

ROMANIA, REGIONAL STABILITY PILLAR

*Violeta NICOLESCU, PhD Candidate**

Abstract: *Why is the security of the Black Sea region important? Or, is the Black Sea important at all or more important than the Baltic Sea? What states are particularly concerned with the security situation in this region? These are questions which the hereby article attempts to answer, in a coordinated approach which takes into account the existing security challenges and threats, the existing actors of the international community and especially one riparian state – Romania. By emphasizing the steps undertaken by this country in becoming a security provider, our intention is to conclude that the Ally and EU member state Romania is a reliable stability pillar in the region and that, besides national efforts, for any “construction” in the region to last, it needs the constant and active support of the North-Atlantic Alliance and the EU.*

Keywords: *Romania, Black Sea, strategic, NATO, regional, deterrence.*

CONTEXT

Placed at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia, the geopolitical region of the Black Sea is an important transit area for energy resources and a space for asymmetric risks, but also for outbreaks of conflict, which have a substantial impact on Euro-Atlantic security.

The post-2014 timeframe, immediately after the illegal annexation by the Russian Federation of the Crimean Peninsula, and up to the present has been, as far as the Black Sea region is concerned, a period of gradual awareness, by the international community, of its strategic importance. Strengthening Russia's military capabilities in the region and the so-called A2/AD (anti-access and regional ban systems); the efforts of some riparian allies to make other NATO member states aware of the importance of NATO engagement in the area; Allied military exercises – all these are elements which have built the present canvas of a region whose security needs to be strengthened and constantly ensured.

* “Carol I” National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: violetanicolescu@gmail.com.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE BLACK SEA REGION

With Ukraine in the north, Turkey in the south and the Russian Federation in the northeast, the Black Sea has Romania, Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova in the west, and Georgia in the east. Of these, Romania, Turkey and Bulgaria are NATO member states, and Ukraine and Georgia are partners of the Alliance, the latter being, since 2008, aspiring to full membership. Thus, all the states in the region are linked, in one way or another, to the Euro-Atlantic structure – three being NATO members, two (Georgia and the Republic of Moldova) NATO partners in the Partnership for Peace, and one – Ukraine, having a distinct partnership with the North Atlantic Alliance. Even the Russian Federation – the initiator of the status-quo – still has a distinct partnership with NATO, through the mechanism of the NATO-Russia Commission, resumed after the events of 2014 exclusively for discussions to prevent things from escalating. In EU-related context, of the states in region, two are member states (Romania and Bulgaria), three are states of the Eastern Partnership (Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) and one is a candidate for full membership (Turkey).

The Black Sea connects the Euro-Atlantic strategic area with that of the Middle East, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, thus finding itself at the intersection of two major strategic circuits, linking the two geostrategic areas, but also dividing them at the same time: the circuit between the energy producer and the energy consumer, on the one hand, and the circuit between the security producer and the security consumer, on the other hand.

The region thus brings together various national interests: strengthening security in the region; achieving the status of regional security and stability pillar; European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations; economic interests – all these in antithesis to the Russian efforts to control the region. That Russia's assertive actions in the Black Sea region are motivated by a "hereditary" desire for expansion or a fear of not being "swallowed" by NATO expansion has already become irrelevant. What matters at the moment seems to be just finding a balanced solution, so that each party gets as much as it wants, without affecting the other.

A strategic crossroads for all actors in the region, the Black Sea also offers the advantage of the possibility of projecting power into a number of

adjacent regions. The takeover of Crimea gave Russia the opportunity to modernize its warships and naval bases and to equip its fleet with new submarines, frigates and missiles. A2 / AD capabilities are strategically placed and include modern air defence systems, such as the S-400 missile systems in Crimea, used to primarily prohibit the Alliance from deploying forces in the Black Sea or operating in certain land, maritime or air zones. Russia has not shied away from taking advantage of this opportunity, securing access to the warm seas, theaters of operations in the Middle East or projecting its power in the Eastern Mediterranean. „*The Russian Black Sea Fleet may not have many warships, but the appropriate combination of offensive and defensive weapons provides it with the capability of performing tactical operations... Its fleet's main mission can be seen in two interconnected domains: power projection/coercion and NATO deterrence... Russia will keep using the Black Sea as a platform for expanding its influence in neighboring regions, including the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. The main task of the Russian fleet is thus successful anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD), based on mostly conventional deterrence but still admitting a low-level nuclear operation, which is aimed at strengthening the stability of deterrence.*”¹

In terms of the energy sector, the Black Sea region is the main transit corridor and a source of energy for consumption in Europe. It is crossed by various routes for the transport of oil and hydrocarbons from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to the West. By controlling certain maritime routes, Russia would have the power to "stifle" trade and energy routes, disrupting the supply of pipeline energy from the Caspian Basin to Europe.

