

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE BLACK SEA AND THE DANUBE MOUTHS FOR THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE BEGINNING OF 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: *The return of the Black Sea issue in its entire geopolitical and geostrategic expression, as well as all its implications in the 21st century framework is a reality which not only surprises, but more than that, it tends to become more and more obvious in the global area. Today, the Black Sea is the densest area in the world in geopolitical and geostrategic interests involving key global players: the Russian Federation, the US, NATO, EU, and China. The Black Sea is the buffer between Europe and Asia, and the eastern border of Western communities. NATO enlargements (1999, 2004, 2008) and the EU enlargement (2001 and 2007) as well as these organizations' global aspirations, stated or implied, have been conferring the Black Sea a special statue in the organic equation of the new global order resettlement. The discovery of huge reserves of oil and natural gas in the Caucasus and Central Asia led to the emergence of economic interests in the Black Sea, turning it into a current geostrategic stake.*

Tsarist Russia had been concerned, since ancient times, with controlling the Black Sea and the Danube, and after the annexation of Crimea, their importance was amplified, the wish being to turn the Black Sea into a "Russian lake" thus getting access to the warm seas... Using a constructivist approach, this article briefly presents the importance of the Black Sea and the Danube to the Russian Federation at the beginning of 21st century.

Keywords: *strategic importance; Black Sea; Danube Mouths; Crimean Peninsula; Russian Federation.*

Motto:

"No one should make any illusions about the possibility of gaining military superiority over Russia. I'll never allow something like this to happen."

quote from **Vladimir Putin**

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At the beginning of the 21st century, a number of major changes are emerging in the current security environment, which is marked by a series of changes in the main areas of society. *The cold war* came to an end in 1990-1991, the USSR and Yugoslavia were divided, the EU and NATO expanded Eastward, toward the Black Sea, Caucasus and Near East (between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea), the EU aims to become a world actor, competing with the United States, Russia has reduced its political and military influence, while China and India aspire to the rank of “*political and economic superpower*”¹.

In this context, of the present security environment, you have to analyze the Black Sea region also. For 200 years, the Black Sea and the extended Black Sea Area represents an especially important bridge between the East and the West, a region of the world that, thanks to this specific area, “*had favored economic exchange relationships*”². Being located at the crossroads of the two religions: Christian and Islamic, but also between two great families of people, Slavic and Turkic “*it represents an important geopolitical space, characterized by political isolation, having specific features that favored the transformation of the region into an enclave and allowing strict control of vessels through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles*”³.

The last decade of the twentieth century led to a dramatic transformation of the Black Sea. “*The Black Sea region is a complicated intersection of societies, cultures and political systems*”⁴. The Black Sea area is the space of interference of three geopolitical and geostrategic regions - *Southern Europe, Eastern Europe and the Middle East*. After 1990, the Black Sea region turned into an unstable area, an area that was marked by a series of misunderstandings characterized by “*politico-military and economic situation of the riparian states as well as other states’ concern with reconsidering their interests in the area*”⁵.

¹ <https://andreivocila.wordpress.com/2010/08/23/securitate-prin-democratizare-in-zona-marii-negre/>, accessed on 15.11.2015, 15.30;

² http://www.safn.ro/publicatii/bfn/BFN19_13.pdf, accessed on 15.11.2015, 15.40.

³ Due to Montreux Treaty in 9th November 1936;

⁴ The article “*Regiunea Mării Negre are un nou rol de securitate*” of the Romanian analyst Paul Ciocoiu, for Southeast European Times, 8th November 2006;

⁵ http://www.cpc-ew.ro/pdfs/securitatea_in_regiunea_mn.pdf, accessed on 15.11.2015, 16.30;

What is customizing this area are the “*key positions*”, which are specific to the Black Sea, and which contribute in an essential way to the value and importance of this geostrategic space. These are⁶:

◆ **The System of Straits** (Bosphorus, Dardanelles - linked by the Marmara Sea) – it allows ships to go from a big “*closed*” sea towards the Planetary Ocean. Turkey is the one that controls the Straits, which is currently the only main artery for external sea transportation, located within reach of all riparian countries, being the most economical means of transportation. Turkey has a privileged role among these riparian states, taking into account that it has control over the Straits.

◆ **The Crimean Peninsula** - a maritime bastion, a real aircraft carrier, “*well anchored*”, with a range of facilities, along which we encounter naval forces ready to operate anytime and in any situation;

◆ **The Mouths of the Danube River (maritime Danube)** - through the complex navigation system to be found in Sulina, on the territory of the Romanian State, the passage of ships in and out is allowed, this representing an element of power for Romania;

◆ **The continental shelf** in front of the Romanian seaside, having elements of interest, resulted in the dispute between Romania and the Ukraine regarding the problem of the delimitation of the continental shelf of the exclusive economic zone;

◆ **Snakes Island** - “*rediscovered*” in recent years and being situated again among international diplomacy issues.

