



Lucrările Seminarului Geografic Dimitrie Cantemir
Vol. 41, October 2016, pp. 111-122
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15551/lsgdc.v41i0.12>



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To cite this article: Mihnea, A., Popescu, V. (2016). Post-Communist Transition in the Black Sea Area - Hegemony, Balancing, Restriction. *Lucrările Seminarului Geografic Dimitrie Cantemir*, Vol. 41, pp. 111-122. DOI: 10.15551/lsgdc.v41i0.12

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15551/lsgdc.v41i0.12>



ISSN: 1222-989X www.seminarcantemir.uaic.ro

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POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION IN THE BLACK SEA AREA - HEGEMONY, BALANCING, RESTRICTION

Andrei Mihnea Vicențiu Popescu¹

Abstract. After more than two decades, the postsoviet era is still marked by the former communist countries searching for a model of economic and social development. The formed EU economic structure attracted the Black Sea countries towards the Western development model, while the Russian Federation still plays the military card in the area. The two modes of exercising power, both military and co-optation, impede the emergence of a regional power, maintaining the state of fragmentation, from balance to total acceptance or restriction. The paper analyzes the polarization of states in seeking economic shelter and security and aims at estimating solutions for balancing the divergent interests of the area in front of the regional players.

Keywords: Black Sea, former communist countries, geopolitical factors, power, hegemony

Introduction

The approaches to the notion of power, in the sense of relations between states, are increasingly diversifying with globalization and access to knowledge. The tandem economic - military power still holds a significant place in international relations. However, some aspects of power tend to change as relation systems, reputation, intelligence, innovation, education, possession of valuable natural resources make their presence felt in international trade. If global economic power backed by military force, with a particular emphasis on the possession of nuclear weapons remains a feature of several countries, at regional or local level, the means of emergence diversity are higher.

In the Black Sea region, the density of exercising power has always been high and excesses occurred at all levels disregarding size, culture and religion. Imperial approaches have been extensively present in Antiquity; Parthians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Mongols, Turks, Austrians, Russians clashed around the Black Sea. Controlling straits brought another determining factor and influence over economic activities.

After the Second World War, Russia was very close to achieve a major goal at the Black Sea. Basically, with the exception of Turkey, all the rest of the coastline was in the former Soviet Union or in Warsaw Pact countries. From a strategic perspective, full control of the Black Sea would have a major political and military advantage to the USSR. This type of policy has not brought the expected economic effects to power core, even more, after the USSR collapsed, the former state and the Warsaw Pact partners moved away from the core. The regional countries orientated, more or less rapid, towards the Western development model, enlarged NATO and brought the West at Black Sea for the first time (Romania and

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Bulgaria). Moreover, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine seem determined to integrate into Western economic bloc at the expense of energy and trade facilities provided by the Russian Federation.

The Russian Federation's move to annex the Crimean Peninsula plus the two territories from Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) appears to be an action in response to EU policy, but can be interpreted as an admission of powerlessness to fight the economic and political-military plan, hence moving the fight to territorial and security threats. Military policy of force continues in breakaway provinces of Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk in the shape of a "hybrid war".

The scale of the interventions in Ukraine and previously in Georgia cannot justify the stated purpose, that to keep the assaulted countries in Russia's area of influence, and it is difficult to believe that in short and medium term, relations will return to normal. Meanwhile, a full military occupation cannot be economically sustained by the aggressor. Therefore, it is obvious that there is an attempt to keep control of strategic points in both the Black Sea and South Caucasus, where is likely to succeed blocking energy routes.

In this way, the Black Sea witnesses two ways of applying power in order to amend competitor behaviour, namely:

- Directly, through usage of military force (less through declaring war and more via hybrid mechanisms - Georgia, Ukraine) or through economic sanctions and political isolation (US vs. EU and Russian Federation). Among other forms of application, there are power and military threats (Transnistria) and economic (trade and market access of Moldovan workers in Russia labour) against Moldavia.