All the above make the Black Sea region the vulnerable spot of NATO's eastern flank, through its great ethnic and cultural diversity, historical ties with Russia, frozen conflicts², illegal border crossings, disinformation campaigns or cyber attacks. Notwithstanding, it was not until 2014, at the NATO Summit in Wales, when the importance of the Black Sea was mentioned for the first time, in an allied context, the joint statement

¹ Polina Sinovets, *The Real and Projected Strategic Dimension of the Russian Black Sea Fleet*, decembrie 2020, available at <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/real-and-projected-strategic-dimension-russian-black-sea-fleet>, accessed on 6 January 2021.

² Southeast Europe, the extended Black Sea area included, is the only European region with frozen conflicts.

following the event stating that: *"the Black Sea region... remains an important component of Euro-Atlantic security"*³, while the Warsaw Summit two years later associated the notion „strategic” with the region: *"We face evolving challenges in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, the North Atlantic, as well as in the Mediterranean, which are of strategic importance to the Alliance and to our partners."*⁴

From a legal point of view, the Black Sea is governed by the Montreux Convention on the Strait Regime (1936) – a document that gives Turkey control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles and regulates the transit of warships through them. According to the Convention, the time spent in the Black Sea by all the ships of the non-riparian states is limited, the military ships being allowed the presence of up to 21 days. Thus, when NATO has training activities in the region, it rotates ships, replacing them every three weeks.

ROMANIA – REGIONAL STABILITY PILLAR

In order to become a reliable ally and security provider in the region today, Romania had to prove, along with its accession to NATO in 2004, that it can meet the commitments that came with the membership status, among which: a substantial contribution to Allied operations and missions; support for partners; or allocating an appropriate budget to the defence and security sector.

Thus, the contribution on the line of crisis management has been a constant and substantial one, even since Romania was only a partner state, being reflected as such: NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation (2003 – 2014); the successor mission, Resolute Support Mission (RSM) (2015 – present); the KFOR peacekeeping mission in Kosovo (1999 – present); the NTM-I operation in Iraq (2004 – 2011);

³ *Wales Summit Declaration*, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, 5 September 2014, para. 18, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm, accessed on 20 December 2020.

⁴ *Warsaw Summit Communique*, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016, para. 23, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm, accessed on 20 December 2020.

Operation Ocean Shield (OOS) against maritime piracy in the Horn of Africa (2009 – 2016); the collective defence operation Active Endeavor (OAE) in the Mediterranean or, more recently, the maritime security operation Sea Guardian (OSG) in the same area (2016 – present time). Currently, Romania has deployed approximately 712⁵ troops in NATO, EU and UN operations and missions, a slightly reduced strength following the decision of the US and NATO in 2020 to reduce the number of troops in the RSM mission in Afghanistan.

Regarding the support provided to partners, Romania's efforts are relevant, especially for the states in the region, such as the Republic of Moldova or Georgia. With the Republic of Moldova, with which Romania shares a strategic partnership, relaunched through a joint statement during the visit of the President of Romania to Chisinau in December 2020, the relationship is a special one, whose status is conferred by the community of language, history, culture and traditions. In addition to the support provided in bilateral context in various fields such as assistance for development, defence, education and culture, in allied context Romania also held the status of NATO Contact Point Embassy in Chisinau during 2004 – 2006, as well as in 2007 – 2008. It was during that tenure that the NATO Information and Documentation Center was established in the Republic of Moldova. Throughout supporting the Republic of Moldova's strategic objective of EU integration, Romania encountered during the terms of the pro-Russian presidencies of Vladimir Voronin and Igor Dodon the same "coldness" in relationship, as the West did. Hampered against this background, the pace seems though to have resumed after the presidential election in Chisinau, in November 2020, of pro-Western Maia Sandu, Romania announcing a support package for its strategic partner consisting, among other things, in extending the agreement of non-reimbursable financial assistance amounting to EUR 100 million, signed in 2010; or support in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, including by sending to Chisinau a team of Romanian experts in the field; vaccine doses or providing medicines and medical equipment and protective equipment for patient care.

⁵ Situația cu efectivele Armatei României participante la misiuni și operații în afara teritoriului național la data de 24.05.2021, available at <https://www.defense.ro/misiuni-internationale-1>, accessed on 24 May 2021.