Events in recent years have imposed a new analysis of the Black Sea and its adjacent area, turning them into so-called “*extensive area of the Black Sea*”. The new area includes, in addition to the six States with the seaside (Bulgaria, Russia, Georgia, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine), other countries such as Moldova, Greece, and also countries in the Caucasus region (Armenia and Azerbaijan).

The process of EU and NATO enlargement has brought European and Euro-Atlantic community on the West Coast, resulting in an alteration of perception according to which “*the Black Sea area is the periphery of*

⁶ <http://documents.tips/documents/marea-neagra-55a4d27fcb354.html>, accessed on 15.11.2015, 16.50;

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*Europe and a Russian Lake*⁷ and growing the geopolitical role of the interface with the Middle East and Central Asia.

Economic interests linked to the discovery of huge reserves of oil and natural gas from the Middle East and Central Asia “*have transformed the Black Sea area in current geostrategic stakes*”⁸.

At the beginning of the 21st century, “*Russia, a former superpower, together with two other powers in the region - Turkey and Ukraine - will be the ones that will influence the political map of the Black Sea*”⁹.

Russia seeks to return on the international political scene, trying to regain the title of main actor in the Black Sea region, after a long period of time. Russia intends to hold the role of “*swivel*” which it once played in building and maintaining the “*architecture of the cold war of the shores*”.

Russia seeks to extend towards the Black Sea, this concept having its origin in the Tsarist and Soviet eras, but also in the process of rebalancing NATO/US and EU forces in the region. Russian President Vladimir Putin has been permanently and intensively concerned with the development of the Russian fleet on the Black Sea¹⁰, which represents a significant force that should be taken into account. By the Russian President’s statements, such as “*the Black Sea and sea of Azov are in the area of Russian strategic interest*” or “*Russia’s Black Sea resort offers direct access to the most important global transport routes*”, **Russia actually asserts that it is not willing to abandon the positions they have in the Black Sea.**

1. Russia - the main actor in the Black Sea region and the Extensive Black Sea Area

The Black Sea and mainly, Extensive Black Sea Area (EBSA) represents “*one of the major stakes of global competition for energy*”

⁷ *President Traian Băsescu’s statement* at the Council on Foreign Affairs, 10th March 2005.

⁸ [http://www.academia.edu/724470/tendin%
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geopolitical_geoeconomical_and_), accessed on 15.11.2015, 17.30;

⁹ http://www.cpc-ew.ro/pdfs/securitatea_in_regiunea_mn.pdf, accessed on 15.11.2015, 17.40;

¹⁰ <http://www.geopolitic.ro/Revista%20Geopolitica%2014-15.pdf>, accessed on 15.11.2015, 17.50;

resources"¹¹. At present, there is no unitary geographical delimitation of the Extensive Black Sea Area. In terms of geographical area, it includes the six riparian states: Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. All these countries have ports with terminals for receiving and loading oil and natural gas condensate. The term "*extensive*" refers to a rather political-economic area than to a geographical one. For this, we must take into account the importance of the political, economic and strategic countries such as: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece and Moldova. Thus, the Extensive Black Sea Area is located between the Balkans and the Caspian Sea.

One other thing which should not be omitted is the energy corridor which connects the main consumers of energy with the Western world's rich reserves from Central Asia and the Middle East (the Caspian Sea). In terms of energy resources, the following classification is utterly clear: exporting countries - Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan; countries that do not depend directly (or depend very little) on supplies from Russian energy resources: Turkey and Bulgaria; importing countries - all the others; transit countries – the states whose territories are crossed by land transport corridors of petroleum and natural gas (for example, Georgia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, etc.). Alongside local actors, there are also the great global actors such as the USA and the EU.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Black Sea region was noted as an important commercial hub, and this is due to the fact that it is located in the vicinity of the Caspian basin, extremely rich in fuels. Therefore, Russia, USA, EU and regional States have initiated a special diplomatic and commercial competition to determine the routes of hydrocarbons. Russia, as one of the leading producers of oil and gas in the region (and the world), but also the main supplier of gas to EU countries, is directly interested in the "*energy game*" in the Black Sea basin. The "*Energy Weapon*" represents for Russia the only means to keep Europe under control and it cannot afford to lose it. Thus, Russia is one of the main actors in EBSA and an exporter of oil and natural gas, while transit countries differ through their position towards the energy flows from this country.

