

## ROMANIAN SECURITY SPACE AND THE PONTO-BALTIC ISTHMUS

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*The Ponto-Baltic Isthmus area, although is a sensible one, being in a strong resurgence because of the opening region of interest due to Black Sea, is less studied. It has a special importance in geopolitics and Romanian anthropogeography, as Mehedinți and Gheorghe Brătianu underlined and becomes more discussed inside of Mackinder's and Spykman's theories. The security of the whole area depends on the Black Sea, the Danube and the Straits security. The policy of a state should be interested on the Straits problem, the natural extension of the Danube Delta as well as naval and air bases that dominate Pontic area. We shouldn't be regardless who mastered them, said the great historian Gheorghe Brătianu. Romanian sociologists emphasized the strategic importance of the Black Sea; its role between three important zones: Europe, Asia and the Middle Orient. The Black Sea represents the key- element for the security of Romania and Europe. Black Sea issue is important because it depends on the security of the energy routes and the security of an entire South East European area.*

**Keywords:** Ponto-Baltic Isthmus area, Black Sea, Danube, South East European area, Gheorghe Brătianu, Simion Mehedinți.

Romanian school of geopolitics has emerged as the nation's science. "It is its major stamp and the key that makes differences from other geopolitical schools that marked that period" (Bădescu I., Dungaciu D., coord., 1993, 74). Romanian geopolitical school representatives (geographers, historians, demographers, ethnographers) developed studies and approaches which emphasized the role of geographical and demo-political Romanian space.

### THE GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF PONTO-BALTIC ISTHMUS

#### *GHEORGHE BRĂȚIANU – HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE BLACK SEA*

Gheorghe Brătianu underlined the fact that "to understand the past, we must first understand the entire geographical, historical and geopolitical context which it belongs. We can not be detached from the whole geographical context which

bounds us and decides our destiny. We should take into account two elements that mastered it: the mountain and the sea” (Brătianu Gh., 1999, p. 27). The whole Romanian history depends on two geographical factors that have a special importance for Romanian people: the mountain and the sea. The mountain and the sea represent “vital space”, fundamental conditions for the existence of Romanian people. The mountains signify “the place from we are coming; they represent a national problem, spatial one. The sea is the place from we can breathe the freedom air. Through Sea we are entering in the world history”<sup>1</sup>.

Brătianu’s main concern is the geo- historic study of the Black Sea, which allowed him to identify what he can define a “security space”. The security problem of an entire area is about the Black Sea, the Danube and the Straits security. A state policy “couldn’t be uninterested in the Straits problems, in the natural extension of the Danube Delta and in the existence of the naval and air basis which dominate the Black Sea area. We can not be indifferent, even beyond our border, who mastered them” (Brătianu Gh., 1999, 78). The security space mentioned by Gheorghe Brătianu is “that space which comprises those regions and points without which no nation can fulfill its historical mission or opportunities that make up its destiny” (*idem*, 82).

The security space becomes the territory that maintains the nation’s existence. This space, says Brătianu, “is stretching from the Danube and Nistru to Crimea... In our security space is the Straits problem, the extension of the Danube and Iron Gates, which regulates the course and the Crimea’s naval and air basis” (Bădescu Ilie, Dungaciu Dan (coord.), 1993, p. 108). There are two “key-positions” that Romania should take into account: “1. Bosphorus entry and the Straits system that takes the navigation far away from the closed sea; 2. Crimea, which has a master position over the whole marine complex through its natural ports and citadels from ancient times. Who has Crimea can master the Black Sea. Who hasn’t it, can not master the Black Sea” (Brătianu Gh., 1999, 82). We can not be indifferent from these important landmarks for the destiny of our country.

The Sea, the Straits and the Danube are the most important pillars for the Romanian security space. That’s why Eminescu said that “our country is a state of culture in the lower Danube”. The country has a cultural destiny, not a political or military one.

