



OANA POIANĂ

EU'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE BLACK SEA  
REGIONAL COOPERATION AND THE  
NATIONAL PREFERENCES OF THE  
RIPARIAN STATES

A ZERO SUM GAME PERPETUATED BY  
ENERGY INSECURITY

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**ACER** - Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators

**AGRI** - Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector

**BLACKSEAFOR** - Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group

**BSEC** - Black Sea Economic Cooperation

**BSS** - Black Sea Synergy

**BST** - Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation

**BTC** - Baku-Tbilisi- Ceyhan pipeline

**BTE** - Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum Pipeline

**CACR** - Central Asia and the Caspian region

**CDC** - Community for Democratic Choice

**EaP** - Eastern Partnership

**ECSC** - European Coal and Steel Community

**ENI** - European Neighbourhood Instrument

**ENP** - European Neighbourhood Policy

**ENPI** - European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument

**EU** - European Union

**FISPMED** - International Federation for Sustainable Development and Fight against Poverty in the Mediterranean-Black Sea

**GUAM** - Organization for Democracy and Economic Development

**IBR** - Interconnector Bulgaria-Romania

**IBS** - Interconnector Bulgaria-Serbia

**IEA** - International Energy Agency

**IGB** - Interconnector Greece- Bulgaria

**ITB** - Interconnector Turkey-Bulgaria

**ITG** - Interconnector Turkey- Greece

**ITGI** - Turkey-Greece-Italy Interconnector

**LNG** - Liquefied Natural Gas

**NATO** - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

**PAC** - Partnership and Cooperation Agreements

**PCI** - Projects of Common Interest

**PEP** - Pan-European Pipeline

**SCP** - South Caucasus Pipeline

**SEEP** - South East Europe Pipeline

**SGC** - Southern Gas Corridor

**TANAP** - Trans-Anatolian natural gas pipeline

**TAP** - Trans Adriatic Pipeline

**UBCCCE** - Union of Black Sea and Caspian Confederation of Enterprise

**US** - United States

**VGC** - Vertical Gas Corridor

**WBSR** - Wider Black Sea Region

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# CHAPTER 1: STUDY OVERVIEW

## 1.1. Introduction

Back in 1814-1815, during the Congress of Vienna, the great powers were setting the basis of a new political order by restoring the balance of power on the European continent. A leap in time across two centuries reveals an unstable and unpredictable European security architecture dominated by geopolitics of resentment and rising tides of conflict. The polarity of the European system took a critical turn in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when Russia entered a period of open contestation of the European order showing a renewed impetus in pursuing its irredentist ambitions. Conversely, the mounting Russian threats determined NATO to pre-emptively employ its collective defence and activate the greatest military manoeuvre since the end of the Cold War. This unequivocal return to *Realpolitik* appears to have been determined by an inverted aim of the EU Eastern enlargement which intended to integrate and stabilize the so called Russian “near abroad” through democratic reforms. Paradoxically, in its quest for stability, the enlargement process uncovered the actual depth and the intensity of the East-West division, forcing the main power poles to embark on a long term political confrontation that has all the premises to become a military confrontation.

In the midst of all these hectic competitions between major international powers, the Black Sea Region represents at the moment probably one of the most neuralgic points on the geopolitical world map. A space of constant variation and contrasts, the Black Sea region has been a contested playground of hegemonic powers since ancient times. In this sense, the first identifiable contrast derives from its very own name which according to Strabo was “The Inhospitable Sea” or *Pontos Axeinos*.<sup>1</sup> Although a Greek term, the word *Axeinos* originates from Iran meaning “dark” or “sober”. After its shores became populated by Greek colonies the sea was renamed as “The Hospitable Sea” or *Pontos Euxeinos*.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the older

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<sup>1</sup> Strabo, Geography, VII, 3, available at:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0198%3Abook%3D7%3Achapter%3D3%3Asection%3D6#note-link8>, accessed on 16.07. 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Charles King, *The Black Sea: A history*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 12.

name for the Black Sea was the Pontic Sea which in Greek meant both “sea” and “bridge”.<sup>3</sup> As we will observe throughout this study, the Black Sea region constitutes a bridge and a border between East and West simultaneously uniting and dividing different countries with various economic, political and cultural interests. As for its degree of hospitability and openness, one can only observe that it varies depending on the temporal and spatial frame of reference. Although the body of water remains the same, a look at the sea from the European and Asian continents will definitely render significantly different perceptions.

Similarly, during the Cold War period the Black Sea was a closed sea governed by the rules of a bipolar regional system which increased its isolation. By contrast, the balanced multipolarity of the post-Cold War period has transformed the Black Sea region into a relatively open space, albeit a highly vulnerable one. The last decade however, has marked the beginning of a new geopolitical paradigm characterized by an unbalanced multipolarity as Russia started to regain strong geostrategic points according to its *reconquista* project and thus, reclaim its regional hegemonic power.