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

Russia is an important strategic player within EBSA and a predictable actor, having a separate position in relation to the states, but also to the problematic issues in the region. According to the diplomatic tradition “*it preserves the right of influence in the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Black Sea*”¹². Russia considers these areas as being important in order to provide security and fight for restoring the status-quo. In the energy competition, Russia relies on energy resources, particularly on oil and natural gas. Favored by holding these resources, Moscow will be an essential actor on the international political stage, using them as weapons, the effect of which is becoming more and more visible. Any initiative in the area foreign to Russia is badly perceived and Russia reacts by stopping the gas supply, by proposing some alternative projects, by maintaining a complicated geopolitical situation (in the case of Georgia and Republic of Moldova) or preventing NATO and the EU from getting closer to its borders (in the case of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine).

Given the orientation and focus of the Russian forces in the Black Sea area, both in the energy space, and also in the military space, particularly after the annexation of Crimea Peninsula, one can estimate “*Russia's intention to broaden the scope of coverage*”¹³. Russian payback means, after the attempt of removing it from the Balkans, will take the shape of obtaining control of the energy space in the Southeast European region. However, what is at stake is not just of geo-economic nature. According to one of the key laws formulated by Halford Mackinder, “*the one who controls Eastern Europe rules the heartland (the territory between Ural and Pamir, Volga and Iantzi); the one who controls the heartland rules the World Island (Eurasia); the one who controls the World Island rules the entire planet*”¹⁴.

2.The importance of the Black Sea for Russia

At the beginning of the 21st century an important point in Russia's foreign policy is to regain and develop its influence “*over neighboring*

¹² <http://www.cadranpolitic.ro/?p=4007>, accessed on 15.11.2015, 18.00;

¹³ http://www.safn.ro/publicatii/bfn/BFN18_13.pdf, accessed on 15.11.2015, 18.30;

¹⁴ In “*The Geographical Pivot of History*”, article published by Halford John Mackinder in 1904 within the Royal Geographic Society in which he launched his theory regarding the Center of the Earth (Heartland Theory);

*States with or without a coastline on the Black Sea, such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, generally on the CIS members*¹⁵. Due to its vast territory, Russia still has “*imperialistic*” tendencies. Currently Russia is oscillating between its desire to integrate in Europe, while respecting the rules of liberal democracy and the oldest Slavic messianism.

Russia regarded with hostility, in a first phase, the integration of the Balkans and the Baltic-Black Sea region in NATO. Immediately after 2000-2001, President Vladimir Putin and his government understood that “*the ongoing processes are irreversible and adopted a strategy of adaptation, dominated by pragmatism*”¹⁶.

An especially important significance was given by the Russia to Black Sea area, particularly in terms of strategic and military aspects. At present, “*Russian land forces have two military bases in Georgia (Batumi and Ahalkalaki), one in Armenia and one in Tajikistan*”¹⁷.

Nowadays, Russia’s policy is conciliatory towards the West, in general, and the USA in particular. President Vladimir Putin is trying to have good relations of cooperation and friendship not only with the U.S., but also with Western Europe.

The energy-related importance of the Black Sea

The Extensive Black Sea Area is influenced on the one hand, by the riparian States of this sea, also members of the North Atlantic Alliance, and on the other hand by Russia, which promotes its own policy and is trying to “*impose its model of operation in the region*”¹⁸.

At the summit of 25-29 June 2004 in Istanbul it was decided on “*expanding NATO to the Black Sea*”¹⁹. This is the first political-military process of this kind. The States of the Black Sea region and its extensive

¹⁵ <http://documents.tips/documents/marea-neagra-55a4d27fcb354.html>, accessed on 15.11.2015, 18.50;

¹⁶ <http://www.geopolitic.ro/Revista%20Geopolitica%202014-15.pdf>, accessed on 15.11.2015, 19.15;

¹⁷ Marinescu, Cornel; Nistor, Florin; Coman, Liviu, “*Crizele caucaziene, mizele energetice și securitatea în Zona Extinsă a Mării Negre*”, (București, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, 2013), pp.33-34.

¹⁸ http://www.cpc-ew.ro/pdfs/securitatea_in_regiunea_mn.pdf, accessed on 15.11.2015, 19.45;

¹⁹ <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2004/06-istanbul/home.htm>, accessed on 15.11.2015, 20.00;

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area had expressed their aspirations to accede and to integrate into NATO. Romania and Bulgaria, countries bordering the Black Sea, were received on this occasion and after the last wave, NATO's doors remained open further on. Russia resisted every time NATO's expansion Eastward, but "*recognizes the right of States to choose security models*"²⁰.

