

WHAT IS ROMANIA'S SECURITY PERSPECTIVE IN THE BLACK SEA REGION?

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Russia's recent aggressions against Ukraine have resurfaced the importance of NATO's Eastern Flank. Modern capabilities with allied presence are considered essential in order to assure deterrence for not just Eastern Europe but for the entire continent. However the actual areas that pose a risk and threat on the Eastern Flank have longed been deemed differently. For the Northern part of the Flank, around the Baltic Sea, due to Poland's geopolitical agenda and the Baltic States geographical position NATO has always considered strengthening this area a priority. Romania is part of the Eastern Flank but is situated in an area that has not always been considered a major strategic challenge, that of the Southern part of the Eastern Flank, around the Black Sea. The aim of this paper is to present Romania's view to the importance of the Black Sea, from a political, military and economic point of view, to analyze the country's push during NATO summits for strengthening this area and to understand what the future is for this region, after introducing the Black Sea area in the NATO Strategic Concept, following the NATO summit from Madrid.

Key words: *strategic concept, energy security, defense capabilities, Eastern flank.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Black Sea has always been a security challenge for countries that have shore line on this specific area, including Romania. After joining NATO, Romania has tried to pursue the inclusion of the Black Sea into a strategic interest for the Alliance and to attract defense capabilities in order

to secure this area of the Eastern Flank (Joja, 2018). However on the Eastern Flank, the Black Sea hasn't always been a priority. The northern part of the flank has always been the major focus of the alliance. Since 2022, Finland will join NATO adding even more depth to the security of the northern part of the Flank and to the Baltic Sea region.

For Romania the Black has strategic role both military and economically (Weizmen et al., 2018). The Romanian economic zone of the black sea has the potential for fossil fuel supply and has started to develop accordingly. From a military point of view the Black Sea represent an immense challenge as seen by Russia's actions during the war in Ukraine. The Russian Fleet has had an enormous presence near Romanian coast line and has had military actions near the Romanian economic zone on Serpent Island.

One important aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is the Montreux Convention. This document includes measures to increase the security of Turkey and order states bordering the Black Sea. Therefore the convention recognizes the right to transit for all commercial ships regardless of pavilion during peace time. During war time the transit of commercial ships is still permitted for countries that are neutral, as long as Turkey is not part of the Conflict. For warships the rules are different, the Turkish state have a decisive permission for which ships can enter the streams. Submarines have different rules, as they can only pass near the coastline, during day

time and on the surface. During war time, if Turkey is neutral no military ships can enter the streams if they are part of the war. We have seen this rule applied during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The challenge with controlling the borders of the Black Sea becomes even more challenging as Turkey is set to develop a new canal in Istanbul (Nate et al., 2019). Question have risen if the Montreux Convention will be also applicable for transiting this canal or will previous security regulations for the Black Sea be renounced once this canal is fully operational.

2. ROMANIA'S STEPS IN THE NATO SUMMITS CONCERNING THE BLACK SEA

The Black Sea represents a further challenge in terms of security following the Crimean crisis where Russian troops occupied the area, closed the Azov Sea for the Ukraine fleet and captures a large part of the Ukrainian fleet that was stationed in Sevastopol (Flanagan et al., 2019).

In Figure 1 we can see part of the security challenges that exist on the Black Sea, including Russian occupied territories of Abkhazia, Tskhinvali and Crimea.

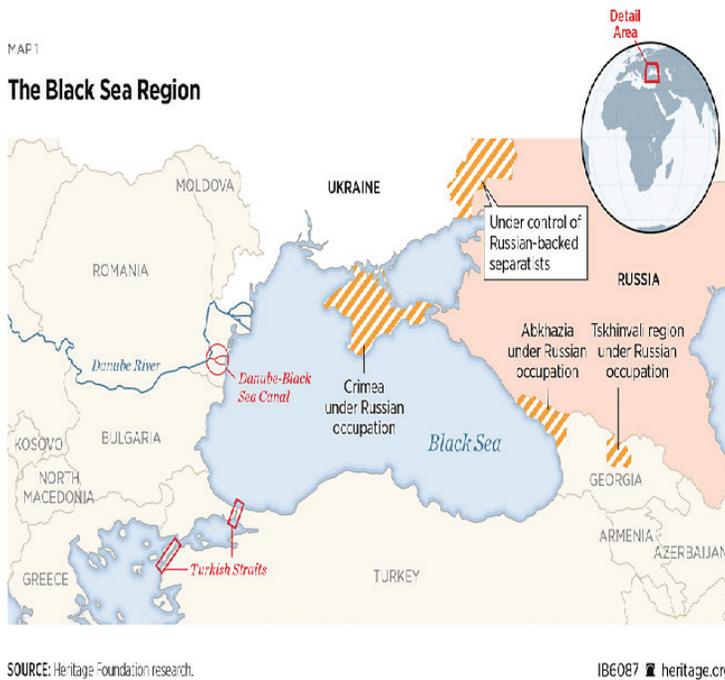


Fig.1 The Black Sea Region and its current challenges (Coffey et al., 2019)

