

THE EU GATE TO BLACK SEA REGIONAL COOPERATION A ROMANIAN-TURKISH COMMON GROUND

Offering an overview of the various frameworks for cooperation in the wider Black Sea, the author explains that Romania aims to bring the EU and the region closer together and argues that Turkey and Romania can play an important role in the future of the region. Touching upon the shared values versus the differing interests between the EU and Russia, the author claims that zero sum games are games of the past. He emphasizes that the EU cannot alone revamp its neighborhood, but also points out that no other state has the ability to play a determinant role in the region on its own terms either.

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“In assisting our neighbors in this region on their long walk towards a sound democracy, development of their fragile economies, reorganization of their political systems, and settlement of their ethnic and territorial disputes, Turkey stands for the challenge. There is certainly no quick-fix solution for the deep running problems. However, establishing a sound regional cooperation is a good point to start.”

President of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Abdullah Gül, speech at the Woodrow Wilson International Center on "Regional trends: a Turkish perspective", 8 January 2008, Washington

“The Black Sea should embody a destiny that unites, not one that divides. The Black Sea region must not become a frontier separating the democratic and prosperous part of the European continent from others. If geographically the region is part of the European configuration, this should also hold true from a political and economic point of view. By initiating the Black Sea Synergy, the European Union has proposed an instrument that can stimulate reforms, sustain economic development and extend regional cooperation, based on specific pragmatic projects.”

President of Romania, Mr. Traian Basescu, speech at the EU-Russia Economic Forum, 26 May 2009, Bucharest

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. Multiplying cooperation initiatives and reinforcing existing ones will bolster regional stability and development. We need to bring aboard all stakeholders to be able to translate challenges into real opportunities. A good case in point is the Black Sea Synergy, the main EU initiative for the region. The Synergy can bring real added-value to European neighborhood policies and can enhance EU’s dialogue with Turkey and Russia. Turkey and Romania are best placed to jointly contribute to security and prosperity at the Black Sea. When one is the gate of the region to the EU, and the other is the region’s gate to the rest of the world, there is little that these two actors could not achieve together if they wish so.

The Black Sea, the Main Concern of Our Regional Foreign Policy

You only have to take a simple look at a global map to understand the complexity of the Black Sea region. It is an area located at the crossroads between Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. The Black Sea itself has access to the oceans by passing through at least three straits. Moreover, it has a complex history and a complicated political environment that have prevented the consolidation of a regional identity so far. Since the end of the Cold War, when the question of creating a Black Sea cooperation scheme was met with a first series of concrete outlines, Romania has expressed a keen interest in actively contributing to strengthening the stability and security of the wider Black Sea Region, by

promoting values of democracy, rule of law and human rights apt to bring prosperity to the communities in this area. Over time, we have come to understand that cooperation in the Black Sea should be twofold: on the one hand, there is the cooperation that develops naturally among riparian countries on maritime issues. On the other hand, on questions such as 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, encompassing countries which share a common history, relative proximity and a strong desire to cooperate as natural regional actors.

The wider Black Sea region should therefore be for all of us a comprehensive political project. Romania is clearly committed to enhancing the Allies' regional attention and awareness with regard to the Black Sea, a region clearly vital for Euro-Atlantic security. Lately, we have witnessed disruptive events, such as the military crisis in Georgia the political-economic crisis in Ukraine or the violent events in the Republic of Moldova, which had a negative impact both on the countries in the region and on security of the Euro-Atlantic space. In this context, we believe that, through a genuine commitment of the countries in the wider Black Sea region and the increased involvement of international organizations such as NATO and the EU, we may build a better future for this area. One might be tempted to assume that EU's growing interest in the Black Sea area is only due to the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU in 2007. This assumption is partly unfounded. The reality is that the Black Sea had already been on the EU's agenda for some time. The region is inevitably important for the EU in its own right because of the energy stake or the various security challenges, which all date back to long before the last EU enlargement.

