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**THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE
GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS**

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Abstract:

The Black Sea region over the centuries played an important geostrategic role in the relations between the great powers. Currently, at the confluence of two Versailles culture and religions, the Christian and Islamic and many nations, the Black Sea is a space of both convergence and collision of the interests of the riparian countries, but also of the various international actors.

This article outlines the main interests of the great powers. Thus, the geostrategic, political-military and geo-economic interests of the US and NATO, the Russian Federation, and, incidentally, those of the EU are under investigation.

Key words: Black Sea basin; Russia; US; EU; NATO; geopolitical interest; geostrategic interest; geo-economic interest;

1.Introduction

Over the centuries, geographically, geo-economically and geostrategically, the importance of the Black Sea was mainly based on the role that the region played by major powers and empires (Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Russian). It was simultaneously a connecting bridge and a border, a buffer zone and transit between West and East, between South and North. In addition, the Black Sea has been and continues to be a connecting point for trade for the energy-rich regions [11]. In this context, the geopolitical energy axis joining Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea deserve attention. Oleoducts and pipelines are the connecting routes for these spaces. The Black Sea region of *Stricto Senso* includes the territorial sea and the coast of Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova [9]. There are three NATO member states and two EU Member States around the Black Sea. A number of political transformations have prompted advances to democratic regimes in other states in the region. The area of the Black Sea basin continues to be transformed [16, p. 42].

The Black Sea region is the South Caucasus, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and some of the EU Member States (and therefore the Union) [19, p.225-241].

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

The Black Sea Basin is the aquatic space with an area of 413 000 km², with a length of 1 150 km from the West to the East and 600 km from the North to the South [14]. The Black Sea region also includes a diversity of cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious identities. The heterogeneity is also met in terms of the structure, size and economic orientation of the countries of the Black Sea region. Surrounded by Europe, the Caucasus region of Anatolia, the Black Sea basin is connected to the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the south through the Bosphorus Strait and the Marmara Sea [18]. The Black Sea as a region has been disputed in the light of its dual bridge or frontier vocation. The size of the Black Sea and the increase of the projection capabilities of the forces, plus the fact that it is a great internal power, with a unique way of exiting the planetary ocean and the one controlled by a single state, Turkey [7. p. 142].

Being at the confluence of two cultures and universal religions, the European Christian and Islamic, and many families of nations, the Black Sea is a space of both convergence and collision of the interests of the riparian countries and also of the various international actors. The geopolitical and security developments in the Black Sea region, the geographic position of the region, the risks and threats to stability in the area, political, economic and military aspects of cooperation are issues that further attract the interest of the international community, European and Euro-Atlantic organizations, generates a closer look at the area's problem. In the context of new realities, geopolitics and geostrategic, Euro-Atlantic, as a result of the enlargement of NATO and the European Union, gives the Black Sea basin the characteristics of a geostrategic space of importance [10].

It is an intersection of strategic directions and routes that provide the connections between the West and the Orient, competition, cooperation between important international actors, from different economic and social collocations and antagonistic value systems. Since 2004, the Black Sea has been defined as the eastern limit of the EU and NATO, located in the vicinity of the CIS and the member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The analyzed region also has a special economic value due to the presence of energy resources and terrestrial and marine raw materials, modern industrial capabilities, the number and degree of education of the population, the magnitude of regional and trans-regional trade etc. [11, p. 492].

Also, the Black Sea Basin is a densely populated area with significant natural resources connected to the Mediterranean Sea through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and has direct links with important communication lines through the Danube, Volga, Don and Corridors on a land link from east to west Central Caucasus and Central Asia, and from north to south the Baltic region of South-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean Sea. These routes have been used extensively for both military campaigns and trade since the establishment of the first Greek colonies along the shores. The only time the Black Sea represented a "frozen lake" and the communication channels were interrupted was during the 50 years of the Cold War when the border between the two blocks was practically the center of the region.

2. Black Sea in the context of the major powers interests

The geostrategic importance of the Black Sea Basin over the centuries has been based on the role played by the region, being both a bridge and a border, a buffer zone and a transit zone between Europe and Asia at the intersection of former powers and empires. In addition, the Black Sea was a junction point for trade routes and regions rich in energy resources. The Black Sea has always been a strategic area for the deployment and mobilization of the armed forces, both from the perspective of defensive and expansionary policies.

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

Its strategic position, between the hydrocarbs reserves in the Caspian Basin and Europe, places the Black Sea in a unique position. But while the opportunity to transfer Caspian oil and gas to European markets increases economic development and regional economic prosperity, competition for the control of pipelines, waterways and transport routes to ensure greater political and economic influence not only in the region, on a global scale, raises the risk of confrontation. At the same time, the proliferation of routes, while the potential for increasing bilateral cooperation to the detriment of the region can at the same time lead to redundancy due to too many capacities for not sufficient gas and oil [1].