The Azov Sea, the streams that are under the Montreux Convention are all strategic challenges that should be taken into consideration when analyzing the importance of the Black Sea. While for many years after the end of the Cold War no one considered the Black Sea a security issue, after the Russian invasion of Crimea, Romania has tried to promote the importance of the Black Sea for the Eastern Flank. This area had been neglected in the past, as a study from CEPA shows, in 2010 the then newly adapted NATO Strategic Concept, not only did not mention the Black Sea at all, but did not consider Russia a threat or a competitor for the alliance (Horell et al., 2022).

NATO's response increased following 2014, as enhanced Forward Presence by NATO was developed on the Eastern Flank but that was located in the Baltic Sea region. Romania's view and other experts view as that the two regions, specifically the two seas, the Baltic and Black sea, should not be treated separately, developing capabilities should not be realized as a trade-off between the two major areas, but rather it should be acknowledged that both face one single threat, and therefore NATO should have one unified answer. That answer would turn out to be an increased allied presence on the Eastern Flank, following the Wales Summit of 2014, where

NATO member states on the Eastern Flank like Poland, Romania, Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania also agreed to increase their defense spending up to 2% of their GDP in order to be able to also contribute themselves with national territorial forces to the joint capabilities that would be developed in their countries together with the alliance.

Following the Crimean crisis, NATO strategic documents have started to focus more and more on the importance of the Black Sea (Horell et al., b, 2022). The next Summit where Romania's agenda was to push for deterrence on the Black Sea was the Warsaw Summit in 2016. During this Summit, Russia's aggressive actions in the region where outlined, cumulated to other actions, like the strengthening of Russian forces in the Mediterranean, deploying more and more military capabilities and so forth. The response for the alliance in the Black Sea region was to support Romania's request for a multinational integrated brigade that would be developed into what now has become the Multinational Division Southeast. Georgia was also assisted on this matter and helped to enhance its air defense and air surveillance capabilities.

The Black Sea region was further strengthened during the Brussels Summit of 2018. Some objectives like increasing NATO presence and activities were

continued following the previous summits, others were initiated like reinforcing allied maritime posture, developing partnerships with countries that are not NATO member states but border the Black Sea, like Georgia and Ukraine. Similar to the Enhanced Forward Presence that had been developed in the Baltic Sea region, the Tailored Forward Presence was created specifically for the Black Sea.

The 2021 Brussels Summit centered on Russia's existing and potential aggressions, condemning the blockade of Ukrainian ports around the Azov and Black sea. Cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia was strengthened even further, trying to build resilience in the two states in front of increasing hybrid threats. Another important conclusion for Romania was that the tailored forward presence in the Black Sea would be increased even further.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine changed the landscape in the Black Sea region even more. A new Summit took part in Madrid. Since 2010, the perception about the Black Sea and Russia have changed dramatically. So much, that in the 2022 Strategic Concept, Russia will be identified as a revisionist actor, an adversary to NATO, with the alliance in full awareness of the need to enhance its force posture on the Eastern Flank.

Romania's desire for the NATO Summit in Madrid was to try and persuade that a substantial and persistent presence is needed on the southern side of Eastern Flank, in the Black Sea Region. This presence should mean deterrence obtained by strengthening air defense, positioning military equipment, developing infrastructure to assure the presence of back up troops. Basically Romania's goal during the Summit was to obtain a similar NATO posture for the south of the Flank to that of the north part of it. This posture is assured by American presence, battle groups presence, which will correlate the entire flank through the development of joint capabilities.

Romania's biggest desire was that the Black Sea region be contained in the NATO Strategic Concept which it now is, at article 46 of the document. Furthermore Romania has a proposal that battle groups stationed at the Black Sea be enhanced if need to battalion level and those that are to be increased at battalion level, in case of emergency even at brigade level. This request has been presented to France who is now in charge of the allied troops present in the Mihail Kogalniceanu base near the Black Sea. Other assistance in terms of military equipment, ammo, logistics have also been agreed upon for the strengthening of the area.

