

POSSIBLE ROMANIAN EXCEPTIONALISM AT THE BLACK SEA, IN A REAL EU FOREIGN POLICY AND COMMON SECURITY STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

This article makes an x-ray of the current situation at the Black Sea, Romania's most vulnerable flank, and proposes possible solutions for Romania, together with Bulgaria and in collaboration with Moldova, Georgia or even Turkey, to become a strong anchor, but also a basis for projecting an external position of the EU in this hot zone, which even envisages an extended collaboration up to the Baltic Sea, on the entire Eastern flank of NATO and the EU!

Keywords: Romania, Black Sea, security policy, cooperation, the Russian Federation.

INTRODUCTION

The Black Sea is the expanse of water in the geomorphological basin called the Pontic, located between Europe and Asia, with a length of 1149 km and a width of 630 km, with Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Georgia as riparian states. Through, it is connected to the Sea of Azov, through the Bosphorus to the Sea of Marmara, and through the Dardanelles Strait to the Aegean Sea, and the Planetary Ocean through the Mediterranean Sea. At the Black Sea, the Greeks had "geopolitical strategies" at the time of Greek colonization when the sea was called "Pontos Euxeinos", meaning "the welcoming sea", followed by the Roman Empire who called it "Pontus Euxinus" (also using "Mare Scythicum"), and later, by the Byzantine Empire, in the Middle Ages, when the names of "Μεγάλη Θάλασσα" ("Megali thalassa") appear, by Genoese and Venetians who called it "Mare maggiore" or "Καικίας Θάλασσα" ("Chechias thalassa", namely the "sea of the sea", taken over in Bulgarian as "more Сечил" ("the blind sea" or "closed"), so that in the end the Russian Empire/USSR/Russian Federation and the Ottoman Empire/Republic of Turkey will make security policies here. From the latter,

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probably after the traditional designation of the cardinal points by colors, where “Kara” (i.e. “dark”) is used for the North and “Ak” (i.e. “bright”) for the South, it was named the Black Sea, north of Turkey (Karadeniz), “Akdeniz” being the Mediterranean Sea, south of Turkey.



Figure 1 – (“Marea Neagră”, 2014).

Romania’s maritime space on the Black Sea is approximately 20,000 square kilometers, consisting of:

- inland maritime waters – 753 square kilometers,
- territorial sea – 4,487 square kilometers,
- contiguous area – 4,460 square kilometers, and
- exclusive economic zone – 10,300 square kilometers (“Marea Neagră”, 2023).

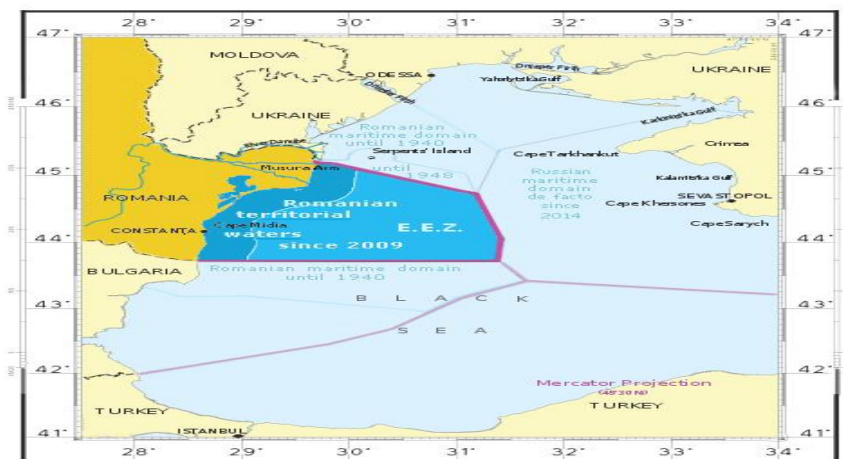


Figure 2 – (“Marea Neagră”, 2023).

Until the illegitimate annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia in 2014, the Black Sea was divided between the riparian countries according to the image below, a situation radically changed after the invasion of Russia on February 24, 2022, when practically, *de facto*, Ukraine “disappears” from The Black Sea, the North and South of the sea being divided between Russia and Turkey.



Figure 3 – (Matei, 2020).