In the context of the analysis of the Black Sea Basin, consideration should be given to analyzing the geopolitical and geostrategic interests of the actors present in the region. Thus, in the Black Sea region can be assessed under the following headings: 1) Global Powers: United States, European Union and Russia 2) Regional Powers: Turkey, Ukraine, and Romania. These actors have difficulties in formulating policies independent of global actors, so they have to work in coordination with them. 3) International Organizations: NATO, EU, OSCE, GUAM, Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) [1]. Thus, by looking at the strategic interests of the Russian Federation, the US and including those of the EU in the Black Sea Basin, these can be examined from several perspectives

a) Geostrategic interest

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, newly created states are in the orbit of different power centers. This also applies to Ukraine, Belarus, and the Caucasus states, including the Republic of Moldova, for which both the Russian Federation and the US and the EU are interested. In the early 2000s, geopolitical competition for control over the Black Sea Basin began between the West and Russia [24, pp.75-83].

Analyzing the position of the Black Sea from a geopolitical and geostrategic perspective, we could determine the causes of the geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic competition triggering the interests of the Russian Federation and the USA, EU and NATO for this space. What are the US, NATO and EU interests towards Ukraine? [26, p.75]. The main actors of the new strategic scenario that is portrayed in the Black Sea border, with the Caspian oil stake, are the United States of America, Russia and the European Union.

The United States of America is the benchmark on the "grand chessboard", primarily aimed at strengthening its position in the Black Sea area, its main pillar being geo-economic interest. The intention of removing the Russian monopoly over the Caspian energy exploitation and transport processes is also a strategic successor of the United States of America. In the context of the global anti-terror war, the United States is engaged in the modernization efforts of the Georgian and Azerbaijan armed forces, as well as in the process of monitoring and evaluating the Black Sea oil traffic, especially through the Turkish straits [9]. The significance of the Black Sea for the US is also important for the following reasons:

- Through the Black Sea, U.S.A. can control the "vulnerabilities" of Russia, the North Caucasus, and engage in different forms of provocation.
- Can increase the confidence and courage of Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova to manifest themselves as international law actors in the country, causing them to raise their voices against Russia.
- In addition to Iran, the Black Sea serves as a plateau to exert pressure on Middle East countries such as Iraq and Syria.
- The region is strategically important for the war on terror, which began in Afghanistan.
- The Black Sea region offers feasible opportunities for the isolation of Russia.
- NATO has included the region in the Partnership for Peace Program (PfP).

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

- The strategic position of the Black Sea could allow the mobilization of ships and war bases in and around this region, which in practice could be used to conduct intelligence operations against Russia.

The United States has also formulated a six-pronged strategy in the region:

- Frozen conflicts should be of higher priority: attention should be given to the conflicts in Transnistria - Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia's objectives are to create turmoil in these regions for its own interests and use conflicts to exert pressure on regional powers.

- Ukraine should focus on: The US considers that the coup in Ukraine is a positive development for the region [17].

Another factor regarding the United States and NATO has been to prevent new independent states from yielding to Russian influence or pressure. The US has reassessed its geostrategic interest in the area and added a military dimension to its strategy to strengthen NATO's role. This has led to a predictable response from Russia. The United States has sought to develop a more coherent and comprehensive strategy towards the Black Sea Region. This had three main points. First of all, US administrations have paid special attention to promoting democracy and the market economy. This approach has focused on greater political freedom, as a result of free and fair elections, the rule of law, respect for human rights and the transparency of market economies. Second, priority was given to the energy issue and the expansion of free trade. This includes an increase in the number of gas and oil pipelines; an increase in trade and economic development due to improvements in transport and infrastructure communications; and the promotion of tourism, customs cooperation, environmental protection, etc.

Security is the third pillar of the US approach in the region. In this case, the main focus was on combating terrorism, organized crime and smuggling with weapons of mass destruction, a strengthened border security regime and a civil-military response. Of particular importance in this regard was the US support for the Black Sea Border Security Initiative and the Black Sea Civil Emergency Response Plan, funded by the US Department of Defense, which is designed to improve cross-border coordination. For improving the profile in the area, the US has developed close bilateral security ties with regional actors such as Georgia, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania.

If we are to analyze the interest of the USA, NATO and the EU for the Black Sea Basin, then we can see that it serves as a tool for coercion and stopping Russia's expansionist interests and ambitions - Ukraine's independence from Russia and its inclusion in the sphere of influence of the US and NATO. As stated in 1997 Zb. Brzezinski, the purpose of the US lies in "not admitting the creation of an Eurasian empire that would be able to put an end to US geostrategic trends and goals." US goals in the Black Sea Basin focus on ensuring geopolitical pluralism in the post-Soviet space. Goals and interests in the Black Sea Basin are also NATO, although in principle they coincide with US interests. Firstly, it aims at extending the Alliance to the East. In the event of joining NATO, Ukraine, it will soon be the role of "keeping" the Russian Federation in its expansionist tendencies and of participating, as necessary, in the formation of a new "health cordon", which would allow division, removal of Russia from the states of the European Union.