- Indirect, through co-optation, by associating non-aligned countries in the region to the EU economic system, namely by providing incentives for sustainable development and good governance.

Difficult to fit to the way power is being applied, are the influencing actions manifested by economic and political corruption, and foreign intelligence activities.

Hegemony, balancing, restriction

Silviu Neguț (2011) explains hegemony as a "primacy or leadership" exercised by *"a hegemon or a state that has the capacity to fulfil this role, the other states of the system must define its relationship to the hegemon, which can be acceptance (consent to the hegemon), resistance or indifference"*.

Quoting Vincent Ferraro, Silviu Neguț associates three characteristics to a hegemon, namely: to rely on a strong growing economy, to be dominant over a top technological or economic sector, political power to be supported by a potential military power.

What global or regional powers can provide a hegemonic role in the region? Starting from the features offered by V. Ferraro (2003), there can be identified five structures that can fully or partially satisfy these characteristics, namely: USA, EU, NATO, Russian Federation and Turkey.

Some aspects of these entities positioning are presented in the table 1.

United States became, post the Cold War, the only truly global power and in broad sense, political - military - economic - technological and, according to some analysts, even cultural - for example, Brzezinski, Zbigniew (2005) page 183. The economic crisis and early withdrawal from the stage of external conflicts (Iraq, Afghanistan) decreased their reputation of single global power, allowing the return of Russian Federation and the rise of China, both economically and militarily. In general, by the coordination with European Union and Turkey, through direct investment and capital flows and technology, USA secures an economic policy

in the region, and relies on NATO on the military side. In the Black Sea area, the hegemonic role of the US is both supported and challenged (the Russian Federation) or restricted (Azerbaijan).

Table 1 Structures with hegemonic potential in the Black Sea Region

Structures with hegemonic potential	Strong economy		Dominant economic sector				Military power		Geographic position
	Stagnant economy	Economy growth	Technology	Financial resources	Natural resources	Human resources	Existing	In emerging (potential)	
USA	2008-2009 Economic Crisis	YES	YES	YES	Do not hold in the region	Do not hold in the region	YES	Is not the case	NO
NATO	Is not the case	Is not the case	YES (military, security and IT & C)	No, but it can influence investment today	Is not the case	Is not the case	YES	Resuming its military growth	Turkey, Romania (Bulgaria)
EU	2008-2013 Economic Crisis	YES	YES	YES	Limited	YES	Average (Britain, France, Italy ...)	Returning to increase military spending	Romania, Bulgaria
Russian Federation	Average economic strength is based on natural resources	Affected by the economic sanctions and the fall in oil prices in 2014	Average	YES	YES	YES	YES	Resumed its growth of military potential	YES, Crimean Peninsula
Turkey	Average economic power	YES	Average	NO	Limited	YES	Average	Within NATO	YES, Bosphorus

NATO itself is not an economic tool, but can stimulate the flow of capital and technology in member states or which are having assistance agreements. NATO represents the main military force that can be matched to the Russian Federation in the Black Sea region, including maritime force. It has no hegemonic role but can compensate to some extent the lack of a robust national military power.

The European Union represents an economic and political bloc of power with great influence in the region, both in terms of territorial and commercial requirements. Besides the Member States Romania and Bulgaria, the EU has trade agreements with Turkey (a candidate country for EU Customs Union Agreement in 1991) and with states of the former USSR, in various stages of development (the Eastern Partnership initiated by Poland and Sweden, was launched in 2009 with the aim of improving relations between the EU and Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova). The EU has the ability and incentive to become a regional hegemon, balancing economic strength under the NATO "umbrella". It is strongly contested by the Russian Federation, especially in terms of military threat upon buffer zones and through hybrid war. It is also restricted to a certain extent, by Turkey, in terms of requirements related to the democratization of the country.