#### N. AL. RĂDULESCU – ROMANIAN DANUBE BORDER

N. Al. Rădulescu shows the geopolitical importance of Romania. He is concerned about the “Romanian Danube border” and finds three important attributions of the Danube river: 1. that of “maritime road”. This road had the same

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from the course on the Black Sea held at the University of Bucharest by Gheorghe I. Brătianu, 1942–1943.

role in the times of barbarian invasions; 2. the second role is that of “frontier”. N. Al. Rădulescu establishes the frontier of the Danube in Europe: “it is obvious that the Danube separates Balkan Europe from Central and Eastern Europe (which Romania belongs). All are in contrast between these two divisions: the terrain is more mountainous, low percentage of loess and pre-Mediterranean climate are the main characteristics of the Balkans, while in Central Europe there are various landforms, high proportion of lowland, predominance of Quaternary, loess-rich strata, Danube and Polish continental climate etc” (Rădulescu N. Al., “Danubian frontier” apud Bădescu Ilie, Dungaciu Dan (coord.), 1993, 97). “The Danube was a border, a frontier from the oldest time which separated the empires (The Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire). And, more than that, it always remained an ethnic axis”: “If the Danube becomes a border for those states, it always remains an ethnic axis. It was a contact element, a drive link for the areas where the Thracians, Romans and, later Romanians lived. It has today the same character: from the entrance in Banat and until the shedding, the population on one side and the other which still preserves traces of unconscious division of the ancient Thracians is the same: it is the Romanian population” (idem); 3. the third role of the Danube is that of “the element of political polarization of the Romanian state”. The destiny of Romanian state is bound by the existence of the Danube. In the paper “Romanian Danube problems”, N. Al. Rădulescu focuses on the European status of the Danube:

1. “The navigation of the river can be done with all the intensity only if in the middle of the river doesn’t exist imperialist states, which can broke the bound between the state who master the upper basin and the the state who guards the Danube.

2. The existence of the Romanian state is related to the Danube. Romania proved through history that it could accomplish its european mission: that of the sentinel at the Danube.

From these geopolitical reasons, Europe needs a strong Romanian state at the Black Sea coast spread sufficiently to be capable for the security of the Danube” (Bădescu Ilie, Dungaciu Dan (coord.), 1993, 99).

N. Al. Rădulescu underlined the fact that the security of Europe is related to regional security of the Black Sea and the defense of the mouth of the Danube from any expansion of the imperialist powers.

Rudolf Kjellen used the term “buffer state” to emphasize “the condition of small states which, from geopolitical point of view, are in intermediary positions between great powers” (Bădescu Ilie, 2004, 27). Romania, state which is “on the long way of the Danube people” (idem) and on the intersection of great geopolitical interests has an important role for the defense of the frontiers on the mouth of the Danube. Romania represents what Nicolae Iorga named “state of european necessity” (ibidem). European Union sustained the integration of Romania among member states especially for its important role in the Black Sea region.

**SIMION MEHEDIŢI – “THE ETHNOPOLITICS AND THE GEOPOLITICS  
OF THE NATIONAL SPACE”**

Simion MehediŃi laid the foundation of the geopolitical state. He underlined the fact that the crucial landmarks for the Romanians are the Mountains, the Danube and the Sea. “Every politician will take care and will be concerned for the Danube, the Sea and the Carpathians. That hwo loses one of these concerns expose its country and its people to many dangers”(Bădescu Ilie, Dungaciu Dan (coord.), 1993, p. 76).

Mehedinti recalls geographical landmarks which can characterize Romanian people: “We are the only people Christened imperceptibly” (MehediŃi- Soveja, 2004, p. 50).

For MehediŃi geopolitical condition of the state has to be examined in its “inner circle” defined by four landmarks: Ponto- Baltic Isthmus, the Straits, the Danube and the Carpathians (*idem*). These landmarks have to be integrated in an assembly of outer circles, which can close the moving larger spaces. Herder called that “moving geography”.

We have the exemple of moving forward of Russia, Moscow giant pressure from political and ideological point of view. The Romanian element is “on the front of the Asian steppe between the Prut, the Baltic and the Urals so the oriental thing lies from Constantinopol to Kdnigsberg” (Bădescu Ilie, Dungaciu Dan (coord.), 1993, p. 77).

Russia represents a threat at the Black Sea shores. Russia knew to defeat its interests better than Romania, said Gheorghe Brătianu. Most Russian interests were related to oil extraction industry in the Caucasus region even before the Cold War.

