

Zones of Security in the Black Sea Region

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The dynamics of the changes in the first decade of the 21st century reformulated not only the global, regional and sub-regional priorities but also the disposition of the subjects within the international stratification. The bipolar confrontation has become a thing of the past while the contemporary accents outline the new security zones. One of them, a zone of high degree of intensity, is the Black Sea region. Geographically, this area incorporates the states of the post-Soviet European and Caucasus regions, the Balkan EU members (Bulgaria and Rumania) as well as Russia and Turkey – strategic partners of Brussels'. The conjunctive configurations and regional unions are what is now of lesser concentration in this region than the strategic objectives of the global players.

September 11th 2001, the date that has become a particular line of division between the new and old times, has strengthened the importance of two phenomena, imprinted with the mark of globalism – security and energy. Each one of them is as much a specific theme and process as it is closely bound to the other one. This symbiosis leaves its imprint on every fact and event in the regional and global spaces.

The struggle for the Eurasian strategic raw materials which concentrates the political, diplomatic and military powers of the leading states (the USA and Russia), significantly affects the accents and purposes of such international organizations as the Organization of the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), NATO, OSCE. From individual and all-round points of view each one of these subjects faces challenges, going through the wide range of the Caucasian and Balkan unknown quantities, through the growing Russian energy might to the independence of Kosovo, outlining the dynamic changes in the international law parameters of the political situation.

In the recent years the security zones in the Black Sea region are determined by geo-energy plans for production and transit of oil and gas. Besides, they are a component of the complex process of transformation, changing the paradigm of the sovereignty and legitimacy, defining the international legal frame of the Post-World War II world. Subject of the present article is the study of these two problems outlining the geopolitical frame of the Black Sea region security.

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In the recent years the term Wider Black Sea is coming more and more into general use, meaning the “Eurasian route of energy carriers, connecting the Euro-Atlantic system with the Caspian energy sources and the states of Central Asia”¹. Besides, the Black Sea system expands “to the north of the Transnistria, Odessa and Sukhumi. A system of stability sets as a preliminary requirement the solution of the ‘frozen conflicts’ at the North-Eastern arc and access to the major trade route rivers falling into the Black Sea, i.e. – the Danube, the Dniester and the Dnieper”². Three South-Caucasian countries are to be included into the Wider Black Sea, they are Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan³.

The Black Sea-Caspian area is of wider geographic parameters and it is perceived as a strategic bridge, connecting Europe with the Middle East, Central Asia and further with the regions of South-East Asia and China. The targets of the leading strategic players in the region turn it into a fundamental element in their plans.

For decades the name Central Eurasia has been uniting at first the Russian and in the due course the Soviet, Middle Asian and Caucasian geopolitical space, and after the end of the World War II it covers the region of the Central Asia including Afghanistan, Southern Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia), Turkey, the Russian North Caucasus (depending on the political situation) and Iran. With the increase of the European dependence on the strategic raw materials of Russia and the Caspian region the importance of

Bulgaria, Greece and Rumania as transportation routes of gas and oil has grown too. This problem together with the relevant ethnic, confessional and social problems in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Balkans predetermines the broadening of the feature contents of the term Central Eurasia in the direction on the Balkans.

The Caucasian region is an indivisible segment of the Black Sea system which is now turning more and more into a focus of the regional and global confrontations. The Black Sea synergy as a stage in the European initiatives, meant to assert the part of the EU as an active presence in the Black Sea region, is predetermined to take into account the differences in the state structures of the countries, the different levels of democratization of their societies and the different strength and effectiveness of their civic and social organizations and institutions which are mainly related to the problems of the controlled instability of the “frozen conflicts”, the risks of political instrumentalism in regard of the energy projects, the issues related to the social model of the East Black Sea area (problems resultant of the multiethnic democracy, human rights, security reform in the zone, struggle with trans-border organized crime, management problems and economic stagnation, insufficient social solidarity).

