

THE EUROPEAN UNION BRINGS A BALANCE OF POWER IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

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Abstract. *The Black Sea Region is clearly in a transition period, and Romanian policy makers will have to be very careful assessing this situation and stating their position. US ambitions for NATO clearly conflict with French ambitions for the EU. Furthermore, even though most EU-NATO members find themselves caught in the middle, the current zero-sum nature of NATO-EU relations seems to portend continuing turmoil on the road ahead, to the detriment of both organizations and of transatlantic relations more generally. The paper analyses the way in which the European Union changed the national interests of the states of the Black Sea Region. The key point of these transformations is set to be the “five-day war” of August 2008.*

Keywords: *Black Sea Region, national interest, EU foreign relations*

JEL classification: *International Relations.*

Introduction

The geopolitics of the Black Sea is still in a quest for stability after the 1989-91 turning of the tide. Bulgaria's and Romania's admission into NATO and the European Union has been a major factor in altering the regional balance of power. But the situation is not at all static. The political future of the EU will be the key variable of this development. An increased European integration added to a strong Euro-American relationship would probably contribute to diminishing competition between great powers, and in a stronger Western hold on the area, at the expense of Russian ambitions. But German foreign policy is now more independent, and considered upon strategic partnerships

with Russia rather than upon a “Euro-Atlantic community,” could reenact a serious intra-Western competition. This will then summon Sofia and Bucharest to make sensible choices.

The Black Sea Region is clearly in a transition period, and Romanian policy makers will have to be very careful assessing this situation and stating their position. US ambitions for NATO clearly conflict with French ambitions for the EU. Furthermore, even though most EU NATO members find themselves caught in the middle, the current zero-sum nature of NATO-EU relations seems to portend continuing turmoil on the road ahead, to the detriment of both organizations and of transatlantic relations more generally. Romania seems to be one of those states

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caught in the middle. Romania has a past of strong and very good relations with the French, but the seamless approach towards the US from the Romanians has weakened them. In fact, in February 2003, the French President Jacques Chirac overtly criticised the “imprudent” move of the two EU candidates, Romania and Bulgaria, mainly because it strongly complicated Paris’ delicate anti-war diplomacy of the moment, but also because France felt it was losing influence over the EU “newcomers.” It should not be forgotten that France consistently backed Bucharest’s application for EU and NATO membership since the 1990s, and that historical ties between France and Romania have always been particularly strong. Paris has even accepted Bucharest as a member of the francophone countries, and the clear pro-American orientation of the new Romanian rulers disappointed France.

The main argument developed in this article is that the latest expansion of the European Union toward Bulgaria and Romania has changed the national interest of the states in the Black Sea Region, creating here a balance of power. First I will employ an analysis of national interest in the Black Sea Region, with an emphasis on Romania. From a rather classical perspective offered by Morgenthau, the direct interest in the region is more important than EU ties and membership. On the other hand, liberal intergovernmentalism shows that there are only a few cases in which geopolitical factors manage to short-circuit European Integration in a holistic understanding. Only economic related issues that stir up rivalries between member states can promote more or less direct changes of national interest. After setting up the theoretical ground, I will

explore Romania’s policy and initiatives in the region. Two important EU policies (the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership) that affect the Union’s relations and national interest with its Eastern neighbours will be thoughtfully discussed. An important moment, maybe the most significant event after the fall of the Soviet Union, in the logic of the policies employed in the region is the “Five-Day war” of August 2008. Not only did it underscore Russia’s interest, but it established the European Union as a major actor in the region. After the August war the European Union deals with its Eastern members as a unified group, not as before through individual member states.

National Interest

Morgenthau defines two levels concerning national interest, one primary and one secondary (Morgenthau 1951:22). In order to preserve the first (the nation’s survival or security of the nation), there must be no question about going all the way. Secondary level interests are not so easy to define, because they often involve negotiation or compromise. Although they are positioned outside sovereignty, they can evolve in the minds of statesmen into primordial interests. Mutually advantageous deals can be struck, if an interest is secondary. They may be understood as appeasement.

Besides primary and secondary, Morgenthau differentiates between specific and general interests, temporary and permanent interests (Morgenthau 1951:25). General interests are applied in a positive manner concerning a large geographic area, a large number of nations, or several specific fields. Permanent interests are relatively constant over a long period of time. A nation might

choose at a certain moment a specific interest and then abandon it; these kinds of interests are variable in time. Specific interests are closely defined in time or space and often are the logical outgrowth of general

interests. Thus, in Morgenthau's view a throughout description of national interest must include three kinds of adjectives: as primary, permanent, and specific, or secondary, temporary and general.

