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**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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Contents

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS.....	
1.1. Introduction.....	
1.2. Methodological framework.....	
1.3. Hypothesis and research questions	
1.4. Research method	
1.5. Theoretical approach	
1.6. Time frame	
1.7. Units of analysis.....	
1.8. The structure of the study.....	
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS AND THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS	
2.1. Introduction.....	
2.2. Region, Regional identity, Regionalism, Regionalization	
2.3. The Energy Security concept	
2.4. An overview of the Neorealist theory and its relevance for understanding the	
Black Sea regional dynamics.....	
2.5. Conclusion	
CHAPTER 3: THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BLACK SEA REGION AND THE DUALITY PARADOX OF THE REGIONALIZATION PROCESS	
3.1. Introduction.....	
3.2. European Union’s regionalization project for the Black Sea region, a security project based on different security logics... ..	
3.2.1. The institutional logic of security	
3.2.1.1 The beginning of EU’s engagement in the Black Sea region	
3.2.1.2. The Black Sea Synergy	
3.2.1.3. Eastern Partnership	
3.2.1.4. A new EU strategy for the Black Sea Region?	
3.2.2 .The geopolitical logic of security	
3.2.2.1. European Energy (In) Security: Towards an European Energy Union	
3.2.2.2. Security of Natural Gas Supply in Europe.....	
3.2.2.3. Pipeline politics and the geostrategic significance of the Black Sea Region for the European Energy Security	
3.2.3. The Black Sea region at the crossroads of two major development paradigms.....	

3.2.3.1. Russian foreign policy and its role in the Black Sea regional deadlock	
3.2.3.2. Energy security at the core of the Black Sea strategy	
3.3. Conclusion	
CHAPTER 4: FIRST DIMENSION OF ANALYSIS. INVOLVEMENT IN REGIONAL SCHEEMS OF COOPERATION	
4.1. Introduction.....	
4.2. Bulgaria.....	
4.3. Georgia	
4.4. Romania.....	
4.5. Russia.....	
4.6. Turkey.....	
4.7. Ukraine	
4.8. Conclusion	
CHAPTER 5: SECOND DIMENSION OF ANALYSIS.	
REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE ENERGY SECTOR.....	
5.1. Introduction.....	
5.2. Bulgaria.....	
5.3. Georgia	
5.4. Romania.....	
5.5. Russia	
5.6. Turkey.....	
5.7. Ukraine	
5.8. Conclusion	
CHAPTER 6	
CONCLUSION.....	
REFERENCES.....	
APPENDICES.....	

Key words: Black Sea region, regional cooperation, regionalism, European Union, energy security, national interests

**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
-Summary-**

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 21st century when Russia entered a period of open contestation of the European order showing a renewed impetus in pursuing its irredentist ambitions. It has been just over *one year* since the annexation of Crimea and Russia has already pledged its preparedness to resort to a nuclear warfare threat. Conversely, the mounting Russian threats determined NATO to pre-emptively employ its collective defense 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*.¹ 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*.² Additionally, the older

¹ 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 16.07. 2014

² 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”.³ 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 economical, 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.”⁴ 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 hegemons.

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

³ 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 16.07.2014

⁴ 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 p. 271-285

geography of conflict, a reconfigured cartography in which resource flows rather than political and ideological divisions constitute the major fault lines.”⁵ 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 hegemons 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.⁶

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. The European Union is directing itself towards a relatively uncertain future by evolving into a federation of nation-states, while Russia adopts a more conservative stance, seeking to restore its past grandeur by attempting to create the Eurasian Union, which redraws the older contour of the Soviet Union.

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

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

⁶ 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 4 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”⁷, as was argued by Ungureanu in a recent debate, 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.

Therefore, this study aimed 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 the below table.

Dimensions of analysis	Regional cooperation	National preferences
1. Involvement in regional schemes of cooperation	Number of relevant, unambiguous participations and memberships. Number of initiatives created by a state in order to become a key regional actor, assuming a leading role in the region.	Ambiguous position in various initiatives, vague commitments as a result of exposure to different levels of conditionality. Development of bilateral agreements as opposed to regional initiatives involvement. Valorization (exploitation), politicization and trading of their geographic location. Blocking initiatives that do not comply with their own interests.