The Russian Federation has the military and historical ascendancy that would allow it to play the role of hegemon. Orthodoxy is a major book which Russia plays in assessing the role. Economic strength is based, mostly, on natural resources which does not allow hegemonic status as per its classical definition. Capital flows that Russia could bring to the region would be spent on investment in Western technologies, which would not be convenient for the donor.

Hancock and Libman (2014) characterizes Russia's role as hegemon through a plutocratic approach rather based on available resources and which they can make available to countries who would like to sign several association agreements. The authors consider that Russia does not have enough economic power so as to assume a hegemonic role in the sense of economic and political supremacy. In this context, Russia seeks establishment of a regional organization based on autocracy, which, along with economic incentives (bilateral cooperation, loans, lower prices for oil and gas), envisages mutual protection of political

regimes in those countries. Autocratic regimes are mutually supportive and aim to cope with democratization trends, with the objective of maintaining political and economic power, without any real concern for the welfare of citizens.

For such, Russia's behaviour towards the Black Sea region countries shows similar traits, based on providing facilities for energy and trade (special prices for hydrocarbons, preferential trade agreements, investment in transport infrastructure or nuclear plants, loans) and support for autocratic tendencies of local leaders.

Turkey wants the role of hegemon, but its economic and military situation do not allow it to assume this role. Even the cultural component can be countered by the regional orthodoxy. However, as a result of Turkish initiative, it was founded the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) with the aim of promoting interaction and create harmony between Member States, together with the prospect of ensuring peace, stability and good neighbourly relations in the region.

A player outside the area that could also be considered is China, seen as a strong investor in energy and transport infrastructure. But, obviously, besides some projects in the area and under the EU guarantee China was not interested in other major investments.

In an optimistic approach taking the first years of the third millennium, Jan Orbie (2004) sees Europe as a model of trade policies, a civil power in action under the slogan: everything except weapons. The author analyzes the future of Europe and sees an evolution in terms of positive incentives in international relations, not through approach "stick-and-carrot", but by those of "carrot-and-ideology". Regional hegemony is gained through economic strength and ideology, the development model proposed being desired by smaller countries that would join the power block created. The geopolitical device is set to neighbouring countries in the political and economic system proposed, thus limiting the state of conflict.

The polarization of the region

Chauprade and Thual (2003) consider that *"global geopolitical space polarization is achieved around a series of primary and secondary antagonisms, as they generate fundamental and secondary alliances"*. The same authors state that the terms of polarization do not cover all the assembly of component states: *"There is always neutral zone, but they are also part of the field of forces and take part to balance of power phenomena."* We intend to analyze the polarization of the region under the aspects proposed by the two authors, namely: identify the main and secondary antagonisms, position the countries included in the analysis.

Relatively modern and characteristic for a century marked by information technology and growth of intelligence services (especially after 11th September, 2001), polarization occurs less on the battlefield and more on economic and political grounds.

Two large military blocks are positioned in the region: NATO and the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation would be somehow "at home", given the fact that the Warsaw Pact was dissolved only about 25 years ago (3rd March, 1991). Soviet collapse left behind numerous national conflicts, fuelled by the Russian Federation, some of which concluded with "frozen conflict zones" quickly transformed into quartering areas for significant Russian forces. The annexation of Crimean Peninsula provides the strengthening of the Russian military fleet in the Black Sea and, not infrequently, references were made to the placement of nuclear weapons in the area.

NATO is present in Turkey and, to provide ground protection against international terrorism will be present in Romania. Meanwhile, the conflict in Ukraine has led, in addition to the deployment of missile shield elements, to visits of naval corps and heavy weapons deployment in the region. NATO military presence in the region cannot counterbalance

Russian forces, but offers warranty for protection to states and provides shelter for investments in the region.

Non-aligned states in the region are positioned according to how they perceive the Russian threat, ranging from direct expression of the desire to be protected by NATO (Georgia and, to some extent, Ukraine), to maintaining the Russian foundation as part of protection (in Armenia). From the military standpoint, Azerbaijan pursues a policy of neutrality that pays off both for its domestic policy interests, and for international trade opening.