Romania believes the appropriate response to most of these regional challenges is to have more Europe in the Black Sea area, not less. Today's geographical presence of the European Union on the Black Sea should be built upon so as to make the Union a significant player in the region, essentially facilitating the spread of European and Atlantic values. On the other side of the coin, Europe needs more Black Sea on its agenda. Security around the Black Sea area must become part of the EU's external and security policy. Of course, Romania is aware that stronger cooperation in the region is not possible without, or against, the interests of the countries in the region, especially the major stakeholders. We know that Turkey also acknowledges the high strategic relevance of this region and we appreciate that our important Ally's involvement in the region can help foster the regional aims that Romania's foreign policy has committed to promote. It is therefore only natural for us to believe that the Black Sea wider region shall benefit from all forms of Romanian-Turkish cooperation, as long as we remain committed to a win-win outlook for all parties involved. Most importantly, accession to

the European Union will boost Turkey's role in the Black Sea, increase its presence and better project its interests across the wider Black Sea area.

Energy in the Areal of the Black Sea

Since we have mentioned the issue of economic cooperation in the wider Black Sea region, one cannot ignore the ever-present question of energy and energy security. To ensure durable European energy security we need to diversify the energy supply sources and the transport routes, to promote dialogue among supplier, consumer and transit states, to consolidate the common energy market and integrate the need for implementing a real environment protection dimension in the process of decision making. Energy security is essential to economic development and even to the very human safety, but development cannot be sustainable in an environment that is rapidly decaying. Oil, natural gas and coal shall remain highly important sources of fuel, as far as energy security is concerned, for many years to come. From this viewpoint, and bearing in mind the unavoidable coupling of energy and environment, we believe that financial expenditures for research and development in this field should also be directed to achieving an environmental friendly exploitation of oil, gas and coal sources. Moreover, given the last year's surge in oil prices and the global momentum towards clean energy, it is time to start addressing the issues of renewable energy in the Black Sea basin in a more pragmatic manner, i.e. across the spectrum of research, development and production. Our region has huge potential in this regard, especially in the wind and solar segments. Ensuring energy security is closely connected to the establishment of a fully functional common energy market that can ensure the competitiveness of the European sector. I have already emphasized and shall continue to stress the importance of a common EU voice in relation to third party supplier or transit countries.

Through the geostrategic position of the Black Sea, the European areal becomes strategically connected to Central Asia, the South Caucasus and the Middle East, high yield energy producing and supplying regions. Thus, the Black Sea becomes a pivotal region for the multiplication of EU's energy supply sources and transport corridors. Romania actively supports the construction of the Nabucco pipeline project, which has been already recognized as a priority of the European energy policy, and of the Pan European Oil Pipeline (PEOP) project (linking the maritime Romanian and Italian ports of Constanta and Trieste).

Turkey's important role in the establishment of the corridor linking Europe directly to producers in the Caspian region and the successful accomplishment of the BTC and BTE projects confirm Turkey 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 add to the supply

security of the EU and Turkey, consolidating our cooperation in the energy sector as well as in the region's other fields of interest at large.

Addressing Security Challenges

Frozen conflicts can be seen as an expression of the intricate realities of the Black Sea area. The protraction of such conflicts stems among others from the lack of trust between some nations, from the lack of a regional identity and, last but not least, from the lack of a shared vision about the future of the region. There are of course differing views on how to best deal with frozen conflicts in the region, but the danger of conflicts unfreezing in a violent way, a danger that was so evident past summer, should make us more alert on the need for well-timed solutions.

The truth is that neither BSEC or BLACKSEAFOR, nor the Black Sea Synergy are endowed with the capacity to solve frozen conflicts directly, but they can provide an environment conducive to the resolution of such conflicts. It is therefore crucial that the EU remains engaged in the resolution processes; if it succeeds, this may prove to be the decisive step towards being recognized as a true Black Sea actor.

Romania considers its bilateral cooperation with Turkey within the Operation "Black Sea Harmony" as an effective instrument for implementing a concept of "regional co-ownership", as well as a solid reinforcement for the principles of transparency, complementarity and inclusiveness, all of them pivotal for Allied prospects in the region.

