

THE ECONOMIC-MILITARY IMPORTANCE OF THE BLACK SEA – NORTH SEA CORRIDOR FOR ENSURING STABILITY IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Valentin-Costinel TOTIR

Commander (N), Graduate student, “Carol I” National Defense University
vtotir@yahoo.com

Roxana ALEXANDRU

Lieutenant (N), Graduate student, “Carol I” National Defense University
roxanaalexandru23@yahoo.com

Abstract: *During history, the main channel of communication and cooperation between countries was through commerce and, consequently, through transport. Among all the transport ways, the maritime transport is the one that offers the best cost – benefits ratio. This article is addressed to all the people involved or interested in the economic and military fields and aims to highlight the importance of the Black Sea and North Sea connecting corridor in ensuring peace and stability in Europe in general and in South-Eastern Europe in special. To achieve this goal, we will review the historical conflicts among European countries for waterway control and make a descriptive analysis of the stability situation in the areas affected by them. Furthermore, using the hypothetical-deductive method, we will highlight the manner in which the connection of the Black Sea with the North Sea has influenced economic and military exchanges between riparian states and the impact on stability across European continent. At the end of the article, we will show how economic and military stability in south-eastern Europe is influenced and threatened by geopolitical changes in the wider Black Sea region and how this stability can be maintained and strengthened due to the great possibilities for economic cooperation among the countries of Western and South-Eastern Europe. The novelty of this approach is that it aims to analyze the importance of the Black Sea-North Sea channel in the context of fundamental changes in the politico-military situation in South-East Europe, generated by the expansion of the Russian Federation and the conflict between Turkey and Greece, NATO member countries.*

Keywords: *Europe; military; economic; stability; NATO.*

Introduction

The main subject that we will try to analyze is the fact that without a multi domain cooperation between the countries is almost impossible to talk about a regional stability. Among the domains suitable for cooperation, our opinion is that the economic and military collaboration constitutes the foundation of any relation between states.

From history we have learned that the transport ways are vital in the cooperation process, facilitating the movements of emissaries or the relocation of resources. There are many rivers in Europe suitable for navigation but the longest and the only one that connects the North Sea and Black Sea shores is the Danube – Main – Rhine Corridor. This water highway has an overwhelming importance for the economy and the development not only for the riparian countries, but for the entire Europe also.

There were a lot of battles involving almost all the European nations for the control of these rivers and we will try to bring to your attention only a few of them just to get a slight idea of how the control of the waterways influenced the interstate relations either by starting wars or by imposing peace, creating and destroying alliances and always building a regional or continental stability.

Moreover, having a very cheap way of transport at your disposal, it is very easy and very profitable to send all sorts of cargo from one part of the world to another. Through this corridor, the western countries have the chance to make commercial exchanges with eastern European countries and, the more interconnected they are, the harder it is to witness an outbreak of a conflict.

Since 1992 with the connection between the Danube and the Rhine through its tributary Main¹, a water highway was built between Rotterdam and Constanta, hence, the North Sea became directly connected with the Black Sea. Though from this moment the relations amongst European regions have grown exponentially, our opinion is that they are yet to reach their peak due to the fact that there is an alternative route through the Mediterranean Sea, the Marmara Sea and the Black Sea. The latest changes on NATO's Eastern flank, such as the expansion of the Russian Federation and the conflict between Turkey and Greece, proves that nothing is forever and it may be possible for the sea route between Western and Eastern Europe to be replaced by the river route.

Historical facts

Since ancient times, human kind realized the importance of the rivers, all major towns being built near a river. In addition to the vital role of providing the necessities for living, the river had other two major roles: protection against enemies and transportation. Related to this approach are the Danube and the Rhine united since 1992 through the tributary of the latest, the Main. Throughout the history, there were a huge number of battles and conflicts between nations for the domination and the control of these rivers. We will highlight only a few of these battles just to emphasize the importance of these waterways.

With its length of 2,858 km, as this river passes through or borders 10 states before it flows into the Black Sea², the Danube is probably the most internationalized river. The only superpower that managed to control at least one Danubian shore along its entire length was the Roman Empire. After its dissolution in the year 476 AD³ many nations have claimed the status of master of the Danube.