The Soviet expansion between the two world wars was an ideological, political and economical one. Control of oil reserves and communist propaganda explain how to maintain Russia’s ascension to power. Lausanne conference from 1923 established a disarmed Straits regime and provided merchandise into the Black Sea. Lausanne Trait was modified in 1936 in Montreux. Turkey had the right to fortify the Straits and it was imposed a weight limit for vessels entering in the Black Sea. Turkey and especially Russia had an advantage of these changes. Litvinov said: “The conference recognized special rights of littoral states of the Black Sea and the special geographical situation of the Black Sea”<sup>2</sup>.

The regional security is related to the Straits and the mouth of the Danube. Gheorghe Brătianu said that “the security space implies the fact that we can not be indifferent on the two key positions (the Straits and Crimea)” (Brătianu Gh., 1999, p. 83).

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<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from the course on the Black Sea held at the University of Bucharest by Gheorghe I. Brătianu, 1942–1943

### GEOPOLITICAL THEORIES OF “RIMLAND” AND “HEARTLAND”

The states have always sought to open new maritime routes to modify their power relations on their side. The opening of trade routes has a real importance for the economy and the power of states. For example, the opening of Suez Canal in 19th century “was the second geopolitical revolution by the fact that England offered a shorter route to India” (Chaupraude A. 2003, 580).

The opening at the sea offered a great economical, military and strategic superiority of the states. W. Kirk was talking about “coastal areas and civilizations” and the American geopolitical analysis underlined the importance of the rimland concerning geo-strategic and geopolitical positions of the states.

English and American schools of geopolitics concentrated on maritime power as strategy of world domination, while German school of geopolitics concentrated on continental power. Alfred Mahan, marine officer, built a strategy for United States to become the great maritime power in 19th century. In his book, “The Interest of America in Sea Power”, Albert Mahan defines his doctrine. He recommends “the association of American maritime power with British one concerning the Sea control; these had to oppose to Reich claims for the Sea control and to assure a security cordon made by Europeans and Americans against Asian ambitions” (*idem*, 44). For Mahan, United States represented, from geopolitical point of view, an island and this insular character can assure its security. He is the one who contributed out of the isolation proposed by Monroe doctrine (1823) and to reassure the American supremacy. Mahan claimed maritime powers, predicting US world domination through its strategic position at the sea.

Despite Mahan who proclaimed the supremacy of maritime power, Halford Mackinder underlined the supremacy of continental power. Mackinder said that intra-continental space circle or heartland is the world pivot. “This world pivot is geographical overlap with Eurasia, whose center is Russia which occupies a strategic position, the same position that Germany has in Europe” (Chaupraude A., 2003, p. 45). The coastal area, the area which surrounds the heartland is protected by a belt of natural obstacles (Himalaya, Gobi desert, Tibet). Mackinder named it the inner circle and is represented by “rimland”, the region of flourishing civilization. The third circle is represented by “outland”, the outer belt (Bădescu Ilie, 2004, p. 16–17).

The geopolitical phenomena can be explained starting from the competition concerning the central pivot, the heartland. Mackinder proposes an important thesis: “that who controls Eastern Europe, dominates the heartland, dominates the World Island, and that who dominates the World Island, dominates over the entire world” (*idem*, 18).

The major competitors of heartland would be Germany and Russia, said Mackinder. These would be countered by England, as maritime power over continental powers.

For Mackinder the geopolitical position of heartland is the result of the history, through human technology which had a strategic superiority for continental powers over maritime powers (Chaupraude A., 2003, p. 45). For Mackinder's analysis is important this vision of concentric areas and the importance of the heartland for the world competition.

Nicholas John Spykman is known for his thesis concerning "containment" policy imposed by the United States in the early Cold War. He criticized Haushofer determinism and the importance of the heartland given by Mackinder. For Spykman the geopolitical pivotal area is not heartland but, at the contrary, the rimland, "intermediary region between heartland and the sea" (*idem*, 51). The zone of rimland is important because it is the confrontation place between the continental area– Spykman example– USSR and maritime power represented by United States. Spykman estimates that "who dominates the rimland dominates Eurasia, and that who dominates Eurasia dominates the world" (*ibidem*).