Romania is also an active supporter of Georgian aspirations for European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Between 2013 and 2016 it held the status of NATO Contact Point Embassy in Georgia, contributing to the development of this partner's cooperation with the Alliance and since 2014 it has been actively contributing to the implementation of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package/SNGP). It also recognizes the importance of the Georgian contribution to the strategic discussions on Black Sea security and cooperates with this partner in a bilateral format, including through participation in multinational exercises and other military training activities.

The fair sharing of allied tasks, the so-called burden sharing, is a sensitive issue within NATO, amplified starting with the term of former US President Donald Trump. The "apple of discord" was the dissatisfaction expressed by the US on the slow pace of Allies' allocation of 2% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the security and defence sector – according to the NATO decision at the Wales Summit (2014). Starting here, and augmented by the unpredictability of the former president, the subject became an open wound of the Alliance, which has generated different reactions from member states: France agrees to allocate a corresponding percentage to the defence sector, but especially in conjunction with the concept Europe's strategic autonomy; Germany, on the other hand, was signaling⁶ in June 2020 that the allocation for defence of 2% of GDP had lost its relevance, proposing that Berlin provide 10% of the Allied capabilities by 2030. Romania has made efforts, starting 2017, to allocate the percentage of 2%, in the official NATO documents appearing as an ally of 2% in 2020⁷, with a percentage of 2.38%.

In addition, Romania hosts, in NATO context, a series of allied multinational structures that are part of the architecture outlined by the Summits of 2014 and 2016 – a NATO Force Integration Unit⁸ (NFIU), a

⁶ Larry Luxner, „*German defense minister responds to US plans for a troop drawdown*”, 24 June 2020, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/germany-defense-minister-responds-to-us-plans-for-a-troop-drawdown/>, accessed on 5 January 2021.

⁷ NATO Press Communique „*Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries 2013-2020*”, 21 October 2020, p.8, available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/10/pdf/pr-2020-104-en.pdf, accessed on 21 January 2021.

⁸ with the mission to coordinate the rapid deployment of NATO forces with a very high level of reaction (VJTF) on Romanian territory.

Multinational Division South-East Command⁹ (HQ MND SE), a Multinational Brigade South-East¹⁰ (HQ MN BDE SE) – with the corresponding command; and from 2020, the Multinational Corps South-East Command (HQ MNC SE) – some of which being Romania's proposals during the allied negotiations which eventually led to the measures taken on deterrence and defence, starting 2016, at the subsequent summits and meetings of the foreign and defence ministers.

Also in terms of initiatives, since 2015, Romania annually hosts and organizes in the Black Sea the large-scale multinational exercise SEA SHIELD, against submarines, which enjoys a wide allied participation and can contribute, in addition to achieving its main goal – that of developing international cooperation between member states and NATO partners in order to strengthen and develop common combat procedures -, to increase the deterrent effect.

The different perception of some allies on the importance of the Black Sea region's security compared to that of the north of the eastern flank is eloquently revealed in the difference between the active commitment of the Allies for the two areas: four Battlegroups in the Baltic States and Poland – all four summing approx. 4700 troops¹¹, as compared to a multinational brigade in Romania which, in addition to the inherent participation of the host state, enjoys the permanent presence of Poland¹² (a company level unit) and, occasionally, the participation in multinational exercises of other allies; and, in the near future, a corps command. Initially designed one on the combat pattern (the forward presence in the northern part), and the other being training-focused (the presence in the southern segment), the two presences should nevertheless enjoy an equally proportional allied commitment so that the deterrent effect is achieved in both cases. There are, of course, other measures to ensure riparian allies, such as the presence of the NATO Standing Naval Forces in the Black Sea,

⁹ under the operational command of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

¹⁰ the core of the land component of the tailored forward presence, adopted at the NATO Summit in Warsaw (2016).

¹¹ “NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence”, available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/3/pdf/2103-factsheet_efp_en.pdf, accessed on 21 January 2021.

¹² “Polish Military Contingent, Romania”, available at <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/pmc-romania>, accessed on 21 January 2021.

consolidated air police missions in the region, allied military exercises, but a disbalanced Allied commitment between the two could lead to the perception that NATO's approach to the flank eastern is not a unitary one.¹³

There are currently a number of complementary initiatives in the Black Sea, some of which are reflected in the support given to Ukraine by Great Britain and Canada, through the bilateral mission Operation Orbital, dedicated to training the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and Operation Reassurance to strengthen security in Southeast Europe. Moreover, in August 2020, London launched a multinational initiative¹⁴ complementary to Orbital, namely the Maritime Training Initiative¹⁵ which aims to train the Ukrainian navy, with the potential to strengthen the status of Ukraine as a NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP). To these, we add the US support provided through the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) by which Washington implements measures to strengthen the security of both allies (Romania, Bulgaria, the Baltic States and Poland) and partners in the region (Ukraine).