The observed variations of the region at different points in time reveal a plethora of metamorphosis. The Black Sea has transformed and transferred itself from a sealed border to an open vital route, from a balanced multipolar regional system to an unbalanced one, from one sphere of influence to another, from anarchy to hierarchy- the only constant characteristic across centuries being its worldwide recognition as a crucial nexus. It is not until we consider its physical map, that we clearly understand its geopolitical significance as a nexus.

Geographically, the region is stretching “from South-Eastern Europe into the western shores of the Caspian Sea, being located at the gateway between the two ends of Eurasia; the EU, the world’s biggest market in the West; and China, the engine of global economic growth in the East.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the region represents the meeting point between European Union (the second largest gas consumer in the world) and Russia (the largest gas producer in the world). Adding to its geopolitical significance, this region also represents a key transit route for the abundant Caspian energy resources to the European market, being thus a battlefield of various energy games developed by global powers and regional hegemony.

Notions such as “pipeline politics” and “resource wars” have dominated the discourse on the Black Sea regional cooperation over the last decades and “have produced a new

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<sup>3</sup> Stella Ghervas, “Conquering peace: exploring European History, Interviews with global historians”, *Global History Forum*, 2014, <http://toynbeeprize.org/global-history-forum/conquering-peace-exploring-european-history-with-stella-ghervas/>, accessed on 16.07.2014.

<sup>4</sup> Mustafa Aydin, “Geographical blessing versus geopolitical curse: great power security agendas for the Black Sea region and a Turkish alternative”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2009, Vol. 9, Issue 3 pp. 271-285.

geography of conflict, a reconfigured cartography in which resource flows rather than political and ideological divisions constitute the major fault lines.”<sup>5</sup> As the confrontational events over energy resources unfolded, the region evolved as a disputed pivotal area and a mean of achieving world power. Implicitly, this caused power imbalances which reshaped not only the interactions between the riparian states, but the region itself.

In such an environment, any political alliance or cooperation agreement requires a very rigorous and pragmatic calculus. The higher the stakes for the great powers, the higher the risks for the weaker states that are caught in between. As a result, the level of cooperation within the Black Sea region waxed and waned over the years being dictated by internal and external hegemony and almost never by the interests of the weaker riparian states. Therefore, in order to understand the regional configuration of forces and the prospect for regional cooperation, one must analyse the interplay between the regional politics and the grand geopolitics of the international system.<sup>6</sup>

After decades of acknowledging, affirming and reaffirming the indisputable strategic significance of the Black Sea region and the importance of finding an inclusive policy that would serve not only the interests of the regional states but also the interests of the external actors involved in the region, no effective policy could be identified despite a series of achievements. Moreover, the region has been caught in a perpetual deadlock, fighting to balance between a deeply rooted Soviet legacy and the Western magnetism, each Black Sea state having a different position on the axis between these two major power poles. Currently, the main regional representatives of the two poles in the region (the EU and Russia) are both undergoing profound systemic transformations meant to improve their status in world affairs and offer new incentives for extending their sphere of influence in the Black Sea area. Although, both actors have recognized the imperatives of change considering the deteriorating economic situation worldwide, the paths they have chosen are significantly divergent.

In the light of these considerations, a widespread discontent over the evolution of the Black Sea regionalization process can be observed at the moment among academics and

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<sup>5</sup> Michael T. Klare, “The new geography of conflict”, *Foreign Affairs*, May/ June 2001, p. 52

<sup>6</sup> Bülent Gökay, “*The politics of oil in the Black Sea area: Turkey and regional power rivalries*” in Tunc Aybak, *Politics of the Black Sea: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2001, p. 15

policymakers alike. The fact that more than 10 years have passed since the European Parliament called for the adoption of an EU strategy on the Black Sea without developing it, represents probably the best evidence that supports these concerns.

Yet, “regional issues of the Black Sea region are not waiting peacefully for the European Commission to put pen to paper”<sup>7</sup>, nor do they remain unaffected by the growing economic crisis. Perhaps, it is now, more than ever, important to establish clearly what it is possible and what it is not in terms of Black Sea regional cooperation. To do so we have to look into the past in order to analyse the interaction records between the Black Sea states and identify the causal mechanisms that built up the current state of affairs.

## 1.2. Methodological framework

This study aims to assess the level of willingness to engage constructively in regional cooperation initiatives within the Black Sea region as opposed to a more reluctant type of Black Sea partnership that uses other forms of cooperation for promoting national preferences. In this respect, the study uses two dimensions of analysis.

The first dimension examines the level of implication in regional schemes of cooperation that aimed to enhance cooperation in a wide range of sectors (economic, security, environmental, maritime), while the second focuses on regional cooperation in the energy sector considering it as an essential driver of the Black Sea regional cooperation.

The position of each Black Sea riparian state would be examined considering the already mentioned dimensions of analysis in correlation with the following corresponding indicators presented in **table 1**.

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<sup>7</sup>Traian Ungureanu, *Black Sea Strategy Debate*, 17 April, Strasbourg, 2012, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20120417+ITEM-018+DOC+XML+V0//NL> (accessed on 18.09.2014).



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