials say", *NBC News*, 6 May 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/us-intel-helped-ukraine-sink-russianflagship-moskva-officials-say-rcna27559>.

■ **Battle for control of Snake Island.** Information regarding the battle for control of Snake Island is partial and incomplete, given that the Russian-Ukrainian war is still ongoing. It began in force immediately after the sinking of the cruiser *Moskva*, which played a crucial role in the Russian tactical system in the northwestern sector of the Black Sea, by providing anti-aircraft protection for Russian surface ships. The two missile-carrying frigates of the Admiral Grigorovich class present in the Black Sea could not assume the role played by *Moskva*, both in terms of the anti-aircraft defence of the Russian fleet and in terms of command-and-control capabilities. In addition, the presence of *R-360 Neptun* coastal defence systems, supplemented by *Harpoon* systems provided by the US, the UK, or Denmark, prevented Russian vessels from operating near the Ukrainian coast.⁴⁹ On the other hand, Ukraine took advantage of Snake Island's strategic vulnerability due to its logistical dependence on Russian bases in Crimea and managed to disrupt communications between the island and the peninsula through sustained attacks. Ukrainian forces proved adept at executing and coordinating attacks against maritime supply routes to Snake Island, using *Bayraktar TB2* unmanned aerial systems, coastal defence systems, air forces, and long-range artillery.⁵⁰ Ukrainian systems such as the *2S22 Bohdana*⁵¹ and the self-propelled CAESAR howitzers, with a calibre of 155 mm⁵², gradually transformed the island into a veritable firing range. The presence of HIMARS systems in Ukraine, starting in June 2022⁵³, signalled to Russian military decision-makers that it was time to withdraw from Snake Island, as they had nothing in their arsenal to effectively counter these multiple operational-tactical missile systems. Ukrainian forces made several landing attempts on Snake Island, but most of them were repelled. On June 30, 2022, Russian forces withdrew from the island, and on July 1, Ukrainian special forces raised the Ukrainian flag there.⁵⁴ Currently, Snake Island is under the control of the Ukrainian state, but its military cannot maintain presence on the island due to the danger of missile or aerial attacks. The need for continental supply for the garrison and the vulnerability of the island to artillery and aerial strikes, coupled with its coverage by coastal defence systems from both the Russian Federation and Ukraine, make it impossible to maintain a garrison under wartime conditions. The costs of maintaining a garrison are too high to be justified. Currently, there seems to be a tacit agreement between the

⁴⁹ Sam LaGrone, "Ukraine Deploys Anti-Ship Harpoon Missiles to the Edge of Black Sea, MoD Says", in *USNI News*, 10 June 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/06/10/ukraine-deploys-anti-ship-harpoon-missiles-to-the-edge-of-black-sea-mod-says>.

⁵⁰ Stetson Payne, "Ukraine Strikes Back: Su-27s Bomb Occupied Snake Island in Daring Raid", in *The Warzone*, 7 May 2022, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/ukraine-strikes-back-su-27s-bomb-occupied-snake-island-in-daring-raid>.

⁵¹ David Axe, "Ukraine's Weirdest Howitzer Drove Russian Troops Off Snake Island", in *Forbes*, 30 June 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2022/06/30/ukraines-weirdest-howitzer-drove-russian-troops-off-snake-island/>.

⁵² Elena Shcherban, "MacGyver's Army»: For the liberation of Snake Island the AFU came up with a clever trick with French Caesar guns - NYT", *Gagadget.com*, 26 November 2022, <https://gagadget.com/en/war/191843-macgyvers-army-for-the-liberation-of-snake-island-the-afu-came-up-with-a-clever-trick-with-french-caesar-guns-nyt/>.

⁵³ Federica Marsi and Usaid Siddiqui, "Ukraine latest updates: Russia occupies all of Severodonetsk", *Al Jazeera*, 25 June 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/25/ukraine-russia-war-missiles-hit-yavoriv-military-base-liveblog>.

⁵⁴ "Russia pulls back forces from Snake Island – as it happened", in *Deutsche Welle*, 30 June 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-russia-pulls-back-forces-from-snake-island-as-it-happened/a-62309716>.

two belligerents that they will no longer attempt to establish garrisons on Snake Island, which neutralises its strategic importance.

■ **Sabotaging the Nordstream 1 & 2 gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea (September 26, 2022).** The event in the Baltic Sea represents an important moment of Russian aggression against Ukraine. The attribution of this sabotage is problematic, but the evidence that has emerged so far indicates Moscow's involvement.⁵⁵ The destruction of the two gas pipelines was most likely carried out with the assistance of Russian naval special forces (*Naval Spetsnaz*)⁵⁶, aiming to (1) send the message that Russia's relations with the West have entered a new era of rivalry and competition, and (2) avoid the seizure or blocking of the assets of the company operating the two gas pipelines through sanctions. However, after the destruction of those pipelines, the market value of the respective company collapsed, rendering its assets worthless. Actions in the Baltic Sea against gas pipelines could also have aimed to demonstrate Russia's capabilities in asymmetric naval warfare. Russian submarines and "marine research" vessels can sabotage gas pipelines, oil pipelines, and fibre optic cables that are important to the global economy.

■ **Ukrainian attacks on Russian bases in the Crimean Peninsula.** Despite establishing a land corridor that connected the Crimean Peninsula with the rest of the Russian Federation through the occupation of the areas around the urban centres of Mariupol and Melitopol, Ukraine has managed to demonstrate the vulnerability of Russia's position in Crimea through numerous attacks on military bases there. The purpose of these attacks is to put pressure on the Russian occupying forces in Crimea, demoralise the deployed troops, and reduce the combat capability of the Black Sea Fleet, naval aviation, and Russian ground forces. Ukrainian forces eliminated part of the Russian naval aviation in Crimea through an attack, most likely using operational-tactical *Hrim-2* missiles, on the Saki air base near Novofedorivka.⁵⁷ Another important moment of the Ukrainian campaign against the Russian occupiers in Crimea was on October 22, 2022, when the bridge over the Kerch Strait, the only land connection between the Russian Federation and Crimea until the February 24 invasion became the target of an attack. This attack, probably carried out by a maritime drone (*Unmanned Surface Vehicle*, USV), clearly demonstrated Ukraine's determination to recover Crimea, and its armed forces'

⁵⁵ Reuters, "Russian navy vessels seen near Nord Stream before blasts - Nordic broadcasters report", 3 May 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-navy-vessels-seen-near-nord-stream-before-blasts-nordic-broadcasters-2023-05-03/>.

⁵⁶ Kyle Mizokami, "Several Hundred Kilos' of Explosives Caused Nord Stream Gas Pipeline Leaks. Is Russia to Blame?", *Popular Mechanics*, 3 October 2022, <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/a41412695/nord-stream-pipelinesabotage-suspected/>; J. Mueller-Töwe, O. Alexander, C. Janz and L. Winkelsdorf, "Russian tracks", *T-Online*, 25 March 2023, https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/deutschland/ausenpolitik/id_100149758/nord-stream-russia-may-have-operated-a-submarine-before-the-explosions.html.

⁵⁷ Joseph Trevithick and Tyler Rogoway, "Does Ukraine Have a Stash of Domestically Developed Ballistic Missiles?", in *The Warzone*, 9 August 2022, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/does-ukraine-have-a-stash-of-domesticallydeveloped-ballistic-missiles>.

capability to physically sever the peninsula's ties with the Russian Federation.⁵⁸ Repeated attacks⁵⁹ with maritime drones (USVs) and kamikaze UAVs (loitering munitions) on the base at Sevastopol aim to target the combat ships launching *Kalibr*⁶⁰ cruise missiles, eliminating their threat to military and civilian targets in Ukraine. They also aim to undermine the morale of the Black Sea Fleet, which has already been affected by the loss of the flagship, and force the abandonment of bases in Crimea in favour of the base at Novorossiysk.

CONCLUSIONS

Russian Federation has not successfully utilised its naval forces to win the war in the Black Sea or achieve a decisive victory against Ukraine in this maritime domain. The naval blockade, illegally imposed since February 24, 2022, has only had partial success. So far, Russian naval forces have demonstrated a low or, at best, mediocre capacity to cooperate with other force categories to fulfil their basic missions and provide support. The cooperation between the Russian Aerospace Forces and the Black Sea Fleet against the security and maritime interests of Ukraine has been uncoordinated and, therefore, inefficient.

The most significant mistake of the Black Sea Fleet seems to be underestimating the combat capability, preparedness, and determination of the Ukrainian Naval Forces, despite their numerical and technical inferiority. Underestimating Ukrainian capabilities has led to the loss of the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet and the inability to launch amphibious assaults on the Ukrainian coastline.

Another equally significant failure was the inability of Russian naval forces to launch an amphibious assault on the Ukrainian coast in the early days of the invasion, to support ground operations in Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Zaporizhia. Despite the concentration of forces by the Russian Federation in the Black Sea, it was unable to achieve a decisive result. The presence of units belonging to the Baltic Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla has had, so far, a marginal impact on the maritime campaign. Strengthening the amphibious units of the Black Sea Fleet with those from the Baltic Sea and the Caspian Sea did not generate enough military force to launch a large-scale amphibious operation. In addition, the Russian naval infantry under the command of the Black Sea Fleet and the Baltic Fleet was wasted in supporting ground operations in Ukraine.

The operational failure to launch an amphibious assault on the Ukrainian coastline is also explained by the Black Sea Fleet's inability to suppress Ukrainian maritime surveillance radars and early warning systems in the air defence network. As a result, Ukrainian forces were able to monitor the movements of Russian ships in the Black

⁵⁸ Scott Savitz, "Beware the Explosive Vessels", The RAND Blog, 20 October 2022, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2022/10/beware-the-explosive-vessels.html>.

⁵⁹ H.I. Sutton, "Why Ukraine's Remarkable Attack on Sevastopol Will Go Down in History", in *Naval News*, 17 November 2022, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/11/why-ukraines-remarkable-attack-on-sevastopol-will-go-down-in-history>.

⁶⁰ Tayfun Ozberk, "Russia Repels Ukraine's Drone Attack On Sevastopol", in *Naval News*, 23 March 2023, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2023/03/russia-repels-ukraines-drone-attack-on-sevastopol/>.

Sea, simultaneously generating an image of enemy operations at sea, along with early warning in the event of missile attacks launched by surface ships, submarines, and Russian aircraft. A belated attempt to suppress the Ukrainian radar network around Odessa took place in March 2023 when *Su-24 Fencer* attack aircraft attempted to destroy or disrupt it with *Kh-31P Krypton* anti-radar missiles, but they were intercepted by Ukrainian air defence.⁶¹

The seizure of Snake Island on the first day of the Russian aggression against Ukraine represented a “poisoned” trophy. The control exerted by the Black Sea Fleet over the Ukrainian coast and the mouths of the Danube River was only temporary in the absence of sustained logistical support and protection against long-range Ukrainian artillery fire. The strategic value of Snake Island should have been exploited through unified operations involving cooperation between the Russian Aerospace Forces and the Black Sea Fleet. Such collaboration should have facilitated operations that compromised or seriously affected the Ukrainian command and control capability and information gathering in the Odessa sector and the outlets of the Dnieper, Bug, and Dniester rivers. The lack of cooperation made such operations impossible.

However, the biggest operational failure for Russia was its inability to anticipate that Ukrainian coastal defence systems would be operational in 2022 after an accelerated development program. Kyiv successfully kept the operational status of the *R-360 Neptun* anti-ship missiles a secret. Even more significantly, Russian decision-makers did not anticipate the delivery and rapid integration by Ukraine of American *RGM-84 Harpoon* anti-ship missiles. Western assistance was a key element of Ukraine’s ability to resist at sea and included providing information about the activities of the Black Sea Fleet.

At a tactical level, the Russian Navy could not demine Ukrainian territorial waters, despite being familiar with the type of mines that Kyiv used to protect its coasts and ports, and the Black Sea Fleet has modern mine-clearing vessels of the Alexandrit class. This failure constrained Russian naval operations in the vicinity of the Ukrainian coast.

Despite multiple operational, tactical, and logistical failures, the Black Sea Fleet has gained total control over the Sea of Azov, fully controls the northeastern sector of the Black Sea, and holds partial control over the northwest sector through a distant and intermittent blockade. The naval blockade of the Ukrainian coast is functional, although it is permeable either through the Bosphorus Agreement or alternative routes. Despite the loss of the cruiser *Moskva*, the Black Sea Fleet remains the most powerful naval force in the Black Sea, at least equal to the Turkish fleet and superior to the Romanian and Bulgarian naval forces. The main assets of the Black Sea Fleet are the Kilo-class submarines, missile-carrying frigates of the Admiral Grigorovich class, as well as light vessels equipped with either Kalibr cruise missiles or supersonic anti-ship missiles. Additionally, it benefits from the support of the Naval Aviation, the Russian Aerospace Forces, and the Caspian Flotilla. The anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) network established along the Russian-controlled Black Sea coast in 2014 remains intact, proving its utility through launching anti-ship cruise missile attacks on Ukrainian targets. The shipyards

⁶¹ Valentyna Romanenko, “Russia attack Odessa Oblast in morning: Su-24s launch 4 anti-radar missiles”, in *Ukrainska Pravda*, 14 March 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/03/14/7393330/>.

in the Crimean Peninsula continue to build warships for the Black Sea Fleet and can repair the existing ones. Control over Crimea allows for force projection throughout the Black Sea area and beyond, although this aspect has been affected by the course of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Ukraine has managed to protect its coastline from potential amphibious assaults by the Black Sea Fleet, but it has been unable to prevent the naval blockade imposed by the Russian Navy. The lifting of the blockade can only be achieved through the defeat of the Black Sea Fleet in a naval campaign. The most significant achievement of the Ukrainian naval forces so far has been their ability to protect the portion of the Black Sea coastline they still control from a potential Russian territorial annexation. This military success has decisively contributed to maintaining Ukraine's viability as a sovereign and independent state.

Kyiv has only partially developed the concept of a "mosquito fleet"⁶², that is, a military navy equipped for coastal protection and exclusive economic zone missions. Between the annexation of Crimea, which severely affected the Ukrainian Navy through personnel and ship losses, and the launch of the 2022 invasion, there was not enough time and resources to implement the concept fully. Ukraine has received small military vessels from the United States and the United Kingdom, but they have proven insufficient to deter and subsequently deal with hostile actions of the Russian Federation. The corvettes ordered in Türkiye and the minehunters donated by the United Kingdom are unlikely to reach Ukraine until after hostilities cease. Despite the lack of modern and well-equipped ships, the Ukrainian naval forces have demonstrated an extraordinary level of innovative spirit concerning the immediate nature of the threat and the resources allocated by Kyiv. The most significant naval innovation in this conflict has been the development of drones (USVs) for attacking Russian bases in Crimea, thereby questioning their safety and seriously affecting the morale of Russian military personnel and sailors. Ukraine has developed three types of attack maritime drones, two of which have already been used in attacks on the naval base in Sevastopol and the bridge over the Kerch Strait. These maritime drone attacks have been coordinated with attacks by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and loitering munitions. Unfortunately, these attacks lacked the critical mass to achieve decisive results, with only one missile-carrying frigate, a mine-clearing vessel, and the Kerch Strait bridge being damaged using these ingenious means.

It is likely that during the counteroffensive, Ukrainian attacks on Russian bases in Crimea will increase in intensity and involve not only unmanned aerial and naval vehicles but also cruise missiles (Storm Shadow/Scalp EG)⁶³ and operational-tactical missiles. Equipping the Ukrainian Air Force with *Storm Shadow* cruise missiles turns the bridge over the Kerch Strait into a viable target.

Ukrainian military personnel have demonstrated a high level of adaptability and technical readiness, as evidenced by the quick integration of anti-ship missiles donated

⁶² Ihor Kababenko, "Ukraine's New Naval Doctrine: A Revision of the Mosquito Fleet Strategy or Bureaucratic Inconsistency?", in *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, 25 May 2021, vol. 18, no. 83, <https://jamestown.org/program/ukraines-new-naval-doctrine-a-revision-of-the-mosquito-fleet-strategy-or-bureaucratic-inconsistency>.

⁶³ Haley Britzky, "Ukraine has successfully used UK-provided Storm Shadow missiles against Russia, British Defence Secretary tells CNN", *CNN*, 18 May 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/18/politics/ben-wallace-cnn-interview/index.html>.

by the US and other Western states, as well as their successful use against Russian vessels.

LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ROMANIA

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has validated Romania's long-standing concerns about the volatility and degradation of the security environment in the Black Sea region. Simultaneously, it has demonstrated the need for a strategic maritime policy in the Black Sea and the need for adequate military, political, economic, and diplomatic means to implement it.

Lessons learned from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict:

- Access to the world's seas and oceans is a fundamental attribute of a state's sovereignty and independence. This aspect may seem obvious at first glance, but the Russian aggression against Ukraine has reminded us of its practical importance;
- A better awareness among political and military decision-makers that the maritime domain is fundamental for defending and promoting Romanian interests within the international system;
- Funding research projects and exchanges of expertise between Romanian and international researchers studying Black Sea issues. Promoting a Romanian agenda for the Black Sea beyond the diplomatic framework, within communities of expertise in the littoral states and other regions;
- Protecting the coastline and the Danube Delta in the event of a maritime attack. Ensuring freedom of navigation requires the existence of a modern military fleet that constantly patrols the shipping lanes connecting Romania to the global economy;
- Realising interconnection projects with the Caspian Sea and launching hydrocarbon exploration in the Black Sea require a predictable and stable security environment and modern naval forces capable of conducting long-duration missions at sea;
- Developing the potential of the Danube River as a European transport route and as an access route to the Black Sea;
- Supporting the local shipbuilding industry through the commissioning of military vessels from Romanian shipyards and supporting Romanian shipowners in acquiring ships;
- The threat of sea mines requires intensifying military cooperation among NATO littoral states. The war has highlighted the need for a common vision and shared missions for Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye;
- Improving maritime surveillance capabilities at both the Navy and Air Force levels;
- Intensifying the development of integrated approaches to the protection of the coastline and the exclusive economic zone among different branches of the armed forces. Thus, a short-term solution to enhance defence capabilities in the Black Sea is equipping the F-16 multirole fighters with anti-ship capabilities;
- Prioritising the completion of procurement programs for the Romanian Navy and modifying procurement procedures to take into account the current security climate.

COMPARATIVE GRAND STRATEGY

ROMANIA AND TÜRKIYE IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

Lucian Dumitrescu

ABSTRACT: *The article sets out to explore Romania and Türkiye's strategic initiatives in the Black Sea area in a comparative vein. Of particular interest is whether both Romania and Türkiye have come up with a grand plan, a grand principle and a grand behaviour regarding the Black Sea region. In order to explore this research question, the article scrutinises comparatively the following aspects displayed by the two countries: strategic vision, strategic role, strategic initiatives and the prevailing strategic behaviour. At the same time, the article pays heed to the connection between security theory and security practice in order to establish whether the formal grand strategies of Romania and Türkiye in the Black Sea area have translated into comprehensive approaches that tackle the military, economic and political dimensions.*

INTRODUCTION

Formally¹, Romania does have a grand strategy for the Black Sea region. More precisely, Romania possesses a (grand) plan, a (grand) principle, and a (grand) behavioural model in the region since 2006.² The (grand) plan refers to national security strategies that emphasise the strategic importance of the Black Sea, the (grand) principle is the internationalisation of the Black Sea, and the (grand) behavioural model consists of a *hard* balancing approach towards the Russian Federation.³ However, substantively, Romania's integrated action in the Black Sea region – political, economic, and military – does not exhibit the characteristics of a grand strategy.

Essentially, a grand strategy aims to enhance a state's structural power in military, economic, and political terms, enabling it to project its influence more effectively on a regional or international scale. Undoubtedly, Romania's geostrategic stature has increased through its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The question here is whether, in the past nearly 20 years since the Black Sea has appeared in the state's formal security documents, Romania has developed its own military, economic, and political resources to enhance its regional influence. Only in this case can we discuss the alignment of security theory with security practice and, thus, a substantive grand

¹ This text is the short and updated version of the following text: Lucian Dumitrescu, "Marea strategie a Turciei la Marea Neagră. Principalele diferențe față de România" in *Turcia la centenar, quo vadis? Geopolitics, economy, internal and external challenges*, coordinator Ioana Constantin-Bercean, Matei Blănaru, Bucharest, ISPRI Publishing, 2023, p. 41-70.

² Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: Three Meanings of Grand Strategy", in *Security Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2018, p. 27-57.

³ Mohammed Ayoob, "Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism", in *International Studies Review*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2002, p. 27-48.

strategy. In other words, only this would represent the realisation of a formal grand strategy.

At first glance, Türkiye's dominant behaviour in the Black Sea appears transactional, an extreme version of *soft balancing*⁴. However, upon closer examination, Ankara's strategic behaviour is more difficult to capture using classical strategic concepts such as balancing or alignment. For this reason, I also employ the concept of strategic hedging⁵. Strategic hedging refers to a state's insurance policy⁶ both in terms of what a regional player can do (exploiting the vulnerabilities of the hedging state) and what it would not want to do at a certain moment (e.g., providing access to public goods, military assistance, financial assistance, etc.).

The comparative grand strategy attempts to provide an answer to the most important question in the field of international relations, namely how to increase the power of a state. Among other things, this approach involves studying the theory and security practices of other states, including from their perspective, to better understand competitors as well as the inherent limitations of any security environment. In this way, the "obstacles" or "frictions" that arise in the implementation process of one's grand strategy can be mitigated.⁷ Importantly, it helps avoid transforming strategic competition with other states into a rivalry with unpredictable effects.⁸

The premise of this text is a civilian one, from the realm of international relations. Generally, grand strategy refers to military planning for wartime situations. This is the classical direction of grand strategy research.⁹ However, as security studies are no longer confined to the military, a direction in international relations has emerged for the study of grand strategy. From this perspective, adopted by the present text, grand strategy is rather a "meta-strategy", i.e. a comprehensive vision of the theory and security practices of a state. "Grand strategy is an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources, and policies."¹⁰

Given that grand strategy is always rooted in a security theory¹¹, it entails a systematic debate of ideas. The security theory I refer to is, in fact, an "intellectual architecture"¹²

⁴ T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy", in *International Security*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2005, p. 46-71.

⁵ Eray Alim, "Strategic hedging in the Black Sea: The case of Türkiye versus Russia", in *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 45, no. 5, 2022, p. 459-482.

⁶ Brock F. Tessman, "System Structure and State Strategy: Adding Hedging to the Menu", in *Security Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2012, p. 192-231.

⁷ Tudor A. Onea, *The Grand Strategies of Great Powers*, Routledge, London, 2021, p. 6.

⁸ Sven Biscop, *Grand Strategy in 10 Words. A Guide to Great Power Politics in the 21st Century*, Bristol University Press, Bristol, 2021.

⁹ Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich, "Is Grand Strategy a Research Program? A Review Essay", in *Security Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2019, p. 58-86.

¹⁰ Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, London, 2016, p. 3.

¹¹ Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich, *Across Type, Time and Space. American Grand Strategy in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021.

¹² See Samuel Charap, Dara Massicot and Miranda Priebe, *Russian Grand Strategy. Rhetoric and Reality*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2021.

that emerges at the intersection of local thinking and universal thinking¹³. If the local is complementary to the universal in the theory and practice of a state's security, then epistemic communities and the strategic ideas circulated by them can offer solutions to mitigate the internal and external constraints acting upon a state.¹⁴ Conversely, if either the local or the universal presence is excessive in a state's security theory, the state will likely have to manage excessive internal or external constraints.

In the absence of debate, there is a risk that a state's grand strategy may lose its creative character. The consequence is the predominance of operational thinking¹⁵, which may fail to see the forest for the trees. Such thinking seeks to resolve crises not by recombining strategic tools, employing new strategic tools, or adjusting strategic objectives, but primarily by finding new resources, with the risk of dissipating them.

This text aims to provide a comparative perspective on the grand strategy of Türkiye and Romania in the Black Sea. What are we comparing? We compare four components: the dominant strategic vision in the Black Sea, the strategic role assumed by Romania and Türkiye, the initiatives of these states, and the prevailing strategic behaviour stemming from these initiatives. Due to space constraints, we do not compare the "institutional configurations"¹⁶ that offer a sub-systemic explanation for the differences in strategic behaviour between Romania and Türkiye in the Black Sea.