Economic polarization should have been initially reduced as a result of involving the Russian and former USSR countries in the European economic bloc. Since the late 90s, the European Union (EU) signed ten similar partnership and cooperation agreements (PCA) to: Russia and new independent countries of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These partnerships have the following objectives:

- Provide an adequate framework for political dialogue;
- Support these countries efforts to strengthen their democracies and develop their economies;
- Assisting them in the transition to a market economy;
- To promote trade and investment.

The partnerships aim also to establish cooperation in the legislative, economic, social, financial, scientific, civil, technological and cultural cooperation sector. The agreement with Russia provides and create the conditions for establishing a free trade zone in the future (Source: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=URISERV:r17002>).

The Russian Federation maintained its desire to preserve some of the former USSR states in its own sphere of influence, facilitating ways for creating alliances that allow it to increase its bargaining power and to concentrate Central Asia resources in its own hand. Eurasian Customs Union (EU) is a customs union which consists of member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and became operational on 1st January 2010, as the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. It was extended to include Armenia and Kyrgyzstan from 1st January 2015. The customs union was launched as a first step towards forming broader economic alliances, similar to European Union, made of former Soviet states. Member States have continued with economic integration and customs borders were removed after July 2011. On 19th November 2011, Member States put together a joint committee on promoting closer economic relations, planning to create a Eurasian Economic Union by 2015. The creation of Eurasia Customs Union was guaranteed by three different treaties signed in 1995, 1999 and 2007. The first treaty guaranteeing its creation in 1995, second in 1999 guaranteeing its formation, and the third in 2007 announced the establishment of a common customs territory and formation of the Customs Union (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurasian_Customs_Union).

The conflict in Ukraine, marked by mutual economic sanctions of the US-EU versus Russian Federation will lead to a clear polarization of economic interests in the area.

Geopolitical Devices

Avoiding broader discussions on the world policy where, of course, Russia is a genuine opponent of globalization and US hegemony in the Black Sea, it can be found the same kind of antagonism marked by territoriality vs. trade liberalization, the positioning of the advance and spread of IT&C, democracy (in the Western sense) vs. autocracy (associated here with "faked" Democracy), the ideological cultivation including recent history (anti-capitalism - anti-Americanism - anti-imperialism, anti-communism, jihadism), certain territorial claims

(some based on historical claims, others justified by the protection of populations). There can also be covered some elements of culture, religion and organized crime, but we appreciate that in the current situation, these real issues that require rapid solutions are used rather as pretexts for conflict than real elements which justifies a device itself.

Starting from the NATO - EU block eastwards enlargement, by incorporating independent former socialist countries and the three Baltic States under the USSR, two geopolitical devices may be retained.

EU (part of economic power) and NATO (military component) organized a device for expanding the commercial alliance, built on the principle of eliminating potential military conflicts. The expansion took place by co-option and the framework, though may be difficult to be adopted and respected, ensured greater prosperity in the area. Romania and Bulgaria have benefited from sustained growth in GDP as a result of integration efforts, Turkey has benefited from the agreement with the EU through Customs Union Agreement.

The European Union (EU) has concluded partnership and cooperation agreements (PCA) with Russia and the new independent countries of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. Of course, in each case the economic benefits predicted by partners prevailed to other arrangements, but the situation has not become any more clear. One explanation is that the partnership with the EU brings a series of principles related to political, security, social, environmental which are more or less difficult to apply in countries that traditionally had autocratic structures. Not necessarily because the "Tsar" himself would want absolute power for life, but also those populations do not have the needed political education to understand and respect the principles of real democracy. Perhaps the situation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and other Arab states reflects a hasty approach to address Western-style democracy. Countries of the region are accustomed to autocracy, while economic life is dominated by oligarchs. Local plutocrats may constitute a major obstacle to the adoption of principles proposed by the EU as a condition of association.

