A PERSPECTIVE
ON CO-OPERATION AND INTEROPERABILITY,
MILESTONES FOR IMPROVING
SECURITY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

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Abstract:
The Black Sea region has lately emerged as a region of main concern due to its increased geopolitical importance and the wide range of security issues it confronts with. As a result both regional and international actors have focused their attention in finding suitable solutions to secure the area. Finding solutions is not an easy issue as there is not regional identity and the regionalization process is nascent. Using information present in academic and government literature, this paper concludes that the process of NATO integration, regional cooperation and defense transformation has been the main drivers for Romania's contribution in improving the security environment in the region. The paper also identifies international cooperation and standardization as tools for increasing the confidence and security in the Black Sea region.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to emphasize the importance of cooperation and interoperability, the tendencies in the cooperation domain, the need for an interoperable naval task group and to lay out some ground work that could perhaps, later on, be taken into acount for the improvement of these tasks.

The upmost questions debated in this study are – "*Is the present level of the cooperation and interoperability satisfactory in order to fulfill parteners missions? And, What are the ways and possibilities to amplifying cooperation in Black Sea region?"*

Our missions will have us, during future exercises, working together with NATO and PfP Black Sea littoral countries, friends, partners, and civilians (as search and rescue and/or environmental organizations). Thus, there is a need for a coherent cooperation and interoperability.

I consider that the most important aspect, having a good level of cooperation and interoperability, will allow us to perform smoothly our assigned mission with the application of standing operating procedures.

This research paper wants to surface some aspects regarding the necessity of cooperation and interoperability in the Black Sea area. To accomplish this task, the paper shows the geostrategic importance of the Black Sea Area, defines some terms used along this study, explains interoperability from a maritime perspective and shows ways to improve it until a required level is reached, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response.

2. The geostrategic importance of the Black Sea area

From ancient times the Black Sea area was a transit region for economic, politic and strategic interests. To support this statement, there are the caravans and the antique sea lanes which created "*the silk road*," as a linkage between eastern and western civilizations and the numerous movements of the greatest strategists of the time with their troops from south to north and vice versa.

The Black Sea basin is a strategic region bordering the Greater Middle East and a key transit route for Caspian oil. This region is a patchwork of overlapping civilizations and spheres of influence. The region is geopolitically significant precisely because it is a nexus of cultures, international trade, ideas, and influences. Oil and gas from Central Asia and the Middle East move along Black Sea shipping lanes and pipelines to Europe and other points west. The Black Sea region can be a launching platform for military, reconstruction, and stabilization operations in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as for the protection of energy shipping lanes between the Caspian region and Western markets. It is also Europe's new southeastern border. Thus, there are many countries with strong interests in safeguarding the movement of some goods, preventing the movement of others, and maintaining a presence in the Black Sea region.

Although it is strategically situated at the crossroads between Europe and Central Asia, and has been the site of many confrontations during history, the Black Sea was never recognized as a region. This was because "*since the Antiquity it had developed a tradition of being backyard of one state or the other; otherwise witnessed their competition to dominate it.*"[1] This was also the case during the Cold War when only Turkey, among the littoral states, was outside Soviet Union influence. Therefore it is understandable the deficiency of regional identity among the local states and of regional awareness within the international community. Moreover, the boundaries that define the Black Sea region are also ambiguous. [2] In order to eliminate confusions this research paper refers to the Black Sea Region as comprising the littoral states, South Caucasus and Moldova.

Geography, the interests of others and the region's relations with the rest of the world in large part explain its resurgence. Black Sea straddles Europe and Asia, linking north to south and east to west. Oil, gas, transport and trade routes are all crucial in explaining its increasing relevance.

In the last two decades, the Black Sea has changed beyond recognition. We have witnessed the transformation of the former communist societies and the impact of globalization.