The detected in a number of Black Sea region countries asymmetry in economic development and civil society status continues to hold back their effective participation in the contemporary processes of integration, which problem has be overcome by stronger cooperation and help for the application of the confirmed good practices typical of the developed societies.

The struggle for the diversification of the energy supplies and routes has been evolving in the shadow of the Russian and European/American projects, firmly covering the Caspian and Black Sea area. The later is no longer composed by the traditional Central Asia and the Caucasus only but now it fully incorporates the Balkan region as an incontrovertible part of the oil and gas routes. Oftener and oftener names like “South Stream”, “North Stream”, “White

Stream”, “Nabucco”, appearing in the political and media spaces, have been turning into key symbols, merging geopolitical accents, confrontations and tactical or strategic victories. From international point of view there is nearly impossible to find a politician or a diplomat who has resisted the temptation to get involved with the energy projects, uniting/dividing states, ruling elites, internal and international opposition. The admittance of Bulgaria and Rumania into the European Union changed not only their positions in the geopolitical puzzle but also their parts in the Black Sea regional and global energy systems.

During the last year, 2009, the Black Sea region turned into a specific dividing line in the Russian-American rivalry. The first year of American President, Barak Obama’s rule was a serious trial for his team. The American Administration not just suffered the negatives of the financial and economic recession internally, but did also try to effect a smooth transition toward a constructive dialogue with the world and with Russia in particular. Kremlin also had to face and do with problems of the economic recession and the wave of terrorist attacks against the Federation which have been growing worse (especially during the last few months) as well as the increasing resistance of the European countries-gas users against Gasprom’s policy.

The energy puzzle of the Black Sea region map is also affected by the breeding grounds of ethnic and confessional conflicts which are characteristic for the processes in various parts of the post-Soviet space and the Balkans. Till 2008 the focus of the Black Sea geopolitical space was the Kosovo case (in the Balkans) as well as the “frozen conflicts” (in the post-Soviet space). However, this year has turned to be decisive for a radical change in this security sphere.

Two key problems prevailed in 2008 – the energy supply routes and the “frozen conflicts”. They are closely related to the European security and the EU’s independence/dependence from/on the Russian energy supply system. Scarcely any one of the previous years of the 21st century has been so unpredictable, reached such high degree of dynamism and was inundated with

so much political tension, so many key elections in states of key importance, involved in the two main problems of 2008. This process has kept on developing in 2009 and 2010, thus now outlining the parameters of two mutually complementary tendencies – the elections as a democratic form of social development of the Black Sea states and the changing accents in the Black Sea energy security policy in the region.

The parliamentary and/or presidential elections of 2009 and early 2010 in Moldova, Ukraine, Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece have put a serious impact on the complicated geopolitical and geo-energy map of the Black Sea region. Opposition's victory in the parliamentary elections in Moldova has made the constitutional crisis there worse but it has also turned that state into a kind of a pledge for the balance in the relations between Rumania and Russia. At the same time Bucharest's desire for deployment of elements of the NDM system on the Rumanian territory, expressed early in February 2010, prompted the announcement of Igor Smirnov, President of the Transnistria Moldavian Republic, about the deployment of Russian Iskander missile defense units on its territory.

The Black Sea geo-energy configuration has been seriously influenced by the Bulgarian parliamentary elections in July, 2009. The new Bulgarian government of Boyko Borissov seriously reassessed the Bulgarian participation in the Russian energy projects – the Belene NPS, South Stream gas pipeline and Bourgas - Alexandroupolis oil pipeline. The wavering signals coming from Bulgaria, varying within the wide range of explicit refusal to hesitant, with reservations, assent, served as incentive to the Bulgarian neighbour states. Very soon Turkey and Rumania declared their willingness to participate in the South Stream project.