Speaking about the interests of NATO member states, according to F. Cune, there are five reasons for showing interest in this area:

1. Geographic and geostrategic location of the region;
2. The role of the Central Caucasus for Eurasian security;
3. Total unexploded gas reserves in the Caspian basin;

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

4. The presence of problems with the threat and spread of the weapons of mass destruction;

5. Not admitting the hegemony of a power in the area [22, pp. 13-14].

In the context of the analysis of the interests of the great powers in the Black Sea Basin, attention is drawn to the interests expressed by the Russian Federation in the region. Thus, for the Russian Federation, the Black Sea area is a fundamental strategic objective, and in its relationship with the riparian states it imposes a status equal to that of the North Atlantic Alliance. Being one of the main actors, Russia's main concern in the "near neighborhood" is to maintain and consolidate its power and to restrict the presence of other powers, building on the premise that Ukraine and Georgia considers Russia as a threat, but the Russian Federation, considers to be surrounded and covered by the West, the reason for maintaining influence in the area is to achieve the interest - to ensure national security. As the USA exercised simultaneous military and political influence on the Black Sea through the expansion of NATO in the region, the Russian Federation considers it the intensity of the Russian fencing fear was evident during the August 2008 crisis. For this reason, Russia's interests in the Black Sea region could be defined as follows: 1) Given the growing influence of regional and global actors in the Black Sea region, the Russian Federation is trying to maintain its position as one of the main actors in the region; 2) to prevent the emergence of problems or projects that are not under Russian control; 3) preventing the emergence of anti-Russian military coalitions; 4) preventing countries in the region from joining NATO; and 5) fighting and suppressing separatism, fundamentalism and terrorism [6].

The Russian Federation has faced a crisis in the last decade as a result of the loss of the status of the second world superpower. Simultaneously with the developments in the Yugoslav crisis and the serious involvement of the US in the region, Moscow has abandoned the claims of political hegemony in Southeast Europe. Analysts believe that today's Russia focuses on the issues of corporate restructuring and strengthening the CIS while at the same time diversifying its partnerships with the US and the EU and its relations with the countries of the Far East. The Russia-US Partnership is perceived in Moscow as a global understanding, and the Russian-NATO Partnership (renewed in May 2002) addresses the issue of combating terrorism, cross-border crime and the proliferation of nuclear weapons [3].

The Black Sea region is an extremely important area of Russia's foreign policy, due to its geopolitical importance and the specificity of Russia's interests during the difficult transition period. The concept of "Neighborhood" was developed to reflect the sudden replacement of the former Soviet republics by sovereign states, generating widespread concerns also in the Black Sea area. There are a number of reasons for Russia's interests in this area. For Russia, the Black Sea has always been a gateway to the world oceans. The region is also a natural bastion for Russia and is marked by a number of potentially destabilizing factors such as the alarming situation in Transcaucasia and North Caucasus, a terrible crisis in the Balkans, the Kurdish issue and the perceived situation around Iran and Iraq. In addition, many Russian regions have maintained strong economic links with the Black Sea area. Russia faces a transformation of the geopolitical environment in the Black Sea region, clearly marked by an increasing number of international actors in the area [5].

The Kremlin considers Georgia and the Caucasus to be exactly what the White House thinks of Central America: its own playground backyard [13]. The Kremlin does not see the growing involvement of the United States in Central Asia and the Caucasus in the area of influence that Russia regards as its own. On this aspect, essentially geopolitical, he attracted the attention and report of the "Strategic Studies Institute". The huge US investments in the two mentioned giant pipelines - pipelines deliberately diverting the very

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

turbulent Russian territory from Central Asia-Caucasus, establishing US bases in the region and supporting pro-American governments in the area, lead to counter-Russian reactions [9].

South Caucasus is regarded by Russia as "close neighborhood". So, it is a Russian military zone for intervention, if necessary. What turns the conflict in the Caucasus into a major international crisis, with possible big "surprises" in the future. Moscow has already made known its ambitions to restore a "Russian orbit," composed of states belonging to the "close neighborhood", Ukraine, Belarus and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. The Russian energy giants RAO and the UES - where most of the actions are held by the Government - have begun a major operation to restore this regional supremacy. RAO acquired most of the energy actions in Armenia and Georgia and announced plans to export energy to Turkey and Azerbaijan [9].

