IMPLICATIONS OF DEFENCE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ON NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

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The new international context justifies an analysis of the priorities, interests and objectives of the Pontic states in relation to an immediate reaction to discourage the armed conflict initiated by Russia and unjustified in terms of international humanitarian law. NATO and the EU have recently intensified the conduct of large-scale maritime exercises to promote stability and peace and strengthen the Alliance's Eastern Flank, and have consistently encouraged cooperation between outgoing states on the Black Sea. Although Russia's energy dependence on some Pontic states could be a problem for the mutual agreement on strategic negotiations and partnerships, NATO and the EU must join forces to take concrete and deterrent action to maintain regional and international order alike. The present article aims to highlight the importance of the Black Sea for the Pontic states, having as the premise of the scientific research the fact that nowadays it represents an important cross-border resource both for the security of the states in the region and for the security of NATO and the EU.

Keywords: Black Sea; NATO; EU; Russia; Pontic states; armed conflict; cooperation; negotiations; strategic partnerships.

Theoretical framework

Samuel P. Huntington, a longtime Harvard University professor, an influential political scientist and mentor to a generation of scholars once said that "national interest derives from national identity. We have to know who we are before we can know what our interests are" (Huntington 1997, 28).

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This theoretical framework will begin by defining key terms and concepts, such as *national interests, national objective, politics and national defence and security strategies* and *defence resource management.* One by one will it be analyzed in relation to the implications of effective defence resource management.

Firstly, we believe it is necessary to clarify the concept of *defence resource management*. It refers to the allocation of financial, human, and material resources within a country's defence sector in order to achieve national objectives.

Romania's Defence White Paper sets out the components of integrated *defence resources management*, namely: human resources management, financial resources management, material resources management, including defence procurement management, research-development and innovation system management, defence infrastructure management, information resources management (Carta albă a apărării 2021, 41).

National objectives are based on each individual nation's own interests, usually stipulated in the Constitution, a fact that highlights a relationship of interdependence normatively transposed into strategic documents. Any democratic, sovereign and independent state will aim to thus strengthen its international profile among other states and capitalize on its geostrategic position.

However, in the Constitution of Romania, the "supreme" law of the country, "the national interest" is not clearly defined, even though it is mentioned five times: in the case of the President's participation in the Government meetings (art. 87, paragraph 1), the referendum called by the President (art. 90), the Economy and public finances (art. 135, paragraph 2, letter b) and letter c) and in the case of property (article 136 paragraph 3). Also, "the national objective" is not clearly defined in the Constitution.

However, from the 2020 National Defence Strategy (SNAP) we learn that "national interests and objectives are perennial and … based on adherence to values similar to those shared by the other EU and NATO Member States, as well as on the fundamental rights and liberties of citizens, as defined in the Romanian Constitution" (National Defense strategy 2020-2024 2020, 14).

In other words, national interests refer to the goals and objectives that a country seeks to advance in its foreign policy, including its economic, political, and security interests.

Based on these, we can consider that the implications of effective defence resource management on national interests can include:

1. Protecting critical infrastructure: proper defence resource management can ensure that the military has the resources it needs to protect critical infrastructure, such as ports, airports, and energy facilities, thereby protecting the country's economic interests.

2. Maintaining regional stability: proper defence resource management can help to ensure that the military is prepared to respond to potential regional threats, promoting stability in the country's immediate vicinity.

3. Supporting humanitarian missions: effective defence resource management can enable the military to participate in humanitarian missions, improving the country's reputation and advancing its political interests.

4. Promoting international cooperation: a well-managed defence sector can prove the country's commitment to international cooperation, promoting its political interests and relationships with other countries.

5. Maintaining military power: by allocating resources effectively, the country can ensure that its military personnel is prepared to defend the country against external threats and maintain its military power.

Next, in the *Foreword* of the same National Defence Strategy for 2020-2024 we could find that this document is the one that "... provides answers to key questions about the main national objectives for ensuring Romania's security and of its citizens and underscores the necessary steps to achieve them" (National Defense strategy 2020-2024 2020, 4)

In this case, we can affirm that national objectives refer to the goals and aspirations that a country seeks to achieve in order to promote its well-being and prosperity.

As a result, the implications of effective defence resource management on national objectives can include:

− ensuring national security: effective defence resource management can ensure that the military has the resources they needs to defend the country against external threats, promoting its security and stability;

− supporting economic growth: by allocating resources effectively, the defence sector can reduce waste and inefficiencies, freeing up resources for other priorities, such as economic development;

− promoting social stability: effective defence resource management can help to ensure that the military is prepared to respond to internal threats, such as civil unrest or natural disasters, promoting social stability;

− improving public services: proper defence resource management can reduce the burden on the defence sector, freeing up resources that can be used to improve public services, such as education, health care, and infrastructure;

− enhancing international relations: a well-managed defence sector can demonstrate the country's commitment to stability and security, enhancing its relationships with other countries and promoting its international standing;

− protecting human rights: effective defence resource management can help to ensure that the military is equipped and trained to respect and protect human rights, promoting the country's social objectives;

− achieving military readiness: effective defence resource management ensures that the military has the resources they need to maintain operational readiness, allowing them to respond quickly to potential threats;

− supporting modernization efforts: proper resource management enables defence organizations to invest in new technologies, weapons systems, and other equipment that can improve military capabilities;

− enhancing national security: by allocating resources effectively, a country can strengthen its military and improve its ability to defend against external threats;

− promoting economic stability: effective defence resource management can help to ensure that the defence sector is not overburdened, freeing up resources for other priorities, such as economic development;

− improving accountability: proper defence resource management can improve transparency and accountability in the allocation of defence resources, reducing the risk of waste, fraud, and abuse.

− development of human capital: proper defence resource management can ensure that the military has the resources to recruit, train, and retain high-quality personnel, helping to build a strong and capable workforce. This can improve the effectiveness of the military and support their ability to achieve national objectives;

− improved strategic planning: effective defence resource management requires improved strategic planning, comprehensive planning and decision-making, which can help to ensure that resources are allocated in a way that supports the country's long-term strategic goals;

− better resource allocation: by managing resources effectively, the defence sector can avoid waste and inefficiencies, allowing it to allocate resources more effectively and make the most of limited resources;

− maintaining international credibility: a well-managed defence sector can demonstrate a country's commitment to its security and stability, enhancing its international credibility and relationships with other countries;

− building public trust: proper defence resource management can help build public trust in the defence sector by demonstrating that resources are being used effectively and efficiently.

