

GEOPOLITICAL RECONFIGURATIONS IN THE BLACK SEA AREA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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*"For America, the greatest geopolitical prize" is Eurasia...
Thus, Eurasia is the chessboard hosting the fight for world supremacy."
Zbigniew Brzezinski*

Abstract: Situated in the proximity of Heartland, whose control is the object of a very complex political, diplomatic and economic-military game, the Black Sea has become, especially after September 11 2001, but foremost once with the decision of NATO expansion in 2002, a space complicated crossroads between the geopolitical and geo-economic boundaries. The new geopolitical configuration of the Black Sea has been announcing itself ever since the '90s, when the first projects of pipelines transporting energy resources of the East to the West have been outlined. Geographically situated at the crossroads of the European, Eurasian and Middle East security spaces, the Black Sea has not been considered as belonging to any of these, this causing it to be ignored and marginalised, without stirring any particular interest. The conflict in the former Yugoslavia has directed, to a large extent, attention towards this space, and frozen conflicts (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Osetia, Karabakh) and the residual situation immersed after the fall of the Soviet Union have lit red lights on the geostrategic maps of the European chancellors. The West stills mirrors it as a "near foreign" area of the Moscow, in which this harbours special interests, and as such, the Black Sea was not considered in major assessments. Today, the region of the Black Sea gradually starts to occupy the epicentre of the western efforts to protect their interests in the Caucasus and Middle East. As NATO expands its attributions and gets ready for a long term involvement in Afghanistan, considering and undertaking additional responsibilities in the Middle East region, and especially in Irak, the Black Sea region begins to be looked from another perspective.

Key words: Black Sea, Wider Black Sea Area, frozen conflicts, democracy, geopolitics, security, energy, geostrategy, NATO, EU

From a pure geopolitical perspective, the Black Sea region is a relatively small and closed area, crossed, throughout history by conflicts between the North-Eastern forces (Russia, via Ukraine and/or Georgia), South (Turkey) and

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West (Romania, Bulgaria, and the European powers such as France Germany, Austria, Great Britain). A “great salty lake”, the area of the Black Sea has been, for centuries, a place of confrontation between the Russian (orthodox) world, the Turkish (Muslim) one and the western (catholic and protestant) one. The wider Black Sea area, geographically situated at the crossroads of the European, Eurasian and Middle East security spaces, is, from a geopolitical standpoint, in the proximity of the *Heartland*, the control of which causes a complex geopolitical, diplomatic and economic-military game. The region is and will be an important source of oil and natural gas, and has the potential to tie the resource rich Central Asia area to the world energy market. Thus, diverse interests in the Black Sea region support a continuous war, fought with less conventional weapons, but foremost through economic attacks between river-sided countries, EU countries and the USA in order to gain the dominant position. The most important stake of this war fought between two geopolitical concepts – maritime power and the prevalence of the continental powers – is energy.

The Cold War has been a bipolar competition between the United States and the Soviet Union which „*represented the enhancement of the theories most dear to geopoliticians; it brought to the arena the main maritime power of the world, which dominates two oceans, the Pacific and Atlantic ones, against the main land power of the world, which owns the supremacy in the Eurasian Heartland (with the Chinese-soviet block, which included a space remind in terms of power of the size of the Mongolian Empire) The geopolitical aspect could not have been clearer: North America against Eurasia, and the stakes are represented by the entire world. The winner would have truly dominated the entire globe. Nothing would have been in its way, once they had won.*”¹ During the Cold War, the Black Sea has been a “front space”, and the strategic tools of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty confronted, in a permanent alert. The western allies strengthened Greece and Turkey, the soviets “handled unconventional manoeuvres” in the Narrows, Cyprus, Iran, and, at some point, through the *Valev Plan*, they planned an economic-political integration, including at the north and west of the Black Sea.

The end of the Cold War, the fall of URSS and of the Warsaw Treaty in the context of the democratic revolutions in the East have provoked however, geopolitical repositioning in the Black Sea area. Suddenly, the Russian Federation, without being militarily defeated, lost the entire exit URSS used to hold to the Pontic seashore, the Republic of Moldova became independent, and Turkey and Ukraine became very active in the region, followed by Bulgaria and Georgia. The disappearance of URSS from the international stage has made the world geopolitical map change in favour of the American geopolitical system². The classic space of the *Rimland*, built by Nicholas Spykman retired from the crossroads of the continent with the ocean towards within the Eurasian *Heartland*, on the line described by the Baltic Sea, Ukraine, Black Sea shore, Transcaucasus, Caspian Sea shore, and the central area of Asia, dominated by Uzbekistan. From the perspective of Spykman’s geopolitics, once with the stop of the Cold War, the United States took advantage of the “power vice” created by

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Marea tablă de șah. Supremația americană și imperatiile sale geostrategice*, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 16.