Moreover, the overlapping of the NATO-EU border on the Black Sea by the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the Alliance is explicitly perceived by Russia as a direct threat to its security, for which it feels right to remodel "geostrategic practices specific to the Cold War and abandoned in 1992. The Russian Federation's military manifestations in fact mark the Kremlin's tendency to resume the force policy before the collapse of communism on the one hand and on the other hand a hard exercise image [15].

b) Political-military interest

The Black Sea Basin for the Russian Federation is also an interest from a political-military perspective. Thus, analyzing the political and military interests of the Russian Federation in Eastern Europe, they, depending on the geographical position of the states, have their degree of manifestation. Ukraine's independence has deprived Russia of its dominant position in the Black Sea, where Odessa was a vital gateway to trade with the Mediterranean and the world beyond. Ukraine's loss is a loss of geopolitical pivot because it has limited Russia's geostrategic options in the Black Sea basin. By keeping control of Ukraine, Russia could still try to be the leader of a Eurasian empire in which Moscow dominated non-Slavs in the south and south-east of the former USSR.

The loss of the Baltic Sea dominant position is repeated in the Black Sea not only because of Ukraine's independence but also because of the independence of the Caucasian states - Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Prior to 1991, the Black Sea was the starting point for Russian naval power in the Mediterranean. Following the Russian-Turkish wars, Russia gained access to the Black Sea in 1783. At the beginning of the twentieth century and during the Second World War, 1939-1945, the Black Sea fleet was one of the main military forces. Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, the maritime fleet became a patrimony of the CIS, and on April 5, by signing by the President of Ukraine the Decree on "The means of establishing the maritime forces of Ukraine", according to which "the Black Sea maritime fleet passes under the jurisdiction of Ukraine and its basis became the armed forces of Ukraine".

Russia's reaction was immediate. Already on April 7th the same year, the President of the Russian Federation issues the decree by which the Black Sea maritime fleet falls under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation. Over the course of 7 years, there have been disputes to resolve this issue. Only on May 28, 1997, the signing of the Agreement on the Black Sea Fleet Splitting Parameters - "Status and conditions of the Russian Federation's fleet on the territory of Ukraine", "Mutual calculations for the division of the Black Sea Maritime Fleet on the Ukrainian territory". All these agreements have been concluded for a period of 20 years, being automatically extended for a period of 5 years if one of the parties does not require their termination. These agreements allowed the signature of the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship and Cooperation Agreement on 31 May 1997, according to which the maritime fleet will not have nuclear weapons in its arsenal.

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

The purpose of finding these forces in the Black Sea aquatic territories is to ensure the safety and exploration of the sea.

Thus, until the 2014 events in Ukraine, with the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation, in the Black Sea waters there were 388 units. Basically, 70% of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's infrastructure is in the Crimean area. Also, the maritime fleet also had deployments in Sevastopol (Sevastopolskaia, Iujnaia, Karantinaia, Kazacia), Feodosia and Nikolaev - for the repair of seagoing vessels. The Director of the Institute of CIS States mentioned that in August 1992, the Black Sea Maritime Fleet consisted of 894 vessels, the maritime aviation had 400 aircraft, the land forces had 28 anti-missile shields, 258 medium-sized tanks, 826 armored vehicles, 457 artillery systems. Aircraft fleet coverage was performed by the FAA (Anti-Air Force) forces. Under those conditions, the fleet was located on the Black Sea coast from the Danube Delta to Batumi. Its foundations were located on a length of 1,750 kilometers, 200 kilometers from the seaside. Also in the defense system were the bases of Bulgaria, Syria, Egypt and other Mediterranean countries, which constituted a ratio of 2.5: 1 in favor of the USSR [26].

Already in 1997, the fleet's arsenal shrinks considerably (by 2014 there is only one submarine), the seaside division is reformed, and the foundations of the cities of Simferopol, Eupatoria, Perevalinoe and Megorya are lost. The 31 tanks (reduced by 8 times), 211 armored vehicles (reduced by 4 times), 54 weapons and mine launchers (reduced by 6 times), and marine aviation has been fully liquidated [26, p. 108]. A part of the air force was transferred to the Novorossiysk region. All these reductions denote the considerable weakening of the Russian Federation's maritime and military power in the Black Sea.

In this context, it is also possible to mention the request of the Ukrainian side to submit to it all its naval and hydrographic objects, motivating the responsibility for the security of swimming in the aquatic territories belonging to Ukraine. As a result of the submitted requirements, the procedure for the liquidation and withdrawal of Russian objects is taking place. Claims against Russia also had the Crimean Property Fund, according to which the Black Sea fleet of the Russian Federation illegally uses 96 objects from the Crimea. Another requirement from Ukraine concerns the revision of the cost of renting the bases on which Russian naval forces are deployed. Although there in the agreements is stipulated the amount of 97 million. US \$ annually [26, p. 108], Kiev quite often raised this issue, showing a firm position.

