



Escola de Sociologia e Políticas Públicas

## Romania as a European Union member in the Black Sea Region

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*Mulțumesc părinților mei*

## **Resumo**

Após a Guerra Fria, a ‘‘região’’ do Mar Negro tornou-se um centro de competição geopolítica de vários poderes como a Rússia, a União Europeia (UE), a Turquia, os Estados Unidos da América (EUA), e a Organização do Tratado do Atlântico Norte (OTAN). Com a adesão da Roménia e da Bulgária à NATO e à UE em 2004 e 2007, respetivamente, a região do Mar Negro passou a região fronteira destas duas organizações. A invasão da Geórgia e a anexação da Crimeia em março 2014, por parte da Rússia, trouxeram novos desafios e paradigmas a este espaço, tornando-se um assunto relevante para a esfera académica. Como tal, nesta dissertação analisamos o papel de um dos atores, a Roménia, sob o prisma de estado membro da UE na região, num período pós-Crimeia. Concluimos que a Roménia ainda se encontra numa fase de desenvolvimento como membro das instituições ‘ocidentais’, possuindo uma política externa limitada na região do Mar Negro, mas é fortemente a favor de uma maior presença por parte da UE, da NATO e dos EUA. Este último é o seu principal parceiro estratégico, numa tentativa de equilibrar o ‘‘duopólio’’ regional representado pela Rússia e pela Turquia, ao mesmo tempo demonstrando interesse pela criação de novas iniciativas regionais como a iniciativa Bucareste 9 (B9) e a iniciativa dos Três Mares (3SI). Além do mais, a Roménia está envolvida numa relação próxima de cariz social, económico, e político com a Moldávia, e participa em projetos regionais destinados à diversificação de fontes de energia.

**Palavras chave:** Roménia, Região do Mar Negro, União Europeia, Rússia.

## **Abstract**

After the Cold War, the Black Sea “Region” became a centre of geopolitical competition for various powers such as Russia, the European Union (EU), Turkey, the United States of America (US), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). With the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to NATO and the EU in 2004 and 2007, respectively, the Black Sea Region (BSR) became a border of these two organizations. The invasion of Georgia and the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, on behalf of Russia, brought new challenges and paradigms for this area, becoming a relevant issue for the academic sphere. Therefore, in this dissertation we analyse the role of one of the actors, Romania, from the perspective of being an EU member state in the region, in a post-Crimea period. We conclude that Romania is still in a developing phase as a member of the ‘western’ institutions, having a limited foreign policy in the BSR and is strongly in favour of a greater presence therein of the EU, NATO, and the US. The latter is its main strategic partner, as an attempt to balance the "duopoly" in the region, represented by Russia and Turkey, while also showing an interest for the creation of new regional initiatives such as the Bucharest 9 initiative (B9) and the Three Seas Initiative (3SI). In addition, Romania is involved in a close social, economic, and political relationship with Moldova, and participates in regional projects aimed at the diversification of energy sources.

**Keywords:** Romania, Black Sea Region, European Union, Russia.

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## **Glossary of Acronyms**

3SI	Three Seas Initiative
AA	Association Agreement
B.C	Before Christ
B9	Bucharest Nine
BLACKSEAFOR	Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Force
BRUA	Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary-Austria pipeline
BSEC	Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation
BSR	Black Sea Region
BSS	Black Sea Synergy
CEEC	Central and Eastern European Countries
CIS	Community of Independent States
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CU	Customs Union
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SCP	South Caucasus Pipeline
TANAP	Trans Anatolian Pipeline
TAP	Trans-Adriatic Pipeline
U. S	United States
USD	United States Dollar
WBSR	Wider Black Sea Region

## Introduction

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and its satellites<sup>1</sup> controlled most of the Black Sea littoral with the exception of Turkey, a NATO member since 1952. Following the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, the former soviet republics around the sea became independent and the region appeared to engage into a new pattern of cooperation towards a more secure environment.

The Black Sea region is a construct open to debate which gained popularity since the 1990s. It designated an area of both challenges and opportunities for cooperation and development for regional and outside actors. For this purpose, in this dissertation we are going to make a brief reflection on the Black Sea's status as a region.

With the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to NATO in 2004 and to the European Union (EU) in 2007, the wider Black Sea region became an important component of European security and a zone of opportunities and threats for the EU. Since the 2004-2007 enlargements, the EU came in contact with the Black Sea and actively started to transform the region according to its vision through several foreign policy tools, such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Black Sea Synergy (BSS), the Eastern Partnership (EaP), together with a few other (Acikmese and Triantaphyllou, 2014).

In 2008 the political climate started to drastically change with the Russo-Georgian war. The Euro-Atlantic response was inconclusive, while distracted by the ongoing crisis and operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Six years later, in 2014, making use of unconventional means, Russia annexed Crimea. In control of Crimea, Russia was able to project its power into the Mediterranean Sea and subsequently to participate militarily in the Syrian theatre of war (New Strategy Center, 2017).

The reasoning for our choice to study the Black Sea is related to the fact that interactions between the Black Sea and the EU have not been extensively covered by the academic field (Acikmese and Triantaphyllou, 2014). Still, some authors made attempts at studying it in different

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<sup>1</sup> In this case the two satellites who shared a Black Sea littoral were the People's Republic of Bulgaria and the Socialist Republic of Romania. A satellite State is a country that lies in the "orbit," metaphorically, of a larger, more powerful country, meaning that it owes political allegiance or economic tribute to the more powerful state. Before the 20th century, such states were typically referred to as "vassal states," "tributary states," "puppet states," or "client states" (Hanks, 2011).

areas. A few authors have focused on the EU's general presence in the Black Sea region, such as Triantaphyllou (2014), while others have been more specific, such as Acikmese and Dizdaroglu's (2014) analysis of the EU's operational impact in the Black Sea Region, Solonenko's (2014) analysis on the EU's democratization efforts, or Coutto and Devlen's (2014) focus on the environmental concerns in EU-Black Sea affairs. Other authors, on the other hand, analysed this topic from other states' or region's perspectives, like Ayidin's (2012) focus on the Turkish perspective, or Konoplyov and Delanoe's (2014) insight into the US perspective, or Freire's (2014a) analysis from Russia's perspective. Other approaches in the academic literature include Simão's (2014) analysis from a conflict resolution perspective. Despite that, the literature presents itself as relatively scarce considering the importance and the recent events unfolding in the region.

We can look at the Black Sea as an increasingly volatile space, ready to plunge the actors in the area into a conflict. The wider Black Sea region is already home to several frozen conflicts and clashes of spheres of influence, and with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, it has been the place for an escalating conflict between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community. Therefore, the goal of this study is to provide a deeper understanding on this matter and address a gap in the literature by researching the following question: *How has Romania's role as an EU Member State evolved in the Black Sea region after Russia's annexation of Crimea?*

The reason behind choosing Romania as a case study is its unique position in the region. It is part of NATO's and the EU's eastern border and it is situated at the crossroads between the EU and Russia, and consequently between two world views. This brings a set of opportunities and challenges for a country which historically found itself pressed between great powers and imperial ambitions. Moreover, Romania was one of the Soviet satellites around the Black Sea and, in the last 30 years following the collapse of the USSR, it has been making efforts to break away from its communist past and comply with European practices. Besides that, the country has a set of relations with its neighbours which are interesting to analyse, which we will do in case of Moldova.

Romania portrays itself as a trusted and predictable ally both in the EU and NATO, whereas in the Black Sea, it is the only NATO partner arguing for a more pronounced Alliance presence therein. With Crimea's new *de facto* status as a Russian territory, Russia and Romania became maritime neighbours. In addition, Romania is hosting an American ballistic missile defence system at Deveselu (figure 1), meaning that bordering Russia may enable periodic threats of annihilation, exercises simulating Romania's invasion, and repeated violations of air space (Joja, 2018). In



Blockman's words, "with Romania and Russia now de facto neighbors and the former getting increased military support from the US, the new maritime border could become a potential source of conflict" (Blockmans, 2015: 183).

To answer the proposed research question, an academic literature review will be conducted in order to provide a general understanding of the state of the art. Moreover, the concept of Wider Black Sea Region (WBSR) will also receive some attention in order to situate our dissertation. Furthermore, we are going to debate the EU's involvement in the WBSR along with other major actors and lastly, we will turn our attention to analysing Romania and its evolution as an EU Member State in this region since the annexation of Crimea. Our time frame will, thus, be the period ranging from 2014 to 2019.

## **Methodology**

This dissertation will analyse the case study of Romania's involvement as an EU member state in the Wider Black Sea Region - which we will call Black Sea region or BSR in order to simplify the term, as we have stated.

Venesson (2008) identify four main types of case studies, namely, the descriptive case study (configurative-ideographic), the interpretative case study (disciplined configurative), the hypothesis-generating and refined case study (heuristic), and theory-evaluating case studies. In our dissertation we will use the first one - descriptive case study. Descriptive case study (configurative-ideographic) is a systematic description of the phenomena with no explicit theoretical intention. According to Venesson (2008: 227), "the work of many historians and anthropologists might lack an explicit theoretical framework for example, but that does not mean that a theory is altogether absent". Venesson (ibid.) argues that "it is common to label this kind of research as simply suggestive and to dismiss its social scientific contribution"; however, it can explore subjects about which little is previously known and in need of an interpretation that would shed new light on known data. Therefore, this will be our objective, in addition to leaving some suggestions for future research.

This dissertation will also have a documental analysis component. As a research method, "document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies — intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization, or program" (Stake,

1995<sup>2</sup>; Yin, 1994<sup>3</sup>, apud Bowen, 2009: 29). We intend to analyse documents which emphasize Romania, the EU, Russia, and NATO in the Black Sea context, that is, attempting to limit our research to this region. These documents will range from official primary sources such as Romania's National Defence Strategy (2015), the Programme of the Romanian Presidency of the European Council (2019), Joint Declarations, EU documents, and speeches; and the document analysis will be supported by relevant books, academic journal articles, media articles, and press releases. In our case, news will be important in order to give an updated situation report on the region's state of affairs and to corroborate or refute our data.

Bowen (2009: 29-30) identifies five functions of documentary material, namely: they can provide data on the context within which research participants operate; information contained in them can suggest some questions; documents can provide supplementary research data; documents provide a means of tracking changes and development; and lastly, documents can be analysed as a way to verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources.

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<sup>2</sup> Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>3</sup> Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## Chapter 1. Defining the Black Sea Region

Historically, the Black Sea region was the meeting point of various “civilizations, imperial ambitions, confrontation and lucrative trade” (New Strategy Center, 2017: 3). During the early 7th century B.C., Greek city-states surrounded its shores establishing trading colonies. After the fall of the Western Roman empire, the Byzantine empire, successor of the Eastern half of the Roman empire, ruled the sea while later on,

Venice and Genoa established thriving trading posts that survived until the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when they were superseded by the growing might of the Ottoman Empire, only to be challenged by the imperial expansion of Russia, which reached the Black Sea shores by the middle of the 18th century. The rivalry between the two great empires resulted in frequent wars, chipping away at each other’s dominions as Russia battled for control of the entire maritime space, especially the Black Sea Straits, assuming the mantle of liberator of the Christian peoples (ibid.)

After a series of wars, the Russian Empire gained a firm foothold on the Black Sea shores and in 1783 the city of Sevastopol was founded. From then onward, Russia emerged as a growing Black Sea power while the Ottoman Empire entered into a slow but steady decline as the ‘sick man of Europe’. The regional power struggle in the Black Sea continued with neither side claiming a decisive victory and, between 1853-1856, the Crimean War took place. In this war, Britain and France fought against Russia alongside the Ottomans, in order to prevent its hegemony in the region and dismantling the Russian Black Sea fleet in the aftermath. After the First World War the treaty of Lausanne recognized the Republic of Turkey as a sovereign state and in 1936 the Montreux Convention was enacted, which established:

Turkish control over the straits and guaranteed free passage of warships belonging to Black Sea states not at war with Turkey. Non-Black Sea powers were restricted in sending their military vessels to the Black Sea (they must be under 15,000 tons per vessel, 45,000 in aggregate, and could only stay in the Black Sea for 21 days) (Toucas, 2017).

After World War II, tensions increased between Soviet Union and Turkey which forced the latter to seek help from USA. As part of the Truman Doctrine, Greece and Turkey became members of NATO by 1952. The end of the Cold war, with the defeat of the Soviet Union was the equivalent of the conclusion of a great hegemonic war. Russia's multinational empire collapsed, it lost the top position in the power hierarchy and entered in a turbulent period of redefining its position in the new international system.

### **1.1 A 'Wider' Region**

Can the Black Sea be defined as a region? It is a question that emerges when addressing the topic of this dissertation. Some areas that effectively share cultural, linguistic and historical commonalities are divided by conflicting states (e.g. Ukraine and Russia). At the same time, the opposite is also true. Areas that share few traces of similarity and even historical conflicts, manage to maintain a minimally common identity and conduct foreign policies in cooperation between their members (e.g. Romania and Bulgaria).

Regardless of the criteria it takes to designate a region, "in ecological terms, it stretches from central Europe to the Ural Mountains. The rivers that run into the Black Sea drain all or part of twenty-two countries, and the effluents carried in those riverways have a profound effect on the sea's ecology" (King, 2008: 5). According to King (2008), deciding what lies within and outside a region is a political process that involves systemic constraints, the goals of political elites, international organizations, cross-border communities; none of which may have exactly the same vision of what constitutes the proper boundaries of the region.

Scholars have offered radically different answers to such questions. Systemic theorists and political economists usually see the growth of regions as a function of rising or declining hegemony, or as a response to the pressures of globalization. Neoliberal institutionalists and constructivists emphasize the existence of common foreign policy goals or shared identities [...] State-level explanations focus on the patterns of interaction among states with similar regime types or domestic interest groups, or the multilevel interaction between domestic elites and international institutions. Other theorists see "regional security complexes" not as aberrations in a world of nation-states, but rather as some of the basic building blocks of the international system (King, 2008: 4).

Defining the black sea as a region is an arduous task, not only because it is an area permeated by instability, but also because of the actors in the were not able to give a concise expression to the region in a post-Cold War context.

A criterion that could be used is the inclusion of countries with coastal areas, encompassing only six countries: Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Georgia. However, this criterion would be presented as simplistic in cultural and political-economic terms and unsuitable for our work.

King (2008) writes in more concise words,

Some areas that share cultural, linguistic or historical commonalities are divided into mutually antagonistic states. Other areas that have few common historical or social features manage to sustain a sense of mutual identity and engage in cooperative foreign policy relationships. Thus, where regions emerge as political concepts, they do so in the main because of self-conscious projects to build them, whether cooperatively or through the tried-and-true mechanisms of imperial expansion and state conquest. In the end, regions exist where politicians and strategists say they exist (King, 2008: 3).

Therefore, a criterion that we could use in this dissertation to designate what is called the Black Sea region would be the association with a political organization, in this case represented by the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the main multilateral regional project dating back to June 4, 1992 including twelve members: Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Turkey, Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine. It is also commonly called the WBSR (Wider Black Sea Region). This also presents some flaws. It does not take into account external actors, such as the US, the EU, or even China, who play a significant role in the area.

Eventually, the BSR seemed to lean towards a new geopolitical paradigm, based not on divergence, but cooperation and complex interconnection. A relation which aimed to create a more prosperous, stable and peaceful region rather than one permeated by conflict. It was an optimistic vision. With the Soviet Union's implosion, marking the end of the ideological war, described by some as "The End of History", the region of the Black Sea experienced a window of opportunity for inter-civilizational cooperation, political, economic and social reconstruction (Popescu, 2017).

As the Black Sea region found itself open to pressures and processes of globalization and liberalization, the initiatives for regionalization also started to take shape.

Regionalization can be seen as an instrument of regional and global security, since the regional groupings can build measures which contribute to geopolitical stability, a sense of common interest and to a certain extent a shared identity, by facilitating collaborative action against a wide array of contemporary problems such as organized crime, terrorism, drugs trafficking, arms trafficking, etc. (Aydin, 2005). Regional organizations also induce their members to develop non-coercive attitudes, and more importantly, provide forums through which state, sub-state, and non-state actors can interact on a range of issues, resulting in an enhanced security.