The Operation Black Sea Harmony goes "hand in hand" with another regional initiative that is the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR). We consider these two initiatives to be complementary and we promote the principle of a "division of labor" between what BLACKSEAFOR has proven it can do and what the newly launched Operation Black Sea Harmony might become.

The Black Sea Synergy

The Black Sea Synergy, which Romania considers as the main EU initiative for the region, provides a framework to discuss security issues and enhance regional cooperation, thus providing an important added-value to the bilaterally-focused European Neighborhood Policy. The Synergy also provides for a more substantial dialogue between the EU, Russia and Turkey. We see the Black Sea Synergy as a two-way road. It is not just European institutions that have to create synergies among the various policies, programs and approaches directed to the region, but also the Black Sea countries themselves, as well as regional organizations and

initiatives, that should speak in a pragmatic, and as much as possible convergent tone. For that to happen, the countries of the region should aim to shape a common vision and a common agenda of their shared interests, as they are the best placed for possessing comparable perceptions of regional problems and their respective solutions.

A new, fresh “philosophy” of flexibility, freedom of choice, dialogue, pragmatism and result-oriented approach has been launched through the Synergy and should continue to be at the heart of our relations. Given the persistence of some clearly divisive matters in the region, it is more reasonable, at least for the time being, to engage in projects dealing with less controversial subjects, to bring aboard as many actors as possible, or even all the actors involved. Such areas are no less important for the region’s development, for concrete social and economic progress. We consider that the wider Black Sea strategies promoted with our Western partners should be implemented in such a way that can ensure the participation of all regional actors and not create new dividing lines. It is politically and practically impossible for the EU to adopt an all-embracing approach towards the Black Sea region. Being neighbors should be privilege, not damnation. 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 are games of the past. Cooperation on environment, migration, and organized crime is a necessary start, which can later on build into addressing collectively energy security, frozen conflicts, separatist movements and weakened states. This can be done by jointly approaching subjects where partners have very similar interests, such as energy cooperation, environment, good governance, democracy, economic and social development.

The Black Sea Synergy has already created the political framework and projected financial resources for deepening the EU involvement in the region. This framework and the implementation of pragmatic projects for regional cooperation will be beneficial to the progress of other specific EU policies, such as those on migration, energy, maritime policy, transport and even the ESDP. These are accumulations that we need to build upon. The European Union cannot succeed alone in these efforts to revamp its neighborhood. This is not a sign of weaknesses, but of the key values underlying the EU’s strength: dialogue, partnership and shared responsibility. There are also two states that have played a historically determinant role in the region: Turkey, now engaged in an EU pre-accession process; and Russia, which envisages a strategic partnership with the EU. Today, no single state in the region could ambition to play such a role exclusively on its own terms.

The Black Sea Synergy does provide a framework for promoting regional cooperation among partners rather than mere bilateral ties between partners and the

EU. An effective approach of fields such as energy, environment, infrastructure, frozen conflicts, migration, and civil society cannot be successful without engaging Turkey and the Russian Federation. This is why Romania strongly supports the concept of Black Sea regional partnerships in different fields. The environment is in our view a good case in point for developing this concept. Turkey's role and position are obvious in the regional setting. Many of the regional cooperation formats have been initiated in Turkey and continue to develop with the contribution of Turkish active diplomacy. In this respect, an interesting proposal, with some potential, is the Turkish idea of a fast-track approach: a smaller number of BSEC countries could take the lead in a number of areas. First concrete results of this fast-track approach are yet to come.

Then again, as we noticed already, the successive crises of 2008 have underscored the need for a balanced approach between those values that can be shared and our differing particular interests. But Russia and the EU do have common interests and concerns in the region, which can be better addressed together. For the success of regional cooperation and EU's involvement, Russia's role in the Black Sea region, and vice-versa, the role of the Black Sea region in EU's relations with Russia, are of special relevance. Leaving "dated" perceptions aside, this should become a pragmatic and shared objective for the EU. The Union needs Russia on board as much as Russia needs the Union.