An issue not less important in the Russian-Ukrainian relations is the delimitation of the maritime borders between the states of the Strait of Kerch and the Azov Sea. Until the collapse of the USSR, the Sea of Azov was largely internal, and, according to the principles of international law, the Kerch Strait was a way of internal waters with a "strait" status. The borders between the Crimean and the Krasnodar regions as part of a state were purely nominal. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union on the international arena, this border becomes interstate, the Strait of Kerch and the island of Tuzla pass under the jurisdiction of Ukraine. Under these circumstances, both the military and civilian ships to pass through the Sea of Azov to Rostov, Taganrog, Eisk, Temriuk, Caucasus Port, have to pay the fee for transiting and operating the straits (annually over 2000 ships). Ukraine, in this case, accounts for 70% of the Azov Sea water area, rich in various species of fish, multiplied by only Russia, with the exploration of the mineral resources on the coast and about 120 gas and oil. Negotiations have been taking place since 1992, but by 2014 the issue remains unresolved, leading to disputes and conflicts [26, pp. 109-111].

The Russian Federation is also limited by NATO and Ukrainian joint military and naval maneuvers, including Turkey's growing role in the Black Sea region. The geostrategic interests of the Russian Federation in the Ukrainian area are quite visible

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

lately, and the events in Kiev on Ukraine's integration policy in the European Union show us once more the tendency to maintain the former union republics in its sphere of influence. In this context, the fight for Crimea, a geostrategic point of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea basin, the involvement of the armed forces in the Donbas, and Lugansk area can be mentioned. Also, the Russians viewed the Orange Revolution of Ukraine in December 2004-January 2005 as an attempt by the US to attract Ukraine into NATO and to prepare the scene for Russia to disintegrate [12, p. 69].

The political-military aspect of the Russian Federation's interests is also present in Armenia. Thus, in 1995 the Russian-Armenian agreement on the location of the Russian Military Base 102 in Armenia was signed. The location of this strategic object serves as a pretext for the Russian Federation to protect Armenia from possible intervention by Turkey and Azerbaijan. On August 20, 2010, Russia and Armenia signed a Protocol (No 15) to Yerevan to extend until 2044 the term of application of the 1995 Inter-State Agreement on the Russian military base no. 102 in Gyumri, a locality in northern Armenia. The protocol was signed by Defense Ministers of the two countries, Seiran Oganian and Anatoli Serdiukov, in the presence of Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Serje Sargsian. The Russian-Armenian agreement on the Gyumri Military Base originally provided that Russian military troops would be stationed in Armenia for 25 years (by 2020). Protocol No. 15, signed on August 20, provides for a term of 49 years, to be calculated from the entry into force of the Interstate Agreement. A new element brought by Protocol no. 15 is the possibility of automatically extending, after 2044, the term of the Russian-Armenian Agreement every five years, "if neither party expresses a contrary will"[2].

Military presence needs to be examined in a complex way with other aspects of foreign policy and state economy. The Military Base in Gyumri includes motorized subdivisions, tanks and artillery. The force is 3,500 soldiers, including some of the officers transferred to Armenia as a result of the withdrawal of Russian military forces from Batumi and Ahalkalaki (Georgia) in 2007 and currently located in Ghiumri, Erbuni and Yerevan.

Thus, in the absence of a full Russian security system, the Gyumri Base is just one point, which serves Armenia's interests, but which, in the future, can be seen as a potential for strengthening Russia's influence in the region. Russia's pragmatism lies in prolonging its military presence and ensuring its presence in the event of a possible confrontation with the interests of the US, Turkey, and Iran. The Russian Federation also assumed the responsibility to protect the 345-km-long Armenian-Turkish border and the Armenian-Iranian border segment of 45 km [20]. In the case of the withdrawal of the Russian Federation from the region, other powers would claim to impose their presence in Armenia. Thus, withdrawing from Armenia, the Russian Federation is aware that the degree of danger to Russia's security would increase considerably, and its economic interests in Azerbaijan would also be limited. Against the backdrop of the events in Ukraine, Armenia seems to be a stable partner of the Russian Federation [21].

During the Soviet period, the region inherited a potentially strong nuclear power and structure. The Caucasus states, especially Georgia, have deposits such as uranium. The Institute of Physics and Technology in Sukhumi can be considered one of the dangerous objects of the USSR. Due to the conflict with Abkhazia it cannot be controlled. Also, the Medzamore nuclear power plant (Armenia) can lead to a similar catastrophe to Chernobyl's impact on Turkey's markets as well. NATO allies also worry that states such as Iran, Iraq and Pakistan may demand exploring this region in the region. Thus, the Caucasus has an important role to play in US, NATO and EU policy. Enforcing a monopoly of power in the region could deprive the US and the European states of income.