² Liviu Bogdan Vlad, *Geopolitica: evoluție și contemporaneitate*, Prouniversitaria Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, p. 8.

the fall of URSS and conquered the *Rimland*, which determined the American offensive towards the Eurasian *Heartland*.

In this context, since 1990-1992, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation was organised, and by 1999, concomitantly with the CSI, GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova) was formed, and in 2003-2004 new progresses of the region's democratisation have materialised in Georgia and Ukraine. Concomitantly, important western investments have started to outline the local resources and transport corridors for oil and natural gas from the Caspian Sea to the European Union. Since 1993-1994, NATO and the European Union have made their presence felt more acutely in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, through associations, partnerships, economic agreements; trade was rapidly activated in the Black Sea area, the lines of the former Cold War front have been overcome, and the region gradually opened towards the area of the Caspian Sea, Near and Middle East. However, apart from the benefiting processes of unravelling and democratisation, along with cooperation projects and programmes, there have been interethnic and inter-religious conflicts, secession wars and numerous territorial disputes.

The geopolitics of the Black Sea has changed dramatically after the fall of the URSS. Starting with 1991, Russia has suffered many counter strikes, and its influence on the former members of the Warsaw Treaty has been drastically reduced. Although Russia maintains important connections with the majority of the former satellite states, in the last two decades, the geostrategic penetration of the USA and EU into what traditionally was the influence sphere of Russia has been extremely important. This is especially true for the Black Sea region, which was weakly controlled by the western block in the time of the bipolar era. During the Cold War, Turkey, which watches over the southern shores of the Black Sea, was the sole supporter of the western agenda, while Romania, Ukraine and Georgia were under the severe control of URSS. After the uncertainty of the 1990s, at the beginning of the 21st century, after Georgia's drastic orientation towards the USA in 2002, and the new pro-western race of Ukraine, Romania's and Bulgaria's accession to NATO in 2004 and EU in 2007 completed the dramatic change in the relations with the powers within the region, a change whose consequences cannot be underestimated.

The region of the Black Sea has been through many uncertain times, wars, border changes, interethnic conflicts, political and economic crises in the last two decades. Even if those events have been initiated locally or regionally, the great powers have constantly kept their important role throughout these periods and thus, any conflict in the region, no matter its cause, has comprised and still reflects geopolitical competition elements. All major actors in the international scene – the United States of America, the European Union, Russia – although they use different means to position themselves strategically in the region, they follow the same purpose, that is to expand their influence and ensure their economic presence in the region.

Currently, the geopolitical structure in the Black Sea region is marked by two dynamics. The *first* dynamic is represented by the replacement of the former Russian and soviet influence with the American one (which, in turn, enters in competition with France's and Germany's ambitions, the leading "engines" of the EU). The *second* dynamic is the emergence of the energy axis which connects the oil and gas from Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region with the Balkans and the EU. The new geopolitics of the Black Sea highlights a new competition

between the great powers. Russia, France and more discretely, Germany, are, at present, the most important external actors fighting for influence in the region. Economic interests, as well as security enhancement are at stake in a crucial strategic area, energy rich, which connects the Balkans to the Caucasus and the east and centre of Europe with Turkey.

The USA and the EU are convinced of the historical superiority of their political and economic models, as in the western world there is the belief that what is efficient for Europe and the USA is efficient for the rest of the world, including for the Black Sea wider region (BSWR), because the western model is correct – it is a conviction enhanced by the fall of the soviet communism, which gave western leaders the feeling of triumph. However, the global situation did not turn the way the West had expected, and there was no *end of history*, in the sense defined by Francis Fukuyama. Sooner, what is happening is the creation of a new spiral of geopolitical competition, which is, from several standpoints, much more dangerous than the confrontational stability of the bipolar world during the Cold War. The EU based its strategy on the approach of the *soft* power, which implies integration policies which have been developed during the expansion process. On the other hand, Russia and the USA have used more competitive manners to exercise their influence. Yet, the strategy differences regarding the BSWR are to a lesser extent, the results of the ideological discrepancies, than the results of the contradicting interests of the actors involved.

