

**A REVIEW OF NATO'S ACTIONS IN THE BLACK SEA
REGION DURING THE POST-COLD WAR ERA**

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Abstract. *The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive examination of NATO's actions in the Black Sea region during the post-Cold War era. In order to better achieve this aim, the article is divided into four sections. The first two parts present the security architecture of the region through a brief description of its geopolitical profile and its main security problems. The third section, the most consistent one, examines NATO's actions in the Black Sea region in the last 26 years. The research behind this section revealed four different phases of the Alliance's involvement in the studied area. Finally, in the fourth section, the author presents the main findings of the study.*

Keywords: *The Black Sea Region, NATO, Post-Cold War Era, Security Architecture, Russia.*

The Geopolitical Profile of the Black Sea Region

A purely geopolitical definition would represent the Black Sea as a body of water with a strategic location – being placed at the crossroads between Europe and Asia** and linking Southeast Europe to Western Europe through the Danube River*** and the Mediterranean Sea. What we can observe, from the definition above, is that the Black Sea is now, and has been throughout history, an important transit area¹. And this reality justifies the manner in which all the scholars describe the Black Sea region: as a highly diversified and heterogeneous area. The region is composed of ten states, each one of them being unique in terms of size, power, economy, and culture. These states are, as

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** The Black Sea links Central Asia to Europe through the transit corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA).

*** The Rhine-Danube-Black Sea Canal.

¹ Alexandra Sarcinschi, “Guvernare și securitate la Marea Neagră”, in Constantin Moștoflei (ed.), *Securitate și stabilitate în bazinul Mării Negre*, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare Carol I Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 15.

follows: 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*2.

What makes the region even more challenging is the fact that the ten states have numerous concerns regarding their security. For example, of the ten states mentioned above, eight have experienced a communist regime in the recent past (1945-1989). Of these eight states, six have been part of the Soviet Union: Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia. As a consequence, all of them are struggling to escape their Soviet past and (re)construct their national identities. And the main problem with this process is that it takes the shape of a struggle between two camps, one being pro-Euro-Atlantic, oriented towards Western values, and the other being Orientalist, advocating the supremacy of a Moscow-oriented system of governance. Another domestic difficulty specific to these states is represented by their concern for their territorial integrity, all of them having domestic secessionist movements. Moldova has to cope with the break-away region of Transnistria; Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia; Ukraine with the Crimean Peninsula (recently lost to Russia) and the insurgency in its eastern provinces of Donetsk, Kharkiv and Luhansk; Azerbaijan and Armenia with their dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh province; and even Russia, with the secessionist territories in North Caucasus.

The other two states with a communist past, Romania and Bulgaria, managed however to make a successful transition from the communist regime to democracy and capitalism and even joined the Euro-Atlantic organizations, the European Union and NATO. But, however, they are still far away from meeting the Euro-Atlantic criteria on issues like good governance, respect for human rights, rule of law or combating corruption.

In addition to the eight states previously mentioned, the Black Sea region includes two other states: Greece and Turkey. Each of these two countries have their own security problems, which can at anytime spill into the entire region. Greece has major economic problems, having to pay a total debt of 362 billion euros³ and is experiencing street protest movements, all in the context of a precarious political environment. And Turkey has not yet found a proper balance between its Muslim identity, its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and its desire to reach the status of a regional centre of power⁴.

This complex context is enriched by the natural wealth of the area. The Black Sea region is rich in oil, gas, fisheries and mineral resources. It also provides important routes for water transport, especially for oil and gas transportation.

* Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Greece are not littoral states, but their history, culture, and foreign policies make them natural regional actors.

² Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Black Sea Synergy – A new regional cooperation initiative*, Brussels, 2007, p. 2.

³ National Debt Clocks, National Debt of Greece. Available at <http://www.nationaldebtclocks.org/debtclock/greece> (Accessed on 6 September 2016).

⁴ Galya Vladova, Jorg Knieling, "Potential and challenges for the Black Sea regional cooperation", in *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, June 2014, p. 44.

Furthermore, the ten states have a total population of 350 million people, which makes the region a huge market of potential customers⁵.

The Security Problems of the Region

In the scientific literature, scholars who have studied the Black Sea Region have identified over time numerous security issues which affect the area. This section of the article classifies the security problems into three categories. The first category is represented by the political problems of the region. As we have seen in the first section, eight of the ten countries from the Black Sea region have experienced the installation of communist regimes in the 20th Century. Even if the events of 1989 brought a rapid change in the political systems in these countries, the legacy of the socialist era is a constant presence in the region, even after 26 years after the collapse of the communist order. Moreover, the democratization processes (including here the efforts to adopt the free market economy system) proved to be superficial and produced a corrupt and incompetent political and economic elite. Even in the most successful cases, in Romania and Bulgaria, the corruption, nepotism, and the involvement of military and political leaders in illegal activities are current realities. Also, across the whole region, progress in the areas of respect for human rights and rule of law has been far behind Euro-Atlantic standards⁶.