⁷ 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 18.09.2014)

2. Regional cooperation in the energy sector	Integration into the regional energy market. Consistent energy security strategy. Signing protocols. Improving energy infrastructure. Overall convergence with regional energy security policies.	Volatility of energy partnerships (shifting alliances, involvement in competing pipeline projects). National energy dependency and vulnerability assessment considering their status – recipient, provider or transit countries.
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Furthermore, the study argued that we can identify a correlation between the energy security issues experienced by the Black Sea riparian states and their level of involvement in the regional cooperation. Consequently, the main assumption of the study stated that:

The energy cooperation practices over the last ten years (2004-2014) within the Black Sea region have stalled the development of EU's regionalization process forcing the Black Sea riparian states to pursue an inward-focus approach instead of supporting the overall regional cooperation.

In order to answer the above mentioned research question, the study primarily utilized *interpretative causal process tracing case studies* for each Black Sea riparian states considering the already mentioned dimensions of analysis. The current study creates a time confined analytical narrative by linking the *neorealist theory* with empirical evidence in order to highlight the logic beyond the regionalization process. The neorealist analytical tool offers the key of understanding the importance of natural resources as power increasing capabilities and explains how they affect the behaviour of the riparian states in the process of regional cooperation. This analytical framework offers a great possibility for operationalizing the national interests of the Black Sea riparian states since it assumes they are all primarily fighting for survival which implies they are security and power seeking units interacting in an “unbalanced multipolar” regional structure. The empirically parallel supports these suppositions since “energy securitization appears to be an epiphenomenon of inevitable power politics and the need to ensure survival.”⁸

Building on the neorealist assumption we argue that during the analyzed time frame, the energy related issues have contributed to a shift in the regional structure which drastically

⁸Jonna Nyman, “Red Storm Ahead: Securitization of Energy in US–China Relations”, *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, SAGE, 2014 p. 19

affected the regional balance of power. Consequently, the magnitude of the energy insecurity impact on the regional cooperation development was broader than expected. This underlines that analyzing the trends in the energy cooperation becomes a *sine qua non* condition for interpreting and elucidating the complexity of the Black Sea regionalization process, for defining and characterizing the space of interactions between the riparian states and for understanding the power distribution within the region.

In order to identify the changes, the mechanisms and the continuity of the Black Sea cooperation process we need to extend our research on a substantial time frame that comprises a spectrum of major regional geopolitical and geostrategic transformations. This *long durée* approach is particularly important for our study since the focus of geopolitical activity within the region is moving very rapidly and studying only a short sequence in time would not give us the opportunity to observe potential patterns of regional cooperation and the eventual transformations of national preferences succeeding major regional events.⁹

Therefore, the ten year time frame (2004-2014) was chosen for this study because it is a period characterized by the emergence and development of the ‘second wave’ regionalism (pre and post EU enlargement) which covers also the 2008 Georgian war, the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and the energy crises determined by the 2006, 2009 and 2014 gas disruptions. Fundamentally, the study represents a collection of analyzed and interpreted snapshots of specific events that were unfolding along with the Black Sea regionalization process with the primary aim of discovering which of these events have essentially impacted the regional cooperation process. Considering the aim of this research and all of the above mentioned arguments, the study will be organized as follows.

The first chapter includes an overview of the current geopolitical architecture within the region emphasizing the purpose of our research. It then presents the methodological framework including the hypothesis and the research questions of the study, as well as the employed research methodology, its theoretical approach, its time frame and its units of analysis.

The second chapter does a conceptual refinement of the key notions employed by this study (region, regional identity, regionalism, regionalization, energy security and energy hegemony) illustrating how they practically apply to the Black Sea region. Additionally, this chapter makes an overview of the Neorealist theory and its relevance for understanding the Black Sea regional dynamics. It delineates between the two branches of the Neorealist theory

⁹ Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 79

namely, the *defensive neorealism* and the *offensive* one and defines the concept of *power*. The first subchapter argues that EU regionalization project for the Black Sea region is based on security interests and can be regarded as a political construction in which “risks and strategic relevance overtake identity.”¹⁰ Hence, the Black Sea regionalism has been born as a reaction to the existing regional hegemonic powers and their attempts to counterbalance their dominant positions within the region.¹¹ The second subchapter explains why energy security represents a fundamental aspect for national security of the riparian states and why energy insecurity will always be considered a prevailing threat. Furthermore, this section acknowledges the emergence of a new energy paradigm characterized by ‘pipeline politics’. By applying the neorealist lenses to the analysis of the riparian states, the last subchapter assesses their capabilities and observes their power status within the region. This in turn reveals important findings related to the Black Sea polarity variation over time. Finally, this section defines the ordering principle of the Black Se regional structure as being *hierarchy within anarchy* and underlines the emergence of Russia as the most powerful regional hegemon.