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

No less interest raises the issue of the fleet of Black Sea coastal states. On 2 April 2001, they established a naval cooperation body called the BLACKSEAFOR Black Sea Naval Joint Task Force (BLACKSEAFOR), aiming at mutual knowledge, confidence building and security in the Black Sea, the actions being focused on humanitarian issues, search-rescue, mines, pollution and so on. It can be used as a force in the Black Sea, but on request it can also intervene outside, in accordance with the agreement of the participating states. There is a strong Russian military presence in the Crimea, which has led to certain disagreements between Russia and Ukraine on the status of the Black Sea Fleet and the strategic base of Sevastopol (June 1995 agreement on the Black Sea fleet allocates 81.7% of Russia and 18.7% of Ukraine). According to the military doctrine, the Russian Black Sea fleet will secure the defense of its own coasts, maintain capacity for the execution of the blockade, and be able to carry out an assault maritime long distance operation.

c) control zone of important frozen conflicts

In the geopolitical sense, the Black Sea position is the key to its importance for the entire South Caucasus, especially if the conflict between two countries in the region - Armenia and Azerbaijan is also taken into account. Because of its location among nations with systemic risk factors, as well as a very high degree of corruption, it has left the way for the development of this country. Maintaining frozen conflicts is a geopolitical priority for the Russian Federation, as they are very important regional control levers, monitoring or involving armed forces in such conflicts is ensured by concluding bilateral agreements. Overall, Georgia can be considered a geopolitical "bridgehead" for the development of regional businesses and the promotion of economic interests in the area's local markets, the exploitation of mineral resources in the area, the use of labor, etc. [18, pp. 129-130]. From a geostrategic point of view, on the one hand and the other on the Black Sea, the Balkans and especially the South Caucasus are characterized by numerous tensions and conflicts (Chechnya, South Ossetia, Transnistria, the Carabakh Mountain, Abkhazia etc.), for which international security organizations are working hard to solve [4].

d) Energy interest

The strategic importance of the Black Sea Basin lies also in the fact that one of the two routes crossing the North Caucasus and reaching the Black Sea passes on its territory. The significance of Abkhazia is even greater, because it is on the Black Sea coast, and Sukhumi port is on its territory. On the other hand, Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan and Baku - Supsa pipelines and the NABUCCO (Baku - Erzerum) gas pipeline have been designed in Georgia. Georgia also has several Black Sea ports (Suhumi, Poti, Supsa, Koulevi and Batumi), which have become very active in oil exports to the EU. Russia does not control the supply routes, as is the case in Northern Caucasus routes (Baku - Novorossisk). The importance of this area comes from the considerations of the geopolitical strategies of the great powers disputing the spheres of influence.

Construction of the Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, the Baku - Tbilisi - Erzerum pipeline and the Karas - Akhalkalai pipeline are part of a plan to capitalize Georgian geostrategic position between Europe and Asia. In geo-economic terms, Georgia is located on the shortest route connecting Europe to Asia, meaning that this territorial proximity has been transposed into other projects such as TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia) and INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) - projects in which Western economic functions and interests are visible in the economic development of the state. The energy potential of the Caspian basin requires that these resources be transported through a branched pipeline system, some of which must cross

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

Georgian territory. Currently, Georgia has two maritime terminals where Caspian oil is transported to other locations. One is located at Supsa, with a capacity of 200,000 barrels per day, and the other in the Batumi port of the same capacity.

Georgia is an essential energy corridor towards the West and, along with other transit states, it has an obligation to guarantee the safety of oil and gas pipelines from the Azeri region of the Caspian Sea. Pipes are of great importance to the European Union because they reduce dependence on Russian supplies and do not cross Russian territory. The Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan oil pipeline has a total length of 1768 kilometers, of which 443 kilometers cross Azerbaijan, 249 - Georgia and 1076 kilometers cross Turkey. It crosses numerous mountains that reach up to 2830 meters and intersects 3000 roads, railways, useful lines and 1500 waterways with widths of up to 500 meters (such as the Ceyhan River in Turkey). The Oleo duct occupies an 8-meter corridor and is buried along its entire course at a depth of at least one meter. In parallel with BTC, there is the Southern Caucasus gas pipeline that transports natural gas from Sanganchal Terminal to Erzerum, Turkey. It has a useful life projected for a period of 40 years and, since 2009, it has carried one million barrels (160 000 cubic meters) of oil per day. It has a capacity of 10 million barrels of oil, which will flow through the oil pipeline by 2 meters per second. There are 8 pumping stations along the pipeline (2 in Azerbaijan, 2 in Georgia and 4 in Turkey). The project cost \$ 3.9 billion, 70% of the costs were financed by third parties - the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, operating credit agencies in seven countries, and a syndicate of 15 commercial banks [18, p. 128].