Its strategic location, between the hydrocarbon reserves of the Caspian basin and energy hungry Europe, places the Black Sea in a unique position. Nevertheless, while the opportunity to transfer Caspian oil and gas to European markets raises hopes for regional economic development and prosperity, competition to control pipelines, shipping lanes and transport routes to secure increased political and economic influence, not only throughout the region, but also on a global scale, raises the risks of confrontation.

Romania's foreign policy has established among its priorities the ones concerning the Black Sea region, which are considered to be "*a very important issue, of national interest.*"[3]

In this geostrategic environment, the influence of historical evolution is a factor that should be taken into consideration as we strive to configure the relationships between this region and organizations like NATO and the EU and to prove its increased importance.

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The former Chief of General Staff, General Constantin Degeratu, has made an assessment about the importance of the Black Sea, at the annual Black Sea Naval Commanders Committee *Meeting, held in Mamaia on May 17th, 2005: "in our opinion, Black Sea is recognized as an important geopolitical area, which also covers the countries placed around it and in its closeness. It claims a real Euro-Atlantic strategy in order to ensure the democratic stability, security and prosperity, on one hand and, to properly promote the dynamism of democratic changes process, on the other hand. In order to support such strategy, we have to start from the region's realities, as well as from the ways this area is integrated onto the global processes."*

From this point of view, as well as from the latest statements of the Romanian president, there are at least three specific elements for the Black Sea area.

First of all, all states within the area are united by the same fundamental values and interests, which govern the current development of international relationships: democracy, human rights and free market economy.

Secondly, all countries are linked, one way or another, to the Euro-Atlantic security configuration. In relation with NATO, there are Alliance members, PfP members, and countries that share a special partnership with NATO.

Thirdly, the Black Sea region develops as a major chain loop, which links the strategic Euro-Atlantic area and the Middle East, Caspian Sea and Central Asia.
The Black Sea area is placed at a central point between two major strategic axes, which have complementary components: the axis of the energy producer and the energy consumer, on one hand and, the axis of the security producer and the security consumer, on the other hand.

The increased importance of the Black Sea region in the present geopolitical context is given by the necessity to establish the strategic raw materials flow, by the economic and military co-operation and by the increased involvement of the great powers and of the international institutions' contribution to solve major issues of the region.

3. Naval interoperability-a maritime perspective

In my opinion, the main pillars of Black Sea security are regional cooperation, interoperability and confidence building the most important attribute being flexibility as a tool for fulfill the mission' requirements.
At the outset, we should be clear what we mean by interoperability as it can be interpreted in different ways. For the purposes of this article, interoperability describes the ability of forces from Black Sea littoral countries to train, exercise and operate effectively together in the execution of assigned missions and tasks. Within NATO, standardization is the process of developing concepts, doctrines, procedures and designs to achieve and maintain the most effective level of standardization in the fields of operations, administration and materiel. The levels of standardization are in ascending order compatibility, interoperability, interchangeability and commonality [4].
Interoperability is a property referring to the ability of diverse systems and organizations to work together (inter-operate). The term is often used in a technical systems engineering sense, or alternatively in a broad sense, taking into account social, political, and organizational factors that impact system to system performance [5].

3.1 Improve Interoperability.

In my opinion, the most important pillar of Black Sea security is interoperability. It was improved exercise by exercise but there are still some gaps. Ships' commanding

officers have to gradually increase the interoperability level in accordance with the mission, aims and objectives stated in EXPLANs, ships characteristics and present level of crews training. This characteristic has to show, first of all, capability to adapt to any situations, fast, without hesitations and capable to face any situation.

Interoperability and rapid reaction is the key to success in missions such humanitarian assistance or search and rescue. Cooperation with naval forces of Black Sea nations requires more interoperability taking in consideration various levels of technology. We have to work as a mechanism for the interoperability level improvement as a main pillar of Black Sea security.