The hegemonic system, by way of example, of initiator, is the least understood in the area and the tendency is to disregard the polite views expressed Westerners communicators. The way Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reacted to the EU observations on certain issues of democratic rights, shows that things are different in Eastern Europe than in Brussels. Of course, it has not gone too far, but it is an example of inadequate response should you want to be co-opted into a powerful economic and political mechanism.

The economic predominantly device EU and NATO is counterbalanced by the Russian Federation organized device. In the absence of solutions conferred on economic competitiveness, the Russian Federation proposes a device based on military force and the natural resources it holds. Of course, the structures formed in the ex-communist states and businesses developed within the EU instruments may be supporting the assumed objectives. In the absence of an expansionary upward trend based on economic incentives, the Russian Federation adopted a counter-threat device type. One can infer resistance to NATO and EU approach. The reasons have deep historical roots, confronting US imperialism and the Cold War are too recent to underpin the strengthening of this device. The military operations included in the concept of hybrid that Russia uses may be associated with a device of defence, based on the Crimean Peninsula and territorial blackmail applied to some states in the region (Azerbaijan and Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine). The annexation of territories or promises to award a state's territory are another sign that the economic battle has not identified sufficient stimuli for ensuring a hegemonic role. Moreover, Russia's hegemonic manifestations will target Central Asia, a place where mutual support for autocratic systems represents a geopolitical device.

At the level of non-aligned states there are two cases, states which would like to immediately align with EU + NATO device: Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine but also states adopting a swing such as Azerbaijan and Armenia. Of course, by no accident these two countries are linked by Nagorno-Karabakh territorial conflict. Armenia took steps towards the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), but it is assumed that was about the only option given its geographic location and relations with neighbours. In addition, the EU is too preoccupied with its own economic crisis and the desire to still go on Turkey's axis.

Azerbaijan has significant economic resources and would like to be a bridge for access to large resources of hydrocarbons and minerals from central Asia to Europe. Its neutrality device is specific due to its current situation where the territorial status quo pressure and proximity of determined competitor on hydrocarbons market trigger a prudent approach to international trade relations. However, economic triumvirate with Turkey and Georgia plus opening to European markets allows them a chance to play a card which does not make them commit, at least on medium term.

The geopolitical devices are influenced by short and medium term developments. The EU has been affected by the global economic crisis, prolonged with a crisis of the Euro zone. This evolution required imposing austerity programs which have not been well received at governments' level. The internal problems of the EU and some repositioning in US foreign policy led to a stagnation of the intention to expand eastwards. Dmitri Trenin (2014) considers the situation in the region as such:

"These developments have allowed Moscow to conclude that at the end of the twentieth century, but especially at the beginning of the XXI century, the global balance has begun to change in favour of non-Western societies. China, India, Brazil, Turkey, Mexico, South Africa and Indonesia rose more quickly, with a number of other emerging market economies in its wake. Most of these countries avoided direct confrontation with the United States, but most of them also want to rebalance the world order in their favour and away from the West."

We believe in the assertion that Russian Federation's geopolitical device is moving towards an area where it has enough competitiveness to assume a hegemonic role, but out in the warm seas, in the Mediterranean and the domination of the eastern part of this sea remains a goal that it will never be abandoned. The actions in Crimea and in Syria are a testament of seeking solutions to support this objective.

Economic and military preponderance

Even if hybrid military action do not translate into a declaration of war, the situation in Ukraine, loss of human life and revisionist threats from Russian Federation worried the entire world. The deployment of Russian forces in both this area and the Baltic Sea region causes movements of NATO forces, called in to protect the targets envisaged by Russian politicians. Russian military strength is well known, as well as the tenacity of a population with strong ideology, but there is no anticipation for an economic force that can maintain such a war machine in motion and neither the support costs can be justified through the effects to be obtained.

