THE BALTIC SEA AND THE BLACK SEA: SECURITY CHALLENGES AND VULNERABILITIES AFTER THE COLD WAR

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Abstract:

After the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the USSR, the international system changed, becoming a unipolar one. Not only did this fact bring a diffusion of power and the reaffirmation of smaller actors/regional powers, the enlargement of several international organizations such as NATO and the EU, but also prompted regional transition and integration.

This paper will focus on two regions that are fundamental in the security environment of Europe and its neighborhood: the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. Both areas suffered important changes after 1990. Furthermore, the areas mentioned have been a rendezvous point for several elements such as the shifting balance of power, political ambitions of smaller states, transit point for global trade routes (Scandinavia, Baltics and the Black Sea) and energy security issues.

The article will take into account the concerns of the actors, outlining their security challenges and vulnerabilities as well as identifying similarities between countries from the two regions addressed. The comparison will further address the issues the regions faced after the end of the Cold War such as the emergence of new countries, political and economic transition with emphasis on cooperation initiatives and integration in NATO and EU. The main aim of the article will be to frame the similarities and differences of the political and security environment of the two regions.

The structure of the paper goes as follows. I will start by laying out a theoretical framework centred upon the concept of security and what it involves and after that I will introduce and define the two regions discussed in the article, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea areas and outline the context each of them faced after the end of the Cold War. The next section will address the threats to the stability of the regions, creating the frame for the last part of the article which will make a comparison between the Baltic and the Black Sea areas.

Rezumat:

Sfârșitul Războiului Rece și dezintegrarea Uniunii Sovietice au marcat transformarea sistemului internațional de la bipolar la unipolar. Această transformare a dus la o reafirmare a puterilor regionale pe scena internațională, la extinderea organizațiilor internaționale și a marcat începutul unui proces de tranziție și integrare regională.

Acest articol se axează pe două regiuni deosebit de importante pentru mediul de securitate european, care au suferit transformări importante după 1990: Marea Neagră și Marea Baltică. Mai mult, acestea reprezintă un punct de întâlnire pentru mai mulți factori cum ar fi balanța puterii, ambițiile politice ale statelor mai mici, rutele globale comerciale și chestiuni din sfera securității energetice.

Lucrarea va puncta provocările la adresa securității și vulnerabilitățile existente, scopul fiind realizarea unei comparații între cele două regiuni. Comparația va aduce în discuție aspectele cu care s-au confruntat cele două regiuni la sfârșitul Războiului Rece, și anume emergența noilor actori, tranziția politică și economică, inițiativele de cooperare regională și integrarea în organizații precum NATO și Uniunea Europeană. Principalul scop al lucrării este acela de a scoate în evidență asemănările și deosebirile mediului de securitate din cele două regiuni.

Articolul va debuta cu o parte teoretică centrată pe noțiunea de securitate, următoarea parte introducând cele două regiuni discutate și contextul existent după 1990. Demersul va urmări ulterior punerea în evidență a provocărilor și vulnerabilităților existente, pentru ca partea de final a lucrării să acopere similaritățile și diferențele existente.

Keywords: regional security, Black Sea region, threats, Baltic Sea region, regional cooperation

Security – theoretical framework

When dealing with security, it is obvious that there is no universally accepted definition of this term. In spite of this, we can narrow this field by posing a few questions as Buzan and Hansen pointed out.¹ They observed that security is related to an “object”, a location, one or more sectors and a

¹ Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10-13.

particular vision of policy. The first question revolves around the “object” of security which is, in their opinion, the state. More, when we take into account phrases such as *national security* or *international security*, the object is still the state. By ensuring the security of the state, automatically the security of the individual is ensured. The second question takes into account the inclusion of both internal and external threats in the problematic of security. After the end of the Cold War, it was clear that both internal and external threats are of equal importance. The third question deals with expanding the area of security beyond the military dimension (The Copenhagen School of Thought), which was the core of its understanding before 1990. The last question encompasses the relation between security, its dynamics and threats.

The Copenhagen School is a name given to a few specialists who published several works that concentrated on security (the most prominent theorists associated with the school were Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde). Their main aim was to expand the definition of security in order to include issues such as the natural environment, poverty, human rights, etc. Their work did not try to give solutions to the posed issues but only established a framework of analysis to deal with security, in theoretical terms.²

The Copenhagen School outlined that the main aspects of security are its areas/sectors, regional security complexes and securitization. The main areas of security are, as pointed out by Buzan: military, political, social, economic and environmental. Security complexes are units found at regional level in which the security relations between two or more states are intertwined in a way that cannot be addressed separate from each other. Securitization refers to the acceptance by the general public that an issue represents a security risk.