A country's politics and national defence and security strategies play a significant role in determining its defence resource management priorities and decisions. Effective defence resource management can have a direct impact on the country's political and national strategies by:

− supporting political stability: by ensuring that the military is equipped and trained to respond to external threats, proper defence resource management can promote political stability;

− influencing foreign policy decisions: the allocation of resources within the defence sector can be influenced by a country's foreign policy decisions, particularly with regards to its military presence and involvement in international conflicts;

− driving economic growth: by reducing waste and inefficiencies within the defence sector, effective defence resource management can free up resources for other priorities, such as economic development, which can drive national growth;

− shaping public opinion: effective defence resource management can demonstrate a country's commitment to stability and security, influencing public opinion and support for government policies;

− strengthening national identity: the defence sector plays a critical role in promoting national unity and pride, strengthening the country's national identity and sense of purpose.
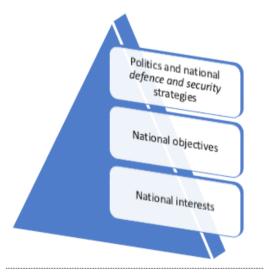

Figure no. 1: A pyramid view of the connection between interests-objectives-politics and national defence and security strategies

1. Case Study - The Black Sea, an Important Cross-Border Resource

A. Background and regional context

In his book "Transboundary Resource Management", the Chinese expert Rongxing Guo addresses the subject of natural and environmental resource management in the area of borders between states. Calling for a succinct classification of them, he delimits natural and artificial borders. The world's oceans as a whole are among the types of natural boundaries, along with mountains, seas, rivers, lakes, bays, canals and straits (Rongxing 2012, 6-15).

In terms of military, it was the Russian Federation that paid more attention to the Black Sea, more precisely to the militarization of the Pontic area. As early as February 2007, in an attempt to reassert itself as a global power and be recognized as such, at the Munich Security Conference, the Russian presidential administration bluntly stated that it was no longer willing to tolerate what it described as being NATO's intrusion into Russia's areas of privileged interest. A few months later, the

Russian Air Force decided that the strategic bombers would resume their long-range flights, including the Black Sea area. According to the statements of Russian analyst Sergey Karaganov, this marked the beginning of a new era of confrontation, in which the Russian Federation is guided by a different set of values, based on the traditional "aspiration to justice beyond formal laws and rules", as well as the desire to "defend its national interests by the use of force" (Karaganov, Novaia ideologicheskaia borba? 2016).

A 2016 study by the Romanian think-thank "New Strategy Center" deals with the importance of the security of the Extended Black Sea Region (REMN), analyzing the stages of its militarization. Analysts from non-govermental organizations (NGO) see the Georgian war of August 2008 as „...a test for what was to come. One of the conclusions Russian military planners reached after the Georgia operation was that they needed modern capabilities for combined naval missions. In the fall of 2008, the Russian Navy Command announced ambitious plans for the development of the Black Sea fleet, including operations in the Mediterranean Sea. It was also decided to accelerate the development of the Novorossiysk military port, considering that at that time Russia could not increase its naval presence in Sevastopol because of the limitations imposed by the corresponding agreements with Ukraine" (New Strategy Center 2023, 6).

The illegal annexation of Crimea, in March 2014, gave Russia a clear geostrategic advantage. At the end of 2015, the Russian Black Sea Fleet had four submarines, 41 surface ships, 34 aircraft and 40 helicopters, plus a marine infantry regiment. The naval force was supported by an air defence corps consisting of two fighter jet regiments, i.e. 50-60 SU-27 (Flanker) and MIG-29 (Fulcrum) machines and two surface-to-air missile regiments. The 5th Kilo-class submarine (Project 636.6 Varshavianka, according to the Russian classification) was completed in March 2015 to join the Black Sea Fleet, followed by the 6th, in 2016. The Krivak-class frigates V Admiral Grigorovich (Project 1135 Burevestnik), Admiral Essen, which conducted sea trials in November 2015, and Admiral Makarov, launched at the Kaliningrad shipyard in September 2015, were to be sent to Sevastopol in 2016. Another three frigates were scheduled to be delivered before 2020, if the Russian side could find substitutes for the turbine engines that were supplied by Ukraine until then. A total of 15 ships habe been recently added to the Russian Black Sea fleet, including two Kilo-class submarines, two missile-carrying corvettes and a several patrol boats. According to the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies in Moscow, another 20 missile-carrying corvettes were to be delivered by 2020 (New Strategy Center 2023, 6-7).

Of the other Black Sea states, only Turkey has a navy and air force comparable to Russia's. Ukraine, having been deprived of 70% of its fleet with the occupation of Crimea, has only two corvettes and a patrol vessel equipped with missiles. Georgia

has only a few Coast Guard speedboats. NATO countries such as Bulgaria and Romania have outdated fleets with low strike capability and limited range (four frigates, two corvettes and a missile patrol vessel − Bulgaria; three frigates, four corvettes and three missile carriers − Romania). In 2015, the Turkish Navy was still superior to the Russian Navy in terms of combatants number (44 surface ships and 13 submarines compared to the Russian Black Sea Fleet's 22 surface ships and 3 operational submarines), but these differences have narrowed considerably by 2020.

In contrast, it can be argued that the Russian Black Sea fleet currently holds superiority in terms of strike capability and surface-to-ship and ship-to-ship range (124-200 km for Turkey vs. 600 km for Russia). All this points to the programmatic development of Russian offensive capabilities focused on Crimea and the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, which tends to alter the military balance in the region and beyond. At the same time, with their characteristic vehemence, Russian decision-makers and opinion-makers were outraged by the purely defensive response measures taken by NATO countries. Evidence of this is their disproportionately nervous reaction to the formal inauguration of the anti-missile system in Deveselu, Romania, on May 12, 2016 (New Strategy Center 2023, 8).

Contradicting reality, Russian propaganda presented the event as a threat to Russia's national security and went as far as to suggest the possibility of denouncing the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which would remove the last vestiges of the arms control regime and paves the way for the resumption of the arms race (New Strategy Center 2023, 8).

Thus, following its hegemonic ideal, the Russian presidential administration decided to concentrate large-scale military forces in Ukraine's eastern vicinity. This shook the entire transatlantic space, and the probability of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was becoming more and more obvious, despite the statements of Kremlin officials, who insisted that nothing but training and military exercises against an imaginary enemy were being carried out in that area.

The end of 2021 attracts a new reaction of the European Parliament, through the Resolution of December 16, 2021 on the situation on the Ukrainian border and in the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia (2021/3010(RSP), in which, in a concise manner, it condemns the large concentration of armed forces of Russia along the Ukrainian border and no justification for this from Russia is accepted; the Russian Federation is demanded to immediately and completely withdraw its armed forces, to stop threatening the territorial integrity of Ukraine, which has a destabilizing effect over the entire region and beyond its borders, to end all measures that further aggravate the conflict and defuse tensions, in line with its international obligations; stresses that a peaceful political solution to the conflict must be found; stresses that the focus of Russian armed forces are also a threat to the peace, stability and

general security of Europe and invites Russia to respects international obligations (Parlamentul European 2023).[1]

On February 21, 2022, after several weeks of extreme tensions, the Russian presidential administration decided to recognize the non-government-controlled areas of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (administrative regions) as independent entities and to send Russian troops to those areas. This decision came as a result of a favorable vote by the Russian State Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) on February 15. On February 24, 2022, Russia has began its invasion of Ukraine (Consiliul European 2023).