At the beginning of the 21st century, BSWR started to be more and more in the epicentre of the western efforts to project their interests towards the Caucasus and Middle East region, and thus, became one of the key areas of the new conflicting arena. The Black Sea is a euro-Atlantic frontier space, all significant geopolitical events, whether evolutions, stagnations, taking place around the Black Sea and bearing, to a certain extent the footprint of global geopolitical evolutions. These events are foremost determined by the pushing of the euro-Atlantic boundary towards the Central Asia, which structured the geopolitical space of the Black Sea in two major geopolitical axes, the *North-South Axis* (Russia – Armenia – Iran) and the *East-West Axis*, which includes, via Caucasus, and the Black Sea, essential energy resources in the Caspian Sea and destined to the Western Europe. The two axes – which intersect in Azerbaijan – draw a region of fundamental security on the agenda of the great chancellors with interests and influence in the area³. These two axes have become visible especially after 2000, when, once with the mandate of Vladimir Putin in Moscow, started the process of rebirth for Russia's power.

Directly neighbouring the European Union and being a complex of security emerging in the geopolitical and geostrategic are of the Greater Middle East, the Black Sea region has a major strategic importance for the EU and the Euro-Atlantic community in its whole. The region is part of an unfinished historical process, to eliminate the Cold War inheritance and to edify stability and democracy in Europe. This process, started in Central Europe, the area of the Baltic Sea and Eastern Europe, has recently included the region of the Black Sea. The turning point which led to a change of optics of the western states toward this region has been represented by the terrorist attacks of September 11

³ For an extended analysis, see Edmund Herzig, *The New Caucasus. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 2000.

2001. In the context of redefining *Heartland*, the Black Sea region has been “rediscovered” by the West and pushed “*from the periphery towards the centre of the western attention*”⁴.

BSWR joins, in a wide definition which is subject to consensus, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania, (NATO: the three states are members with full rights in the organisation, Turkey from 1952, Bulgaria and Romania since 2004, EU: Bulgaria and Romania are members since 2007, and Turkey is a candidate state); Russia, Ukraine, Moldova as representatives of the CIS – from the sphere of the ones most related to the soviet inheritance; Caucasus, including Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan – engaged on the route of democratisation, but whose renowned political earthquakes jeopardise the institutional and civilian democratic construction; *the cold area* whose blizzard blows thanks to “frozen conflicts” maintained by the opponents of modernity conceptualised by the European and Euro-Atlantic stabilisation factors, Russia – *the turbid fragments from the Soviet Union*: Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Osetia and Karabagh⁵; although lacking legitimacy, these formations are functional states – succeeding “*to bring close, with an unremarkable dexterity, all exterior attributes of sovereignty*”⁶. Ronald Asmus and Bruce Jackson foresee an even wider area equal to BSWR and, in the virtue of building “*a stable system at north of Transnistria, Odesa and Suhumi, [...] across the north-east arch*” and ensuring “*access to the great commercial rivers which flow into the Black Sea: the Danube, Nitre, and Nipper*”, they put forward the hypothesis according to which “at that moment, the BSWR concept will be as wide and as varied as the North Plain of Germany or the area of the Baltic/North Sea”⁷. Using the strictly geographical analytical filter, Charles King grants membership to the region to Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Turkey, so that a wider definition of the region comprises 22 states, from the Alps to the Urals, because “*what takes place up stream the Danube, Nitre and Don has a major impact on sea health and the health of the people inhabiting around it*”⁸.

In the view of the European Commission, the Black Sea region represents a distinct area, reuniting 10 states: 6 river-side states – Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Georgia and Turkey – and 4 states which history, proximity and tight connections to the Black Sea area – Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova and Greece recommend them as relevant actors in the area. Thus, the *European* definition of the Black Sea region falls under the same lines of the Wider Black Sea region, promoted, afterwards, by NATO in its relations with the allies and partners in the area⁹. If under the ratio of geographic coverage, the two concepts are somewhat similar, at an international level, differences may be spotted. NATO, outlining the fact that BSWR is both a bridge towards the energy rich region of the Caspian Sea and a weir to trans-national menaces, promotes a “bridge/barrier” type of concept

⁴ Ronald D. Asmus, Bruce P. Jackson, *The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom*, in Policy Review, No.125, June-July 2004, p.17-26.