In the context of the Cold War, the strategic area known as "the rimland" was Eastern Europe, a region between the Atlantic Alliance and Varsovia pact (*ibidem*). NATO, as military alliance corresponds to rimland in Mediterranean area and in the Black Sea region.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, follower of Spykman, sustained "the embankment" theory of the Eurasian area by United States. Brzezinski said that it is imperious not to appear any Eurasian competitor able to dominate Eurasia and to compete with America" (Brzezinski Z., 2000, 12). Brzezinski considers that Eurasia can represent anytime a danger for the West and the Americans have built the strategies concerning these fears. In Eurasia, after the strategy proposed by Brzezinski, we have to be concentrated on Ukraine as Russian influential space, being on the East-European fault and on the Caspian Sea which, controlled, isolates Moscow from southern area (Chaupraude A., 2003, p. 58).

"It is necessary that those offshore sectors that would keep the neutrality or would gravitate towards internal spaces of the continent have great importance so that the anaconda strategy can succeed" (*idem*).

A. Dughin distinguished between "talasocratic powers" and "telurocratic powers" or "the continental powers" and "the maritime powers". "Russia geopolitical analysis has two observations: a) "heartland" is a space disputed by continental powers, "virtual geopolitical spaces"; b) "heartland" is disputed by two great geopolitical powers: the continental powers or "telurocratics" and atlantic powers or "tanasocratics". Dughin said that the same heartland area is disputed by four Great virtual geopolitical spaces: The Great Russia (Eurasia's space), China with its expansion in North, the Middle Europe (with *Drang Nach Osten*) and *Islamic unit*" (Bădescu I., Alexander Dughin, "The Geopolitics of Russia and the Geopolitics of Orthodoxy", in *Security Studies*, no 1/ 2003).

For its balance, Russia needs to extend towards cold and warm waters. It seems that Russia takes advantage of the warm waters in the West by strengthening

the security base at Sevastopol in Crimea. “Every region of the planet can be thought as having an heartland and an external maritime medium, an external belt” (Bădescu Ilie, 2004, 33), said Saul Cohen. Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic space can be thought as “Heartland”, and external belt represents Black Sea region as an area of the South East Europe’s security.

#### **GEOPOLITICAL AND GEO-STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE BLACK SEA**

Romanian sociologists underlined the strategic importance of the Black Sea, its role of “revolving plate” (Brătianu Gheorghe, 1999, 317) between three different special areas: Europe, Asia, the Middle East) and the importance of the Straits, of Ponto-Baltic Isthmus and of the mouth of the Danube.

The Black Sea represents the key-element for the security of Romania and Europe. It is in attention of the Europe because it is bound by the desire to stabilize the South East area and it is in the project which seeks to integrate Turkey, Ukraine and Georgia. For United States and for Europe the Black Sea issue is crucial because it depends on securing energy routes. It depends on the security of an entire South East European area. The Black Sea region should take into account the Euro-Asian energy corridor, joining Euro-Atlantic system of energy reserves in the Caspian Sea and Central Asian states. This energetic system was based on the idea of building the future of the Nabucco pipeline and South-Stream gas pipeline.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the multiplication of the riparian countries, Caspian neighbourhood that houses the largest reserves of oil, the location between two major players on the world political scene, Russia and Euro-Atlantic alliance, contribute to increased geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the Black Sea region.

The Black Sea becomes an important pillar for the security and the identity of a region being in immediate proximity of Russian interests.

The interest of Russia for the Black Sea is crucial. The Russian security belt is designed in the vicinity of the extended Black Sea region. This region represented for the Russians the vector expansion since 1696, when they possessed the Azov (the first Russian map of the Black Sea was drawn in 1701 when it was taken into account the depths around the Crimea and the Bosfor) and until 1945 when the Black Sea falls under Soviet control. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia tries to revise its borders and to secure hegemony over the Black Sea.

The maintaining of certain frozen conflicts is part of Russia’s geostrategic project that tries to shape a region of prime interests. Russia tries to create a security belt threatened by Euro-Atlantic extension.

Near the Black Sea region are many conflicts, some of them almost anonymous to the public. The protagonist of these conflicts is, in most cases, Russia. There are so-called “frozen conflicts” from Transnistria, Cecenia, Abkhazia, South Osetia.

The file of southern Bessarabia shouldn't be overlooked when we want to analyze Chisinau- Kiev- Bucharest relations. Indeed, the geopolitical stakes of the region is the control of Crimea, a real source of tension, where are both Russians and Ukrainians. Besides Russia- Ukraine dispute, the Crimean file implies the fight with Ankara because of the Crimean Tatar community. The number of Crimean Tatars is almost 300 000 when the Crimea population decreased from 2,43 million in 1989 to 1,99 million in 2005 (Serebrian Oleg, 2009, 159).