Bogdan Aurescu, international humanitarian law (*IHL*) specialist, stated in an interview at the beginning of May, 2022, that during one of his visits to two cities near Kiev, Irpin and Borodianka, he has discovered that the disaster, both humanitarian, as well as physical, material destruction of civilian objectives is inadmissible. Moreover, civilian objectives must not be subject to military actions, according to the IHL. He has expressed his belief in the commission of serious violations of international law, of IHL, including war crimes, and probably, as international investigations will prove, other types of international crimes − genocide or crimes against humanity (MAE 2023).

Next, Aurescu stated that he supported the referral to the International Criminal Court on March 2, together with 39 other states, and granted 100,000 euros from the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the approval of the Government, for the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to facilitate the effort of investigating this crime in Ukraine. Moreover, during the visit to Kyiv, he also mentioned the possibility of sending experts, if necessary, to support the investigation in Ukraine on this subject. Also, Romania, together with 44 other states, was among those that notified the Moscow Mechanism of the OSCE (it is a mechanism that also deals with the investigation of IHL violations and human rights violations in Ukraine in connection with the ongoing conflict). In addition, Romanian and Ukrainian officials discussed the possibility of supporting the process that Ukraine opened at the International Court of Justice against the Russian Federation for violations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (MAE 2023).

Additionally, in a Memorandum on the consequences of the war in Ukraine on human rights (the Memorandum), published on July 8, 2022, Dunja Mijatovic, the Commissioner for Human Rights within the Council of Europe, insists on the "imperative to do justice" , given the fact that "the attack of the Russian Federation caused serious and massive violations of human rights and IHL, with disastrous effects on the exercise of practically all human rights by the population of Ukraine".

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[1] To be seen the entire document at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0515_RO.html, accessed at 12.01.2023.

In addition to this, both states "have the obligation to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of massive violations of human rights and serious crimes against IHL" (Commissioner for human rights 2023).

In the contents of the Memorandum, a relevant aspect for the present research has been identified. Due to the overwhelming nature of the atrocities committed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine for any justice system, the involvement of multiple actors and mechanisms in the process of gathering evidence and documenting international crimes is called for. However, effective coordination between national and international actors is essential to ensure the proper management of evidence and to avoid re-traumatizing victims and witnesses. Coordination of assistance to Ukrainian judicial authorities in the investigation and prosecution of international crimes is also necessary to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure the best use of resources (Commissioner for human rights 2023, 22-23). In this regard, the Commissioner welcomes the joint EU, UK and US announcement of the creation of an Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group for Ukraine to ensure effective coordination of their support (GOV.UK 2023). The establishment by the investigative authorities of Ukraine and five European Member States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia) of a Joint Investigation Team, under the auspices of the EU Eurojust, to which the International Criminal Court has since joined (European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation 2023), aims to establish a structured and rapid exchange of information (GOV.UK 2023) and is another positive development towards the judicious use of resources.

Both EU and NATO leaders have repeatedly called on Russia to immediately cease military action, unconditionally withdraw all military forces and equipment from Ukraine, and fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. They have highlighted the fact that Ukraine has the right to choose its own destiny and congratulated the Ukrainian people for their courage in defending their country. In response to the military aggression, the EU massively expanded sanctions against Russia, adding a significant number of individuals and entities to the sanctions list and taking unprecedented measures.

The new Strategic Concept adopted at the NATO Summit in Madrid, on June 29-30, 2022, explicitly states that the Russian Federation violated the norms and principles that contributed to maintaining a stable and predictable European security (NATO 2022 Strategic Concept 2023, 3-4)

B. The Black Sea, a National Objective of Strategic Importance

The concept of regional security complex, addressed by professor emeritus Barry Buzan, representative of the Copenhagen School, is the faithful image of the strategic importance of the Black Sea region today.

The major concern for this area by some international organizations and Pontic states is due to the security fluctuations that have occurred over the last two decades.

The Black Sea is considered a national objective of strategic importance by several countries that have a coastline along the Black Sea, including Romania. The Black Sea is an important economic, political, and military region, and the bordering countries have significant economic and security interests in the region.

The Black Sea is a major hub for energy and trade, and is also an important area for military operations. Countries bordering the Black Sea have an interest in maintaining stability and security in the region, and in protecting their economic and political interests. This requires significant resources, including military resources, and a strong defence posture.

The national objective of strategic importance of the Black Sea is a complex and dynamic issue, and requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach to security and defence. This includes the development of effective military capabilities, the establishment of regional security partnerships, and the implementation of effective crisis management and conflict resolution mechanisms.

In summary, the Black Sea is considered a national objective of strategic importance due to its strategic location, economic and political significance, and the need to maintain stability and security in the region. The protection of this objective requires the coordination of multiple resources, including military, economic, and diplomatic resources, to address the complex and dynamic security challenges in the region.

Romania, being a coastal country along the Black Sea, has significant strategic interests in the region. The following study examine Romania's defence strategy, its military capabilities, and the measures taken to protect its national interests in the Black Sea.

The study will start by reviewing Romania's defence strategy and its objectives in the Black Sea region. This will involve examining the role of the Romanian military in the region, its partnerships with other countries in the region, and its contribution to regional stability and security.

Next, the study will examine Romania's military capabilities, including its naval and air defence capabilities, its capabilities for maritime surveillance and control, and its ability to respond to crisis and conflict in the region. This will involve analyzing the resources and equipment available to the Romanian military, as well as its organizational structure and training programs.

Romania's defence strategy in the Black Sea region is focused on protecting its national interests, maintaining regional stability and security, and contributing to NATO and European security efforts. Romania recognizes the Black Sea as a strategic region with economic, political, and military significance, and has taken several measures to protect its national interests in the region.

The main objectives of Romania's defence strategy in the Black Sea region are:

− maintaining stability and security: Romania is committed to promoting stability and security in the Black Sea region, and participates in multinational peacekeeping and security operations, as well as in regional security initiatives;

– protecting its national interests: Romania is committed to protecting its economic, political, and military interests in the Black Sea region, and has developed its naval and air defence capabilities to support this objective;

– supporting NATO and European security efforts: Romania is a NATO member and is committed to contributing to the alliance's security efforts in the Black Sea region, as well as to the broader European security architecture;

– strengthening regional partnerships: Romania recognizes the importance of regional partnerships in promoting stability and security in the Black Sea region, and has established strong relationships with its neighbours, as well as with NATO and the European Union.