One of the most important wars for the supremacy in the Danube region was the War between Russia and Turkey of 1806-1812, concluded with the peace treaty in Bucharest, following which Russia obtains an opening at the mouth of the Danube and becomes a decision-maker regarding the status of the river⁴.

Another major conflict for the control of this important river is the one that puts face to face the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Empire whose culmination is the Siege of Vienna in 1529⁵. For a long period of time, the Ottoman Empire dominated the lands watered by the Danube and imposed its will on transportation along the river.

We can conclude that the Danube river was of great importance in the past because at least three great empires – Ottoman, Russian and Habsburg - fought bloody wars to ensure its control.

With a total length of about 1250 km, the Rhine ranks 9th among Eurasian rivers and it flows in the Atlantic Ocean, after crossing six countries⁶. Due to the fact that it is located in the Western part of Europe, region mostly dominated by only two superpowers, the river was one of the reasons for the long conflict between France and Germany. The major wars between these two great nations are the Franco – Prussian War of 1870, the World War I (1914-1918) and the World War II (1939-1945). Each of these conflicts ended with a peace that favored one

¹ A. Dávid & E. Madudova, *The Danube river and its importance on the Danube countries in cargo transport*, 13th International Scientific Conference on Sustainable, Modern and Safe Transport, Slovak Republic, May 29-31, 2019, p. 1011.

² ***, *The EU Strategy for the Danube region*, Panorama Magazine, no. 37/2011, page 4, link: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/panorama/pdf/mag37/mag37_en.pdf, accessed on Feb. 25, 2021, time: 21.00.

³ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Universală sau Istoria Lumii după căderea Imperiului Roman de Apus*, 6th edition, Așezământul tipografic „Datina Românească”, 1933, p. 14.

⁴ A.N. Petrov, *The War between Russia and Turkey, 1806-1812*, vol. 1-3.

⁵ J. Shaw Stanford, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 93.

⁶ Urs Uehlinger & Karl Wantzen & Rob Leuven S.E.W. & Arndt Hartmut, *The Rhine River Basin*, First publ. in: *Rivers of Europe / Klement Tockner u.a. – London: Acad. Pr., 2009, p. 199.*

or the other of the warring parties, each gaining or losing territories and, implicitly, domination over certain parts of the river.

Considering the huge loss of human lives in the above-mentioned conflicts, we can say that the Rhine is a river of a tremendous importance in Europe.

Economic and military importance

The important landmark in stability across Europe is the 1950 emergence of the European Coal and Steel Community, the foundation stone of the European Union, whose declared intention is to unite European countries economically and politically in order to secure lasting peace⁷. For more than 70 years, this Union has managed to fulfill its purpose, enabling us to witness the longest period of peace in history, with the exception of some minor conflicts in the ex-Yugoslavian territory.

Being created primarily on an economic basis, for proper operation, the European Union required many good and wide transport ways that will connect the member countries. The first six foundation nations became more and more interconnected by highways and by the fact that EU countries stop charging custom duties when they trade with each other, facing a colossal economic growth which determined other states to join the union. Starting with the year 1973, the number of members has grown continuously (except BREXIT), nowadays 27 countries enjoying the membership of the European Union⁸.

The more the union expanded, the more it needed new means of interconnection, especially in the ex-communist states. In this direction, the Danube has played and is still playing a major role. This role has increased once with the 1992 creation of the Danube – Main – Rhine corridor that connects two of the biggest maritime ports in the world.

Though some incidents occurred and the navigation alongside the Danube was impeded upon, such as the destruction of three bridges by NATO in Novi Sad in April 1999, the volume of goods transported on the Danube River have increased in the last few years. For instance, the total amount of goods transported on the Danube in 2016 has increased with about 4.86 % in comparison with the previous year, reaching 59 729 thousand tons, including transports of goods on the Danube branches and its canals (the Main-Danube Canal and the Canal Danube-Black Sea)⁹. Most of these goods are addressed to riparian countries like Romania, Hungary and Ukraine, but also, through the Black Sea, these goods arrive to other countries of the extended region.

Regarding the Rhine, it flows through industrial and commercial areas and assures about 50% of all inland navigation within the European Community. The border between The Netherlands and Germany is crossed by more than 700 ships daily, with about 311 million tons of goods. In the span of only six years, the transport of containerized cargo has increased astonishingly from 450,000 twenty-feet equivalent units (TEU) in 1991 to 900,000 TEUs in 1997¹⁰.

