



# THE DYNAMICS OF TURKISH- ROMANIAN RELATIONS IN THE WIDER BLACK SEA REGION. A NEOLIBERAL PERSPECTIVE

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*The Wider Black Sea Region is a complex geopolitical construct. On the one hand, the area has a huge potential in terms of raw material extraction, while facilitating the trade between states. On the other hand, within this geographical area there are several frozen conflicts caused by state and non-state actors. In this context, regional geopolitical developments are issues of interest for both Romania and the Republic of Turkey, countries that have numerous common energy, trade and security goals. For this reason, the study starts from the premise that the Romanian-Turkish relations in the Wider Black Sea Region can be viewed from the perspective of the neoliberal theory of international relations. In order to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the subject, a brief history of the political dynamics between the two states, as well as a presentation of the geopolitical aspects of the area were included in the article.*

**Keywords:** *Wider Black Sea Region; Turkey; Romania; bilateral relations; neoliberalism; international institutions.*

## Introduction

This paper aims at highlighting the dynamics of Turkish-Romanian relations in the Wider Black Sea Region. Since most studies focused on this topic approach the issue from a historical perspective, the paper brings an element of novelty as the

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analysis is made considering the viewpoint of international studies and geopolitics, starting from the premise that countries' political relations can be seen through the prism of neoliberal theory developed by Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane. Thus, the two authors begin with the specific ideas of realism, respectively neorealism, according to which the international system is characterized by anarchy and the states seek to maximize their power. However, anarchy does not rule out the possibility of cooperation between states when actors identify common interests. More specifically, as stated by Robert Keohane in *After Hegemony, Cooperation and Discord in a World Political Economy*, states tend to cooperate in order to maximize their interests and reap greater benefits than they would gain by acting on their own account (Keohane 1984, 69). Neoliberal theorists also place strong emphasis on the role of international institutions and economic connections in enhancing interdependence and, implicitly, cooperation (Meiser 2011, 24). It must be noted from the beginning that there is no widely accepted definition in the scientific community of the specified institutions. However, John Duffield considers as types of international institutions the treaties, organizations, regimes, conventions, etc., which play a role in regulating relations between states (Duffield 2007, 1).

At the methodological level, the paper is a result of the literature analysis that falls into the fields of history (Koc 2018) international relations (Keohane 1984) (Nye and Keohane 2009) (Meiser 2011), and geopolitics (Balog 2009) (Ancuț and Dănilă 2009) (Buțiu 2009) (Cioculescu 2009a). A special attention has been paid to economic relations and international institutions because, as already mentioned, they are key elements of neoliberal theory. Topics such as the security interests of the two actors, specific to realism and neorealism, were also addressed, as neoliberal theorists do not deny their importance, but only argue that the foreign policy agendas of state actors include other components than those of security nature.

At the structural level, the study comprises three topics, each being the subject of study of a section: in the first part presents the evolution of Turkish-Romanian relations since the Middle Ages; in the second part, the research focuses on the geopolitical features of the Wider Black Sea Region; the final section includes a brief analysis of the factors that determine the dynamics of the relations between the two countries.

## **1. Key Moments in the History of Turkish-Romanian Relations**

The history of the Romanian-Turkish bilateral relations dates back to the Middle Ages, when the rulers of the Romanian countries began sending the soles to the Ottoman Empire (MAE 2022), in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the tradition of representing Romanian rulers through diplomatic agents being established. However, relations



between the two peoples were largely antagonistic due to the Ottoman Empire's expansionist tendencies in the Balkan Peninsula.

After Romania proclaimed its independence, there were several diplomatic efforts to overcome the differences between the new state and the Ottoman Gate. In fact, the relations between these actors in their "modern" form have their bases in 1878 (at legation level) (Cioculescu 2009b, 25).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two events that took place had a strong impact on Romania's foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire. The first is the outbreak of the Second Balkan War in 1913, when Romanians and Ottomans aligned their interests in the fight against Bulgaria. The second event was the First World War, a context in which Romania had joined the political-military alliance of the Entente, while the empire turned to establish an alliance with Germany and, implicitly, with the Central Powers. The interwar period marked a moment of normalization of relations between the two actors, especially during the 1930s. In 1934, both Greater Romania and the Republic of Turkey acceded to the Balkan Agreement, as for both, maintaining the status quo in the region had become a goal. One year later, the diplomatic activity carried out by Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu and his Turkish counterpart, Tevfik Rüştü Aras, materialized through the signing of a Treaty of Friendship, Non-Aggression, Arbitration and Conciliation. In 1938, diplomatic relations were raised at embassy level.