⁵ Ronald D. Asmus, Konstantin Dimitrov, Joerg Forbrig (eds), *O nouă strategie euro-atlantică pentru regiunea Mării Negre*, Romanian Institute of International Studies, „Nicolae Titulescu”, Bucharest, 2004, pp.19-20.

⁶ Charles King, *Marea Neagră: o istorie*, Brumar Publishing House, Timisoara, 2005, p. 352.

⁷ Ronald D. Asmus, Konstantin Dimitrov, Joerg Forbrig (eds), *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁸ Charles King, *op. cit.*, p.29.

⁹ Adrian Pop, Dan Manoleli, *Spre o strategie europeană în bazinul Mării Negre. Cooperarea Teritorială*, European Institute in Romania, București, 2007, p.9.

regarding the area¹⁰. For the European Union, the Black Sea region is a distinct area of implementation of the European Neighbouring Policy (ENP) which aims to institute at its borders a “circle of friends”, as it was named by Romano Prodi, within which principles, values and governing manners are respected and promoted to a greater or lesser extent¹¹. If we accept that the last wave of expansion towards the East meant the control of the EU on certain neighbours marked by instability and poverty, applying the ENP means the expansion of this process further to the East, beyond the borders of wider Europe, more precisely, the second step of a process by which “goods” which need to be “exported” are translated from the *internal* periphery to the *external one* of the wider European Union¹².

In the era of after the Cold War, in western strategic studies, BSWR appeared as some sort of “Bermuda Triangle”. The reason for this label is the positioning at the confluence of the European, Eurasian and Middle East security spaces, towards which the Black Sea presents a collateral interest. The stringent aspects for Europe were represented by the states in the former soviet space and the definition of a proper answer to their appeal for enhancing the European vocation turned obscure due to the long period of stagnation behind the Iron Curtain; and the sensitive point in the Eurasian area was the fragility of the relation with Russia, with the ghost of the Cold War haunting the diplomatic chancellors of Europe¹³.

The terrorist attacks of September 11 2001 have outlined the extra/Atlantic origin of the menace for the United States and Europe, and the cartographic polarisation resulted replaced the Black Sea in the centre of the western attention¹⁴ - a statute which promoted from the one of “barbaric” and “dirty” periphery, whose “civilisation” was the responsibility of the future, with the degree of ignoring or disconsidering inherent under the conditions of the utopian character of an immediate resolution. However, the current reality shows that neither Europe nor the USA have integrated fully the BSWR in the global policy agenda as a *priority* or attributing correlated strategic objectives. Thus, the resources and efforts allocated for assisting the democratic construction in the states neighbouring the Black Sea and for supporting the accession or accommodation in view of full functioning, in the Euro-Atlantic cooperation structures are for the moment inconsistent with the expectations of these states and the imperatives of security in the area.

The West permanently asserts that it is necessary to abandon the win-lose way of thinking, as we need to adapt the win-win model of thinking. However, at the same time, democratic regional organisations, which the West has encouraged in the Black Sea region since the end of the 1990s, are actually based on the need to create alternative ways to transport energy, going around Russia. It is not surprising, therefore, the fact that the West brings to discussion the “anchorage” or “integration” of BSWR, and the main instrument chosen for

¹⁰ See more in Adrian Pop, *NATO and the European Union: Cooperation and Security*, NATO Review, Summer 2007.

¹¹ Romano Prodi, *A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability*, in *Peace, Security and Stability – International Dialogue and the Role of the EU*, Sixth ECSA-World Conference, Jean Monnet Project, Brussels, 5-6 December 2002.

¹² Adrian Pop, Dan Manoleli, *op. cit.*, p.10.

¹³ Ronald D. Asmus, Konstantin Dimitrov, Joerg Forbrig (eds), *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁴ *Idem.*

this transformation is NATO, *not* the EU. And NATO is a political-military organisation whose purpose is to protect against a common enemy, not spread welfare and democracy throughout the world. The reason for which NATO is chosen by the West for this task is not just the complexity of the European Union, which cannot expand forever, but the fact that NATO promotes the geostrategic interests of the United States. The possibilities the EU offers to the region are quite limited, and its capacities do not rise to the level of the ambitions. Therefore, the key player in BSWR is not the EU, but the USA, with NATO as a tool. There is no ideological understanding between Russia and the USA, but a well established geopolitical competition.