The “regionalism”, if there is any in the Black sea, is reflected mainly in the creation of the BSEC (Organization of the Black Sea Economic Community). Aydin (ibid.) provides an interesting evaluation on whether the Black Sea is a region or not. He recognizes that many analysts indeed question its existence by arguing that it is not seen as such from outside (international community), nor from the inside (Black Sea countries themselves). The Black Sea identity plays no role for these countries, coupled with the discrepancies among themselves in economic, political and cultural aspects. As such, the Black sea has no potential for region building. What is happening with the BSEC can be seen merely as a side-effect of European integration and not region building in itself, as the differences among the countries overshadow any attempt to develop a sense of community. But, on the other hand, all regions are made in the minds of people, intellectuals, government elites, and business communities. The political will of the interested countries and their engagement in turning a geographic area into a political region is an important factor and the local governments demonstrated an interest to develop the region with the creation of the BSEC in 1992, as a new project of cooperation which previously did not exist (ibid.)

In sum, the Post-Cold war transformation enforced a change in the political arena in the Black Sea region, with new players emerging, who, in turn, became subjects of influence from other external powers. An analysis of the specific character of this region does not concern merely just geographical issues but it encompasses geo-political, geo-economic, cultural, social and security issues (Stepniewski, 2019). Thus, the region presents itself as a complex issue in need of analysis.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Black Sea region in the academic literature

As mentioned in the introduction, the academic literature on the topic is relatively scarce; nonetheless, some authors recognize its importance and provide some insights on the BSR. The European Union's interests in the Black Sea Region can be grouped in four main areas: long term stability and conflict management; promotion of democratic institutions and the rule of law; securing a stable supply of energy to Europe; and combatting organized crime and terrorism, including control of borders and migration (Cornell, 2006).

The creation of a unified, peaceful, and prosperous Europe is the core objective of the EU. The EU's enlargement policy has often been considered one of its main foreign policy tools; however, this policy has shown signs of reaching its limits in terms of extension, following the 2004 and 2007 enlargements. Consequently, the tools under which the EU operates may have to possibly change in order to address new challenges (ibid.)

Triantaphyllou (2014) argues that the EU's involvement in the Eastern Neighbourhood and in particular in the Black Sea region resulted in the formulation and implementation of various policies; however, the EU is still searching for the right mix of policies and strategies towards its neighbours as the policies did not have the intended effects. As a space where the commitment and transformative power of the EU finds its limits, the countries of the Eastern neighbourhood are not able to totally erase their soviet legacies and, in face of a more assertive Russia, they are forced into a balanced act between Russia and the 'West'<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The image of the 'West' appeared in juxtaposition with the 'Others' along the centuries. In the case of Russia, whether it should be categorized as 'East' or 'West' is a source of great debate. Peter the Great led Russia into a period of 'Westernization' in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Russian culture became more accepted by its European counterparts. As a result, Western Russia became associated with Western cultures over time, until the Bolshevik revolution. Currently, human rights, tolerance, diversity, individual freedom, rule of law, secularism, are ideas that roughly form 'Western' values. Those that do not embrace these values are perceived as 'Others', and consequently they provide an image of what is not the West. Therefore, Russia is struggling in its relationship with the West as these values are not consolidated in the country.

In the post-Cold War environment, the growing realism of the Russian Federation provokes a feeling of uncertainty for the EU regarding its ability to produce proactive policies towards their biggest neighbour. In the Black Sea region, Manners' (2002) concept of "normative power Europe" is challenged by Russia's offensive realism, and while Russia sees the neighbourhood in a strategic manner, the EU is more technical in its methods and is thus struggles to penetrate further (Triantaphyllou, 2014).

Triantaphyllou (ibid.) sees the divergences between the EU and Russia and, to a lesser extent, between the EU and Turkey, as the key points for turning the Black Sea region from 'a grey zone of instability' to one of peace, freedom, security, and prosperity. To that effect, the author argues that the EU needs to formulate a new paradigm for the region that adds a political and strategic element along with a common narrative that meets the demands and expectations of the member states, institutions, and partners in the region. Furthermore, the Russian and Turkish exceptionalisms should be understood in order to bridge the gap of identity and values which are different from those of the EU.

Solonenko (2014) analysed the democratization efforts in the Black Sea Region, concluding that even though the EU has had some leverage towards the previous accession countries in improving their democratization levels, this does not apply to the EaP countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine), since the countries in question have no individual democratization agenda of their own. Therefore, democracy is 'imported' from the EU and the outcomes are questionable. Moreover, this democratization effort is offset by Russia's stronger role in these countries, political power struggles, and their civil societies being too weak to make pressures. The author argues for a more home-grown democratization rather than being continuously promoted by the EU. According to Solonenko (2014), the EU should turn democracy into a multilateral issue in the region by increasing synergies between the civil societies of the countries in the region (including Turkey and Russia), promote democracy related agendas in the existing multilateral institutions and enhance the democracy-exporting role of the countries that are showing more progress through the share of experience and expertise between themselves (ibid.).

Regarding the EU's conflict management capacity, Acikmese and Dizdaroglu (2014) attempted to explain the flux in EU policies towards the Black Sea region as a security actor in the regional conflicts of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transnistria. The authors



analysed ‘three and a half’ missions, namely the EU Rule of Law Mission in Georgia (EUJUST Themis, 2004-2005); the Border Support Team (BST, 2005-2008) which is dubbed as ‘half’ due to not being elevated to the status of a CSDP mission; the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM, since 2008) in Georgia; and the EU Border Assistance Mission to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM, since 2005). The EUJUST Themis and BST missions had little impact along with the EUMM. The most successful was EUBAM in Moldova since it helped to create a secure environment at the borders of Ukraine and Moldova (ibid.). Furthermore, the authors came to the conclusion that the EU is relatively more powerful as a long-term structural stabilizer rather than a security actor under the CSDP, by offering tangible incentives to the regional actors and asking, in return, for policy transformations by dealing with the problems at the ‘grass-roots’ level.

Regarding Turkey, Aydin (2012) emphasizes the uneasy relationship between Turkey and the US after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the growing tensions between Russia and the EU/NATO in the Black Sea. NATO’s Operation Active Endeavour in the Black Sea in 2006 was jointly opposed by Turkey and Russia. Russia opposed the expansion of US influence in its neighbourhood and Turkey was determined to preserve the legal regime of the Turkish Straits under the Montreux Convention of 1936. Both of these countries wanted to maintain the political and military balance, whereas NATO was seen as a regional disruptor. The author provides a very pertinent point regarding the US and NATO’s position towards the agreement during the Cold War because it limited the access of the Soviet ships to the Mediterranean, but with the changing security dynamics and the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to NATO and the EU, the relaxation of the regime of the straits towards warships became appealing for NATO in order to increase its Black Sea presence. According to Aydin, this was opposed by Turkey with concerns over a Russian retaliation. NATO did not insist on the revision of the regime; nevertheless, constant pressures throughout the years from Romania, Ukraine, and Georgia put Turkey in a complicated position between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia (ibid.). Aydin sees the Black Sea as a region of big power confrontation at the intersection between Russian, EU, and US interests.

Therefore, the author sees the development of cooperative regional programs as a possible alternative to big power confrontation, similarly to Triantaphyllou’s (2014) conclusions. An example of that program would be the BSEC (Black Sea Economic Community), a regional initiative developed in the 1990s, which halted during the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008. Aydin (2012) argues that Turkey could pick up again with the BSEC and play a leading role

in the stabilization of the region, although he shows some reluctance: “whether Turkey will be successful is still an open question, and will depend on various regional and international developments that are largely beyond Turkey's control” (ibid.: 57). In addition, Turkey’s attempts towards cooperation in the Black Sea region, as of 2019, are largely insignificant, being marked by a deterioration in the relation with the EU and NATO (Waldman, 2019).

Blockmans (2015) argues that the annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Eastern Ukraine have turned the Black Sea region into a contested geostrategic zone. Russia’s move on the Crimean peninsula was a strategic decision with a destructive effect on the post-Cold War order, resulting from an impatience or uncertainty of Russian soft power to win the Ukrainian population, with Putin deciding to intervene militarily in order to turn Crimea away from Ukraine and above all the EU. In terms of International Law, the author argues that Putin does not care about violating past agreements and general principles, for instance the 1997 Agreement on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet, and even more importantly the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances of 5 December 1994. Moreover, he admits that the annexation altered the balance of power in the region, resembling a duopolistic geopolitical arrangement between Russia and Turkey. The importance of the region in terms of energy is also stressed out, with Russia, the EU and the US competing for the control of the critical pipeline routes and energy pockets, whereas in the aftermath of the Crimean crisis the “geopolitical ‘chessboard’ is being reordered, with Russia, on the one hand, and the Euro-Atlantic community, on the other, seeking to reconfigure their positions” (ibid.: 187).

Manoli (2015) contends that, while the Maidan protests were viewed by the Euro-Atlantic community as an outcry of Ukrainian people against the Russian-imposed decision on their government to not sign the Association Agreement, Russia pointed the finger at the ‘West’ and their orchestration of the so called “coloured revolutions” to bring down the democratically elected pro-Russia government of Ukraine. The author argues that the strategic orientation of Ukraine has geopolitical consequences for Europe’s order and balance of power. Drawing from Brzezinski’s insights he argues that,

For the EU, on the other hand, losing Ukraine to the Russian sphere of influence would cancel its Eastern policy, diminish its ‘soft power’ actorness in its neighbourhood and condition EU’s neighbourhood policy to Moscow’s geopolitical choices. The triumph of

'zero sum' logic in the above narrative is evident. It remains, however, still very relevant (Brzezinski, 1997<sup>5</sup>, apud Manoli, 2015: 122).

One important article regarding the NATO-Russia security challenges in the Black Sea in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis is authored by Cross (2015). The author digs deep into the root of the problem and explains that, despite the optimistic expectations after the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO and Russia have not been able to forge a lasting partnership (ibid.). Citing Manfred Woerner,<sup>6</sup> "the time for confrontation is over. The hostility of mistrust of the past must be buried. We see your country, and other countries of the former Warsaw Treaty Organization, no longer as adversaries but as partners" (NATO, 1990<sup>7</sup> apud Cross, 2015: 152). This course has not realized and, while many in the international security community attempted to build a common European security community among nations with shared interests, other saw the issues from a zero-sum game between the 'West' and Russia. Brzezinski's "Grand Chessboard" is an example of such mindset.

Furthermore, the author argues that instead of a collaborative security community being fostered for the countries in the Balkans, Caucasus, and Central Asia with ties both to the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia, these countries were put in a position of choice between either of these two (Cross, 2015). While, initially, leaders like Clinton and Yeltsin, George W. Bush and Putin, Obama and Medvedev, expressed the desire for an US-Russia strategic partnership, the clashes of interests prevented this accomplishment. NATO's enlargement issue and the Kosovo air war are seen as a motif for the Russians to switch from a pro-Western *Foreign Policy Concept of 1993* to a reassessed *Russia's National Security Concept* in 2000. In Cross' words:

Russians tended to conclude that NATO enlargement and the NATO Kosovo air war demonstrated that Western countries would take advantage of Russia's transitional

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<sup>5</sup> Brzezinski, Zbigniew (1997). *The Grand Chessboard*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>6</sup> Manfred Woerner, former West German defence minister who led the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as Secretary General for six years (1988 - 1994) that spanned from the end of the Cold War to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

<sup>7</sup> NATO (1990). Speech by Secretary General, Manfred Wörner to Members of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Moscow 16 July 1990. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1990/s900716a\\_e.htm](https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1990/s900716a_e.htm)

domestic turmoil and weakness. Following the Kosovo war, Russian official foreign and security documents reflected reassessment of the potential for cooperation with Western nations (ibid.: 154).

Regarding the Black Sea, Cross argues that the two decades of cooperation should be preserved and expanded. According to the author, this will be achievable only through an inclusive policy between all the parties in the region with special emphasis on Russia, since the relations between NATO and the Soviet Union/Russia have been central for defining the European regional and global security configuration for the past decades and will continue to be so, as “without cooperation of all parties of the region, to include Russia, resources are likely to be dissipated and the risk of accidents or confrontation could entail scenarios that would not be advantageous to any country of the region” (ibid.: 173). It is important to note that, although there has been some compromise between the two on critical issues such as arms control and counterterrorism cooperation, there is a clear deficit of trust. For the author this relation is central for the future security architecture in Europe, Eurasia, and the wider global community and, therefore, efforts should be made to repair the damaged relations after the Ukrainian incident, or the situation could further deteriorate for all the players in the region and even beyond.

Proedrou (2018) identifies three failures of the Black Sea Region, namely that it failed to set itself towards a security community path via regionalism, it failed to constitute the terrain of a harmonious pan-European security architecture, and it failed to define regional politics under a joint Russo-Turkish ‘bigemony’.<sup>8</sup> Despite existent regionalist dynamics, these have not surpassed or suppressed the competition between the main stakeholders in the region while the growing East-West confrontation and geopolitical tensions have led to politics of fragmentation. Moreover, the idea of cooperation between Turkey and Russia in order to create and spearhead convergent and unified politics for the region is also absent, with both countries focusing mostly on selective bilateral partnerships according to their interests. Lastly, the Black Sea Region intersects with other

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<sup>8</sup> Proedrou (2018) suggests that the term ‘bigemony’ can be defined as shared hegemony. In this case Russia and Turkey could play a pioneering role in steering regional politics and in shaping region-building in concrete directions. The author recognizes that this did not happen. In addition, despite their recent approximation, their relation has not been a constructive one for the BSR, especially in solving the frozen conflicts.

regional systems, for example the Middle East, which translates into a deepening of the existing division. In Proedrou's words:

The Black Sea states have different stakes in the dramatically shifting Middle East landscape and pursue their interests in conjunction with their extra-regional partners, thus deepening the lines of division. Any analysis of Black Sea politics thus must inevitably expand to the way it is affected by developments in the Middle East, and how this feeds back into Black Sea states' policies (ibid.: 453).

## **2.2 The European Union**

Simply put, in the Black Sea region, the EU faces a competitor/challenger to its policies. In comparison to the past enlargement policy towards the Central European and Balkan countries and the southern component of the European Neighbourhood policy (ENP), in the Eastern neighbourhood, the EU must cope with Russia, which is a regional power in its 'near abroad'<sup>9</sup>.

As previously stated, the EU's interests in the Black Sea Region can be defined along four categories: promoting long term stability and conflict management; promotion of democracy and rule of law; secure Europe's energy supply; and combating organized crime and terrorism including migration and border controls (Cornell, 2006). Regarding the first category, the EU shows an interest in long-term regional stability, considering it was one of the regions that was hit worst by the dissolution of the USSR. The EU's enlargement has brought unresolved conflicts to its own doorstep, with no concrete resolution in sight (ibid.). For example, with the entrance of Romania and Bulgaria, the Transnistrian conflict is less than a hundred miles from the EU's borders and, across the Black Sea, lie two more in the Caucasus, and, more recently, the Crimean crisis and the frozen conflict in eastern Ukraine, which appears to be not so frozen, despite what the name implies.<sup>10</sup> As such, the EU sees the continued instability in these zones as potentially affecting it, in case these erupt into large scale conflicts.

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<sup>9</sup> The term 'near abroad' is used by the Russian Federation to refer to the fourteen non-Russian republics of the former U.S.S.R, which are perceived as an important component in Russian foreign policy.

<sup>10</sup> The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) estimates the total number of conflict-related casualties in Ukraine (from 14 April 2014 to 15 February 2019) at 40,000–

Furthermore, the EU's proximity to such conflicts requires it to play a leading role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, although there are some restraints regarding Russia's cooperation in such endeavour, as Russia's partial role in the conflicts makes it, to some extent 'unviable as a peacekeeper and honest broker' (ibid.: 19). At the same time, Cornell (2006) recognized that, without the role of the main powers in the region, notably Russia, the US, Turkey, and even Iran, a long-term regional stability will not be achieved and thus a constructive relation with Russia is imperative. Another major interest identified is the promotion of democratic institutions and the rule of law. According to Cornell, there is the perceived idea that the security of the EU is tied with being surrounded by stable and democratic states. Through the years, it contributed considerably to the transformation of eastern and southern European authoritarian systems into consolidated democracies. In the Black Sea region, the results are mixed, although improvements over the years have been shown (ibid.).