At the end of World War II, Romania entered the Soviet sphere of influence, while Turkey benefited from US economic aid through the Marshall Plan. Moreover, Romania joined the Warsaw Pact Organization in 1955, a political-military alliance formed in response to the establishment of NATO, of which Turkey had become a member in 1952. A proof of the negative impact of the Cold War on the Turkish-Romanian relations was the September 1957 event, when Foreign Minister Stoica proposed to convene Balkan states to discuss regional political issues, but Turkey and Greece rejected Romania's request (Koc 2018, 266).

The reconciliation of the two states took place after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. Turkish President Turgut Özal was the second political leader to visit post-socialist Romania (Koc 2018, 267), proving Turkey's interest in strengthening diplomatic relations with the Romanian state. Since then, Romanian and Turkish diplomatic representatives have repeatedly made official visits in order to improve political relations (Koc 2018, 268). Thus, during the 1990s, the two actors collaborated in order to sustain trade cooperation by establishing the Association of Turkish Businessmen (1993) and the Dobrogea Association of Turkish Businessmen (1999). Actions were also implemented at cultural level: in 2007, the Cantemir Museum in Istanbul opened its doors, while in Romania the Yunus Emre Institute was created, offering Turkish language lessons to Romanian citizens. In fact, according to the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania has an embassy



and a cultural institute in Ankara, a general consulate in Istanbul and Izmir, and five honorary consulates in important Turkish urban centres. Turkey has also opened an embassy in Bucharest, a general consulate in Constanța, two cultural centres in the aforementioned cities and two honorary consulates in Cluj and Iași (MAE 2022).

It is also important to mention that on December 13, 2011, a Strategic Partnership was signed between Romania and Turkey, on the occasion of the former Romanian President's (Traian Băsescu) visit to Ankara. The decision to raise the Romanian-Turkish relations at the level of a Strategic Partnership was based on "very good bilateral relations, intense political dialogue, as well as the common interests of the two countries, at bilateral, regional and international level" (MAE 2021a). In 2016, during his visit to Ankara, the current President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, stressed the importance of the partnership and of the continuation of friendly and cooperative relations between Turkey and Romania, stating: "This visit finds us in a complicated geopolitical and regional context, with many security risks and challenges to which we must find solutions. My belief is that together, by virtue of a strong Strategic Partnership, we can better manage these risks. Our citizens want security and prosperity, and through joint efforts we are trying to meet these expectations" (Presidency.ro 2016). The Romanian President also discussed the need for cooperation between the two states in the Black Sea region, as proof of solidarity with NATO: "In terms of security and defence, we are closely linked to cooperation and partnership within the North Atlantic Organization. As you know, Romania considers the Black Sea of strategic importance not only for the security of the region, but also for the Euro-Atlantic area and must benefit from an increased attention" (Presidency.ro 2016). Also, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that "Romania and Turkey share similar views on the issues we face today. We are firmly committed to strengthening bilateral relations in all areas, based on the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed by the two countries in 2011" (Presidency.ro 2016). Thus, the partnership is the proof that the two countries have managed to overcome historical disputes through diplomatic dialogue.

## **2. Wider Black Sea Region – Geopolitical Aspects**

In terms of geography, the Black Sea is located at the intersection of two continents, its extended region bringing together 10 states: 6 riparian countries – Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Turkey – and 4 states which history, proximity and close ties with the Black Sea basin recommend them as relevant actors in the area: Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova and Greece (Pop and Manoleli 2007, 9).

The geopolitics of this space can be viewed from various perspectives. At the energetic level, it is estimated that the Black Sea would have reserves of about



10 billion barrels of oil and 1.5 trillion square meters of natural gas (Roşca and Senic 2013, 12). Moreover, the sea is an important trade route between Asia and Europe, respectively a transit zone for products and resources from Asia (especially the Caucasus) to the European continent. Its energy and commercial potential are in the attention of both the states in the area and the international organizations of which some of them are members, mainly the European Union. European officials acknowledge that Europe is currently far from producing the amount of energy needed to meet the demand in its own market.