ROMANIA'S GRAND STRATEGY IN THE BLACK SEA

Before joining NATO, Romania did not have a formal strategy toward the Black Sea and the region. This can be inferred from Romania's national security strategies of 1999 and 2001. Anyone reading these formal security documents will not find any mention related to the Black Sea. However, from the perspective of security theory related to the Black Sea, Romania in the 1990s was not entirely devoid of activity. In the early 1990s, Mircea Malița, member of the Romanian Academy, founded the Black Sea University Foundation (FUMN) "to develop studies on the Black Sea as an international centre for research and guidance"¹⁷.

The vision behind FUMN was classical both in terms of international relations and the Black Sea. More specifically, FUMN was more concerned with the question of peace rather than security issues in the Black Sea, in line with classical theories in the field of international relations that seek to explain the causes of peace and war, as well as state behaviour.¹⁸ At the same time, FUMN's activities were guided by the

¹³ John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, Penguin Books, 2019, p. 23.

¹⁴ Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination", in *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1992, p. 1-35.

¹⁵ Benjamin H. Friedman, Justin Logan, "Why Washington Doesn't Debate Grand Strategy", in *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 2016, p. 14-45.

¹⁶ Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2014.

¹⁷ Mircea Malița and Dan Dungaciu, *Istoria prin ochii diplomatului*, RAO Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014, p. 329.

¹⁸ Mohamed Ayoob, "Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism", in *International Studies Review*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2002, p. 27-48.

principle of a closed sea, belonging to the coastal states, a perspective enshrined in the Montreux Convention. This was also Bucharest's **strategic vision** regarding the Black Sea before joining NATO.¹⁹ Some ideas of FUMN, such as involving civil society in the interaction between coastal states, with the partial de-securitisation of the region as a consequence, were adopted by Romania's strategic initiatives, such as the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation, established in 2006.

Romania's strategic vision in the Black Sea underwent a radical change after the country joined NATO, in 2004. Since then, Bucharest has advocated for an open sea, accessible not only to coastal states but also to major Western powers, such as the EU and NATO. In the face of a revisionist Russia, both the European Union and the United States need an open sea. The reasons are both military and economic, such as improving access to resources in the Caspian Sea and in the Middle East. The security agenda of the West in the Black Sea has overlapped with Romania's interests in enhancing military and energy security in the region, as well as resolving "frozen conflicts." Since 2004, the internationalisation of the Black Sea has been the guiding principle shaping Romania's strategy in the region.

The strategic role of Romania in the Black Sea region is limited by the Montreux Convention and simultaneously by Bucharest's vision. In the 1990s, Romania not only lacked regional initiatives in the Black Sea but also did not undertake military modernisation or economic development projects. It can be said that Romania's strategic ambition in the region was limited.²⁰

After 2004, the main strategic role assumed by Romania in the Black Sea is stipulated by Romania's National Security Strategy of 2006, a document that dedicates an entire section to the Black Sea. Specifically, it aims to "stimulate a strong European and Euro-Atlantic involvement in the region".²¹ According to academician Mircea Malița, the fact that Romania underwent a "strategic shift" in the region in 2004 was not the issue itself. Rather, the problem was that "Romania built and formulated a total Western option, without nuances."²² The political survival of the elite in power in 2004, the inherent process of international socialisation that Romania underwent, even if with limited structural power, and the transfer of strategic subcultures, such as the dominant one in the United States at the time of unipolarity²³, can explain the absence of nuances referred to by Mircea Malița. This probably refers to the "degrees of strategic autonomy"²⁴ gained by Romania through the promotion of the Western agenda in the Black Sea.

¹⁹ Lucian Dumitrescu, "Writing 'Eastness': Romania and the Conundrum of Regionness in the Black Sea Area", in *SAGE Open*, January-March 2021, p. 1-11.

²⁰ Pavel Shlykov, "Russian-Turkish Relations in the Wider Black Sea Region: Cooperation and Competition" in *Perceptions*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2018, p. 93-116.

²¹ See *Romania's National Security Strategy*, from 21.02.2006, Bucharest, 2006, p. 19.

²² Mircea Malița and Dan Dungaciu, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

²³ Marius Ghincea, *Zeitwende. Time for a Reassessment of Romania's Foreign Policy?*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bucharest, 2021, p. 3.

²⁴ Daniel Fiott, *Strategic autonomy: towards "European sovereignty" in defence?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2018.

What is important here is that the strategic thinkers behind Romania's 2006 National Security Strategy understood that Romania's promotion of an open sea agenda could generate "new lines of separation in the Black Sea region"²⁵. Their solution to avoid the emergence of these new regional divisions was as follows: "Our country will effectively support the perspective of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of neighbouring states."²⁶ This is another dimension of Romania's regional role assumed in the Black Sea. Has Romania, through this regional role, managed to alleviate tensions in the security environment of the Black Sea? Success in this regard would be reflected in the success of Romania's strategic initiatives in the Black Sea. Let us discuss them briefly.

Romania's **three main strategic initiatives** toward the region were subordinated to the principle of internationalising the Black Sea and can be conceptualised as part of the Băsescu doctrine, and later the Iohannis doctrine. The main strategic principle of the Băsescu doctrine was stated in September 2005 in San Francisco, United States, where Romanian President Traian Băsescu declared that the Black Sea should not become a "Russian lake"²⁷. The most important security policies in the Black Sea region under the Băsescu administration were the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership²⁸ (BSF) in 2006 and the Black Sea Synergy²⁹ (BSS) in 2007. In its initial form, the BSF aimed to internationalise the Black Sea and modify the 1936 Montreux Convention so that not only the naval vessels of the coastal states, but also those of other states could be present in the region. Changing the Montreux Convention would have upset the regional balance of power, which was favourable to the Russian Federation and especially to Türkiye at that time. Additionally, Türkiye and Russia were also concerned about the normative component of the BSF, which was linked to the dissemination of liberal democratic values in the region. As a result, the BSF failed after the first edition and serves as a textbook example of the "obstacles" or "challenges" that arise in the implementation process of a strategy by a state that overestimates its resources and available tools to achieve a strategic objective.

The second subregional initiative under the Băsescu doctrine was the Black Sea Synergy (BSS). Formally, BSS was the European Union's first regional initiative for the Black Sea.³⁰ However, the central idea of BSS had already appeared on the BSF agenda in 2006. Therefore, BSS can be considered an initiative of Romania and part of the Băsescu doctrine. Under BSS, the European Union could have been involved in resolving the "frozen conflicts" in the Black Sea, with Romania particularly concerned about the one in Transnistria. There are several reasons why BSS failed. Firstly, it competed with the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), launched by Türkiye

²⁵ See Romania's *National Security Strategy*, version 21.02.2006, Bucharest, 2006, p. 21.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ "Băsescu: Rusia tratează Marea Neagră ca pe un lac rusesc", in *Ziarul de Iași*, 17 September 2005, <https://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/national-extern/basescu-rusia-trateaza-marea-neagra-ca-pe-un-lac-rusesc-ni3r7j>.

²⁸ Forumul Mării Negre pentru Dialog și Parteneriat.

²⁹ The Black Sea Synergy.

³⁰ Carol Weaver, *The Politics of the Black Sea Region. EU Neighbourhood, Conflict Zone or Future Security Community?*, Routledge, New York, 2016.

in 1992. Secondly, it competed, starting in 2008, with the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a better-funded and better-supported subregional initiative of the EU by member states.

The first implementation under the Iohannis doctrine in the Black Sea was the Black Sea Flotilla (BSFt) initiative³¹. The initiative initially appeared on the official website of the Ministry of National Defence, suggesting the establishment of a “flotilla” in the Black Sea. The idea was then adopted by Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, who argued that NATO could effectively utilize the Black Sea through a “multinational naval group”³². After the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, balancing the regional balance of power required the cooperation of NATO member coastal states, namely Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye. The unknown factor was whether Bulgaria and Türkiye would support the BSFt.

In 2006, both Bulgaria and Romania supported the extension of Operation Active Endeavor in the Black Sea. Türkiye and the Russian Federation, which defended the regional status quo, opposed it. For BSFt, Romania managed to obtain Türkiye’s support and, formally, Bulgaria’s support as well. However, in 2016, Sofia surprised Bucharest with a diplomatic setback. The President of Bulgaria and the Minister of Defense had already informally declared their support for BSFt. However, during President Iohannis’ visit to Sofia to sign the respective agreement, he faced the refusal of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, who changed his mind overnight, and BSFt did not materialise. Authorities in Bucharest reacted and announced that there was a misconception regarding the BSFt, emphasising that the intention was not to have a NATO fleet in the Black Sea, but rather a naval cooperation between Romania, Türkiye, and Bulgaria for “joint exercises” under NATO auspices.

Bucharest 9 and the Three Seas Initiative, promoted by the Iohannis administration in 2015 and 2018, respectively, have proven to be two effective cooperation formats for the states in the eastern flank of NATO. Unlike the BSFt, the Three Seas Initiative and Bucharest 9 have promoted a security agenda dominated by low political aspects, which may explain their resilience. It should also be noted that Türkiye and the Russian Federation are not members of the aforementioned initiatives.

Two main conclusions can be drawn regarding Romania’s policy toward the region under the leadership of President Klaus Iohannis. Firstly, the strategic interest of the United States in the Black Sea was relatively low when Klaus Iohannis became President of Romania in 2014. This aspect was reflected in the National Defence Strategy for the period 2015–2019, which mentioned the Black Sea only three times. This is in contrast to the National Security Strategy of 2006, in which the Black Sea issue was addressed in a few pages. Secondly, after the failure of BSFt in 2016, the Iohannis doctrine shifted from securitisation to de-securitisation as the main philosophy of the strategic initiatives supported by Romania in the Black Sea. An example of this is the Three Seas Initiative,

³¹ The Black Sea fleet.

³² Dan Dungaci and Lucian Dumitrescu, “Romania’s strategic initiatives in the Black Sea area: from sub-regionalism to peripheral regionalism”, in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2019, p. 333-351.

guided by values such as “promoting economic development, enhancing European cohesion, and strengthening transatlantic ties”³³, according to the website of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The dominant strategic behaviour of Romania in the Black Sea is hard to balance against the Russian Federation. More specifically, it involves combining internal balancing, which entails military modernisation, with external balancing, namely Romania’s integration in NATO. Interestingly, despite almost two decades since Romania’s accession to NATO, local internal balancing has not materialised in the modernisation of Romania’s military fleet in the Black Sea.

THE STRATEGIC APPROACH OF TÜRKIYE IN THE BLACK SEA

Ankara’s **strategic vision** in the Black Sea is called “regional ownership”³⁴. Essentially, this vision is equivalent to the perspective of a closed sea institutionalised by the Montreux Convention, and implies that the regional security environment should be controlled by the littoral states rather than NATO and the European Union.³⁵ Herein lies the first difference compared to Romania. Romania’s regional vision in the Black Sea has regional-localist accents, while Ankara’s strategic vision seems to be regional-globalist. More specifically, Türkiye does not view the Black Sea as an end in itself, but rather as a region that it can instrumentalise to project its influence towards the Caucasus, Central Asia, Eastern Mediterranean, and the Balkans.³⁶

Romania’s strategic vision, as a NATO and EU border state, is propelled by “constitutional patriotism.” In Türkiye, the strategic concept of “Türkiye, a central state,” asserted by Davutoğlu in the strategic depth doctrine, has gone through increasingly assertive developments during the Erdoğan administration. While Davutoğlu’s vision was fuelled by neo-Ottomanism, Turkish Eurasianism (quite similar to that of the Russian Federation) portrays Türkiye as the “true centre of Eurasia,” with a central role in the Caucasus and Central Asia.³⁷

These civilisational discourses can generate exaggerated strategic ambitions that are not supported by Türkiye’s resources and strategic instruments. As a result, major strategic errors can occur, leading to negative effects on the citizens. On the other hand, as constructivist theories in the field of international relations suggest, a bureaucratic-type strategic identity explains the underdevelopment of a state’s structural power.

Ankara’s vision in the Black Sea resonates with the “near abroad” doctrine of the Russian Federation, which seeks to minimize Western presence in its own “sphere of influence.” It must be said that the vision of “regional control” and the maintenance of

³³ <https://www.mae.ro/node/49437>.

³⁴ Mitat Celikpala, Emre Erşen, “Türkiye’s Black Sea Predicament: Challenging or Accommodating Russia”, in *Perceptions*, vol. XXIII, no. 2, p. 74.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Shlykov, art. cit., p. 93-116.

³⁷ Robert E. Hamilton and Anna Mikulska, *Cooperation, Competition, and Compartmentalization: Russian-Turkish Relations and Their Implications for the West*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2021.

the Montreux Convention had insidious effects after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014. Firstly, it indirectly supported the increase of Russia's military power in the Black Sea region. Secondly – and related to the above aspect – the vision of “regional control” and the maintenance of the Montreux Convention also led to an increase in Russia's strategic influence in the Mediterranean Sea³⁸. And thirdly, the result is a clear tilt in the balance of regional power in favour of Russia and the relegation of Türkiye to a secondary role.

From the perspective of **the strategic role**³⁹, Türkiye aims to be a “regional security actor” in the Black Sea. This vision is supported by members of the “foreign policy community”⁴⁰ in Türkiye, which gives a clear political connotation to an academic concept. For the Erdoğan administration, Türkiye as a “regional security actor” means Ankara's capacity “to decisively influence the security environment in its vicinity.”⁴¹ From an academic point of view, the concept of “regional security actor” is neutral and refers to states whose security interests are regional rather than international. Turkish policymakers, however, understand this concept in a normative sense, linking it to Türkiye's ability to address security issues in the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, and even Iraq.

This concept also animates the Blue Homeland strategy (*Mavi Vatan*), through which Türkiye assumes its role as a regional power in the Mediterranean Sea. The association between Ankara's strategic vision and the regional role assumed, which exhibits an increasingly pronounced propensity for *hard power*⁴², is quite clear. This goes beyond military presence in Syria and Libya, extending to the military cooperation agreement signed by Türkiye with Uzbekistan in October 2020, the first of its kind between Ankara and a Central Asian state.⁴³

It must be said that, despite the neo-Ottoman and Eurasianist currents circulating in Türkiye and its assertive strategic roles, Ankara does not underestimate the importance of its relations with NATO and the European Union. Without NATO's support, Türkiye would lack the strategic capacity to balance the Russian Federation in the Black Sea region. Otherwise, “whenever Türkiye felt powerful enough to play a regional role,” it did so.⁴⁴ Ankara has assumed an increasingly pronounced regional role, according to Mustafa Aydın, not only because of neo-Ottomanism, Davutoğlu's writings, and nationalist-Islamist or Eurasianist strategic subcultures. Changes at the structural level have also mattered – especially the United States' shift of attention to the Indo-

³⁸ Siri Neset, Mustafa Aydın, Evren Balta, Kaan Ataç, Hasret Bilgin and Arne Strand, *Türkiye as a regional security actor in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Levant Region*, CHR Michelsen Institute, Bergen, 2021, p. 32.

³⁹ The strategic role of a state responds to two types of expectations. On one hand, there are the internal expectations of the local elite, and on the other hand, there are the expectations of the strategic allies of a state.

⁴⁰ Siri Neset, Mustafa Aydın, Evren Balta, Kaan Ataç, Hasret Bilgin and Arne Strand, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Dimitar Bechev, *Türkiye under Erdogan. How a Country Turned from Democracy and the West*, Yale University Press, London, 2022.

⁴³ Robert E. Hamilton and Anna Mikulska, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Mustafa Aydın, “Grand Strategizing in and for Turkish Foreign Policy: Lessons Learned from History, Geography and Practice”, in *Perceptions*, vol. XXV, no. 2, 2020, p. 217.

Pacific region starting in 2011. Assertive strategic subcultures circulating in Türkiye perceived this strategic reorientation as a retreat by America, which Ankara decided to take advantage of.

Türkiye's **strategic initiatives** in the Black Sea have aimed to institutionalise the vision of a closed sea and project Türkiye's strategic influence in line with the philosophy of de-securitisation. The first of these initiatives appeared in 1992, called the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and it had numerous strategic objectives: transforming Türkiye into a regional actor, balancing the potential strategic influence of the European Union in the Black Sea, and asserting Türkiye as a normative actor.

BSEC is the longest-standing subregional organisation in the Black Sea. Its long lifespan is also explained by the philosophy of de-securitisation behind it. Ankara understood better than Bucharest – for reasons related to structural power, bureaucratic experience, strategic subcultures, geographic position, political leadership, etc. – that when addressing security issues of a high-politics nature head-on, with states that have distinct security agendas, the inherent competition between them can turn into rivalry.

BSEC does not provide guarantees of military security. However, by promoting cooperation among member states – in economic, tourism, environmental, agricultural, infrastructure, and NGO sectors, among others – BSEC has contributed, on various occasions, to easing political tensions in a region where major powers (US, EU, Russian Federation) have divergent security visions.

In 2001, Türkiye launched the BlackSeaFor initiative to institutionalise a multinational maritime force whose tasks included humanitarian assistance, environmental protection, search and rescue operations, as well as countermeasures against sea mines. In line with the security philosophy behind BSEC, Ankara also de-securitised the agenda of BlackSeaFor. The participating states in this initiative were Türkiye, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine.

BlackSeaFor also had an informal, undeclared objective. It was about Ankara blocking the extension of the Operation Active Endeavour, sponsored by the United States, from the Mediterranean Sea into the Black Sea. Operation Active Endeavour was launched after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In this way, in line with the closed sea vision, Türkiye kept the United States out of the Black Sea.

Ankara did the same in 2004, when initiating the Black Sea Harmony operation. Unlike BlackSeaFor, Black Sea Harmony had a more pronounced military profile, and there were fewer participating states. The first country to join Black Sea Harmony was the Russian Federation in 2006. Ukraine signed a protocol regarding its participation in 2007, and two years later Romania joined, but not Bulgaria. For Sofia, BlackSeaFor meant another way of consolidating Türkiye and Russia's regional dominance over the Black Sea.⁴⁵ The United States applied for observer status within BSEC after the emergence of Black Sea Harmony.⁴⁶ Regarding this application, Türkiye abstained,

⁴⁵ Mustafa Aydın, "Contending Agendas for the Black Sea Region: A Regional Alternative", in *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2012, p. 55.

⁴⁶ The Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) was established in 1992.

and the Russian Federation voted against it⁴⁷. This is the reason, writes Bechev, why Washington recommended both Romania and Bulgaria to become members of Black Sea Harmony.⁴⁸ It should be noted that after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, the BlackSeaFor initiative dissolved.⁴⁹

Türkiye's **dominant strategic behaviour** in the Black Sea, as well as in other regions of interest to Ankara, is not balancing but rather an extreme version of balancing, namely transactional⁵⁰, which involves "using one great power against another." During the Erdoğan administration, it has become a habit for Ankara to use the United States against Russia and at the same time, Russia against the United States.⁵¹ Türkiye's transactional behaviour with major powers is an integral part of its foreign policy populism, the economic and social consequences of which need to be explored by other studies on Türkiye. Mustafa Aydın informs us that the strategic balancing practised by Ankara is also a principle inherited from a weak Ottoman Empire that aimed to maintain the status quo in the 18th century. In this regard, Istanbul practised the corollary of strategic balancing, namely "using one great power against another."

In relation with the Russian Federation, Ankara practices *soft balancing*. If by this we mean external balancing through NATO, but not accompanied by internal balancing, then the concept is appropriate. However, the situation is more nuanced. After the annexation of Crimea and the shift in the balance of power in favour of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea region, Türkiye initiated the construction of a new naval base in the province of Trabzon. The objective is to increase the mobility of its navy and more effectively defend its coastal region.⁵² Additionally, Türkiye has conducted military exercises in the Black Sea alongside Ukraine and the United States and has delivered the well-known Bayraktar drones to Kyiv. In short, Ankara has engaged in both internal balancing and external balancing towards Russia.

Can we speak of *hard balancing* as a new strategic behaviour of Türkiye towards Russia after 2014? Apparently, yes. In reality, things are more nuanced. First, the military base in Trabzon is not a large-capacity one. Second, Türkiye's naval exercises with Ukraine and the United States have also been conducted within the framework of the BlackSeaFor initiative. The delicate issue, according to Eray Alim, was the supply of military drones by Türkiye to Kyiv. However, the approach has been rather ad hoc. Moreover, economic cooperation between Russia and Türkiye continued even after the annexation of Crimea, and Ankara maintained the regime of the Montreux Convention.

⁴⁷ Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power. Russia in Southeast Europe*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017, p. 160.

⁴⁸ Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁴⁹ See also Eray Alim, "Strategic hedging in the Black Sea: The Case of Türkiye versus Russia", in *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 41, no. 5, 2022, p. 459-482.

⁵⁰ Evren Balta, Constantinos Filis and Mustafa Aydın, *Russia, Türkiye, and the EU: An Uneasy Triangle*, Centre for Applied Türkiye Studies, 2021, p. 15.

⁵¹ Dimitar Bechev, *Türkiye under Erdogan. How a Country Turned from Democracy and the West*, Yale University Press, London, 2022, p. 233.

⁵² Eray Alim, *op. cit.*

Under these circumstances, we cannot speak of *hard balancing*, but rather of strategic hedging, whose manifestation is economic pragmatism and compartmentalisation in Russian-Turkish relations, namely collaboration in certain foreign policy issues and confrontation in others. This tactic of compartmentalisation – as interesting as this can be for strategic thinkers and as disturbing as it is for Türkiye’s Western allies – allows for de-escalation in Russian-Turkish relations and thus avoids the emergence of a too-pronounced rivalry between Moscow and Ankara. It remains to be seen how long compartmentalisation will ease tensions between the two states, especially since Türkiye and the Russian Federation do not have a common vision regarding the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and North Africa. However, Türkiye and Russia share the same dominant strategic subculture of the “besieged fortress,” which partially explains pragmatism in their relations.⁵³

SHORT CONCLUSIONS

Formally speaking, it can be stated that Romania has a grand strategy for the Black Sea. However, in practice, things are more complicated. Over the nearly 20 years since the Black Sea has been mentioned in formal security documents, Romania has not developed its military capabilities in the region, with most of them dating back to the Cold War era. From a long-term perspective, it is also unclear what economic and infrastructural projects Romania has implemented in the Black Sea area. Therefore, Romania’s security practice in the Black Sea is not specific to a grand strategy. The failed initiatives of Romania in the region are also not characteristic of a grand strategy.

A grand strategy involves a concerted effort to develop military, economic, and political resources for a state to effectively project its interests in a region. Legal arguments alone will not change the regime of the Montreux Convention. It requires the structural power behind legal arguments, considering the imbalance of regional power, the emergence of a new “Cold War between Russia and Türkiye,”⁵⁴ longer than the one that erupted in 2015, and the failure of the compartmentalisation tactic in Russian-Turkish relations. Obviously, this is just one scenario. However, in essence, we will only discuss Romania’s grand strategy in the Black Sea when Bucharest’s structural power registers a military, economic, and political increase in the region.

In the case of Türkiye, looking at its regional initiatives, military resources, as well as infrastructural and economic projects, one can speak of a grand strategy of Ankara, but one that instrumentalises and extends beyond the Black Sea. Türkiye uses the Black Sea, as well as the multilateral formats it participates in, to project its influence in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa. Considering that, especially after the annexation of Crimea, the balance of power in the Black Sea has shifted in favour of Russia, the question arises: what strategic value does Türkiye’s “transactionalism” hold? Currently, NATO membership and

⁵³ See Evren Balta, Constantinos Filis and Mustafa Aydin, *op. cit.*, p. 2-3.

⁵⁴ Pavel Shlykov, *op. cit.*

collaboration with NATO states in the Black Sea are the ways Ankara can balance Russia's growing assertiveness in the region. There are also other foreign policy issues, such as Syria, Libya, and the broader Middle East, as well as the Eastern Mediterranean, where Ankara can balance Russia to enhance its negotiation capacity in general, including its approach to the Black Sea.

From a **strategic perspective**, Ankara projects the principle of "regional control" in the Black Sea, whereby the region should be primarily controlled by the littoral states, with minimal interference from major powers. This is the main reason why Türkiye advocates for a closed view of the Black Sea and makes efforts to maintain the Montreux Convention. Romania, on the other hand, stands at the opposite end. Bucharest desires the internationalisation of the Black Sea and the modification of the Montreux Convention. Thus, by advocating for an open sea vision, Romania starts from the premise that its own security agenda, as well as regional security issues, can be resolved through collaboration among the littoral NATO member states with the United States and the European Union in the Black Sea.