The need to create a bridge head to fight against Islamic terrorism is enhanced by a series of structural factors present in the region, such as political instability, unconsolidated democracies, poverty and economic disparities, corruption and organised crime. Moreover, the NATO expansion (2004) and the EU one (2007) to the borders of the Black Sea, and especially, the global aspirations of these organisations determine this region to come out of the “shadow corner” it used to be in. This geopolitical context is shared by the new are partners of the West, like Georgia, a country which is expected to ensure security for the oil pipelines on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route. Regardless of the themes put forth, it is very clear that the main purpose to be allied with some countries such as Azerbaijan or Georgia is that of ensuring sure access to the Caspian oil.

The Black Sea offers material solutions to the diversification perspectives for the routes and sources, as it possesses reserves (oil in Azerbaijan and natural gas in Armenia) and the potential to connect the main major suppliers with the most *starving* consumers of Western Europe. Given the geographical situation, in the context in which more and more countries depend on the energy quantities supplied from large distances, through pipelines which run across entire continents or oil ships which transport natural liquefied gas over oceans, BSWR is the ideal host of the “*cardinal pipelines for the non-OPEC, non-Persian Gulf and non-Russian oil and natural gas, flowing from the Caspian Sea and central Asia to the gates of the West*”¹⁵. The stakes are quite high. The United States have already developed an exploration strategy for the resources and transit potential, which has been put to practice, destined to Georgia and Azerbaijan. Europe is still hesitating – some actors, such as Germany or France, prefer cooperation with the Russian federation in more moderate terms of dependency. However, both the European Union and the USA aim to reduce dependency on Russian resources, orienting towards the Caspian Basin and using the energy infrastructure of the states in BSWR (under the Russian monopoly in its vast majority).

The imperative of the hydrocarbon imports has been a reality for Western Europe since the beginning of the industrial era, and the information era has not made this disappear from the landscape of necessities for fuelling the industrial sector. In the Eurasian region, direct suppliers of these resources are the Russian Federation, the Caspian Basin and the Persian Gulf¹⁶. The relation

¹⁵ Iris Kempe, Kurt Klotzle, *The Balkans and the Black Sea Region: Problems, Potentials, and Policy Options*, Centre for Applied Policy Research, No.2, April, 2006, p. 9.

¹⁶ Sergiu Celac, *Cinci argumente pentru o implicare mai activă a Occidentului în Regiunea Mării Negre*, in Ronald D. Asmus, Konstantin Dimitrov, Joerg Forbrig, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

between the West and Russia has been marked by moments of harmonisation of the dialogue, and also, by rebuff periods and acute tensioned times, so that the relation with Russia bears the prints of caprice and instability. NATO and the EU, the main actors which may be perceived as the potential adversaries by the Eurasian giant bear in memory demonstrative episodes of power concentrated in the hands of Russia, as well as the sanctioning of Georgia, Ukraine or Turkey by ceasing gas or electricity supply¹⁷.

Given the relatively unstable nature of the relation with Russia, European and Euro-Atlantic partners have sought for alternatives. Thus, the attempts to reduce the dependency on the Russian resource pool has determined a retracing of the energy transport circuits, reoriented towards the *East-West Axis*, disfavours the previous route of energy dialogue which implies the Eurasian giant, the *North-South Axis*¹⁸, and the pipelines built in this spirit or the ones projected tracing this progressive unclench implies the BSWR states. Yet, given the crucial significance of energy, these energy *highways*, in order to attract relevant actors' investments, require guarantees of safety and durability. The sustainability of these projects comes from regional stability, momentarily jeopardised by the frozen conflicts and regional adversities (Armenia-Azerbaijan, Turkey-Armenia, Turkey-Greece, Romania-Ukraine), by the sporadic political earthquakes in the Caucasus and the fragility of the democratic institutional construction in the area, by the involvement of Russia, and to some extent, by the Balkan tension (fuelled by the distinctive assortments of the states in the area regarding the declaration of independence for the Serbian republic of Kosovo). Implicitly, this appeal to common actions regarding the construction of BSWR under the form of economic investments protected by out loud campaigns and projects to diffuse frozen conflicts and stabilise affected regions, democratic support initiatives for the institutional construction, both political and civilian, seems very complex, and the responsibility of the European and Euro-Atlantic actors will be a lengthy process. Certainly, building a stable and secured corridor for Caspian and Arabic energy has determined the placement of the Black Sea as a strategic priority on the EU and NATO agendas¹⁹.