On the energy side, securing a stable European energy supply has been one of the EU's top priorities. The growing energy dependence on Russia over the years has threatened the EU's energy security, amplified by an assertive Russia, which is keen on using energy as a foreign policy tool (ibid.). Consequently, diversification of energy suppliers has been the alternative presented. Aside from North Africa, the Caspian region is presented as a region potentially available for Europe and one where Russia does not exert full control. The Black Sea region has been, and continues to be, the site of infrastructural energy projects of natural gas imports to Europe. In the Black Sea regions, in terms of energy, for Russia the trans-border pipeline projects were political leverage tools in order to block market competitors of accessing the European market, while the EU viewed the region as a road to both source and route diversification of energy supply suppliers (Dimitrova, 2015). As such, both the EU and Russia are geopolitical competitors attempting to align the states around the Black Sea region towards their view regarding the region's energy future (ibid.).

The fourth main objective in the area is preventing the spread of organized crime and terrorism. The Black Sea region has been either a source or a transit area for human traffic, armament and drug smuggling, and terrorist activity. Countering these threats in the region constituted an increased priority for the EU and they cannot be disassociated from the previous

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43,000: 12,800–13,000 killed (at least 3,321 civilians and est. 9,500 combatants), and 27,500–30,000 injured (est. 7,000–9,000 civilians and est. 21,000–24,000 combatants).

main objectives, since it is the instability, poverty, unresolved conflicts, and non-transparent state institutions that enable such activities (Cornell, 2006).

## **Black Sea Synergy**

The Black Sea Synergy complements the Eastern Partnership. Whilst the Eastern Partnership promotes the partner countries' rapprochement to the EU, the Black Sea Synergy aims at regional development by encouraging cooperation between the countries surrounding the Black Sea and it has been the EU's key regional policy framework for the BSR, covering the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Romania, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Turkey, and Ukraine. It is different to the Eastern Partnership in the sense that is essentially a regional initiative, open to all Black Sea states and its centre of gravity is the Black Sea, in contrast to the EaP whose centre is Brussels.

The initiative started in 2007, during the German rotative presidency of the Council of the EU and was fully launched in February 2008 with the support of the other member states, especially Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece. The Black Sea Synergy is as a coherent and long-term initiative which complements the EU's bilateral activities and support in the region. It is inclusive, meaning that it is open to all states in the BSR; seeks to build confidence; foster regional dialogue and achieve positive results for the citizens and states; and encourages a bottom-up approach to project development, by identifying and supporting the needs of the partners in the region (European Commission, 2019). The main sectors and fields of cooperation are promotion of sustainable blue growth with a particular focus on integrated maritime policy, marine research, and innovation; fisheries; environmental protection and climate change; cross-border cooperation – Black Sea basin programme 2014-2020; civil society engagement, democracy, and human rights; education, research and innovation, culture and tourism; and energy and transport (ibid.).

The European Commission's Joint Staff Working Document (ibid.) recognizes that tangible results were partial and only some sectors have made important progress during the period 2015-2018, as described above. However, the remaining areas obtained mixed to no improvements in cooperation and thus the BSS has been having a partial success remaining to be improved for better future results.

Yazgan (2017) argues that the recent events in Ukraine and the relations between Turkey and the EU have exacerbated the challenges confronted by the EU in implementing the BSS. Drawing from Trantaphyllou's (2014) remarks, Yazgan (2017) argues that the EaP countries have followed 'multi-vector' policies between Russia and the 'West' and thus they have not been deeply committed to EU norms.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the other stakeholders in the BSR have different 'value systems' and the stability in the region depends very much on the relations between Russia and EU and to some extent between the EU and Turkey since the gradual deterioration of relations between them.

The author concludes that, despite the deficiencies of the EU as a foreign policy actor, the future of the BSS depends on the creation of a cooperative environment with Russia and Turkey in order to create a common ground for achieving the EU's objectives and vision for the region. This idea, as previously stated, is shared by other authors like Cross (2015) for example, as the security environment, stability, and the prosperity of the region is very dependent on the participation and consensus between the main stakeholders in the region, while the competition between them will only aggravate and deteriorate even further what has been achieved to this date.

The Black Sea Synergy was eventually partially replaced by the Eastern Partnership in 2009, since Greece's, Romania's, and Bulgaria's actions of trying to impose a cooperative structure under a big-power patronage proved 'illusionary'. Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece had different perspectives on the development of the cooperative network, with Romania articulating in order to promote the interests of the US in the region, Greece trying to promote Russia's interests, and only Bulgaria was closer to the "EU's synergy philosophy of low politics designs and sectorial cooperation" (Roth, 2015: 23).

To conclude, even though the BSS has the potential to maintain the contacts between the partners in spite of the political disagreements among them, the initiative has lost impetus and the results were very lacking since its implementation. The recent events in Ukraine and the strained relations between Turkey, Russia, and the EU will limit the prospects of future cooperation in the Black Sea and of the BSS.

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<sup>11</sup> The incentives provided are very limited and without any accession prospect. Consequently, these countries policies' frequently go 'back and forth' between Russia and the EU.



## **The Eastern Partnership**

The Eastern Partnership established between the EU and the six Eastern European and South Caucasus ENP partner countries in 2009 is a specific Eastern dimension to the ENP designed to foster the political association and economic integration of the partner countries with the EU. In exchange for undertaking political and economic reforms, the EaP offers new contractual relations, DCFTAs, steps towards visa liberalization, and a multilateral framework to discuss these issues (European Council, n.d.-a). The overall objective of the Eastern Partnership is to bring the partner countries closer to the EU. In Angelescu's (2011) view, Romania gave only a "lukewarm" welcome to the Eastern Partnership (EaP), because it saw it as distracting attention from the Black Sea region.

The Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit (2009), which launched the EaP, proposed a "more ambitious partnership between the European Union and the partner countries" and its main goal was to create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic between the EU and interested partner countries through a specific Eastern dimension of the ENP, by supporting political and socio-economic reforms of the partners and thus facilitating approximation towards the EU. The EaP sought to promote a deeper bi-lateral engagement and a focus on multilateral co-operation. The bilateral cooperation covered issues such as Association Agreements, EU technical assistance in institutional building matters, visa liberalization agreements, and energy security. The multilateral co-operation consisted in a multilateral framework which aimed at sharing information and experience on the partners' steps towards transition, reform, and modernization and give the EU an additional instrument to accompany these processes. The document also mentions that a "complementarity with regional initiatives between EU and relevant partner countries, in particular the Black Sea Synergy, will be ensured" (ibid.). However, the EaP overshadowed the BSS, which was relegated to a lower tier in terms of importance after the former's implementation in 2009.

### **2.3 Russia**

Friedman (2018) writes that geographically, Russia is different from the rest of Europe. It is essentially a landlocked country whereas the rest of Europe is a maritime region, with extensive

rivers leading to ports and where no one is more than 650 kilometres from the sea. The ports in the Arctic are frequently frozen, in the Baltic and the Black seas the access to the ocean has narrow straits which can be easily blocked. Friedman (2018) presents an analogy to describe the differences between Russia and the rest of Europe:

Thucydides distinguished between Athens, a maritime power whose inhabitants lived in wealth and had time for art and philosophy, and Sparta, a landlocked territory whose people lived a hardscrabble life with limited opportunities for self-indulgence but were able to survive conditions that would break Athenians. Both were Greek, but they were different (ibid.).

Land powers were historically more traditional and secluded, and they focused strongly on autarky, collective organization, security and strong central rule – examples include Sparta, Czarist Russia, Imperial Germany, and the Soviet Union. Sea powers favoured broad-mindedness and openness, free trade, individualism, enterprise, and a desire to unveil the unknown either out of curiosity, prestige or profit, represented historically by powers such as Carthage, Athens, Venice, Netherlands, Great Britain, and today's global sea power, the US.

As we have mentioned in the introduction, the BSR is heavily susceptible to external actors, and this exacerbates even further its "regionness" dilemma. From a Geopolitical perspective, the BSR, as part of Eastern Europe, can be seen as part of a "shatterbelt",

Eastern Europe is an exceptionally troubled region since Antiquity, with a history characterized by large-scale migrations, wars, invasions and occupations by foreign powers. Therefore, long ago it has been considered by theorists such as Mackinder, Spykman, Brezinski, Cohen and Kelly as a region of transition and attrition between the dominance of Atlantic naval and Eurasian land powers, strategically important for access and control of the Heartland. This makes it a shatterbelt, an area sorely disputed by nations which project their powers and influence, imposing themselves over local peoples (Kosinski and Parizkova, 2017: 1).

Russia's history is one of constant struggle against invading forces in a territory relatively easy to invade. The core of Russia, formed more or less by what was once the Grand Principality of

Muscovy, does not possess any defensible landmark (rivers, oceans, swamps or mountains) and it can only count on the forests and the relatively inhospitable climate for defence. Traditionally this core was invaded either from the central Asian steppes as was the case of the Mongol conquest of the Kievan Rus, which arguably left a deep mark on Russian history; or from the North European plains, a path of invasion by Teutonic Knights or by European powers such as Poland, Sweden, France or Germany. The only perceived way by Russia in order to deal with these vulnerabilities was through expansion (Stratfor, 2012). By establishing a considerable distance between the borders and the core, Russia sought to protect itself by continually expanding their buffer zones and therefore, wear down potential invaders by overstretching their supply lines and by the exposure to the elements. Simply put, NATO and EU enlargements towards Russia's core resulted in the reduction of these traditional "buffer zones" which constituted a cause of deep concern for Russian strategists. Since our purpose here is not to explain Russian history, we move forward to the period after the fall of the USSR

Sakwa (2008) divides Russian foreign policy since independence as passing through six stages:<sup>12</sup> the emergence phase before the 1991 coup; the establishment phase; the romantic phase; the reassertion phase; competitive pragmatism; and New Realism. The author argues that each of these stages were marked by contradictory goals as Russia's size, location, and history generated 'multifaceted if not contradictory' foreign policies. Freire (2014b) picks up on Sakwa's division proposal and divides Russian foreign policy into four main periods: liberal internationalism, competitive pragmatism, new realism, and neo-revisionism. We are going to use these to make a brief review of Russia's foreign policy evolution.

The first phase is the post-independence period when contradictory objectives were starting to be defined. In this period of 'liberal institutionalism', integration into 'western' institutions and, at the same time, the recognition as a great power were being pursued. Russian politics opened to the 'west' and relations with the European Communities were reinforced under the minister of foreign affairs Andrei Kozyrev, described as an 'Atlanticist'.<sup>13</sup> However, the benefits and the costs associated with these policies did not correspond to the Russian national interests, especially

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<sup>12</sup> For more details on these, see Sakwa (2008). Freire (2014b) seems to pick up on these stages but provides a more up-to-date list.

<sup>13</sup> Someone who advocates for a closer cooperation in military, political, and economic matters with the 'West'. This term gained a negative connotation among conservative Russians.

in economic terms, which gave rise to heavy criticisms, especially from more conservative groups (Freire, 2014b).

In face of such pressures, Russian foreign policy had to be revised and the second phase was initiated under Evgeny Primakov in January 1996. This phase is identified as ‘‘Competitive Pragmatism’’ and assumed a more critical position towards the ‘West’ which was welcomed by nationalists and communists in the Duma, while still pursuing a posture of cooperation with the former. Primakov also sought to re-assert Russia’s position in China, the Far East and with the traditional allies in the Middle East. He took Russia’s particular interests more seriously and insisted to portray the country as a Great Power in a multipolar international community. In 1999 Ivanov replaces Primakov and continues his policies (Sakwa, 2008).

Putin came to power in 2000, after Ieltsin’s step down. He kept Ivanov and changed Russian foreign policy towards a ‘‘new realism’’. Elements of Primakov’s ‘‘competitive pragmatism’’ remained, although Putin’s foreign policy was marked by a more realistic appreciation of Russian interests. Putin’s aspirations were ambitions, but at the same time he was aware of the country’s handicaps and that it lacked the means to claim what he considered Russia’s ‘‘rightful place’’ in the world. As such, he urged the Russian diplomacy to promote the country’s economic interests abroad, while also improving the country’s image in order to bring it closer to its aspirations as a great power (ibid.). Putin managed to introduce a more coherent foreign policy by addressing the tensions between the European wing, which defended a closer relation with the ‘West’, the orientalist, who sought more dialogue with the ‘Orient’, or the Nationalists, who advocated for a focus on strengthening the Russian ‘‘heartland’’ or ‘‘vital space’’. Although these tensions continue today (at the time of the writing of this dissertation), Putin managed to mitigate them by continuing a previously formed, but now consolidated and clearer multivectorial foreign policy, focused mainly on the post-soviet space as the main vector followed by the ‘western’ and ‘oriental’ vectors (Freire, 2014b).

The 2007 Munich Security Conference marked the start of a period of increased assertiveness from Russia. Putin’s famous speech revealed the discontent over North American and European decisions, such as the U.S. missile shield in Europe and the Kosovo question.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kosovo’s declaration of Independence in 2008 which Russia, a staunch Serbian ally, sees as a violation of international law and an example of double standard in comparison with the Crimean question and its secession legitimacy.

Medvedev's presidency (2008-2012) kept the key elements of Putin's foreign policy, combining the growth from energy resources with a new foreign policy vector focused on modernization. Although his presidency was marked by an attempt towards more liberal policies, he did not see himself as a liberal (ibid.).

Furthermore, the return of Putin to the Russian presidency in 2012 meant the return to centralized policies, the containment of the popular voice, and the strengthening of power by removing the more progressist and liberal elements of his opposition (ibid). In the next years, the relations between Russia, the USA and the EU dramatically soured after the annexation of Crimea.

In the economic field, with Putin as President, the Russian economy has been characterized by a shift from Yeltsin's crony capitalism, to state capitalism (Djankov, 2015). Djankov argues that Putin's career in the secret police gave him 'a charismatic aura', displaying strength and determination (ibid.). During his first terms, Putin pursued liberal reforms, he enacted a flat income tax of 13 percent, a reduced profit tax, and new land and legal codes. The real incomes in Russia during 1999-2008 rose by 250 percent; real wages more than tripled, and unemployment and poverty more than halved (ibid.).

"The positive economic developments during Putin's first presidencies (2000-2007) were largely associated with surging energy prices" (Havlik, 2008: 3), which resulted in putting off pressure on the government to introduce further structural and institutional reforms (ibid.). Putin's programs for 2012-2017 were made public in October 2011 and January 2012, following which he announced the priority of the Eurasian integration of the post-Soviet space and stressed the need of stability and cutting the dependent character of the economy on the extraction of raw materials, via modernization and diversification (ibid.: 7). Modernization still continues to be a key issue for Russia and one which Putin tried to address without much success. However, Russia managed to bring part of the former Soviet Union economic space together through the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union which came into force in January 2015, as a project of integrating the former republics of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and some other future members like Tajikistan, Syria, Uzbekistan and Mongolia into an economic bridge to Asia. The annexation of Crimea and the proxy war in Ukraine have constituted a sign of alarm for the regional actors and for Europe. On the energy field, as most countries in the Black Sea region and the Balkans rely heavily on Russian energy supply of gas, this brought them under political blackmail and pressure.

Freire (2014a) argues that Russian foreign policy has followed three main principles. The first is that it is multivectorial, focusing on the post-soviet space as the preferential area of action, then followed by Western, Eastern and Southern dimensions; second, it is pragmatic; and third, it pursues its affirmation in the international system as a great power striving for a multi-polar order. Therefore, the Black Sea region is a strategically important area in Russia's multivectorial policy. According to the author, Russia's policy towards the Black Sea is based on two main lines, namely: seeking to influence the developments in the area with its presence in the BSEC, as a vehicle for that purpose in parallel with bilateral relations, and secondly, to limit the involvement of other actors in this area, specifically the EU, a regional player, and the USA, an external actor (ibid.).