As a **strategic role**, Türkiye has assumed that of a "regional security actor" in the Black Sea. However, this is not in the neutral, academic sense of the term, referring to an actor whose security interests are regional rather than international. Instead, it is in an assertive sense, as a state that seeks to decisively influence strategic events in the region. Undoubtedly, this strategic role is connected to the vision of Ahmet Davutoğlu, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister of the Justice and Development Party government, who aimed to expand Türkiye's manoeuvring space in the regions of interest.⁵⁵ In this context, the concept of "active agency" began to circulate in the academic debate within Turkish security studies, referring to Türkiye's active individuality in the regions of interest. This narrative, along with Türkiye's broader regional ambitions, should also be connected to the foreign policy populism of the Erdoğan administration, which seeks to attract voters by highlighting the country's foreign policy successes.

What matters is whether Ankara has the necessary capabilities - military, economic, diplomatic, and soft power - to fulfil the assigned regional role. A change in the strategic role, usually a gradual process, requires not only the emergence of a new dominant strategic subculture that sets new security objectives but also, more importantly, the possession of the necessary capabilities. Without capabilities, new foreign policy objectives are merely foreign policy populism.⁵⁶ At the same time, without vision, capabilities will not magically appear.

The strategic role assumed by Romania in the Black Sea is to promote its own security agenda, along with the Western security agenda, through the collaboration - currently insufficiently fruitful - among the littoral NATO member states. It can be said that

⁵⁵ Zeynep Arkan and Müge Kinacıoğlu, "Enabling ambitious activism: Davutoğlu's vision of a new foreign policy identity", in *Turkish Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2016, p. 381-405.

⁵⁶ See Ekrem T. Başer, "Shift-of-axis in Turkish Foreign Policy: Turkish National Role Conceptions Before and During AKP Rule", in *Turkish Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2015, p. 291-309.

Romania has limited ambitions in the Black Sea region, mainly linked to political survival. Institutionally, from the perspective of different capabilities, Romania cannot have greater ambitions in the Black Sea. At least not at this moment. But what about at the level of ideas?

In the local specialised literature, I have not come across the concept – and even less so the narrative – of active agency associated with Romania in the Black Sea region. One of the reasons for this absence – beyond the dominant strategic subculture – is also the lack of any foreign policy populism from Romania regarding the Black Sea. Not that Romania needs such populism. However, these populist narratives usually find echoes in the region of academia with political ambitions, which can produce more nuanced concepts about Romania's strategic role in the Black Sea. The Băsescu administration delivered a foreign policy populism in the Black Sea.⁵⁷ However, its strategic initiatives – the BSF and the BSS – failed due to Romania's limited capabilities and the unfavourable regional context.

The **dominant strategic behaviour** of Romania in the Black Sea region is hard to balance against Russia. Türkiye exhibits more sophisticated strategic behaviours, ranging from soft balancing to transactionalism and strategic hedging, which have institutionalised compartmentalisation and economic pragmatism in Turkish-Russian relations.

What are the effects of Türkiye's transactionalism in the Black Sea? Well, the effects are contrary to those estimated by Ankara. Firstly, after Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, the balance of power in the Black Sea has shifted in favour of Russia. By deploying S-400 missiles in Crimea, Syria, and the Caucasus, Russia has created restricted or no-access areas that contradict Türkiye's security interests.⁵⁸ Türkiye is also at odds with the modernisation of the Russian military fleet initiated after 2014, a process that has significantly surpassed Türkiye's military capabilities in the region. For this reason, President Erdoğan called for increased allied military presence in the Black Sea at the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016. However, Türkiye itself had blocked such initiatives through the BlackSeaFor and Black Sea Harmony in the early 2000s.

Secondly, Russia has maintained the "Turkish model" of economic growth through investments in the construction sector, but these investments have created a significant trade deficit between the two countries, meaning that Russia economically exploits Türkiye. In 2018, for every dollar of goods and services imported from Russia, Türkiye exported only 15 cents.⁵⁹

Thirdly, nearly half of Türkiye's gas imports come from Russia, along with over one-third of its coal needs.⁶⁰ Normally, states develop and implement grand strategies to achieve autonomy and security in international politics, rather than to strengthen the military and economic power of an adversary, which is now the actual effect of the transactionalism done by Ankara in its relationship with Moscow.

⁵⁷ Theodor Tudoroiu, "The Regional Foreign Policies of Black Sea New Populist Leaders", in *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2014, p. 161-180.

⁵⁸ Mitat Celikpala and Emre Erşen, art. cit., p. 85.

⁵⁹ See Evren Balta, Constantinos Filis and Mustafa Aydin, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

THE ROMANIAN-TURKISH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND ITS ROLE IN THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE BLACK SEA

Alexandru-Ionuț Drăgulin

ABSTRACT: *Türkiye is one of the countries that Romania has a history of long and fruitful relations with. These have been elevated in 2011 to the level of strategic partnership. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, since February 22, 2022, the radical transformation in Europe of the geopolitical context, of the security environment and in the field of economic relations calls for a reevaluation of the opportunities implicit in strategic partnerships. This article explores Romania's approach to the Black Sea region and analyses the opportunities offered in the context of the strategic partnership with Türkiye.*

INTRODUCERE

The study looks over the strategic partnership between Romania and the Republic of Türkiye, focusing on the commitments made by the two signatory states and the potential benefits for Romania. The research aims to explore Romania's possibilities to obtain certain advantages from this partnership for its policy in the Black Sea region.

The Romanian-Turkish relations are analysed from the perspective of their integration into the geopolitical environment. By elaborating the foreign policies, both countries inevitably consider their proximity to the Black Sea. The two countries' views on the Black Sea in terms of geostrategy and trade relations have shaped the operationalization of initiatives that, in turn, have influenced the evolution of the strategic partnership in geopolitical and economic dimensions, revealing commonalities and differences.

As a result of these observations, the main question addressed here emerges: What are the actual advantages of the strategic partnership with Türkiye in developing Romania's policy strategy for the Black Sea region? Subsequently, two secondary questions follow: To what extent is the strategic partnership between the two countries shaped by the political and economic construction of Romania's policy for the Black Sea region? What is the relationship between the regional approach in the Black Sea region, implicitly reflected in the Romanian-Turkish partnership, and the „internationalisation” of the Black Sea supported by Romania?

We started from the premise that the role of the strategic partnership between Romania and Türkiye in consolidating a Romanian strategy for the Black Sea is directly proportional to the shared vision of this region. We considered the security and economic criteria in the implementation of the strategic partnership between Romania and Türkiye. The motivation for this choice lies in the importance of these two areas of cooperation, which are defining strategic partnerships and shaping the long-term regional foreign policy projections of both countries.

The investigative study is structured into three main sections. The first section encompasses the theoretical framework of strategic partnerships, providing analytical support for the argumentative approach. The second part includes relevant data on the Romania-Türkiye strategic partnership, focusing on identifying common areas of cooperation and certain differences in vision and strategy. This section also synthesizes the Romanian geopolitical conception of the Black Sea and evaluates the effectiveness of implementing a series of strategic initiatives in the past two decades. The third section presents the advantages obtained by Romania as a result of its cooperation with Türkiye in terms of security and trade relations. The conclusions focus on a perspective on Romanian-Turkish relations and Romania's possibilities of utilising the Black Sea neighbourhood to its strategic advantage.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

After the end of the Cold War, strategic partnerships have become one of the main foreign policy tools for states. Referring to the post-1990 period, Charles Kupchan argued that a global strategy for peacebuilding in the international system could be achieved, where "enemies become friends,"¹ by building regional and global partnerships based on cooperation, consensus-building, and the restraint of international actors in the face of conflictual interactions. In the development of strategic partnerships, the culture of cooperation, even in the Kantian interpretation, has an essential contribution.

The increase in the number and variety of strategic partnerships is due to the expansion of globalisation, the interconnectivity between state and non-state actors, and interdependencies. S.M. Dent (2004) and Clive Rich (2013) have observed this trend. According to Dent's definition, "a partnership means the agreed interaction of two or more (economic, social, political, etc.) actors, each contributing to the success of the other"² while "maintaining their distinct identities."³

In this sense, a partnership becomes strategic when the parties collaborate not only in the letter of the founding agreement but also in the spirit of a common vision of the objectives they seek to implement, "clearly and committedly establishing what, who, how, and when action is taken to achieve the shared goals."⁴ A partnership is strategic when each party brings added value to cooperation, both intellectually and materially.⁵

The long-term advantages of cooperation, compared to conflictual situations, are highlighted by Robert Axelrod in his book *The Evolution of Cooperation*, published in 1984, during the final stage of the Cold War. Using the example of the prisoner's dilemma, Axelrod concludes that the reward for bilateral cooperation is more substantial than the presumed short-term gain resulting from a potential confrontation/competition. Additionally, the author warns that "through conflictual interaction, one can obtain an

¹ Charles A. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010, p. 414.

² Stephen M. Dent, *Parteneriatul în afaceri*, Curtea Veche Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 17.

³ Vasile Pușcaș, *Negocieri pentru parteneriate*, Școala Ardeleană Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2016, p. 19.

⁴ Vasile Pușcaș, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵ Roy J. Lewicki, Bruce Barry, David M. Saunders, *Negotiations – readings, exercises, and cases* (Fifth Edition), McGraw-Hill, New York, 2007, p. 44.

advantage for the present, whereas, through cooperation, both present and future benefits are considered.”⁶

A comprehensive definition of strategic partnerships is provided by Giovanni Grevi: “Strategic partnerships are those that both parties regard as essential to achieve their basic goals. This is because the cooperation of strategic partners can lead to win-win games and, conversely, because such partners are those who could inflict most harm to one another were relations to turn sour. As such, they may concern pivotal global but also regional actors. What matters is that they deliver. Effective partnerships are bilateral relationships that should contribute to advancing towards higher levels of cooperation.”⁷

Another definition of strategic partnerships, including their fundamental characteristics, is given by Jonathan Holslag: “They are forms of cooperation characterised by identified and formulated common interests and expectations in the long term; they are multidimensional and operationalized primarily in the economic, political, and military domains; they have a global scope and are relationships in which the objectives must be of such a nature that they cannot be achieved outside the partnership and serve to distinguish it from other forms of cooperation.”⁸

The Routledge Encyclopedia of International Political Economy defines a strategic partnership between two states as a political instrument to facilitate the intensification of economic relations between the parties involved.⁹ Therefore, it highlights the role of politics as an intermediary and a link between the economic agents of the signing countries of the partnership.

At the institutional level, strategic partnerships have differentiated themselves from other forms of cooperation such as preferential partnerships, privileged partnerships, and special relationships. The 2003 European Security Strategy states that all key actors relevant to EU security and/or who share common objectives and values with it are considered potential strategic partners¹⁰. The transatlantic relationship with the United States falls into the category of strategic partnerships, as stated in the report presented to the European Council in 2010.

Summarising the presented definitions and characteristics, it is evident that strategic partnerships are built in vital areas for the existence and functioning of states, they operate on a long-term basis, and are based on a set of common values.

⁶ Robert Axelrod, Richard Dawkins, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (Revised Edition), Basic Books, New York, 2006, p. 3.

⁷ Giovanni Grevi, “Making EU strategic partnerships effective”, *Working Paper* (FRIDE) no. 105, December 2010, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/130706/WP105_Making_EU_Strategic_ENG_dic10.pdf.

⁸ Jonathan Holslag, “The Elusive Axis: Assessing the EU-China Strategic Partnership”, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2011, vol. 44, no. 2, p. 295.

⁹ R. J. Barry Jones (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of International Political Economy*, Routledge, 2011.

¹⁰ Council of the European Union, “European Security Strategy. A Secure Europe in a Better World”, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30823/qc7809568enc.pdf>.

ROMANIA AND TÜRKIYE: INTERSECTIONS AND DIFFERENCES REGARDING THE BLACK SEA

The strategic partnership between Romania and Türkiye in data and figures

The chronology of its main milestones show that the field of political-military security and trade, on which we have built our argumentation, stands out compared to other established spheres of cooperation in the founding documents. The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirms that “the bilateral relationship is traditionally good, characterised by cooperation and consistent dialogue on numerous levels: economic and sectoral trade, security (within NATO).”¹¹ However, reviewing the significant moments in the history of collaboration reveals certain discrepancies in vision that raise questions about the efficiency with which Romania extracts advantages.

The 1990s marked a period of reestablishment of bilateral relations on democratic grounds due to the change in political regime and the return to a capitalist economy in Romania. The signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighbourliness during the visit of the Turkish president to Bucharest from September 18th to 20th, 1991, was followed in 1992 by the signing of the founding document of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), a multilateral project and Türkiye’s most impactful regional initiative, which continues to function. The resilience of the organisation lies in “maintaining the principle of de-securitisation parallel to the promotion of cooperation among member states. This doctrine competes with that of the Russian Federation, focused on hard politics and militarisation, as well as that of the United States and the EU.”¹² Türkiye currently dominates the organisation and obtains advantages that place it at the top of the economic ranking among the countries of the Black Sea. “Türkiye, as initiator of the BSEC, understood that there were two conditions for creating an efficient subregionalism in the Black Sea region: capitalising on the economic factor, the only factor generating cooperation in the region throughout history, and desecuritising hard security concerns.”¹³

The visit of President Traian Băsescu together with a delegation to Ankara on December 12-13, 2011, marked the moment when the bilateral relationship was elevated to the rank of Strategic Partnership. Two years later, in March, the Action Plan for implementing the Partnership was also signed.

Romania and Türkiye share common economic and security interests in the Black Sea. Both countries face common threats – Russia and the “frozen conflicts” in the region. Good relations are considered the basis for cooperation in the Black Sea area. However, while Romania aims to implement a Black Sea strategy in line with the Euro-Atlantic internationalist approach, Türkiye seeks to persuade the West to recognise and legitimise its influence in the Black Sea region and the Balkans¹⁴. Using the ethno-nationalist and

¹¹ Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Relații bilaterale – Republica Turcia”, <https://www.mae.ro/bilateral-relations/1746#null>.

¹² Lucian Dumitrescu, “Marea strategie a Turciei la Marea Neagră. Principalele diferențe față de România”, in Ioana Constantin Bercean, Matei Blănaru (coord.), *Turcia la centenar. Quo vadis? Geopolitică, economie, provocări interne și externe*, ISPRI Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023, p. 48.

¹³ Dan Dungaciu, Lucian Dumitrescu, “Romania’s strategic initiatives in the Black Sea area: from subregionalism to peripheral regionalism”, in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2019, vol. 19, no. 2, p. 343.

¹⁴ Aurel Lazăr, Miruna Butnaru-Troncotă, “Assessing a decade of Romania-Türkiye strategic partnership in an era of ambivalence and ‘De-Europeanisation’”, in *South-East European and Black Sea Studies*, 2022, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 165.

religious components, Türkiye seeks to strengthen its influence in the Balkan Peninsula while simultaneously distancing itself from the European Union, undergoing a process of “de-Europeanisation.”¹⁵

From 2008 to 2013, Romanian-Turkish cooperation in the Black Sea reached its peak, with an emphasis on economic relations, as well as political progress. During this period, Türkiye began to reorient itself towards what it perceived as its national interest, but at the expense of NATO, promoting a renationalisation of its foreign policy. However, 2011 also marked the beginning of an anti-Western shift in Turkish foreign policy, a transformation of a populist nature.

The period from 2014 to 2016 brought explicitly divergent views on security policy in the Black Sea, and the “de-Europeanisation” was followed by an intensification of anti-Westernism in the public discourse of politicians. Türkiye’s distancing from Euro-Atlantic values is also evident in its relations with Bucharest. This interval is marked by an increasing divergence of positions regarding Russia’s hostile actions in the Black Sea. After the Crimea episode in 2014, the two countries did not reach a consensus on the future role of NATO in the Black Sea region. Following the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, Turkish foreign policy became increasingly distant from NATO and the EU, while showing a constant approach and intensified cooperation with Russia.

The ambivalent approaches from Türkiye and the intensification of “de-Europeanisation” also characterise the period from 2017 to 2020. However, there is a revitalisation of economic relations. Romania reiterated its support for Türkiye’s European path and EU enlargement in the Western Balkans during its presidency of the Council of the European Union (January-July 2019). In turn, Türkiye supported Romania’s candidacy for the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).¹⁶

In recent years, Türkiye’s geopolitical coordinates in the Black Sea have been characterised by strategic ambivalence and “de-Europeanisation.” Türkiye has acted as an economically and strategically relevant partner for Romania, while distancing itself from the EU and increasing assertiveness in the Black Sea and the Balkans, indicating a regional actor with significant influence.

Based on these foundations, Türkiye employs generalised *transactionalism* as a substitute for a “grand strategy” for this region. The main explanation for this is the lack of adherence to democratic principles in its foreign policy (refusal to consent to the US strategy) and its authoritarian internal regime, which seeks advantages both vis-à-vis the United States and Russia, using tactics similar to those of Russia¹⁷. However, Türkiye’s *hard balancing* and *ambivalence* in its relations with Russia and NATO allies have given it the role of an efficient and credible mediator in the Ukrainian crisis, including peace negotiations in March-April 2022, negotiations on the grain corridor in the Black Sea, and negotiations

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 165. See also Beken Saatçioğlu, “De-Europeanisation in Türkiye: The case of the rule of law”, in *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 21, no. 1, p. 133-146; Başak Alpan, “Europeanization and EU-Türkiye relations: Three domains, four periods”, in Wulf Reiners, Ebru Turhan (coord.), *EU - Türkiye Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, open access, 2021, p. 107-137.

¹⁶ Robert Lupițu, “România preia la 1 iulie președinția Organizației Cooperării Economice a Mării Negre (OCEMN)”, in *Calea Europeană*, 18 June 2015, <https://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/romania-preia-la-1-iulie-presedintele-organizatiei-cooperariieconomice-a-marii-negre-ocemn/>.

¹⁷ Lucian Dumitrescu, art. cit., p. 51.

on prisoner exchanges.”¹⁸ Through this reinvention, Türkiye intends to transition from a geopolitical pivot to a strategic player. Therefore, its foreign policy is largely conjunctural, based on opportunities.

ROMANIA AND THE BLACK SEA: STRATEGIC ACTIONS WITH PARTIAL SUCCESS

After a long historical period during which Romania’s interest in the maritime area manifested intermittently¹⁹, since 1990, a consistent focus on obtaining security advantages in the Black Sea has emerged, becoming part of the national security strategy. The main reason for this choice is “a mix of threats, risks, and opportunities that made the region attractive. Politically, Bucharest did not want to be associated with the Balkans and their turbulent history,”²⁰ but as will be observed, Türkiye has placed Romania alongside Balkan countries regarding its foreign affairs.

The chronological milestones that justify Romania’s emphasis on security in the Black Sea include the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, and the aggression war against Ukraine starting on February 24, 2022, through which the Kremlin practically challenges the security order established at the end of the Second World War. Following the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, Romania has de facto direct proximity to Russia in the exclusive economic zone of the Black Sea, and the potential maritime threat has increased. In the future, “there is a risk that Russia will not recognise the decision of the International Court of Justice regarding the allocation of the exclusive economic zone following the Ukraine case.”²¹

Therefore, considering limited resources and the increasing level of threat, Romania has taken action to enhance security through initiatives focused on including the Black Sea in NATO and the European Union’s strategy. To succeed, these actions required a strategic approach. And strategy, in turn, is conditioned by vision. A brief presentation of the visions and strategies that underpinned Romania’s main initiatives for the Black Sea is useful for explaining the current situation of the strategic partnership with Türkiye. The correlation between vision, strategy, and action serves as an explanatory framework for the evolution of Romania’s foreign policy regarding the Black Sea.

Romania’s policy towards the Black Sea encompasses two stages corresponding to two temporal intervals. In the first stage, from the 1990s until 2014, Romania had a vision and strategy oriented towards the West and, in the context of conflicts in the 1990s, towards the Balkan region. This approach aligned with the American and NATO perspectives, and the Black Sea was a marginal subject during this period. The second stage, starting in 2014, is characterised by Romania’s abandonment of its focus on the Balkans and its orientation towards the Black Sea region. The resetting of geostrategic priorities was prompted by

¹⁸ Dorin Popescu, “Mixul geopolitic al Turciei la Marea Neagră. Reinventări paradigmactice”, in Ioana-Constantin Bercean, Matei Blănaru (coord.), *op. cit.*, p. 93.

¹⁹ George Vişan, “Guardian of the Danube: Romania’s Mixed Progress in Implementing a Black Sea Strategy”, *The Jamestown Foundation Global Research & Analysis*, 20 December 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/romania-the-danube-and-the-black-sea-growing-security-challenges-and-underutilized-economic-potential/>.

²⁰ George Vişan, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and Bucharest's imperative to dissociate itself politically from the Balkan region.

Romania has consistently taken action not only to implement a vision and strategy for the Black Sea but also to maintain good neighbourly relations and territorial security. It sought to place the "frozen conflicts" in the Black Sea region on the international agenda, starting with the threat in Transnistria. Romania acted for the delimitation of the continental shelf in its case with Ukraine. The role of the Black Sea was introduced in the National Defence Strategy. At the NATO Summit in Madrid in 2022, the Romanian delegation placed the future role of the Black Sea on the agenda. Ultimately, the war in Ukraine, with its economic and military implications, brought back to the attention of the West the geostrategic and geoeconomic importance of the Black Sea.

For nearly 100 years, Romania advocated for a closed Black Sea under the provisions of the 1936 Montreux Convention. With its NATO membership in 2004, a strategic reset occurred in Romania's perspective on the Black Sea, shifting from a "closed sea" perspective to an „open sea" perspective. This vision coincided with the Western perspective and aimed at military and energy security, including access to resources in the Caspian Sea²². This conception only partially aligned with the Turkish vision of the Black Sea, which was anchored in the economic sphere and displayed ambivalence in its stance towards Russia, alternating between competition and cooperation. "Building and consolidating a single strategic vision for the Black Sea riparian member states remain an ongoing challenge for Romanian diplomacy."²³ Currently, "in this regard, Romania is dependent on the regional environment and largely on the international conjuncture."²⁴

The mandates of Presidents Traian Băsescu and Klaus Iohannis coincided with the crystallisation of this vision of the Black Sea and a strategic role that sought to actively involve NATO and the European Union. President Băsescu promoted two strategic principles:

1. Romania to act on the "Washington-Brussels axis", meaning to be a "stability factor" and a strategic interface between NATO and the former Soviet countries in Eastern Europe.
2. The transformation of the Black Sea from a "Russian lake" into a "NATO lake."²⁵

President Iohannis did not substantially alter these principles but abandoned certain points on the strategic agenda due to the increasing tensions in the Black Sea region following the occupation of Crimea in 2014. As a result, regional summits were discontinued because, based on *high politics* logic, they emphasised securing an already tense environment, coinciding with the reduced US interest in the Black Sea, now focused on competition with China. The internationalisation of the Black Sea remained a continuing principle in President Iohannis' mandate, but the discourse of freedom and democracy promotion was replaced by that of security, as Russia became an increasingly clear threat.

²² Lucian Dumitrescu, art. cit., p. 53.

²³ George Vişan, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁴ Dan Dungaciu, Lucian Dumitrescu, art. cit., p. 341.

²⁵ Lucian Dumitrescu, art. cit., p. 54.

Black Sea Forum (BLACKSEAFOR) - 2001, Black Sea Harmony (2004), Black Sea Synergy (2008), the Three Seas Initiative, the Bucharest - 9 Format, and the Black Sea Flotilla are the initiatives through which Romania has acted towards implementing its vision and strategy for the internationalisation of the Black Sea. All these initiatives are multilateral and have focused on the involvement of NATO and the European Union. They demonstrate Romania's different conception, compared to that of Türkiye, regarding its role in the Black Sea. "Instead of anchoring their security policies in a philosophy of de-securitisation, which might have reinforced both Romania's military security in the Black Sea area and its political stature in the Euro-Atlantic community, Romanian authorities have adopted a securitising approach."²⁶ However, at the same time, Türkiye has distanced itself from the Euro-Atlantic vision in the Black Sea, rejecting internationalisation and emphasising its exclusive regional role, predominantly in economic terms.

ROMANIAN-TURKISH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: CONCRETE ADVANTAGES FOR ROMANIA

Security Advantages

The main security advantages of Romania at the Black Sea, as a result of the cooperation with Türkiye, were obtained through its participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program and the political-diplomatic support granted to Romania by Türkiye, for the accession to NATO. For Romania, the agenda regarding security needs at the Black Sea is the dominant one in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century.

"The Partnership for Peace (PfP) is a programme of practical bilateral cooperation between individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries and NATO. It allows partners to build up an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation."²⁷

A major initiative introduced by NATO at the January 1994 Brussels Summit of the North Atlantic Council, PfP was accepted by 27 countries, and the activities undertaken by each country are based on jointly developed individual partnership programs. Romania was the first partner state to sign the PfP Framework Document on January 26, 1994, and in April 1994, it submitted its Individual Partnership Program document to NATO Headquarters. The Partnership for Peace would become a gateway for Romania's NATO accession following the failure of NATO's eastward expansion.