In summary, Romania's defence strategy in the Black Sea region is focused on maintaining stability and security, protecting its national interests, supporting NATO and European security efforts, and strengthening regional partnerships. These objectives are essential for ensuring Romania's security and prosperity in the region, and for promoting stability and security in the wider Black Sea region.

C. Overview of Romania's defence posture in the Black Sea region

The Russian Federation's aggressive behaviour, the actions to militarize the Black Sea region, as well as their hybrid actions carried out with the purpose of maintaining a tense climate of insecurity in the proximity of our country, prompt Romania to firmly continue the extensive process initiated in 2015 of building robust deterrence and defence capabilities. This process is concurrent with the increase of our Armed Forces' interoperability with the Allies, as well as with the strengthening of the institutional capacity to counter hybrid actions (National Defence Strategy 2020-2024, 6).

Raising the awareness among allies on the role of the Black Sea and on the importance of securing this area is another objective that channels articulated efforts made by Romania. It has the interest to support and contribute to developing policies and solutions aimed at putting out existing outbreaks of tension and conflict, as well as to support regional development towards an area of security, stability and progress. At the same time, it must create the necessary premises for the efficient use, for its own interest as well as for the interest of its allies/partners, of its potential as energy and transport corridor in the Black Sea region, as well as of its energy resources in the Black Sea, so that our county may become a relevant actor in the energy sector (National Defence Strategy 2020-2024, 9-10).

In terms of **foreign policy**, Romania must aim at strengthening its position as a relevant international actor, connected to the Euro-Atlantic principles and values – in accordance to the goals set forth at the political level, as well as in line with its economic development capacity. Our country is not only a beneficiary, but also an important contributor in providing regional, European and Euro-Atlantic security.

Given these coordinates and in accordance with national security interests, **national security objectives** aim at:

− strengthening security in the Black Sea region and in the Balkans, as well as the security and stability of the other neighbouring regions (National Defence Strategy 2020-2024, 17),

− strengthening NATO defence and deterrence posture in the Black Sea area, including by boosting partnerships with other interested states, as well as improved situation awareness and early warning capacity (National Defence Strategy 2020-2024, 18).

The Black Sea region is **an area of paramount strategic interest** for Romania. Ensuring the security of this region requires a comprehensive approach covering, in addition to the military dimension, relevant aspects related to economy, transportation, energy, environment, society resilience (National Defence Strategy 2020-2024, 22).

The Romanian military plays a significant role in the Black Sea region, as it is responsible for protecting Romania's national interests, promoting regional stability and security, and supporting NATO and European security efforts.

The Romanian military has several key responsibilities in the Black Sea region, including:

1. Maritime and air defence: the Romanian military is responsible for defending the country's maritime and air territory in the Black Sea region, and has developed a comprehensive maritime and air defence posture to support this objective.

2. Maritime surveillance and control: the Romanian military plays a key role in monitoring and controlling maritime activity in the Black Sea region, and contributes to the security of the region by ensuring the free flow of commerce and preventing illegal activities.

3. Crisis management and conflict resolution: the Romanian military is responsible for responding to crisis and conflict in the Black Sea region, and has the capabilities to support peacekeeping and security operations, as well as to support humanitarian and disaster relief efforts.

4. Regional security partnerships: the Romanian military plays an active role in regional security partnerships, including partnerships with NATO and the European Union, as well as with its neighbours in the Black Sea region.

In summary, the Romanian military plays a critical role in the Black Sea region, as it is responsible for protecting Romania's national interests, promoting regional stability and security, and supporting NATO and European security efforts. The Romanian military has developed a comprehensive defence posture and has the capabilities to respond to crisis and conflict in the region, as well as to support regional security partnerships.

The main military risks and threats to national security are determined by the further consolidation of the military potential in the vicinity of Romania (militarization of Crimea and the Black Sea basin by the Russian Federation), running military exercises (especially ones with short-term notification or without notification) and the development of offensive and defensive capabilities on NATO's eastern flank (Military Strategy of Romania 2021, 9).

Additionally, a series of challenges are emerged that can be ranked, from the perspective of the probability of generating security crises, as follows:

- the limited prospects for settling the frozen conflicts in the wider Black Sea region (including Transnistria) (Military Strategy of Romania 2021, 9).

NATO remains the most successful alliance in history, with 30 member states with a population of nearly one billion people, producing nearly half of global GDP and providing a safe space from the American Pacific coast to the Black Sea (Military Strategy of Romania 2021, 11).

For the period 2021-2024, national military objectives are: increasing the presence of allied and partner forces in the Black Sea region, facilitating their mobility, emplacement and deployment (Military Strategy of Romania 2021, 14).

The Naval Forces carry out military actions, independently or within multinational task forces, to ensure the integrity of the sea and river lanes of communication, participates in national and international law enforcement operations in territorial waters, contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone, conducts sea maritime security operations and search-and-rescue interventions at sea and on rivers. Furthermore, it ensures permanent reconnaissance of the littoral and of the Black Sea, provides support to the other Services and takes part in international operations and missions, according to approved plans.

In order to fulfill these missions, the composition of the naval forces will include: the Naval Forces Headquarters; Maritime fleet; River flotilla; a research, surveillance and reconnaissance brigade; a logistical support base and military institutions/units for continuing education and training (Military Strategy of Romania 2021, 22).

Romania strengthens its national defence and preserves its national interests in the Black Sea Region and the Danube River, with its own structures and capabilities, until the activation of "Article 5"/NATO or "Article 42/7"/TEU functioning mechanisms, as well as through developing cooperation with strategic partners, close allies and through regional military cooperation initiatives. The Romanian Armed Forces will be able to deter and counteract a possible armed aggression on the national territory and to participate in deterring and repelling an aggression within the alliance. The Romanian Armed Forces will participate in ensuring internal security in peacetime, in supporting central and local public administration structures in civil emergencies, and will contribute to promoting regional and Euro-Atlantic stability by participating in crisis response operations, under the command of NATO, EU, UN and OSCE and in coalitions (Military Strategy of Romania 2021, 30).

D. Romanian military's partnerships with other countries in the Black Sea region

The Romanian military has established several partnerships with other countries in the Black Sea region to promote stability and security, protect its national interests, and support NATO and European security efforts.

1. NATO Partnerships: Romania is a NATO member and has established strong partnerships with other NATO member states in the Black Sea region, including Turkey and Bulgaria. The Romanian military works closely with its NATO partners on regional security initiatives, including joint training and exercises.