However, it is assumed that the entire area would want a period of peace and prosperity, which will mean a predominance of economic factors in the area. In this regard, the only hegemon really open to the free market is the EU. Referring to hegemony, Arthur A. Stein (1984) states:

"... International free trade arrangements do not come out and, really, neither will exit the policies of a state. A single hegemon cannot create an open trade policy. It may unilaterally reduce its own rates, but this does not create an international trade policy of

lower rates. There can be imposed an open trade regime on weak countries, but this does not generate a comprehensive global regime. Liberalisation of trade between commercial members is rather the product of negotiation over tariffs. The hegemon must persuade others to agree to reduce their tariffs, as he does. Without agreement, there can be no free trade regime....Hegemons can lead, but need followers and must make concessions to achieve the consent of others."

The struggle for hegemony stays open as long as autocratic behaviour or autocratic tendencies of the leaders in the area remain active. Hesitations on the way of democratization from Ukraine and Moldova, marked by corruption and economic stagnation allowed less controllable developments. Playing at two ends cannot be worn in a region where democracy has rarely been a way of life.

Erik Gartzke (2005) made the following statement:

"Democracy must be encouraged, but evidence suggests that democracy alone will not bring peace, while popular attitudes appear unstable without some degree of prosperity. In short, to achieve the objectives of peace and freedom, the world's developed countries cannot afford not to sponsor the intentions and practices of capitalist expansion."

It is possible that the weakening "sponsor" force for transition countries, austerity imposed in the Eurozone and avoid a strong response on accession programs of certain countries including Turkey, have created an impression of EU helplessness to maintain its role of economic hegemony in Eastern Europe and thus to determine the state of conflict marked by the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and the recent conflict in Ukraine (2014). In 2008, The US and EU passed over Moscow's actions and too easily, moreover they even continued to develop economic relations with the Russian Federation, economically empowering them and support maintaining a large military device.

Real democratization and fighting corruption imposed by the EU "hegemony" led the process of European integration to a threshold more difficult to pass by countries outgoing Communist bloc.

Recognizing the advantage of Russian military device in the Black Sea region, raises the question whether this could be an attractive economic hub for people in the area. With hope of immediate economic benefits, residents of affected areas hope for jobs and better pensions, but for Russia is difficult to bear the military and civilian costs without affecting its growth potential. Rosecrance (1999) states in one territory vs. trade approach:

"Focusing on the development of products of the land, the Russians are still prisoners of territorial fetishism. Their commercial laws still do not allow sensitive and complex arrangements to ensure that goods manufacturers deliver quality products to foreign companies. Moreover, Russia's transport network is primitive. Russian mafia groups are too closely linked to the country's government and its legal system. Moscow Government failed to collect enough taxes to provide basic services or to make payments on the national debt; but these are temporary setbacks."

Should the assertions above be still valid or not today, obviously, the economic performance of the Russian Federation is marked by falling behind the other world states. Even if in certain military technologies, space flight and IT, the Russian Federation is leading global competitiveness, businesses remain focused on companies exploiting natural resources of the land. The lack of productivity of enterprises in the federation does not flow sufficient financial capital for investment, increasing living standards, together with keeping a military apparatus operating both in the Black Sea and Baltic Sea hot spots of the new conflict with the West, although currently only political and economic.

Territorially, Russia did not annex provinces which could bring an economic benefit aimed to cover the costs of open or hybrid military operations. Nor might bring it, as claimed by Rosecrance (2006):

"The land has always been a major asset and could be seized and exploited by coercive force. But with financial and technological capital there are different problems. Financial capital cannot be seized by military force. Like mercury, would melt and would change its shape should it pass into other hands."

In absence of true investment in regional infrastructure development of the Black Sea and with EU preoccupied with internal crisis (Greece, Britain, refugee crisis, secessionist tendencies of some provinces), the economic model based on free trade may not be implemented and will leave room for military-territorial actions. Nabucco discontinuation was a reflection of economic efficiency but the negative political signal given is major.