Even though the width and the depths of the rivers might cause restrictions of navigation, the Danube, the Rhine and the Main can still allow the passing of river ships large enough to transport almost any cargo, including military equipment and troops. The legal aspects concerning the navigation through the European rivers were harmonized in the last decades. With all the bordering countries being part of the European Union, the European Economic Area (Liechtenstein) or having bilateral agreements (Switzerland), the navigation

⁷ https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history_en, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 07.50.

⁸ https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history_en, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 07.50.

⁹ A. Dávid & E. Madudova, *The Danube river and its importance on the Danube countries in cargo transport*, 13th International Scientific Conference on Sustainable, Modern and Safe Transport, Slovak Republic, May 29-31, 2019, p. 1014.

¹⁰ Urs Uehlinger & Karl Wantzen & Rob Leuven S.E.W. & Arndt Hartmut, *The Rhine River Basin*, First publ. in: *Rivers of Europe*/Klement Tockner u.a. – London: Acad. Pr., 2009, p. 234.

regulation along the Rhine is pretty much an internal affair. The situation is a little bit different regarding the Danube, mostly due to the fact that Serbia is present alongside 588 Km, from which around 200 Km are internal waters¹¹. Nevertheless, after centuries of wars for the control of the Danube, on 18 august 1948, the Convention Regarding the Regime of Navigation on the Danube was signed at Belgrade¹².

We can conclude that freedom of navigation along the Rhine – Maine – Danube canal is guaranteed by the signing of different agreements and conventions and, in spite of restriction of military ship navigation, there are no restrictions regarding the goods and cargo transport from North Sea to Black Sea.

Perspective of the North Sea – Black Sea Corridor

Considering the latest changes in the geopolitical situation in the South-Eastern part of Europe we need to analyze the possibility and the implication of a rupture in the western and eastern countries sea line of communication.

The trigger of that might be identified in the expansion of the Russian Federation by the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. As a result, a vast offshore oil and gas resources in the Black Sea, estimated between 4-13 trillion cm of natural gas, are now at their disposal¹³. Moreover, having a larger area of the Black Sea under control, the role of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea navigational environment has increased. The Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea are connected through the Bosphorus/Istanbul Strait, the Marmara Sea and Dardanelles/Canakkale Straits. The navigation from the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea is regulated by the Montreux Convention regarding the Regime of the Straits of 1936. However, we should take into account that out of the six countries bordering the Black Sea, only Turkey is not a party to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which thus does not apply to it¹⁴.

Furthermore, there are some frozen conflicts in this area, due to the fact that the delimitation of the economic exclusive zones are not always the subject of a treaty or agreement, but, like Romania and Bulgaria, Ukraine and Russia and Russia and Georgia the boundaries are drawn on the map as median or equidistant lines¹⁵. These situations may be exploited by any other third party and could seriously jeopardize the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea.

Not least, the recent dispute between Greece and Turkey concerning the delimitation of the sea frontiers in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea might also impede the stability and security in this area. As both countries are NATO members, the intensification of this issue could lead to an interdiction or, in the best case scenario, to an indefinite delay of the commercial traffic via the Turkish straits.

Taking into consideration all mentioned above, we are justified to determine a new possibility to transport goods from one part of Europe to the other. In this regard, the North Sea-Black Sea corridor seems the best solution, even though it is not without risks. There are political changes in the EU member states and recently, we witness the increased representation of Eurosceptic parties in the national legislative forums and even in the European Parliament. What is more, the part of the Danube that flows strictly on the territory of Serbia could cause severe restrictions and limit the freedom of navigation on the river. However, although it is not

¹¹ <http://www.serbia.com/visit-serbia/natural-beauties/rivers-lakes/the-danube-point-of-disjunction/>, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 09.40.

¹² <http://www.danubecommission.org/uploads/doc/convention-en.pdf>, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 09.40.

¹³ <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2014/05/27/the-energy-dimensions-of-russias-annexation-of-crimea/index.html>, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 09.40.

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/eumss-factsheet-black-sea_en.pdf, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 10.20.

¹⁵ <http://scene.bsnm.org/eez.html>, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 10.30.

ideal, this canal is still a very good solution thanks to the multitude of highways, airports and railways located in the vicinity.