2. European Union Partnerships: Romania is a member of the European Union and has established partnerships with other EU member states in the Black Sea region, including Bulgaria, Greece, and Cyprus. The Romanian military works closely with its EU partners on regional security initiatives, including crisis management and conflict resolution.

3. Bilateral Partnerships: Romania has established strong bilateral partnerships with its neighbours in the Black Sea region, including Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. These partnerships are focused on promoting regional stability and security, and on strengthening regional cooperation on security and defence issues.

To sum up, the Romanian military has established a range of partnerships with other countries in the Black Sea region to promote stability and security, protect its national interests, and support NATO and European security efforts. These partnerships are essential for ensuring regional stability and security, and for contributing to the broader European and NATO security architecture.

E. The Romanian military's contribution to regional stability and security

The Romanian military makes significant contributions to regional stability and security in the Black Sea region. Some of these contributions include:

1. Maritime and air defence: The Romanian military contributes to regional stability and security by defending the country's maritime and air territory in the Black Sea region and monitoring and controlling maritime activity to ensure the free flow of commerce and prevent illegal activities.

2. Peacekeeping and security operations: The Romanian military is capable of responding to crisis and conflict in the Black Sea region, and can support peacekeeping and security operations to promote stability and security in the region.

3. Regional security partnerships: The Romanian military plays an active role in regional security partnerships, including partnerships with NATO and the European Union, as well as with its neighbours in the Black Sea region. These partnerships help to promote regional stability and security, and to strengthen regional cooperation on security and defence issues.

4. Joint military exercises: The Romanian military participates in joint military exercises with other countries in the Black Sea region to improve regional stability

and security. These exercises help to build interoperability and coordination between military forces in the region.

The Romanian military makes significant contributions to regional stability and security in the Black Sea region by defending its territorial interests, supporting peacekeeping and security operations, participating in regional security partnerships, and participating in joint military exercises. These efforts help to ensure regional stability and security and to promote cooperation and coordination between countries in the region.

F. Romania's military capabilities

Romania's military capabilities include both naval and air defence capabilities, which are essential for ensuring its security and regional stability in the Black Sea region.

Romania's military capabilities can be analyzed by examining its various branches of service, including its army, air force, and navy. In terms of land forces, Romania has a well-trained and equipped army that is capable of conducting a range of missions, including peacekeeping and security operations. The army has modern equipment, including infantry fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers, and artillery systems.

The Romanian air force owns a mix of modern and older aircraft, including fighter jets, transport aircraft, and helicopter gunships. While the air force has faced some challenges in modernizing its fleet, it is capable of conducting a range of missions, including air defence, close air support and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR).

The Romanian navy is responsible for maintaining security in Romania's territorial waters and for protecting its coastline. The navy owns a range of vessels, including patrol boats, corvettes, and minesweepers. The navy is capable of conducting a range of missions, including maritime security operations, anti-submarine warfare, and search and rescue.

In other words, Romania has a capable military with a range of capabilities. While there are some areas for improvement, particularly in terms of modernizing its equipment, Romania's military is capable of conducting a range of missions and contributing to regional and international security efforts.

One example of Romania's military capabilities is its participation in NATO and EU peacekeeping and security operations. Romania has contributed troops and equipment to a number of international missions, including NATO's mission in Afghanistan and the EU's mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These deployments demonstrate Romania's ability to operate effectively in challenging and complex environments, as well as its commitment to contributing to regional and international security.

Another example of Romania's military capabilities is its ability to conduct maritime surveillance and control operations in the Black Sea region. The Romanian navy owns a range of vessels, including patrol boats and corvettes, which are equipped with radar and communications systems that enable it to monitor and control shipping in its territorial waters. This helps to ensure the security of Romania's coastline and to prevent illegal activities, such as smuggling and human trafficking, in the region.

A third example of Romania's military capabilities is its ability to conduct air defence operations. The Romanian air force owns a range of modern and older aircraft, including fighter jets, which are equipped with air-to-air missiles and radar systems. These capabilities enable the air force to defend Romania's airspace and to respond to any threats to its security. Whether it is conducting peacekeeping and security operations, maritime surveillance and control, or air defence, Romania is able to make a significant contribution to regional and international security.

The Romanian Navy and Air Force have the equipment and personnel to support a range of operations, including maritime and air defence, peacekeeping and security operations, and support for NATO and European security efforts. By maintaining a strong military capability, Romania is able to ensure its security and support regional stability in the Black Sea region.

Romania has developed significant capabilities for maritime surveillance and control as part of its efforts to ensure security and stability in the Black Sea region.

1. Maritime patrol assets: Romania operates a range of vessels, including frigates, corvettes, and patrol boats, which are equipped with advanced sensors and systems for monitoring and controlling maritime activity in the Black Sea. These assets provide the Romanian Navy with the ability to detect, track, and respond to a wide range of maritime threats, including illegal activity and smuggling.

2. Airborne surveillance: The Romanian Air Force operates a range of aircraft equipped with sensors for airborne surveillance and reconnaissance, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). These assets provide the Romanian military with the ability to monitor and control maritime activity from the air, and to detect and track a range of threats, including illegal activity and smuggling.

3. Information and communication technology: Romania has also invested in advanced information and communication technology systems to support its maritime surveillance and control capabilities. This includes systems for collecting and analyzing data, such as satellite imagery and signals intelligence, as well as systems for exchanging information and coordinating operations between different agencies and military assets.

In summary, Romania has developed a range of capabilities for maritime surveillance and control as part of its efforts to ensure security and stability in the Black Sea region. The Romanian Navy and Air Force operate a range of vessels and

aircraft equipped with advanced sensors and systems, and Romania has invested in information and communication technology to support its maritime surveillance and control efforts. These capabilities allow Romania to effectively monitor and control maritime activity in the Black Sea, and to respond to a range of threats to its security and stability.

Romania's efforts to enhance its maritime surveillance and control capabilities are part of a broader strategy to secure its interests in the Black Sea region. The Black Sea region is of strategic importance to Romania, as it provides access to major shipping lanes, energy resources, and markets. By maintaining strong maritime surveillance and control capabilities, Romania is able to ensure the safety and security of its territorial waters, and to support regional stability and security.

In addition to its own efforts, Romania is also actively engaged in regional and international cooperation to enhance its maritime surveillance and control capabilities. This includes participating in NATO and EU initiatives, as well as collaborating with other countries in the region on maritime security and counter-terrorism operations. For example, Romania has worked closely with NATO and EU partners to improve its maritime surveillance and control capabilities in the Black Sea, including through joint training exercises and the sharing of best practices.

Romania is actively working to enhance its maritime surveillance and control capabilities in the Black Sea region. These efforts are driven by the need to secure its interests in the region and to support regional stability and security. By investing in its naval and air assets, as well as in information and communication technology, Romania is well positioned to effectively monitor and control maritime activity in the Black Sea, and to respond to a range of threats to its security and stability.