We cannot ignore the fact that in order to support the security and durability of the new streams and transport corridors, Europe and the USA, may, under the umbrella of the north-Atlantic cooperation, pump creating and financial energy into the BSWR. For example, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, transporting oil from the reserves of the Azerbaijan via Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean since 2005 and thus running across "*the spine of infrastructure of the energy corridor East-West, which contributed significantly to the process of sedimentation of the Caspian-Black Sea cooperation region*".²⁰ In the future are envisaged extensions of the pipeline by co-opting Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, as suppliers of oil and natural gas. It is for certain that the development of the project has welded the intra-political cooperation. The

¹⁷ Baran Zeyno, *Dezvoltând o strategie euro-atlantică pentru Marea Neagră – exemplul zonei caspice* in Ronald D. Asmus, Konstantin Dimitrov, Joerg Forbrig, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹⁸ Sergiu Celac, *Cinci argumente pentru o implicare mai activă a Occidentului în Regiunea Mării Negre*, in Ronald D. Asmus, Konstantin Dimitrov, Joerg Forbrig, *op. cit.*, p. 141

¹⁹ Ronald D. Asmus, Bruce P. Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁰ Elen Suleymanov, *Azerbaijan: The Wider Black Sea's Caspian Keystone*, in Asmus D. Ronald (ed), *Next Steps in Forging a Euroatlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006, p.176.

collaboration at the level of BSWR will benefit from the productive input of the projects in debate or already in construction, for oil and natural gas transport, which imply knurls in the different transit routes such as Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Macedonia, or Albania²¹. Moreover, in light of overlapping multiple strategies of fundamental actors in the global security system - USA, Russia, EU, NATO, to name the most active ones – and the fragility of the regional cooperation links, the hypothesis according to which “*in time, competition for natural resources will be both a closeness factor and a dividing one between states and peoples in the region*”²² becomes plausible.

At present, the security situation in the area of the Black Sea and of the Caucasus is extremely complex, as it is characterised, on one hand, by a process of reaffirmation of the regional security architecture, as part of the Euro-Atlantic one, and on the other, through the existence of an important conflicting potential, caused both by maintaining the frozen intra or inter state conflicts in the Community of Independent States, as well as by the amplification of asymmetric menaces, illegal drug and persons traffic, the phenomenon of migration and not last, terrorism. The emergence of new states in the area of the Black Sea and Caucasus, as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union has brought to attention the unsolved frozen territorial and ethnic disputes in Transnistria, South Osetia, Abhazia.

In the bipolar period in the area of the Black Sea there have been accumulations of large military infrastructure, which has enhanced the opportunities for illegal munitions and light armament traffic, which fuels the needs of the separatist / secessionist movements. Keeping the military bases and means in the area, under the conditions of the inexistence of clear regulations regarding their statute and dimension, along with the breach of the provisions of the CFE Treaty, represent a multiplying factor of negative evolutions in the region. The neighbouring states, former soviet ones, are confronted today with direct risks regarding the improvement of political legitimacy, reduction of corruption and the fight against internal and external mafia groups. There have been tensions between the internal power centres and their peripheries, between the regional integration processes and the fragmenting ones, including, sometimes, uncontrolled areas, along with frozen conflicts and borders²³.

The magnitude of the fight against terrorism and organised crime, along with the acceleration of competition for energy resources and their transport means, have brought the Black Sea are in the centre of attention for the main European and Euro-Atlantic organisms. The area is a potential European gate for the flows of people coming from Asia, but also from the regions of Maghreb or even Africa. Illegal migration, along with the development of the local mafia organisations, represents a potential basis of growth for the armament traffic and for the transit of terrorist means through the Black Sea towards Europe. The proximity of the area of the Black Sea as compared to the Middle East, Balkans and Asia represents a significant advantage for the terrorists in these

²¹ Iris Kempe, Kurt Klotzle, *The Balkans and the Black Sea Region: Problems, Potentials, and Policy Options*, Center for Applied Policy Research, No.2, April, 2006, p. 9.

²² Charles King, *op.cit.*, p. 357.