On the other hand, despite Russia's effort of limiting EU's involvement in the Black Sea region, Freire (ibid.) argues that the EU is not seen by Russia as a 'game changer' in the area, since it is perceived as a limited player. Moreover, neither Russia has a concrete strategy for the Black Sea, having only reacted to the EU's policies. These divergent interests and competing projects leave cooperation initiatives, such as the BSEC, unable to provide 'regionness' to the Black Sea (ibid.). In Freire's words: "the lack of strategy towards this space from Russia, as well as from the EU, together with the complex relations among the states in the BSR, and the influence of external actors, such as the USA, renders the primary issues on the agenda, such as energy, security and conflicts, rather challenging" (ibid.: 379).

Delcour (2015: 93) argues that "the simultaneous deployment of mutually exclusive economic projects by the EU and Russia has shaped the recent developments in the Black Sea Region". Russia attempted to 'spoil' the EU's growing influence. The AAs/DCFTAs with three countries in addition to Ukraine "prompted Russia to increase pressure on partner countries with a view to counteracting the Union's growing influence in what Russia perceives as its near abroad" (ibid.). Russia's response to the EaP were functional and geopolitical, that is, it re-activated a 'hard-law' in which the ECU integration cannot be combined with an EU offer for DCFTA, while secondly it "relied upon interdependences inherited from Soviet past to exert pressure on partner countries" (ibid.: 98).

Samokhalov (2017) argues that the Eurasian Union was not designed to become a competing block of the EU but as an instrument to gain recognition from the EU: "it was more about boosting the status of Russia to the level of great powers. This mix of competitive and collaborative tactics can be best explained by this dual rationale of gaining Europe's recognition

and acceptance of Russia's superiority'' (ibid.: 221). However, the EU's engagement with Ukraine was suspiciously seen by Russia as an attempt to tear Ukraine apart from Russia which was at the time a full member of the ECU and increasing pressures were exerted on countries engaged with the EU. Delcours (2015) argued that these attempts of Russia to thwart the EU's EaP countries by pressuring them into Eurasian integration, as it was the case of Armenia, or undermining their territorial integrity, as in Ukraine's case, have managed to disrupt the EU's policy towards the Eastern Neighbourhood at a time when EaP was gaining ground, managing to bring these countries more into the EU's sphere.<sup>15</sup> "In essence, Russia used geopolitical leverage to thwart the EU's low-key policies. Paradoxically, at a time when it is moving toward implementation, the EU's Eastern policy has thus been caught in a geopolitical trap as a result of Russia's countervailing actions" (ibid.: 94). The EU itself is ill-equipped to respond to Russia as illustrated in the wake of the annexation of Crimea. But, at the same time, these attempts have also strengthened the resolve of some countries and the reluctance among those involved in the Eurasian integration process, such as Ukraine, who chose to pursue EU integration instead:

it [the EU] is strongly constrained by its own internal situation and specificities as a foreign policy actor and thus hardly able to produce the paradigm shift that the situation calls for. At the same time, while unwilling and unable to move openly toward a geopolitical contest, the EU has gained significant leverage in the region, not least because of its consistently high attractiveness for partner countries (ibid.: 95)

Delcours (2015: 4) identifies two problems that the EU faces, namely, that it must define an up-to-date strategy in a complex regional context involving a competition for regional integration projects and threats of destabilization and disintegration of states. Secondly, the EU must reach a consensus on how to deal with Russia "both bilaterally and in a contested neighbourhood". Notwithstanding, both Delcours (2015) and Freire (2014a) seem to agree that Russia has only reacted to the EU's policies. Moreover, Russia seems to operate on a "carrot and stick" policy

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<sup>15</sup> Armenia's DCFTA agreements negotiations with EU were suspended weeks before completion and the country joined the Eurasian Union. Armenia and the EU finalized a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in February 2017 as a softer version of the DCFTA, in which 96% of Armenian goods may enter the EU's single market with zero tariffs. As of 2019, the EU is Armenia's biggest export market with a 28.4 % share in total Armenian exports.

although when the ‘‘carrots’’ or rewards were not sufficient enough and the partners drifted towards EU, more ‘‘stick’’ or punishment was used as in the case of Ukraine or Georgia which in reality might be contrary to Russia’s interests as these countries’ have grown even more resentful towards their neighbour.

## **2.4 Romania**

There is an old Romanian proverb: ‘‘Capul ce se pleaca, sabia nu-l taie’’ which, translated into English means something like ‘‘the head that bends the sword does not cut’’. Vaduva (2013) provides a geopolitical reading of the proverb:

It must be said that Romania has never defied the great powers; always has subjected to their will, even if it did in a way criticized by some or appreciated by others, because there was a respect in Romania towards the neighboring Powers and a careful attitude to not offend them, "The head that bends, the sword does not cut". If you talk with an Iranian, an Afghan, a British or a representative of a population that does not conceive of surrender, acceptance of conditions or humiliation, they would look at this idea with contempt (The head that bends, the sword does not cut). But when you are at the crossroads, trapped between the great powers that extended themselves and have spread violently and virulently over the territory of your ancestors - and you have no power over them - and they exert enormous pressure on you in order to completely swallow and make you disappear as a nation of this earth, you don't have much alternative, and humility is one of those modus vivendi for you and those like you, hoping that somewhere later in time you will be able to be reborn in your ancestors’ blessed land (Vaduva, 2013: 90).

This Romanian mindset of enduring and pledging allegiance in order to survive as a nation is a deep characteristic of national identity and is also present in the Romanian national anthem lyrics.<sup>16</sup> It begins with a call to action ‘‘Wake up, Romanian from the sleep of death, you've been sunken in by the barbarian tyrants’’ and it contains messages of cultural self-preservation and identity

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<sup>16</sup> Written by Andrei Mureșanu during the 1848 revolutions which, after the 1989 revolution, became the national anthem, replacing the one from the Communist era.



“...let us give proof to the world that in these veins a Roman blood still flows”; along with messages of resistance against occupying Empires.

Nations need their origin myths (Samokhalov, 2017) and, similarly to the Italians who looked for them in their ancient history or the Nordic countries in their Viking sagas, Romanians looked at Trajan’s Dacian wars and the ensuing romanization of Dacia as their origin myth. Therefore, the Romanian mindset along the centuries has been one of enduring the whims and threats of the great powers in order to preserve this constructed identity and revolt against the occupiers at their weakest moment, thus the “wake up” call.

Angelescu (2011) analyzes Romania’s foreign policy identity in the past centuries with particular attention to the period after 1989. Following Ivan’s (2009<sup>17</sup>, apud Angelescu 2011: 124) distinction of three periods in the country’s foreign policy following 1989. The periods are separated as following: the first represented the confusion period immediately after the revolution, the second was represented by the period of general consensus and support for Romania’s membership in the Euro-Atlantic institutions, and third, the period after the accession to the EU and NATO. Ivan (ibid.: 125) argues that, although Romania has never been a Great Power, it always gravitated towards them (i.e. Ottoman, Russian, Austro-Hungarian).<sup>18</sup> Consequently, large part of its transformation in modern history has been due to events outside of the country’s control or borders (Baleanu, 2000: 2<sup>19</sup>, apud Angelescu, 2011: 125). Examples of such dynamics were the creation of ‘Greater Romania’ in 1918 after the defeat of Germany in 1918, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939 which compelled Romania to cede the regions of Bukovina and Bessarabia<sup>20</sup> to the Soviet Union (ibid.).

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<sup>17</sup> Iva, Ruxandra (2009). *La politique étrangère roumaine (1990-2006)*. Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles.

<sup>18</sup> If we see the EU as a form of “Great Power”, the same principle applies, as we will see ahead with Romania gravitating towards the Euro-Atlantic structures.

<sup>19</sup> Baleanu, V.G. (2010). *In the Shadow of Russia: Romania’s Relations with Moldova and Ukraine*. Conflict Studies Research Center, August 2010. Retrieved from: [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/97702/00\\_Aug.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/97702/00_Aug.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> In 1940 Bessarabia was incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. On 27 August 1991 the officially named Republic of Moldova became independent.

During the Middle Ages when religion played the preeminent role of identity, Romanians orbited towards the East,<sup>21</sup> as a member of the Orthodox faith. However, during the nineteenth century, when ethnic identity played a critical role, Romania experienced a change in their national identity stimulated by the elites who re-discovered the nation's 'Latin roots' and wanted a geopolitical shift towards 'the great capitals of Europe' like Rome, Paris, Vienna and Berlin (Muresanu, 2010: 49<sup>22</sup>, apud Angelescu, 2011: 125). Consequently, a big contrast to the previous centuries developed. Romanians viewed themselves as an isolated 'island' surrounded by Slavic neighbours, which were seen with suspicion and perceived as competitors in the absence of a common enemy, previously embodied by the Ottoman empire.

After the modern Romanian state was formed and gained its independence in the second half of the nineteenth century, the political elite began to look at Russia with increased concern regarding its imperial ambitions. As pointed out above, Romania's 'new' identity as 'a Latin island in a Slavic sea' put it at odds with its biggest Slavic neighbour, the Russian empire (Angelescu, 2011: 126). Despite that, given the power imbalance between the two States, a careful position was taken towards Russia in order to appease it whenever possible, to avoid conflict, but, at the same time, not getting in a more than necessary relationship in order to preserve the fragile independence. This idea continued well into the twentieth century with Ceausescu playing the same balancing act by not getting too close to its 'Soviet brother' but also not angering him (ibid.). After the fall of Communism, Romania's long pursued desire of becoming a 'Western' country was reignited by the prospects of joining the EU and NATO (ibid.).

The period immediately after the revolution was characterized by a severe internal turmoil. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, one of the most important economic transitions of all time began. In Stiglitz's (2002) view, this was the second boldest economic and social experiment following the communist experiment in Imperial Russia. The transition from communism to a market economy was not solely an economic experiment but also "it was a transformation of societies and of social and political cultures" (Stiglitz, 2002 135). Romania found itself "in a precarious economic situation raising the need to consolidate the country's democracy and market economy"

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<sup>21</sup> The East in this case is represented by the Orthodox faith, the official religion of the Byzantine Empire who separated from its Western counterpart, the Catholic church, in 1054.

<sup>22</sup> Muresanu, Camil (2010). *Identitate si destin. [Identity and Destiny]*. In Vasile Boari, Sergiu Gherghina and Radu Murea (eds). *Regasirea identitatii nationale [Rediscovering National Identity]*. Iasi: Polirom.

(Angelescu, 2011: 127). The dissolution of the USSR and Romania's location "between two unstable regions" made the latter look Westward and eliminate any option of another Eastern orientation (Ivan, 2009: 10, apud Angelescu, 2011: 127). In the subsequent years, Romania's membership to the EU was identified as a national strategic objective and after a brief period the decision to embark on the Euro-Atlantic path was consensual among the elites (Angelescu, 2011: 127).

After the stabilization and the accession to the EU, the country had to formulate its foreign policy as a new member state. The political class either focused on the Black Sea or South-Eastern Europe as a geography in which Romania had competence, presence, and expertise (Ungureanu, 2008: 72<sup>23</sup>, apud Angelescu, 2011: 128). For Romania, the Black Sea was a strategically relevant space needing to be integrated into the EU's and NATO's agendas. The dialogue with other European partners was intensified as to increase the EU's presence in the Eastern Europe and Caspian region, in order to find a solution for the ongoing frozen conflicts (ibid.).

With the membership to these organizations, Romania started to become 'aware' of its geopolitical location. Angelescu (2011: 131) argues that the Romanian path of accession to the Atlantic institutions had beneficial consequences for the country's relations with its neighbours, except for Moldova. Moldova's historical geopolitical shifts between the Russian Empire, Kingdom of Romania and then the Soviet Union, resulted in Moldova's population having a 'regional' rather than a 'national' identity. Of all its neighbours Moldova is the country with which Romania has more affinity, and because of this, the author argues that the relations between them unexpectedly soured. According to Angelescu (ibid.) "Romania was the first country to recognize Moldova's independence and saw it as a "Romanian state"." This, in turn, induced a state of agitation for the national minorities, which led to the Transnistrian war and the current frozen of conflict (ibid.). We will address this issue later on in this dissertation by analyzing and providing an update to the relation between Romania and Moldova in the last years, as Moldova is now drifting towards Europe and Romania is playing an important part in that.

According to Angelescu, "in 2006, former president Basescu, at a speech in Washington DC, called the Black Sea "indispensable" for Euro-Atlantic security and emphasized Romania's commitment in creating a space of stability and security in the region" (ibid.: 136). In the 2007

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<sup>23</sup> Ungureanu, Mihai-Razvan (2008). *Intotdeauna loial: Note diplomatice pentru a Romania moderna (2005–2007)* [Always Loyal: Diplomatic Notes for a Modern Romania (2005–2007)]. Iasi: Polirom.

Romanian National Security Strategy there is a chapter dedicated entirely to the Black Sea region and importance of Romania as a vector of stability and prosperity in the region (ibid.). However, “...even the forms of cooperation it participates in the Black Sea region – including the one Romania itself proposed, the Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialogue (BSF) – are fairly loose and informal” (ibid.: 138).

Angelescu (2011) recognized that Romania still lacked foreign policy experience and did not really manage to successfully push the Black Sea and the Moldovan issues onto the EU agenda, while at the same time the EU itself did not have a concrete policy towards them at the time. The author concluded that Romania was at the “beginning of the road” regarding its geopolitical role, but also recognized that, since 1989, the country was capable of learning from its experience and in the future it had the potential to engage more successfully in the Black Sea region and the Eastern Neighbourhood. This argument corroborates what we propose in this dissertation.

Roth (2015) gives an interesting appraisal of Romania’s foreign policy in the BSR between 2007-2010. He argues that Romania’s foreign policy portfolio of deliverables for the region during the period for assuring a regulatory role for itself, control over the development of infrastructure, security cooperation within the existing frameworks, and development of a hydrocarbon transport corridor from the Caspian to Europe bypassing Russia - were, in fact, a by-product generated by a divergent interplay of exogenous influences of US and Russia primarily, and EU secondarily, and the US’s and EU’s non-native regional perspectives, preferences and interests which in turn Romania incorporated into its foreign policy agenda with the aim of being its main promotor in this area. Roth (2015: 24-25) argues that this “indigenous hybridization” of imported transatlantic and European policy agendas were an attempt to enhance the country’s status and ‘allure’ in the ‘West’ when the US and the EU manifested some interest in the area. Simply put, Romania took these ‘non-native’ agendas and tried to incorporate them into the Black Sea region through a hybridization process by bringing them into the existing framework in hope of being portrayed as a good ‘promoter’ of the US and EU agendas. Moreover, the author also argued that:

in the post-accession period, when Bucharest eventually began to use the superior institutional capacities for foreign policy design and formulation, it started to upload its previously constructed Americanized foreign policy perspectives regarding the Wider Black Sea Area into EU’s institutional framework. In particular, with EU (especially France and Germany) manifesting both a lack of appetite for hard foreign policy

approaches and a lack of motivation, of political and of institutional impetus for challenging Russia's regional or energy hegemony. Romania's endeavors led to extremely modest results and, to some extent, to the isolation of Bucharest (and of other actors with similar agendas) at the periphery of Brussels' foreign policy profile (Roth, 2015: 37)

On the same line of thinking, Roth (2015b) characterizes Romanian foreign policy in the late 1990s as a drive for security under a "voluntary" servitude. Romania, under the conviction that its poor political, social, and economic performance would not lead to the fulfilment of necessary criteria for NATO and EU accession, attempted to buy the 'West's' "benevolence" in order to advance its institutional accession goals. Later on, the indigenous elites, having realized this miscalculation and realizing that Romania would miss the first wave of the 2004 EU enlargement, replaced the previous approach based on political compromises and strategic expectations with a more integration focused approach in order to at least partially fulfil the accession criteria.