Brussels is primarily concerned with the formation of a stable economic and political area that focuses on common European values. The European Commission publishes in March 2003 the "Neighborhood of extended Europe. A New Framework for Relations with Neighboring Countries in the East and South", which outlined the basic principles of the future European Neighborhood Policy addressed to Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova, as well as to the Caucasus states. This document outlines the EU's strategy for relations with neighboring countries. The aim of this strategy lies in "creating a prosperous neighborhood and neighborhood friendship - "friends ring", with which the EU has close ties with friendship, peace and cooperation. The Communiqué and the Concept had a negative reaction from the Russian administration. For Moscow, this release signifies the EU's intention to strengthen its economic positions in Russia's sphere of influence in the CIS - the area of priority interests. At the same time, the EU's interest is also the issue of fuels exposed on European markets from Russia, which transit through Ukrainian territory. That is why the EU is not interested in triggering a conflict with Russia because of Ukraine, doesn't want to worsen the Russian-Ukrainian relations, following which it suffers the energy security system [26, p.75].

The South Caucasus region has an important role, which makes the EU interested in this region. The main thrust of the newly independent South Caucasus states after the collapse of the Soviet Union is the possibility, without the involvement of the Russian Federation, to explore energy resources and to build on the territory of these countries ways of transporting energy sources to the European area of the region South Caucasus and Central Asia. The geopolitical role of the states in the region has grown as a result of Western states' interest in diminishing influence and dependence on the Russian Federation. In the last 13 years the Azerbaijan pipelines in Turkey - "Baku - Supsa" and "Baku - Tbilisi - Geyhan" - and the Azerbaijan pipeline in Turkey, Baku - Tbilisi - Ezrum [23, pp. 59-63]. Georgia is a transit state for international markets, which runs counter to the interests of the Russian Federation, which intends to control the transit of exported fuel to Europe. Georgia also has a tourism potential but has not explored it fully.

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

Unlike the interest in former Eastern European states, especially in the preservation of the monopoly over energy resources, the Russian Federation's interest in the EU member states is a pragmatic one, focused on deliveries of petroleum products and natural gas to the area. The decisive factor in the relations between the Russian Federation and the East European countries remains to be the export of natural gas and oil. The Russian Federation exports about 44 million tons of oil to the region, half of which comes from Poland. Starting with 2014, as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, there is a more political turn in the relations between the Russian Federation and the Eastern European states (EU member states). The Russian-Ukrainian crisis also affects the trade relations between the Russian Federation and the Eastern European partners. Eastern Europe's trade deficit with the Russian Federation is down to \$ 32.5 billion (\$ 36.4 billion in 2013). If Russia's imports to Eastern European countries in 2008 were 2, 6 times higher than in 2014, then in 2014 it dropped 2.2 times.

Regarding energy resources, the states of the analyzed region depend strongly on energy supplies from Russia's oil and gas supplies, a particularly important vulnerability. Thus, with the support of Western Black Sea states, the West seeks to open up access to energy sources in the Caspian Sea and the near and Middle East, which would in the medium term reduce the dependence of Eastern Europe - the EU in general - on The Russian Federation.

The geo-economic and geopolitical location of the Central Caucasus states is not so important to NATO member states but serves as a point of reference for all other interests. The region is the border of the European Common Space, an economic center and a transport corridor. The Caucasus is the bridge between Europe and Asia, an important element in trade relations between the Orient, the US and NATO, and between North and South. It plays a strategic role in reviving the Silk Road, as it is a land-based way of transporting goods and raw materials from Central Asia to the Mediterranean Sea and Europe. Due to its economic potential and commercial cooperation, the region can become an important economic center. The civilization of the Caucasus is not European, but cannot be considered as Asiatic either. It is a connecting link of European and Asian (Muslim) civilization. Thus, according to S. Hadington, this type of culture is growing considerably, especially after the events of September 11, 2001, as a bridge between Christianity and Islam. The existence of conflicts in the area is of interest to European security. Throughout history, the South Caucasus has been a buffer zone, or an area of influence of the great powers - Russia, Turkey and Iran - each of which has its own interests. The difference is that the status of the former empires turns into one of regional powers [22, p.15]. That is why the primordial interest of the US and NATO in the area is to keep Russia at the periphery of these interests and not to admit the fortification of Russia's presence in the Caucasus. NATO members watch Turkey's growing role in the region. Thus, by estimating all these interests, it can be mentioned that cooperation with the NATO member states is only a matter of priority interests. The region is an "important periphery". It is a region where it is difficult to reach a consensus [22, p. 22].