Building on neorealist arguments which state that the regional cooperation is “heavily dependent on the presence of a hegemon who bears the cost of establishing institutions through which interdependence can be maintained”¹², **the third chapter** analyzes EU’s engagement in the Black Sea regional cooperation (as one of the regional hegemons) and asses its regional leverage in the present geopolitical context. Furthermore, the chapter identifies two sets of contradictions underlying the Black Sea regionalization process. The first set of contradictions refers to the fact that the regional project is divided between two different types of strategies intended to ensure security: a strategy that takes into account the geopolitical elements (placing the region at the top of the European agenda) and another that uses the institutionalized cooperation as a key for regional development. After analyzing the first set of contradictions the study emphasizes the importance of identifying the geopolitical and geoeconomic imperatives because the level of regional cooperation is directly proportional to the relevance of geopolitical changes within the region. The second set of contradictions refers to the clash of two major paradigms (EU and Russian) that are claiming their own sphere of influence within the area. These sets of contradictions create a “duality

¹⁰ Daniel Grotzky and Mirela Isic, „The Black Sea Region: Clashing Identities and Risks to European Stability”, *CAP Policy Analysis*, Vol.4, 2008, p. 5.

¹¹ Panagiota Manoli, *The Dynamics of the Black Sea Regionalism*, England:Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012, p. 22

¹² Robert Giplin and Stephan Krasner as quoted in Panagiota Manoli, *The Dynamics of the Black Sea Regionalism*, England:Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012, p. 22

paradox” because on the one hand they are the main factors that hamper the regional cooperation process, but at the same time they build the region contributing to its evolution as an important geopolitical centre.

In order to understand the causal mechanism behind certain cooperation behaviours, **the fourth chapter** briefly underlines the foreign policy orientations of the riparian states and their position in the regional balance of power. Besides creating a timeline of the main regional schemes of cooperation, this analysis emphasises the main actors and institutions that played the most significant roles in the evolution of Black Sea regionalization process according to the first dimension of our study. Interpreting the results, Romania stands out as the country with the highest number of initiatives and a high commitment for promoting EU’s policy in the region. However, in spite of its efforts, very few of its initiatives materialized. At the opposite pole stands Russia with the lowest score both for participation in the existing regional forms of cooperation and for taking initiative to create new ones. The other Black Sea states sent ambivalent signals and had cautiously approached the multilateral forms of cooperation because they were not willing to sacrifice their long lasting bilateral forms of cooperation that secured their national interests.

According to the second dimension of analysis, **the fifth chapter** individually examines the national energy policies of each Black Sea riparian state taking into consideration their statuses, their level of energy dependency, their involvement in energy projects and their reliability as energy cooperation partners. Although the Black Sea region has a multipolar structure, Russia is the single regional energy hegemon which uses energy to shape up its geopolitical ambitions within the region and beyond. Given this context, we cannot talk about regional energy cooperation but rather about heavy-handed Russian political pressure to comply with its norms in its own terms. During the analysed time framework, the energy sector become so highly politicized that currently it is very difficult to differentiate between the political and economic will to cooperate.

The **final chapter** of this study concludes that the new regional context has reached an unprecedented level of uncertainty representing a fertile soil for future confrontations between regional hegemons. This in turn determined a shift in the regional system from a “balanced multipolar” system, to an “unbalanced” one. The current tensions involving Ukraine represent just the beginning of what could evolve as the “energy cold war” having the Black Sea as an epicentre. Although Russia and EU are aware of their mutual economic and energy dependencies, their external policies resemble more of a “mutual assured destruction” strategy. Due to the current geopolitical context, the study argues that EU is obliged to

advance to a new stage and configure an inclusive long term Black Sea Strategy that would be able not only to diffuse its norms and policies to the Eastern neighbourhood, but also to keep EU-Russia economic and energy cooperation in place. Unless it succeeds to do so, EU's fight for constructing a bastion of peace might result in one of the most terrible conflicts in the recent history. EU should be able to learn from tactical mistakes and the difficulties met by previous policy framework and fundamentally rethink its strategy using contextualised internal as well as external lenses.