THE GEOSTRATEGIC ROLE OF THE BLACK SEA AREA

The military capabilities now installed in Crimea have affected the military balance (and thus strongly distorted) in the entire Black Sea area. In the absence of a strong NATO fleet in the area and with the complicity of Turkey, the area has become a “Russian lake” in which, Romania, only through a strategic coordination with Bulgaria and possibly Georgia, could exercise a strategic counterbalancing for its interests, but also for the EU or NATO. Moreover, in the last year, all the Security experts of the North Atlantic Alliance have become aware of the crucial role of the Black Sea in the future security architecture of Europe (with influences even on a planetary scale) and are looking for answers to Russia’s challenges. Cruise missiles for the defense of coastal areas, surface-to-air missiles and other capabilities will be able to exert a military influence on the Black Sea from the Russian side, and the solid answer should be the construction of a wall of “steel and fire” on the Romanian coast and the Bulgarian one, similar to what the Russians did in the Crimean Peninsula.

Sevastopol, where the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation is located, has already become the center of gravity of a regional interdiction system whose mission seems to be to keep at a distance any capacity to refuel and reinforce the region. Military investments already made by Moscow in the Black Sea have already overturned any balance of power, as the Black Sea Fleet received new Kilo-class submarines, TU-22M3 long-range supersonic bombers, anti-ship capabilities, S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems Triumph” and the long-range S-500 “Prometheus” and the older S-300 platforms, including the Iskander surface-to-ground systems, which cover an operational area of 400 km, but also military drones or dolphins to secure this “fortress”. Although Russia has tried to create the operational capability to impose a no-fly zone (where it even caused the downing of an American drone!), to obstruct maritime traffic (including the Ukrainian grain trade) and to keep NATO at bay, the loss of the cruiser “Moskow” sunk by the Ukrainians and also the loss of the Snake Island have diminished the offensive appetite shown by the Russian navy and its aggressiveness. The Black Sea is for Romania (and not only for Romania, but also for the EU!) an extremely important energy corridor, with perimeters and underground resources important for the energy security of the region, but also routes to the perimeters rich in hydrocarbons in the Caucasus and the Asian area power plants. It is probably a matter of time until the territorial waters of Romania will match the well-known Thucydides’ trope: “the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must”. Therefore, the urgent resumption of the idea of creating a joint Romanian-Bulgarian fleet with financial aid from the EU and NATO, would be likely to give credibility to this naval presence in the Black Sea. I show that this idea was presented for the first time by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Nikolai Mladenov, who as early as 2010 proposed the union of the naval and air forces of Romania and Bulgaria. <<“Why not have a common fleet and military aviation with Romania”, asked Mladenov, during a speech held on Friday at the Atlantic Club in Sofia. Bulgaria’s first diplomat gave the example of Belgium and the Netherlands, which have common naval forces, writes the Sofia daily Trud on Saturday.

The idea for uniting the fleet and aviation of Romania and Bulgaria was also formulated two months ago by the former French ambassador in Sofia, Etienne de Poncins. “Bulgaria must make a decision regarding the development of its naval and air forces. Why not also discuss the creation of joint forces of Romania and Bulgaria?”, said the diplomat in a farewell speech that marked the the end of his mandate. In recent years, several politicians and military experts have stated that the cheapest option for the purchase of new fighter jets by Romania and Bulgaria would be for the two countries to join their efforts, buying the same type of aircraft, and in this case aircraft maintenance and pilot training will cost much less>>. – (“Romania și Bulgaria, flota și aviație militară comună?”, 2010). The image below shows the *de facto* change in the territorial

sea in favor of Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, but today, Ukraine has also been removed from the northern area of the Sea of Azov where it had the ports of Mariupol and Berdiansk, the Sea of Azov becoming, we repeat, de facto, a “Russian Sea”.

If we also add the area of Abkhazia, a secessionist “republic” from the composition of Georgia de facto also controlled by Russia, we realize that only a fine line exists between the east and the west of the Black Sea, only the ports of Poti and Batumi being under the control of the Georgian government, with main correspondents on the west coast at Constanța, Mangalia, Varna and Burgas.



Figure 4 – (GMT, 2015).

The problem of Romania, but also of the EU, in a possible collaboration with Georgia, is the pro-Russian policy of the Georgian government led by Irakli Garibashvili, a politician who, after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, did not support Western sanctions against Russia, resumed air links with Moscow and has a duplicitous position, despite the fact that in June 2014 the EU and Georgia signed an Association Agreement, which entered into force on 1 July 2016 and which allowed Georgians to travel visa-free within the EU. The strategic thinking of the Romanian state, if it existed, would require the development of SC TMC CFR Ferry-Boat SA which is a company strategic maritime transport company from Romania, established in 2007, by a government decision, as a subsidiary of the state company *CFR Marfă*.