Furthermore, there can be distinguished several levels of security: the unit level, the regional and the global level. Units are independent and well defined actors, regions are formed from units that are close, geographically speaking. The major difference between units and regions is that the latter does not have the quality of actor in international relations. The distinction between regional and global can be sometimes difficult to pin point. Without a doubt, the regional is included in the global level, but in some cases it is hard to tell in which of these two an actor operates (for example the US is a global actor while the security dynamic in the Middle East falls under the regional pattern; the problem arises when we refer to actors such as Russia or China – are these regional or global powers/actors?). The regional level was outlined

² Paul D. William, ed., *Security Studies* (London: Routledge, 2008), 68.

as a link between the unit and the global level, after the Cold War ended, the concentration of security related issues being at this level of discussion.

This paper focuses on two cases of regional security, namely the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea regions, both of importance in assessing the regional dynamic of security in Europe and Eurasia.

Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions after the end of the Cold War

Firstly, we need to delimitate the two areas from a geographical point of view in order to be able to discuss specifically the issues that these regions faced after the end of the Cold War. The Baltic Sea area consists of the countries with direct access to the sea, namely Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Poland, Germany and Russia. Before 1990, the area was dominated by the USSR, Sweden and Finland being the buffer states between the two worlds, the Baltic Sea part of the USSR and Norway part of NATO Northern flank. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the USSR brought a total shift of the region which became a hub for international organizations such as the EU and NATO.

Figure 1

Source: <http://era.ideasononeurope.eu/> .

One of the main issues that arose was the economic drawbacks. The creation of new independent states and the transition from centralized economy brought important setbacks in the development of the area. The table below (GDP per capita) illustrates how the regional economies developed, pointing out that the local economies managed to overcome the hardships of the newly environment, creating a prosperous area.

Table 1

<i>Country</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2003</i>
Denmark	25,217	26,283	34,043	31,628	32,361	29,421	38,994
Estonia	5,982	1,074	2,469	3,178	3,693	3,932	6,212
Finland	23,738	16,117	24,470	23,366	24,360	23,153	30,681
Germany	22,286	24,292	29,945	25,598	25,463	22,446	28,986
Latvia	6,176	835	1,792	2,352	2,775	3,303	4,494
Lithuania	6,377	734	1,735	2,675	2,960	3,356	5,107
Norway	26,935	26,508	33,505	35,279	35,092	37,567	49,152
Poland	2,006	2,235	3,376	3,850	4,149	4,709	5,312
Russian Federation	5,375	1,145	2,258	2,850	1,271	2,112	2,999
Sweden	28,662	21,702	27,386	27,281	28,109	24,556	33,513

Source: Clive Archer, ed., *New Security Issues in Northern Europe: The Nordic and Baltic States and the ESDP*, 31. (The figures are in US dollars).

The Black Sea area or the wider Black Sea area, as it is taken into consideration by many specialists and authors, has become a core point on the international agenda after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Before 1990, the region consisted of only USSR, Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The end of the Cold War saw a multitude of new actors arising in the region that faced numerous issues. These actors such as Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia have sought steps to integrate on the international stage, establishing diplomatic relations, seeking integration and partnerships with major international organizations such as NATO and the EU that were eager to cooperate with them. This context created a new balance of power and a surface of divergent interests. Furthermore, it made the Black Sea region

a highly important area also given that it is the shortest route to the Caspian Sea and its resources.³

After the shift in the regional environment, a process of integration in the transatlantic security started through NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program that engaged local actors in cooperation and exercises in the NATO framework. The new shift also meant the opening of commercial routes from Central Asia and the Caspian Sea to Europe. This was very important taking into account the rich reserves of oil and natural gas that these areas have and the chance to bypass Russia in order to bring these resources to the consumers in Europe.

There are several definitions of the Black Sea region⁴ – broader and narrower in scope – and it is hard to find any degree of consensus. A narrow definition includes only the six littoral states of the basin (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, and Turkey), while the wider Black Sea region also encompasses Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.⁵

Figure 2

Source: <http://uk.mfa.gov.ua/en/>.

³ Duygu Bazoglu Sezer, "The Changing Strategic Situation in the Black Sea Region", 1, http://www.bundesheer.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/03_jb00_26.pdf, accessed at 15.05.2015.