The essence of the PfP program is an individually formed partnership between each Euro-Atlantic partner and NATO, tailored to individual needs and implemented collectively at the level and pace chosen by each participating government. The main programs of the Partnership for Peace, the Membership Action Plan (MAP), and the Planning and Review Process (PARP) have represented the framework for achieving Interoperability Objectives for Romania, also serving as the mechanism through which military structures have been involved in joint activities with similar structures of NATO member states.

Through these efforts, the aim has been to achieve interoperability between Romanian military units, subunits, command structures, and logistics with those of NATO. However,

²⁶ Dan Dungaciu, Lucian Dumitrescu, art. cit., p. 342.

²⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The Partnership for Peace Programme", https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm.

the activities offered within the PFP program have had an even broader scope, covering practically every aspect of NATO activities, including defence reform, policy and planning, civil-military relations, education and training, military cooperation and exercises, civil emergencies, disaster planning and response, as well as cooperation on science and the environment. Romania has undertaken 84 partnership objectives (with the last ones fulfilled in 2007) as follows: 26 general objectives, 19 for land forces, 23 for air forces, and 16 for naval forces.

The continued political and military support provided by Türkiye to Romania during the negotiations for NATO accession marked bilateral relations in the 1990s and early 2000s. Türkiye's support was based on the understanding of the need to strengthen NATO's southern flank, including the Black Sea region, as a counterbalance to Russia. In the same vein, Türkiye formally supports the NATO and EU membership of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

Romania's accession to NATO in 2004 crowned the support provided by Türkiye in this direction, but the active involvement of decision-makers from Romania, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of National Defence should not be forgotten. At that time, three Black Sea coastal states were NATO members (Türkiye, accompanied by Romania and Bulgaria), and the security dimension was increasingly prominent on the Romanian regional policy agenda.

According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "In accordance with Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, Türkiye supports the idea that the doors of NATO should remain open to European democracies that wish to and can assume the responsibilities and obligations associated with membership. In this regard, Türkiye welcomed the accession of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia to NATO starting from March 29, 2004, the largest expansion in the Alliance's history, and believes that it will continue to contribute to the consolidation of security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region." At the same time, "Türkiye keeps on contributing to NATO's missions and operations in a comprehensive and active way in the scope of the importance that NATO and Türkiye present for each other. Türkiye maintains its position within NATO by protecting its national interests as well as supporting the solidarity within the Alliance."²⁸

Overall, Romanian-Turkish cooperation in security matters has yielded positive results at the political and military levels, with diplomatic representation instruments playing an undisputed role. However, Türkiye does not hide the fact that it utilises both hard power and soft power resources to preserve its regional interests and achieve its objectives, even within NATO. According to Ankara's official perspective, "Türkiye mobilises its 'soft power' by means of using its deep historical ties with populations and countries in the wide geography where NATO acts."²⁹ The current projection of influence in the region, perceived differently by respective states, does not negate the main conclusion from Romania's perspective: Türkiye's support for our country's NATO membership and integration has been significant for our security, alongside the support of other alliance member states, especially the United States, as well as the efforts of Bucharest within the same context.

²⁸ The Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Türkiye's and NATO's views on current issues of the Alliance", https://www.mfa.gov.tr/ii_-Türkiye_s-contributions-to-international-peace-keeping-activities.en.mfa.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

Trade advantages

a) EU as a common market

Each member state of the European Union benefits from participation in the single market. Alongside the “free movement of goods, services, capital, and persons,” the internal market “has created new jobs and reduced many trade barriers.”³⁰ The reduction of barriers has also benefited trade with third-party countries, with goods imported from Türkiye gaining access to the European single market.

“The Single Market Act was put forward in two parts, in 2011 and 2012, containing proposals to further exploit the opportunities afforded by the single market, in order to boost employment and improve confidence in European business.”³¹

Access to the single market is restricted for third-party countries. However, the European Union has consistently pursued integration into the global economy. This approach includes, for example, the Agreement with the Swiss Confederation on the free movement of persons and mutual recognition agreements with non-EU countries, which guarantee compliance of goods from those countries with EU norms. Additionally, there is the Agreement on the European Economic Area, which regulates “a zone in which there is free movement of people, services, goods and capital across 31 European countries,” with its stated objective being “to promote a continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between these countries.”³² The Agreement “covers the 28 member states of the European Union (EU) and three of the four members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) - Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway.”³³ Furthermore, there are association agreements with countries in the EU accession process, association agreements within the framework of the EU Neighbourhood Policy (East and South), as well as various stages of operation of free trade agreements with countries outside the European area. Among these, agreements already in the implementation phase are those between the EU and Canada, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, South Africa, Algeria, and Egypt, as well as other countries around the world, including Latin America. The unique relationship between the Union and Türkiye formalised through a customs union agreement, is also situated in this context.³⁴

b) EU-Türkiye Customs Union, January 1, 1996

The development of relations between Türkiye and the EU has been slow but with firm commitments from both sides, which have given them longevity and solidity. The European Union has privileged economic relations with Türkiye, formalised through

³⁰ EurLex, “Internal Market”, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/chapter/internal_market.html?root_default=SUM_1_CODED%3D24&locale=en.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² EurLex, “Agreement on the European Economic Area”, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/RO/legal-content/summary/agreement-on-the-european-economic-area.html>.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Charlotte Bretherton, John Vogler, *The European Union as a global actor*, Routledge, New York, 2006; Knud Erik Jorgensen (coord.), *The European Union and international organizations*, Routledge, New York, 2009.

the Customs Union that came into effect on January 1, 1996. Its legal basis is provided by the Ankara Agreement (1963) and the Additional Protocol (1970).

The implementation of the customs union was facilitated by the transformation of the Turkish economy, especially after 1980, "from import-substitution industrialization to export-oriented industrialization as a development model."³⁵ Türkiye immediately benefited from the EU agreements in the international context described above, gaining "access to global production networks, and to become a hub for the production of intermediary industrial goods due to its relatively cheap labour force."³⁶ However, over time, the challenges facing the Turkish economy and changes in political vision have resulted in reduced opportunities for exploiting the customs union.

In its response to Türkiye's accession request to the EU, published in 1989, the European Commission emphasised the "completion of the customs union as a means to align Türkiye further with the operation of the internal market."³⁷ A defining aspect of the customs union with Türkiye is its inclusion in the EU's trade policy, which falls under the exclusive competence of the European Union. Türkiye was thus required to integrate into the Union's logic, not its own. And this logic is straightforward, representing the very foundation of the single market, applied to both member states and partner countries: "Trade policy is an exclusive EU competence. This means the EU and not the member states legislates on trade matters and concludes international trade agreements. If the agreement covers topics of mixed responsibility, the Council can conclude it only after ratification by all member states."³⁸ However, Türkiye's integration based on this principle has not yet been realised, as some governments in Ankara have preferred to implement counterproductive policies.

The objectives of the Customs Union are: "free movement between the two parts of the customs union for the goods covered which are either wholly produced or put in free circulation after their importation from third countries in either Türkiye or the EC; alignment of Türkiye with Community common customs tariff, including preferential arrangements, and harmonisation of commercial policy measures; approximation of customs law, in particular through decisions of the Customs Co-operation Committee (e.g. Decision no. 1/2001) and mutual assistance in customs matters approximation of other laws (intellectual property, competition, taxation...); preferential agreement on agriculture (rules of origin)."³⁹

The EU-Türkiye Customs Union exclusively covers trade in industrial products and processed agricultural products. "The Agreement does not cover: agricultural products, as defined in Annex I of the Amsterdam Treaty. These are subject to Decision of 1998 on the trade regime for agricultural products; coal and steel products, as covered

³⁵ Özlem Terzi, "The EU - Türkiye customs union. Shortcomings and prospects for modernization", in Sieglinde Gstöhl, David Phinnemore (eds.), *The proliferation of Privileged Partnerships between the European Union and its Neighbours*, Routledge, London & New York, 2019, p. 125.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

³⁸ European Council/EU Council, "EU Trade Policy", <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/trade-policy/>.

³⁹ European Commission, "EU-Türkiye Customs Union", <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-turkiye-customs-union>.

by the European Coal and Steel Treaty. These are subject to the European Coal and Steel Community - Türkiye Agreement on a free trade area for products covered by the ECSC.⁴⁰ Regarding tariffs, the agreement stipulates eliminating customs duties for the goods explicitly mentioned in the document.

The Customs Union has brought undeniable benefits to Türkiye: the number of transactions in the production networks between companies from the EU and Türkiye has significantly increased; productivity and the quality of infrastructure have also improved, facilitated by the reform of technical regulations. In this way, Türkiye is supported in the process of aligning with the EU *acquis*. Overall, Türkiye's global competitiveness, an objective pursued by the Customs Union, has witnessed an ascent. An important aspect of the agreement is the elimination of regulations regarding the origin of goods in bilateral trade, making the Customs Union a preferable option for Türkiye compared to a simple free trade agreement with the EU.

On the other hand, research in the field of political economy demonstrates that, at the institutional level and in terms of options for economic relations with third-party countries, the balance of advantages clearly tilts in favour of the European Union, the signing party that has imposed the political and legal conditions. The European Union implements its trade policy on behalf of and for the benefit of all member states. Thus, "Türkiye needs to apply customs legislation and trade defences identical to that of the EU; Türkiye needs to follow the Common Commercial Policy as adopted by the EU." Furthermore, the organisation "defines its own trade policy without an official position from Türkiye. When negotiating its preferential trade agreements, the EU then barely mentions the situation of Türkiye to its partners."⁴¹ The freedom of action for the Turkish side is thus limited, which affects the freedom to establish trade relations. In addition, the literature emphasises certain institutional deficiencies in the implementation of the Customs Union: the lack of effective mechanisms for the consultative process and the resolution of inconveniences.

Moreover, with the advancement of emerging markets, the EU opts for signing preferential free trade agreements instead of customs unions, and Türkiye loses a significant part of its comparative advantage. An example is the free trade agreements concluded by the EU with advanced economies such as South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Canada, South Africa, and others, which harm the Turkish economy. The main challenge for the Turkish economy is "to maintain attractiveness in an environment where production increasingly relies on global value chains, which the recent free trade agreements concluded by the EU with third countries promote more than the customs union with Türkiye."⁴² Therefore, in addition to the constraints imposed by the Customs Union's trade policy, Türkiye is disadvantaged by the EU's reorientation towards free trade agreements, rendering the Customs Union an outdated type of agreement.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ Cécile Rapoport, "EC-Türkiye Customs Union and the WTO System", in Halük Kabaalioğlu, Andrea Ott, Allan F. Tatham (eds), *EU and Türkiye: Bridging the Differences*, İKV Publications, İstanbul, 2011, p. 185.

⁴² Garry Gereffi, "Global Value Chains in a Post-Washington Consensus World", in *Review of International Political Economy*, 2014, vol. 21, no. 1, p. 9–37.

In the political sphere, the divergence of views on European integration between Türkiye and the EU “has turned from the accession negotiations to the modernization of the customs union, alongside migration management, energy issues, and security cooperation.”⁴³ However, it is equally true that the current divergences with the EU in the field of trade policy and the issues in the accession process, de facto suspended, combined with an increasingly commitment of Ankara to the Middle East, Africa, and Russia, can further affect Türkiye’s relations with the Union in the future.

Nevertheless, the available statistics demonstrate a very close balance in the EU-Türkiye trade relationship. Thus, the advantages for Türkiye in economic relations with an entire organisation of 27 member states are evident. The European Union is by far Türkiye’s largest partner in imports and exports of goods. In 2022, 26% of Türkiye’s goods imports came from the EU, and 41% of the country’s merchandise exports were directed to the common market.⁴⁴

Total bilateral trade in goods reached €198.1 billion in 2022 (3.6% of the EU’s total trade with other partners). EU imports from Türkiye were valued at €98.6 billion and were dominated by textiles (€17.5 billion, 17.7%), closely followed by transport equipment (€17.3 billion), common metals and articles (€16.8 billion), and machinery and appliances (€15.8 billion). EU exports to Türkiye amounted to €99.6 billion, with machinery and appliances (€25 billion, 25.1%), transport equipment (€17.5 billion), common metals and articles (€13.1 billion), and chemicals (€13.1 billion) being the dominant sectors.⁴⁵

Total trade in services between the EU and Türkiye in 2021 amounted to €24.2 billion, representing 1.2% of the EU’s total trade with the rest of the world in services. Türkiye’s imports of services from the EU accounted for €11.4 billion, while exports reached €12.8 billion, making each party the 12th and 16th largest services trading partner of the other. Transport services (€4.7 billion, 41.2%) and travel services (€3.9 billion, 34.2%) are the most significant services imported by the EU from Türkiye, while transport services (€4.5 billion, 35.2%) and information and communication technology services (€2.7 billion, 21.8%) are the most exported services from the EU to Türkiye.⁴⁶ Therefore, a relative balance can be observed in the trade relations between the Union and Türkiye. It is worth noting that the trade relations between Türkiye and Romania are heavily in favour of Türkiye, and the trade deficit for Bucharest increases from year to year.

c) Romania-Türkiye Trade Agreements

Currently, bilateral cooperation in the economic and trade dimension has reached a sufficient level of depth to confirm the implementation of the Strategic Partnership. The Turkish Embassy in Bucharest confirmed at the end of 2022 that “Türkiye and Romania remain among the largest bilateral trading partners in the Balkans” and that “despite the global epidemic conditions in 2020, the trade volume, which was \$6.6 billion, reached a

⁴³ Özlem Terzi, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

⁴⁴ European Commission, “EU trade relations with Türkiye. Facts, figures and latest developments”, https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/turkiye_en.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

record level of \$8.6 billion in 2021.⁴⁷ Thus, the volume of bilateral trade in 2021 exceeded the level during the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Regarding the volume of investments in Romania, "Türkiye maintains its position among the largest investors in Romania, with an investment value of over \$7 billion, including those made through our companies located in third countries."⁴⁸

The Free Trade Agreement between Romania and Türkiye, which came into effect on April 29, 1997, operated until February 2006 when it was replaced by the Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation.

The objectives of the Free Trade Agreement were: "a) to gradually establish a free trade area between Romania and Türkiye, covering a substantial part of their trade, within a transitional period ending no later than January 1, 2002, following the provisions of this Agreement and Article XXIV of GATT - 1994 and WTO; b) to promote, through the expansion of reciprocal trade, the harmonious development of economic relations between Romania and Türkiye; c) to ensure fair competition conditions in the field of trade between Romania and Türkiye; d) to contribute, by removing barriers to trade, to the harmonious development and expansion of world trade; e) to enhance cooperation between Romania and Türkiye."⁴⁹ The Agreement provided for a gradual elimination of import duties on industrial products of origin and the non-introduction of future such duties.

The Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation signed in 2006 and currently in force, an advanced version of the previous free trade agreement, actually regulates bilateral economic relations. The 2006 Agreement aims to promote cooperation, particularly in the following areas: "machinery construction; energy; mineral resources; infrastructure and transportation in the oil and natural gas sector; chemical and petrochemical industry; metal industry; automotive industry and components; food industry; transport; information technology and telecommunications; tourism; finance; regional economic cooperation."⁵⁰

The implementation of the Romania-Türkiye Strategic Partnership, announced in 2011, received a decisive impulse through the Action Plan for Partnership implementation, finalised and signed in 2013 in Bucharest. In that context, "State Secretary Luminița Odobescu declared that the completion of the Action Plan for the Strategic Partnership between Romania and Türkiye is yet another example of the excellent and extensive bilateral relations between the two countries and of the common interest in promoting sectoral projects and initiatives in multiple fields."⁵¹ Officials from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised that "the Action Plan focuses on intensifying cooperation

⁴⁷ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Türkiye and Romania", <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-romania.en.mfa>.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ "Acordul de comerț liber între România și Republica Turcia din 29.04.1997", in *Monitorul Oficial*, Part I, no. 373, 22 December 1997.

⁵⁰ "Acordul între Guvernul României și Guvernul Republicii Turcia cu privire la cooperarea economică și tehnică din 01.02.2006", in *Monitorul Oficial, Partea I*, no. 644, 26 July 2006.

⁵¹ "MAE: Planul de Acțiune pentru implementarea Parteneriatul Strategic România-Turcia a fost finalizat", in *Adevărul*, <https://adevarul.ro/politica/mae-planul-de-actiune-pentru-implementarea-1185781.html>.

between the two partners, both at the political level and in various sectoral areas, such as the economy, energy, transportation, internal affairs, defence, culture, education, social affairs, tourism, etc.⁵²

However, available trade statistics from official Turkish sources show an imbalance in trade that has been accelerating in recent years. The surplus on the Turkish side has increased, especially after 2019, and the Covid-19 pandemic has not slowed down this trend.⁵³

YEAR	EXPORTS (from Türkiye to Romania; million \$)	IMPORTS (from Romania to Türkiye; million \$)	COMMERCIAL BALANCE (Türkiye's perspective)	TOTAL VOLUME
2019	4.073	2.770	+1.303	6.843
2020	3.893	2.769	+1.124	6.662
2021	5.175	3.434	+1.740	8.609
2022	6.950	3.335	+3.615	10.285

Source: Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, „Relations between Türkiye and Romania”, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-romania.en.mfa>

Economic bilateral relations have been strengthened through a new format of bilateral cooperation complementary to the Strategic Partnership, namely the “Operating Regulation of the JETCO mechanism” (Joint Economic Trade Cooperation Committee). It was designed as a bilateral dialogue instrument involving the business environment to facilitate direct contact between Romanian and Turkish businessmen, enabling the identification of new niches for expanding exchanges. The regulation was signed on February 8, 2019, by the trade ministers of both countries. Ms Ruhsar Pekcan, the Turkish Minister of Trade, stated at the time that “the political, economic, and trade relations between Romania and Türkiye have been positively influenced by the way businessmen conduct their activities. We need to establish how we can raise the level of this synergy and how to diversify it into other sectors. I am confident that, following these meetings, bilateral economic and trade relations will evolve.”⁵⁴ It remains to be seen whether this latest bilateral agreement will also contribute to reducing the negative trade balance for Romania, considering that Romania is a member of the European common market while Türkiye is still awaiting the modernisation of its customs union with the EU.

CONCLUSIONS

We have constructed this brief analysis around the following main question: what are the concrete advantages of the strategic partnership with Türkiye in developing Romania’s

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Relations between Türkiye and Romania”, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-romania.en.mfa>.

⁵⁴ Romanian Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, “Relațiile economice România-Turcia, relansate printr-un nou format de cooperare bilaterală”, 8 February 2019, <http://www.imm.gov.ro/2019/02/08/relatiile-economice-romania-turciarelansate-printr-un-nou-format-de-cooperare-bilateralala/>.

policy strategy for the Black Sea region? Breaking it down into two sub-questions has led to the analysis of data and the answers provided in the two main sections above. The conclusions can thus provide the expected main response here. Firstly, it must be acknowledged that the economic and military potential differences between the two countries limit Romania from obtaining significant benefits from the Strategic Partnership with Türkiye. However, the institutional structure (NATO, EU) and the market (EU) to which both parties adhere can and should be utilised more extensively to balance the relationship.

Bucharest is consistent in its regional approach to its Black Sea strategy. At the same time, Türkiye has intensified cooperation with its neighbours but has distanced itself from the European Union and, to some extent, from NATO, opting for the role of a strategic player in the Black Sea.

For Romania, the security benefits of cooperation with Türkiye are verifiable through the Partnership for Peace and constant support for NATO membership and integration within the alliance. Additionally, the inclusion of Türkiye in multilateral cooperation formats such as the Bucharest – 9 can be considered. The success of the Romania–Türkiye–Poland Trilateral can be an example, provided that it operates for the benefit of all parties.

The advantages gained in the commercial domain are not yet sufficiently evident for Romania to claim that it is maximising the efficiency of this strategic partnership. On the other hand, due to economic development through exports, Türkiye obtains a wider range of benefits from the Strategic Partnership, as demonstrated by the growing trade surplus in its relations with Romania and the balance in trade with the EU. However, commercial relations remain the primary area where the strategic partnership can advance through a common vision, as security aspects create divergences not only between Türkiye and Romania but especially between Türkiye and the United States or Türkiye and NATO.

The Strategic Partnership is not shaped solely by Romania's vision of the Black Sea because this vision is not shared by Türkiye. While Romania proposes internationalisation in terms of both security and commerce, Türkiye subordinates its strategy to a regional vision, aiming to transition from being a game-changer to a regional actor.

A positive turning point for Romania could be the regional approach to the Black Sea strategy, facilitating discussions with regional partners, including Türkiye, and even their acceptance of a form of internationalisation of the sea. The fundamental condition, including within the Strategic Partnership, would be for the proposed solutions to bring benefits to both parties and other partners in the region.

The Strategic Partnership with Bulgaria (March 2023) can be used as an important step in this direction, given the increasing importance of Greece for South–North energy flows. In connection with other forms of cooperation, including the Bucharest – 9 or the Three Seas Initiative, such inclusive approaches can lead to inclusive solutions. However, addressing the reduction of the negative trade balance in the relationship with Türkiye should be approached in a coordinated manner within the bilateral strategic partnership and the EU's trade policy towards Türkiye, particularly in the negotiations for the modernisation of the customs union. Bucharest must apply all the lessons learned so far to achieve favourable conditions for a more balanced trade relationship with Ankara.

AZERBAIJAN-EU RELATIONS IN THE BROADER CASPIAN AND BLACK SEA REGION: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES AND ENHANCING COOPERATION

Farid Shafiyev, Vasif Huseynov, Shahmar Hajiyev

ABSTRACT: The war between Russia and Ukraine has had major implications for Azerbaijan-EU relations, which have been marked by expanding mutual trade and agreements on a range of energy and connectivity projects. EU-Azerbaijan relations have developed since the early 1990s into several areas such as political dialogue, trade, investment and energy. Now they are preparing for a new phase that will strengthen their cooperation, which is the upgrading of the framework of relations.

Moreover, the war has boosted the role of the international trans-Caspian transport route, which serves as an alternative for linking Europe's energy with the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Azerbaijan remains the main gas export partner for most European countries. Many of them, including Romania, are interested in supplying natural gas from Azerbaijan under the Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Energy Partnership between Europe and Azerbaijan, signed in July 2022, which implies growing gas exports and green energy (electricity). However, there are some political impediments that could jeopardise the strengthening of Azerbaijan and EU relations, as well as the full exploitation of the resources available in the Black Sea-Caspian region. According to the authors, the key solution is a united EU position regarding the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, a pivotal moment in European history unfolded as the war between Russia and Ukraine sparked widespread uncertainty and instability in global international relations, particularly in regional countries. This conflict also had far-reaching consequences for the South Caucasus and for the relations of states in the region with the European Union (EU). The war prompted increased engagement from the EU, as it succeeded to play a proactive and significant mediating role in the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Concurrently, the South Caucasus has assumed a pivotal role as a transit passage in the transportation route between Europe and Asia, and as a source of energy imports. These developments entailed overwhelming implications for the relations between Azerbaijan and the EU, particularly between Azerbaijan and Eastern Europe across the Black Sea. This is exemplified by the record-high level of mutual trade and the agreements on a series of energy and connectivity projects between the sides in the past year.

Notably, Azerbaijan's natural gas exports to Europe increased by 12.3% from 2021, reaching 11.4 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 2022, and a further agreement has been reached with the EU to increase the volume of exports to over 20 bcm by 2027. Both sides have also reached an understanding on electricity exports from Azerbaijan to Europe. Furthermore, the war has heightened the significance of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), also known as the Middle Corridor, which serves as an alternative to the trans-Russia connection for transporting goods between Europe and Asia. There have been also challenges in the relations between Azerbaijan and the EU, on the issues related to the normalisation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan relations in particular. However, it is important that both sides have been careful to avoid elements that could undermine their overall relationship.

This article is primarily focused on the evolution and future prospects concerning cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU, particularly, the member states of the Union from the eastern part of the Balkans. It presents the most important recent developments in these relations in the areas of energy and connectivity and argues that the geopolitical situation in the region necessitates and opens up opportunities for closer ties between the sides.