At the Black Sea, three major players meet, all allocating large amounts of military spending: the Russian Federation - third place worldwide after the US and China, EU countries bloc, which owns four countries in the world top 15 in terms of military expenditures, and Turkey (according to data from SIPRI - Stockholm International Peace Research Institute). Of course, both the EU and Turkey are part of NATO. Three countries in the Black Sea region - Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia - have a military spending share of over 4% of GDP. Turkey, albeit allocating only 2.2% in 2014, ranks 15th worldwide in terms of military spending size. A situation of military expenditure in Black Sea region by country is shown in the following table.

Table 2 Share of military expenditure as % of GDP for the Black Sea Region countries, 2010-2014

Black Sea countries	Military expenditure					Expenditure on education	R & D expenses
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010-2013	2010-2012
Armenia	4,3	3,9	3,8	4,3	4,3	2,3-3,3	0,24-0,27
Azerbaijan	2,8	4,7	4,7	4,7	4,8	2,4-2,8	0,21-0,22
Bulgaria	1,8	1,5	1,5	1,7	1,5	3,7-4,0	0,57-0,64
georgia	3,9	3,2	3,1	2,5	2,3	2,0-2,7	NA
Moldavia	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	8,3-9,1	0,40-0,44
Romania	1,3	1,3	1,3	1,3	1,3	3,0-3,5	0,46-0,50
Russia	3,9	3,7	4,0	4,2	4,5	NA	1,09-1,13
Turkey	2,4	2,2	2,3	2,2	2,2	NA	0,84-0,86
Ukraine	2,7	2,3	2,4	2,4	3,1	6,2-6,7	0,74-0,83

(Data source: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS>)

GDP percentage of allocations are reflected on the ground, too, Armenia and Azerbaijan are locked in dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, while newly generated conflict in the northern Black Sea is reflected in the evolution of tandem Russia-Ukraine.

Of course, the obvious disproportion between the Allied military spending in NATO and the Russian Federation raised a question, who would be more afraid. Russian Federation still remains a nuclear power, and in this segment it is never a problem to who the winner is.

Given the marks of the economic crisis are still being felt, and the political conflict between the West and the Russian Federation over the events in Ukraine will not bring any improvement in this aspect, the military preponderance begins to be felt more strongly, including on the west side which seemed devoid of military threats. Secretary General of the Atlantic Alliance, Jens Stoltenberg, inaugurated in Bucharest first NATO Headquarters in Romania, NATO Force Integration Unit -NFIU- whose role will be to coordinate the transit of

troops in Response Force NATO (NRF), thus allowing " Spearhead Force " fastest component of it, to reach the eastern border of Romania in 48 hours (Source: Mihai Diac, România Liberă, 03 July 2015, at: <http://www.romanalibera.ro/actualitate/eveniment/comandament-nfiu-la-bucuresti-in-48-de-ore-trupele-nato-pot-ajunge-la-granita-de-est-a-romaniei-384272>).

It is interesting to approach the evolution of military spending in relation to the education and R&D ones. If in terms of expenses for education, the situation seems normal, the allocations for R&D can be characterized as very low, which will not only translate into weak capacity to develop new technologies, but also to assimilate medium and advanced technologies that come from developed countries.

Conclusion

Obviously, anyone would choose economic progress and welfare instead of military confrontation. Not because the economic wars would not be as harsh, but that the effects are not measured in human casualties. However, EU trade agreements with countries in the region have created a framework for economic growth superior to the areas marked by military conflicts. Unfortunately, the Black Sea has failed a regional trade agreement, with approaches only on punctual issues (environment, fisheries, transit, cooperation etc.). Regionalization at the Black Sea was done only geographically through different combinations of countries bordering or in closely related connections with it. There is no conscience formed to allow a single positioning in terms of regional, political and economic unit, and this facilitates fragmentation, conflict states, autocracies maintenance, corruption and plutocracy etc.

Factors of internal policies often refuse to implement democratic instruments (justice agencies for purposes of combating corruption, control of public expenditure, tax evasion etc.).