Another integrating process is the enlargement of the EU. Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU on January 1st, 2007. At the same time, negotiations started with Turkey for attaining membership of the EU. No one can oppose this process, which depends on the ability of States to reform society, so as "*to join the European Union*"²¹.

A particularly important issue on the agenda of U.S. foreign policy is the oil problem. Americans are looking for diversified energy sources to lessen dependence on oil from the Middle East, turning it into a security interest for the USA. Oil from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia represents an alternative for which the USA "*use economic, political and military strategy*"²².

The USA has an opportunity to establish a number of long-term mechanisms, in order to ensure the free transit of oil. Thus, the US will be able to increase the amount of oil previously commercialized.

The oil from Azerbaijan will be insufficient. Here, the companies are represented by Russia, USA and United Kingdom. However, another competitor appeared in the area, China, which is on the second place in terms of oil consumption around the world, and another big consumer of oil, India, comes strongly from behind. Ensuring the energy resources represents the process determining India's economic growth.

Given this situation on the globe, an especially important role will be played by **hydrocarbons, especially those from Russia**, Central Asia and Iran. In order to ensure the long-term resources of their allies, "*the USA will need the cooperation of Russia, not its opposition*"²³. Russia, on the other

²⁰ <http://geopolitics.ro/atitudinea-rusiei-fata-de-noii-si-viitorii-membri-nato/>, accessed on 06.07.2015, 17.00;

²¹ <http://www.mapn.ro/diepa/ispaim/files/ms122014.pdf>, accessed on 16.11.2015, 17.20;

²² http://www.cpc-ew.ro/pdfs/securitatea_in_regiunea_mn.pdf, accessed on 16.11.2015, 18.00;

²³ http://cssas.unap.ro/ro/pdf_studii/securitatea_energetica.pdf, accessed on 16.11.2015, 18.30;

hand is seeking the advantages offered by the Western market, as well as those on the USA market.

At the beginning of the 21st century Russia has a major role in ensuring energy resources, especially in the Eurasian space.

Moscow is trying to “prevent the emergence of actors or projects related to energy that are not under Russian control, prevent the emergence of military coalitions which could lead to the disruption of Russia and obstruct the countries in the region to aim towards the status of a NATO country”²⁴.

In the Extensive Black Sea Area, the perception of security has changed, especially after the Russia-Georgia war. Now we have seen clearly that its security is closely linked to regional conflicts. After the end of the war, Russia’s role as a regional actor has been increasing. Russia currently has military bases in the Caucasus; Western credibility is quickly disappearing, and the perception of the regional threat is at the highest level.

Russia’s foreign policy seems to be largely inspired from expansionist theories of Alexander Dugin²⁵, considering Russia’s special relationship with Germany, which provides about 70% of its energy demand, the protection that Moscow attaches to Iran (including the hundreds of Russian atomic physicists working for the regime in Tehran), but also the recent dialogues with Japan. Alexander Dugin and the current geopolitical trend of Eurasia adepts²⁶ seem to define the attitude that fits now Russia best and its major globalist ambitions.

Holding the second place in the world as a producer of petroleum, “Russia relies on energy resources”²⁷, especially the oil and natural gas and seeks by every means to achieve its goal, that of achieving a system of

²⁴ Calopăreanu, Gheorghe, *Complexul de securitate “Zona extinsă a Mării Negre”*, (București, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, 2012), p.104.

²⁵ Alexandr Dughin is a specialist in politology and one of the most popular ideologists of expansionism, nationalism, and Russian fascism. He has strong connections in Kremlin and in Russia’s Armed Forces. He is best known for his book “Fundamentals of Geopolitics”;

²⁶ The Neo-Eurasianist doctrine promotes the idea of a multi-national and multi-confessional Russia, in which the small peoples of Syberia, the Far East, upon Volga and Northern Caucasus accept Russian dominance in exchange for respecting their national traditions and keeping inter-ethnic peace.

²⁷ http://www.academia.edu/3201496/Gazul_rusesc_unealta_a_Geostrategiei, accesat la data de 16.11.2015, orele 19.00;

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dependencies in order to ensure economic growth, to interfere and to get involved in all the world's problems, but also to ensure its own security. Russia depends on the income earned through energy exports, and "*Moscow, knowing the advantage of owning such resources, is forcing itself on the international political scene, using them as real weapons whose effects are becoming more and more visible*"²⁸.

In the 21st century, the economy engine is energy, and "*Russia is the largest holder of energy resources around the globe*"²⁹. Russia currently holds the leading position worldwide in terms of the energy market.