The company owns two ferry-boats, that is, Eforie and Mangalia, built in 1991 and 1988, which could ensure the transport of wagons, containers and TIR trucks between the ports of Constanța and the Georgian ports (Batumi or Poti). It is worth mentioning that an important traffic between Romania and Asian countries took place before 1990. Just by looking at the map, we realize that this sea route, if it were to be realized to its true potential, would represent a major shortening of transport distances and duration for goods from Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan or even China. Of course, in addition to the two ships with a displacement of 12,000 tdw each that can load on board 40 coaches or 40 wagons, there should be at least 4 more pairs of such ships, especially since the ferry line makes part of the IV Pan European Corridor, which should connect with Asia and which, on the territory Romania, up to the Western border, ensures high speeds on high-speed railroad corridors. We only specify that the Romanian state, through a decision of the Supreme National Defense Council (CSAT), decided that the two ships should be kept in working order, having the status of “strategic equipment from a military point of view”.

The above strategy is also in line with the ideas expressed at various levels by the Romanian authorities, Romania wanting to attract to Constanța the flow of goods from China, via Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia. From Constanța, the goods could go either on the Danube to Vienna and from there to the rest of the EU states, or by highway or even by rail (*via* the IV Pan European Corridor). In this context, we specify that the foreign ministers of Romania, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia signed a political declaration in 2019 for the creation of a freight transport route linking Constanța with Poti (Georgia), Baku (Azerbaijan) and Turkmenbashi (Turkmenistan), Constanța being the largest port on the Black Sea and a veritable cargo hub.

We note that Poti is the main port of Georgia on the Black Sea and is owned by APM Terminals, a subsidiary company of Moller-Maersk, from Denmark, and the annual cargo traffic is about 500,000 TEU. Batumi is the second largest Georgian port, being controlled by the Kazakh company KazTransOil, but the operators of the container terminal are Filipinos from International Container Terminal Services (ICTSI). From the map below, the political and military lines that intersect at the Black Sea between the EU, NATO and the Russian Federation are very clearly visible (since 2017, 5 years before the start of the invasion from Ukraine), the claims of the latter leading not only to the accumulation of tensions, but also to open conflicts with an unpredictable end.



Figure 5 – (Corneanu, 2017).

Internally, after solving the logistical problems regarding the securing of gas and oil transport routes from the Caucasus or Central Asia, Romania should hurry to develop essential petrochemical platforms in the processing of natural gas from the Black Sea continental plateau that belongs to Romania, under the conditions in which as early as June 2021, Exxon announced that it had reached an agreement with state-owned Romgaz to sell its 50% stake in the Neptun Deep concession for \$1.06 billion, a deal that was closed on August 1, 2022. The deposit of about 100 billion cubic meters, which will be exploited for 10 years, probably starting from 2027, will make Romania the largest producer of natural gas in the European Union and should bring to Romania's state budget about 20 billion euros only from royalties. Under such circumstances, we argue that Romgaz should, by necessity, develop at least a capacity for petrochemical processing of natural gas from the Black Sea, given that, today, Romania's balance of payments is deeply unbalanced by the import of some goods that were once produced in Romania (carbon black, synthetic oils, fertilizers, etc.). Also for the purpose of the reindustrialization of Romania and for the achievement of the goal of producing in Romania competitive products with high added value, in fields of top technology, as an adjacent part of a Black Sea strategy, we could act immediately for the reinstatement and revalorization of the Vadu Rare Metals Enterprise, where there are reserves of "rare earths" of about 1 trillion dollars (one thousand billion dollars), in the form of alluvium brought by Danube and deposited by sea currents in this point of the Romanian coast.

The European Union is a big consumer of such raw materials used in the high-tech industry, from electronics to aviation and from the nuclear industry to the space industry, which it does not really have and which it imports from countries

that are not very “friendly”. Zirconium, hafnium, thorium, etc. are heavily used in the chip industry which the EU is pushing to massively develop to reduce its dependence on China. We specify that the former Rare Metals Enterprise was managed directly by the Security until 1989, and the “most expensive beach in Romania” can produce 4.71 million dollars in eight hours (2017 prices and representing only the value of the ore), under the conditions in which China produces about 80% of the production of “rare earths” worldwide, i.e. about 100 thousand tons per year, Russia about 20, and Brazil about 4, the demand being significant and far exceeding the production. Notably, Poland, without owning Romania’s assets in the abovementioned domain, managed to attract an investment of 4.6 billion dollars from the American giant INTEL in a chip factory. This metallurgical company could be integrated with the former Altân Tepe copper mine, the only one of its kind in Dobrogea, which exploited the unique copper pyrite deposit in Romania with the richest copper content of the ore, 4% in the ore, and with Zirom Giurgiu, which is a company producing strategic metals from Romania. The main activity of the company will be the production and marketing of titanium, zirconium and their alloys, as well as the micro-production of non-ferrous and ferrous metals resulting from copper mining at Altân Tepe.