G. Romania's military and diplomatic means

Romania has the ability to respond to crisis and conflict in the Black Sea region through a combination of **military and diplomatic means**.

The Romanian military has a range of capabilities that supports it in case of crisis or conflict, including land, air, and naval assets. The Romanian military also has the personnel and training to support a range of operations, including peacekeeping and security operations, as well as support for NATO and European security efforts.

In addition to its military capabilities, Romania also has significant diplomatic and humanitarian assets that it can use to respond to crisis and conflict in the Black Sea region. This includes experienced diplomats, humanitarian workers, and development specialists who can support efforts to address the root causes of conflict and to promote stability and security.

Romania has also demonstrated its ability to respond to crisis and conflict in the Black Sea region through its participation in a range of international and regional organizations, including NATO and the EU. Through these organizations, Romania

has been able to work with other countries to address common security and stability challenges, and to coordinate its response to crisis and conflict.

For example, Romania has contributed troops and equipment to NATO and EU peacekeeping and security operations in the region. It has also been involved in international efforts to promote stability and security in the region, including through participation in NATO and EU initiatives to address common security challenges.

In addition to its military contributions, Romania has also used its diplomatic and humanitarian assets to respond to crisis and conflict in the Black Sea region. This has included sending diplomatic delegations to engage with other countries in the region, as well as providing humanitarian aid to support civilians affected by conflict.

One notable example of Romania's response to crisis and conflict in the Black Sea region is its support for the Ukrainian government following the 2014 crisis in Crimea. Romania provided political and diplomatic support to Ukraine, and worked with other countries in the region to help to address the root causes of the conflict. Romania also contributed troops to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in Eastern Europe, which was established in response to the crisis.

Romania has the ability to respond to crisis and conflict in the Black Sea region through a combination of military and diplomatic means. The Romanian military has a range of capabilities that it can use to respond to crisis and conflict, and Romania has demonstrated its ability to participate in international and regional efforts to address security and stability challenges in the region. By leveraging its military, diplomatic, and humanitarian assets, Romania is well positioned to respond to crisis and conflict in the Black Sea region.

H. To protect its national interests in the Black Sea, Romania has taken several measures, including:

1. Increasing its military presence: Romania has increased its military presence in the Black Sea region by deploying more naval vessels and air defence assets, as well as strengthening its coastal defence. This has helped to enhance Romania's ability to respond to potential threats and to maintain security in the region.

2. Developing partnerships with other countries: Romania has developed partnerships with other countries in the Black Sea region, including NATO allies and neighboring countries. These partnerships help to ensure that Romania can work together with other countries to address common security challenges and to promote stability and security in the region.

3. Improving maritime surveillance and control capabilities: Romania has taken steps to improve its capabilities for maritime surveillance and control, including upgrading its naval vessels and enhancing its ability to monitor shipping in its territorial waters. This helps to ensure the security of Romania's coastline and to prevent illegal activities, such as smuggling and human trafficking, in the region.

4. Strengthening its air defence capabilities: Romania has taken steps to strengthen its air defence capabilities, including modernizing its air force and upgrading its air defence systems. This helps to ensure that Romania can defend its airspace and respond to potential threats to its security.

To summarise, these measures demonstrate Romania's commitment to protecting its national interests in the Black Sea region and to promoting stability and security in the region. By increasing its military presence, developing partnerships with other countries, improving its maritime surveillance and control capabilities, and strengthening its air defence capabilities, Romania is well-positioned to address the security challenges it faces in the Black Sea region.

I. To participate in regional security partnerships, Romania has taken several measures, including:

1. Joining regional organizations: Romania is a member of several regional organizations, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Southeast European Defense Ministerial (SEDM), which promote cooperation and coordination among countries in the Black Sea region. By participating in these organizations, Romania has been able to contribute to regional security initiatives and to collaborate with other countries on security-related matters.

2. Building relationships with other countries: Romania has taken steps to build relationships with other countries in the Black Sea region, including NATO allies and neighboring countries. These relationships help to ensure that Romania can work together with other countries to address common security challenges and to promote stability and security in the region.

3. Participating in joint military exercises: Romania has participated in joint military exercises with other countries in the Black Sea region, including NATO allies and neighboring countries. These exercises help to improve interoperability among military forces and to enhance the ability of countries to respond to potential threats in the region.

4. Supporting peacekeeping operations: Romania has provided personnel and resources to support peacekeeping operations in the Black Sea region, including NATO-led operations and United Nations-led operations. This demonstrates Romania's commitment to promoting stability and security in the region and to supporting international peacekeeping efforts.

In other words, these measures demonstrate Romania's active participation in regional security partnerships in the Black Sea region. By joining regional organizations, building relationships with other countries, participating in joint military exercises, and supporting peacekeeping operations, Romania has demonstrated its commitment to promoting stability and security in the region and working together with other countries to address security challenges.

c) Romania has taken several measures to engage with NATO and to strengthen its ties with the Alliance, including:

1. NATO membership: Romania joined NATO in 2004 and has since been an active member of the Alliance. This has allowed Romania to participate in NATO's decision-making processes, to contribute to NATO's missions and operations, and to benefit from NATO's collective defence capabilities.

2. Hosting NATO assets and activities: Romania has agreed to host NATO assets and activities, including NATO command and control facilities, NATO-led military exercises, and NATO-led training missions. This has helped to increase NATO's visibility and presence in the Black Sea region and to demonstrate Romania's commitment to NATO.

3. Contributing to NATO operations and missions: Romania has contributed to NATO operations and missions, including NATO's peacekeeping mission in Kosovo and NATO's Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean. This has demonstrated Romania's commitment to NATO's collective defence efforts and to NATO's mission of promoting stability and security in Europe.

4. Participating in NATO's defence planning and decision-making processes: Romania actively participates in NATO's defence planning and decision-making processes, including NATO's Defense Planning Committee and NATO's Military Committee. This allows Romania to provide its perspectives and to influence NATO's decision-making on security-related matters.

These measures demonstrate Romania's active engagement with NATO and its commitment to strengthening its ties with the Alliance. By hosting NATO assets and activities, contributing to NATO operations and missions, and participating in NATO's defence planning and decision-making processes, Romania has demonstrated its commitment to NATO's collective defence efforts and to NATO's mission of promoting stability and security in Europe.

J. Romania has taken several measures ***to participate in multinational peacekeeping and security operations***, including:

1. Contributing troops: Romania has contributed troops to various multinational peacekeeping and security operations, including the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in Kosovo and the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan. This has shown Romania's commitment to promoting peace and stability and to supporting international efforts to maintain security.