Seagle (2008) provides an interesting insight on the elites' shift towards 'Western' institutions and their priorities after the revolution. In a speech given at the Woodrow Wilson Center in 2002, former Romanian president Ion Iliescu argued that "Romanians have long identified with Western Europe, despite a half century of soviet occupation and the deprivation and isolation imposed by the Ceausescu regime in the 1980s" and, despite all, "the Western values and ideals still seeped in" (ibid: 119). However, the author finds it thought provoking that the same person, shortly after taking office as a president in 1991, sent one of his political counsellors to Moscow in order to enact a very controversial political treaty that was supposed to "strengthen the friendship and collaboration between Romania and the USSR"(ibid.: 119-120), even though the treaty was not ratified by the Romanian Parliament. Seagle argues that, if ratified, the treaty would have blocked, for almost fifteen years, any political and military alliances that Romania may have had with the 'West', since it stipulated that "Russia had a right of veto when Romania sought occidental alliances" (ibid.).

Iliescu was a former classmate of Gorbachov when both studied in Moscow and, as a leader, Iliescu was interested in maintaining the old USSR organizations functional, especially the Warsaw Pact. In an interview given by Iliescu to Reuters on May 1990, after his election, he argued that Romania would maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union, with which it shared a long

border, and it would continue to remain in the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet-led COMECON<sup>24</sup> trading block “as long as they exist.” Three years after this interview, organizations such as the Warsaw Pact and COMECON were extinct, and Romania shifted its attention to the “European House” and signed the Association Agreement with EU in 1993 (ibid.).

Seagle (2008: 126) argues that “Romania assured its security first and then it earned a more complimentary etiquette for being a good and obedient ‘other’ that allowed its return to Europe, thus, western organization”. This is interesting in the sense that this “identity” card that the Romanian elites played through discourse was more of a method of gaining access to these institutions as a way to ensure the country’s security at a time when the Eastern alternative was perceived as “dead” and the rational strategic move was to align with the ‘West’ as rapidly as possible. Seagle (2008) also argues that entering NATO was a high priority because of the Hungarian minority present in Romania. In order to safeguard its national integrity, being on good terms with NATO was crucial. This concern regarding territorial integrity is also shown in the country’s refusal to recognize Kosovo independence along with Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus, and Greece. This is a reflection of the country’s permanent struggle at maintaining its territorial unity since modern times.<sup>25</sup>

Bonnemains (2010) shows a somewhat more positive position when compared to the previous authors. In an exhaustive study about Romania’s Post-Cold War International Relations, he argues that the BSR has a high importance in the National Strategy documents and, therefore, it represents a key area in the Romanian strategy for the future and its international actorness. As it is a crossroads for the Black Sea, the country can be seen as a gateway to Eastern markets. According to the author, as a NATO and EU frontier, the country wants to expand the ‘West’s’ borders. I would add here that expanding the borders is not only for the purpose of being a contributor to these institutions but because the country itself does not want to be a frontier forever. Bonnemains (ibid.) argues that this is hard for countries like Bulgaria and Romania to achieve,

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<sup>24</sup> COMECON was the Eastern Bloc’s reply to the formation in Western Europe of the Marshall Plan. It was established in January 1949 and it dissolved in June 1991.

<sup>25</sup> Modern times here refers to early 16<sup>th</sup> century. During a short time 1599-1600, Michael the Brave managed to reunite the three principalities of Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania into a single State, however he was shortly assassinated at the orders of Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor. Wallachia and Moldavia fell to Ottoman rule while Transylvania became part of Austria-Hungary. It would be another 250 years before Romania would again be united (Newworldencyclopaedia.org, 2008).

since the major Powers in the Black Sea – Turkey and Russia – aim at a status quo and oppose the ‘Western’ penetration of the region. The author argues that, since it is anchored to the Western institutions, when compared to the other countries in the BSR, Romania has been more active in establishing regional cooperation:

The country has developed gradually leadership with the support of western institutions and the US. Romania promotes the EU Black Sea Synergy and participates actively in regional cooperation organizations, holds regional institutions and develops initiatives with the ambition to lead the Black Sea cooperation process from the position of the Euro-Atlantic community and bringing the area closer to the European Union. In fact as Ognyan Minchev states that ‘Romanians’ perception of selves as ‘Latin Bridgehead’ into a ‘Sea of Slavs’ brings them to more explicit pro-Atlantic and anti-Russian standing in assessing the Black Sea agenda (ibid.: 532).

The next chapters aim at presenting Romania's position in the region during the last years. In the case of some of the mentioned authors, many years have passed since the publication of their views, so we aim at giving an update also in this regard. Moreover, initiatives through which Romania tried to elevate the importance of the Black Sea will be presented in order to assess how Romanian foreign policy has evolved in this region as an EU and NATO member state, along with a particular attention to the relations with Moldova.

### **Chapter 3. Romania as an EU Member State in the Black Sea region**

#### **3.1 Romania’s reaction to the Russian aggression (March 2014)**

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has alienated many European countries. It led to EU sanctions and the acknowledgement of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, costing Russia a vast amount of support from the governments of the EU. Although the EU28 recognized the Russian aggression, the Kremlin Watch Report (2017) categorized the EU member states into

seven groups, based on their reaction to the aggressive steps of the Russian Federation. This was conducted through an analysis of strategy and policy documents.<sup>26</sup>

According to the report, the first category of countries that most opposed Russian actions are characterized as “principled defenders”, which are at the forefront of the European response to the Russian aggression, made up by countries such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Denmark. These countries developed a strong concern towards Russian foreign policy, which is perceived as a dangerous threat. The second category includes “the awoken” countries, formed by Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, Czech Republic, and Germany which, after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, have “shifted” their policies and concerns. The “bellow-radar supporters” are those who carry concerns about Russia but, given their complicated historical and local contexts, have mostly stayed away from being vocal about the Russian aggression. This category includes Croatia, Bulgaria, and Romania. In the fourth category are those who have “no relations with Russia,” due to their geographical distance from Russia and so they carry no concrete interest on this particular issue. This category includes Portugal, Malta, and Ireland. The fifth category includes countries having energy-related or special economic relations with Russia and thus do not feel threatened and do not acknowledge the threat outside of the conflict in Ukraine. These are the member states who are “trying to stay away from the issues”, comprised by Austria, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Spain, and Slovenia. Interestingly, there are also governments using the “Russian card for domestic reasons” formed by Slovakia and Hungary whose governments, in spite of having negative experiences with Russia, use the relations with Russia for domestic political or economic reasons or as a “tool against the EU establishment”. Lastly, there are the “Kremlin friendlies” which do not feel threatened and advocate for better relations with Russia. This category is made up of countries such as Italy, Cyprus, and Greece - the latter holding deep historical ties with Russia.

Although Romania is placed in the third category, as a “bellow radar supporter”, the Romanian National Defence Strategy (2015) document hints at perceiving Russia as a threat. However, it is also true that it does so in a relatively subtle way, mainly due to Romania’s moderation in its discourse regarding Russia, according to Angelescu (2011). Considering this, it is also worth mentioning that Romania’s biggest port city of Constanta, in the Dobruja region, is

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<sup>26</sup> For a list of such documents visit: <https://www.newstrategycenter.ro/documente/>



at around 400 km from Sevastopol in Crimea, where the Russian Black Sea fleet has a substantial presence; therefore, the fear factor plays a role. Moreover, Romania's strategic partnership with the USA and the missile shield defence site proved to be a source of high concern for Russia and, as a result, it is worth considering that Romania chose to not throw more "fuel into the fire" (Emmott, 2016).

On 7 March 2014, former president of Romania Traian Basescu mentioned that the first two countries bound to negotiate with Russia after the conflict in Ukraine were the United States and the United Kingdom, as a result of the Budapest Memorandum signed with the former Soviet state, which guaranteed Ukraine's borders in exchange for Ukraine giving up its nuclear stockpiles (Calea Europeana, 2014). The former head of state mentioned Romania's recognition of the Ukrainian parliament as legitimate after the ousting of former president Víktor Yanukóvytch and that Russia's actions were an aggression towards Ukraine. Moreover, Basescu said that Ukraine had to "urgently" sign agreements with the IMF and the EU to recover economically and to have an "accelerated reform program", mentioning that Ukraine could sign the Association Agreement<sup>27</sup> (AA) with the EU (ibid.). The former president highlighted that Romania should participate in the eventual negotiations, since it shares over 400 km of frontier with Ukraine and is not dependent on Russian gas, suggesting that Romania's posture towards Russia can be relatively more relaxed when compared with the other countries in the region (ibid.). Therefore, the country's high domestic fuel reserves make the question of energy secondary in Romania's relations with Russia, while the country's primary concern is its immediate neighbourhood (Kremlin Watch Report, 2017).

The Romanian Presidency communicated that it did not raise the levels of alert of its national security structures following the situation in Crimea, since the country was not affected directly by the situation in Ukraine and saw no immediate risks. However, the Romanian Presidency said it was watching very closely the separatist evolutions in Ukraine and Moldova, while admitting that any presence of Russian Federation troops on Ukrainian territory without Ukraine's approval and beyond the limits of bilateral accords could be seen as an act of aggression against Ukraine (Hotnews.ro, 2014).

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<sup>27</sup> The association agreement between EU and Ukraine was drafted on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012, signed on 21 March 2014, and considered effective on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017.

### 3.2 The Romanian National Defence Strategy (2015-2019)

Romania's National Defence Strategy is described as the main instrument behind defence-level planning, which ensures a national strategic framework for organizing and coordinating activities concerning the defence of the country and national security (National Defence Strategy, 2015). The analysis of this document is of utmost importance, since it provides us with the planification of objectives and priorities for the period between 2015 and 2019. This will give us some insights on the country's standpoint on matters of foreign policy, regional security concerns, threats, risks, and vulnerabilities for the given period in the Black Sea Region.

In the National Defence Strategy for 2015-2019, entry 33, it is postulated that Romania's position on the eastern flank of NATO and the EU, and at the junction of areas with high security risk, highlights the fact that defence and security go beyond the sphere of responsibility of a single state (National Defence Strategy, 2015: 12) . As such, the document shows some awareness regarding the country's geopolitical position, while also seeing defence and security as the responsibility of all the actors in the area. Very importantly, the document's 34<sup>th</sup> entry also recognizes that the best guarantee for national security is NATO, which puts in evidence the high degree of importance that the alliance carries for the country. We will address topic later on to explain why NATO is so 'emphasized' in the country's discourse. Interestingly, in the document's 35<sup>th</sup> entry, the Russian Federation is described as an important actor in the European and Euro Atlantic space; however, the document also states that

[Russia's] actions in the Black Sea Region, infringing upon international law, questioning international order, preserving frozen conflicts and the annexation of Crimea have raised again the NATO awareness upon fulfilling its fundamental mission that is collective defence, as well as the validity of the security arrangements agreed upon with Russia at the end of the XX century....The Russian Federation is trying to consolidate its status as a power at the regional level, its actions having an impact upon regional stability and the European path of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia (ibid: 12).

Moreover, the document assesses that the European security architecture is threatened by crises, frozen conflicts, terrorism, and migrations in its Eastern and Southern vicinity, which can directly or indirectly affect Romania's security.

From a foreign policy perspective, the 23<sup>rd</sup> point (National Defence Strategy, 2015: 10) postulates that Romania must shape a country profile in accordance to its levels of political ambitions, demographics, and economic capacity. For that purpose, eight major objectives were to be pursued for the period 2015-2019:

- The consolidation of Romanian prestige in NATO and the EU, through conceptual and operational contributions;
- Respect for the EU's fundamental principles and values;
- The consolidation of the strategic partnership with the USA. Including the economic and commercial fields;
- Deepening of relations with the neighbouring states and with those belonging to NATO's eastern flank;<sup>28</sup>
- Intensification of regional cooperation, including on defence matters;
- Support for the Republic of Moldova's road to European integration;<sup>29</sup>
- Promotion of political, economic and security interests in regions of strategic relevance.

At the regional level, Romania shows awareness regarding its position at the junction of various regional security complexes, while the 40<sup>th</sup> entry obliges the country to maintain the strategic balance in the area and, at the same time, contribute to the consolidation of the "Europeanization" process, through the gradual expansion of the European "area" of freedom, prosperity, security, and justice (National Defence Strategy, 2015: 13). This shows commitment to the European norms and their expansion in the neighbourhood, which not only affects European security, but of the country as well. Moreover, this constitutes evidence that the promotion of European interests is closely tied with Romanian national interests. The 41<sup>st</sup> entry shows a clear interest related to the promotion of cooperation both on the Southern and Eastern vicinity of the EU while, on the other hand, in entry number 42 the Russian Federation is seen as a source of concern by consolidating its status as a regional power and also interfering in Ukraine's, Moldova's, and Georgia's 'European path' (ibid.).

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<sup>28</sup> A special attention is given to Poland with whom Romania launched the B9 initiative analysed later on.

<sup>29</sup> That is, bringing Moldova closer to the EU's vision and norms, thus fulfilling Romania's interests.

Therefore, on one hand, Romania seeks to promote cooperation in the region, while on the other, Russia is perceived as incompatible with this idea, as long as it pursues offensive and assertive policies which forces Romania to see Russia as a threat and turning towards the USA in the process. This can be seen either as a reflection of Romania's engagement with the USA; Russia's policies, and recent events, which clash with Romanian interests; a perception formed by a historical past in, which Russia is perceived either an aggressor and an actor to be appeased, as Angelescu (2011) explains; or even a combination of all three. The subsequent entries (43, 44, 45) give attention to the Western Balkans and the rise of populism, extremism, and deeper ethnic divisions, which could destabilize the region. Furthermore, the document recognizes that the regional energy architecture may undergo changes determined by the eventual harnessing of energy resources from the Black Sea area, with potential projects supported by the European Union and Romania at risk of clashing with their Russian counterparts.

Chapter three pays special attention to threats, risks, and vulnerabilities. Threats are represented as capabilities, strategies, plans, or intentions that may affect values, and national security interests and objectives. Risks represent the probability of an uncertain event which can directly or indirectly impact national security. Lastly, vulnerabilities are described as the result of systemic deficiencies or dysfunctions that may be exploited or may contribute to the materialization of a threat or risk (National Defence Strategy, 2015: 14).

On the threat side, Romania saw the events in the Eastern neighbourhood as generators of instability for the security of the Euro-Atlantic space and a potential source of negative phenomena such as migrations, organized crime, and decrease in regional economic development. Moreover, the frozen conflicts in the Black Sea region and the instability in the western Balkans are perceived as creating additional pressures on Romania, along with pressures from competing energy market projects, which may affect Romania's efforts of assuring a comfortable level of energy security. Furthermore, cyber threats, terrorism, nuclear arms proliferation, and hostile informative actions, especially for influence purposes, may obstruct strategic projects and state decisions (ibid.).

On risks, entry 58 is the most notable (ibid.: 15), which sees regional instability as potentially limiting the country's capacity to promote its strategic objectives, namely the support for Moldova's 'European path', the solving of frozen conflicts, guaranteeing energy security, and the defence of economic activities in the country's exclusive economic zone in the Black Sea and of Romanian communities' rights.

The 65<sup>th</sup> entry ( states that a big vulnerability in the capacity of the state's institutions to assess and mitigate the impact of risks and threats is limited by the persistence of vulnerabilities in the absorption of European funds, the use of public money, energy, critical infrastructure, agriculture, environmental protection, justice, health, education, and scientific research. Another source of vulnerability is the capability of the central and local administrations to implement national and European public policies. Lastly, corruption is seen as a security vulnerability which affects the state as a whole. This puts in evidence Romania's structural deficiency and the partially still present Communist legacy, reflected in institutions which still cripple the country, resulting in mass protests against the government since 2017 and warnings from the EU (Luca, 2019).

At the diplomatic level another source of interest is the promotion of an active diplomacy in consolidating the strategic dialogue inside of the EU and NATO among other international organizations and the deepening of the existing strategic partnership on economic terms<sup>30</sup> (National Defence Strategy, 2015: 21). Another point is the intensification of cooperation with the other partners on the Eastern flank of NATO and, concerning the Black Sea, the promotion of the strategic attributes of the Black Sea region and of the cooperation initiatives in this area.<sup>31</sup>

### **3.3 The Presidency of the Council of the EU and the Black Sea (Jan. 2019-Jun. 2019)**

The first ever Romanian Presidency of the Council of European Union started on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019. The Member States holding the Presidency work closely together in groups of three, called "trios", a system introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. Each member has a presidency of six months. The Presidency represents the Council in its interactions with other EU institutions, especially the European Parliament and European Commission and its main role is to find an agreement on the legislative files through trialogues, informal negotiations and Conciliation Committee meetings (European Council, n.d.-b).