If we need to analyze the degree of concentration of the Russian forces in the Black Sea region, in particular in the energy space, we find Russia's intention to broaden its coverage area in the Extensive Black Sea Area.

The importance of the Crimean Peninsula for Russia

The recent events in the Ukraine and the multitude of problems caused by these events have brought Crimea into the media spotlight. The Crimean Peninsula has always had and it still has an important strategic role for Russia. The Black Sea fleet, and the military base at Sevastopol used to have in the past and still have nowadays a decisive role on the Caucasus and Western Europe.

Until March 2014 and its annexation by Russia, the Crimean Peninsula was part of Ukraine, being an autonomous republic located in Southern Ukraine, between the Black Sea and The Sea of Azov. Until it was annexed by Russia (March 2014), Crimea was separated from Russia by the Strait of Kerch. You have to remember that here, not only the Russian Tsars, but also the Soviet elite used to spend their holidays on the southern coast of the peninsula.

Nowadays, the Crimean Peninsula still represents an important attraction for tourists, and lately, it has aroused more and more the interest of foreign investors.

²⁸ *Ibidem*;

²⁹ http://cssas.unap.ro/ro/pdf_studii/securitatea_energetica.pdf, accesat la data de 16.11.2015, orele 19.30;

On the Crimean peninsula, “*in the Balaklava Bay of the Black Sea, a secret Russian naval base has been running for many years*”³⁰. Submarines could easily come out of the Black Sea from under a mountain hideout, below which there were also ammunition warehouses, repair shops and a channel through which submarines came out into the Black Sea. Between 1957 and 1961 the Soviet naval base was built and “*it remained operational also for several years after the fall of the USSR, which was a secret*”³¹. Since 1995 it has been abandoned, and in 2003, a Museum was opened in a few areas of the base. It was said that this naval installation is indestructible and that it can withstand a nuclear attack. The majority of the population of the town of Balaklava worked on the base, during the Cold War, and security rules were very strict. However, this was only natural because the base sheltered nuclear weapons submarines were equipped with.

The port of Sevastopol, the main harbor in the Crimean peninsula, is “*an important naval base in the Black Sea*”³². Russian Black Sea fleet is housed in this port of the Soviet Union. The Black Sea fleet was divided between Russia and Ukraine immediately after the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. In Sevastopol, the presence of the Russian Fleet represented “*a permanent cause of tension between Russia and Ukraine*”³³.

Another moment of tension between Russia and Ukraine was the signing of the agreement regarding the stationing of the Russian Fleet in Sevastopol. The two States from the Soviet Union, Russia and Ukraine signed the agreement which stipulated that “*the Russian fleet will remain in the port of Sevastopol from Ukraine until 2017*”³⁴, but after the election of President Viktor Yanukovich in 2010, “*Ukraine accepted the extension of the agreement for a further 25 years over the deadline laid down initially, receiving cheaper gas in exchange*”³⁵.

³⁰<http://www.rumaniamilitary.ro/istoria-razboiului-rece-baza-secreta-ruseasca-de-submarine-de-la-marea-neagra>, accesat la data de 20.11.2015, orele 17.15.

³¹http://www.realitatea.net/imagini-rare-baza-secreta-de-submarine-de-la-marea-neagra_1081419.html#ixzz3euy74ZCJ, accessed on 20.11.2015, 17.45;

³² http://www.safn.ro/publicatii/bfn/BFN18_13.pdf, accessed on 20.11.2015, 16.30;

³³ <http://inprofunzime.md/stiri/politic/analiza-crimeea-centrul-intereselor-strategice-ale-rusiei-de-ce.html>, accessed on 20.11.2015, 17.15;

³⁴ *Ibidem*;

³⁵ *Idem*;

Due to the intention of Kiev to accede to the North Atlantic Alliance, new disputes arose between the two countries, Russia and Ukraine. In late 2003, the Strait of Kerch was a reason for tensions. As soon as Russia began to build a dike connecting the island of Tuzla, which belongs to Ukraine located in Kerch Strait, with the Russian peninsula Taman, tensions between the two countries boosted again. Tuzla island constitutes an important strategic point, given that it allows the control of vessels entering and leaving the Strait of Kerch, which connects the Black Sea and sea of Azov.

Crimea has a strategic importance for Russia. Russian military ensured its presence in Sevastopol, in 2008 by 10,000 troops. After annexing Crimea to Russia (March 1986), Russian military presence in this peninsula has increased. The massive Russian military presence in this peninsula, which has a coastline on the Black Sea, allows Russia to maintain its influence not only over Ukraine, but also on the Caucasus.