Out of these alternative, the railways appear to be the most economic. Therefore, the European Union has conducted several studies regarding the modernization and the extension of the railways along the Rhine – Danube core network corridor. In the 2017 study, the EU ambition is to fulfill 114 rail projects (excluding pure ERTMS projects) by the year 2030, without neglecting the roads and airports¹⁶. Also, the European Union has initiated several projects with the aim of increasing the permissible draught at the Upper Main (Germany) and will contribute to the insurance of adequate depths between Wien and Devin (Austria/Slovakia), also between Szob and Budapest (Hungary)¹⁷.

Moreover, the importance of the Rhine – Main – Danube canal is augmented by the possibility of being connected with other major rivers across Europe. In this direction, if a modernization of the Rhine – Rhone canal would be carried out, it would be possible to transport huge amount of cargo aboard larger river ships from the western Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea and to the North Sea¹⁸.

Conclusions

The basic goal of the paper was to focus on the general economic and military importance of the Rhine – Main – Danube waterway, its economic and transport importance for the riparian countries, commercial navigation from Rotterdam to Sulina and Constanta, and SWOT analysis of the navigation. At the end of the paper we predicted the development of transported goods on the North Sea – Black Sea corridor by bringing to attention some EU projects expected to increase the ships dimensions allowed to navigate through it, and also to extend some alternative means of transportation from western to the eastern countries of Europe and back.

Both major rivers that are parts of this corridor have proven their importance throughout history, the main empires and kingdoms waging long and costly wars, with huge human casualties and losses in order to gain their control.

Furthermore, the existing international legislation is permitting the freedom of navigation along the rivers and the seas, but it could be jeopardized by the volatile situation generated by different countries ambition and policies.

In order to maintain a good stability in a certain area it is imperative that, in addition to military effort, to have an economic stability and growth. The military importance of the rivers and seas was very well understood by the higher strategy minds, either for the transport of resources and troops or to ensure a good border protection. NATO understood not only the economic but also the military importance of the Danube, and, in special cases, took extreme measures to prevent an enemy to benefit from it.

In the perspective of an EU Naval Force, and not only, in order to increase the security level at its maritime borders, the North Sea – Black Sea may become the core network corridor capable to assure economic and military stability across entire European continent.

^{16***}, *Study on Rhine – Danube TEN-T Core Network Corridor, 2ndPhase, Final Report*, page 47, link: https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/rhd_study_2017_final_report.pdf, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 11.00.

¹⁷ ***, *Study on Rhine – Danube TEN-T Core Network Corridor, 2ndPhase, Final Report*, page 17, link: https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/rhd_study_2017_final_report.pdf, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 11.00.

¹⁸ <https://www.french-waterways.com/waterways/north-east/rhone-rhin/>, accessed on Feb. 26, 2021, time: 11.30.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. DÁVID A.&E. Madudova, *The Danube river and its importance on the Danube countries in cargo transport*, 13th International Scientific Conference on Sustainable, Modern and Safe Transport, Slovak Republic, May 29-31, 2019.
2. IORGA Nicolae, *Istoria Universală sau Istoria Lumii după căderea Imperiului Roman de Apus*, 6th edition, Așezământul tipografic „Datina Românească”, 1933.
3. PETROV A.N., *The War between Russia and Turkey, 1806-1812*, vol. 1-3.
4. SHAW STANFORD J., *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Cambridge University Press, 1976.
5. UEHLINGER Urs & Wantzen Karl & Leuven Rob S.E.W. & Arndt Hartmut, *The Rhine River Basin*, First publ. in: *Rivers of Europe* / Klement Tockner u.a. - London: Acad. Pr., 2009.
6. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/panorama/pdf/mag37/mag37_en.pdf
7. https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/eumss-factsheet-black-sea_en.pdf
8. https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/rhd_study_2017_final_report.pdf
9. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history_en
10. <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2014/05/27/the-energy-dimensions-of-russias-annexation-of-crimea/index.html>
11. <http://scene.bsnn.org/eez.html>
12. <https://www.french-waterways.com/waterways/north-east/rhone-rhin/>
13. <http://www.serbia.com/visit-serbia/natural-beauties/rivers-lakes/the-danube-point-of-disjunction/>