Referring to the global situation, Richard Rosecrance (1966) addresses the future towards a bipolar or multipolar world. Developed at a time the possession of nuclear weapons by more countries was seen as a step towards multipolarity, the analysis takes into account the incentives that the allied or neutral states can get them from power poles. In his conclusions of the analysis of relations between states in bipolar - multipolar systems, the author suggests that progress towards a bipolar system will gain allies, while neutrals will be lost. In the event of a multipolar world, the allied states will maintain their benefits related to the defence system, but stimuli will go to neutral states.

Of course, the assumption of evolution towards a multipolar world determined by the possession of nuclear weapons is questionable, but in theory the bipolar - multipolar approach in the Black Sea Region and stimuli given to allies and neutrals is actual and will further influence the political structure of the area where there yet a few winners.

In this context, clear and unequivocal orientation towards political and trade openness has brought peace and prosperity in the region, within internal efforts of course. Countries which were waiting and did not modernize administration, allowing corruption and crime, found themselves in the face of hard to tackle economic problems.

Turkey, which had a clear option to the West by joining NATO in 1952, made a remarkable growth and gained stability, which places it in a position of regional power under both aspects - economic and military. Turkey is taken as reference, it is seen as a factor of political, economic and military stability in the area. Romania and Bulgaria are two recent winners of the economic competition. They are differentiated by the superior speed with which Romania has adopted reforms since Isarescu government in 2000. Azerbaijan has great potential in terms of exploitation of hydrocarbons, but the growth was felt only after 2007

when the international openness brought up its economic effects. Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine much delayed economic reforms and the effects are found in the status quo.

The following figure highlights the GDP per capita developments in several countries of the Black Sea region, differentiated by how they were positioned towards political and economic reforms.

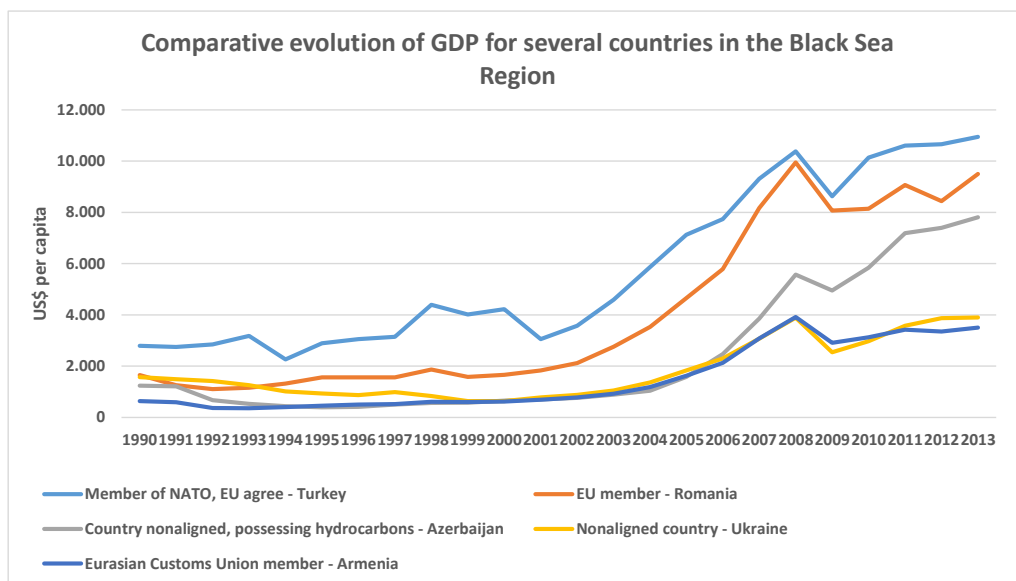


Figure 1: The compared GDP per capita development in several BSR states, differentiated by bloc positioning and the speed of economic reform

Clearly, pro-Western positioning, characterized by requirements of real democratization and economic reform has produced enough stimuli to bring advantages to a cost-benefit analysis. May be not the ideal, but it is certainly working and went better for the people of these countries.

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