The second category of problems is represented by issues in the security field. The greatest such problem is the existence of an unstable political environment, which encourages the reduction of the state authority (including here the inability to ensure the efficient surveillance of the borders) and the proliferation of organized crime. The organized crime networks manage to use the region as a transit zone for large quantities of arms, nuclear materials and narcotics (from the producers in Central Asia to the consumers in Europe). Regarding arms traffic, it is well known that part of the weapons are transported through the Black Sea harbors, the maritime routes being considered safer by the smugglers than the land ones⁷.

Another security vulnerability in the region is the persistence of latent tensions arising from various secessionist movements inside many of the ten states. These tensions vary in intensity, from easily manageable cases (like the Szekelys in Romania) to conflict causing tensions, such as the Transnistrian and Donbass separatist movements in Moldova and Ukraine. Here, we can also include the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh province, a highly dangerous conflict with a great possibility of

⁵ Alexandra Sarcinschi, *op. cit.*, p. 15. See also Teodor Frunzeti, "Optimizarea securității prin cooperare în Zona Extinsă a Mării Negre", in Constantin Moștoflei (ed.), *loc. cit.*, p. 276.

⁶ Florian Pința, "Actualitatea securității în Regiunea Mării Negre", in Constantin Moștoflei (ed.), *loc. cit.*, p. 53.

⁷ Liviu-Mihai Buțiu, "Riscuri de natură teroristă în Regiunea Extinsă a Mării Negre", in *Infosfera*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2009, p. 45.

turning into a military confrontation. A major characteristic of these problems is the lack of international legal instruments accepted by all the states in the region for the peaceful settlements of the disputes⁸.

The third category of problems consists in the economic and social difficulties encountered by the ten states of the region. These problems revolve around issues like persistent economic crises, failed reforms, and privatizations mixed with political involvement⁹. All these problems led to failed pyramid schemes, bankrupt factories, and relatively low standards of living. For example, only Greece qualified as a state with very high level of human development in the last United Nations Human Development Index. The other Black Sea states ranked poorly in the index: Russia, Romania and Bulgaria in 50th, 52nd and 59th place respectively; Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan were in 72nd, 76th and 78th place respectively; and Ukraine and Armenia in 81st and 85th and Moldova on 107th places¹⁰. As a consequence of their economic difficulties, all the states in the region face the problem of massive emigration – for example, 615 171 Moldovan migrants resided abroad in 2012, which represent 17.3% of the total population¹¹. And perhaps the most burdensome facet of this phenomenon is the *brain drain*, the exile of highly educated workforce. Such an example is the migration of the Romanian doctors. From 1990 to 2015, 21000 doctors left the country (mainly for Germany, France and the United Kingdom), of which 14100 have left since 2007, when Romania joined the European Union¹².

NATO's Actions in the Black Sea Region during the Post-Cold War Era

The security architecture described in the first two sections of this article portrayed the Black Sea region as an area full of problems, instability and uncertainty, but with abundant resources and strategic relevance. This third section presents the involvement of the North Atlantic Alliance in the region during the last 26 years through examining how NATO became interested in the region, how it shaped its actions in accordance with the challenges encountered, how it interacted with the regional actors, and how it was dragged in a confrontation with Russia over supremacy in the Black Sea. The research behind this section revealed four different phases in NATO's involvement in the Black Sea region, which are presented below.

⁸ Sorin Ioan, "România în ecuația stabilității regionale a Bazinului Mării Negre", in Constantin Moștoflei (ed.), *loc. cit.*, p. 231.

⁹ Florian Pința, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Index*. Available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi> (Accessed on 31 August 2016).

¹¹ Migration Policy Centre, *Migration Profile Moldova*, June 2013. Available at http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/migration_profiles/Moldova.pdf (Accessed on 31 August 2016).

¹² Ioana Mocanu, "Migrația medicală: un fenomen la care România este pe primele locuri din Europa", in *Viata medicală*, vol. 1360, no. 6, February 2016. Available at http://www.viata-medicala.ro/*articleID_11373-dArt.html (Accessed on 31 August 2016).

*The First Phase: NATO's Search for a New Identity
in the Post-Cold War World (1990-1994)*

The end of the Cold War, even as it brought a sharp victory for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, also led the Alliance to an existential dilemma. On 5 and 6 July 1990, at the London Summit, NATO and Warsaw members met together and produced a joint declaration which stated “we are no longer adversaries and reaffirm our intention to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state”. Furthermore, the London declaration also stipulated new areas of cooperation between the two blocs, such as arms control, reduction of nuclear weapons and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Central and Eastern European states¹³.

But one year later, in 1991, both the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Therefore, many voices in the international arena, especially from the new Russian Federation, asked NATO to follow the same path of dissolution. Two events proved, however, the further necessity of the North Atlantic organization. Firstly, the NATO summit in Rome in November 1991 created a new institutional framework for the organization, in order to help NATO to cope with the new global security architecture¹⁴. To achieve this goal, the Alliance reserved the right to maintain a “military capability sufficient to prevent war and to provide for effective defence; an overall capability to manage successfully crises affecting the security of its members; and the pursuit of political efforts favouring dialogue with other nations and the active search for a co-operative approach to European security”¹⁵.