²³ Florian Piñta, *Actualitatea securității în regiunea Mării Negre*, in Moștoflei, Constantin, (coord.), *Securitate și stabilitate în bazinul Mării Negre*, The Publishing House of the National Defence University „Carol I”, Bucharest, 2005, p.50.

regions, to connect and launch terrorist attacks on the European continent. It is obvious that these security risks are interconnected to the conventional menaces, along with the frozen conflicts. A potential way of solving the region's problems can only rely upon a wider security concept, which incorporates regional integration, democratisation, economic growth and redefining policies and strategies regarding the Black Sea. In the context of the increasing NATO implication in managing crisis situations beyond their responsibility area, the presence of the American bases in Romania and Bulgaria make the basin of the Black Sea and its adjacent area a davenport necessary to the Alliance in projecting stability and security throughout the entire region.

With an important political, economic, military, cultural and demographic potential, this area attracts, without a doubt, the Euro-Atlantic interests, representing concomitantly, the continuation of the Mediterranean basin, towards Central Asia and the Middle East. In these circumstances, the Black Sea basin may become a true "control tower" of the Eurasian space and the "arbiter" of the Middle East. To enhance stability and security in the region, NATO has developed individual partnerships with the states in the region. The strategic value of the Black Sea will continue to rise, to the extent of the real awareness of its importance by all political actors with interests in the area, whether global or local, of defining and applying certain specific policies for this space. *The Partnership for Peace, Open Skies, Regional Cooperation Initiatives* and, not last, the strategic partnerships concluded bilaterally have contributed in a benefiting way to a closeness between states, to an efficient and real cooperation, based on new, innovative coordinates, in order to protect and promote national interests in the regional and global context.

The securitisation of the area implies also an enhancement of the role of the regional cooperation and security organisms (BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR, SEEBRIG, GUAM) which, in collaboration with the international ones (EU, OSCE, NATO) can ensure the realisation of a regional security architecture that is real and efficient, with the active participation of all political factors involved, as part of the European and global security architecture. The area will become the surveillance and early warning platform in order to protect the strategic security interests of both Russia and the West. In this context, the control of the communication ways to ensure freedom of movement in the operations theatre of the Black Sea basin, through its dislocated military potential will offer in the future, a significant importance to this space

Strategically positioned at the confluence of civilisations and of two macroeconomic systems, the area of the Black Sea will be confronted to asymmetric risks and threats. This will probably be one of the common points of closeness between Russia and NATO, in establishing and commonly acting in order to reduce and stop them in the common interest space. The involvement of NATO in leading military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, coordinated with the plans of dislocating the military bases of the USA from the west of Europe towards the centre and south-east of the continent (Romania and Bulgaria) asserts the shift of the operations sphere of the Alliance towards the East, concomitantly with the expansion of the interest sphere towards Central Asia and Middle East. The expansion of EU introduces a new factor of strategic nature in the region, by including three river sided states (Bulgaria, Romania and prospectively Turkey) in the prosperity are of the single market and in the future arrangements regarding the external security and common defence policy.

The challenge represented by the implementation of these processes in the Black Sea region is all the more important as this presents multiple geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic connotations. As the new frontier of the EU, the Black Sea region, with its population of almost 200 million inhabitants represents an immense market for the EU exports. As transit area of oil and natural gas from Central Asia and the Middle East towards Europe, the Black Sea region also represents the link of an emerging geopolitical and geo-economic axis: Mediterranean Sea – Black Sea – Caspian Sea²⁴. On the other hand, it is an area of illicit traffic, organised crime and terrorism, as well as a platform for military, reconstruction and stabilisation operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and possibly Iran. Concomitantly, the region is presented as a buffer-area where three cultures and civilisations meet: the orthodox, Islamic and western ones.

The geopolitics of the Black Sea is still searching for stability after the 1989-1991 “revolutions”. For now, only one clear change can be determined, the reduced Russian influence and the growth of USA’s influence in the region. However, the situation is far from being static. The political future of the EU and of the relations between Germany and the USA will be some of the major matters to consider in the future. Probably, a full integration, on federal bases in Europe, associated with a strong Euro-American relation, will result probably in a diminution of competition among the great powers and in a larger influence of the West in the Black Sea region. On the contrary, a more independent external policy from Germany, in the direction of strategic partnerships with Russia and China rather than with the “Euro-Atlantic community” could determine the rebirth of serious intra-western competition.

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²⁴ Adrian Pop, Dan Manoleli, *op. cit.*, p.10.

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