Russia seeks to secure the borders with Abkhazia and South Osetia and doesn't want to leave Sevastopol. Recently it was signed an agreement with Ukraine to extend the term presence of Russian bases in Crimea for another 25 years. The treaty signed by Russia and Ukraine established that the presence of Russian bases will be until 2042 with an extension of five years in exchange for reducing the cost of gas delivered to Ukraine with 30%. The Russia strategy is to maintain its fleet in the neighborhood side of Georgia and to supervise other military bases in the region, including the one in Constanta. Russia has understood the importance of security at the sea and near the Straits. Its strategy is to build the security belt near rimland.

Ratification of the agreement concerning the presence of the Russian fleet in Crimea reopens a page of strategic relations between Russia and Ukraine and demonstrates a closer approach of Ukraine by Russia than the West. It seems that the benefits for Ukraine come from the eastern part, and this deal could mark the beginning of closer relations and cooperation with Russia on other plans.

In Ukraine, Moscow has interests in Odessa, the most important trading port during the Soviet Union. Russia has interests especially in Mikolaiv port until the Crimean Peninsula, the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea fleet. US experts believe that Russia sees in Ukraine the key to Eurasia. Ukraine has Sevastopol, the maritime base for Russia and Ukrainian ports are the only modern ports with landlocked warm waters which assure the passing to Belarus; Ukraine has a large concentration of Russian speaking population especially in the industrial heartland, Odessa. Concerning this, Ukraina represents for Russia a security barrier against Euro- Atlantic expansion.

Russia focuses on the territories from Northern Danube, maintaining its influence in the region of Transnistria and Republic of Moldova. Transnistria, through its geopolitical and geostrategic position, is the lever by which Russia wants to keep at bay the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Transnistrian file is very important for Russia.

Kremlin supports autonomist movements in Azerbaidjan and Georgia are present only to destabilize these countries, seeking independence. All these separatist movements aspire to rebuild a new USSR.

The relations between Russia and Georgia are still strained. Georgia conflicts may break out in areas where there is a concentration of Armenian minority and can lead to a destabilization of the region.

Turkey represents an important actor in the Black Sea region from military, demographic and geo-economic point of view. Turkey is an important piece in the region, being the main corridor of gas and is the focal point, providing an interface between Euro-Atlantic area and the Middle East. Turkey collects gas from Azerbaijan and Central Asia, from Iran and from Syria, being the main channel of energy transport to Western Europe.

It seems that South Stream pipeline gas, with a length of about 900 kilometers will pass under the Black Sea, from Novorosisk to Varna, in Bulgaria, and will carry Russian gas to Europe, bypassing Ukraine. In this context, Romania, the landlocked geopolitical actor may have won, being a possible competitor for South Stream.

We underline that the importance of the Black Sea region follows two directions: on the one hand, provide strategic natural resources to Western Europe and the US (the Black Sea has a geo-economic interest), and on the other hand is an important geostrategic area concerning Euro- Atlantic enlargement.

We must consider and the security threats to the Black Sea area by the presence of the separatist movements in the region (Chechen police, separatist regime of Tiraspol and separatist Kurdish groups in Turkey) (Serebrian O., 2009, 164) but also by the proliferation of organized crime, trafficking persons and weapons and transnational terrorism. Black Sea region is also a route for illegal drugs and weapons. "The traditional route of the Silk Road is used to bring heroin to European markets" (Asmus Ronald and Bruce Jackson, "The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom" in *Policy Review*, no. 125/2004).

Today the geopolitical importance of the Black Sea increases considerably, being not only a component of interest to American bases and the East-West demarcation line, but also the energy corridor which provides the transport of Caspian gas to Europe. Russia has control over energy supplies from Eurasia, strengths Sevastopol base and keeps control over Crimea. Russian troops still stationed in Transnistrian area and Russia still put pressure on Georgia, while maintaining some separatist groups that threaten the independence of the region. All these and the closer relation between Russia and Germany (an important pillar in EU) indicate the fact that Russia has a great influence on the Black Sea policy. Among these, in the relation with UE or NATO, Russia's actions shouldn't be neglected.

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