We specify that the company was established during the communist period, as a section of the Giurgiu Chemical Combine, out of the desire of the then regime to ensure Romania’s energy independence. The zirconium alloy (Zircaloy 4) is necessary for the operation of CANDU-type reactors, which are used at the Cernavoda nuclear power plant, where Romania wants to complete reactors 3 and 4. After 1989, the company separated from Combinatul Chimic, becoming Regia Autonomă Zirom Giurgiu. Currently, the company produces titanium ingots and titanium alloys and is part of the portfolio of Fondul Proprietatea, which can be taken over by the Romanian state through negotiation, analyzing the takeover and integration of the company GRANTMETAL București, which developed towards the end of the 1980s the spaces of high-fineness production for the titanium-zirconium line, together with the Metallurgical Research Institute as a strong link in metallurgical design. It is obvious that such strategic thinking, with strong military and economic security components, would lead to the emergence of an integrated commercial company that could be a unique manufacturer at the level of the European Union and produce various high-tech equipment and products used in aviation, the space industry, microelectronics, the chemical and nuclear industry or the sports materials industry. This vision of developing such a manufacturer should also be taken into consideration in a particular context: Japan will collaborate with the UK and Italy to develop a new generation fighter jet by 2035, “an ambitious effort to develop a new generation of fighter jets fight” within a program called GCAP (Global Combat Air Programme) and to which Romania could be added.

The Romanian government, in completing its Black Sea security strategy and also in the process of changing its role from “spectator” to a “player”, must

consider the urgent launch (completion) of some public works of the state or in a public-private partnership that would generate development in a short time, and we would dare to list some of them: the Danube-Bucharest Canal or the expansion/modernization of the Constanța port. Although it is not directly related to the security issue of the Black Sea, being only adjacent to it, the Danube-Bucharest Canal can be an economic asset for Romania, in its economic development and the connection of its capital with the Planetary Ocean through several ports. This canal was designed to have a length of 73 km and a width of 80 m with a minimum water depth of 4.5 m, the difference in level of 53 m (10 m above sea level in Oltenița and 63 m in Bucharest) , including four locks and three ports , two in Bucharest (near the 1 Decembrie commune – on Argeș and in Glina – on the Dâmbovița river) and another in Oltenița. The communist regime had already allocated about \$400 million for this project, and in December 1989, the canal was about 70% complete. The project was also supposed to be a “green” energy producer (which is why it could receive funding from the EU), through the four micro-hydropower plants in the hydrotechnical nodes, set up next to the sluices, being able to reach an electricity production of over 50 MW. Also, the water from the canal was intended as a source of irrigation for about 150,000 hectares of arable land.

CONCLUSIONS

In analyzing our possible Black Sea Security strategy, we intentionally did not analyze Turkey’s position. We appreciate that, despite a duplicitous and “non - combat” position with Russia and despite the ideological foundations of neo-Ottoman origin, which include pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism as central ideas, which they promote quite aggressively, it is still a NATO state. And an ally of Romania, with whom we have a treaty of “eternal friendship” from 1934. For this reason, we appreciate that if a combined Romanian-Bulgarian-Turkish fleet existed and acted in a coordinated manner in the Black Sea area, in conjunction with the provisions of the Montreux Convention regarding the status of the straits from 1936, through which Turkey obtained control over the straits of Bosphorus the Dardanelles, Russia’s military fleet would be brought under control, irrespective of the aggressive action or manifestation it would have attempted, including by effectively protecting the rest of Ukraine’s remaining coastline by granting Ukraine the “right to use” its port facilities for the combined fleet mentioned above. Although, pessimistically, we appreciate that no Romanian government would ever even dare to outline such ambitious objectives in the Black Sea for the defense and/or promotion of its previously detailed interests, we have made this exercise of imagination, backed with logical arguments, in order to offer potential solutions, so that the decision-makers look towards a different kind of future and give them the

courage to look up from the ground for the benefit of current and future generations. Despite the academic profile of this article, I have chosen to end it with a joke that needs to be understood in the context of this text.

God distributed the riches to all the peoples and poured out his riches on Romania. Amazed and a little shocked by God's excessive benevolence for the Romanians, Saint Peter asks him:

– What are you doing, Blessed One, you give them too much!

To which God answers:

– Wait and see what leaders I give them!

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