The parliamentary elections in Greece changed the political configuration in the country but, similarly to Germany, any changes in the energy policy of the state were only part of the pre-election campaign. Athens like Ankara and

Bucharest is consistent in upholding and widening the scope of its participation in the energy projects, aimed at finding a solution to the European needs of strategic raw materials.

The presidential elections in Ukraine, won by Victor Yanukovich, the new Ukrainian President, have a serious effect on the geopolitical situation in the Black Sea region. The renouncement of the pro-American political line of his predecessor Viktor Yushchenko and his turning toward a balance between Brussels and Moscow, based on an effective Russian-Ukrainian cooperation in the gas scope, are the most important accents in Yanukovich's position. Another expected move of his is his statement that Ukraine's membership in NATO is not among its most pressing foreign political priorities.

Alongside the change in Kiev the ascertainment of Abkhazia as an important part of the Russian geopolitical space has been completed. The number of agreements signed between the Russian President Dmitri Medvedev and his Abkhazian counterpart Sergei Bagapsh in February 2010 has turned Abkhazia into a Russian outpost in the Caucasian region. A similar process but with much less media publicity is also taking place in the South Ossetia.

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The changes that took place in 2008 define as well the new characteristics of the security zones in the Black Sea region. This applies as to the "frozen conflicts" in the post-Soviet space as well as to the Balkan case of Kosovo.

Kosovo remains a peculiar enclave of slow burning tension in Europe with a stronger growing Euro-Atlantic accent. Kosovo continues to be an obstacle to the Serbian membership in the Euro-space. Something more, in the political and public space that country's European fate is more and more strongly pronounced to have to be preceded by its membership in NATO and at that linked to the fate and future of Kosovo.

Though the new status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia settles the problem for Russia, it does not do the same for Georgia and its supporters regardless of

the active political, financial and military aid they receive. The Georgian crisis goes beyond the frame of regional conflicts. Being part of the Eurasian space, concentrating in itself the global rivalry, Tbilisi's territorial problems are becoming a catalyst of the geopolitical processes. Since the dissolution of the USSR Georgia has passed through the long sequence of historical emotions, through the refusal to accept the changing realities and the aspiration to achieve goals not only unattainable but also destructive for the Georgian society.

Besides, Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia has changed the accents in the post-Soviet space and the global world. Together with the sovereignty of Kosovo the Balkan and the Caucasian cases are turning into a specific test for the implementation of the existing international norms and a filter at the formation of a new international stratification. The fact that the new international format of their existence renders new meaning to terms like buffer and problem zones cannot be eliminated either.

In Transnistria and Nagorni Karabakh these processes are closely interwoven with processes not only of the post-Soviet space but also such beyond the territory of the ex-Soviet Union. The development of Transnistria is strongly dependent on the growing tendencies for closer relations between the official authorities in Moldova and Rumania. In that case it is possible to talk of an interesting bond, interrelated with the results of the presidential elections in Ukraine. The reactions of Bucharest and Tiraspol are indicative of their positioning in the rivalry between Russia and America in the region.

The Nagorni Karabakh problems depend on a very wide range of accents – the processes in Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia with much, much more than a modicum of energy. This is relevant to the Armenia-Turkey relations, with their increasing tendency for rapprochement but with too many obstacles of historical roots. The problems are also associated with the unaltered Turkish ambition to make a maximum use of the Nabucco gas pipeline for its own purposes. Ankara is persistent in its requirement that Azerbaijan should sell the

gas to Turkey and then Turkey would decide at what price it will be transported to Europe. Apart of that Baku is firmly unwilling to change its position that Nagorni Karabakh is a part of the Azerbaijani territory in contradiction to Ankara's position which becomes more and more hesitant in this respect. Iran is not to be forgotten as well, with its ever growing persistence to establish a nuclear program of its own which has provoked strong political and diplomatic actions on the part of the USA, Russia and the concerned states in the region. There is another important element connected with Armenia. In the last few days the Parliament of Armenia ratified the agreement concerning the Collective Rapid Reaction Force of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) an agreement reached on 14th July 2009 at a meeting of the leaders of the states-members of the CSTO in Moscow. Now the words of the Russian President Medvedev of February 2009 that this organization is an analogue to NATO ring with a stronger perception of reality.