THE BLACK SEA REGION CONNECTS THE EU POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY WITH THE CASPIAN REGION

Azerbaijan is located in a complicated geographical region, being the only country in the world that has borders with both Russia and Iran. This geographic situation entails a wide range of risks and threats to the national security and sovereignty of the country. Russia views Azerbaijan as part of its sphere of influence and expects Baku to act accordingly. Ideally, Russia wants to see Azerbaijan joining the Moscow-led regional integration projects including the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). On the other hand, Iran views Azerbaijan as part of its historical territory and dreams of carrying out a pro-Iranian Islamic revolution in Baku. Azerbaijan's geopolitical situation was further complicated by the occupation of twenty percent of its territories by Armenia in the early 1990s, which fed into Russia's hands as a conflict to be manipulated to exert influence on the region. Russia managed to preserve its role in this context after the liberation of the occupied territories by Azerbaijan in the 44 Day War (September 27 – November 10, 2020) by deploying its peacekeeping mission to the presently Armenian-populated Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Under these circumstances, the EU has been one of the few actors along with Türkiye and the United States that has helped Azerbaijan to develop economic independence and safeguard its sovereignty.

The Black Sea region is a crucial junction that connects the EU politically and economically to the South Caucasus and Central Asia, commonly referred to as the Caspian region. The region boasts extensive natural resources, particularly oil and gas, making it a potential supply source for Europe. Azerbaijan's relations with the European Union (EU) have evolved along a progressive path since the start of bilateral

communications in the early 1990s. Since then, the two sides have achieved a wide range of accomplishments in the areas of political dialogue, trade, investment, economy, culture, etc. Today, Azerbaijan and the EU are approaching the end of negotiations to upgrade the framework of their relations. This is currently based on the EU-Azerbaijan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, signed in 1996, that entered into force in 1999. The sides are currently negotiating a new framework agreement, which is likely to be signed in the near future.

Relations between the two parties have been reinforced by the growing engagement of the EU with the South Caucasus since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. During this period, the EU has become the major mediator in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace negotiations and has regularly organised high-level contacts between the two countries and achieved some important breakthroughs. The EU's growing role in this process, in parallel to Russia's distraction due to its war against Ukraine, raised some hopes in the South Caucasus that Brussels could replace Moscow as an honest broker between Baku and Yerevan which would lead to a major breakthrough since it is widely believed that Russia manipulates this conflict and is not genuinely interested in a complete settlement.

To fully exploit the potential of the Black Sea-Caspian region, European countries should adopt a unified approach to the fundamental principles of international law, as well as security and political engagement. Unfortunately, the approach of European countries to issues related to territorial integrity, sovereign borders, and ethnic minorities has varied depending on their political preferences.

For instance, the reaction of some European politicians, including the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Joseph Borrel, to the installation of a border crossing post at the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in the section of the Lachin-Khankendi road on April 23, 2023, was seen in Azerbaijan as a manifestation of double standards. In his reaction to Azerbaijan's action, Borrel tweeted that, "Azerbaijan establishing unilaterally a checkpoint along Lachin corridor runs counter to EU calls for reducing tensions and solving issues by dialogue." It is unclear on what legal basis, supported by international law and precedent, Azerbaijan is expected to grant access to its territory without the presence of border crossing posts. There is not a single country in the world that gives its ethnic minority access to the outside world without border and customs control. No one should expect Azerbaijan to make an exception in this respect.

It is also important for the EU to subdue the impact of the pro-Armenian forces on its policies towards the region, as it threatens the EU's image in the region and its acceptance as a neutral actor. This threat started to be felt more in late 2022 as the EU took over the major mediator role between Armenia and Azerbaijan. France's intervention in the EU-mediated talks using its influential role within the EU negatively affected the peace process and the role of the EU thereby.

France has a rather negative image in Azerbaijan in the context of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, as the political leaders of this country, where half a million Armenians live, have always demonstrated a clear bias against Azerbaijan. It might

suffice to note that both chambers of the French parliament recognised the separatist regime established in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan as an independent state after the 44-Day War, although even Armenia itself never recognised it so. Therefore, France's intervention in the EU-mediated peace talks and the attempt of the French President to participate at these talks along with the European Council President Charles Michel are unacceptable for the Azerbaijani side.

Protesting this attempt of the French President, Baku cancelled the next round of the peace negotiations which were scheduled for December 7, 2022, in Brussels. The European Union, hence, needs to protect its neutral image in its policies towards the South Caucasus and make a genuine contribution to the peace efforts between Baku and Yerevan. This is indeed high time for the EU to reconsider its policies with respect to the countries of the region and stand with international law and norms even when it appears at odds with the parochial interests of some member states.

In this context, *the Black Sea*, a meeting point between Russia and NATO, with three countries (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) aspiring to become members of Euro-Atlantic institutions, has enormous potential to serve as a bridge between the countries of the South Caucasus and the EU, not only in energy and connectivity spheres but also in the geopolitical alignment. The export of Azerbaijan's natural gas and renewable energy to Europe, as well as the transit opportunities Azerbaijan provides to the Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to export their energy to Europe, is of noteworthy geopolitical importance. These initiatives have transformed the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), also known as the Middle Corridor, into a geopolitical corridor connecting the countries along this passage and providing them a geopolitical alternative.

Hence, against the backdrop of the efforts to bypass Russia in transportation between Europe and Asia, it is of great importance for the European Union to develop connections with the South Caucasus and Central Asia. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the EU has become an active investor in the projects along the Middle Corridor. A recent study by European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) concluded that an immediate investment of €3.5 billion is required to upgrade the infrastructure along this corridor and increase its capabilities.

The participating countries made a series of initiatives in 2022 to increase the capacity of the corridor and to overcome the challenges related to limited port capacities, cross-border delays and transportation costs. On July 5, a quadrilateral coordination council was established among Türkiye, Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary for joint investment and improving cargo capacity and infrastructure, which will be critical for the optimization of the section of the route passing through southern Europe. On November 25, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Transport from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Türkiye signed a "Road Map for 2022-2027" for the development and operation of the Middle Corridor. In early December, the first train cargo from Uzbekistan reached the Black Sea passing through the Caspian Sea and the South Caucasus marking the opening of a new chapter in regional connectivity.

Keeping the momentum, in April 2023, in the course of the Azerbaijani president's visit to Kazakhstan, the leaders of the two countries reached additional agreements regarding the shipment of Kazakhstani oil via Azerbaijani pipelines, which adds a new dimension to the Middle Corridor. The need for this appeared due to the complications Kazakhstan faced with transiting its oil via the trans-Russia Caspian Pipeline Consortium, which carried two-thirds of Kazakhstani oil to global markets, in 2022. In March 2023, the State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) announced the initiation of transporting Kazakhstani oil via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. This connection between Central Asia and Europe across the South Caucasus and the Black Sea is likely to top the agenda of the relations among the participating countries in the years to come.

AZERBAIJAN IS THE MAJOR TRADING PARTNER OF THE EU IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

The EU and Azerbaijan have developed successful cooperation in various sectors. Today the EU is the main investor in Azerbaijan's non-oil sector. The EU is a key reform partner in Azerbaijan and brings the best practices and experience to a wide range of sectors. Azerbaijan is one of the main beneficiaries of the EU's Twinning instrument, benefiting from peer-to-peer training and exchanges with members of public administrations of EU member states. Over the 15 years since the beginning of the EU Delegation's operations in Azerbaijan, the EU has financed approximately 400 projects valued at €224 million (\$238 million). These initiatives have included more than 50 twinning projects, which have involved experts and public agencies from EU member states, as well as governmental institutions in Azerbaijan.¹

In 2021, over 13,000 SMEs were supported through the EU4Business initiative in Azerbaijan. This generated an extra €63 million in income, more than 2,000 new jobs, and increased the participants' exports by 8%. The EU supports Azerbaijan with concrete investment to enhance the country's economic diversification and accelerate the green and digital transition. For instance, the EU supports important projects such as "Port of Baku as a sustainable hub for the movement of goods and services"; "Digitalization of transport corridors in Azerbaijan"; "Supporting the competitiveness of 25,000 startups and SMEs"; "Enable rural development and economic growth in the region"; and "Invest in sustainable infrastructure and solutions for smarter and greener cities."²

The EU is Azerbaijan's main trading partner, biggest export and import market, and the largest investor in the country. Analyses of the trade structure between the Union and Azerbaijan reveal that the EU imports from Azerbaijan mainly mineral fuels, lubricants, and related materials. EU's imports from Azerbaijan include also food and live animals, chemicals and related products, and certain manufactured goods. EU's exports

¹ Caspian News, "EU-Azerbaijan Trade Turnover Reaches Record High in 2022", February 22, 2023. Available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/eu-azerbaijan-trade-turnover-reaches-record-high-in-2022-2023-2-21-0/> (accessed: April 2, 2023)

² Eastern Partnership (EaP), "The European Union and Azerbaijan", PDF (2022). Available at: <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/EaP%20factograph%20Azerbaijan-12.2022-v3.pdf> (accessed: April 4, 2023)

to Azerbaijan are dominated by machinery and transport equipment but include also chemicals and related products, manufactured goods and articles, food and live animals.³

Azerbaijan has been supplying natural gas to European energy markets since December 2020, and this has increased the value of Azerbaijani exports to Europe substantially. According to Peter Michalko, Head of the European Union Delegation to Azerbaijan, "the EU became Azerbaijan's strongest trade partner in 2022. 52% of Azerbaijan's foreign trade is with the European Union. At the same time, 65.6% of Azerbaijani exports go to the EU market. The mutual EU-Azerbaijan trade reached a record high level."⁴ It can be clearly seen that trade turnover between the EU and Azerbaijan is increasing year on year, and Azerbaijan is the EU's largest trading partner in the South Caucasus.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS IN THE FIELD OF ENERGY

Amid European efforts to reduce dependency on Russia in the energy and connectivity fields, Azerbaijan offers some alternatives. For example, a ten-point plan to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas, proposed by the International Energy Agency in the early months of the Russia-Ukraine war, included Azerbaijan as an alternative source in this context. With vast natural resources, especially oil and gas, Azerbaijan represents a new supply source for Europe. After Western sanctions on Russian crude oil, as well as the \$60 per barrel price cap on Russian seaborne oil, Azerbaijan increased oil supplies to European markets. In January 2023, 67 percent of the 2.246 million tons of crude oil exported by the country went to eight EU countries. During this one-month period, Italy alone imported 849,000 tons from Azerbaijan. The other European countries supplied were Germany, Czechia, Ireland, Romania, Austria, Greece, and Spain.⁵

Another key milestone in energy cooperation is the export of natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe. The Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) established strong energy cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan and enabled Azerbaijan to directly export natural gas to EU energy markets. Today, Azerbaijan is gradually increasing its gas exports. In 2021, the country exported around 19 bcm of gas; in 2022, the figure was 22.6 bcm; and in 2023 gas exports are expected to be about 24.5 bcm. Last year, approximately 11.4 bcm of gas were delivered to Europe.⁶ During January-March 2023 natural gas export increased by 11.2%. During this period, 2.9 bcm of gas was exported to European energy markets, 2.7 bcm to Türkiye, and 0.9 bcm to Georgia.⁷

³ An official website of the European Union, "EU trade relations with Azerbaijan. Facts, figures and latest developments", Available at: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/azerbaijan_en (accessed: April 26, 2023)

⁴ EU NeighborsEast, "EU-Azerbaijan trade reaches highest level in 2022" (February 23, 2023). Available at: <https://eunighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/eu-azerbaijan-trade-reaches-highest-level-in-2022/> (accessed: April 5, 2023)

⁵ Eurasianet, "Azerbaijan's oil exports restart amid high demand in Europe" (February 16, 2023). Available at: <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijans-oil-exports-restart-amid-high-demand-in-europe> (accessed: April 10, 2023)

⁶ Caspian News, "Azerbaijan Boosts Gas Supplies to European Markets", February 6, 2023. Available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-boosts-gas-supplies-to-european-markets-2023-2-6-0/> (accessed: April 12, 2023)

⁷ APA, "Azerbaijan's gas export increases by more than 11% in IQ2023", April 11, 2023). Available at: <https://apa.az/en/energy-and-industry/azerbaijans-gas-export-increases-by-more-than-11-in-iq2023-400614> (accessed: April 15, 2023)

Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) is the first pipeline supplying Caspian gas to Europe. For Europe, TAP provides, first and foremost, a diversification of gas sources and supply routes. Azerbaijani gas supplies will reach southeastern, central and western Europe, also regions that have a high dependence on a few gas suppliers. In addition, TAP supports gas interconnectors in Europe such as the IGB interconnector between Greece and Bulgaria. Moreover, for southeastern Europe, TAP can provide an exit point to the planned Ionian Adriatic Pipeline (IAP) to link to markets in Croatia, Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In recent years, intensive negotiations have taken place between the EU and Azerbaijan to explore possibilities for increasing the export of Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe, and for cooperation in the field of green energy. To this end, the “Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy” between Azerbaijan and Europe, signed on July 18, 2022, set the basis for the growth in the export of natural gas and green energy from Azerbaijan. According to the signed MoU, Azerbaijan will increase imports of Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe by at least 20 billion cubic meters (bcm) per year by 2027.⁸

After signing this important document, many member states of the EU aim to buy Azerbaijani gas and diversify their energy sources and supply routes. Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Albania, and others are also interested in importing Azerbaijani gas as soon as possible. Toward this end, Azerbaijan and Romania have signed an agreement on gas supply. According to the agreement between SOCAR and Romgaz S.A., the supply of Azerbaijani natural gas was to start from January 2023. This agreement was a short-term spot contract that envisaged SOCAR supplying about 300 million cubic meters of gas from January 1 to April 1, 2023. In February 2023, Azerbaijan and Romania signed another gas purchase contract for the supply of additional volumes of Azeri gas during 2023–2024. According to this agreement, up to 1 bcm of gas will be delivered from Azerbaijan to Romania in this period.⁹ Moreover, the “MoU for encouraging cooperation among Bulgartransgaz (Bulgaria), Transgaz (Romania), FGSZ (Hungary), Eustream (Slovakia) and the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR)” has been signed in Sofia.¹⁰ With the signing of such new energy agreements, the geographic scope of the SGC is expanding and, consequently, Azerbaijani natural gas is reaching new markets.

⁸ Official website of the European Commission, “EU and Azerbaijan enhance bilateral relations, including energy cooperation.” Available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-azerbaijan-enhance-bilateral-relations-including-energy-cooperation-2022-07-18_en (accessed: April 15, 2023)

⁹ Report, “New gas contract enters into force between Azerbaijan and Romania” (April 14, 2023). Available at: <https://report.az/en/energy/new-gas-contract-enters-into-force-between-azerbaijan-and-romania/> (accessed: April 13, 2023)

¹⁰ AZERTAC, “The distribution system operators of Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and SOCAR signed Memorandum of Understanding in Sofia. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev attended the signing ceremony” (April 25, 2023). Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/The_transmission_system_operators_of_Bulgaria_Romania_Hungary_Slovakia_and_SOCAR_signed_Memorandum_of_Understanding_in_Sofia_President_Ilham_Aliyev_attended_the_signing_ceremony_VIDEO-2586152 (accessed: April 26, 2023)

SUMMIT: THREE SEAS INITIATIVE IN BUCHAREST, SEPTEMBER 2023

Claudiu Codreanu

ABSTRACT: *The eighth summit of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) will take place in Bucharest in September 2023. The latest developments in the region announce significant discussions between participating states, and that the issue of Russia's war against Ukraine will take a central place once again. However, shortcomings of the Initiative's proposed projects, lack of efficient communication and scarce funding will also be addressed. Considering Romania's recent actions in the region, namely the consolidation of its relationship with Poland and the trilateral formed with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, it is expected that the summit could generate concrete results and special attention to security issues. More funding, a more coherent alignment with EU's policies in the region, more involvement from the US and developing a 3SI common policy regarding Ukraine's post-war reconstruction represent possible targets of the incoming summit.*

The eighth summit of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) will take place in Bucharest in September 2023, five years after the last meeting of the platform in the capital of Romania. At the same time, the Business Forum of the Three Seas Initiative will also be organised in Bucharest. Therefore, Romania becomes the first country to host the 3SI summit for the second time.

The initiative was formulated in 2015 as a flexible platform with the purpose of addressing the division between Eastern and Western EU, and also to enhance connectivity along the North-South corridor. The Three Seas Initiative brings together the Eastern European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary), connecting the northern and southern parts of the region and the three adjacent seas (Adriatic Sea, Black Sea, Baltic Sea). The main objectives of the platform, announced following the 2022 summit, are economic growth, resilience-building in the region, management of the geopolitical situation, attracting investor interest to the member countries, enhancing energy security, and ensuring sustainable and efficient connectivity.¹ The initiative complements the European Union's agenda in the region and contributes to achieving the EU's objectives regarding improved connectivity, infrastructure development, and energy security, playing an important role in supporting countries aspiring to join the EU². Therefore, the joint declaration adopted by the 3SI after the Riga summit emphasises on increasing the cohesion of the European Union (including aligning EU financial instruments and initiatives with 3SI projects),

¹"Three Seas Initiative – Objectives", Three Seas, <https://3seas.eu/about/objectives>, accessed on 27 April 2023.

²Gorana Grgić, "The Changing Dynamics of Regionalism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of the Three Seas Initiative", in *Geopolitics*, 28, no. 1: 216-238, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2021.1881489>.

improving transatlantic connections, promoting economic development, and enhancing regional infrastructure.³

Russia's war against Ukraine has fundamentally changed the security situation in Europe, especially in the eastern region, affecting the views, behaviour, and policies of states in the fields of foreign affairs and security. In this context, the Three Seas Initiative can play an important role in developing a framework for managing transnational challenges.

CONTEXT OF THE BUCHAREST SUMMIT

Russia's war against Ukraine has led to the consolidation of European and transatlantic unity, but has also highlighted the differences among EU member states in their foreign policies towards Ukraine and the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU (e.g., the case of Hungary and the deterioration of Budapest-Warsaw relations and even the Visegrad Group). At the 2022 3SI summit in Riga, Ukraine was granted partner status within the platform, with President Volodymyr Zelensky stating that his country can join energy and infrastructure initiatives. Similarly, the states gathered under the 3SI stated, in the joint declaration adopted after the summit, that they will support Ukraine's reconstruction efforts and its EU accession aspirations, as well as Kyiv's participation in the Initiative's infrastructure projects.

Therefore, the forum can serve as a counterbalance to authoritarian influence in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood (and even within the EU itself) and accelerate the European integration of aspiring states from the former Soviet space and the Western Balkans. In recent years, member states have made various decisions to distance themselves from authoritarian influences such as Russia. Poland, for example, is reducing its dependence on Russian gas, and the Baltic countries have completely stopped importing gas from Russia. Additionally, the 3SI can serve as a counterbalance to China's projects in the region, such as the 17+1 (now 14+1 Platform, with the Baltic countries having withdrawn from the former), and the Belt and Road Initiative.

However, one of the biggest challenges for the 3SI is the effort to institutionalise the platform as an international organisation and secure more substantial funding from member states, countries, international organisations, and the private sector. By June 2022, just over 1.3 billion euros had been raised, with the goal being to reach 3-5 billion euros, although the amount remains far below the region's development needs.⁴

Infrastructure investments alone require over 500 billion euros to improve and close the gap with Western EU countries.⁵ Following the Riga summit, the US International

³ "Three Seas Initiative – Joint Declaration of the Seventh Three Seas Summit", in *Three Seas*, <https://3seas.eu/about/joint-declaration-of-the-seventh-three-seas-initiative-summit>, accessed on 27 April 2023.

⁴ "DFC and the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund Agree to Term Sheet for up to \$300 Million in Financing", US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), <https://www.dfc.gov/media/press-releases/dfc-and-three-seasinitiative-investment-fund-agree-term-sheet-300-million>, accessed on 27 April 2023.

⁵ "Reports – Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund", *Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund*, <https://3siif.eu/potential/>, accessed on 27 April 2023.

Development Finance Corporation (DFC) announced that it would provide \$300 million to finance the 3SI Investment Fund, after initially pledging \$1 billion. The Fund was launched in 2019 and seeks financial support from member states, observer states, and the private sector. According to the 3SI website, half of the proposed projects are related to the transportation sector, over one-third are in the energy sector, and only 14% are in the digital sector.

The main projects proposed in the transportation sector include the development of a north-south highway in the region (*Via Carpatia*), the construction of a Baltic-Adriatic road and rail corridor, and the Rail2Sea railway route aiming to connect the ports of Gdansk (Poland) and Constanta (Romania).

The 3SI emphasises on the development of railways, particularly as part of the EU project Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). In addition to social and economic aspects, infrastructure consolidation is essential for increasing NATO's military presence in the region and facilitating military mobility, which has become more relevant following Russia's actions.

In the energy sector, notable initiatives include infrastructure development for liquefied natural gas (LNG) with pipelines and maritime terminals in Poland and Croatia, supporting the connection of other countries to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline between Greece and Italy, as well as the exploitation and transportation of natural gas from Romanian reserves in the Black Sea.

MAIN EXPECTATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Currently, the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) represents an informal platform of states, but there is a perspective for it to become an international organisation over time. Important steps towards institutionalising the 3SI and increasing the platform's relevance have been taken in recent years, such as the formation of the Parliamentary Forum in 2021 and the Civil Society Forum in 2022. Additionally, the 3SI needs to attract partners from the transatlantic space and liberal democracies, such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, South Korea, or Australia. However, even if it does not become an international organisation in the short term, the Initiative can be compared to other similar platforms such as the Visegrad Group, the Nordic Council, or the Bucharest 9 format. It can play a role in bringing participating states closer together, increasing the convergence of their foreign policies, solidifying European integration, and developing and promoting a common policy among Eastern EU states on certain, essential topics.

The Three Seas Initiative needs to accelerate the development of energy and transportation infrastructure along the north-south axis. It should contribute to the consolidation of security in the Black Sea region and support Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in their path towards EU membership. Therefore, the 3SI also requires concrete institutionalisation, increased financial contributions from participating states, and more effective communication in the region.

The platform could have a more significant role in managing and mitigating the effects of climate change. Despite committing to green transition and promoting

renewable energy, relatively few of the Initiative's energy projects focus on these aspects, with most of them targeting natural gas. Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on green energy. One possible initiative could aim to develop infrastructure for hydrogen production and transportation, building on existing collaboration between Germany and Ukraine that could be extended to the 3SI countries.

In the digital field, the focus on developing online trade and investment, accelerating innovation, building communication and data transfer infrastructure must be accompanied by initiatives that address cybersecurity in the member states, particularly given the malicious activities in cyberspace by Russia and other state and non-state actors. In this regard, the 3SI has proposed a plan for a Digital Highway of the Three Seas, aiming to connect the region through communication infrastructure, fibre optics, and 5G networks, as well as developing resilient digital infrastructure against cyber threats.

Therefore, the Bucharest Summit could address regional security, energy security, the transition to green energy, and economic cooperation with the United States. It will also address the strengthening of partnerships with neighbouring Eastern European countries to support their European integration processes.

The 3SI Civil Society Forum in 2022 called for the integration of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia with a clear status within the Initiative, such as associate or observer. In this context, the September 2023 summit could lead to closer engagement of these three states with the 3SI and the consolidation of the partnerships with Germany, the United States, Greece, or North Macedonia. Additionally, there may be increased involvement from Japan, the United Arab Emirates, or Singapore in 3SI projects.

Romania considers the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) both an important economic institution and a high-potential security instrument in the region. According to statements made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bogdan Aurescu, on the sidelines of the 2023 Munich Security Conference, the Rail2Sea and *Via Carpathia* projects are of great importance to Romania.⁶ The Minister added that Bucharest aims to consolidate the 3SI as a political platform and increase its capacity to attract investments for the development and security of the region. He emphasised that these initiatives and investments need to be integrated within a European and Euro-Atlantic framework by aligning the 3SI initiatives with those of the EU.

Due to Russia's war against Ukraine, security issues will once again be at the centre of attention for summit participants, and projects related to energy, digital infrastructure, and transportation are already closely linked to security aspects. The 3SI region has become essential in supporting Ukraine in the face of Russia's aggression, including providing military aid, transferring NATO troops and equipment to strengthen the alliance's eastern flank, and managing the flow of refugees from Ukraine as well as Ukrainian exports of cereals and food products.

⁶"Aurescu a subliniat, la München, importanța acordată de România Inițiativei celor 3 Mări; un nou summit - în septembrie, la București", Agerpres, 18 February 2023, <https://www.agerpres.ro/politic/2023/02/18/aurescu-a-subliniatla-munchen-importanta-acordata-de-romania-initiativei-celor-3-mari-un-nou-summit-in-septembrie-la-bucuresti--1062423>, accessed on 27 April 2023.