National Interest		Romania/ Bulgaria	Russia	Black Sea Synergy States	EU (including national interest of member states)
Importance	Vital	No threats to the national territory.	No threats to Russia's role as main economic player in the region (gas supplier).	No threats to the national territory.	No threats to the national states' territory. Protection of peace and stability.
	Secondary	Protection of Romanian citizens in Moldova and Ukraine.	Regaining its traditional position of influence in the region.	Good relations/ integration with/in Europe.	Establishing the EU as a major political player in the Region.
Duration	Permanent	Friendly relations with neighbors.	Maintaining and affirming its position as leader in the region.	Avoiding Russia's supposed hegemonic intentions.	Strong and friendly relations with Russia.
	Temporary	Attaining leadership position in the Region.	Support for the European Union's bid as a major actor in the international system.	Lack of support for EU initiatives that do not offer membership prospects.	Support for individual member states' initiatives (until the Five-Day war).
Specificity	General	Deepening the European integration process.	Keeping Europe under a Russian gas monopole.	Consolidation of democracy in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus.	Consolidation of democracy in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus.
	Specific	Acquiring diplomatic levers through initiatives.	Acquiring support from the European Union in relation to the United States.	Strong ties with individual EU member states.	Acquiring diplomatic levers through initiatives (Poland, Sweden, Germany, Austria, and Czech Republic).

Table 1. National interests in the Black Sea Region

Liberal theories of international relations affirm that “the foreign policy goals of national governments vary in response to shifting pressure from domestic social groups, whose preferences are aggregated through political institutions” (Moravcsik 1993: 481). The national interests of states are neither fixed nor uniform; they vary among states and within the same state across time and issues according to issue-specific societal interdependence and domestic institutions. Liberal intergovernmentalism considers the state as a unitary actor because it assumes that domestic political bargaining, representation, and diplomacy generates a consistent preference function. Thus, by considering the state as a unitary actor, liberal intergovernmentalism is the European integration theory that has the greatest explanatory power in relation to national interest.

The empirical analysis employed by Moravcsik established that the preferences of national governments that stemmed from European integration have mainly reflected concrete economic interests rather than other general concerns like security or European ideals. Concrete preferences emerged also from a process of domestic conflict in which specific sectoral interests, adjustment costs and, sometimes, geopolitical concerns played an important role (Moravcsik 1998: 3.)

From a liberal intergovernmentalist standpoint, geopolitical or ideological interests seem to have been decisive in some cases, particularly, where governments lack intense economic interest. This could explain why the Eastern Partnership has seen some

criticism from countries such as Bulgaria and Romania who do not want to see the Union’s Black Sea Synergy undermined and want to be a part of any initiative that involves the region (Velizade 2009). But the Czech Republic, which sits at the EU’s helm in 2009, has thrown its weight behind the Polish-Swedish policy initiative and cast a shadow on the Romania and Bulgaria’s wishes to be the EU portal to the region.

Romanian Initiatives

In the line of Romanian initiatives vis-à-vis the Black Sea, we have to note one proposed by a former Foreign Affairs Minister, Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu. At the reunion of the General Affairs and External Relations in January 2007, the first in which Romania participated as member state, the Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister said that there is a need for defining a more preeminent Eastern dimension to the ENP. This, in consequence, would confirm the European Union’s commitment to the Black Sea Region. According to EUexpands.com, Minister Ungureanu suggested the implementation of a so-called “Bucharest Process”, which would come to the aid of the state in this region¹.

The Carpathian countries initiatives were not always in accordance with sea neighbours interests. Matthew J. Bryza, the American Deputy Undersecretary of State, reckons Romania’s policy, as wonderful. Romania, as a new member of the European Union, wants to exercise the position of leader in the Black Sea Region. Bryza draws the attention to the

¹ *Euractiv*, 12 April 2007; http://www.euractiv.ro/uniunea-europeana/articles|displayArticle/articleID_9936/Regiune.html, 11 March 2009

fact that Romania needs to cooperate more closely with Turkey, the other NATO big state. These two countries have to conform to each other.