⁴ Ersan Bocutoğlu and Gökhan Koçer, "Politico-Economic Conflicts in the Black Sea Region in the Post-Cold War Era," *OSCE Yearbook* (2006): 111, <http://ifsh.de/en/core/publications/osce-yearbook/2006/>, accessed at 10.05.2015.

⁵ Cristina Bogzeanu, *Evoluția mediului de securitate în zona extinsă a Mării Negre și influența acesteia asupra configurării forțelor navale ale României pe termen lung* (București: Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare "Carol I", 2012), 8.

Even though the regional developments in the Black Sea area brought democracy, cooperation at both local and regional level and free economies, several issues arose that threaten the security of the region, such as political instability, economic hardships and direct confrontations.

Most of the countries went through a period of transition from centralized system to a democratic one and faced numerous issues in consolidating the new systems and the process of institution building. Even more, the local clusters of conflicts of an ethnic-separatist nature escalated, giving birth to other kind of threats that destabilized even more the region. These conflicts erupted in the former USSR territories and threaten the progress of countries such as Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Even if at a first glance the Black Sea region seemed to be isolated from the European politics, the developments taking place proved to have a direct impact and consequences at European level, outlining the existent link between these two areas. The reasons that sustain this link are as follows. After 1991, the actors from the Black Sea area shifted their attention to integration in the European structures, essentially sharing common ground both cultural and political with the partners from the West. Secondly, the most important security organizations looked to expand to the East and immediately established partnerships and memberships with local partners (for instance NATO and OSCE). Both the Black Sea resident countries and the Caucasus seemed attractive from a security standpoint.⁶

All sources of instability and threats are closely linked to the fragility of the new states that is due to the process of transition and institution building that took place. Furthermore, the foreign policy and geopolitical new orientations contributed to a state of instability. The economic hardships and decline slowed down the integration process of the new actors and restricted them from taking a leading role in the development of the Black Sea region. Ulger⁷ identifies three main areas of weakness of the region in the context created after the end of the Cold War: economic (I already mentioned the economic issues emerged from moving from a centralized system to a free market economy that delayed the transition process), political (it was clear that establishing the rule of law will take time and several issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, unaccountability will appear) and social

⁶ Duygu Bazoglu Sezer, "The Changing Strategic Situation in the Black Sea Region", 8, http://www.bundesheer.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/03_ib00_26.pdf, accessed at 15.05.2015.

⁷ Fatih Ulger, "Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region," *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, 2 (Spring/Summer 2007): 58-60, http://yalejournal.org/pastissues_post/volume-2-issue-2-springsummer-2007/, accessed at 10.05, 2015.

(unconsolidated civil society, lack of common values, aspects that take a lot of time to strengthen). These weaknesses can also be found in the case of the Baltic Sea states: economic (the Baltic states, Poland, Finland and Sweden faced similar issues), political (mostly in Poland and the Baltic states, Finland and Sweden being consolidated in this matter) and social (mainly in the new countries and Poland).

Security challenges, vulnerabilities and regional cooperation

When analyzing the Black Sea region, the main actor that stands out is Russia. Even though it was very weakened after the disintegration of the USSR, its foreign policy focused mostly on the nearby regions where once it was dominant. The aim was to exert influence over the former USSR territories and to keep a balance of power in which Russia hold all the cards. This meant keeping the West from getting involved in the region.⁸ However, former territories such as Georgia and Azerbaijan sought cooperation with the international organizations, starting cooperation in different areas – political, economic and military – through partnerships with NATO, bilateral agreements, accords with OSCE.

The OSCE Mission to Georgia, established in 1992, assisted the Georgian Government with conflict settlement, democratization, human rights and the rule of law. The Mission's top priority is to help resolve the Transdnistrian conflict. This dispute is rooted in the conflict that broke out in 1992 between the Transdnistrian authorities and the central government in Chisinau. Violent clashes resulted in several hundred casualties and more than 100,000 displaced persons. A ceasefire was agreed in July 1992 and the parties committed themselves to negotiate a settlement to the conflict.⁹

In short, Russia's interest in the region after the end of the Cold War can be summed up as follows. Firstly, one of the main priorities of the Russian government was to maintain a high profile position in the area in spite of the penetration of international actors. Secondly, it was highly important to maintain supremacy over the energy transport. Thirdly, another priority was to retain military superiority. Furthermore, it was highly important to slow

⁸ Mitat Çelikpala, *Security in the Black Sea Region. Policy Report II*. An initiative of the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010), 8, <http://www.euractiv.de/erweiterung-und-nachbarn/linkdossier/the-commission-on-the-black-sea-000123>, accessed at 15.05.2015.

