MARITIME SECURITY THREATS IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

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Abstract: Unfortunately, the end of the Cold War did not bring the desired peace and stability to the regions neighboring the Black Sea. Moreover, for the past few years, there has been an increase of tensions, both at state level and at interstate level, thus causing political dissensions, placement of embargos and even posing military threats.

Risks and threats that may affect the maritime interests of Romania are mainly in connection with the violation of the maritime borders and the carrying out of certain actions displaying a diversionist character, meant to destabilize the internal political background, as well as the expansion of terrorist nets and activities in the direction of or from the sea, transnational organized crime (economic-financial crime, trans-border illegal human trafficking, drug, radio-active and strategic materials, weapons and ammunition smuggling etc.).

Keywords: maritime security, threats, migration, Black Sea region.

1. INTRODUCTION

Romania's geographic position constituted a military interest both for Russia as well as for the historical alliances that perceived the territory situated to the East of the Carpathians Mountains as a buffer zone or transit of some campaigns toward a new world order.

The two European hot zones: the Caucasians and the Balkans, play a direct influence on the maritime security of the Black Sea regions, hence the numerous potential, existent and future military threats in the region.

Moreover, apart from the permanent desire for expansion and territorial influence, the conflict is also economically augmented by the energy resources existent in the region and by the fact that the Black Sea represents the necessary link toward the strategic resources and materials from Central Asia and Middle East, as well as toward these markets, now in their full development and ascension.

To these frozen conflicts, numerous asymmetrical risks in the area are added, which leads us to the conclusion that the Black Sea region represents a challenging background at the NATO's European Union's Eastern border.

2. THREATS TO MARITIME SECURITY

From the military perspective, the interest gains new dimensions, in the context of asymmetric risks and threats amplifying and diversifying. Due to the existence of certain vulnerabilities in the Black Sea region, despite evolutions favorable to international relaxation and cooperation, military and non-military threats and challenges continue to take place, endangering security and stability of the whole region.

According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the six threats to maritime security, which affect each port and each ship to a certain extent include: merchandise robbery, drugs smuggling – IMO Resolution A.872 (20) – Guidelines for the prevention and suppression of the smuggling of drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals on ships engaged in international maritime traffic, illegal migrants and transfugees – IMO Resolution A, 871 (20) - Guidelines on the Allocation of Responsibilities to Seek the Successful Resolution of Stowaway Cases, piracy (UNCLOS Art. 101) and armed attack against the ship, sabotage and terrorism [3]. Some of the above mentioned manifestations have existed since Homer until now. For the Black Sea region we may also add:

- political, economic and social instability within the newly appeared states after the disintegration of the USSR;

- bitter economic competition launched by the necessity of exploiting and transporting oil from the Caspian Sea region – this fact contributing paradoxically to both initiation of some forms of cooperation and to the appearance of tensions in some of the regional states, based on their national interests;

- manifestation of aspects related to organized crime, armament trade, nuclear materials and narcotics trade, as well as human trafficking;

- existence of risks of ecological nature, more and more acute in the Black Sea and Danube River regions;

- existence of zones of permanent ethnic-separatist conflict, such as the centrifugal movements of some forces meant to constitute independent state entities ;

- export of instability, through promotion of the Islamic fundamentalism as well as political, military and economic interests of Islamic states directed to the south-eastern Europe, through the existence of some entities of Islamic religion and of compact ethnic groups.

We can argue that for almost all the risks presented, each state of the region, perceived as recognized authority, may take action both militarily, using armed force and diplomatically, through dialogue, techniques and legal procedures, in accordance with the type of threat.

FIG. 1. The Black Sea region ([6])

The past events that occurred in Ukraine, annexation of Crimea by Russia and Russia's involvement in the Eastern Ukraine's conflict are, equally, a warning signal and food for thought for military strategists. These events, in the context of the massive cybernetic attacks of 2007 against Estonia and of the invasion of Georgia in 2008 [4], denote an ampler strategic plan that threatens the NATO and, implicitly, the Balkan states situated at the Western border of the NATO alliance, all of which take place on the background of some relaxation with regard to threat disappearance once the Cold War had come to an end [2].

The Black Sea region constitutes an interface between the Euro-Atlantic community and the Middle East (see Fig. 1), this region being today at the epicenter of the western efforts to design stability in a broadened European space and even beyond its boundaries[1].

Military analysts have considered that the migrant flux that troubles Western Europe is conducted by Russia. After the closure of the Balkan route, via Greece and Macedonia, the migrant flux might be deviated through an alternative route, namely through Romania, fact that would threaten, in a specific manner, the maritime security at the Eastern border of the NATO and the European Union.