Other Regional Initiatives

It must be underlined that the active support of Romania for the Synergy is not detrimental to other regional institutions and initiatives. These complementary arrangements reinforce regional cooperation. On the other hand, one should acknowledge that by becoming an actor of the Black Sea, the EU had two options: either to join existing arrangements, which under the current circumstances is more difficult to achieve, or to propose a creative cooperation scheme, inclusive and complementary, which the Synergy is supposed to provide. We strongly believe that multiplying cooperation initiatives in the region, as well as reinforcing existing ones, will bolster regional stability and development in each of our countries and in the wider Black Sea region. This is an integral part of bringing the Black Sea area closer to the EU and the EU closer to the Black Sea area.

Romania remains firmly committed to reinforcing the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, as a founding member state, an active participant and contributor to its activities, particularly in the current context. The organization is and will remain relevant to answering real needs and bringing tangible results. The commitment of the EU to BSEC is clear, but our expectations should be realistic. In any case, major projects in the BSEC area 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, which, through its cooperation on transnational projects, could contribute to prosperity and stabilization, thus capitalizing on confidence-building even in areas affected by frozen conflicts.

Another regional cooperation format, the Black Sea Euro-region, is again not duplicating the existing structures, since it envisages strengthening regional cooperation through the representatives of local authorities, while other formats focus on cooperation at an inter-governmental level. Romania and Turkey have a positive and effective collaboration in initiatives dealing with the development of transport infrastructures on routes connecting Europe and Asia, under the auspices of TRACECA. The TRACECA corridor, a vital part of the historical Silk Road, aims to establish the shortest and most reliable transport solutions on the East-West axis, to ensure the smooth flow of trade and persons among Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

A short summing up would be useful here. While we take into account and highlight already existing formats of cooperation, we must avoid any duplication between these meaningful initiatives. Equally important, we need to maintain their open and inclusive character, with always the possibility to engage third countries willing and able to participate in the Black Sea regional cooperation. Last but not least, we should aim to develop the linkages between countries in the region and international organizations, such as the EU and NATO, through the use of open and transparent mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation.

The Way Ahead

Romania is committed to remaining deeply involved in the region, through a pragmatic, open and flexible attitude, focused on concrete projects of cooperation. Our objective during the last couple of years has been to bring the EU and the region closer together. Based on regional and European developments, this explains why our approach has focused on soft security, and on thematic regional partnerships. As I have pointed out, Romania wishes to closely work with Turkey and with the other states, partners or stakeholders in the region, in the attempt to metamorphose the multitude of challenges of the area into real regional opportunities. Romanian-Turkish relations are at an unprecedented level, due to intense political dialogue, flourishing economic links and strong historical cultural exchanges. Thus, the foundations are laid for us to multiply the means and ways of cooperation. There are so many things Romania and Turkey could achieve together for the benefit of the Black Sea region. Romania and Turkey can cooperate in various ways, under the aegis of the Black Sea Synergy, within the BSEC or in other regional arrangements. Furthermore, Romania strongly believes that the Black Sea is of strategic importance for NATO, hence the two coun-

tries could work together in order to define a role for NATO that can be appreciated by other countries in the region as well.

But besides seeking formats in which we can work together, as many as there are, we need to not lose sight of concrete priorities. Energy, migration, environment, transport are a few eloquent examples where we must focus our attention. Protracted conflicts around the Black Sea continue to represent a source of instability and insecurity for all of us. In this field again we could facilitate confidence among the various conflicting parties – and Turkey has acquired a valuable experience and knowledge on how to move forward on resolution processes.

It is our firm belief that, despite the traditional view that nothing occurs in the Black Sea without the consent of the two historical powers of the 19th century, today, Turkey and Romania can bring a common contribution to the stability, security and prosperity of the Black Sea region. When one actor is the gate of the region to the EU and the other is the region's gate to the rest of the world, I cannot imagine what these two actors could not achieve together if they wish so.