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<sup>30</sup> The Strategic partnership with the US for example, as USA energy multinational companies such as ExxonMobil have offshore gas projects investments and economic ties in this sector are being strengthened between the two partners.

<sup>31</sup> By this we understand that the Black Sea is to be brought into evidence along with the opportunities it might offer and the promotion of existing cooperation initiatives in the region such as the BSS and the BSEC.

For a period of six months, from January 1<sup>st</sup> until June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the motto chosen by the Presidency was “Cohesion, a Common European Value” (Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2019). The Romanian Presidency Programme for the Council of the EU acknowledges the European project’s need of a “creative and enhanced perspective to overcome the challenges it is currently facing and to provide new impetus to the integration process” (ibid.: 3). Under the umbrella of "cohesion", the Romanian Government has grouped the priorities into four pillars, namely: 1. Europe of convergence - growth, cohesion, competitiveness, connectivity (ibid.: 3); 2. Europe of safety - EU internal security, management of external borders, cyber security (ibid.: 5); 3. Europe, as global player - EU-NATO partnership, Black Sea synergy, expansion into Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership, trade treaties (ibid., 6); 4. Europe of common values - citizen participation in the legislative process and combating misinformation online (ibid.: 7)

Concerning our study, it is worth noting the programme’s identification of Turkey as a candidate country and a key partner for the EU in many areas, which we will discuss further ahead; the recognition of the Romanian Presidency as a proper moment to discuss the Eastern Partnership’s (EaP) post-2020 future; and the special focus on strengthening the “concrete” EU answers to the ‘European aspirations’ of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. Moreover, regarding the Black Sea it emphasizes the reaffirmation of the “importance of the Black Sea on the European Union’s agenda, including from the perspective of reinvigorating the Black Sea Synergy and of moving forward projects under the Three Seas Initiative” (Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2019: 7).

Enlargement policy is considered a foundation for stability and prosperity; therefore, the programme states that special attention will be given to candidate countries and potential candidates with impact on ensuring “stability and security in the region” (ibid.: 14). As part of the efficiency of the EU’s external action, Romania pledges support for the High Representative in strengthening the CSDP, in order to improve the EU’s defence capabilities, within a framework of complementary and strengthened partnership with NATO (ibid.: 17). It is worth mentioning that an EU-NATO Joint Declaration was signed in 2016 in Warsaw, in order to boost the cooperation between the two organizations in key areas such as defence capability, research and development, and countering hybrid and cyber threats and terrorism.

Special attention was to be devoted to the Western Balkans in order to improve the security and development of the EU’s immediate neighbourhood. An enhanced consistency of the EU’s

actions in its Eastern neighbourhood was seen as an objective, and Romania proposed extending the benefits of the free trade agreements and in connectivity with EaP countries in the transports, energy, and digital fields. This translates into enhanced incentives and benefits as a way to accommodate Moldova,<sup>32</sup> Ukraine, and Georgia's approximation to the EU.

Moreover, a special focus was placed on "enhancing the specific responses" the EU can give to aspiring countries. This is a way to mitigate the problems Yazgan (2017) identified, as the EaP countries have not been deeply committed to the EU's norms since their accession prospects are almost non-existent and their immediate benefits are few. Furthermore, Romania sought to reaffirm the importance of the Black Sea on the EU agenda and the new EU strategy for Central Asia in which Romania seeks to revitalize the relations between the EU and Central Asian countries by contributing in fields such as water resources management, education, and connectivity.

Concerning Turkey, the programme states that "as Turkey is a candidate country and a key partner of the EU in fields such as migration management, combating terrorism and Euro-Atlantic and regional security, the Romanian Presidency will make every effort to impart a pragmatic and constructive dynamic to EU-Turkey relations" (ibid.: 19). As a supporter of Turkey's accession to the EU, it is worth considering Romania's interest in developing better relations with Turkey in the BSR, in order to bring a regional "heavyweight" closer to Romania. Turkey's history, geography, security, and economic interests make the Black Sea an important region for the country. It took a leading role in creating the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in 1992, and in setting up the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task force (BLACKSEAFOR) and Black Sea Harmony, in order to promote cooperation between littoral states.

Viewed from Bucharest, Turkey has been a major regional actor for centuries and, in the past 25 years, has taken the lead in promoting a constructive, future-oriented agenda for the Black Sea region. Turkey's political, economic and military capacity entitles it to play such a role also in the future. Recent regional developments have brought home the notion that Turkey is also a significant actor in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern space. In a statement that reflects the feelings of most Romanians, the President of Romania

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<sup>32</sup> Further ahead in this dissertation, we will analyse the Romanian-Moldovan relation.

described Turkey as ‘indispensable ally for regional stability’ (New Strategy Center and Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation, 2017: 3).

Lastly, the programme portrays the EaP’s consistency as a ‘successful’ EU policy in the last decade and, as the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the initiative occurred during the presidency, Romania will be involved in the implementation of the agenda and of the communication strategy for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in cooperation with other international actors interesting in promoting the EaP’s objectives. Moreover, informal meetings in order to ‘foster a reflection process on the future EaP after 2020’ were planned to be conducted (Programme of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2019: 19).

Overall the programme approached some relevant issues in matters of disparities across the EU. Given Romania’s location and the common history shared by Romania and Moldova, it would have been prudent to give more attention to the latter, although this did not happen. The idea of ‘cohesion’ is highly relevant, as the EU is facing a period of fragmentation driven by issues such as the UK’s impending departure from the European integration project, internal turmoil, disunity, along with substantial disparities in levels of development between its members.

The programme aimed at greater convergence across the entire Union as a priority, in order to stimulate economic and social development for all Member States and for all European regions. The Romanian Presidency will aim for the EU policies to be permanently in line with the principle of cohesion among Member States, regions and all citizens as stated:

We consider cohesion to be a common European value, as well as an expression of unity among the countries and regions of the European Union. The promotion of economic and social convergence is essential to the Union’s harmonious, balanced and sustainable development, which can be achieved by closing the development gaps among various regions and creating genuinely equal opportunities for all citizens (ibid.: 2).

New member states, such as Bulgaria and Romania for instance, have been seen as the ‘backyard’ of the EU and have been relegated to a ‘second tier’ membership while their accession to the Schengen area is still pending (Romania Insider, 2019). Just like any EU member state, Romania strives to be treated with equal respect and to enjoy equal rights, while also taking into consideration its participation in the decision-making process. Ignoring this reality would result in



this member state's alienation towards the EU and even become easy targets for populist and Eurosceptic agendas with repercussion on the European project as a whole.

One of the marks of the Romanian presidency was the 2019 informal summit of Sibiu. The 27 European Union leaders present at the informal summit, hosted by President Klaus Iohannis, adopted the Sibiu Declaration, a ten-point commitment: "We will defend one Europe; We will stay united, through thick and thin; We will always look for joint solutions; We will continue to protect our way of life, democracy and the rule of law; We will deliver where it matters most; We will always uphold the principle of fairness; We will safeguard the future for the next generations of Europeans; We will protect our citizens and keep them safe by investing in our soft and hard power; Europe will be a responsible global leader" (EU27 Heads of State, 2019).

In a speech held on 27 August 2019, Iohannis emphasized again the Romanian presidency of the council, the commitment towards the EU, the commitment towards the transatlantic relationship, and the next objectives regarding Romania's membership:

The Sibiu Declaration will remain a relevant landmark: the most important message of the Declaration - that is, "the spirit of Sibiu" - is the confirmation of our willingness to continue, together, the European project. Also, during the Presidency, Romania has proven its deep commitment in strengthening the transatlantic relationship. We have made serious efforts to design a positive EU-US agenda and to deepen the dialogue between the two parties, especially on issues where there are still different approaches. For Romania, several important objectives remain to be met: accession to the Schengen area, which will significantly contribute to strengthening security for the entire area of free movement in the Union, and also accession to the Eurozone, when all conditions are met (Iohannis, 2019a).

Another important detail of the Romanian presidency programme was the support for Turkey as a candidate member, as briefly mentioned previously. From a political perspective, Turkey's relationship with the EU and the US has been deteriorating in recent years. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 paved the way for a stronger Kurdish government, therefore the US was seen as a destabilizing force in the middle east and in the Black Sea the same opinion holds, as Aydin (2012) argues. NATO's presence induces Russia to perceive it as an encroachment in its sphere of influence which, in turn, makes Turkey reluctant in its commitment with the Alliance. As Sanders

claims, “Turkey’s pursuit of an independent multidimensional foreign policy has strained the relations with the US (...). Strained Turkish-US relations in turn, created opportunities for Turkish-Russian relations” (Sanders, 2014: 64), while improvement in relations between Turkey and Russia may create concerns for the EU. Turkish Foreign policy under the AKP government has been shaped by Davutoglu’s doctrine of ‘‘Strategic Depth’’ and a policy of ‘‘zero problems with neighbours’’:

For Davutoglu, Turkey’s Ottoman past, historical and cultural links with the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Gulf, Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas gives Turkey geographical depth which makes it central to security and stability in these areas. The policy goal of ‘zero problems with neighbours’ is aimed at settling long standing differences and reducing tensions with immediate neighbours and former adversaries (ibid.: 58).

From Turkey’s perspective, it does not want the Black Sea to become a conflict zone between Russia and NATO and compromise the Russo-Turkish security condominium, As Delanoë (2014) argued,

...recent changes occurring on the Black Sea maritime stage might lead to an enhanced duopolistic Russian-Turkish security condominium in the region. Russia and Turkey share a common interest in maintaining the status quo in the region and have sought to not openly challenge each other’s interests in what they consider as their shared neighbourhood (ibid.: 379-380).

As far as relations between Turkey and Romania go, Turkey supported Romania’s application for NATO and Romania participated for the first time as a NATO member at the Istanbul Summit in June 2004. In 2011 the two countries signed a strategic partnership. Romania’s support for Turkey’s aspirations for European integration implied in the discourse and in the previously mentioned in the Romanian Presidency of the Council of EU (2019) reflects the amiable relations between the two countries and of mutual benefit, especially in trade and security. From a geopolitical perspective, Turkey sees the relation with Romania as a way to engage in its immediate neighbourhood (Balkans), whereas for Romania it is an opportunity to gain leverage

and weaken the Russian influence in the Black Sea, gain more partners in the region, and add more depth to their relation as an EU and NATO frontier country:

For Romania, the strategic partnership with Turkey has an additional geopolitical benefit: this is supposed to be an element of weakening the Russian-Turkish domination in the Black Sea region. In turn, for Turkey, this is an element of its policy of broader engagement in its immediate neighbourhood and strengthening its position in its dealings with Russia. (Dabrowski, 2011).

However, Turkey's and Romania's vision for the Black Sea is different. Romania supports an increasing engagement from the USA and the EU in order to "internationalize" the sea and has also expressed the wish of a revision of the Montreux Convention to be considered, whereas Turkey does not desire external actors to become more active in this region, demonstrating a wish to preserve the agreement on the Straits and the status quo (ibid.), which is also in line with Aydin's (2012) and Delanoe's (2014) remarks.

Turkey's most important trade partner in the Balkan region is Romania, which in 2017 ranked 15th in exports from Turkey and 17th in imports. Romania's exports to Turkey consist mostly of vehicles, other than railway or tramway rolling stock, parts, and accessories, iron and steel products, while importing machinery, mechanical appliances, nuclear reactors, boilers and parts (Ercan, 2017). As of 2019, Romania continues to be Turkey's biggest trading partner in South-Eastern Europe, and the two economies have an interesting dynamic in terms of trade. However, the two countries possess somewhat divergent interests when it comes to their affiliation with the US and the EU, and this can be seen as a reflection of their roles in the region, with Romania attempting to balance the Russo-Turkish condominium and the status quo in the Black Sea Region seeking to "Internationalize"<sup>33</sup> it as Dabrowski (2011) previously mentioned.

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<sup>33</sup> To be clearer regarding the "Internationalization" of the BSR, it consists mainly in the revision of the Montreux Convention and the ease of access of non-Black Sea states' warships in the Black Sea, and an overall increase of engagement in the region by the West.

### 3.4 A balancing act between EU and NATO?

The Romanian presidency programme's mentioning of the "strengthening the CSDP in order to improve the EU defence capabilities, within a framework of complementary and strengthened partnership with NATO" (Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2019: 17) was a surprise, at a time when France and Germany had hinted at the creation of an EU army, considering Angela Merkel's speech to the European Parliament in 2018 (Stone, 2018). This is evidence of Romania's overall interest in maintaining ties to both of these organizations, and at the same time abstains to give primacy of one over another. This reflects Romania's engagement in the Black Sea also. We will attempt to explain this at the end of the current chapter, after analysing two speeches by Romanian President Klaus Iohannis.

In a speech given on 15 August 2019, on the occasion of Romania's Navy Day, Iohannis stated that "The Black Sea and its whole region possesses a geo-strategic importance not only for Romania but for the entire Euro-Atlantic space" and "The Black Sea region is a region of geostrategic interest for the North Atlantic Alliance as much as for the European Union" (Iohannis, 2019b). Moreover, Iohannis added that "Romania, as a member of these two organizations, belongs to a common security and defence space" (ibid.). He touched on the Romanian past Presidency of the European Council and the informal Sibiu meeting by saying that "At the end of the informal summit held at Sibiu on May 9 we, the European leaders, pledged to defend, one Europe - from East to West, from North to South" (ibid.). Right after this, Iohannis mentioned that the same principle applies to NATO, "one for all and all for one, which offers us the guarantee of protection and defence" (ibid.).

Concerning the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, Iohannis said that one of the priorities for the presidency was the "promotion of the consolidation of the defence capacities and security of the Union in tight connection with those similar in NATO" (ibid.). Right after, Iohannis stated that another objective of the Presidency was the "reaffirmation of the Black Sea's importance on the EU's agenda" (ibid.). From this we can observe that his speech alternated between NATO and the EU, implying that both carried the same level of importance. Iohannis never mentioned Russia, but he did mention that the Black Sea region was confronted by "complex provocations in its security and in order to discourage any "hostile acts" in the BSR, a

coordinated, coherent, and comprehensive approach was necessary in all levels including political, economic, transports, energy, environment, and especially societal resiliency”(ibid.).

In a speech given at the White House in June 2017, when confronted with a question regarding Russian aggression and how much of a concern Russia is, Iohannis replied

Everybody is concerned, but you see, being concerned should lead you to being prepared. So, in my opinion, we have to be very clear, very simple, and very straightforward if we talk about Russia and with Russia. In my opinion, we need dialogue... but, on the other hand, we need what we all together decided in NATO - a strong deterrence. So, this combination - strong deterrence and dialogue - should lead towards a solution which is feasible for every part (Iohannis, 2017).

This defensive attitude, which Romania employed throughout centuries, seems even today to be present in the sense that, once Romania ensures the support of a ‘great power’ and manages to secure its own security interests, it strives to act as a mediator between the interests of ‘‘Great Powers’’. As Seagal (2008) argues,

Due to its geopolitical setting, located at the crossroad of interests [the U.S., EU, Russia and China], Romania will continue to serve as the pylon of equilibrium that balances the U.S. and other European powers. (...) Romania has continued to preserve its defensive identity through the centuries, serving as a messenger of diplomacy even now into the 21st Century (ibid.: 169).

Moving ahead to some of intergovernmental organizations planed for the region, the Bucharest 9 initiative (B9) was proposed by Romanian and Polish presidents, Klaus Iohannis and Andrzej Duda, during the Bucharest Summit in November 2015. The initiative proposed to strengthen the dialogue and support NATO’s objectives aimed at improving the security and stability between the Baltic and Black Seas. The main objective of this initiative is to create a platform to strengthen the dialogue and consultations among nine NATO allies: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary. The Bucharest 9 has reflected a regionalist approach to security advocated by its founding members: Poland and Romania.

