POST-SOVIET CONFLICTS IN TODAY BLACK SEA REGION: CHALLENGES FOR SECURITY

CONFLICTE POSTSOVIETICE ÎN REGIUNEA MĂRII NEGRE DE ASTĂZI: PROVOCĂRI PENTRU SECURITATE

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The Black Sea region has undergone over the last three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union multiple wars, change of borders, inter-ethnic conflicts, political and economic crisis. The region has changed substantially its geopolitical status, and as a result more and more international actors developed an interest in it. All major players on the international stage – the Russian Federation, other post-soviet riparian states, Turkey, EU, including individual countries of the EU, the US and NATO – aim for the same objective namely the expansion and consolidation of their influence and the ensuring of their economic and military presence in the region, even though they use various geostrategic means [1].

It is worth noting that according to the definition of the European Commission, the Black Sea region represents a special region, which unites ten states: six riparian states such as Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Turkey and four states positioned in the proximity of the Black Sea – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Republic of Moldova, and Greece [2]. Yet, the close cooperation between EU and NATO expanded even more this definition according to the concept "Bridge/Barrier", which views the Extended Black Sea region either as a " bridge to the Caspian Sea, rich in energy resources" or as a "barrier against the Middle East" [3].

In the present moment the security situation in the Black Sea region and in the Caucasus is incredibly difficult, because it is characterized, on one hand, after the beginning on February 24th of the "special operation" on the territory of Ukraine by an aggravation of the confrontation between all players in the region and Russia, on the other hand, by the presence of dangerous and controversial problems, related to the militarization of the region, internal and interstate conflicts in the Caucasus and Moldova, the increase of military presence of all actors and of terrorist threats in the region.

A colossal blow to the system of regional security was dealt by the actions of Russia against Ukraine, starting in 2014, first the annexation of Crimea and finally an open military strike on Ukraine, the so-called special operation of 2022. Regional security has collapsed. The once peaceful region has become one of the hotbeds of war in the world. According to Iulian Chifu, the annexation of Crimea by Russia has showed a new reality that presented itself to the players in the region and the world by emphasizing

the vulnerabilities and fragility not only of the Ukrainian state but of other post-soviet states in the region which are exposed to a wide range of factors such as penetration by foreign control and interests, possibility of an insurgency war, possibility of a proxy war, possibility of an informational war, possibility of a cyber war [4, p.115].

Currently still remain dangerous sources of military threat for the security of the region such as the prolonged conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh and Moldova. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when the Soviet Republics started gaining their independence most of them were ill-prepared and ill-equipped for the incipient stages of the process of state building. Through trial and error each of these newly created states embarked on the path of reform both economic and political as well as on the path of transition. Additionally, these countries had to put in the effort and challenge the lingering constraints and burdens of the Soviet rule that lasted several decades.

For Armenia the more evident challenges were its small size, its landlocked geography, and the Nagorno-Karabach conflict. From a strategic perspective of a pervasive nature are the obstacles of isolation and insignificance. Isolation can be explained by the fact of constraints of closed borders, collapse of regional trade and transport and the exclusion of all regional development projects [5].

It is not yet forgotten the forty-four-day long Armenia-Azerbaijan war (November 10th, 2020) over the disputed territory of Nagorny-Karabakh has reached an end as a result of the ceasefire agreement that has been brokered by the Russian Federation. As such, the agreement has brought fundamental change to the geopolitical configuration of the region offering the Russian Federation a central role in it. Following the agreement Moscow deployed a peacekeeping mission of 1960 men to both Karabakh and the Lachin corridor between Karabakh and Armenia [6].

On August 3rd, 2022 Baku launched a military operation in Nagorno-Karabach. It has been reported that the Azerbaijani forces were advancing in a number of locations on the western and north-western fronts in the vicinity of the city of Stepanakert. Even though the military advance has been called a military operation of “revenge” for the death of one Azerbaijani soldier but in fact constitutes one another attempt at forcing Armenia to capitulate during the ongoing negotiations [7].

Long period the strategies of three regional actors in the Black Sea region were extremely important for the Republic of Moldova, such as interests of Russia-EU binomial pair, and Romania. *In the case of Russia-EU binomial pair, the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict shall be the main culmination.* As was repeatedly emphasized by the political expert I. Boțan such commitments will hit the interests of the main decision-maker in the Transnistrian - Russia case and European diplomacy is increasingly prone to include in the loaded bilateral agenda the Transnistrian problem [8, p.13].

Moreover, the European aspirations of three BSEC countries were reflected in Batumi Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State of Association Trio - Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on 19 July 2021: “We look forward to strengthening cooperation between our countries and with our Black Sea partners to ensure the security

and stability in the Black Sea Region. We recall the 17 June 2019 EU Council Conclusions reaffirming the EU's long-standing commitment to fostering prosperity, stability, and resilience in the Black Sea area. We share the EU's concerns about the security challenges in the Black Sea area, reiterating that respect for international law, including the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, including freedom of navigation are fundamental for the security and cooperation in the Black Sea area. We will engage our Black Sea partners in order to jointly promote the sustainable development of the region, as well as make full use of the opportunities that the Black Sea provides for wider and secure connectivity between Europe and Asia" [9].

Conclusions. The geopolitical configuration of the Black Sea region could open a series of opportunities for the Republic of Moldova, in order to realize its national interests through bilateral cooperation with the countries from neighborhood, such as Romania and Ukraine, Russia and Turkey, as well as through the international organizations from this region. Yet the complex situation which was created in the Black Sea region following the military crisis between Russia and Ukraine and the related worsening of the relations between western regional players and Russia, fundamentally changed the regional agenda from cooperation to confrontation, aggravating the relations between Russia and the rest of the participants of the Black Sea format, and set under the threat the entire system of regional security. Today is time to revise the whole security system in Black Sea region. It is obvious, that to achieve this goal all actors need to join forces in working on a new security system in this region. The lack of regulation of existing conflicts is a constant threat to regional security.

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