Romania's efforts for this crucial objectives containing the relevance of the Black Sea for the alliance have not only had national interest but represent regional challenges that can be mitigated by the member states of NATO in joint force structures operating together (MAE, 2021).

3. THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE BLACK SEA

For Romania, the Black Sea Region also has an enormous economic importance. For many years Romania has planned to exploit its fossil reserves discovered in the economic perimeter of the country. The challenge had become one of political dimensions as the offshore law was blocked for many years in the Romanian parliament. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine the Romanian parliament approved the law and therefore an analysis on the fossil reserves in the Black can be made to better understand the economic potential of this region, as well as why Romania needs to assure security for its waters not just from a strategic point of view, but also from an economical one as well.

One element that should be mentioned that in the last decade Russian important of fossil fuel like oil and gas had increased in Romania, just like they had had in the rest of the European continent,

due mainly to legislative barriers that would keep energy companies for investing in the Black Sea reserves as well as diminishing reserves from the mainland that had already been in exploitation, Romania having its first refinery ever since the 1920's. Romania's mainland gas can presumably maintain the country's need for consumption for as much as 9 to 10 years.

While the mainland reserves may be decreasing, the offshore reserves identified in the Black Sea can assure Romania's gas consumption for the following 20 years. Available resources are considered to be at around 200 billion cube meters, while Romania has an annual consumption rate of around 11-12 billion cube meters.

In Figure 2 we present the concession areas of exploitation. Investments were frozen starting with 2018 due to the fore mentioned political disagreements regarding the offshore law but starting with 2022, under conditions of security the production and distribution of gas from the Black Sea can become a reality for the Romanian economy. In the following paragraphs we aim to present some of the major investments for gas exploitation in the Romanian exclusive economic zone of the Black Sea.

The most advanced project in the Black Sea belongs to the Black Sea Oil and Gas (BSOG) conglomerate owned by American investment group Carlyle, in partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (BERD). This group has conceded the Midia perimeter of the Black Sea EEZ of Romania. Even though investment for production of gas had been stopped following 2018 political disagreements Black Sea Oil and Gas continued to develop its necessary infrastructure. An underwater pipeline to bring the gases to mainland has been constructed in the last 5 years. Being one of the first investors in the Black Sea region, BSOG became a pioneer of the offshore exploitation in Romania, and had a role in drafting together with the Romanian state the offshore law.

When the offshore law was drafted two type of investments were determined for the private companies that would chose to operate in the area. Upstream investments that would imply a part in developing the project would be acknowledged to a percentage up to 40% by the Romanian state while royalties would be as high as 60%. Operational costs for these type of investments are usually high and they progress as the

the depth for extraction gets deeper. Naturally the first investments were realized in waters with small depth the so called shallow waters.

For BSOG this would be the perimeter entitled Midia, where two projects were developed “Doina” and “Ana”. The entire Midia Perimeter has a depth of 70 meters with an estimated 9 billion cube meters of natural gas in reserves. It will take around 2 to 3 years for full operational extraction from this perimeter.

One other important perimeter is that of the Romgaz-OMV consortium which is called the Neptune perimeter. This perimeter used to belong to the Exxon-OMV consortium but Exxon backed out of the project, and sold the shares to Romanian company Romgaz.

Most of the 200 billion cube meters deposits reside in deep waters, the so called deep offshore. The biggest deposit is considered that in the perimeter Neptune, which is called Neptune Deep and is also administered by Romgaz-OMV. Drilling in deep waters is a much more complicated process and costs are therefore larger as well. Investments for such a drill are estimated to around 2 billion euros.

Another perimeter is the one called Trident owned by Lukoil in partnership with the Romanian state.

This is also a deep water perimeter considered to hold around 30 billion cube meters of natural gas, though some specialists consider the number might be even bigger than that. Few investments have been finalized in this perimeter, therefore exploitation of gas here is considered to start further in the following years than for the other perimeters.

Other existing perimeters are Histria, which is also owned by OMV Petrom, and drilling here has started in 2021. Other perimeters have also been given permits for exploitation by the Romanian state. Such are the perimeters of Muridava and Cobalcescu East for example. These are perimeters owned by Romanian private companies, but no operations for exploitation have started here so far.

The perimeters from Figure 2 are subject to further economic operations, meaning that ownership can change as well as who holds the right to invest in some the designated areas. Furthermore some of the existing perimeters can be subject to even further breakdown as the mother companies might want to split the drilling activities into different time lapse project, as investments on long term will likely take many expenses that cannot be started lightly.

