

THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE WIDER BLACK SEA REGION

The article deals mainly with the importance of EU involvement in the wider Black Sea region, the main European policies and initiatives related to this region (the Black Sea Synergy, the European Neighborhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership, the EU Strategy for the Danube region), as well as regional initiatives and priorities in the fields of energy and security. Regional cooperation issues are also approached from a bilateral perspective: the role played in this strategically important area by Romania –gate of the region to the EU and Turkey– gate of the region to the rest of the world.

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The Black Sea region is of strategic importance for the European Union (EU). The fact that it is a European sea results in shared challenges and opportunities for the EU and countries of the wider region. It also results in a common need to make sure that peace, democracy, security, stability, regional cooperation and sustainable prosperity are ensured all around the region.

The response to most of our region's challenges is to have more Europe at the Black Sea, but also to have more Black Sea on the European agenda. We already have a solid number of cooperation initiatives in the region. Reinforcing them is one way to bolster regional stability and development. The trick is to bring aboard all stakeholders so that challenges can be transformed into real opportunities. The EU is not a recent player in the Black Sea region, but its involvement will become more focused and pragmatic in the future.

The strategic importance of the Black Sea region for the EU was recognized – once more– in 2007. In the context of Romania and Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the Black Sea became partially an internal sea of the EU. As developments in this region, strategically situated at the junction of Europe, Middle East and Central Asia started having a direct impact on EU internal affairs, the EU acknowledged the need for stronger involvement.

A good case in point is the Black Sea Synergy (BSS), the main EU initiative for the region. The Synergy adds value to European neighborhood policies and, if used to its full potential, can enhance the EU's dialogue with both Turkey and Russia. Romania is committed to enhancing cooperation in the Black Sea realm, in order to take the implementation of the BSS further. For this reason, we believe the time is ripe for Turkey to be more actively involved in cooperating with the EU on issues related to the region, in the BSS format.

Another case is the Eastern Partnership (EaP) which Romania views as a powerful soft power instrument to anchor Eastern neighbors to EU's identity and values. The EaP is well on track, with a satisfactory implementation pace on both bilateral and multilateral dimensions. While the bilateral dimension is, for obvious reasons, more advanced, the multilateral pillar also provides for interaction with existing cooperation initiatives, which is likely to result in complementarities on topics such as energy, environment, infrastructure and frozen conflicts.

We should not be shy about drawing a necessary differentiation between the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy. Romania supports an optimal interaction between the two, so that complementarity and differentiation is ensured. To this end, Romania is in contact with the current PRES HU (Hungary) and incoming

PRES PL (Poland), as region-minded EU Presidencies which will push forward both initiatives. Romania voiced its view that the differentiation principle, under the same policy roof provided by the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), should be maintained and the policy differentiation East-South should be based on the diversity of challenges and threats. In practical terms this means that we want to see Turkey as naturally involved in both EU neighboring areas. We also expressed our belief in the necessity of maintaining an enlargement-oriented approach towards all of our Eastern neighbors.

Turkey is unmistakably a key regional player. Turkey can and will bring, for sure, added value to the process, given all the heritage of the Turkish Republic, its expertise and geographic proximity to the target-states of the Eastern Partnership. This, we believe, will contribute to the advancement of our shared objectives. Moreover, we believe that this is in full conformity with the “zero problems with neighbors” concept promoted by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. For these reasons, we plead for Turkey to be more involved in cooperating with EU on issues related to the region, under the current circumstances and in the Black Sea Synergy format.

As the core political framework guiding the relations between the EU and its neighbors, the ENP is of paramount importance. Its original objectives, such as creating a space of cooperation, stability and socioeconomic progress are still valid. The ENP must be continuously developed, improved and adapted so that it can better serve its purposes. This is the main reason for the ongoing ENP’s review process that we hope to finalize this year. This should result in a substantially increased profile of the ENP.

Even if Turkey is a candidate country and not formally linked to the ENP, its position at the crossroads between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea qualifies Turkey as an important connector of the Southern and Eastern vectors of the ENP. Adding a consistent strategic dimension to our neighborhood agenda and developing extensive dialogue with the major regional stakeholders where Turkey ranks in the prime is another position we promote consistently in Brussels.

Given the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for the EU and the rather limited results of the BSS, the European Parliament has also become involved. Hence the initiative to launch an EU Strategy for the Black Sea region was initiated by a Romanian Euro-parliamentarian. The stated goal of this European Parliament Resolution concerning the future Strategy, adopted on 21 January 2011, is to enhance the coherence and visibility of EU action in the region and to define an integrated and comprehensive EU approach. This approach will address the challenges and opportunities of the region, and will contain a detailed action plan,

clear objectives, flagship initiatives and benchmarks for measuring progress. The importance of the document stems from the fact that it actually maps the region at the European Parliament level, hence increasing its visibility. It pushes the discussion from the strategic-academic realm into the political agora.