Once obtained the desired interoperability' level will demand a high degree of coordination among liaison officers, exercises' staff, ships with their departments in order to execute their responsibilities of providing, training, and sustaining naval forces. Each commanding officer at all levels has to act responsibly for determining how ships are organized, deployed, and employed. This role involves identification of requirements emphasized by mission stated in EXPLANs and articulation of how their ships or subordinates can be integrated in appropriate ways to meet aims and objectives. Close synchronization among these is more than necessary having a satisfactory level of efficiency. International staff must prove their ability to plan, asses and execute in accordance with NATO series documents.

3.2   The Level of Interoperability Required.

To determine and extract from the mission what the required level of interoperability is, represents the most important objective. Interoperability is multifaceted and its requirements vary from sea phases exercises shore SIMEX, workshops, briefings and post exercise discussions

The Romanian Navy is engaged in interoperability since 1990 when it paved the way with Partnership for Peace and, continuing with BLACKSEAFOR and more pre-eminently after Romania' accession to NATO. I consider that, in order to fulfill our assumptions and missions an increased level of interoperability is required to maintain an effective Command and Control.

Sometimes, interoperability covers a large spectrum including language, cultural and technical aspects. The basic level of interoperability represents communications, both in technical and operational point of view. During sea phases, communications have to be improved in order to avoid any misunderstanding. For ships, situation is complicated by limitation in number of radio equipment, language barriers, and being continuously shorthanded in communication personnel.

4. Humanitarian assistance and training

4.1   Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response

During NATO and PfP exercises, many interactions have been developed among ships, in order to reduce the harmful effects of natural disaster. Because of their operational readiness and capabilities, ships are able to support and assist people in distress and in suffering. I consider this Navy' mission one of the most important. There is a need to improve our trainings, both, at sea and in ports, in order to improve the standing operating procedures. People in distress do not have enough time and patience to wait. Thus, ships have to show capability to develop a sustained, precise and fast non-combatant evacuation.

In case of natural disasters or emergencies on humanitarian assistance situations, the Romanian navy ships should be able to provide timely civilians evacuation and non-combatant personnel support. In addition, it has to be able to provide emergency medical treatment and to fix or evacuate damaged infrastructure. Finally, for the humanitarian support, the exercises actions has to focus on measures for human life saving, such as medical support, water supplies, food, clothing, fuel and also the transportation on sea of the persons affected by the disaster.

4.2   Training

Given the mission, there is a mandatory necessity to train both, sailors and staff, in order to face challenges. For young officers, they have to work in a very sustained sea exercises, requiring from their commanders to be entrusted with responsibility to conduct different exercise and serials in order to execute and fulfill the mission.

Crews training must be polished in accordance with missions. Operations such humanitarian assistance require enhanced understanding of real life situation, achieved through intense training throughout workshops, sea serials, shore simulated exercises (SIMEX), staff assignments, nights and days on the bridge.

5. The Romania Naval Forces contribution to the provision of cooperation and security in the Black Sea

Cooperation [1] can mean two things. Firstly, it means being together. As social creatures, we need other human beings for companionship. We feel most secure in a group where we are accepted and find encouragement. Secondly, it means working together. Preservation of security in the Black Sea region through regional cooperation is a key to maintain the stability of this region. In this paper I analyze one of the Navy missions, developing cooperation among countries.

The Black Sea region is increasingly becoming a priority on the international agenda. In fact, a regional approach is emerging as actors understand that common problems need to be addressed jointly. Nevertheless, cooperation efforts are hampered by a number of factors, such as uneven economic and political development within and among countries, nationalist forces, and longstanding animosities between regional players. In this context, it is imperative to foster sound policies aimed at strengthening dialogue and cooperation.

In my opinion, security of the Black Sea region and anchoring the region to the Euro-Atlantic cooperation using the existing regional initiatives including BLACKSEA HARMONY are priorities to Romanian Naval Forces Staff.