FIG. 2. The future directions of the migrant fluxes in the Balkan region ([5])

Although the Black Sea is not a friendly sea from the meteorological perspective, and the religious differences could receive certain reactions from the local populations, when thousand of migrants wait daily at one country's border, diplomatic and moral approaches which a state should apply are not able to face the situation or they cannot be applied. Consequently, the only available method for a state is to act in cohesion with their desire to transit a national territory only to reach the promised land, as a result of a well designed and applied plan that is almost impossible to counterattack.

Recently, Russia has made a map public (see Fig. 2), showing the future directions of the migrant fluxes in the Balkan region. On this map, Romania is crossed by a flux of migrants coming from Turkey on the Black Sea, passing through Dobruja, and then crossing Romania through the central area, to finally exit it to Hungary. The infograph is published by the Russian propaganda agency, Sputnik News.

The route transiting Romania is called "alternative route", whereas the route via Greece, Macedonia and Serbia is named "Balkan route" [5]. It is less probable for such events to take place, they being more of a series of fake news, released by Russia in order to consolidate its influence in the Black Sea region and to send a new scorn at the EU's helplessness in front of the migrant crisis.

Migration, as a form of threat to maritime security, is considered an increased vulnerability for a state to which, apart from its internal problems of any nature that might occur, the appearance of new cultures and values that need to be integrated does not imply only financial resources, but also something that is probably the hardest thing to happen – integration of migrants within the democratic society and convincing the local people to accept migrants while each individual has to respect and tolerate the values and ideologies of the Other culture. History has proven that the preservation of latent instability spots, generated by separatist ethnic movements or by territorial litigations may change, when needed, the force rapport in key moments of a conflict.

We can invoke an attempt to destabilize the European Union, by adding trouble to what was already vulnerable: free circulation, democracy and religion. Nevertheless, isn't this, in fact, only a pretext for weakening the Orient and not for the weakening of Europe, taken the entire amount of assumed risk to infiltrate terrorists? For the EU, this is not but a pretext for increasing control and limiting the free circulation.

What is going to happen in these regions after it is considered that all of those who refused to fight or those who were against terror and chose the old continent for a better, democratic life left? There will be a purification war and all of those who have remained will be considered terrorists and will live the consequences. And after that, the territories will be populated with those who contributed to purification and will taste the great existent resources, being able to control the dependent parties, in the absence of less orthodox modalities.

For the past two years, immediately after the annexation of Crimea, Russia has started to consolidate its naval position at the Black Sea. The new batteries and long-range missile installations located in Crimea, confer Russia a significant coverage of the Black Sea, including the Romanian sea coast, while the Black Sea Fleet – as it is nicknamed by Russia -, has received new equipment and ships.

"If there were a conflict with Russia, especially a conflict of high intensity, at the Black Sea, then Romania would be dependent, to a great extent, on its allies in the NATO, for help, especially that it lacks an efficient defense against the sea-aviation and thus, it could be vulnerable to Russian aircraft equipped with anti-ship missiles", declared for the HotNews.ro Omar Lamrani, a military analyst at Stratford, an American agency specialized in military and geostrategic analyses.

Nevertheless, international rules of access to the Black Sea limit a lot the presence of American ships, the United States being Romania's most important military ally, on whom it would depend largely in any possible conflict [6].

3. CONCLUSIONS

Romania, just as any of the European Union's and NATO's member states, holds and will continue to hold responsibilities in the area of counterattacking security threats to maritime region and it will have to contribute with its own force, means and resources to the common defense effort. In order to do so, it is necessary for Romania to maintain the interoperability of its forces and the expeditionary capacity to be ready to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The EU and NATO's interests with regard to maritime security consist of protecting their member states and citizens against the whole array of risks and threats in the maritime area, including those connected to illegal migration. Legal migration has already been approached through a comprehensive set of laws issued by the EU, including cooperation with EUROSUR, for the purpose of improving the situation, raising awareness and increasing reaction capacity at the external borders to detect, prevent and combat illegal migration and to save migrants' lives.

Regarding the influence of the changing threats to security in the Black Sea region, I estimate that Romania's, Bulgaria's and Turkey's adjustment to the new geo-political status required a relatively long interval of time, the first two countries passing through a neutrality transition from their belonging to the Warsaw Treaty Organization to joining the NATO (2004) and the EU (2007). Adherence to the North-Atlantic defense structures has meant, for the two countries, a replacement of ideologies, doctrines and procedures, which proved to be long-termed and costly.

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