THE ADVISORY MISSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO UKRAINE (EUAM-UKRAINE) *

Anamaria Veronica Fuduli (Șandor)

As a Romanian diplomat, in October 2022, I chose to apply for a position at the Advisory Mission of the European Union to Ukraine (EUAM-Ukraine). I wanted to directly contribute to the efforts of my country and the international community, especially the European Union, in supporting the reform of the civil security sector in this country, which has been severely affected by the violence of Russia's unprovoked and illegal war. In support of my candidacy, I relied on my previous experience within the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA RO). There, I contributed to the preparation and exercise of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, including matters related to the EU-Ukraine relationship, as well as the strengthening of the human resources strategy segment within the MFA RO. Following the interview, I received a favourable decision regarding my selection, and the firm support of the institution where I have worked for the past 15 years, to be sent to Kyiv and carry out my activities as the Head of the Human Resources Reform Unit there. "Have courage!" my colleagues and friends told me. "It's a responsibility," I replied, "and I cannot refuse the opportunity to contribute where it is needed, when it is needed."

The mandate of the Mission, established by a decision of the EU Council in 2014, is to support Ukraine in its commitment to reform its civil security sector by advising the Ukrainian authorities in developing strategies and implementing coherent and comprehensive reforms. The objective is to ensure that the implementation of these reforms results in providing legitimate security services that respect the rule of law and inspire confidence among citizens, fully in line with human rights and fundamental freedoms. Currently, EUAM-Ukraine's priorities are: strengthening the capacity of Ukrainian institutions to investigate and prosecute international crimes, state and national security, criminal justice, combating organised and cross-border crime, community safety, and police organisation. These priorities are cross-cutting and encompass human rights, gender equality, minority rights, digital transformation and innovation, anti-corruption efforts, and ensuring good governance.

Given the events of 2022, namely Russia's unprovoked and illegal war, and Ukraine becoming formally candidate for EU membership, the priorities and structure of the Mission have been adapted from the initial mandate, granted in 2014. Currently, it has the configuration mentioned above. I also consider this context to be particularly relevant in terms of the relations between the European Union and Ukraine, and how the Union can shape Ukraine's future, as well as how Ukraine can influence the priorities and ways of being within the European Union. This is because I believe that these events have influenced the

* This material represents the author's vision and opinion and cannot be considered under any circumstance as the official position of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or EUAM-Ukraine.

daily lives of ordinary people, both Ukrainians and those in the Union, as well as notions of patriotism and the importance of belonging to the Euro-Atlantic community.

In practical terms, the Mission's field of action materialises in activities such as advising Ukrainian authorities in the preparation of essential documents, such as the Comprehensive Strategy for Reforming Law Enforcement Agencies as part of Ukraine's defence and security system for the period 2023-2027 (Comprehensive Reform Strategy), whose adoption and implementation are the very *raison d'être* of EUAM-Ukraine. Additionally, support is provided for the creation of "solidarity corridors" with neighbouring states, including Romania, to facilitate the transit of goods to and from Ukraine, and monitoring the implementation of the Anti-Corruption Program for the period 2023-2025. The Mission's personnel also engage in practical professional training in specific areas, such as combating organised crime, investigating and prosecuting war crimes, and enhancing the resilience and professionalism of personnel working in civil security institutions through training on critical event management, mental health, and psychological first aid.

At the onset of the aggression, the Mission's personnel were evacuated to the Republic of Moldova and then to Poland, with activities being resumed in Kyiv in September 2022. Throughout this period, the Mission continued to be active remotely. Upon returning to the field, some personnel chose to conclude their mission due to security risks, even though the Kyiv area is no longer part of the front line but rather what we refer to as "liberated territories."

I began my activities at the end of January 2023 with enthusiasm and optimism, sincerely believing in the chance for Ukrainians to advance with reforms despite the challenges posed by Russia's aggression. I wanted and still want to be where my contribution can make a difference. I am often asked whether I am afraid. My response refers to the fact that I have confidence in the security procedures for EUAM-Ukraine personnel and I am sure that they will work well in the event of a situation requiring evacuation.

As a way of life, this seems, in many respects, normal, except for the restriction of movement on the streets outside the 24:00-5:00 timeframe, the need to seek shelter during air alerts, avoiding walks in unpaved areas for security reasons and avoiding landmines. Otherwise, all types of services function normally, and life goes on for Ukrainians and for the international personnel deployed here. This was the surprise I discovered on the spot. The locals seem to have overcome the shock of the attack, they understand the situation they are in, have adapted to the new rules and circumstances, and each contributes, through their own efforts, to the resilience of their country. The faces on the streets are not always cheerful, but they are dignified. I remember the first training I attended as a representative of EUAM-Ukraine. I felt humbled in front of the representatives of civil security institutions who had lost colleagues or family members on the front lines and yet were present and interested in learning how they could contribute to the reform of the system they are part of.

The interlocutors from the Ukrainian authorities are grateful for the support received and for our presence in Ukraine. They sincerely believe in the chance of victory, and most of them seem unafraid of the sound of air alerts that can start at any time, in the middle of the day, or in the middle of the night, and last for hours on end. These are everyday aspects... of day and night. The pride of standing up to the enemy from the East and the respect for the heroes and the brave who sacrifice themselves on the front lines are part of their everyday language and motivate them to move forward with heads held high.

On the other hand, from my experience, we, those at EUAM-Ukraine and other European or international partners, try to be attentive to local needs and how they evolve. We coordinate constantly to ensure coherent support. At the same time, we strive to actively listen, and our language and attitude are empathetic. We encourage them, but avoid making unrealistic promises so as not to disappoint them later.

If material and institutional support for resilience-building in the context of the war is provided based on the availability and mandates of European and international partners, including EUAM-Ukraine, from my point of view, the notion of “conditionality” remains relevant and has not lost its consistency in terms of pursuing the necessary progress to verify the fulfilment of criteria for opening EU accession negotiations. From this perspective, I believe it is very clear that a positive decision in this regard will only happen based on merit, namely upon the authorities being able to show concrete results in the required reforms.

Thus, my experience as a member of the Mission combines, in an unprecedented way, personal and professional approaches: the multilateral one – as part of the EU team on the ground – with the bilateral one – working constantly with Ukrainian partners; the diplomatic sphere – the relations with foreign partners, including internal negotiations to identify the Mission’s priorities vis-à-vis them – with the technical one – providing concrete support to improve specific aspects: legislation, procedures, know-how, and best practices in the field of civil security. All of these happen in the current context of a war taking place simultaneously with reform efforts. Therefore, I can only be enthusiastic about being entrusted with the opportunity to fully test my capabilities from all these angles, including as a coordinator at the Mission level, in providing EUAM-Ukraine’s advice in the development of the Action Plan for the Comprehensive Reform Strategy.

Overall, this experience offers me the opportunity to learn and adapt, both as a professional, a female diplomat, and as an ordinary citizen – a person with fears and responsibilities, a mother, daughter, and sister. I delve into new procedures and perspectives every day, whether related to current activities, or to personal security in the context of war. I discover new ways to perceive things, like peace and tranquillity, which I previously considered guaranteed, and I directly experience what dignity and patriotism truly mean. At the same time, I deepen my understanding of the normality that, despite unjustified violence, one can come together and responsibly fulfil duties without victimisation.

Thus, I appreciate that the EU’s exercise of supporting Ukraine’s efforts in the reform of the civil security sector, in the context of Russia’s unprovoked and illegal war, could have a profound effect, first and foremost on Ukraine, through the evolution of institutions and society, rapid adaptation to circumstances, and the adoption of the European model. Moreover, I believe that the effect could also be identified at the level of the European Union and its citizens, as they experience solidarity with the Ukrainian people, learn through concrete examples what resilience and dignity mean in everyday life, and become familiar with the threat and consequences that an autocratic and abusive system, violating international legal norms, can represent/produce. Last, but not least, I appreciate that the experience of European presence at the local level and the demonstrated, constant support can strengthen the level of mutual knowledge and trust, so that when Ukraine joins the EU, both sides will be prepared to function within appropriate parameters in the new format.

THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC ACADEMY - THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL STABILITY

Mihai Constantinescu

“Europe is a garden, while the rest of the world is a jungle.” This phrase has been haunting me since I arrived in Brussels. I’ve tried to find its meaning, but sometimes I looked at it detached and cynical. Even Josep Borrell didn’t seem entirely at ease when he uttered it. It was October 13, 2022, the official opening of the European Diplomatic Academy (EUDA). Borrell had previously received a standard speech, the kind of address that StratCom keeps in storage and only changes the name of the event and the location. However, something radical happened in the High Representative’s office, and he suddenly decided to replace cold phrases with metaphors that would be picked up and circulated by the global media.

The Catalan politician walks alongside Federica Mogherini, former High Representative of the European Union, into the auditorium of the College of Europe in Bruges, under the curious gaze of a few dozen young European diplomats. He quickly gets into character, familiar with the stage, and the choreography is already set. He takes his seat at the lectern in front of a huge panel displaying his name and an endless list of positions: “Josep Borrell Fontelles – High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission.”

“The garden cannot be protected by high walls, as the jungle can overcome any obstacle, no matter how tall the walls may be. Gardeners must venture into the jungle and stop its advance”, Borrell declares, to the astonishment of those who prepared his speech, but not this awkward comparison. Many criticised him for his colonialist, racist, or Eurocentric views. However, Borrell kept his statement despite growing pressure, leaving a bitter taste in Europe and internationally.

Indeed, Europe is a garden, representing the area with the highest indicators of political, economic, cultural, or social development. This status would not have been achieved without the centuries-long campaigns of exploitation carried out by Europeans on other continents. However, it is equally true that the European Union must remain a fervent defender of fundamental rights by diversifying and developing relations with a wide range of actors.

Borrell’s statements make even more sense in the current context, as they were unveiled at a symbolic moment in European foreign policy. Originating from the specialised literature of the 2000s, the project of a European Diplomatic Academy has recently taken shape. Those who have worked closely to establish the academy like to say that Borrell is the heart, while MEP Nacho Sanchez-Amor is the brain. They are somehow right. When he took the role of High Representative, Josep Borrell was viewed with scepticism by member states and EU institutions. In the eyes of many, a politician

at the end of his career, lacking European stature and often holding questionable public positions, cannot be considered a viable option for leading the EU's global assertion strategy. In this hostile context, the idea of creating a European Diplomatic Academy appealed to Borrell, a legacy he could leave behind after his mandate ends in 2024. The need of the EU High Representative to appease critics through a major project coincided with the strategic vision of Sanchez-Amor. As a politician embarking on his first venture in the European Parliament (EP), and an influential member of the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs, Nacho Sanchez-Amor was the one who brought the vision and the implementation framework for the future academy.

On October 13, 2022, nearly six months after the European Parliament decided to finance the pilot project of the European Diplomatic Academy, the frame of this project was detailed in a relatively limited setting. For a period of nine months (September 2022 - May 2023), 40 young diplomats and EU officials went through a unique process of training and professional development.

Accommodated in the heart of Europe, in the picturesque Bruges, the participants engaged in a wide range of exercises and activities aimed at deepening their knowledge and acquiring additional skills in European studies. The program curriculum had a special design, created and implemented by the College of Europe, with standard lectures complemented by simulations and high-level meetings with decision-makers in Brussels.

Thus, going through a rigorous process focused on diplomatic practice, the graduates of the first edition of the academy are capable of both facilitating the relationship between member states and European Union institutions, and promoting common interests and values concerning third parties.

It seems like an ambitious plan, a mechanism that aims to form a bond between national diplomacies and their relations with European institutions. However, in addition to the apparently "idealistic" logic of the project, we are discussing an extremely pragmatic approach. Member states quickly realised that the academy provides an opportunity to reduce the expenses for the trainings of diplomats. The European External Action Service (EEAS) relies on this advantage, offering the foreign ministries a compact group of trained diplomats ready to take up positions in the permanent representations in Brussels at the end of the training months. Additionally, the academy provides a unique context for networking. At the end of the program, the 40 participants will have developed an extensive network of relationships ready to be used in future diplomatic discussions.

But the stakes go beyond national and community borders. In the few months spent alongside the EEAS team, directly responsible for managing the European Diplomatic Academy, I began to attribute different meanings to "gardeners" and the "jungle." The first edition of the academy implicitly targeted states in the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans. Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Turkey, Georgia, and Ukraine responded positively to the EEAS invitation to send young diplomats for training in Brussels. Thus, Borrell's statements begin to take on nuances. We are talking about a European Diplomatic Academy funded from the European Parliament's budget, which

includes diplomats from outside the European Union. By incorporating neighbouring states into a program defining the future of EU foreign and security policy, it sends a clear message: regional crises can only be improved through extensive cooperation, and diplomats must stay a central factor in determining bilateral and multilateral relations. Peace and stability could be built based on relationships established through this program, even in regions such as the Black Sea area, where frozen conflicts and the Russian invasion of Ukraine currently have destructive effects.

Indeed, although is still a pilot project, but with real chances of becoming an independent entity in the EU architecture, the European Diplomatic Academy can become a pillar of regional security, particularly in the Black Sea area. The testimony of these future developments lies in the conception and development approach of EUDA. The desire of EU decision-makers to strengthen an *esprit de corps* beyond the traditional vision of national diplomatic academies and institutes is transposed through a homogeneous set of educational practices.

First, we are discussing the complexity of the curriculum implemented in the academy. The College of Europe, the institution designated through a tender to host the first stage of the pilot program, has developed a plan based on three main sections: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These three aspects intertwine, and the central element is the vision and mission of the European Union at a regional and global level.

The “knowledge” section, perhaps surprisingly, represents a small percentage of the entire program, approximately 20%. The category itself has been divided into thematic areas aimed at familiarising participants with the main branches and areas of action that Brussels considers the core of its policies regarding member states and third parties. The ten main topics were extensively covered in the program, with each dimension allocated between 2 and 4 weeks for in-depth learning. Moreover, lecturers and instructors were mostly selected from the ranks of EU institutions’ practitioners, along with prominent members of the European academic community. The ten thematic areas targeted economic, social, political, cultural, security, and diplomatic aspects, tailored to specific case studies and geographic regions. The main purpose of the “knowledge” section was to familiarise young diplomats with the practices used by the European Union at both the community and international levels, thus facilitating the participants’ adaptation to future diplomatic positions and activities.

However, knowledge can prove to be a limited asset without the development of concrete skills to put it into practice. Therefore, the skills section represents the essence of the curriculum prepared by the College of Europe. Within the training program, participants were involved in an extensive module of simulations. Managing crises in the context of diplomatic missions, engaging with the media, or organising a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council were just a few of the exercises participants had to adapt to. By offering a variety of scenarios and case studies tailored to potential positions that participants will receive at the end of EUDA, the “skills” section provided an ideal framework for developing vital reflexes in both sensitive situations and the day-to-day conduct of diplomatic activities. Numerous exercises in academic writing (policy) and drafting diplomatic documents were also included.

The unique element of the curriculum was driven by the organisers' desire to develop a group with personality. The section dedicated to "attitude" aimed to stimulate critical thinking and creativity in a diverse environment. Throughout the program, at the end of each week, a debriefing session was held in the presence of the current rector of the College of Europe, Federica Mogherini. These activities allowed participants to express themselves freely in a safe space, strengthening their individual capacity for transparent relationships with other group members and, implicitly, the cohesion of the entire team. The method used had the desired effect, as participants developed a bold attitude in the proposed activities, adding dynamism to the entire program.

The additional activities proposed to students clearly indicate the EEAS's ambition to transform EUDA into a security-generating instrument in the extended region of the Eastern Neighbourhood. When organising the tender for the first phase of the academy, the EEAS explicitly stated that the winning institution must provide rapid access to the decision-making arena in Brussels. Therefore, the College of Europe, headquartered in Bruges, had an indisputable advantage. However, the first week of the academy, dedicated to team cohesion development, took place in Natolin, the Polish campus of the college. At that time, in late August 2022, Poland was at the centre of a group of Eastern European states advocating for an assertive stance by the EU and NATO regarding the Kremlin's bloody actions in Ukraine. The decision to send the 40 participants to Poland had an obvious political substrate – the first European generation of diplomats would be an active part of the efforts to manage crises near the borders of the European Union.

As stated by some of the participants, the first week in Natolin was at least surprising: "When we were selected by the foreign ministries to participate in the first edition of the European Diplomatic Academy, we didn't know what to expect. It was an innovative project, and the limited information we received didn't provide us with many answers. We found out that the first week would take place in Natolin and would mainly consist of knowledge exercises. It wasn't mentioned that there would also be a few field visits included in the program. So, in the middle of the week, at six in the morning, a bus was waiting in front of the dormitory. Sleepy and disoriented, we were transported outside of Warsaw. That's how we embarked on two overwhelming visits, one at the Poland-Ukraine border and the other at the Belarusian border." These are just a few of the impressions shared by the participants during the Graduation Ceremony, held on May 9, 2023, at the EEAS headquarters. Not only Joe Biden, Ursula von der Leyen, or other global leaders were present near the war in Ukraine, but also the first generation of the European Diplomatic Academy.

The signal sent by the EEAS was quickly received by the young diplomats. The EU's neighbourhood must be defended and treated with the same seriousness and attention as the interior of the Union. And we were able to observe this during the EUDA graduation ceremony. During the final preparations for the event, I received a message from the College of Europe. The 40 diplomats decided to intervene in the planned program by the EEAS, proposing that the representative from Georgia within EUDA speak at the graduation ceremony on behalf of the group of participants. Although seemingly a small gesture, the proactive attitude of the first generation of EUDA graduates demonstrates

a high degree of empathy, as well as the group's willingness to integrate partners, neighbours, and potential full members of the European Union into any context.

Although not explicitly listed among the main aspects when discussing the strengthening of security in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, EUDA provides all the premises for European success in preventive diplomacy. We are talking about future generations of diplomats, beneficiaries of comprehensive training courses, and, perhaps most importantly, part of a European diplomatic corps formed on the campuses of major European universities. The beneficial effects of these years of preparation will be visible in the medium term when, in crisis situations, the EEAS hopes to have a group of colleagues and friends at the forefront of national and European diplomacy who have shared the same academic space at one point, now collaborating and resolving pressing issues, this time outside the simulation rooms offered by the College of Europe.

And the first signs of success appear sooner than expected by the EEAS. A significant percentage of the 40 young diplomats have remained in Brussels, within the permanent representations and embassies, while some of those who returned to their home countries have taken positions in departments dealing with either European affairs, or the eastern neighbourhood. Furthermore, preparations for the second stage of EUDA, starting in September 2023, reveal a growing interest from EU member states in sending young diplomats to EUDA training internships. Unlike the first edition, all 27 EU member states have responded positively to the EEAS invitation and will send at least one representative.

From a format perspective, the EEAS team took note of the desires of the national foreign ministries for the second edition, and prepared an improved project. To avoid creating personnel crises within national diplomacies, the EEAS decided to divide EUDA into two distinct semesters, with two different batches of participants (September-January/February-June). Additionally, participants will have the opportunity to directly familiarise themselves with the work of the EEAS through a four-week internship in Brussels. However, the consortium that will implement the second edition of the academy will continue to be led by the College of Europe, which offers an ideal combination of academic prestige, facilities, and connectivity.

Therefore, we have enough reasons to be optimistic about the future of European diplomacy, which is shaping up to be essential in joint efforts to maintain a high standard of security in the EU's neighbourhood. The decision of the 27 member states to partially outsource diplomatic training is a strong signal to the entire European project. By building a generation of capable diplomats, ready to handle a significant variety of national and European files, the program gives us hope that member states have understood the depth of the integrated concept of foreign policy and common security. The global and regional interests of the European Union must be seen as an extension of national ambitions, without which no European state can reach its true potential on the international stage.

THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE SECRET AGREEMENT OF MARCH 18, 1915, WITH RUSSIA REGARDING CONSTANTINOPLE AND THE BOSPORUS AND DARDANELLES STRAITS

Valentin-Ioan Fuşcan

Abstract: In the spring of 1915, Great Britain and France concluded with Russia a secret agreement regarding the Constantinople and the Dardanelles straits. The object of this secret agreement was Russia's control over the straits after the war. This article is focused mainly on the political and military evaluations of the London cabinet, which led to the conclusion that such an event would not run counter to the long-term interests of the British Empire.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a holder of extensive possessions in Asia, Great Britain has been interested for a long time in maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire as a barrier against possible Russian expansion.¹ The primary function of the Ottoman Empire, in the British diplomatic view, was to serve as a source of raw materials and a market for a country that had primacy in the industrial revolution. Gradually, the dynamics of relations between the Great Powers with interests in the Balkans and at the mouths of the Lower Danube led to a fundamental change in the importance attributed to the Ottoman Empire by the British government as an instrument for protecting British interests. The consolidation of modern states in the Balkan Peninsula and their resistance to pressures from Russia convinced British diplomacy that the integrity of the Ottoman Empire was no longer a key objective of British foreign policy. The "Bulgarian Crisis" of 1886, caused by the proclamation of the union between Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia and Russia's opposition to this action, resulted in a reassessment of British strategy in Eastern Europe. The London Cabinet concluded that the Balkan states, rather than the Ottoman Empire, could become the main instrument for restraining Russian ambitions in this region of Europe.²

In the last decade of the 19th century, British strategy in Eastern Europe underwent a spectacular twist. The main concern of Great Britain became the issue of naval superiority and the capability of the British fleet to organise large-scale naval operations and successful troop landings in the Straits, in case Russia will impose its dominance over Constantinople. The Franco-Russian Alliance of January 4, 1894, endangered British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean Sea³. The collaboration between France and Russia implied the need

¹ See R.J. Crampton, *The Hollow Detente. Anglo-German Relations in the Balkans, 1911-1914*, George Prior Publishers, London, 1979, p. 12.

² *Ibidem*, p. 13.

³ M.B. Cooper, "British Policy in the Balkans", 1908-9, in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1964), p. 259.

to neutralise not only the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, but also the French fleet in the Mediterranean, based in Toulon. Conclusions drawn by the British Admiralty highlighted the impossibility of countering a joint action by France and Russia and, consequently, the difficulty of ensuring the security of Constantinople.⁴ These factors contributed to the abandonment of the traditional concern for the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, especially since the integrity of the Ottoman Empire did not appear to be genuinely threatened. Moreover, the Austro-Russian agreement of 1897 was, in the view of British diplomacy, a guarantee of the status quo in the Balkan Peninsula, recognised as a necessity by the emperors of Austria-Hungary and Russia.⁵

At the beginning of the 20th century, British foreign policy adopted a new approach. Gradually, the London Cabinet perceived Germany's hegemonic tendencies as a serious threat to the security of British interests on the international stage. This made the Anglo-French rapprochement possible by resolving contentious issues between the two countries, particularly those regarding Egypt and the Suez Canal, which were settled through the London Agreement of April 8, 1904, known as the "Entente Cordiale."⁶ The same concerns of British diplomacy regarding Germany formed the basis for reconsidering the attitude towards Russia and the signing of the Anglo-Russian Agreement on August 31, 1907, in Petrograd, thus solidifying the Triple Entente between Great Britain, France, and Russia.⁷

In the years leading up to the outbreak of World War I, London was concerned about Germany's accelerated organisation of a powerful fleet, which posed a threat to the maritime position of the British Empire.⁸ During the Balkan Wars, as British interests were not fundamentally affected, the government in London offered mediation to facilitate an agreement between the Balkan states. However, as is known, the negotiations between the former belligerents, mediated by Romanian diplomacy, led to the signing of a peace agreement (without the involvement of any major powers) whose validity, particularly regarding the delimitation of borders, was not questioned for a long time. Undoubtedly, this precedent of settling the situation in the Balkans solely by the states in the region greatly affected the pride and interests of the major powers on the eve of the first global conflict.

After the outbreak of World War I, the London Cabinet was forced to reassess British interests along the Danube and in the Balkans. Turkey's alignment with the Central Powers brought about a radical change in London's position. In order to eliminate German presence from the Ottoman space and secure control over economically and strategically significant areas for the British Empire, under Turkish control at the time, the British government engaged in a vast operation aimed at partitioning the Ottoman Empire. The Government in London was concerned with ensuring its predominance in a space that encompassed both segments of maritime communications and the market for British industrial products. At the same time, Great Britain was interested in preventing the human and material resources

⁴ R.J. Crampton, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁵ J.B. Duroselle, *L'Europe de 1815 à nos jours. Vie politique et relations internationales*, Presse Universitaire de France, Paris, 1964, p. 137.

⁶ Nicolae Ciachir and Gheorghe Berca, *Diplomația europeană în epoca modernă*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1984, p. 420.