The Crimean Peninsula has always represented a “*traditional direction of expansion for Russia*”³⁶. The war between Russia and Ukraine started immediately after the military occupation and after the so-called annexation of Crimea.

In early March 2014 the Crimean Peninsula was invaded by “*little green men*”. Immediately after the invasion, while the inhabitants of the Crimean Peninsula were preparing for the referendum, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, was making the following statement: “*Crimea has always been and will become Russian once again*”³⁷.

Through the occupation of the Crimea Peninsula, which is also a “*swivel*” of Russians on the Black Sea, Russia has regained its true importance in the Black Sea region and beyond. The Crimean Peninsula is the “*swivel*” of the Black Sea, from where it can threaten any country with a coastline on the Black Sea, as well as riparian States and “*from where it can project its power up in to the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East*”³⁸.

The balance of power in the Black Sea region is changing with the annexation of the Crimea Peninsula.

³⁶ <http://www.revista22.ro/anexarea-crimeei-schimbari-balanta-de-putere-in-marea-neagra-51651.html>, accessed on 20.11.2015, 18.30;

³⁷ *Ibidem.*

³⁸ http://www.cpc-ew.ro/pdfs/securitatea_in_regiunea_mn.pdf, accessed on 17.07.2015, 18.40;

Russia asserts that the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula was made on the basis of a referendum and it cannot be considered a genocide, which would have necessarily triggered the implementation of the UN resolution of 1970, which refers to the right of peoples to self-determination.

Moscow will have to give other explanations for the “*illegal abduction*” of this territory (Crimean Peninsula)³⁹. Russia presents as arguments that “*this province (Crimean Peninsula) has always been Russian territory; Crimea is imbued with the blood shed in many Russian wars; Crimea was transferred to Ukraine illegally by Khrushchev*”⁴⁰.

Following the amplification of the tensions between Russia and Ukraine, “*Russia sent dozens of fighter aircraft Mig-29 and Su-27 as well as Tu-22 bombers to the military bases in the region of Crimea*”⁴¹.

NATO should prioritize in a geostrategic manner the protection of Central and Eastern Europe against the possible threat of Russia, including the economic one. In order to meet this objective, Europe should solve its energetic problem and not longer depend on Russia.

The importance of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits

Located at about 20 kilometers from Istanbul, Bosphorus-Dardanelles Strait represents the entrance towards the Black Sea, a stretch of water that separates Europe from Asia⁴². The Strait has been and still is nowadays an important point of interest both for commerce and for armed incursions. This area has been holding up until today special significance for the transportation of weapons towards Syria and Africa, as well as for Russia's involvement in the conflict from Ukraine, which is only about 515 kilometers to the North.

³⁹ <http://www.revista22.ro/anexarea-crimeei-schimba-balanta-de-putere-in-marea-neagra-51651.html>, accessed on 20.11.2015, 18.50;

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*;

⁴¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/22/opinion/the-new-col-war-that-isnt.htm>., accessed on 21.11.2015, 18.00;

⁴² <http://www.energyreport.ro/index.php/2013-stiri-pline-de-energie/2013-stirile-pline-de-energie/2013-batalia-pe-resurse/2017-conventia-de-la-montreux-din-1936-s-ar-putea-dovedi-decisiva-intr-un-eventual-razboi-rusia-ucraina>, accessed on 22.11.2015, 16.30;

The Bosphorus and Dardanelles are also known as the “*Turkish Straits*” and have been for centuries the object of fierce disputes. Today, *the Montreux Convention* regulates the passage of ships through these waters as a result of the conclusion of the Treaty of 1936⁴³.

Through this Convention, Turkey is deemed as the absolute owner and master of these Straits. The Montreux Convention signatories are Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, the USSR, France, the United Kingdom, Greece, Japan, Yugoslavia, and then Italy in 1938 (Japan withdrew in 1951), “*establishing a strictly argued regime of liberties regarding the type of ships - warships and merchant ships - and in relation to four types of situations: the period of peace, the period of the war, in which Turkey is not belligerent State, the period of war in which Turkey is a belligerent state, and the period during which Turkey is threatened by an upcoming war*”⁴⁴.

Merchant ships are free to pass, both at day and at night, regardless of their flag, regardless of the type of cargo, but only in peacetime. Military vessels also are subject to this clause, being obliged to sail only by day and without docking. Light line ships, small battle ships and auxiliary vessels belonging to the category of merchant and/or military ships belonging to riparian States can enter into the Straits.