2. Providing equipment and support: Romania has provided equipment and support to multinational peacekeeping and security operations, including providing logistical support, medical support, and engineering support. This has helped to improve the effectiveness of these operations and to increase Romania's influence in the international community.

3. Training and equipping peacekeepers: Romania has invested in training and equipping its peacekeepers, ensuring that they are well-prepared to perform their duties and to respond to the challenges of peacekeeping and security operations. This has helped to enhance Romania's reputation as a responsible and capable contributor to international peace and security.

4. Participating in regional peacekeeping initiatives: Romania has participated in regional peacekeeping initiatives, including the Partnership for Peace program, which aims to promote peace and stability in Europe. This has allowed Romania to build closer relationships with other countries in the region and to participate in peacekeeping initiatives that are relevant to its national interests.

All in all, these measures demonstrate Romania's commitment to participating in multinational peacekeeping and security operations and to promoting peace and stability throughout Europe and around the world. By contributing troops, providing equipment and support, training and equipping peacekeepers, and participating in regional peacekeeping initiatives, Romania has demonstrated its willingness to support international efforts to maintain security and to promote peace and stability.

K. Valuable insights into the strategic importance of the Black Sea for Romania

Strategically located in its direct eastern proximity, the EU undertakes to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in various fields, which, moreover, are among the national objectives of the neighbouring states of the Black Sea:

"a) promoting and supporting democracy, respect for human rights and good governance;

b) encouraging regional dialogue with civil society, improving cross-border management and customs cooperation at the regional level with the aim of increasing security, combating cross-border organized crime (trafficking in human beings, weapons or drugs), as well as illegal migration;

c) promoting confidence-building measures in the regions affected by the so-called "frozen conflicts" (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh), including cooperation programs designed specifically to bring together otherwise divided parties;

d) the existence of a clear, transparent and non-discriminatory framework, in accordance with the EU acquis, for energy production, transport and transit;

e) actively supporting regional cooperation in the field of transport in order to improve the efficiency, safety and security of transport operations;

f) promoting and supporting sustainability, maritime trade, environmental protection, regional development, etc." (Communication From The Commission To The Council And The European Parliament Black Sea Synergy - A New Regional Cooperation Initiative, Brussels 2007)

Later, on May 21, 2019, during the exercise of the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council (January 1-June 30, 2019), one of the national external objectives was achieved. The adoption of two notable framework documents, under the auspices of the Black Sea Synergy initiative (the Joint Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda), reaffirm regional cooperation between Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia, Russia, the Republic Moldova and Ukraine, cooperation supported by experts from the main European maritime institutes and organizations and the European Commission (Ministerial Declaration On A Common Maritime Agenda For The Black Sea Bucharest - 21 May 2019 2023).

All these being stated, the Black Sea holds a strategic importance for Romania for several reasons:

1. Geopolitical significance: The Black Sea region is strategically located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, making it a crucial hub for regional and international trade and security. Romania, as a coastal state in the Black Sea region, is particularly interested in maintaining stability and security in the area to protect its national interests.

2. Energy resources: The Black Sea is rich in oil and natural gas reserves, making it a critical energy hub for Europe and the world. Romania has a vested interest in ensuring the stability and security of these resources to ensure its own energy security.

3. Maritime security: The Black Sea is an important shipping lane, connecting Europe to Asia and Africa. Ensuring the security and stability of this route is critical for Romania's economic prosperity and for the region as a whole.

4. Military presence: The Black Sea region is increasingly becoming a focal point of competition between NATO and Russia, with both sides seeking to increase their military presence in the area. Romania, as a NATO member state, has a significant interest in ensuring the alliance's ability to defend its interests and respond to potential threats in the region.

5. Border security: The Black Sea region is a major route for illegal migration, human trafficking, and organized crime. Romania, as a coastal state, is concerned about the security of its borders and the stability of the region to prevent these activities from threatening its national security.

These insights highlight the strategic importance of the Black Sea for Romania, which is deeply concerned about maintaining stability and security in the region to protect its national interests. By participating in regional security partnerships and engaging with NATO, Romania is working to enhance its ability to defend its interests and to contribute to regional stability and security.

Romania's defence strategy in the Black Sea region is centered around several key objectives, including:

− enhancing regional stability and security: Romania is committed to working with its regional partners and NATO to promote stability and security in the Black Sea region. This includes participating in multinational peacekeeping and security operations, as well as engaging in regional dialogue and cooperation initiatives.

− maintaining a strong military presence: Romania has a vested interest in maintaining a strong military presence in the Black Sea region, both to deter potential adversaries and to demonstrate its commitment to regional security. This involves modernizing and strengthening its naval and air defence capabilities, as well as enhancing its ability to respond to crisis and conflict in the region.

− protecting national interests: Romania is focused on protecting its national interests in the Black Sea region, including ensuring the stability and security of its borders, maintaining control over its exclusive economic zone, and ensuring the security and stability of critical energy resources.

− strengthening partnerships: Romania is committed to strengthening its partnerships with other countries in the Black Sea region, both bilaterally and through regional organizations such as NATO and the European Union. This enhances its ability to cooperate on regional security initiatives and to respond to potential threats in the area.

L. The measures taken by Romania to protect its national interests in the Black Sea region

To achieve the above objectives, Romania has taken a number of measures to enhance its military capabilities and to participate in regional security partnerships, including:

− enhancing its maritime surveillance and control capabilities: Romania has invested in modern technologies and equipment to enhance its ability to monitor and control its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone. This includes investing in advanced surveillance systems, such as radar and remote sensing technologies, to improve its ability to detect and respond to potential security threats;

− strengthening its military presence: Romania has modernized its armed forces and has stationed military units in the Black Sea region to enhance its ability to respond to potential security threats. This includes deploying naval and air defence capabilities, as well as land-based forces, to help to ensure the stability and security of its territorial waters and airspace;

− participating in multinational peacekeeping and security operations: Romania is an active participant in NATO and EU-led peacekeeping and security operations in the Black Sea region. This includes contributing military personnel and equipment to multinational operations, as well as providing intelligence and logistical support to help to ensure their success;

− engaging in regional dialogue and cooperation: Romania is committed to engaging in regional dialogue and cooperation initiatives to promote stability and

security in the Black Sea region. This includes participating in regional forums and working with other countries in the region to address common security concerns and to build trust and confidence;

− developing partnerships: Romania is committed to developing strong partnerships with other countries in the Black Sea region, both bilaterally and through regional organizations such as NATO and the European Union. This enhances its ability to cooperate on regional security initiatives and to respond to potential threats in the area.

These measures demonstrate Romania's commitment to protecting its national interests in the Black Sea region and its determination to contribute to regional stability and security. By investing in its military capabilities, participating in regional security initiatives, and engaging with its regional partners, Romania is helping to ensure the stability and security of the Black Sea region.