In terms of security dynamics, in the Wider Black Sea Region there are numerous frozen conflicts in Abkhazia, Transnistria, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh that cause the emergence of terrorist movements (Buşiu 2009, 44). Moreover, the South Caucasus region does not have a regional security structure (such as a diplomatic organization), that is indispensable for negotiating solutions to conflicts (Cioculescu 2009a, 40). Also, the separatist entities fighting in the aforementioned disputes resorted to various forms of cooperation, in 2016, laying the foundations of the Community for Democracy and Peoples' Rights (CDDP). The fact that the CDDP usually meets at the same time as the summits of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) take place may lead to the idea that it seeks, in fact, to counteract its legitimacy (Cioculescu 2009a, 40).

Regional instabilities are fuelled by Russia's efforts to discourage NATO and the EU from entering new strategic partnerships with actors in the Wider Black Sea Region. For example, Azerbaijan, a close ally of Turkey, represents an alternative source of energy supply for European countries and a way to reduce energy dependence on Russia. However, projects such as the Trans-Adriatic pipeline, completed in 2020, are unlikely to exist in the near future, as Russia has consolidated its position by stationing troops in the region on the pretext of initiating a peacekeeping mission after the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In addition, the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 generated two new sources of insecurity: firstly, the materialization of Russia's expansionist tendencies leads to the conclusion that the federation will have new territorial claims in Ukraine, a state that wants to join NATO; secondly, the Russian army has strengthened its position in the area.

The European Union remains a major player, being a key economic partner for Turkey, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia. Moreover, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) applies to most of this countries, so that they have a special status in their relations with the Union. NATO also plays an important role in this geopolitical space and its value for the partners in the Wider Black Sea Region has grown due to Russia's increasingly aggressive actions, a context in which the region is and will continue to be characterized by tense relations between the West and the Federation (Ancuţ and Dănilă 2009, 32).

In conclusion, the Wider Black Sea Region presents both military risks and



opportunities in terms of intensifying trade and ensuring the states' energy needs, while remaining an area of interest for international actors.

### **3. Romania-Turkey Relations in the Black Sea Area in Terms of International Institutions**

In this section of the paper, the focus is on Turkish-European relations in the Wider Black Sea Region in the light of economic interests, security objectives, instruments of cooperation and international law.

According to the latest statistics, in 2017, Turkey represents Romania's first trading partner outside the EU and the 5<sup>th</sup> partner in Romania's total foreign trade (MAE 2022). In turn, Romania is also an important trading partner for Turkey, ranking 15<sup>th</sup> in exports and 17<sup>th</sup> in imports (MAE 2022). Thus, as the Black Sea is an important trade route for the riparian states, it facilitates the exchange of Romanian-Turkish products. Bilateral economic relations are governed by a number of agreements such as the Agreement on Investment Promotion and Protection (Acordul pentru promovarea și protejarea investițiilor) and the Agreement between the Government of Romania and the Government of the Republic of Turkey on economic and technical cooperation (Acordul între Guvernul României și Guvernul Republicii Turcia cu privire la cooperarea economică și tehnică), but also by the EU-Turkey Association and Customs Union Agreement (signed in 1963) on the basis of which the Customs Union was subsequently established. The two actors are also cooperating on finding alternative sources of energy supply in order to reduce energy dependence on Russia, the Nabucco project being an evidence of this fact. Moreover, according to the latest statistics, the energy resources available in Romania in 2020 decreased by 6.2% compared to 2019 (Mazilu 2021), while Turkey's dependence on the use of natural gas has increased (Ankara Bureau for Economic Promotion and Cooperation 2020), which means that Turkish and Romanian officials will be more focused on their common energy issues in the future.