Being neighbors should be a privilege. In the Black Sea area, the EU needs to take advantage of all existing strengths in order to overcome problems that affect the welfare of the peoples. Zero-sum games belong to the past century. Cooperation on environment, migration and organized crime is a necessary start, which can later positively influence the collective processes of addressing energy security, frozen conflicts, separatist movements and weak governance. This can

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be done by jointly approaching subjects where partners have very similar interests, such as energy cooperation, environment, good governance, rule of law and democracy, economic and social development. Here I will give the example of how Romania spearheaded EU initiatives in the region. At the Black Sea Synergy launch (the Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU and of the countries of the Wider Black Sea Area, Kiev, February 2008), Roma-

nia promoted four concrete initiatives on environment, civil emergencies, education and developing contacts at the level of NGOs in the region.

As it is with every beginning, work was not easy, but eventually the initiative on environment took off, in the shape of a concrete Partnership for Environment, which is now handled by a dedicated unit in the European External Action Service. The Partnership for Environment was launched in March 2010 by the European Commission as the first sectoral partnership under the aegis of the Black Sea Synergy. It is envisaged that it will soon have a Steering Group in the shape of a political forum composed by Member States and partner states. The Financing Fund will involve all stakeholders, including those from the region and the international financial institutions (IFIs), who will merge their resources with EU funds. The very aim of this perhaps bureaucratic process is to ensure that once the Partnership is implemented, it will revitalize regional cooperation at a very tangible level. As far as the other initiative which is well on track –The Black Sea NGO Forum– it already held its third edition in Constanta, in October 2010, with the consistent support of the European Commission and the Black Sea Trust.

The Black Sea Region From a Bilateral Perspective

Against this background, it becomes clear that Turkey and Romania are best placed to jointly contribute to the security and prosperity of the Black Sea region. While one is at the gate of the region to the EU and the other at the region's gate to the rest of the world, there is much that the two actors can achieve together. Both countries are sophisticated enough to recognize that there are shortcomings at the level of regional cooperation but are equally aware of the fact that these gaps can be closed through better cooperation of the countries of the wider region with the EU. Needless to say, this will yield significant results for strengthening confidence in expanded regional cooperation.

Collaboration in the area has taught us a twofold lesson: on one hand, there is the cooperation that develops naturally among riparian countries on maritime issues. On the other hand, on questions dealing with economy, environment or migration, it would be a serious mistake not to approach cooperation in a much broader sense, including countries that, due to their economic, geographical or historical ties, are linked to the Black Sea. This is why Romania is in favor of a far-reaching view of the region, referred to as the Wider Black Sea, including countries which share historical moments, geographic proximity as well as a strong desire to co-operate in order to improve the attractiveness of the region.

We, in Romania, are not alone in thinking along these lines. Turkey also acknowledges the high strategic relevance of this region. Its continuous involvement in the region will also help foster the regional objectives Romania also promotes. It is therefore only natural for us to believe that the Black Sea wider region shall benefit from all forms of Romanian-Turkish cooperation in the long run. The accession of Turkey to the EU will boost its role in the Black Sea region, increase its presence and project its interests better across the wider Black Sea area.

Turning now to BSEC: Romania remains firmly committed to reinforcing the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization. We are a founding Member State, an active participant and a main contributor to its activities, particularly in the current context, when we have the Chairmanship. A concrete example: Romania is one of the only three other BSEC Member States to maintain a Permanent Representation to the PERMIS, which has dedicated diplomatic staff for dealing with BSEC affairs. And maintaining such a mission is an effort during such economic conditions. For us, the organization is and will remain relevant to answering real needs and bringing tangible results. Of course, we know that this is valid chiefly for Romania and Turkey because, as is often the case, any organization has exactly the value its members wish to confer to it. We would like to see the same level of commitment and participation from other Member States, as well. On the interaction of

BSEC with the EU, our position is very clear: the commitment of the EU to BSEC is undisputed, but our expectations should be realistic, particularly when speaking about funding. Successful BSEC-EU interaction is a two-way street.

And better communication from BSEC side in Brussels will lead to positive outcomes. Having BSEC mentioned in the European Parliament Resolution on the Strategy for the Black Sea is a good start. The vote on the EP's initiative in Brussels is a seed for raising awareness. But this seed has to be nourished. As Romania opened this path, and Turkey has the know-how, the interest and the instruments for lobbying, why not try to team up and discuss more about the Black Sea in Brussels think tanks?