M. There are several ways to ensure **stability and security in the Black Sea region** that can be taken into consideration by policy-makers and military planners:

1. Enhancing maritime security: strengthening maritime security through effective surveillance and control systems, such as radar and remote sensing technologies, can help to detect and respond to potential security threats in the region.

2. Building regional partnerships: encouraging cooperation and dialogue among the countries in the Black Sea region can help to build trust and address common security challenges. This can be done through regional organizations such as NATO and the EU, as well as through bilateral initiatives.

3. Modernizing military capabilities: modernizing military capabilities, such as upgrading equipment and training personnel, can help to ensure the ability of countries to respond to potential security threats in the region.

4. Promoting economic development: encouraging economic development and stability in the region can help to reduce the risk of conflict and promote stability. This can include initiatives such as increasing trade and investment, promoting tourism, and supporting the development of local businesses.

5. Supporting peacekeeping and security operations: participating in and supporting multinational peacekeeping and security operations can help to maintain stability in the region and to address regional security challenges. This includes providing military personnel and equipment, as well as intelligence and logistical support.

Encouraging transparency and cooperation: encouraging transparency and cooperation between countries in the Black Sea region, as well as between regional organizations such as NATO and the EU, can help to reduce tensions and build trust. This can include initiatives such as exchanging information, engaging in

dialogue, and working together on regional security initiatives. The Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy of 2016 takes into its text the concern of the states in the Eastern neighborhood of the Union regarding a reconfiguration of Europe's security architecture. Russia's hybrid actions in Ukraine and the violation of international humanitarian law, combined with the prolongation of the "frozen conflicts" in the extended Black Sea region, led the EU to focus its attention on this area (European Council 2023, 33).

A solution to preserve Pontic security is the Three Seas Initiative. This is a flexible and informal political platform, at presidential level, that brings together the 12 EU Member States located between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black seas (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). The initiative aims to increase convergence and cohesion, in parallel with reducing the economic development gap between different areas and EU member states, by increasing interconnectivity in the region, in the fields of energy, transport and digital. The basic principles of the Three Seas Initiative are: promoting economic development, increasing cohesion at European level and strengthening transatlantic ties (MAE 2023). By taking a comprehensive and cooperative approach to security, countries in the Black Sea region can work together to ensure stability and security in the region.

Also, the following findings can contribute to the development of effective defence and security strategies in the Black sea region:

1. Geopolitical and regional dynamics: understanding the political and military relationships between the countries in the Black Sea region, as well as their alliances and rivalries, is crucial in developing effective defence strategies.

2. Strategic importance of the region: the Black Sea region is strategically important due to its access to key energy resources, transportation routes, and military bases. Understanding these factors can help to shape defence strategies to protect these assets.

3. Hybrid threats: the Black Sea region is vulnerable to various types of hybrid threats, including cyber attacks, propaganda, and covert operations. Defence strategies must take these threats into account and have the capability to counter them.

4. Military capabilities: understanding the military capabilities of the countries in the region is important in developing effective defence strategies. This includes analyzing the size and strength of each country's armed forces, as well as their weaponry and technological advancements.

5. Maritime security: the Black Sea is an important shipping route, and ensuring its security is crucial for the region's economies. Defence strategies must consider the threats to maritime security, such as piracy, terrorism, and smuggling, and have measures in place to counter them.

6. Border security: effective border security is essential for protecting the countries in the region from illegal activities, such as human trafficking and drug smuggling. Defence strategies must include measures to improve border security and enhance cross-border cooperation.

Conclusions and recommendations

Among all the countries with access to the Black Sea, Romania stood out by far with its active military of its strategic importance, advocating for its inclusion in the objectives on the NATO and EU agendas. To support this, Romania's political-military representatives often brought into discussions as arguments the developments in the Pontic states and the role of the Black Sea as a link between Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Figure no. 2 – The extended Black Sea region[2]

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[2] The extended Black Sea region includes Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova in the west, Ukraine and Russia in the north, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in the east, and Turkey in the south. Although Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Greece are not littoral states, their history, proximity and close ties make them natural regional actors, *Communication From The Commission To The Council And The European Parliament Black Sea Synergy - A New Regional Cooperation Initiative*, Brussels, 11.04.2007, pp. 2-13, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX: 52007DC0160&from=EN, accessed at 12.01.2023.

Shortly after Romania's and Bulgaria's accession to the EU, an increased focus on the Pontic region could be observed through the launch of a new regional cooperation initiative called the Black Sea Synergy*³* and the subsequent advancement of the projects initiated through it, including the Black Sea NGO Forum, proposed and started by Romania in close collaboration with the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for Development.

Being the main initiative of the Union specifically dedicated to the Pontic region, it is based on the supported and coordinated efforts of Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Germany and other member states, as well as the considerable contribution brought by the support of the European Commission. The core directives focus on promoting and supporting the security of the Black Sea, as well as awareness of its major role in maintaining a stable climate in the region and in Europe.

Undoubtedly, the presence of the EU in the Pontic region, first of all, opens up new horizons and facilitates different opportunities. The Black Sea Synergy Initiative and related processes are important instruments precisely because of their stated purpose. The platform created by them outlines the guidelines for proposing pragmatic cooperation projects between coastal countries and the EU.

Secondly, the direct proximity of the Union to the Black Sea also means a series of commitments and responsibilities that require concerted and sustained efforts to achieve lasting and effective regional cooperation. The persistence of Romania's advocacy for its objectives regarding the strategic importance of the Black Sea region in the tense international context generated since 2014 by Russia, by annexing the Crimean Peninsula, has been included in the defining documents of the EU and NATO.

Once seen as a terrain of controversy and rivalry at the intersection of the peripheries of great empires by professor Charles King, the vast expanse of the Black Sea has lately acquired its own and somewhat uncomfortable centrality.

Regional dynamics call for a careful reconsideration of existing theoretical premises and analytical assessments in order to relate them to new realities, to understand what is happening, to identify viable solutions to current vulnerabilities, risks and threats, and to capitalize on the opportunities that may arise during this process of profound transformations.

The instability generated by the Russian Federation in its desire to change the strategic balance in the region by resorting to brute military force, its actions aimed at blocking the European path of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, the use of energy as a tool of geopolitical pressure, the constant interventions in the Balkans and The Middle East, the attack on the liberal value system, the encouragement of ultra-nationalist and populist discourse – all these are calls to anticipate what might come next and deter possible future challenges to regional stability and security.

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3 *Ibidem.*

History has shown that whenever Russia decides to depart from established norms of international behavior and accepted business practices, Europeans are capable of finding alternative solutions if they act with unity and determination. In our viewpoint, the same applies to ensuring and maintaining stability and security in the extended Black Sea region.

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