There are many proofs in support of this statement. One of them is connected with the deployment of the American elements of NMD. In the last five years Ukraine, through its former President Yushchenko, was a tension zone, fortifying the American positions in Europe. Besides, during those years Ukraine was something of a pawn in an intricate triangle: the EU – Russia – the USA. New Ukrainian President's statements made clear that Ukraine is going back into the Russian-European orbit. One of Yanukovich's first declarations, stating that "Ukraine's membership in NATO is not a priority for the country" activated the American politics in the Balkans through Bulgaria and Rumania which play complex parts in the Black Sea region. They are members of both – the EU and NATO, but at the same time they are also very important transmission routes in the solution of Europe's energy processes. In view of this complicated configuration of overbuilding of problems the reaction of the USA was only too predictable. Rumania, much more active and mobile in making decisions concerning its national interests, was the state, declaring that it "will

be integrated in the missile defense system of the USA". Not of lesser importance is the fact that after Obama had come into authority and especially after American President's visit to Moscow early in July 2009 at which he officially declared that the deployment of such elements in the Czech Republic and Poland would be abandoned, there was a political though not a diplomatic lull in the treatment of this matter. Non-coordinated statements of Bulgarian politicians induced a special declaration of the Under-Secretary of the United States, Ellen Tauscher. There are two essential points in it. As it was done with the other NATO members, talks of bilateral format were held with Bulgaria but there were no definite decisions made. The second point, related to the Black Sea region is that no deployment of sea-based elements of the system is planned for the Black Sea, and that Washington does not intend to transfer any warships, equipped with EGS systems.

There is a most important point which must not be ignored – the integration of Rumania and Bulgaria into the American NMD places these two states in an extremely complex position, binding them to foreign problems. We are both members of NATO but it should not be forgotten that the problems in Iran and Afghanistan are also problems of the USA politics. Rumania and Bulgaria are first of all members of the EU, not only geographically but also politically. What Europe needs above all is something to serve its interests – a defense system of its own. In this respect there are two important elements of the European security, related to already existing ideas. First – German Foreign Minister's proposal to create EU's army, made in February 2010 in Munich. Second – the presidents of France and Russia have been insisting for nearly a year and a half that European security architecture should be created. All processes, dynamically evolving and receiving its actual dimensions through the geopolitical and geo-economic energy aspects from 2008 on, outline several main positions and directions. There are two lines of direction in the Black Sea region subordinate to the strong side of the leading ones. Russia's strong side is

its working energy transport system with increasing possibility for its further expansion by means of future energy projects. Its counterpoint is the deployment of different elements of the American NMD in neighbouring countries of the post-Soviet European space. To this moment the latter process has mainly played the part of a psychological instrument meant to stimulate relevant political and diplomatic reactions.

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The security zones in the Black Sea region are fully situated within the geopolitical and geo-energy models that have appeared recently. Russia's growing stronger presence and the increasing cooperation with Turkey determine the future security accents. In regard of the energy the political and diplomatic shuttles and declaration shall go on. The intended target is not so much the construction of gas and oil pipelines but the political and financial positioning turned toward the European-Russian energy projects.

The problem security zones like the Transnistria and Nagorni Karabakh, remaining as "frozen conflicts" together with Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Kosovo from the point of view of their new status, remain within the range of the convenient aims serving to destabilize the region. Having in mind their presence in the strategic plans of the regional and global players in the Black Sea region, the possibility to eliminate such alternative is rather slim.

¹ Asmus Ronald D. and Bruce P. Jackson. The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom. Policy Review, N125, June /July 2004

² Ibidem

³ Ibidem