In order to achieve this goal, EU should learn first how to counter Russia's many leverage mechanism and its coercive tools and prevent the escalation of future conflicts. At the moment there seems to be a common understanding that if there was something that could be used to drastically challenge the Russian strategy in the Black Sea region that is the destabilization of its energy market. A comprehensive perspective upon the region cannot be achieved overlooking the new energy politics of the Black Sea region as energy represents a sector of utmost importance for all the riparian states and has critical geostrategic implications for the EU. Structural geopolitical rivalry within the Black Sea region is expected to continue even though a compromise might be reached concerning the Ukrainian crises. However, this crisis represents a stress test for EU that will eventually lead to the creation of a more sustainable foreign policy towards Eastern Europe. For this purpose, there is a need for EU-NATO regional concerted action and the support of regional allies. There is definitely a convergence in expectations within the Black Sea states but there is a great divergence of preferences that stems from their regime types variety, their different memberships in systemic structures, their disproportionate economies, their lack or their abundance of natural resources, their frozen conflicts, their national security policies and their military alliances. All these factors must be taken into consideration in order to move out of this limbo. Observed from outside the Black Sea region might seem caught in a strategic inertia, in fact the strategies within the region are shifting so rapidly that no common decision can be taken without expecting the risk of different repercussions.

Talking about energy security, Winston Churchill was arguing a century ago that "safety and certainty lie in variety and variety alone."¹³ Apparently this rather logical inference seems to have been forgotten by the EU politicians who for the last decades failed to understand that diversification of energy supplies represents the key to energy security. After the latest geopolitical events that took place within the Black Sea region, the need for

¹³ Sascha Muller-Kraenner, *Energy Security: Re-Measuring the World*, London:Earthscan, 2008, p.19

uniting efforts on energy front could not be stronger. Unfortunately, it took several energy crisis and two major military aggressions provoked by Russia to unify the interests and efforts within a very heterogeneous European energy policy landscape.

Nonetheless, the first signs of this strategic imperative seem to have finally appeared. Firstly, although their actions determined widespread protests, several states including Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine attempted to replicate the shale gas revolution. Secondly, there were also attempts to exploit the offshore hydrocarbon potential in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. Thirdly, the Third Energy Package has challenged Gazprom's business pattern by promoting higher degrees of transparency, competitiveness and liberalization in the energy cooperation process. Fourthly, EU has showed an increased interest in accelerating its grid interconnectivity.¹⁴ Fifthly, starting with 2020, the TANAP-TAP pipeline tandem which for many appeared to be a "never-ending odyssey" will complete EU's Southern Gas Corridor diversification strategy strengthening thus the European supply security.¹⁵

Finally, probably the boldest EU decision in this sense is the recently launched Energy Union that has been intensely discussed for the last decade. Although it will take a great deal of effort, time and money to harmonise the national energy policies of the member states, EU should not lose the momentum created by the current low oil and gas prices, and build an European integrated market. As the Black Sea region represents an area of vital interest for crucial energy infrastructure projects, the Black Sea riparian states have a very important role to play in the implementation of Energy Union's goals. Unfortunately, the track record of regional energy cooperation over the last decade was poor and there are enough evidences that confirm the continuity of this negative trend. However, in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, three Black Sea riparian states emerged as potential energy hubs and security exporters within the region: Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria.

Turkey has a moderate degree of polarization, a high level of energy vulnerability and represents a highly significant location for diverse energy projects. Adding to this, Turkey is an EU client, a NATO member and a balancer in the Black Sea regional balance of power. This complex profile allows Turkey to simultaneously participate in large scale competing energy projects supported by different actors. Despite being one of the regional hegemony, it

¹⁴ Radu Dudau, "The Ukraine crisis: Legal and energy security impacts in the Black Sea Basin", *Caspian report*, 2014, p. 4

¹⁵ Manfred Hafner, "The Southern Gas Corridor and the EU security of supply: what's next?", *Natural Gas Europe*, <http://www.naturalgaseurope.com/southern-gas-corridor-and-eu-gas-security-of-supply-22688>, 20.04.2015

never undertook any military aggression, nor did it officially support other regional military interventions. Similarly, it wisely constructed its foreign policy so that it will meet its national interests without major concessions and never at the expense of the national security of other riparian states. Its soft power hegemony together with its political equidistance recommends it as an actor which can endorse regional cooperation as well as a potential mediator of the regional conflicts between East and West.

Among the Black Sea countries, Romania stands out as the main regional pillar of the West offering many strategic advantages that might impede Russia to further extend its power range. Given the fact that it already has NATO's military protection and EU's support, Romania is the most likely riparian state to support a new Western regional strategy. For this purpose, Romania has to gain the support of the other Black Sea states, especially Turkey. During the last decade Romania has proven its commitment and reliability to its Western allies maintaining itself as a strategic front even at the cost of deteriorating its relations with Russia which after annexing Crimea, become its direct neighbour within the Black Sea. Romania does not only represent the third-most energy-independent state in the European Union, it also has a favourable geostrategic location for energy transport as well as significant energy infrastructure that includes the largest harbour (Constanța) and the largest refinery (Midia Năvodari) in the Black Sea basin.¹⁶ Furthermore, during the last decade it made progress in interconnecting itself with its neighbours. Although Romania has neglected for a long time its energy strategy, the recent geopolitical and socioeconomic contexts together with the recent resource discoveries, determined a significant improvement in its energy sector performance, which proves it has all the necessary means to become a potential energy hub.