Romania is paying particular consideration to the Black Sea region and I believe that its geographical location at the southeastern boundaries of the EU and NATO requires a special approach from all countries. Romania will continue to play an important role in sharing trust and interoperability of the navy forces of the riparian countries.

I think that the geographical position of Romania in the vicinity of the Black Sea and its connection to the Planetary Ocean represents a strategic advantage that must be fully exploited.

In the context of Romania's external policy priorities, a special attention is given to the Black Sea issues. This concern is a very important matter, of national interest. Romania wants to promote its own maritime and river interests, which are sustained by its maritime power, by the access to the sea and by the length of the maritime and river borders.

From this perspective, our country has major interests to support the supply with raw materials through the maritime and river lines of communications, to exploit the sea bed, to develop the submarine exploration and exploitation, to support economic activities at sea and river – naval transportation, tourism, naval building – and to promote its image worldwide, by showing the flag at seas and oceans. Also, the Euro-Atlantic involvement on the extended region of the Black Sea is very important.

Participation at common naval exercises under the auspices of the regional initiatives, consolidates the trust, friendship and relations of good vicinity with Black Sea littoral states.

The main tendency for the Black Sea is that this area will become an area of co-operation, interoperability, development and regional mutual confidence. The regional co-operation is a reality with significant results, especially regarding to the level of trust between the littoral states. Black Sea has permanently been unstable and represented a border between various political, ideological and religious systems.

The co-operation relationships are focused on the economic development and the prevention and elimination of the risk factors that may generate crisis situations, with harmful effects over the regional stability and security. Thus, there are promoted political, ideological, economic, diplomatic and cultural relations in order to maintain and consolidate the stability and, also, the military co-operation relations in order to increase the trust and security through transparency.

By participating to the regional and PfP activities, the Romanian Naval Forces are mainly engaged in the fulfillment of humanitarian and Search and Rescue missions. The contribution of the Romanian Naval Forces to the regional stability can be evaluated also by the adoption of "The Document on Confidence and Security Building Measures in the naval field in the Black Sea", which is the result of the negotiations between the six littoral states.

6. Conclusion

The Black Sea Region has significantly grown in importance in the last decade, both for the regional and international actors. It has been due to the enlargement of both NATO and the EU, which has connected them geographically to the Black Sea, making the Black Sea an access point. Because of globalization, the main tool in dealing with security issues is to develop a regional security approach reinforced by region building and regional cooperation. Even though the Black Sea lacks a regional identity due to different political and economic development, military potential, history, religion, and culture, there has been evidence of regional cooperation since 1992. Moreover, the important differences in foreign policies and strategic orientations of the countries in the region have hampered the regionalization. However, the regional cooperation has diversified, having a big impact on regional security challenges. I am considering regional initiatives have the potential of enhancing stability and security in the Black Sea Region.

The Black Sea security environment is fairly complex. However, the foundation to cope with these complex challenges is strong. The Montreux Convention, existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation arrangements, organizations and structures are concrete instruments. What counts is the will and intention of all littorals states to maintain and foster peace and stability in the Black Sea region.

Beside cooperation, interoperability is extremely complex and becoming more important. Experimentation of different standing operating procedures innovation in finding new interoperable ways to fulfill our missions and building based on lessons

identified from previous exercises to improve interoperability, will remain important aspects from my perspective. It is a long way to transform an identified lesson into a learned one, but as an officer, I am taking the responsibility to take this over the time.

Finally, this paper has outlined the potential contribution of Romania, as an EU and NATO member, in enhancing Black Sea regional security cooperation in the future. Before EU integration, Romania has envisaged playing an active role for the enhancement of security situation in the Black Sea region, by canalizing regional efforts in developing a coherent strategy towards this region and promoting it within EU. As EU member, Romania is enhancing its contribution for prioritization of common efforts, which will increase regional development and stability. As NATO member, Romania has the military capabilities and political maturity to develop NATO' assumed missions.

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