An idea with potential, similar to the above, was outlined in 2016, at the initiative of the Romanian Minister of Defence at that time, on the creation of a NATO fleet in the Black Sea – an idea for which Romania made efforts, after talks with Bulgaria and Ukraine, to have it agreed as a decision at the NATO Summit in Warsaw. But just in June 2016, shortly before the Allied Summit, Bulgarian Prime Minister at the time, Boiko Borisov, announced that he would not support such an idea, with the Bulgarian president also adding that his country *"is peaceful and its foreign*

¹³ Ben Hodges (former Commander of the US Forces in Europe/USAREUR), *Strengthening NATO in the Black Sea Region*, Dec. 2020, available at <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/12/15/defending-forward-strengthening-nato-in-the-black-sea-region/>, accessed on 21 January 2021.

¹⁴ Press Communique *UK Launches Multinational Training to Enhance Ukrainian Navy against Threats from the East*, 18 August 2020, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-launches-multinational-training-to-enhance-ukrainian-navy-against-threats-from-the-east#:~:text=UK%20launches%20multinational%20training%20to%20enhance%20Ukrainian%20Navy%20against%20threats%20from%20the%20East,-English-&text=The%20UK%20will%20lead%20a,Secretary%20Ben%20Wallace%20has%20confirmed,> accessed on 21 January 2021.

¹⁵ Great Britain, Canada, Sweden, Denmark.

policy is not directed against any state."¹⁶ No change of government following the Bulgarian Parliamentary elections in April 2021 would bring anything new to the Bulgarian partner's vision and perhaps nor the new Maritime Coordination Center in Varna inaugurated¹⁷ in July 2020 and offered¹⁸ by Bulgaria to host the NATO Allied Maritime Coordination function currently placed at the Allied Maritime Command in Northwood.

Turkey, on the other hand, has an almost strategic partnership with Russia, the most recent "argument" regarding the improbability of Turkey's rally to such an initiative being the acquisition by Turkey, in 2017, of the S-400 air defence systems from the Russian Federation. Thus, the initiative would remain open only to Romania, Ukraine and Georgia, of which only Romania is an allied state. Another shortcoming of the present equation is the fact that Ukraine, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, being partners, cannot therefore participate in mechanisms intended exclusively for EU Member States or allies, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) of the European Union being the best example – joint participation in projects that can strengthen security in the Black Sea region would mean an iteration of effective NATO-EU cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

It is natural for Romania to assume its responsibilities, as a partner and ally of other European countries, and to contribute, calibrated to its potential, to the solutions or the management of the security issues of the Euro-Atlantic community. Therefore, strengthening regional cooperation and solidarity are essential for security in the Black Sea region. The necessary ingredients are, at the moment: a good bilateral cooperation with the riparian states and in the region as a whole; active and effective regional

¹⁶ Reuters article *Bulgaria Says It Won't Join Any NATO Black Sea Fleet after Russian Warning*, June 2016, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/nato-bulgaria-blacksea-idUSL8N19835X>, accessed on 21 January 2021.

¹⁷ Bulgarian Ministry of Defence, "With the contract for the ships we took the second step towards the modernization of the Bulgarian Army", available at https://www.mod.bg/en/index.php?&fn_page=3, accessed on 21 January 2021.

¹⁸ Common press conference by NATO Secretary General and the Bulgarian Prime Minister, 12 December 2019, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/-opinions_171970.htm?selectedLocale=en, accessed on 21 January 2021.

cooperation through the various existing formats; preserving the aim to invest as much as possible in defence industry and its materialization.

At the level of bilateral cooperation, we have shown above that the bilateral relationships with partner states Georgia and the Republic of Moldova are with tradition and substance, and in support of that, Romania's foreign policy in the National Defence Strategy for 2020-2024¹⁹, recently adopted in July 2020, provides for maintaining this long-term vision. Added to this – the support for Ukraine, a good bilateral relationship with Bulgaria and a strategic partnership with Turkey.