⁷ J.B. Duroselle, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁸ Sir Edward Grey, *Vicomte de Fallodon, Memoires*, Payot, Paris, 1927, p. 234.

of the Balkan states from being used by Germany, which would have given Berlin a significant advantage in the war of attrition against the Entente Powers. During this time, British diplomacy acted on multiple fronts, attempting to bring about the realisation of a united Balkan bloc. However, these efforts collided with the differing interests of Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Serbia, which could not be reconciled without accepting compromises that entailed territorial concessions that none of these states were willing to accept.

In his study on the Danube and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits issue, FI. AI. Mironescu highlighted Britain's constant interest in Southeast Europe, as manifested in the Black Sea matters.⁹ As a major maritime power, Britain's interests in the Black Sea basin fell within the broader framework of British foreign policy, with the essential principles of ensuring the security of imperial maritime communications in the Commonwealth. This, in fact, constituted the main rationale behind London's concern regarding Russia's expansion at the mouths of the Danube and in the Balkans.¹⁰ Since the first half of the 19th century, Britain had been interested in the grain trade in the Danube Delta area and actively supported the freedom of navigation on the river. The Russian Empire, according to British diplomacy, represented a potential threat to the freedom of navigation on the Danube, and in the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits.¹¹ In the eyes of British naval strategy, the freedom of the Black Sea fell under the general principle of the freedom of the seas.¹²

2. BRITAIN, RUSSIA, AND THE STRAITS ISSUE-GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the Crimean War (1853-1856), one of the main objectives of British diplomacy had been to prevent Russia from occupying Constantinople and the Straits.¹³ During World War I, concerned about the risk of deteriorating relations with the Eastern ally as a result of the naval operations to occupy the Dardanelles Strait by Britain and France, British diplomacy directed its efforts towards safeguarding Russian interests. The consequences for Britain's naval position in the Mediterranean in the event of Russia's occupation of Constantinople and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits were the subject of discussions within the Imperial Defence Committee long before the outbreak of World War I. They formed the basis of British strategy regarding the Straits issue. Moreover, from 1895 to 1914, the traditional conception of British foreign policy opposing Russia's occupation of Constantinople and the Straits underwent a significant reconsideration, with British diplomacy even entertaining the possibility of accepting Russian claims in that direction.¹⁴

On February 14, 1903, Arthur Balfour prepared a particularly interesting report on the conclusions of the discussions held on February 11 in the Imperial Defence Committee regarding relations with Russia concerning the Constantinople issue. Analysing whether the balance of power in the Mediterranean would be affected if Russia gained unrestricted

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives, vol. 130, FI. AI. Mironescu, *Dunărea și Strâmtoarele*, p. 26-29.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 28.

¹³ Sir Edward Grey, *op. cit.*, p. 474. See also Gregory Paget, "The November 1914 Straits Agreement and the Dardanelles-Gallipoli Campaign", in *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, vol. 33, no. 3, December 1987, p. 253.

¹⁴ C. Jay Smith, Jr., "Great Britain and the 1914-1915 Straits Agreement with Russia: The British Promise of November 1914", in *American Historical Review*, vol. 70, no. 4 (July, 1965), p. 1015-1016.

access for its fleet from the Black Sea through the Dardanelles, even though close to other powers, the committee concluded that Russia would gain certain naval advantages without fundamentally altering the strategic position of the British fleet in the Mediterranean.¹⁵

At the same time, the director of British naval intelligence, Prince Louis of Battenberg, prepared a memorandum on these issues. He believed that Russia would not occupy Constantinople, or force the Straits without first securing an alliance with France. However, for Russia to undertake major operations in the Mediterranean, its Black Sea fleet would have had to destroy the British fleet. In conclusion, the Russian occupation of Constantinople would not have significant implications for British interests, as long as the British naval fleet maintained its predominant position.¹⁶

The conclusions of the 1903 meeting of the Imperial Defence Committee were brought back into discussion by Maurice Hankey, Secretary of the Imperial Defence Committee and the War Cabinet, on March 11, 1915, and were studied by Sir Arthur Knyvet Wilson, Admiral of the Fleet. He believed that, unlike the time when the Imperial Defence Committee held the opinion that Russia's occupation of Constantinople would not fundamentally alter Britain's strategic position in the Mediterranean, strategic realities had changed. He drew attention to the fact that a hostile Russia in possession of Constantinople could make communications with Egypt and India via the Mediterranean Sea almost impossible. Furthermore, there was a danger that a powerful submarine force established in the Dardanelles Strait could intercept and destroy ships attempting to sail between Crete and the coast of Africa en route to Alexandria or the Suez Canal. Additionally, the British fleet would face difficulties in fuel supply, and any reinforcements for the defence of Egypt could only be sent through the Red Sea.¹⁷

3. NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND FRANCE WITH RUSSIA REGARDING CONTROL OF THE STRAITS AND THE SECRET AGREEMENT OF MARCH 18, 1915

The first steps towards an agreement regarding Constantinople and the Straits began just a few months after the outbreak of the First World War. In November 1914, Sir Edward Grey and King George V promised Russia that Great Britain would support its old aspirations regarding the former capital of the Byzantine Empire and the Straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles at the end of the war. The British Foreign Secretary verbally informed the Russian ambassador in London, Count Benckendorff, on November 9, 1914, that the fate of Constantinople and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles would be resolved "in accordance with Russia's interests."¹⁸ This was followed by a statement from King George V on November 13, 1914, during a personal meeting with the Russian ambassador in London, expressing his support for Russia's claims to obtain Constantinople.¹⁹

¹⁵ The National Archives, Kew, CAB 24/1, Dept. Records of the Cabinet Office, Series War Cabinet and Cabinet, Piece Papers, nos. 1-46, *Russia and Constantinople*, 11 March 1915, f. 34, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 36, p. 5-6.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*; A.K. Wilson, *Russia and Constantinople*, 15 March 1915, f. 58, p. 2.

¹⁸ Apud Robert J. Kerner, "Russia, the Straits, and Constantinople, 1914-15", in *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 1, no. 3 (September, 1929), p. 407. See also David Trudinger, "The Bear in the Room: Gallipoli, Russia and the First World War", in *War in History*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2022, p. 138.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

To eliminate any misunderstanding regarding Russia's intentions concerning the Straits and Constantinople, and aiming to reach an official agreement with its allies, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Dimitrievich Sazonov presented a memorandum to the French and British ambassadors in Petrograd, Maurice Paléologue and Sir George Buchanan, on March 4, 1915. The memorandum expressed Russia's desire for the issue of Constantinople and the Straits to be definitively settled in line with its traditional aspirations. Russia sought recognition from Great Britain and France of its right to occupy Constantinople, the left bank of the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles, as well as southern Thrace up to the Enos-Midia line. Additionally, Russia wanted to incorporate into its empire the Asian shore between the Bosphorus, the Sakarya River, and a point to be determined in the Gulf of Ismid. In exchange for these concessions, the Russian Empire pledged to consider the special interests of France and Great Britain in the region.²⁰

Russian concerns about the actions of its Western allies in the Dardanelles were echoed by the Japanese military attaché in Russia, Odahiri. On March 3, 1915, he reported discussions in the Duma on this matter, which expressed the belief that the operations in the Dardanelles aimed to prevent Russia from taking possession of Constantinople.²¹ In order to address Russian sensitivities, Sir George Buchanan was tasked by Sir Edward Grey to inform the Russian Foreign Minister that the naval operations in the Dardanelles did not aim to occupy Constantinople to the detriment of the Russian Empire. Britain considered Greek military support in the Gallipoli Peninsula essential for the complete success of the operations. British diplomacy intended to offer the city of Smyrna (Izmir), located in the central and strategic area of the Aegean coast of Anatolia, to Greece in exchange for its intervention.²²

In Greece, the prospect of its army entering Constantinople fuelled public enthusiasm, which supported intervention alongside the allies. It was believed that the Greeks could not remain indifferent to the capture of Constantinople, the "cradle of Hellenism," and that this could not be achieved without Athens' participation.²³ The government led by Venizelos also supported such action. In February, Venizelos promised Britain that Greece would participate with a corps in the occupation of the Gallipoli Peninsula, thereby entering the war against Turkey.

On March 4, 1915, the Crown Council discussed Greece's participation in operations against Turkey. Although the Greek General Staff raised some objections, King Constantine supported this proposal. However, Greek action was conditional upon guarantees against a possible attack from Bulgaria.²⁴ King Constantine, initially in favour of taking action against Turkey, eventually opposed Greece's abandonment of its neutral position.²⁵ This led to Venizelos' resignation, and he was replaced by the Dimitrios Gounaris cabinet, which was pro-

²⁰ CAB 24/9, Papers nos. 301-400, f. 277, p. 1.

²¹ *Documents diplomatiques secrets russes. 1914-1917*, Payot, Paris, 1928, p. 251-252.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 253-254.

²³ *Serviciul Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale*, Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri fonds, file no. 2 (5)/1913, f. 67, telegram no. 258 from 18 February/3 March 1915, Athens, Filodor to Emanoil Porumbaru.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 82, telegram no. 466 from 19 February/4 March 1915, Sofia, Derussi to Emanoil Porumbaru.

²⁵ Yuri Danilov, *La Russie dans la guerre mondiale (1914-1917)*, Payot, Paris, 1927, p. 400; Michael Llewellyn Smith, "Venizelos" Diplomacy, 1910-23: From Balkan Alliance to Greek-Turkish Settlement", in *Eleftherios Venizelos. The Trials of Statesmanship* (edited by Paschalis M. Kitromilides), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2006, p. 155.

German.²⁶ The first act of the new government was to issue a political declaration on March 10, 1915, proclaiming the continuation of Greece's neutrality. The government pledged to respect its alliance obligations at that time, provided its territorial integrity was not compromised.²⁷

Moreover, Russian diplomacy did not agree with the British proposal regarding Greece's involvement in military operations in the Dardanelles.²⁸ The French Foreign Minister, Théophile Delcassé, advocated to the Russian ambassador in Paris, A.P. Izvolsky, the political and military considerations that necessitated Greece's participation alongside the Entente, as well as Italy's involvement, assuring him that Russia, France, and Great Britain would have the final say in the definitive settlement of the Straits issue.²⁹

Minister Sazonov declared to the British Ambassador in Petrograd, Sir George Buchanan, that Italy's entry into the war, accompanied by its naval and military cooperation, had lost most of its strategic value. Furthermore, the Russian Foreign Minister believed that Italy joining the Entente would complicate future peace negotiations.³⁰ However, Great Britain and France supported Italy's participation, considering Russia's viewpoint to be exaggerated. In a telegram on March 4, 1915, to Sir Francis Bertie, the British Ambassador in Paris, Sir Edward Grey stated that Italy and the Balkan states joining the Entente would contribute to a possible speedy conclusion of the war and the collapse of Central Powers' resistance.³¹

On March 8, 1915, the French Ambassador in Petrograd was authorised to inform the Russian Foreign Minister that Russia could rely on the "good will" of the French government regarding Constantinople and the Straits. These issues, along with the broader issue of the East, were to be subject to definitive settlements in the peace treaty of the three allied powers.³²

Regarding British diplomacy, it was taken aback by the magnitude of Russia's demands, considering them to exceed the earlier claims of the Russian Foreign Minister.³³ The British Cabinet met on March 10, 1915, to analyse the Russian memorandum. The War Council's atmosphere was dominated by a piece of information from Sir Edward Grey indicating that if Russia's claims were rejected, Petrograd could conclude a separate peace with Germany.³⁴ The discussions focused on the future security of the British Empire after the war. After Germany's defeat, France and Russia were expected to become the main threats to the security of Great Britain and to its position as a major power both in Europe and globally. To pre-empt the risks that would arise from Russia's occupation of Constantinople, the Admiralty and the War Office proposed establishing a naval base at Alexandretta, the likely

²⁶ Constantin Iordan, *Venizelos și România*, Omonia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 49; C.J. Lowe, "The failure of British Diplomacy in the Balkans, 1914-1916", in *Canadian Journal of History / Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1969, p. 83.

²⁷ *The Greek White Book. Diplomatic Documents. 1913-1917*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1918, p. 57, press conference of Gounaris cabinet on 25 February/10 March 1915.

²⁸ Sir Edward Grey, *op. cit.*, p. 473-474.

²⁹ *Documents diplomatiques...*, ed. cit., p. 255.

³⁰ Sir Edward Grey, *op. cit.*, p. 498-499 (telegram from 3 March 1915, Petrograd, Sir George Buchanan to Sir Edward Grey).

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 499.

³² *Documents diplomatiques...*, ed. cit., p. 256.

³³ CAB 24/9, Papers nos. 301-400, f. 277, p. 1.

³⁴ A.L. MacFie, "The Straits Question in the First World War, 1914-18", in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1983, p. 58.

terminus of the railway network from Baghdad to the Mediterranean Sea. In the event of a military conflict, British troops could easily be transported by railway from Alexandretta to India and Mesopotamia.³⁵ Lloyd George, on the other hand, proposed Palestine as an alternative, attaching less significance to Alexandretta.³⁶

After the deliberations of the War Council, the British government responded positively to Russia's requests, as outlined in the Sazonov memorandum submitted a few days earlier. Therefore, on behalf of his government, Sir George Buchanan handed a statement to the Russian Foreign Minister on March 12, 1915, representing a "complete reversal of traditional British policy."³⁷ The British government assured Russia that if the war ended with the victory of the Allies, and if the aspirations of Great Britain and France regarding the Ottoman Empire and other regions were realised, as outlined in the Russian memorandum, His Majesty's Government would agree to Russia's demands.³⁸

However, the agreement of Great Britain was conditional. In the opinion of the British government, Constantinople held significant importance for trade in Southeast Europe and Asia Minor. That is why they wanted to ensure that it would remain a free port for the transit of goods to and from territories other than Russia. To facilitate commercial exchanges with these regions, Britain requested freedom of trade for ships passing through the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits.³⁹

Recognising that Russia would be the primary beneficiary of the Dardanelles operations if victorious, British diplomacy requested that Russia not create difficulties if another power offered reasonable cooperation. This point specifically referred to Greece's offer of cooperation alongside the Allies for the conquest of Constantinople, and to negotiations with Italy regarding its entry into the war, which had raised Russian suspicions. The British considered Greece's fleet to be of "inestimable value" since the British Admiralty had informed Admiral Carden that they had no available cruisers.⁴⁰

Aware that the agreement of the Great Powers regarding Russia's possession of Constantinople would provoke negative reactions from the Balkan states, the London Cabinet urged the Russian government to make every effort to alleviate Bulgaria and Romania's apprehensions. It was also necessary for Russian diplomacy to present an attractive perspective to the governments of these countries regarding their cooperation with the Entente⁴¹. Additionally, Sir Edward Grey emphasised in the memorandum transmitted to the Russian government that a comprehensive analysis of future French and British interests in Asian Turkey was necessary. The British government wanted the holy places of Muslims and Arabia to remain under independent Muslim domination after the war. As for Persia, the British government demanded a revision of the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 to "recognize the present neutral sphere as a British sphere."⁴² Until the

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ CAB 24/9, Papers nos. 301-400, f. 277, p. 1.

³⁸ *Documents diplomatiques...*, ed. cit., p. 257.

³⁹ CAB 24/9, Papers nos. 301-400, f. 277, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

Allies were able to provide satisfactory assurances to the Balkan states, particularly Bulgaria and Romania, regarding their prospects in joining the Entente and defining the general position regarding the territories neighbouring their borders that they desired to enter, Sir Edward Grey emphasised the desirability of keeping secret the agreement reached by the governments of the three allied countries.⁴³

The terms of the agreement, advanced by the British Cabinet (mentioned above), were communicated to Emperor Nicholas II of Russia by the British Ambassador in Petrograd, Sir George Buchanan. During his audience with the Emperor, the territorial claims of Italy in Dalmatia and the Adriatic Sea were also discussed.⁴⁴ Negotiations between the Allies and Italy were complicated by the fact that Italian claims directly conflicted with those of Serbia, which was supported by Grand Duke Nicholas, who opposed accepting the Italian government's demands. Furthermore, some circles in Russia viewed unfavourably Italy gaining a strong position in the Adriatic Sea, as Italy could then pose a threat to Serbia. The significant concessions made by Great Britain and France regarding Constantinople and the Straits convinced Sazonov to abandon his objections.

Following the resolution of all objections during the negotiations between the three Allied powers, the secret agreement of March 18, 1915 was concluded, with its most important point being the approval by the governments of Great Britain and France that, following victory on behalf of the Allies, Russia would gain possession of the Straits and Constantinople. However, the disintegration of the Russian Empire in 1917-1918 and the Bolshevik withdrawal from the war⁴⁵ prevented the materialisation of an agreement that, if realised, would have had major implications for the geopolitics of the Black Sea basin and neighbouring regions. The consequences of Russia's control over the Straits were keenly observed by the American ambassador to Italy, Thomas Nelson Page. Despite the secrecy of the agreement, the American ambassador was indirectly aware of the discussions between the governments of Great Britain, France, and Russia regarding the Straits issue.

In a telegram sent to Secretary of State Robert Lansing, the American ambassador wrote: "While it is said that Russia has been promised possession of Constantinople and the Dardanelles and undoubtedly awaits it with impatience, and while it is believed that France has given her assent to this plan, as far as we can learn, none of the other Powers, whether Allies or those in the East Mediterranean, look favourably upon such an understanding [...]"⁴⁶ Thomas Nelson Page believed that "the most likely solution for the entire issue would be for Constantinople to ultimately remain with the Porte with a modest hinterland, and the city and the Straits to be neutralised and placed under the protection of the Powers; otherwise,

⁴³ *Ibidem*; Frank Alfred Golder, *Documents of Russian History 1914-1917*, New York, 1927, p. 62.

⁴⁴ Sir George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories*, vol. I, London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne, Cassel and Company Limited, 1923, p. 227-228.

⁴⁵ The Bolshevik government published in *Izvestia* the secret agreements concluded by the Russian Empire with Great Britain and France. The American Ambassador to Petrograd, David R. Francis, hastened to send a copy of them to Washington on December 5, 1917. See *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 2, The World War*, vol. I, "The Ambassador in Russia (Francis) to the Secretary of State, Petrograd, December 5, 1917 [Received December 27]", p. 493.

⁴⁶ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920*, vol. I, Document 676, "The Ambassador in Italy (Page) to the Secretary of State, Rome, August 21, 1915", p. 724.

it will prove almost certainly [...] an apple of discord, and no one knows what difficulties will arise after the great current war".⁴⁷

4. CONCLUSIONS

The agreement of March 18, 1915 regarding Constantinople and the Straits represented, as demonstrated by British historian A.J.P. Taylor, one of the most important secret treaties concluded by the Allies during World War I.⁴⁸ The abandonment by Great Britain of its traditional opposition to Russia's possession of the Straits can be explained, according to American historian William Renzi, by several factors.⁴⁹ British interests did not necessitate the continuation of this old policy. As mentioned above, on March 11, 1915 Maurice Hankey brought back into discussion the report from February 11, 1903, prepared during the meeting of the Imperial Defence Committee.

Based on the analysis of the consequences of a potential Russian establishment in Constantinople and consequent possession of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus, the committee agreed that this event would not significantly affect the strategic position of Great Britain in the Mediterranean. An important role can also be attributed to the fears of British and French diplomacy regarding the possibility of Russia concluding a separate peace with Germany, in case the consent to Russian claims over Constantinople and the Straits was refused. Sir Edward Grey appreciated the contribution of the Russian army to the Allied war effort as indispensable for avoiding defeat on the Western Front during the two years of solidarity between Great Britain, France, and Russia.⁵⁰

Furthermore, British diplomacy considered the transfer of the Straits to Russia as the best guarantee against a Germany that, after the war, would have rebuilt its forces and resumed its *Drang nach Osten* policy. Recently, historian H.E. Goemans has argued that Britain's agreement for Russia to occupy Constantinople and the Straits after the war represents a reduction in the goals of British policy. In his opinion, the weakening of the Ottoman Empire would have made it difficult to balance Russia, which had its own interests in Persia. Increased Russian influence in Persia could have threatened British imperial interests in India. Moreover, Russia's control over the Straits would have had significant consequences for the balance of power in the Mediterranean.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*. The position of the United States of America, expressed through the voice of its diplomatic representatives, was consistently in favor of freedom of navigation in the straits, even after the war. In a telegram from Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes to the Ambassador of the United States of America in France, Myron T. Herrick, dated October 27, 1922, he attached special importance to the issue, considering that the American government needed "to obtain effective assurances that the straits would be open in peacetime for both commercial vessels and warships to pass through to Constantinople and the Black Sea." Regarding the Black Sea, the Secretary of State believed that: "This sea is a commercial route and should not be under the exclusive control of Turkey and Russia." See *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1923*, vol. II, Document 730, Secretary of State to Ambassador in France (Herrick), Washington, October 27, 1922, p. 888. For the position of the United States of America regarding the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles starting from 1914, see Harry N. Howard, "The United States and Turkey: American Policy in the Straits Question (1914-1963)", in *Balkan Studies*, vol. 4, 1963, Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, Greece, p. 225-250.

⁴⁸ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe. 1848-1918*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1954, p. 542.

⁴⁹ William A. Renzi, "Great Britain, Russia, and the Straits, 1914-1915", in *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 42, no. 1, 1970, p. 17-19.

⁵⁰ Sir Edward Grey, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

⁵¹ H.E. Goemans, *War and Punishment: The Causes of War Termination and the First World War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2000, p. 191.

THUCYDIDES'S TRAP. CAN AMERICA AND CHINA STILL AVOID WAR?

Anil Sigdel

Graham Allison's book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap*, draws compelling lessons from the history of strategic competitions between ruling powers and rising powers and examines whether the ongoing US-China great power competition will lead to war. He cautions statesmen that when a rising power challenges a ruling power, there is danger. Today, it seems that China, a rising power, and the US, a ruling power, are sleepwalking into the Thucydides's Trap. Is war between US and China inevitable? He finds the answer in the history of rivalries. He repeatedly reminds readers that statesmen and advisors alike should know history and that anyone who does not know history is more likely to repeat it.

In addition to the Thucydides's Trap theory and historical cases as well as his expert advice, to make his case, Allison deals with the other four major themes in his book: 1) China's spectacular economic rise and Xi Jinping's vision; 2) China's defense policy and Chinese or Confucian culture vis-à-vis the Western civilisation; 3) Americans as a rising power in the past; and 4) US policies and their flaws vis-à-vis China and the ongoing US-China maritime competition in Asia.

This review-article will explain the content of this book under five sections: Thucydides Trap, The Rise of China, War Is Not Inevitable and Policy Prescriptions and end with brief comments about strengths and weaknesses of this book in the Concluding Remarks.

THUCYDIDES TRAP

Thucydides wrote about the Peloponnesian war in the fifth century BC. Allison believes that among other explanations about the war between the two classical Greek city-states Athens and Sparta, Thucydides gets to the "heart of the root cause" – when a rising power threatens a ruling power that causes a "structural stress" and that stress makes wars the rule, not the exception. He explains that there is the "rising power syndrome" and "ruling power syndrome": a rising power has increased sense of its status and interests, and a ruling power has fear of decline and sense of insecurity. These "syndromes" on both sides lead to a condition that makes war more likely than not.

Today, China is turning into a formidable military, political and economic competitor of the United States. Therefore, Allison argues that "the defining question" about the world order is whether China and the US can stay away from the Thucydides's Trap. In his study, most cases – 12 out of 16 in the last 500 years – of strategic competition ended in war. Only four cases in the dataset did not end in war that is because the players made "painful adjustments in attitudes and actions on the part of challenger and challenged alike" (p. xvii)

Allison further elaborates that the US and China can escape the Trap only if they embraced two hard truths: first, “on the current trajectory, *war between the US and China in the decades ahead is not just possible, but much more likely than currently recognized.*” (p. xvii)(emphasis original)

If policymakers underestimate the danger, war becomes ever more likely. Second, “*war is not inevitable.*” (p. xvii) (emphasis original). Allison warns that although Thucydides used the term “inevitable” as “hyperbole”, the US-China competition bears resemblance to the rise of Germany versus the British empire and what had happened back then should worry everyone.

In Chapter Two: Athens vs. Sparta, Allison provides historical accounts of the rivalry between Athens and Sparta – a baseline classic case of this book. Sparta, a garrison state, and Athens, an open society, come together to defeat Persians. Greek allied fleet under Athenian command defeat the Persians. Athens’s ambition grows – along with its growing cultural and innovative clout – and works to turn that defense alliance into a “benign” maritime empire. The status quo power Sparta found such a “no-limits” behavior of Athens disconcerting and reacts by asking the Athenians to not re-build their city wall. Spartan strategists took Athens’s denial to do so as “disrespect” and even an attempt to change the order leading to series of fights between the two powers which is known as the First Peloponnesian war. The treaty of 446 BCE called Thirty Year’s Peace establishes a regional security order enabling a harmony in the broader Hellenic world extending from Cote D’Azur to the Black Sea. However, both powers got entangled into their allies’ wars, fought devastating wars, and finally Sparta came out victorious but destroyed.