Russia can be considered the main US and NATO competitor in this area. Its policy and actions in the region can be qualified as the main factor influencing NATO policy. Both NATO and the Russian Federation, having common interests in the region, are two competitors. In order to increase the influence in the region, both actors use methods of exerting influence, but the methods are different. The US intends to intensify its influence by the method of cooperation and economic principles, hoping to expand the commercial aspect and expand the security in the region. The Russian Federation, for its part, does not allow the independent development of the Caucasus states. Russia continues to invest enormous amounts in order not to lose control in the region.

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

Also, for the US, the Black Sea is an important passage in the transfer of energy resources from the Caucasian-Central Asia line to the Western markets. Not only are the foreign powers operating in the region influenced in shaping the energy policies of the countries of this line, but they can also dictate the energy policies of the whole region, the main export channel for oil and natural gas. In this context, the location of the Black Sea at the core of North-West, North-South energy corridors and the manifestation of the region as a considerable alternative to the Middle East reserves, an increasingly unstable area, urged both the US and the EU to establish good relations with the states of the region.

The Black Sea is a region considered by Iran as a channel for export of oil and natural gas. Therefore, the active involvement of the US in the region offers the opportunity to manipulate Iranian energy policies. At the same time, geographical proximity can turn Iran into an easy target for aircraft that could take off from bases or aircraft transported to the region.

Another key state for the realization of oil and gas transport projects from the Caspian Sea to Europe, bypassing Russia, is Turkey. Ankara is interested in managing transit of oil and gas in the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Black Sea. Thus, since 1994, Ankara has become one of the promoters of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) project, as an alternative to the "Nordic Route" proposed by Moscow. Competition does not exclude, however, and cooperation within certain limits. Turkey is massively importing natural gas from the Russian Federation, although it is trying to diversify its sources of supply (the Nabucco gas pipeline, between Iran, the Balkans and Central Europe). The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Erzurum pipelines offer Turkey an alternative energy source and increase the strategic importance of the state [9].

Thus, more economical transport routes and energy routes (the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the trans-Caspian gas pipeline) align the countries of the two groups [4]. Throughout this equation, Romania has an important strategic role in international economic circuits, both for Russian oil transit or the Baltic Sea basin to Western Europe (for example the Constanta-Belgrade-Trieste project) and quality an exporter of electricity and petroleum products. The uneven economic development of these states has negative effects in turning them into credible economic partners for Western investment. Therefore, in order to strengthen regional cooperation and cooperation, Black Sea states have set up a number of organizations, such as the BSEC, or are members of others - CIS, GUUAM.

With the accession of Central and Eastern European countries to the EU, the EU has become the Black Sea Neighborhood. With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, the EU has become an active power in the Black Sea region. Starting from the premise that the EU is bordering the Black Sea, the problems of this region are addressed through the "European Neighborhood Policy" framework. The European Neighborhood Policy seeks to recognize sovereignty and independence, to resolve conflicts, to recognize human rights and democratic foundations and to implement economic reforms. Being located on energy routes, the Black Sea is becoming an important area for the EU. In addition, environmental factors have created a link between the Black Sea and the EU through the membership of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU. Thus, the EU has a coastline on the Black Sea, and responsibilities such as coastal protection, water scarcity and the fight against radioactive waste will come to the fore. In addition, the Black Sea oil tankers will have to comply with EU security standards. The EU's relationship with the region is also necessary to control potential immigration from the fragile and relatively underdeveloped countries of this region in Europe [16]. The intensification of the energy dependence of most riparian states, together with the forced delay of the implementation of the Western countries' plans to exploit and transport energy resources, are the premises of a cumulative risk.

THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

NATO's strategic goal in this part of the globe is determined by the need to strengthen security and stability in the region and to build a model of cooperation. After the admission of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO, the construction of the seat belt around the Balkan conflict zones will be completed, which has considerably increased its importance in this area as a major trade route between East and West, especially from the point of view of transport energy resources. As a result, the unified security region expanded and the Black Sea, which ceased to be isolated, "becoming" a continuation of the link between the Mediterranean, Caspian and the energy resources of the Caucasus, Kazakhstan and the Near East.

3. Conclusion

Thus, analyzing the Black Sea Basin region from a geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic perspective, it is worth mentioning that the region is the area in which the interests of major powers such as the USA and NATO, the Russian Federation, including the EU. Russia is interested in not accepting the presence of the US and NATO in the area which, according to Moscow, is the area of its exceptional interests. Foreign presence in the area, especially the location of the Western military contingent in Ukraine and Georgia, will weaken and ultimately neutralize Russian influence in these states. The interest of the USA, NATO and the EU lies in constraining and hindering Russia's interests and influence in the region. The intention of the European Union to integrate into its sphere of influence the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine is determined first and foremost by the formation of a stable economic and political zone that would ensure the stability at the eastern borders.

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THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR POWERS

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