On 8 June 2018 the B9 states gathered in Warsaw and produced a Joint Declaration of the Heads of State. The declaration expressed words such as ‘reaffirmation’ of NATO as a cornerstone of security and collective defence; confidence in NATO’s ‘strengthening’; welcoming of ‘solidarity’ and ‘commitment’ between allies; deep concerns regarding Russia’s actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine; along with ‘challenges’ to the territorial integrity of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova; and lastly concerns related to the threats and challenges stemming from the Southern neighbourhood. As for the Black Sea, the document stated that the countries were welcoming the progress made in establishing a NATO forward presence between the Baltic and the Black Sea (B9 Heads of State, 2018).

The 3SI (Three Seas Initiative) - or Trimarium as a reference to the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas -, unites twelve EU member states and started as a Polish-Croatian regional project defined as ‘a political platform to promote connectivity among nations in Central and Eastern Europe by supporting infrastructure, energy, and digital interconnectivity projects’ (Wemer, 2019).

Both of these initiatives are related to a new concern regarding security threats in the region, most notably Russia’s growing assertiveness, but also the recognition of the lacking cooperation and infrastructure along the North-South axis. In 2017, Poland received Donald Trump in Warsaw, alongside the other members from the Three Seas Initiatives. In this context, the US President considered the meeting ‘incredibly successful’ while also commenting that:

America is eager to expand our partnership with you. We welcome stronger ties of trade and commerce as you grow your economies. And we are committed to securing your access to alternate sources of energy, so Poland and its neighbours are never again held hostage to a single supplier of energy (Beckwith, 2017).

Even though Trump’s participation in the Warsaw meeting managed to bring the 3SI into the International public eye, both the 3SI and B9 initiatives are still in their infancy and do not carry yet any tangible geopolitical meaning. Nonetheless, they have the potential to ‘revitalize’ the relations and cooperation among the countries in the region. Moreover, Chinese initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the 16+1 cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries are also projects that can work well with the Three Seas Initiative, since they

may complement each other and find a synergetic relation in the future. Yet, these initiatives may also raise disunion in the EU. Rotaru and Umland (2017) argue that Trump's endorsements made the EU suspicious, since "the initiative might eventually serve U.S. more than EU interests. Many German officials, including Chancellor Angela Merkel, reportedly believe that the 3SI is an attempt to divide the European Union and to balance against Germany and France within the EU." We also cannot ignore the possibility that Trump's strong endorsement of this initiative might as well have been made with the intent to provoke such suspicious attitude since his disruptive reputation in matters of discourse precedes him. We can also argue that a divided EU is beneficial for the US.

Support for the US in some of the Eastern European states such as Poland and the Baltic states is very visible, as most of these states do not think that the EU can protect them and so NATO, and the US in particular, are seen as the only entities that can protect their territorial integrity. Distrust towards Germany, including from Ukraine, as an actor that would "sell" them to the Russians in exchange for gas is very present, not to mention the historical agreements between Germany and Russia, the three partitions of Poland, or the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that is still present in not only Poland's or the Baltic States' memories, but also in Romania (Mirovaley, 2019).

In Poland's case, despite its population being pro-European, the government clashed on many occasions with the EU, while at the same time showing more preference for ties with the US than the EU. According to the newspaper *The Economist* (2017), this situation gives Germany reasons for suspicion, and there is the perception that by drawing these member states closer to the US might be an attempt to divide Europe.

There is an old concept with which the 3SI bears resemblance, although in methods they differ very much. The Intermarium, as it was called, started by being a political project of Polish national supremacy at the regional level and, at the same time, an anti-Russian pan-east-European concept. The 3SI seems like a revival of this geopolitical idea with similar goals – containing the influence of Russia, while 'bandwagoning' and promoting US interests, which replaced France as the power who influenced the region during the inter-war period. These countries, apart from Austria, share a post-communist heritage and some of them display "illiberal" or ultra-conservative tendencies such as the V4 (Visegrad Group), comprised of Czech Republic, Hungary,

Poland and Slovakia. As a result, some perceive this new regional platform as the sign of a geopolitical opposition of Eastern members to their Western counterparts (Kurecic, 2018).

Friedman (2017) views Romania and Poland as the two foundations of this new form of an old concept. According to the author, some are worried about this formation, as we have seen. Few want to revert to a Cold War geopolitics, while most Europeans want to “accommodate” Russian interests without creating a containment line. The EU also feels somewhat challenged by it, as most of this “Neo-Intermarium” project is composed of members out of the Eurozone seeking to promote regional integration, which might conflict with the EU. Friedman (ibid.) views this, not just as an alliance, but also as a sign of rupture in the EU’s ideology, since most of the members have clashed with the EU on different occasions. However, the 3SI is, by and large, seen as just an idea, portrayed as an attempt at promoting regional cooperation by its members through a North-South axis in complement to the already existing West-East axis between Eastern Europe and Germany (ibid.).

In Romania, such debates on whether to choose between US ties over the EU also rose up; however, the President of Romania Klaus Iohannis expressed his dissatisfaction that some politicians in Romania are talking about a choice to be made in this context. He considered this idea as “toxic” and “counterproductive” and a “false” choice, stating that the partnerships with the EU, the USA and NATO are the three pillars of Romanian foreign policy and should be treated with equal importance (Realitatea.net, 2018). As Rotaru and Umland (2017) argue “Bucharest, by contrast, is as strong a supporter of the EU as of NATO and conducts a foreign policy more in line with the Romanian population’s similarly pro-European feelings.” The B9 and 3SI are seen by Romania as instruments to enhance EU-NATO and Eastern-Western European cooperation, rather than a platform which creates disunion between EU members. This dissertation argues that both organizations carry the same level of importance, another factor influenced by the country’s foreign policy, geography, and historical background. Thus, it must be understood that Romania acts as a balance between the US’s and the EU’s interests in the Black Sea region. As Bonnemains (2010) argues,

Romania is a historic European country willing to integrate the European Union by complying with the Union’s criteria. Romania’s transatlantic identity is necessary for the security of the country by the integration in NATO, which could be materialized only with



the U.S.' support. When Romania's "European" identity was arguably put in danger, Romania found a middle way so that, in time, both US support and evolving EU norms were secured [...]. CEECs [Central and Eastern European Countries] do not want to be forced "to choose" between the United States and Western Europe; they want good relations with both, making "the leaders of eastern European states uncomfortable" when divergences occur (Bonnemains, 2010: 501-502).

As the EaP faces difficulties and its future is uncertain, the Black Sea Synergy (BSS) - a project that was put aside when the EaP started -, could serve as a potential replacement. With such a project, Romania could put regional partnerships (with Poland for example) in the framework of the Three Seas initiatives to good use and find ways to approach issues like EU-Turkey relations or promoting stability in the South Caucasus.

The B9 and 3SI have the potential to consolidate the EU's and NATO's border or as Friedman (2017) to strengthen the regional presence of countries such as Poland and Romania. That is, if they do not remain mere talking groups without any recognizable impact. The extension of membership to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, as Rotaru and Umland (2017) suggest, may complement the EaP. These three countries have signed, between 2014 and 2017, Association agreements with the EU; yet, they remain within Europe's "Grey Zone", without membership perspectives for the foreseeable future. Extending the membership of these two initiatives to the three countries will not be necessarily to save them from the problems they currently face, but it will provide a platform for them countries to belong to some concrete intergovernmental project within the EaP, with some political and economic substance, "raising the stakes for Russia in a possible escalation" (ibid.) and preparing these countries for future membership in both the EU and NATO. As Rotaru and Umland (ibid.) argue, these two initiatives will not necessarily solve the complicated territorial issues present in these countries. But they have the potential, for both Poland and Romania, to continue the integration of their neighbours, since they enjoy a more pronounced historical, geographical, or cultural proximity with these three EaP countries which is an advantage. In the next subchapter we will approach the relations between Romania and Moldova.

### 3.5 The Moldovan Question

Politically the country remains divided between proponents of close integration with Russia or the West. The Moldova of today is the heir of the Moldavian Socialist Republic and, with the collapse of the USSR, it had a promising starting point in the process of becoming a democratic state. In the first years of independence, Moldova signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, privatized mass media, adhered to the International Convention on Child rights, and started a process of reform towards a market economy. This proved to be very difficult, due the character of the reforms implemented, from political, economic, social to cultural. Musteata (2012) argues that the totalitarian past has a huge impact on Moldovan state development and its oscillations from East to West vectors. The society is divided on many aspects ranging from territorial, political, economic social and cultural. Issues on the domain of identity remain a main topic for Moldavian society, not only regarding the divergences between the majoritarian population and the minorities, but also between Romanian-speaking population with some of them identifying themselves as “Romanians” and others as “Moldavians” - a distinct ethnic and linguistic identity. From Musteata’s point of view this ‘moldavianism’ is a soviet invention, elaborated and promoted by the Stalinist regime (ibid.). The adherents to moldavianism view themselves as ‘statists’ and promote a specific identity of the Moldovan Republic, while the promotion of the Romanian values is seen as a threat to the Moldavian statehood (ibid.).

As the medieval principality of Moldova was comprised of a region which stretched more or less from the Dniestr to the Carpathians, and half of it is in today’s Romania, the two halves being separated by the Prut river, ex-president Vladimir Voronin claimed in an interview that the Romanian authorities discriminate a Moldavian ‘minority formed by 10 million Moldavians’ living in Romanian territory (Ziarul Prahova, 2007).

The Moldavian society is also full of ambiguities, such as when the PCRM (Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova) leaders celebrate the national hero Stefan III of Moldavia as the defender of Moldavian statehood and Christianity and, on the same day, they visited Lenin’s monument. Or on Easter holidays they visited Lenin’s monument and after they went to the Cathedral as ‘good Christians’. On 9 of May, another ambiguity happens, as some parts of the population celebrate Victory day against Fascism and others celebrate the Day of Europe (Musteata, 2016).

Oleksy (2018) argues that the issue of a common identity is the country's greatest problem. According to the national census of 2014, 75% of the citizens declare themselves as Moldovans, 7% as Romanians, Ukrainians 6.6%, Gagauzes 4.6%, Russians 4.1%, and Bulgarians 1.9%. As such three quarters would identify themselves as being Moldavian. But, at the same time, about 25% of the group that defines themselves as Moldovan supports a unification with Romania, while another 25% of that group would like to be incorporated into Russia. This is another proof of the population's identity confusion or cognitive dissonance. In the author's view, the political life in Moldova is divided into three approaches: the post-Soviet Moldovanism (following the idea created in the Soviet Union as a civilization related to Russia), Unionism (which views the Romanian speaking people of Bessarabia as a part of the Romanian Nation), and the third which is a pragmatic state patriotism (ibid). The first two deal with emotions, and the third one, although supported by most of the society, was never accepted by the "intelligentsia" (ibid.). This view was used by the business elites, which avoided the topic of identity, while at the same time looting the state.

Oleksy (ibid.) writes that it is often argued that Moldovans are an artificial nation, or an invention of Soviet politics, while pointing out that all nations include some kind of artificial social construct that came to be in some historical period. Before the Romanians appeared, no one thought that such a "nation" existed. The Soviet Union simultaneously deconstructed and constructed nations. The majority of Moldovans declare themselves as Moldovans, and have their own state, but the politicians fail to provide a coherent national identity to the masses which, in turn, benefits the local oligarchs by profiting and abusing the population's emotions in a geopolitical tug between the 'West' and Russia (ibid.). So, Moldova's foreign policy is a reflection of a conflicting identity, as mentioned earlier.

Litra (2014) identifies three trends for the country's foreign policy since independence. The first one was inherited from the Soviet Union and is a foreign policy carried out within parameters shaped by Russia, in which Moldova complies with the rules imposed by Russia, and the latter, in turn, defends Moldova's interests in relation to others. Simply put, Moldova as a quasi-protectorate.<sup>34</sup> A system, the author argues, informally implemented through the creation of

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<sup>34</sup> The author did not use this term, it was part of my interpretation; "the term 'protectorate' refers to a relatively powerful State's promise to protect a weaker State from external aggression or internal

a Customs Union (CU) in which, unofficially, a degree of sovereignty is ceded to Russia (ibid.). The second foreign policy trend identified was a Romanian-centred agenda, resulting from the strengthening of Romania in political and economic capacities since independence, which, through a set of factors, such as the inefficiency of the Moldovan government, projects carried by the latter and people-to-people contacts permitted the influence of Romania in the government in Moldova. The failure of the Romania-centred policy in the mid-1990s created a strong momentum for developing a foreign policy oriented towards the EU by undertaking reforms in a responsible manner and being rewarded for it. To a great extent, the EU ‘option’ absorbed the Romanian-centred option. These three trends resulted in Moldova following a multi-vector policy (ibid.). The author argues that

the combination of the three foreign policy trends created in the late 1990s and early 2000s the so-called multi-vector policy. This means a policy lacking strategic direction and results, and of balancing between the West and Russia, trying to use differences between them to its advantage. Other countries in the region, such as Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia, have used this approach in the past (ibid.: 61).

In Moldova’s case, this multi-vector policy became a weakness, since the country’s interest was replaced by an oligarchy who courted either the ‘West’ or Russia for their own profit. Since 2009 to the time of the writing of this dissertation, this multi-vector policy came to an end, as Moldova signed an AA/DCFTA with the EU which excludes the possibility of joining the CU, unless it gets reverted or the two projects do not exclude each other, which is hard to attain considering the current state of affairs (ibid.).<sup>35</sup> The author argues that many Moldavian policies were guided by fears of Russia and the re-arrangement of its foreign policy towards the ‘West’ follows the same principles. Litra (2014) claims, by comparing the two actors which exerted influence on Moldova, that

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disturbance, in return for which the protected entity yields certain powers to the protector” (Trilsch, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Joining the Eurasian Economic Union would mean that Ukraine will have to opt out of the Association Agreement and re-establish the tariffs imposed by the Eurasian Economic Union to trade with the EU. Moreover, AA implementation implies large-scale “acquis” approximation – a process, which is difficult to reverse or just stop, once it has been launched (Litra, 2014).

The EU's positive conditionality was implemented in accordance with the model by which Moldova carries out reforms and gets rewards in return. If Moldova does not implement reforms, then no support follows, but also no punishment. In contrast, Russia's approach is a combination of hard and soft security tools, often applying negative conditionality such as energy tools or trade restrictions, which means that if Moldova acts to the detriment of Russian interest, it is punished (ibid.: 62).

In the author's view, the choice of favouring the EU over Russia also resulted from the fear of losing the capacity of taking strategic decisions independently, which resulted in the AA/DCFTA. As such, Moldova was forced to make a real choice, as both Russia and the EU created a zero-sum game, and the regional status quo was altered after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

As far as the prospects of re-unification with Romania, which is a recurrent theme in the public sphere of both countries, it potentially problematic to assume that the two countries view themselves as one, as we have seen. The idea is very present in the Romanian "Unionist" wing and even in far-right groups that advocate for a return to the once "Greater Romania". Although Romanians view Moldavians, to great extent, as belonging to the same "identity", in Moldova it is a source of conflict and it is supported only by a minority. Romanian authorities' discourse towards Moldova has a deep influence in the latter's politics and on Transnistria, the separatist region made up mostly of Russian ethnics, which unilaterally declared independence after the dissolution of the USSR in fear of a possible unification with Romania.

Between 2007 and 2017, Romania developed a competence in managing its relationship with Moldova. At the same time, through a commitment made by Romania in the Official Assistance for Development, Romania had to offer to others what it benefited from international donors during the pre-accession period to the EU. Moldova is the main beneficiary of this development assistance and, in this context, Moldova has offered an opportunity for Romania's exercise of this competence. At the beginning of the reference period (2007-2009) the assistance granted was realized in a way specific to the 1990s: generalist, without ordering priorities, and without monitoring the expected results and effects. Since 2010, the granting paradigm of aid has changed significantly, becoming focused on obtaining results (Barbulescu, 2018).

In 2018, Romania provided 252 million USD in total Official Development Assistance (ODA). 180.6 million USD was accorded multilaterally, 32.4 million USD bilaterally, and the rest

6.5 million USD multilateral/bilateral. The main recipient of the bilateral ODA was Moldova, with 24 million USD, followed by Turkey and Serbia, with 6 and 4 million USD, respectively (OECD, 2019).