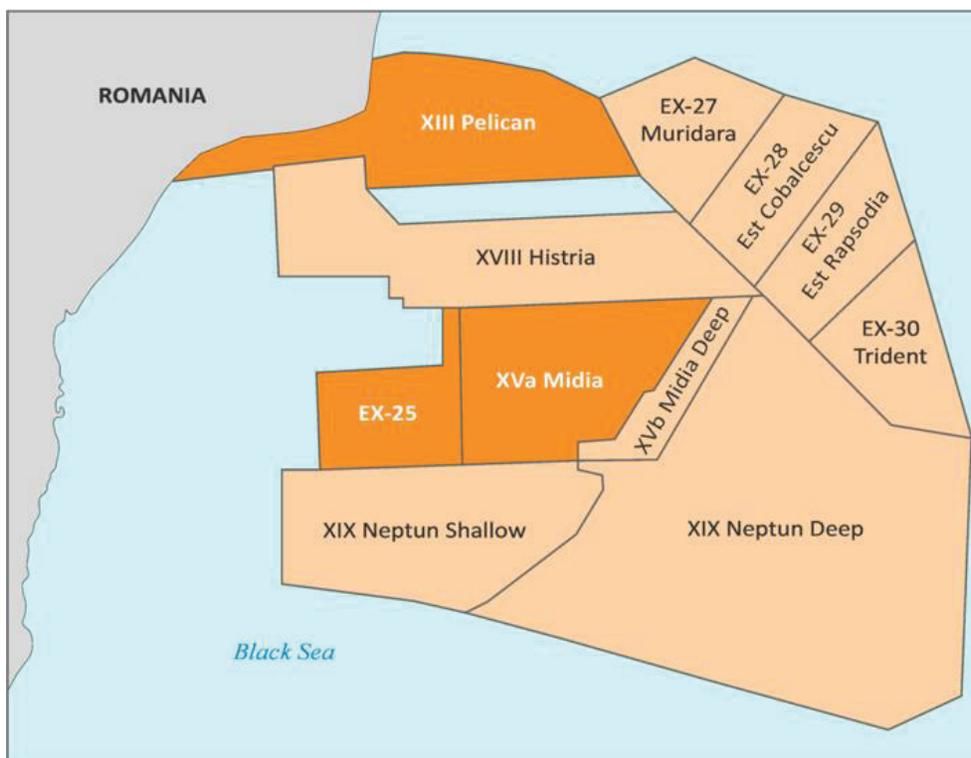


Fig.2 Perimeters for gas deposits,
Romanian Exclusive Economic Zone in the Black Sea (Globuc.com, 2019)

The potential for further development of this economic area, the fact that international conglomerates have chosen to invest in the region and by providing Romania with the opportunity to be independent from an energetic point of view creates an extra dimension of security for the Romanian state when considering the Black Sea's role for the country and the entire region.

CONCLUSIONS

Current events have demonstrated the crucial role that

the Black Sea region plays from a strategic point of view, on three major fields: economic, security and political. For NATO member states bordering the Black Sea, this area has become perhaps the most important threat because of Russia's actions throughout 2022.

For Romania, the region remains a top security priority. With a global energy crisis present and economic alternative in the Black Sea identified, Romania cannot afford to not push for further deterrence and

an increase in security policies in this critical area.

NATO has deployed troops throughout the Eastern Flank. However joint forces and defense capabilities have not always been deployed in the same balance in the north, respectively in the south of the Flank. Romania's agenda, as seen in the NATO Summits presented above has been to try and persuade the alliance to always increase its military presence in the area, as only by doing so NATO could through its means assure the resilience of not just security objectives in the region, but also help increase economic growth, resolve different political crisis and even find a viable alternative for the energy crisis looming ahead.

The Black Sea represents a military hub as well, as deemed by the presence of allied troops in the MK Base, as well as the development of the US military Base in the same region as well.

The aim of this paper was not just to present Romania's efforts during the last decade in determining an increased NATO presence in the area, but to open the potential for making the Black Sea region an interconnection between economical investments, under a

security umbrella of the alliance, with the potential to develop defense capabilities that with deter any potential risks and threats, while assuring that other countries besides Romania and Bulgaria, countries that are not NATO member states like Ukraine and Georgia can benefit from a secure and democratic region, one that enables transportation of goods, economic trade and liberty of travel.

Solving the Black Sea dilemma by NATO contributes to three major crisis in one step, a humanitarian crisis that is due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a security crisis that is beyond the Russian threat, as the Black is subject to other risks as well and the economic crisis that is due to the energy shortage in Europe.

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