“It is wonderful that Romania wants to be a strong leader, with an ex-sailor on the Black Sea as president, who feels and breaths the Black Sea breeze. There are other states that want to achieve that position, that’s why Turkey and Romania have to work together for a common vision. I think that things in this direction are much better now than some years ago, when Turkey was more sensible and worried of what was happening in Iraq and in the Kurdish zone and in relation with NATO’s intend of bringing ships in the Black Sea. At that time, when Romania was promoting so actively NATO’s role at the Black Sea, the relations with Turkey were tensed even more. It isn’t that Romania shouldn’t articulate its points of view, but it is better that the two allies share a common vision. Romania must seek her interest of being a regional leader, but it is very important that this will happen in the context of good relation with its neighbours” (Pop 2007).

The accession of Romania and Bulgaria incorporated two Black Sea states and thus brought the EU to the shores of the Black Sea. This implied a more engaging EU in regional cooperation². Romania, with its 22-million strong population, is particularly well-placed for a greater role, and has also worked

toward this aim in the past.

As the Romanian government appears determined in seeking to develop a vision on the Black Sea, Romanian analysts, not tied to government bodies, express a somewhat more gloomy view of Romanian capabilities for bringing the topic of the Black Sea Region to the European Union’s agenda. Many say that present Romanian attitudes towards the Black Sea cover a far too broad and vague range of issues. Romania would gain credibility and space of maneuver if it chooses to focus on fewer, but more concrete issues that can be more easily translated into concrete projects. Doubts can be raised to whether Romanian administrative capacity is capable of living up to the ambitious ideas elaborated by the government. Furthermore, the question is whether skepticism toward BSEC would not be best addressed by steps to strengthen the organisation, rather than create parallel ventures.

EU officials share doubts of Romania’s capabilities, and stress that Romania’s main obligation upon joining the EU is developing the security of its external borders. It may be argued whether Romania has the capabilities to promote economical exchange across the European Union’s external border, while at the same time adhering to EU security requirements. The success of regional initiatives, such as the Black Sea Forum, was dependent on a delicate balancing act where the interests of key players Russia and Turkey must be accommodated. Romania accordingly sought to utilise all diplomatic means available to ensure Russian participation, and the Black Sea Forum agenda was

² *European Voice*, 12 April 2007; <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/the-eu-must-feel-at-home-by-the-hospitable-sea/57199.aspx>, 15 March 2009.

designed specifically not to be offensive to Russia. However, these efforts did not prove sufficient and the Black Sea Forum experience constitutes an example of the difficulties present in promoting cooperation initiatives by small actors in the region.

Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership

We have to ask a critical question. Can the creation of a sound policy for the Black Sea Region help implement democracy, development and Europeanisation to the East? It is very hard to give a clear answer to such a question. But there are important advantages of regional initiatives seen in the previous attempts to create a region out of the countries around the Black Sea. Alina Mungiu Pippidi outlines some:

- “The ability to focus more Western attention if a group of countries of low interest are packed into one region whose profile is raised by an awareness campaign.
- The simplification of resource mobilisation if one framework is offered instead of many. This was the logic behind the Balkan Stability Pact.
- The easier spread of best practices from the most developed part of the region to the less developed” (Pippidi, 2006).

The European Union envisages four types of goals at the Black Sea Region. These include: promoting of stability and conflict resolution, promoting democratic institutions and the rule of law, tackling terrorism and corruption (including migration issues), and providing a safer future for Europe in terms of energy supply. The accession

to the EU in 2007 of Romania and Bulgaria, which both border the Black Sea, has given the European front a bigger stake in the region’s stability. The Black Sea Synergy put together under the European Neighborhood Policy all of this challenges and goals of the European Union (Wielard 2007).

The European Commission’s report on the first year of implementation of the Black Sea Synergy salutes the progress that has been made under the umbrella of this programme:

“The initial results of the Black Sea Synergy reveal the practical utility and the potential of this new EU regional policy approach. The launch phase of the Synergy has been completed and implementation has begun. Participants favour the establishment of a long-term Black Sea cooperation process and have formulated converging ideas about its content and arrangements. Experience in the first year also demonstrates that the development of EU-supported Black Sea regional cooperation is a process taking place in a complex environment. Continued progress requires the consistent and active involvement of a growing number of actors, including both Member States and Black Sea partners. As in the first year, the Commission will be ready to contribute to this important work” (European Commission 2008a).

According to a report of the International Center for Black Sea Studies, the Black Sea Synergy had created a couple of positive effects. First of all, it reinforced the Europeanisation process by putting forward clear incentives

and delivering concrete benchmarks. Secondly, the Black Sea Synergy singularised and put the region on the map of the European Union as policy area. In this sense, it promoted regional cooperation and brought together, maybe for the first time, all the major political actors and other key stakeholders (Yakis 2008: 5).