⁹ <http://www.osce.org/>.

down as much as possible the process of rapprochement to NATO by the local actors. Last, another matter was the issue of terrorism that needed to be tackled in Caucasus.¹⁰

One of the main challenges of the region is the military threat, a core component of any frameworks of threats. The disputed territories that engaged direct confrontations in the years after 1991 are still hot sources of insecurity and can destabilize the area. The recent history proves that these conflicts (of which I will briefly mention Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transnistria) have no solution on the short term and even more it can be affirmed that these particular areas from the Black Sea region are subject to continuous emergence of other confrontations, an example sustaining this being the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. Nagorno-Karabakh is an Armenian majority entity on the territory of Azerbaijan that receives support from the Armenian government. After the 6 years' war in which Nagorno aimed at joining Armenia, it declared independence in 1991 opening the path for continuing clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Even if after 1991 it seemed as a frozen conflict, it can break out at any time.¹¹

These conflicts have undoubtedly heavily slowed down the integration process in the Euro Atlantic sphere, have brought more economic issues and hindered the economic progress as well. Going further, the disputes have brought resentment among the people and the governments creating an environment in which it is basically impossible to cooperate and reach common solutions that could establish a climate of trust. The international community has showed little initiatives to intervene and help a reconciliation process.¹² The fact that the majority of the states in the region were very weak at the beginning of the transition process brought about other types of security threats, namely organized crime (illegal trafficking of weapons, drugs, human beings). The states needed a comprehensive approach in this field, integration in international organization being a chance to strengthen this approach and gain the necessary tools to enforce it.

The matter of energy security also holds an important place in the geopolitics of the region. The 1990-1991 events opened the path for new routes to the resources of the Caspian Sea and at the same time opened a path for competition and rivalries between counterparts in regard to energy supply

¹⁰ Mitat Çelikpala, *Security in the Black Sea Region. Policy Report II*, 8.

¹¹ Carl Schreck and Luke Johnson, "Explainer: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty*, August 05, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/background-nagorno-karabakh/26514813.html>, accessed at 10.05.2015.

¹² Mitat Çelikpala, *Security in the Black Sea Region. Policy Report II*, 14.

and transit routes. There is a major competition for the resources that the Black Sea area holds. Russia has the monopoly over the production and over exports which gives it a net advantage and the possibility to gain leverage over other countries that do not have energy resources. Azerbaijan also has important energy resources which makes it an attractive strategic point for the other regional actors and not only.

Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

An important regional structure that emerged after the 1991 momentum was the creation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) at the initiative of the Turkish government (1992) which was comprised of 12 states from the wider Black Sea (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, and Turkey).

At the beginning, BSEC seemed like an outstanding opportunity for the local countries to deepen cooperation, exchange good practices and seek economic revival as well as a bridge to the stage of the world affairs. However, according to Ersan Bocutoğlu and Gökhan Koçer¹³, in the late 90s the organization had some setbacks due to several factors. Firstly, in spite of the favorable outcomes of the cooperation set through this organization, the fact that international actors saw the strategic importance of the region and decided to get involved creating an area of clashing interests reduced considerably the potential of the BSEC to become a full-fledged regional organization.

Secondly, the disparities between the member countries and different views led to more setbacks in the process of enhancing BSEC and consolidating it. There can be distinguished patterns that actors in the area are following. For instance, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia sought to use their strategic position in order to gain an advantage in the collaboration with NATO and the EU and further to embark on an integration process. The security issues they faced also seemed as a barrier in enhancing the cooperation inside the BSEC. Romania and Bulgaria started the long process of integration in the EU (which concretized in 2007) and envisaged their future roles as part of the Union. Turkey, a NATO member but with slim chances of integration in the EU, has multiple interests in several regions such as the Mediterranean and the Middle East so its focus was somehow limited.

¹³ Ersan Bocutoğlu and Gökhan Koçer, "Politico-Economic Conflicts in the Black Sea Region in the Post-Cold War Era," 114-115.

Thirdly, the existent military threat that destabilizes several countries and shakes their territorial integrity was another factor that limited the effectiveness of BSEC and made it clear that the organization will not break through with all these unresolved issues.

The power vacuum helped these conflicts escalate and created numerous security issues for NATO and the EU that undertook actions to get involved in managing these crises. It also created opportunities for the involvement of the Russian Federation that looked to reinstate its influence over the lost territories.¹⁴ One of the threats that emerged after 1991 was the newly created Russia that, despite the problems it was facing, looked to exert influence over the former territories of the USSR and mainly Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan and naturally did not want these actors to follow a path of integration in the Euro Atlantic system.

Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)

The Baltic Sea area transformed after 1991 in a buffer zone between the West and Russia, a buffer zone that centered on cooperation given the importance of the actors on both sides. Following this path, the residing countries decided to form the Council of the Baltic Sea States - CBSS (1992) that aimed at

serving as a political forum for regional intergovernmental cooperation, promoting political and economic stability as well as forming a regional identity.¹⁵

It comprises all the actors that have direct access to the Baltic Sea – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Poland, Germany, Russia together with Norway and Island (from 1995) and the European Commission. As Oldberg notes, the CBSS faced some hardships in the regional cooperation environment that it sought to create and maintain.¹⁶ The fact that the Council is not a regional international organization in the real

¹⁴ Ersan Bocutoğlu and Gökhan Koçer, "Politico-Economic Conflicts in the Black Sea Region in the Post-Cold War Era," 117.

¹⁵ CBSS 1st Ministerial Session – Copenhagen Declaration, March 5-6 1992, <http://www.cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/1992-CBSS-1st-Ministerial-Session-Communique.pdf>, accessed at 05.05.2015.

¹⁶ Ingmar Oldberg, *Soft Security in the Baltic Sea Region. Russian Interests in the Council of Baltic Sea States*. UI Occasional Paper 12 (Stockholm: Ulrikespolitiska Institutet, 2012), 12-13, <http://www.ui.se/eng/news/ui-publications/soft-security-in-the-baltic-sea-region-russian-interests-in-the-council-of-baltic-sea-states.aspx>, accessed at 15.05.2015.

sense of the word has affected its capacity of implementing and enforcing measures and decisions. Arguments that sustain this assumption are as following: CBSS is not based on a treaty and a chart but on a ministerial declaration; it has only the power to give recommendations that cannot be enforced. Secondly, the council is weak from the financial point of view and does not have a common budget, member countries being in charge of funding projects or find financing.

Conclusions - Similarities and differences

Comparing the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea region, in short, I have outlined the most important areas, in which the two regions are similar or totally opposed.

- Level of integration – by comparing the two regions in this matter, it is noticed that the presence of the EU and NATO in the Black Sea area is limited and takes form of cooperation and partnerships established with the former communist countries and with the new actors. By 2004, the Baltic Sea area appears as fully integrated in the structures of the EU and NATO (Sweden and Finland having strong partnerships with the Euro-Atlantic organization). In the case of the Black Sea, besides Bulgaria and Romania, the other actors have only established mechanisms of cooperation, their integration being a faraway plan (due to the multiple issues that they are facing).¹⁷
- Threats to security – As mentioned before, the frozen conflicts in Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia together with the weak economic systems and the energy dependency on Russia made the Black Sea region very fragile and even after all the progress made through cooperation with international actors, the mentioned sources of instability are still present. By contrast, The Baltic Sea became a consolidated and prosperous area. The threats here are coming from a non-military perspective. On this point it can be affirmed that in terms of the level of instability, the Black Sea area was and is much more exposed to the possibility of the outbreak of military conflicts while the Baltic Sea are is more stable but can face issues in the sphere of non-military.

¹⁷ Dan Dungaciu, "Geopolitică și securitate la Marea Neagră: opțiunile strategice ale României și Moldovei", 9-10, <http://leader.viitorul.org/public/507/ro/DanDungaciu06.pdf>, accessed at 10.05.2015.

- Strong institutional system – the Baltic countries present strengthened national regimes that did not face the transition process (for instance Sweden or Finland) or that managed very well this process (Poland). At the same time, the identities of the Nordic countries has been constructed over several centuries which gave birth to a consolidated mentality that focused on prospering and thus making the idea of conflicts less likely.
- Regional cooperation – The initiatives that took place in these areas showed in each case difficulties in gaining a fully operational and recognized presence.
- Strategic importance – both areas are similar judging by their strategic location: the Baltic Sea is part of the Scandinavian corridor, connecting the West and Russia while the Black Sea area makes the connection to Caucasus and the Caspian Sea being an important corridor.

The paper aimed at presenting a few perspectives over the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea region, outlining the main similarities and differences that exist. Furthermore, it aims at opening a dialogue over this comparison, setting up the framework for further research that can go deeper in understanding the processes that each area faced after the end of the Cold War and up to today.

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