Ships with a gross tonnage greater than 10,000 t, those endowed even with one cannon with a caliber larger than 203 mm, as well as carriers and submarines are prohibited.

For riparian States, it is stated in the Convention that “*their line military ships are authorized to pass, provided that the passage through the Straits is done one at a time, being escorted by two torpedo vessels, if they have a gross tonnage of over 10,000 t*”⁴⁵.

Riparian States submarines can pass through the Straits only if they were built or bought outside the Black Sea, having the right to proceed only once towards the harbor where it is going to be stationed or, if they were built in one of the construction sites on the Black Sea coast. Before commencing to move the submarine, the coastal State must fulfill several

⁴³ *Ibidem*;

⁴⁴ <http://bolsevicsange.wordpress.com/2015/03/07/miza-marii-negre-si-a-stramtorilor-fabuloasa-conventie-de-la-montreux>, accessed on 22.11.2015, 18.30.

⁴⁵ http://adevarul.ro/international/europa/miza-marii-negre-stramtorilor-fabuloasa-conventie-montreux-1_54fac9f4448e03c0fd517d51/index.html, accessed on 22.11.2015, 19.00;

conditions imposed by Turkey, namely: the announcement to be made in a timely manner, and the movement to be made only in day time and on the surface of the Black Sea.

In addition, the Convention presents the provisions which limit the access to the Black Sea for naval vessels belonging to other States than those of the riparian States. They have the right to sail in the Black Sea only for 21 days. Before sending warships into the Black Sea through these Straits non-riparian States will have to notify Turkey.

In the event of a war, but without Turkey being involved in it, the merchant ships will have the same status as in peacetime, but the access of military ships belonging to the warring States in the straits is forbidden, as well as the right to “*seize something ... the right to visit or make any hostile gesture*”⁴⁶.

If Turkey is involved in a war, the right of passage through the Straits is held only by merchant ships belonging to States which Turkey is not at war with. For war ships, “*their transition depends entirely on the will of Turkish authorities*”⁴⁷.

In a situation in which Turkey is threatened directly with a possible war, provisions are similar, additionally specifying that Turkey may block the circulation of vessels of all kinds passing through the Straits and threatening its security.

In April 1982, the Convention suffered alterations and was adopted again, Turkey now having the opportunity to hold control over the Straits, both at peace, and also at war time.

The text of the Convention was designed so as to meet the technological requirements of the year 1936. Nowadays, the situation becomes very tense, especially when addressing the topic of naval vessels that have missile systems (for example: “*the AEGIS systems, as well as ballistic or cruise missiles or other particularly complex weapons systems*”⁴⁸). Allowing their passage is most of the times challenged by Russia, but it is authorized by Turkey.

⁴⁶ *Idem*;

⁴⁷ *Idem*;

⁴⁸ <http://buletinul.unap.ro/pagini/pdf/2014/01-2014-ro/01-2014-ro.pdf>, accessed on 22.11.2015, 19.30;

Another important and at the same time particularly dangerous issue, in the context of nowadays' security environment, is the one in which Russia is willing to make its presence felt in the Mediterranean Sea. By the conclusion of the agreement with Cyprus, which also facilitates its access to its ports on the island, Russia carried out a close connection with its maintenance and repairs base on the Syrian coast.

In article 2 of the Convention it is also mentioned that access to civil vessels of all flags, in times of peace, is free and unlimited "*with any load*"⁴⁹. Russia was the one state taking advantage of this provision, by having access to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and thus supporting the survival of the Syrian Government in Damascus.

In any type of warfare involving Ukraine, the Convention guarantees Russia a strategic advantage, because it limits the access of warships of states with no exit to the Black Sea. This provision prohibits access of hostile warships to Russia.

During the crisis in Crimea in March 2014, we could see the importance of the Black Sea for Russia. When Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine and to become annexed to Russia, by the referendum in March 2014, Moscow declared void the Kharkiv Pact, an agreement which granted concession of naval facilities from Sevastopol Harbor in the Crimea until 2042⁵⁰. Crimean residents handed over the base directly to Russia. Thereafter, Russia announced that it would spend \$ 2.4 billion to expand its Black Sea fleet based in Sevastopol. This will lead to an increase of Russia's power in the region.

It should be recalled that in August 2008, during the war waged by Russia against Georgia, Moscow, feeling somewhat threatened, protested when Turkey accepted the passage of USA warships through the Straits and their entry into the Black Sea to bring aid to Georgia.