On the other hand, the Eastern Partnership grants a more enhanced role to bilateral relations, thus putting at least some of the partners on the path to EU membership. Also it has increased funding, from € 450 million in 2008 to € 785 million in 2013 (Devrim, Schulz 2009). That is why many argue that the Eastern Partnership serves as a quasi pre-accession strategy document.

European officials often underscore the fact that the Eastern Partnership will not overlap with the Black Sea Synergy. Moreover, the two programmes address different issues. The Eastern Partnership was born from the standing fact that the EU needs to have enhanced ties with its Eastern neighbours. This will be done through a bilateral track, but bearing in mind the multilateral stake. The partnership will be suited to each country's desire. In this sense it is very important to provide ownership for each country. The Eastern Partnership will enhance only some areas dealt by the Black Sea Synergy: economic ties, trade issues, political stability and energy security. These fields of action are only one of the aspects that differentiate the two programs. While it focuses on cross border and multilateral cooperation, the Black Sea Synergy is suited to operate in Russia and Turkey and one of its political goals is tending to the frozen conflicts. On the other hand the Eastern Partnership does not say anything about Turkey or

frozen conflicts, but it gladly invites Russia to join it (European Commission 2008b).

All the countries in the Black Sea Region have complained about the form and substance of the Eastern Partnership. The new EU policy is clearly changing national interests, and the May 2009 summit in Prague, is going to formalise this course of event. When it comes to Russia, its complaints are just a rhetorical exercise, and are not grounded in an attempt to understand the Eastern Partnership (Polkhov 2008). The EU envisions a stable, democratic and prosperous neighbourhood, objectives that are not at all anti-Russian.

Moldova and all other states to which the Eastern Partnership applies have argued that such a policy exclude them from an actual integration track. The membership perspective is probably the most significant driving force of domestic reforms for nowadays "new" EU member states. Although the Eastern Partnership improves this perspective it clearly marks a step forward from the strategy of strict association employed by with the Black Sea Synergy. Moreover, the integration strategy used for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has become trivial due to the fact that the states in the Black Sea Region need even wider and deeper reforms.

It is the new EU member states that seem to have a more critical attitude toward Russia, and propose a tougher stance, or say, a united position in EU-Russian relations. On the other hand, older and established members do not wish to oppose Russia in matters that do not resonate with their broadly defined national interest. Since the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy, many member states have stated that the

European Union needs to apply a degree “hard power”. This means that the EU has arrived to the conclusion that what it considers to be “soft power” policy may look as policy of appeasement, or Russia first policy (Ahlin 2006). But, dangers of actual anti-Moscow initiatives have the potential of alienating the states of the Black Sea Region.

Moldovan officials’ complaints against the Eastern Partnership were not based on the fears that it is an anti-Russian initiative³. Indeed in Moldova the Eastern Partnership did not get the upper hand in the debate, but not because it would allegedly be anti-Russian, but mainly due to the fact that Moldova thinks that accepting this initiative will slow down its progress of European integration by associating it with the Southern Caucasus. Moldova’s domestic scene offers its own incentives for such a negative attitude toward the Eastern Partnership. Both the Communist government and most pro-European political parties are equally skeptical of the Eastern Partnership. Moreover, a part of the opposition has criticised the government for showing too much openness toward this new EU initiative.

The “Five Day War”

The focus on the many challenges and risks which bound in the region has been sharpened by the Georgian crisis. Moreover the war with Russia has shown, yet again, that the main states capable of achieving and maintaining peace and stability in the region are the regional stakeholders.

After the fall of the soviet regime, Russia was highly disoriented. The 1990s with the wavering leadership of Gorbachev sharpened the sense of humiliation that the Russian people felt after losing their superpower position. Putin capitalised on this sentiment of inferiority felt throughout Russia and managed with an iron hand leadership to flesh the countries muscles. In addition, Russian power and political surge in the international system was influenced by the rise of oil prices. Consequently, the end of Russian convalescence meant that all the spheres of influence lost with the dismemberment of the Soviet Union had to be recaptured. Former soviet republics became the first in line for a more or less indirect offensive from Moscow, and the Saakashvili regime felt the full frontal Russian power.

The Russian Federation felt that the time was right to send to the international a strong signal that it meant business and one should try to go near its back yard. Additionally, Russia was disturbed by the United states attempts to deploy air defense shield in Poland and the Czech Republic and the talk in Brussels of future interventions of the EU made under the CFSP (Stewart 2008:1). All of these new developments made Russia truly aware of the fact that its hegemonic position in the Black Sea Region was being questioned.