Regarding regional cooperation, the existing formats Bucharest 9²⁰ (B9) and the Three Seas Initiative²¹ (3SI) provide the discussion platform and, in some cases, the decision-making process, for projects related to the security of the allied eastern flank (B9), but also for revitalization of the economy (3SI). For example, a number of Allied decisions on deterrence and defence taken at the NATO Summit in Warsaw were based on the previous coordination of the positions of the B9 allies, in order to ensure a smooth and efficient decision-making process. Moreover, the B9 Summit in Bucharest on May 10th 2021, in a hybrid formula (presence of Polish President in Romania, as co-chair of the initiative, and online presence of the other participating states, to which we add the special attendance of the US President and that of NATO Secretary General), is paving the way for a coordinated stance of the Eastern Flank states on the main topics of the upcoming NATO Summit in Brussels. Similarly, the BRUA²² gas pipeline project, which aims to diversify the European Union's natural gas supply

¹⁹ Romania's National Defence Strategy for 2020-2024, July 2020, p. 22, 31, 48, available at https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Documente/Strategia_Nationala_de_Aparare_a_Tarii_2020_2024.pdf, accessed on 21 January 2021.

²⁰ Bulgaria, Czech R., Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.

²¹ initiated in 2016, the format brings together 12 EU member states geographically positioned between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech R., Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (partner states – US and Germany).

²² project acknowledged by the European Commission as being of strategic importance; it unites Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria and is part of a much larger project – the Vertical Corridor – which aims at diversifying the routes of natural gas transportation from the Caspian Sea to Central Europe.

sources and, by extension, to strengthen energy security in the Black Sea region, was launched under the 3SI umbrella and, in December 2020, Romania managed to reach the completion of phase I of the project²³, the next steps being expected from Bulgaria and Hungary.

Since 2017, Romania also hosts an annual security forum dedicated to debates on classic and emerging security challenges in the Black Sea area and the Balkan region, namely the "Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum", which enjoys the presence speakers²⁴ with extensive professional experience such as senior Romanian and foreign officials, NATO and EU officials, representatives of institutions with responsibilities in the field of foreign relations and national security, guests from academia in Romania and abroad.

Following the events in 2014 and, more recently the pandemic in 2020, the resilience concept has become most important both for NATO and the EU, but also at national level. In connection, a most recent Romanian initiative is the setup of the *Euro-Atlantic Resilience Centre (E-ARC)*, which responds to a national priority set in Romania's National Defence Strategy, and through which Romania brings its contribution to sustaining NATO and EU efforts on enhancing resilience. This could lead this ally to becoming a reference point and an expertise provider for NATO and the EU on the matter, as well as for their member and partner states.

Inaugurated on May 31st 2021 in the presence of NATO Deputy Secretary General, E-ARC will provide a platform for strategic discussions, training and exercises, development of concepts, as well as for the provision of lessons learned. At the same time, it will allow the development of various programs and initiatives in the field of resilience on three pillars: combating/reducing risks through anticipation and adaptation; development of analytical tools and good practices; practical cooperation in the field of education and training and joint exercises.

Complementary to these efforts, in December 2020, Romania was selected by the EU member states as the prospective seat of the

²³ Press Communique by Transgaz, 28 November 2020, available at <https://www.transgaz.ro/sites/default/files/comunicat%20%20finalizare%20proiect%20BRUA%20-%20faza%20I.pdf>, accessed on 21 January 2021.

²⁴ BLACK SEA AND BALKANS SECURITY FORUM 2020, available at <https://2bsecurityforum.ro/speakers/>, accessed on 21 January 2021.

new *European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre*, with the European Parliament formally adopting, on May 19th, the Regulations establishing the new centre. The Cybersecurity Competence Centre is meant to improve the coordination of research and innovation in cybersecurity in the EU, and will also be the EU's main instrument for pooling investment in cybersecurity research, technology and industrial development.

In the field of endowment, the Romanian Army has, since September 2020, the first PATRIOT surface-to-air missile system, one of the best air defence that allows counteracting all types of current air threats, three other similar systems will be received by Romania in 2022. Romania thus becomes the 17th country to have such a system and the 7th among NATO members. In the same year, in October, Romania took possession of the first batch of 36 armored personnel carriers for 8x8 Piranha 5 troops, and in February 2021 it also received, from its American partner, the elements of the first HIMARS²⁵ system. By acquiring the HIMARS and PATRIOT systems, Romania becomes the first allied state on the eastern flank to own these systems. In addition, Romania also operates a squadron of F-16 aircraft, consisting of 17 aircraft, purchased from Portugal, the last Fighting Falcon being received in March 2021. Romania is thus taking safe steps on the road to ensuring a modern and efficient ground and air defence capability, which can defend both the national space and strengthen the security provider status of this allied state.



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