Major projects in the region such as those on infrastructure should be developed in close consultation and cooperation with the European Commission. BSEC will remain a mainly economic cooperation forum that can contribute to prosperity and stabilization through its cooperation on transnational projects. Thus, it may capitalize on confidence-building even in areas affected by protracted conflicts. Again, here emerges the need to underline the importance of being realistic when launching projects within BSEC: as in any budgetary exercise, all proposals should be launched when financing resources are identified.

Hot Spots Around the Black Sea

There is no dispute on the pressing need to start delivering on the resolution of protracted conflicts that riddle the region. Of all areas of Europe, the Black Sea Region has the greatest density of separatist conflicts, disputes or regional tensions. These situations bring major concerns for the regional stability and security of the Wider Black Sea Region. The conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as other disputes, are posing serious threats to regional security. Sometimes, the risk of violent confrontations floats like a toxic cloud. The good news is that the differences between countries are counterbalanced by the common opportunities and challenges facing the Black Sea area.

Romania has a keen interest in actively strengthening the stability and security in the Wider Black Sea Region, and promoting the values of democracy, rule of law and human rights. In this context, building a culture of cooperation within the Wider Black Sea Region is key. What we put on the table is not the idea to tackle the four conflicts within a regional approach, as this is not a new design, but the need to reinforce a cooperation culture. Regardless of the different origins and different nature of the frozen conflicts, and the argument that they require different solutions, the common denominator here is dialogue. And the existing formats of dialogue, established in the 1990s must be used in reaching lasting and viable solutions.

Our approach towards frozen conflicts is based on the logical need to eliminate sources which could trigger instability at regional level from the immediate neighborhood of NATO and EU. Even if there is no unique or universal model for the settlement of the frozen conflicts, the cooperation and dialogue process in itself is a genuine test for the Black Sea states and for the European and Euro-Atlantic community, equally. Neither of us can afford to fail this test.

Energy and Security - Regional Initiatives and Priorities

Energy issues are significant for the Black Sea region since half of the energy imports to Europe transit this region. To secure the region's fuel supply and production networks, EU, the Black Sea and Caspian Sea riparian countries should maintain an active approach towards ameliorating the access to new energy sources, expanding alternative routes and enabling the transit between Western markets, and Caucasus and Central Asian producing countries. The Southern Corridor creates an essential route of access for Caspian resources to the European market. Azerbaijan is on board and the fact that this country has made another step in supporting the EU approach on energy is welcomed. Diversification of transit routes and sources, development of renewable energies, energy efficiency and conservation are areas where regional actors can improve their cooperation.

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The opening of new gas routes from the Caspian region to Europe through the Black Sea area, as well as the construction of LNG terminals on the Black Sea shore have to be mentioned, too. These projects underscore the emerging profile of this region as an axis for energy diversification projects and for energy security in Europe.

Romania is primarily involved in the materialization of three important energy projects to be implemented in the wider Black Sea region: Nabucco, the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania-Hungary Interconnector (AGRI), and the The Pan-European Oil Pipeline (PEOP) pipeline. These projects will have a major impact on the development of the Trans Caspian-Trans Black Sea energy corridor, contributing in the long run to the energy security of Europe as well as to the economic development of the whole region.

Turkey has played an important role in the establishment of the corridor linking Europe directly to the producers in the Caspian region. The successful accomplishments of the BTC and BTE projects confirm Turkey's profile as a reliable energy transit country.

Today, having as an example these successful projects, Romania and Turkey are partners in the development of the Nabucco project, which will further EU's energy sources and bring benefits to all producer, transit and consumer countries. This is beneficial, as it will increase competition and price stability in the natural gas sector, consolidating our cooperation in energy as well as in the region.

AGRI has the clear potential to become an important contribution to the Southern Corridor and to the European energy security ensuring the shortest direct route of Caspian gas towards the European market. The Pan-European Oil Pipeline from Constanța to Trieste could be the most direct, viable and secure route for transporting Caspian oil towards Europe, having a direct contribution to diversifying oil resources and transit routes to Europe.

The Black Sea region could provide solutions for energy supply diversification since it holds vast and unexplored potential on renewable energy. Wind, waves, salinity and solar energy could make the region emerge as a key element of Europe's energy strategy. There is a considerable gap in the region between the actual and the prospective use of energy resources –both conventional and alternative– and this requires due attention and expedite action.

Romania has committed itself to support the development of the renewable energy sector in the Black Sea region. Among others, Romania encouraged the development of a suitable regional format of dialogue, namely the Black Sea Forum on Renewable Energy, whose opening edition was held in Bucharest last November. The event highlighted the various contributions made by BSEC countries to the development of the renewable sources of energy. This is in harmony with the initiative promoted by the former Greek Chairmanship-in-Office of BSEC regarding promotion of green energy in the Black Sea. Establishing a Black Sea Regional Center of Excellence on Renewable Energy, potentially complemented by a network of such structures in the Black Sea region, was one of the outcomes of this Forum.