Montreux Convention also has another very important feature. Named after the Swiss town in which it was concluded, this agreement

⁴⁹ <http://www.energyreport.ro/index.php/2013-stiri-pline-de-energie/2013-stirile-pline-de-energie/2013-batalia-pe-resurse/2017-conventia-de-la-montreux-din-1936-s-ar-putea-dovedi-decisiva-intr-un-eventual-razboi-rusia-ucraina>, accessed on 22.11.2015, 20.10.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*;

guarantees Russia's access towards the major international markets only from ports with warm water throughout the year⁵¹.

In the transit of oil and hydrocarbon reserves from Russia, Turkey has a very important role. To do this, at present, the links between Russia and Turkey are also much closer, especially after Russia found in Turkey "*the gateway*" of its energy resources from the space of the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea and the pipeline network crossing to Europe⁵². Turkey wishes to maintain an agreement which is biased towards Russia more than towards all the other States being bound by its dependence on Russian gas and oil.

Now we can understand much better why Russia wanted at any price the annexation of Crimea, but also its possibilities of access to the mouths of the Danube, in order to gain definite control over the Black Sea, as well as the ability to use the "*network of military bases, which Russia currently has in the Commonwealth of Independent States*"⁵³.

If we look at the world map, we can easily observe the "*map of the Russian offensive intentions*" and the speed of events generated on it by Russia, which plans to achieve a rebalancing of forces in the Black Sea. By the understanding closed with Turkey and Greece, Russia is trying to set up the famous "*way to the warm seas*", and a map of the world is likely to be amended again in the near future.

3.The importance of the Danube Mouths

At the beginning of the 21st century Russia's desire is once again to reach the Danube, even though some experts in geopolitics considered that it had given up on that, probably having lost interest in the mouths of the Danube.

The country which controls the mouths of the Danube / the entry into strategic Danube corridor, which has a strategic importance from the economic point of view that increases from year to year (see shipments from the European network of inland), has the lead role, gaining the role of key country / swivel country in Europe. This will necessarily lead to an increase

⁵¹ *Idem*;

⁵² *Idem*;

⁵³ <http://www.geopolitic.ro/Revista%20Geopolitica%202014-15.pdf>, accessed on 22.11.2015, 20.30.

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of its very consistent responsibilities, but also to the possibility of self-assertion and development in Europe.

Unlike Russia, Ukraine, under the control of the powerful Soviet Union knew how to make its presence felt on the Danube and not only militarily, but primarily in the military domain, though. From the outfalls of the Prut and Danube down to the entrance of the Danube into the Black Sea, the shore was packed with soldiers. Nonetheless, Russia has developed here also from the economic point of view. Having a number of six jetties, the port of Reni, had occupied the first place on the Danube according to the volume of cargo, and the railway station at Reni “*had become the most important channel on the trade route with the CMEA (Socialist Europe)*”⁵⁴.

Being the repository of a great empire, Russia has always known to take advantage of the benefits of the Danube, while Ukraine either did not know, or had no time to do so. Thus, nowadays things have got where they got... Russia ended up today with its armies at the border of Ukraine, and Ukraine is now undergoing a war between pro-Russian forces and national army of Ukraine, in which peace and territorial integrity, as well as the constitutional order are threatened, and the exit from the Danube mouths also.

But why are Danube Mouths so important for Russia? Russia considers important them important, because it is one thing to keep your armies on the Danube and a completely different thing to keep them on the shores of the Dniester River. It is one thing to control the ships sailing on the river Dniester or the Volga and another thing to control them on the Danube.

*“Danube is no Dnieper, Dniester nor any Don, Volga, nor any Baikal ... Danube is a river, but it is also the bridge between two worlds, two civilizations for which Russia has not found such an alternative, of controlling the Danube Mouths after 1991”*⁵⁵.

⁵⁴[http://www.zdg.md/editia-print/editoriale/rusia-ramane-la-dunare,](http://www.zdg.md/editia-print/editoriale/rusia-ramane-la-dunare) accessed on 22.11.2015, 21.00;

⁵⁵ *Ibidem;*

Conclusions

For over 200 years, the Black Sea basin, as well as its adjacent area has been an important bridge between the East and the West.

The economic interests linked to the discovery of natural gas and oil from Central Asia and the Caucasus have transformed the Black Sea area in a geostrategic stake.

In the 21st century, Russia, one of the former superpowers, is influencing the political map in the area of the Black Sea.

Russia, the main actor of the Black Sea, intends to regain the lead role of “swivel” acquired some time in the past in building and keeping “*the Cold War architecture of the banks*”⁵⁶.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Black Sea once more presents strategic interest for Russia.

The Black Sea provides direct access to the main transport routes from all over the world.

Russia’s geopolitical goal is the closure of ponto-baltic isthmus and control of the Danube Mouths.



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