Many analysts have argued that the Georgian war might signal a return of power politics employed in the past, while others see it as *sui generis* case. But one clear conclusion can be drawn from last August events, the Black Sea Region packs a great deal of instability,

³ *Moldova.org*, 27 February 2009; <http://politicom.moldova.org/news/voronin-eastern-partnership-is-encircling-russia-like-a-ring-186084-eng.html>, 15 March 2009.

that, if not properly contained through the diplomatic efforts of the European Union and the regional actors involved, can spread not only to the entire region but engorge the neighbouring areas.

It can be argued that the EU at some point perceived itself as a balancer, a mediator in the region, due to the membership of three important regional actors: Greece, Romania and Bulgaria. Russia seemed more open than the United States to recognise the role of the EU as major security actor in the international system. At the signing of final peace accord of the “Five-Day war”, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister, Sergei Lavrov requested that all the three leaders of the European Union be present: Mr. Barosso, the President of the European Commission, Mr. Solana, the EU Representative on CFSP and French presidency of the Council of the EU, led by French President Nicolas Sarkozy⁴. This was for the first time when all three leaders were dealing together with an important foreign policy issue. The August events have also demonstrated, if not strengthened the idea that the major players of the Black Sea basin are the Russian Federation and Turkey. In this sense, a project that is drawn up without full cooperation since the outset with these two countries carries the risk of less cooperation from them.

Recently President Saakashvili argued that “Romania must become the leader of European integration for the whole Black Sea Region – Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and then Azerbaijan and

Armenia⁵”. This is clear evidence that national interests in the Black Sea Region were transformed by the “Five-Day war” as the EU no longer wishes to implement policies in the region through individual member states. Actually, Romania and Bulgaria perceiving this new trend have called on the United Nations to play an enhanced role in promoting democracy and regional peace and stability across the Black Sea area, saying that the recent conflict in Georgia signaled some of the challenges the region face (Leviev-Sawyer 2008). The national interest of Romania after the events in Georgia was underscored by former Romanian Prime Minister, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu:

“Our position as member of the European Union is not a purpose in itself, but an instrument serving the fundamental interests of Romanian society. We need the European Union to be powerful on a global level, economically competitive and politically respected, capable of taking action on the backdrop of economic challenges doubled by tension in international relations.”⁶

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the “five-day war” between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 was the most significant event in the Black Sea region since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Georgian developments signaled that the international system has changed, in the sense that politics is based now on

⁴ *Kommersant*, 8 September 2008; http://www.kommersant.com/p1022961/r_538/Russia_Georgia_conflict_EU_/, 3 June 2009.

⁵ *Ziua*, 9 April 2009; <http://www.ziua.ro/news.php?data=2009-04-09&id=25361>, 21 April 2009.

⁶ *Mediafax*, 2 September 2008; <http://www.mediafax.ro/engleza/romania-to-participate-in-post-conflict-reconstruction-of-georgia-pm.html?6966%3B3115809>, 15 April 2008.

interest, and values are losing momentum. An evidence of this is that the China issue did not breed much debate in the recent US elections. This interest driven world is at the same time highly multipolar, but not in the traditional way. States now do not live anymore in the security dilemma, in the sense they did some decades ago. Actually the international system is emerging to be one full of cooperation, based on the interest of every state. And in this atmosphere, the European continent presents itself as being bipolar, with Brussels and Moscow as its centers. But while the EU has the economic upper hand, Russia is keener on the political level. This has been proved by the discrepancy in response time during the August crisis. Judging by all of these facts most of the participants agreed that in external relations the EU must not be viewed as an important actor bent only on soft power. Political issues, frozen conflicts, energy security and such

problems must be dealt with if the EU wants to be successful in the region.

New EU policies in the Black Sea Region, like the Eastern Partnership will further transform national interest. At least for the moment most member states do view this new policy as a potential success, because it implies only soft measures that are not financially supported by many EU members, which are not the solid policies that the states in the area desire, and furthermore may make them band wagon alongside the EU. And moreover, the success of such an initiative must bear in mind the domestic situations of these states, and from the drafted proposal it clearly does not: the trajectory of transition in Ukraine and Georgia; the same countries torn apart, one by political issues, the other by the war with Russia; possible sudden domestic change in Belarus; and, Armenia not wishing to follow a Western path.

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