The Black Sea region should become associated to development trends in the area of renewable energy undertaken at the EU level. A regional framework for dialogue appears to be timely in order to foster interest for a strategic outlook on Black Sea renewables potential and to explore the opportunities for practical cooperation in renewable energy between private initiatives, public institutions and

academia. The time is ripe for such actions, as EU will adopt during this year its EU Energy Strategy.

Transport is another building block for integrating our region into the increasingly globalizing world. Transport corridors should contribute to the design of broader perspectives that address today's social and economic context. Without effective, reliable and efficient transport, trade is hampered and international investments lag.

An option to overcome today's challenges could be the TRACECA corridor, which, as a vital part of the historical Silk Road, is aimed at establishing the shortest and reliable transportation solutions on the east-west axis. This could ensure the smooth flow of trade, investments and skilled workforce among Europe, Caucasus and Central Asian countries in a competitive framework.

The wider Black Sea region should be a comprehensive political project for all of us. Romania is committed to enhance regional cooperation with countries in the Black Sea region, both Allies and NATO partners, in order to make this region a stable and democratic component of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Romania and Turkey have reached a high level of cooperation within NATO. One example is the successful joint action in raising Allied awareness on the importance of the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic security. As a result of our common efforts, starting with the 2004 NATO Summit in Istanbul and at the Bucharest, Strasbourg/Kehl and Lisbon Summits, the NATO heads of state and government recognized publicly the importance of the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic security, and the importance attached to regional cooperation through the effective use of existing initiatives and mechanisms.

Both Romania and Turkey are strong supporters of the continuation of the "open door" policy and the consolidation of NATO's partnerships, as an expression of NATO's commitment for cooperation with nations in the neighboring regions. One of the tasks of the Lisbon Summit was for NATO to modernize its partnership instrument. Romania's objective is to continue working with Turkey and other allies on that.

Among neighbors, Russia ranks as a major partner. In the NATO – Russia Council, we are teaming up together to undertake complex work following the new impetus for cooperation given in Lisbon. This path must continue to be followed, as it is a simultaneous development with EU engagement in a Partnership for Modernization with Russia.

EU's enhanced cooperation with Russia, at institutional and operational levels, is based on a partnership in terms of shared standards and mutual concerns for the interests of both parties. The results of the EU-Russia Summit last December laid a solid basis for closer cooperation in 2011. As major organizations symbolizing the cooperation of democracies, both EU and NATO looked with more interest and willingness towards the eastern part of the continent in the last two decades. They have adapted themselves and engaged in cooperation and found common language on issues of mutual concern or interest with past time foes.

At this juncture, two other important regional cooperation initiatives must be mentioned: the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR), and the Romanian-Turkish cooperation within the Operation Black Sea Harmony.

The BLACKSEAFOR is the first and only multinational format of cooperation in the military field of all Black Sea countries. In 2011 we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the establishment of BLACKSEAFOR. Since 2001, BLACKSEAFOR has demonstrated its capacity to contribute to the further strengthening of friendship, good relations and mutual confidence among the Black Sea littoral states, to improve peace and stability in the region, and to enhance the cooperation and interoperability among the naval forces.

At the same time, Operation "Black Sea Harmony" is the only initiative in the region with operational functions in combating maritime risks and threats in the Black Sea basin. We welcome the fulfillment of necessary procedures for the entry into force of the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the cooperation of Romania and Turkey in the framework of Operation "Black Sea Harmony". Based on the provisions of this Memorandum, our appropriate national authorities will carry out systematic maritime surveillance missions in national jurisdiction areas together, and will exchange information in order to identify combat maritime risks. We are convinced that Romania's participation to this initiative will give an impetus to regional cooperation in the Black Sea region, with a strong potential to expand stability and security in this area.

Concluding Thoughts

Through the genuine commitment of the countries in the Black Sea region and the increased involvement of international organizations such as NATO and EU, a better future for this area, well into the 21st century, can surely be built.

Romanian-Turkish relations are at an unprecedented level, due to intense political dialogue, strong economic links and durable historical and cultural exchanges. Thus, the foundations are laid for us to multiply the means and ways of cooperation.

Romania wishes to work closely with Turkey and other states, partners or stakeholders in the region, in an attempt to transform the multitude of challenges of the area into real regional opportunities. Help and guidance (from NATO and the EU) is always welcome, but regional efforts are the backbone of any attempt to Black Sea region's international profile.