Russia's actions in the Wider Black Sea Region are a source of insecurity for both Turkey and Romania. The importance of the Russian Black Sea monopoly has been repeatedly emphasized by the geopolitician Alexandr Dughin, who considers that the port of Constanța and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits have the greatest strategical value for the Federation. It must be noted that following the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, Russia has increased its naval capabilities, seizing 70% of the Ukrainian navy (Celac and Aydin 2017, 4). However, Turkey has repeatedly bought Russian weapons, which has brought dissatisfaction to European states and NATO members, a factor that negatively influences the dynamics of Turkish-Romanian relations. In fact, according to the data provided by Romania's





MFA website, the last high-level bilateral visit, took place 7 years ago (in 2015). However, the crisis in Ukraine seems to be generating a common geopolitical stake for the two states, namely the repositioning of NATO, with increased attention to the Black Sea and Russia. This is evidenced by the joint statement of the foreign ministers of the Romania-Turkey-Poland Trilateral, during which the following were stated: “We agreed that we must continue to straighten NATO’s deterrence and defence position, sustain the political dimension of the Alliance, and support the ‘open door’ policy.” Russia’s aggression is not the only issue on the security agendas of Romania and Turkey. Similar to other EU countries, Romania attaches great importance to cooperation with Turkey on migration management, given that the Black Sea is a crossing point from Asia to Europe.

The institutionalized international instruments within which the Romanian-Turkish collaboration is carried out are extremely numerous, so as we will focus on only the most important ones:

- Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), formed on June 25, 1992, brought together 11 heads of state and government representing Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. Subsequently, Serbia (2004) and Northern Macedonia (2020) joined as Member States. The main objectives of the organization are to develop and diversify bilateral and multilateral cooperation in accordance with the principles and rules of international law, to improve the business environment and to promote individual and collective initiative of enterprises and companies directly involved in economic cooperation and to intensify the mutual respect, trust and to promote the dialogue and cooperation between BSEC member states (MAE 2021b);

- BLACKSEAFOR brings together the six states bordering the Black Sea, creating a framework for collaboration on rescue missions and humanitarian assistance;

- Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC) continued the Southeast Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI Center), with experience and superior coverage that can be a real support and a model through its activity for others similar organizations. It comprises 12 member states, namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Turkey and Hungary (Pop and Manoleli 2007, 19);

- Civil-Military Emergency Planning Council in South-Eastern Europe (CMPCSEE) formed by Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, aims to develop databases on civilian-military emergencies (Pop and Manoleli 2007, 20). To achieve this, Member States have decided to: develop common standards for planning and responding to regional disasters or emergencies; develop databases on civilian-military emergencies and digital maps of roads, railways, pipelines and airports in south-eastern Europe; set up emergency operations centres in each country, with common communication standards and conduct national and multinational exercises



(Pop and Manoleli 2007, 20);

- Black Sea Euroregion is an initiative launched in 2006 in Constanța, bringing together all ten states in the Wider Black Sea Region, which aims to achieve sustainable development in key areas such as the environment, economy, society, culture, youth and good governance (Pop and Manoleli 2007, 20);

- Black Sea Synergy, officially launched in 2008 in Kiev, aims to create an environment of cooperation between EU and Black Sea countries in the areas of democracy, human rights, good governance, border management, frozen conflicts, energy, transport, maritime policy, fisheries, trade, migration, development, education and research (MAE 2021c).

In terms of international law, three main documents regulate Turkey's relations with Romania in the Black Sea area. In chronological order of their signing, the first is the Montreux Convention adopted in 1936 by 11 states, including Turkey and Romania, the contracting parties recognizing the "principle of freedom of passage and maritime navigation" (Indaco n.d.) through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The second document, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, strengthened the principle of compliance with existing treaties governing navigation in international waters. The third major international document for the Wider Black Sea Region is the 1998 BSEC Charter, by which the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization has gained international recognition.

### **Conclusions**

Turkish-Romanian relations have a long tradition, being influenced over time by political and historical contexts from various periods. The fall of the communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the twentieth century created a beneficial environment for diplomatic dialogue which has resulted in overcoming historical differences and establishing a framework for cooperation between Romania and Turkey.

The economic and security objectives of the two states in the Wider Black Sea Region are to reduce their energy dependence, promote trade and combat regional instability, which are mainly rooted in Russia's hostile actions. In this context, the elements that have a major impact on Romania's relations with Turkey are the common economic interests, the security goals, the international institutional instruments of cooperation and the international treaties signed by both parties. Therefore, the relations between the two actors can be viewed from the perspective of the neoliberal theory of international relations, despite the fact that the analysis has also identified some issues specific to realism.

As the topic is extremely broad, this study is just the beginning for future scientific initiatives. The elements that influence the Turkish-Romanian relations





were briefly presented and there are many quantitative and qualitative limits, as several collaboration tools and visions of Turkish and Romanian officials on the political dynamics were not included.

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