Dataset and Cases of War

In Chapter Three: Five Hundred Wars, Allison introduces his dataset on wars. His Harvard Thucydides’s Trap Project prepared a small dataset that qualified 16 cases in the category of rising vs. ruling power in which 12 cases resulted in war. This chapter talks in length about five cases out of 12 that ended in war:

Japan vs. US (mid-20th century): In Allison’s interpretation, the factors such as the US attempt to deny critical imports for survival of Japan, US miscalculation of Japan’s warning that it preferred to fight than fall, and Japan’s option of attacking the US as better one than not doing so, led Japan to attack the US on Pearl Harbor.

Japan vs. Russia and China (late 19th and early 20th century): Here the author argues that the psychological pattern of claiming a “rightful place” in the world after suffering “indignity” has been a leading cause of war for centuries. As Japan becomes a naval power, defeats China in the Korean rebellion and gets Korea, Taiwan and Southeastern Manchuria. After Russia and the Europeans pushed Japan back, with a scenario of Russian control around Japan, Japan prepared for war against Russia.

Germany vs. France (mid - 19th century): Prussia (later Germany) is the rising and France is the ruling power. Bismarck manipulates France’s fear of Germany’s encirclement and provokes an attack against Germany and then unites several principalities giving birth to the unified Germany. Here France showed the “ruling power syndrome” and gives a “reckless response” to save the status quo. Bismarck proposing a German

prince to Spanish throne becomes a matter of “honor and interests” for France. France saw Bismarck’s move as an attempt to change the Balance of Power in Europe and encirclement of France.

England vs. the Dutch Republic (mid- to late 17th century): The rising naval power England threatens Dutch maritime order and free trade. Both saw the control of the waters as existential, a “do or die” situation, and end up fighting three wars. There seems the Thucydides pattern of “transitional friction”: for the ruling power, the rising power “overreaches” and has no merit for their demands and for the rising power, the ruling power “contains” and rules do not change in time to accommodate their demands.

The Habsburg Monarchy vs. France (first half of 16th century): The growing power of Habsburg threatens French pre-eminence as the growing ambition of the Spanish King Charles V seems likely to “reduce the glory” of the Francis I of France. The rising Habsburg discounts France’s fear and the ruling power France sees Habsburg’s demands overreaching.

In Allison’s view, in all these five cases a recurring pattern is that the war was not inevitable but conditions and factors were favoring wars. Although at the beginning it looks like the statesmen’s decisions were “irrational”, in a deeper examination they were not.

Similarly, in Chapter Four: Britain vs. Germany, Allison discusses Germany’s rise causing anxiety in Britain. Churchill takes Germany’s naval and technological rise not just as a threat to the British primacy but an existential threat. Britain had a policy to contain any European powers to become dominant, but also knew that any attempt to contain Germany’s rise would end up in war. Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm II claimed that Germany’s place was on the sea and decided to challenge the British global empire. The British feared that this European giant would eat their lunch both at home and abroad. Amidst these anxieties, and also for its allies, the British were pulled into the Balkans without any vital interests – and so the Great War begins.

THE RISE OF CHINA

In Chapter One: The Rise of China, to understand the Chinese leadership’s thinking, the author draws upon the insights of Lee Kuan Yew, former President of Singapore and strategist whom Xi Jinping himself calls his “mentor”. Lee calls China “the biggest player of the history of the world”. Similarly, Allison gives an interesting comparison to put China’s rise in perspective: in the mid-2010s, even at its low economic growth streak, China was creating a Greece every 16 weeks and Israel every 25 weeks. After 2008, just the increment of China’s GDP growth has been larger than that of the entire economy of India. When the Americans surpassed the British between 1860 to 1913, they were growing at four percent a year; China has grown ten percent a year. According to the IMF report in 2014, in the purchasing power parity (PPP) terms the Chinese economy (US\$ 17.6 trillion) surpassed the US economy (US \$ 17.4 trillion) showing a robust growth even in the post-2008 financial crisis.

On every count, China's growth was so spectacular and unprecedented that Kevin Rudd, former Australian prime minister and a smart China watcher said that the change that the Industrial Revolution unleashed in the world happened in China not in 300 but just 30 years, and added to that is the benefits of Information Revolution. Karl Marx would be surprised to see so many Chinese "communists" wearing Prada today, observes the author.

In Chapter Six: What Xi's China Wants, Allison quotes Singapore's Lee as saying that Xi is a "man in a hurry." In Lee's view, with regard to the disagreements between democratic values between US and China, if China were to become a democracy, "it would collapse." (p. 220) Allison describes Xi as China's Trump who wants to "make China great again" and that Xi's "rejuvenation" includes the "reunification" of Taiwan. Xi's nightmare revolves around Soviet Union's collapse – that is why he makes sure that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) remains the communist party's Army, not the Chinese state's army.

In Chapter Five: Imagine China Were Just Like US, Allison recounts the US President Theodore Roosevelt's (TR) hegemonic mission to build an American century. For TR, America's greatness rested on advancing American influence abroad with military superiority. At home, it rested on expanding and incorporating nearby lands, called the "Manifest Destiny," an idea of a mission given by Providence itself. TR believed that the "preparation for war is the surest guaranty for peace," thus, the US quickly emerged as a mighty naval power extending its domination from Alaska to the Caribbean. In Allison's view, Xi Jinping and TR have more differences than similarities and Xi is not even half demanding as the Americans were to the British.

In Chapter Seven: Clash of Civilizations, the story goes: King George III's envoy Lord George Macartney went to Beijing in 1793 to establish diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Qing dynasty's China but failed. The Gulf between China and the West remains until now despite the modern day trade and diplomatic ties. Allison draws upon Samuel Huntington's insights on the fault lines between Confucian and Western societies. China's view of external order is the expansion of its internal Confucian hierarchical order with the Chinese at the top of the system. Hillary Clinton once said: "I don't want my grandchildren to live in a world dominated by the Chinese." (p. 140)

Chapter Eight: From Here to War talks about some historical cases of war in which China was involved: Mao's war against the Americans in the Korean Peninsula and the preemptive strikes against Soviets for minor border disputes. China was manifesting its "active defense" doctrine telling the world that China could not be intimidated even by nuclear superpowers. Mao called that a "defense through decisive engagements." (p. 158) But during the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996, Beijing's show of firepower to intimidate the Taiwanese turned out to be misjudgment, still, the Americans came to realize China's propensity for aggression. As regards the South China Sea, Allison explains that after the Hainan Island accident – a mid-air collision of an American and a Chinese aircraft in 2001 – the Chinese PLA began to create new facts in the South China Sea.

WAR IS NOT INEVITABLE

In Chapter Nine: Twelve Clues for Peace, Allison explains that the four no-war cases provide rich clues for leaders, starting from the first case in the late 15th century in which

Spain challenges Portugal's primacy in the sea to the case of Britain versus the US, the Soviet Union versus the US and the rise of post-Cold War Germany in Europe. He attributes the peace in these cases to huge compromises by both sides.

The first clue is that the higher authorities can resolve tensions without leading to war – the case of Spain vs. Portugal is the case in point. The unified Spain, after the merger of the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile, becomes the rising power that challenges the ruling power Portugal. After Columbus's discovery of America, the two feared bloody rivalry in the new continent and preferred to call a higher authority – Pope Alexander VI. Both accepted Vatican's arbitration in allocating territories in the Western Hemisphere.

The second clue is that when rising powers integrate into a larger economic and political structure that will change their historically belligerent behavior as observed in the case of Germany versus Britain and France. France's wish to allow Germany to grow within the larger European structure of interdependence worked as Germany became an economic power without becoming a military one. A Europeanised Germany rather than a German Europe supported the EU's advance in a peaceful way.

The third clue goes on like this: wily leaders are able to make smart choices. They know their needs, and can make adjustments and move on. As explained elsewhere in this review, fearing a war with the Americans, the British backed down and the reasons were: budget constraints, no possibility of allies in the hemisphere to balance US, problems in South Africa and more threatening neighbours Germany and Russia next door.

Fourth and fifth clues are the extension of the lessons from the same case of Britain vs. US. Allison captures two factors here: timely decision-making and shared cultures. He argues that had Britain chose to intervene on behalf of the Confederacy in the American civil war in 1861, that would have perhaps left the Americans weak and secured the continuation of the British domination in the Western Hemisphere. Similarly, since both the Americans and the British shared language and culture, rise of the Americans did not pose any threat to the British way of life, hence paved the way for peaceful solutions.

Nuclear Weapons

The clues six to nine talk about different concepts related to nuclear weapons. Leaders now know that the use of nuclear weapons will risk killing hundreds of thousands of their own people. Therefore, they have had to think twice, which Allison refers to as a "crystal ball effect." After the first explosion in 1949, the Soviet Union built so much of nuclear arsenal that both the US and the Soviet Union got into a condition called MAD – mutually assured destruction. Allison quotes Ronald Reagan's famous line: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must therefore never be fought." (p. 208)

Now China with its large nuclear arsenal has created a 21st century MAD and the US does take that into account while deploying ballistic missile defenses. As the Americans had the experience against Soviet Union that a "hot war" was not justifiable between nuclear powers, now the US and China face the similar situation. On the ninth clue, Allison argues that the US must keep its nuclear toolkit open because since there is no risk of war due to MAD, opponents can pressure you to either yield or escalate to create condi-

tions for their win. Similarly, on the clue 10, he adds the MAD concept to the economy – the MAED or the mutually assured economic destruction. Since both sides would incur heavy economic losses in the event of war, and there are peace advocates, states are less likely to choose war. Given the very high trade relations, war between US and China would be a MAED scenario. The case of Britain vs. Germany had caused huge economic loss as well. On the clue 11 he cautions that alliances can be a “fatal attraction” and on US’s part, careful review of allies’ interests and intentions in Asia is warranted. In the last one, the clue 12, he talks about the importance of domestic performance in international competition. For instance, Soviet Union’s controlled economy could not compete against the US’s open system.

POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS

In Chapter Ten: Where Do We Go From Here, Allison argues that if Washington continues doing what it does, it will be like prescribing a strong-aspirin to treat cancer. When it comes to tackling the Chinese civilisation that has 5,000 years of history, a nation that has 1.4 billion population and has achieved a dramatic rise, there is no such “solution”, it is rather a chronic condition that has to be dealt carefully over generations.

He believes that the Americans need a long-term multi-minded thinking similar to the insights of the “wise men” (a post-WWII elite foreign policy group including the likes of George Kennan and Dean Acheson who advised President FD Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson). In this chapter, Allison offers “a set of principles and strategic options” to avoid Thucydides’s Trap and World War III.

Begin with structural realities: Richard Nixon, towards the end of his life, shared that he might have created a Frankenstein, i.e., China. By certain estimates, China’s economy will be three times higher to that of the United States by 2040, which means that China’s size is and will cause a significant change in the international environment that will force the US to ask some difficult questions. Can the Americans live and thrive in the world in which the US does not write the rules of the road anymore? But Washington, instead of going for diagnosis, just prefers to have prescriptions.

Apply history: Allison and his colleague Niall Ferguson had recommended in some other writings to establish a Council of Historical Advisors at the White House. That Council will provide answers to “three key questions” about China: Has there been any competition in the history that looks like the one between US and China? How the US and China got here – the China challenge – and how? How do foreign counterparts see this matter? It is about looking deeply at history and informing policy makers, not just about finding interesting analogies and arriving at conclusions as it usually happens in Washington. As regards the complexity of “China challenge,” longer perspectives are needed to understand that.

In the conclusion chapter, Allison talks about Kennedy’s role in averting a nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crisis and recommends “four core ideas” to the leaders today to do hard thinking and make wise choices. The core ideas are the following:

Clarify vital interests: US's fundamental interests is to preserve its freedom and values, and avoid nuclear war against China, but not defend the claim of Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea. Geopolitics should represent national priorities. Why the US need to maintain primacy in the Western Pacific?

Understand what China is trying to do: Allison argues that the Americans, including State Department officials, often misunderstand China's vital interests that make resolving problems difficult. He recommends that the US should stop telling China what should they do or not do and try to achieve predictability and stability in the relationship, not friendship.

Do strategy: Washington lacks coherent strategy. President Clinton compared foreign policy of his time with version of jazz, an improvisation, and Obama went beyond Clinton in claiming that he did not need George Kennan, the architect of containment policy against the Soviets. US needs a grand strategy and intellectual acumen to sustain the post-WWII status quo.

Make domestic challenges central: Both China and US face serious domestic challenges – neither democracy nor autocracy is sufficiently addressing the governance-related issues. The US is divided. China's political system is becoming obsolete in the world of Smartphone. If the leaders really prioritise the real problems, both sides will figure out that the geopolitical domination of Asia is not their most pressing challenge. They definitely can secure their vital interests without resorting to war. Allison ends the chapter with Shakespeare's line that our destiny lies "not in our stars, but in ourselves."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Allison's *Thucydides's Trap* caught the attention of the White House and the Politburo as the timing of growing tensions between the US and China favoured wide resonance for his arguments. However, it would not be entirely correct to attribute the originality of this idea to Allison because Donald Kagan, one of the foremost American scholars on the Peloponnesian war, had outlined almost three decades ago Thucydides's explanation that states go to war for "fear, self-interests and honor." Similarly, Paul Kennedy's book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* is still actively discussed after three decades although his prediction about America's decline did not exactly hold. Even with Allison, his indication towards "American decline" is not holding vis-à-vis the American ability to adapt to new challenges. In her recent speech, the US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen have argued that the "American decline" was always "proven wrong" and it is proving wrong this time as well.

Moreover, the fact that his dataset has a very small number of cases to make bold claims faces scholarly criticism. The author quite ambitiously applies the Thucydidean lens on all the 16 historical cases, which makes him downplay other important drivers of those wars and theoretical lenses that could also explain these conditions well.

Similarly, in the Britain vs. United States case, the massively growing American capabilities simply forced the British to climb down without fighting in the Western Hemisphere. The author does not explain how rival's capabilities affect the Thucydidean

theory. Contrary to Allison's claim that painful decisions from both sides contribute to peace, only the British had to adjust, the Americans got the Hemisphere. Are the Chinese doing what the Americans did to the British? The Chinese have already succeeded in militarising islands and maritime features in South China Sea and claiming Chinese sovereignty further from there and that did not trigger any war.

Allison, a scholar of realist school, critically scrutinises Washington's policies which he claims are putting US and China on a collision course, but downplays the norms and values in his effort to justify the Chinese position. However, he does provide both powers with some unsettling questions. Should the US be a bystander in China's path to dominate Asia, say, to annex Taiwan or make South China Sea a Chinese lake? Is it wise for the Chinese Communist Party to overreach and provoke the US to start a war in Asia? Raising these critical questions at a critical time, and the emphasis on the lessons from history, are the most important contribution of this book.

Allison is not a sinologist. Nevertheless, as an eminent scholar with decades of academic experience, who served in the US government under Reagan and Clinton and in private sector, he offers highly valuable insights on US-China geostrategic competition at this very critical juncture. Students, policymakers and professionals will substantially broaden their knowledge on the matter by reading this book.

THE ROMANIAN DIPLOMATIC INSTITUTE'S ACTIVITY

During the first semester of this year, the Romanian Diplomatic Institute (RDI) continued its activity focusing on two core pillars – research and professional training – within the Department of Expert Analysis (DEA) and the Department of Professional Training, Accounting and Logistics (DPTAL).

I. All our researchers in the Department of Expert Analysis have produced volumes, analytical studies, scientific presentations, while also participating in various conferences, colloquia, and symposia, both domestically and internationally. The RDI has also organised debates, roundtable discussions, book launches, and hosted visits from special guests. Here, we recall these events in chronological order.

Publications

- *România Occidentală* Journal, vol. II/2022 (chief editor: Delia Voicu; issue editor: Dragoş C. Mateescu)

- Chapter titled “Turkey towards the Centennial. Authoritarianism and Anomie in the 21st Century,” authored by Dragoş C. Mateescu, in the book *Turkey at the Centennial - Quo Vadis?* edited by Ioana Constantin-Berceanu and Matei Blănaru, ISPRI Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023

- *Education Campaign “Xi Jinping’s Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era,”* analysed by Sînziana Dumitrescu

- The Department of Expert Analysis has edited all public communication texts of the RDI, both in print and online. In the April-May period, the English version of the RDI website has been created.

Events:

- **January 20:** Roundtable discussion on the topic “The Use of History in Foreign Policy and Diplomacy.” Participants: Silvana Rachieru (historian, University of Bucharest, former director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Istanbul), Ruxandra Ivan (political scientist, University of Bucharest, adviser at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Victor Boştinaru (former member of the Romanian Parliament and the European Parliament, president of the Western Balkan Forum), Doru Costea (lawyer, expert in international law)

- **February 3:** Debate and book launch event: *Challenges of modern Israel: Socio-political reality, academic perspectives.* Coordinators: Liviu Rotman, Eugenia Mihalcea, Daniel Gheorghe. Speakers: Liliana Popescu-Bîrlan, Livia Szasz, Madeea Axinciuc, Cristian Pîrvulescu, Liviu Rotman

- **February 6:** Visit of the Ambassador of Turkmenistan, His Excellency Annammet Annayev

- **February 7:** Visit of the Ambassador of the Republic of Georgia, Her Excellency Tamar Beruchashvili

- **February 9:** Visit of the Vice President of the Romanian Cultural Institute, Attila Iuliu Weinberger

- **February 10:** Visit of the President of the National Institute of Administration, Alexandru-Mihai Ghigiu

- **February 20:** Visit of the Ambassador of Armenia, His Excellency Sergey Minasyan

- **February 22:** Visit of the Ambassador of Spain, His Excellency José Antonio Hernández Pérez-Solórzano

- **February 23:** Roundtable discussion on the topic “One Year of War in Ukraine - Impact on Romania.” Speakers: Dragoș Mateescu, Director of DFE, IDR (moderator); Iulian Fota, Secretary of State for Strategic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Luciana Alexandra Ghica, Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest; Roxana Dorobanțu-Voicu, Faculty of International Relations, Romanian Academy of Economic Studies

- **March 1:** Liliana Popescu-Bîrlan, General Director of IDR, was invited to the roundtable discussion for the launch of the book *Turkey at the Centennial - Quo Vadis?*, coordinated by Ioana Constantin-Berceanu and Matei Blănaru, at ISPRI Publishing House

- **March 9:** The documentation and Memorandum of Understanding was prepared, which institutionalised the collaboration between the Romanian Diplomatic Institute and the Institute for Development and Diplomacy at ADA University in Baku, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. The Memorandum was signed in Baku by the directors of both institutions

- **March 10:** Romanian Diplomatic Institute Conference, in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, on the topic “Zeitenwende one year after. Understanding Germany’s new foreign policy outlines.” Guest: Peer Teschendorf, expert in European Foreign and Security Policy from Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Berlin, in dialogue with Alina Inayeh, advisor to the President of the George Marshall Foundation. The discussion was moderated by our colleague, Dragoș C. Mateescu, director of the DEA

- **April 11:** Visit of the Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, His Excellency Do Duc Thanh

- **April 12:** Romanian Diplomatic Institute Conference, in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, on the topic “Defense Spending in Europe. What role does Germany assume, and what model of leadership can it offer?” Guest: Wolfgang Hellmich - Member of the Bundestag (Defense Committee) and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, in dialogue with Claudiu Degeratu - foreign policy and security expert. The discussion was moderated by the director general of the RDI, Liliana Popescu-Bîrlan

- **April 20:** *Open Doors Day at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute*, an event where 23 young friends of the institute were welcomed by the DEA director, Dragoș C. Mateescu, together with colleagues Sînziana Dumitrescu (programme coordinator), Rebeca Bașuț, and Anca Mirea. The guests attended a lecture on the role of RDI and the professional opportunities it offers, followed by a tour that included the RDI library, where the most valuable volumes and the institute’s ongoing projects were presented.

- **April 24 and 27:** Ileana Racheru (director, DPTAL) and Dragoș C. Mateescu (director, DAE) accepted an invitation from the management of School no. 12 Herăstrău to talk to eighth-grade students about the environment, history, and culture in the ex-Soviet space and Anatolia and the Middle East, respectively. The activity took place within the framework of the Green Week program of the Romanian Ministry of Education.

- **May 4:** Visit of the Ambassador of Lithuania, His Excellency Donatas Augulis

- **May 23:** Dragoș C. Mateescu (director, DEA) gave a presentation titled “Countries in the Balkan region, Turkey, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Energy politics and regional interactions” during a roundtable discussion organised on the occasion of bilateral discussions between the *Middle East Political and Economic Institute* (Romania) and the Center for Strategic Studies of the Armed Forces Academy in Cairo

- **March - July 2023:** Mihai Constantinescu, DEA researcher, participated in the training programme at the European External Action Service, European Diplomatic Academy, Brussels, Belgium

- **January - June:** Meetings with Ambassador Doru Costea, Flavius Caba (MEPEI director), Cristian Diaconescu, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Minister of Justice, journalists Marian Voicu, Mihaela Crăciun, Ioana Dumitrescu (TVR), Ovidiu Nahoi (RFI), Cătălin Gomboș (Radio România), Horia Sârghi (Veridica), etc.

- **January - June:** Liliana Popescu-Bîrlan, Ileana Racheru, and Dragoș C. Mateescu were invited to a series of interviews on news and political analysis programs at TVR1, TVR Info, TVR Moldova, B1 TV, Digi24, TV Moldova; Radio România Actualități, Radio România Cultural, RFI România, Radio Moldova, and others.

II. In the field of professional training, the following courses were organised at the RDI:

- *Foreign Languages@IDR - United Nations Official Languages Section: Arabic* (December 10, 2022 – May 29, 2023);

- *Communication, Protocol, and Etiquette in Diplomacy* (January 30 – March 2, 2023);

- *“Leadership” in Diplomacy and Governance* (April 26 – June 28);

- *Basic Diplomatic Training Program for New Members of the Romanian Diplomatic and Consular Corps* (May 8 – October 27, 2023).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

➤ **Liliana Popescu-Birlan** is the Director-General of the Romanian Diplomatic Institute and a university professor at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (NUPSPA) in Bucharest, where she also is a PhD supervisor in political science. She holds a PhD in political theory, obtained at the University of Manchester, UK, in 1996. She served as advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, director (Political Planning Department, 1998-9), and vice-rector of NUPSPA (2012-2022). Her publications include *The Construction of the European Union* (Bucharest: C.H. Beck, 2009), and *Individual Freedom and Political Manipulation* (Bucharest: Politeia, 2003). She co-founded the English-language *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics* (2001), and was an ambassador for *Foreign Policy Romania*. Over the last 17 years, her research interests gravitated towards the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union and the Post-Soviet space, consequently publishing articles on Russia, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova. Her latest article focuses on the Russia-China partnership (RJE, December 2021). She has a rich history of pioneering and active involvement in civil society campaigns supporting women's rights and minorities. She was awarded the title of *Ambassador of Knowledge* by the Romanian Diversity Chamber of Commerce.

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➤ **George Vişan** is an advisor at the cabinet of the Secretary of State for Strategic Affairs within the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Prior to holding this position, he worked as a counsellor at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute and as coordinator of the Black Sea security program at the independent think tank Romania Energy Center. He has published reports and articles in English and Romanian focusing on security developments in the Black Sea region. He is a contributor on defence policy affairs for the *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, edited by the *Jamestown Foundation* in the United States. In 2019, he

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➤ **Anil Sigdel** is associate professor at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (NUPSPA) in Bucharest. He is the author of the volume *India in the Era of China's Belt and Road Initiative: How Modi Responds to Xi* (Lexington Books, 2020). His studies have been published in magazines and by media outlets such as *Foreign Policy*, *People's Daily*, *South China Morning Post*, *TRT World*, *Observer Research Foundation*, and many others. He holds a PhD in International Relations from the Diplomatic School of Spain, Madrid.

“Everything that has any connection with the Black Sea is of interest to my country in the highest degree, because it is through the Black Sea and the Straits that we have access to the free seas....

I should say that the Straits are the very heart of Türkiye, but they are also, at the same time, the lungs of Romania.”

Nicolae TITULESCU,
former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of
Romania and former President of the League of Nations