Bulgaria represents another Black Sea riparian state that has announced its willingness to become an energy regional hub. Although the European Commission noted a long time ago the potential of the Bulgarian gas transit configuration, it was only recently that Bulgaria showed a real interest in developing a circular hub.¹⁷ This sudden change of perspective in Bulgaria's energy strategy right after the dismissal of South Stream raises doubts regarding its genuine political will to support the future regulatory framework of the European Energy Union. If we are to analyse Bulgaria's measures concerning the implementation of its energy strategy, we observe that during the last decade its progress

¹⁶ Adrian Gheorghe et al., "An Energy Security Strategy for Romania: Promoting Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Sources" in Adrian Gheorghe and Liviu Muresan (eds.), *Energy Security. International and local issues, theoretical perspectives and critical energy infrastructures*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2011, p. 357

¹⁷ Peter Popchev, "A vision of a Gas Union in Central and South East Europe", *Energy Post*, 2015, <http://www.energypost.eu/vision-gas-union-central-south-east-europe/>, accessed 20.04.2015

was relatively slow and was not translated into coherent action. Although the first discussions regarding its diversification plans started in 2006, until now Bulgaria did not implement any significant transit project and registered no major gas discoveries. These data, leads us to conclude that out of the three riparian states that expressed their willingness to become energy hubs, Bulgaria represents the least likely state to rich this goal unless it decides to act more decisively.

Nevertheless, the real goal for these states should be to acknowledge the current paradigm shift which underlines the fact that now, more than ever, the need for long term energy cooperation and coordination could not be stronger. If we are to apply Nash's game theory to our case, we observe that a more cooperative environment focused on finding a regional solution for the energy issue would optimize the returns for all the states involved, as it will prove crucial for endorsing major trans-national gas infrastructure projects and will diminish the question of competitive advantages. Furthermore, the spill over effect of this cooperation will constitute the core of re-structuring the patterns of regional amity and enmity and of the region itself.¹⁸

It is perhaps naive to think that the Energy Union would produce immediate results. For now, it represents nothing more than an initiative born out of a common desire to put an end to the current Russian political pressure, disproportionate pricing and energy cut off concerns. During the analysed time framework, it has been observed that taking a decision in the energy sector is no longer a simple economic decision. Such a decision is first and foremost a political one that can cause repercussions in different areas of national and international politics. Moreover, even if the decision refers to a bilateral agreement it does not have a unilateral character, but it also affects the decisions of other actors. In many ways, the decision making process in the energy field it is similar to military strategic planning in which tactical moves become crucial for a state's survival. In the current regional chaos, planned pipelines maps might give us hints regarding the potential configuration of national preferences and regional alliances.

In this sense, Neorealism provided a good framework for understanding the regional deadlock, considering energy a crucial capability, a source of power and threat that shapes the national interests of the Black Sea riparian states. This theoretical approach also allowed

¹⁸ Angelos Gkanoutas-Leventis, "Competing gas hub theories and the Europeanisation of energy politics", *Natural Gas Europe*, 2015, http://www.naturalgaseurope.com/competing-gas-hub-theories-and-the-europeanisation-of-energy-politics-24295?utm_source=Natural+Gas+Europe+Newsletter&utm_campaign=ffa167e159-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c95c702d4c-ffa167e159-307755997 , accessed 22.06.2015

us to understand why short term interests derived from advantageous gas deals can erase centuries of rivalries (as it could be observed in the recent case of Russian-Turkish energy cooperation) and why the current zero-sum mentality will most probably prevail within the region for the years to come, unless the West finds out a solution to contain Russian aggression and attract the state into the Black Sea network of cooperation. EU's decision to further extend the sanctioned imposed to Russia points out that future relations between the two blocs would continue to be confrontational rather than cooperative. If Russia succeeds to construct the Turkish Stream via the Black Sea region, the conditions of maintaining the regional security and stability would considerably decrease. Thus, one of the clearest recommendations that can be drawn from the current analysis is that Turkey must be maintained in the Western sphere of influence.