Moldova presents a very uncertain political and economic outlook and a hard business environment for foreign direct investments. It is the poorest country in Europe, and it has a low level of productivity. Corruption, weak governance, oligarchy, and clientelism, in addition to its heavy dependence on remittances from expatriate workers, coupled with separatist tendencies are a source of great weakness for the country. However, it possesses a huge agricultural potential in products such as wine, vegetables, sunflowers, wheat, and an inexpensive labour force.

As of the time of the writing of this dissertation, Romania is the main economic partner of Moldova. In 2017 the top export destinations of Moldova were Romania (729 million USD), representing 25% of total exports; Italy (301 million USD), and Russia (279 million USD) (OECD World, 2019). On the import side, the top origin was also Romania, with (792 million USD), representing 16% of total imports. Romania continues to increase the levels of cooperation in the economic, educational, and cultural areas, and is the main supporter for Moldova's advance towards the European integration process. The relations between the two countries have witnessed an upward trend during 2010-2015, through intensified cooperation in various fields. In recent years, Romania has supported Moldova both economically, through private investment, loans, and aid granted by the Romanian state; and culturally, through the financing of various projects in the education field (Bodrug and Petre, 2015). It is expected that the two countries develop even more solid bilateral relations in the future, given the intensity of trade and the investments in Moldova made by Romanian state or private entrepreneurs and the former's approximation to the EU, unless this approximation to the 'West' is reverted by the ruling elites. Moreover, Romania may be the provider of expertise in a democratic transition of Moldova.

Since Moldova signed the Association Agreement with the EU, Russia has hiked the price it charges Moldova for gas and piled pressure on the country to abandon its search for alternative supplies. Romania started exporting natural gas to Moldova in early March 2015 (Necsutu, 2019), and in the next section we are going to talk about Romania's impact on the regional energy scene.

### 3.6 Romania and the Energy Security Projects in The Black Sea Region

Due to the high dependence on imports and concerns about the reliability on Russian gas sources, energy security has become a particularly important matter on the European Union's foreign policy agenda over the last decade. The EU relies, to great extent, on natural gas from Russia, and, in 2017, 66% of the EU's natural gas had to be imported. In 2015, 74.8% of the EU's import needs were represented by Norway and Russia. Reducing dependence on Russian gas supplies was a major motivator in the EU strategy for diversifying energy supply. According to statistical data provided by the European Commission (2017) (Table 1), Romania remains an important producer of natural gas in the European Union, especially in the South-East region (Tanase and Motoc, 2017). At the level of EU28, the demand for natural gas is constantly increasing, while domestic production at the EU-28 internal production is decreasing which increases the energy security risks (ibid.).

Thus, EU member states are significantly dependent on energy imports and have developed a series of plans for the diversification of natural gas suppliers (ibid.: 28). In this respect, the first large-scale plan was the Nabucco pipeline (figure 2). The project envisaged Azerbaijan's natural gas resources be sold on the European market, with Romania being an important transit point in this project. The Nabucco project would have made a considerable contribution concerning the diversification of natural gas supply routes to Europe (ibid: 29). The outcome would've been a reduction in dependence on imports from the Russian Federation which is contrary to Russia's interests and losing market share. Consequently, Russia did not approve the Nabucco plan. Following its sustained opposition, in 2011 the Nabucco project was officially abandoned (Saban, 2011<sup>36</sup>, apud Tanase and Motoc, 2017)

Nabucco was the direct rival of the South Stream (figure 4). In the South Stream project, the Russian gases were to be transported under the Black Sea to Bulgaria, where a northern branch extended on the route Serbia - Austria, and a section south to Italy. In this project, Romania was completely excluded from the route transit. As South Stream was not a viable replacement for the Nabucco project as the imported energy would have come exclusively from Russia, the project wasn't considered beneficial for the EU's initiative of diversifying sources. The plan was

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<sup>36</sup> Saban, Kardas. (2011). Geo-strategic position as leverage in EU accession: The Case of Turkish–EU Negotiations on the Nabucco pipeline. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 35-52.

discontinued at the end of 2014 when Bulgaria (under strict EU directives) blocked the construction of the pipeline on its territory (Reed, 2014). Consequently, the Russian Federation proposed a new expansion plan of the network pipelines, from the perspective of the Turkish Stream project (figure 3). Russian gas is to be transported underneath the Black Sea directly to Turkey, with export prospects to the rest of Europe. “The new Turk Stream pipeline will be operating by the end of 2019 enabling Russia to supply gas to the Balkans via Turkey, bypassing Moldova and Ukraine the previous main routes until now for Russia to export gas to the Balkans” (Necsutu, 2019). The Turkish Stream pipeline makes of Turkey an essential player in the geopolitics of supplying natural gas for the EU, which also constitutes a strong leverage for the former (Tanase and Motoc, 2017). Therefore, the relations between Turkey and EU in the BSR, even if strained, cannot be overlooked.

In response, Member States of the European Union reacted by starting the Southern Corridor plan (figure 3). This project aims to develop a series of gas pipelines stretching from the Caspian Sea region (Azerbaijan) to southern Europe (Italy), presenting the possibility of extension to Central and Eastern Europe. The South Corridor is composed of three pipeline segments, namely: SCP (South Caucasus Pipeline, Azerbaijan-Georgia), TANAP (Trans Anatolian Pipeline, Turkey) and TAP (Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, Greece-Albania-Italy) (ibid.: 30)

To accelerate the integration of the natural gas markets for Central and South-East Europe, and to diversify the supply of natural gas, but also of energy, a high level working group was set up in 2015 consisting of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (Central and South Eastern Europe Gas Connectivity - CESEC). Later, they joined six other Contracting States of the Energy Community: Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. (European Commission, 2018). “The initial aim of the group was to coordinate efforts to facilitate the swift completion of cross-border and trans-European projects that diversify gas supplies to the region and to develop regional gas markets and implement harmonized EU rules to ensure the optimal functioning of infrastructure” (ibid.)

Starting in July 2015 with the CESEC high-level meeting held in Dubrovnik, which resulted in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding and Action Plan (European Commission, 2015a), some progress has been made important in the implementation of energy infrastructure projects for the Central and Eastern Europe’s energy security. One of these projects



is BRUA (Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary-Austria) pipeline (figure 5). This gas pipeline represents a new natural gas transport corridor that provides an interconnection of the states from Eastern Europe with the states in the central area of the EU. BRUA is complementary to the Southern Corridor, representing an alternative in the propagation of natural gas from the Caspian Sea area. Romania is the main actor and promoter of this project, which represents a national security objective; for Romania, BRUA can represent the project through which it can materialize the ambitions of being a regional energy hub. In addition, the BRUA gas pipeline will also use a bidirectional natural gas flow. In other words, Romania can import natural gas if it needs from Hungary and Bulgaria and export the rest of the time without infrastructure changes. Phase II of this project provides linking the BRUA pipeline to a new pipeline that will link additionally link Romania's natural gas from the Black Sea (CESEC, 2018).

Additionally, BRUA will be able to export energy resources that cross the Black Sea under the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector (AGRI) (figure 6) project which envisages transportation of Azerbaijani gas to the Black Sea coast of Georgia via gas pipelines, followed by a liquefaction at a special terminal and subsequently be delivered in tankers to a terminal at the Romanian port of Constanta (Azernews, 2019). Therefore, relations between Georgia and Romania are developing towards more interconnection. On April 16, 2019 Romanian and Georgian Prime Ministers met in order to advance the relations between the two countries regarding international transport corridors connecting Europe and Asia via their territories, as “the Prime Ministers underlined Georgia’s progress on the path to European and Euro-Atlantic integration and the importance of Black Sea security for ensuring common Euro-Atlantic security” (PortSEurope, 2019). Romanian Prime Minister Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă stated that

Romania is a staunch supporter of Georgia’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration. I am convinced that Georgia, through its own efforts, will become a full member of the EU, and we, as the country presently holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU, will support you on this path, and on your path to Euro-Atlantic integration. Georgia’s contribution to Euro-Atlantic security is invaluable, for which we are grateful to you (PortSEurope, 2019).

BRUA represents a concrete chance for the economic and energetic prospects not only for Romania but also for the European partners’ energy security. This has the potential of turning Romania into an energy exporter in the region and in consequence this would provide more foreign

policy options for neighbours that are dependent on Russian gas. However, the aspirations of countries like Turkey, Greece or Romania to be regional hubs can lead to regional rivalries. Notwithstanding, as Gribince (2015) argues, with the help of the EU, countries in the region could learn to work together for the common benefit, since all are vulnerable in terms of energy security; therefore, the Ukrainian crisis can act as a catalyst to encourage regional cooperation in this perspective.

## Conclusion

When I started this dissertation what I had originally proposed was to investigate whether Romania was an active member of the EU in the Black Sea region as not many authors, even native ones have touched upon this theme in the last years. Therefore, I proposed to investigate this case in particular and provide an up-to-date insight into this topic by answering the research question: “*How has Romania's role as an EU Member State evolved in the Black Sea region after Russia's annexation of Crimea?*”. To answer this question, an inquiry into the region’s state of affairs and the main actors operating in the area was conducted in order to create a perspective on their interactions. These actors were mainly the EU, Russia, and Romania. Posteriorly, Romania’s position was analysed in the period 2014-2019 with the aid of some documents such as the National Defence Strategy (2015) and the Programme of the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council (2019), along with other documents and sources in order to draw some conclusions which we will present in this section.

Romania’s foreign policy in the Black Sea region has not been very pronounced: it can be considered to be at an embryonic stage and struggling to find coherence and concrete policies as Angelescu (2011) and Roth (2015a) argue. Moreover, after the revolution, it was characterized by a “voluntary servitude” and the usage of an alleged “western identity” by the elites as a brand in order to gain the benevolence and access the ‘western’ institutions in order to be perceived as less of an “other”.

While agreeing with the authors who criticize the country’s lack of a concrete foreign policy for the region, it is also important to be realistic and recognize that Romania, as it is now at the time of the writing of this dissertation, must shape a country profile in accordance to its levels of political ambition, demographics, and economic capacity, as stated in the National Defence Strategy document (2015). From a strategic perspective, Romania’s own foreign policy in the BSR at first sight shows a low impact in the area. However, Romania’s impact in the area is made through the connections with other ‘big players’ in the region, such as the US and the EU. From the EU, Romania seems to use its regional instruments, namely the EaP and the BSS, and the different fora to promote cooperation, promote its interests and those of the partners, especially in terms of energy. From the US partnership, Romania seems to seek the security it needs in a region where two regional powers (Russia and Turkey) exert considerable influence. A hard balance to

make, nonetheless, since NATO and the EU have not been always on good terms with these countries. Therefore, Romania is a supporter of both of these organizations, and feels ‘uncomfortable’ when faced with the choice between them.

Thirty years after the revolution, Romania is still struggling with the Soviet legacy, as shown in recent protests against the government, due to rule of law infringements. Most of the population has a pro-European feeling and a desire to emulate the ‘West’ and achieve a ‘sense of belonging’ to a European ‘identity’. The Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union was an opportunity for Romania to show its commitment as an EU member and, for that matter, we chose to analyse the programme in this dissertation. However, Romania remains a country whose population is trying to comprehend what it means to be ‘European’ and the values associated with it. This is time costing and a hard process for a country historically at the crossroads of different world views and still in search of its ‘identity’ within the ‘Western’ world.

In its discourse, Romania refrains from a hard rhetoric against Russia. Due to its geopolitical location, its defensive mentality, and reluctance in challenging ‘Great Powers’, it has a more moderate discourse towards Russia, while, at the same time, it shows full commitment towards the strategic partnership with the US. Romania sees the US as a guarantor of security to pursue its interests in a region where the security is seriously lacking.

By becoming fully integrated in NATO and in the EU, Romania has developed a more ‘Western identity’ and started to be seen as less of an ‘Other’ by its European partners, which was not present after the revolution and only started to emerge gradually after integrating these organizations. Nonetheless, Romania seems to be still developing its role within NATO and the EU and, at the same time, attempting to do a balancing act between the three pillars of its foreign policy, namely the Strategic Partnership with the US, its membership to NATO, and its membership to the EU.

As of 2019, Romania’s interest seems to still be focused on the Black Sea region and its relations with Moldova; but, at the same time, we noticed Romania’s involvement in the creation of initiatives in the Eastern neighbourhood, such as the Three Seas initiative and the B9, which could revitalize and complement other initiatives such as the EaP, the BSS or even Belt and Road. At the same time, Romania wishes to be a regional energy player with the potential of curbing its neighbours’ dependence on Russian energy imports, although the lack of infrastructure and interconnectivity with the European gas market continues to be a big issue. For that matter steps

towards cooperation, with the support of EU, are being taken within the CESEC, in order to accelerate the integration of the natural gas markets, and the supply diversification of natural gas and of energy. Moldova and Romania possess significant economic, political and cultural affinity with each other, and it is expected that the two countries develop even more solid bilateral relations in the future. Moreover, Romania is attempting to curb Moldova's dependence on Russian energy imports following its orientation towards the EU.

If Romania manages to overcome the difficulties it faces as an EU member state in the Black Sea region, it could prove beneficial not only for the country, but also for its neighbours and potentially new members by sharing and providing the accumulated experience with the Western Balkans, likely the next future EU members. Nonetheless, the Black Sea region remains a zone of confrontation between Russia and the 'West', a zone of 'Big Power' interest and a source of conflict without a clear end in sight. This region is complex and, therefore, in need of further analysis, in order to comprehend it from the perspective of other players in the region, not just the country we proposed to analyse. Moreover, it needs to be analysed from various perspectives.

We conclude by arguing that, despite the aforementioned issues, Romania's position at the crossroads between the interests of the EU, the USA, Russia, and even China could be seen as an opportunity for its actorness and for a successful 'regionalization' of the Black Sea.

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## Annex

Country	1995	2005	2014	2015	% of total (EU 28) year 2015
Romania	16,0	10,7	9,7	9,7	7,52
Bulgaria	0,0	0,4	0,2	0,1	0,08
Hungary	4,2	2,7	1,5	1,5	1,25
Austria	1,4	1,6	1,2	1,1	0,91
Greece	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,00
EU-28	212,2	211,7	130,5	119,8	100,00
Values represent million cubic meters/per year - mcm/year					

**Table 1 – Annual production of natural gas of Romania and some of the CESEC countries and of the EU-28 during the selected years.**

The table was translated by the author of this dissertation but was originally published in Tanase and Motoc (2017) with data provided by the European Commission (2017).





**Figure 1 – Aegis Ashore BMD system in Romania in blue, frozen conflicts in red, and the Russian fleet bases of Sevastopol and Novorossiysk in the Black Sea.**

Source: <https://medium.com/center-for-strategic-and-international-studies/nato-and-russia-in-the-black-sea-a-new-confrontation-8ae70ea08660>



**Figure 2 - Path of the proposed Nabucco pipeline.**

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabucco\\_pipeline#/media/File:Nabucco\\_Gas\\_Pipeline-en.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabucco_pipeline#/media/File:Nabucco_Gas_Pipeline-en.svg)

## Russia-Turkey gas pipeline plans

Moscow and Ankara seek to develop Turkey as a transit route for Russian gas to Europe, avoiding Ukraine



Figure 3 – EU backed pipeline (Southern Gas Corridor) and Russian-backed pipeline (TurkStream).

Source: <https://www.france24.com/en/20180830-turkstream-pipeline-nearly-complete-gazprom>



Figure 4 – The proposed South Stream gas pipeline.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Stream#/media/File:South\\_Stream\\_map.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Stream#/media/File:South_Stream_map.png)



**Figure 5 – The Romanian part of the BRUA pipeline with a possible future connection to the Black Sea.**

Source: <http://www.wraconferences.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/1450-Eric-Rasmussen-European-Bank-for-Reconstruction-and-Development.pdf>



**Figure 6 – The Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector (AGRI).**

Source: <http://www.agrlng.com/Home/EUProjectOfCommonInterest>