The second event was the beginning of the conflicts in the Yugoslavian area, which soon proved that the military threats were not over, and the need for collective defence organizations was still a reality. In this context NATO changed from a “tightly knit alliance with responsibility for collective defence” to “a partnership of nations cooperating in the wider field of security”¹⁶.

*The Second Phase: The Establishment of an Institutional Framework
for Cooperation with the States in the Black Sea Region (1994-2004)*

After embracing a new role for the Alliance, NATO member states decided to institutionalize their cooperation with the former Warsaw Pact countries and the newly established republics from the former Soviet area. This aim led to the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991, later renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. And since many of the countries included in

¹³ NATO, *London Declaration on a transformed North Atlantic Alliance*, 5-6 July 1990. Available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c900706a.htm> (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

¹⁴ NATO, *Rome Declaration on peace and cooperation*, 8 November 1991. Available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c911108a.htm> (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

¹⁵ NATO, *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept*, 7 November 1991. Available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23847.htm (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

¹⁶ NATO, Office of Information and Press, *Understanding NATO*. Available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/presskit/010219/004gb.pdf> (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

this program were Black Sea littoral states (eight), the Alliance became more and more interested in the Black Sea region.

Under the Council's umbrella, the Alliance created the Partnership for Peace in 1994, an event which took NATO a step further towards being a major actor in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region. The Partnership, still existing today, is basically a "programme of practical bilateral cooperation between individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries and NATO" which "allows partners to build up an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation"¹⁷. All the eight countries of the Black Sea region which were not part of the Alliance became members of the programme by signing the Partnership for Peace Framework Document*. In 1997, NATO created new institutional mechanisms of cooperation with the two biggest littoral states of the Black Sea, Ukraine and Russia: the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council and the NATO-Ukraine Commission. These new institutions were created as discussion forums for issues like "peacekeeping in the Balkans, crisis management and the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, defence conversion, environmental protection and civil emergency planning"¹⁸.

Also in 1997, on 27 May, NATO leaders and Boris Yeltsin, the President of Russia, signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act. The aim of the document was to set up an institutional framework for dialogue and cooperation on issues like counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and theatre missile defence, prevention of conflicts and dispute settlement by peaceful means¹⁹. Two years later, in 1999, NATO and Russia encountered the first major obstacle in their post-Cold War cooperation. The Alliance's decision to intervene to stop Belgrade's aggression in Kosovo triggered a huge wave of criticism from Russia, which suspended its participation in the Permanent Joint Council. But fortunately, this obstacle was quickly overcome, Russia agreeing to contribute forces to KFOR and to resume bilateral meetings within the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council in 2000²⁰.

As we have seen in the paragraphs above, the new millenium started with a relatively stable configuration of the security architecture of the Black Sea region and implicitly, of relations between NATO and Russia. Surprisingly, an important momentum for increasing cooperation appeared after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. On 28 May 2002, NATO officials and Vladimir Putin signed a joint declaration, *NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality*. They established the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), a body which was supposed to

¹⁷ NATO, *Partnership for Peace programme*. Available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

* The first country in the region to sign the document was Romania, on 26 January 1994, and the last one was Belarus, which signed the document on 11 January 1995.

¹⁸ NATO, Office of Information and Press, *Understanding NATO*. Available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/presskit/010219/004gb.pdf> (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

¹⁹ NATO, Public Diplomacy Division, *NATO-Russia Relations: The Background*. Available at http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_09/20140901_140901-Backgrounder_NATO-Russia_en.pdf (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

²⁰ NATO, Office of Information and Press, *Understanding NATO*. Available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/presskit/010219/004gb.pdf> (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

facilitate their cooperation in the post-9/11 era and make them “stand together against common threats and risks”²¹.

The Third Phase: NATO's Enlargement in the Black Sea Region and the Beginning of the Confrontation with Russia (2004-2014)

Also as a consequence of the events of 9/11, NATO decided to accelerate the accession of two Black Sea littoral states, Bulgaria and Romania, to the Alliance. Since NATO's operations in Afghanistan and Iraq were dependent on its air base in Dobruja (Mihail Kogalniceanu airbase is located on the Romanian sector of the Black Sea coast), the Alliance decided to speed up the integration processes of Romania and Bulgaria. Thereby, in 2004, through the incorporation of the two states, NATO came to control 2318 kilometers* of the Black Sea coastline.

The success of the 2004 integration process led two other Black Sea littoral states, Ukraine and Georgia, to ask to enroll in the NATO Membership Action Plans. But these actions generated a huge feeling of betrayal and insecurity in Moscow. If, in the case of the 2004 NATO enlargement, the Kremlin seemed to be able to accommodate itself to the changes, now the situation was radically different. The Russian leaders claimed they could not accept the possibility of NATO incorporating into its structures the two states, which were once part of the Soviet Union, and which share with Russia thousands of kilometers of border. So, when at the April 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest the issue of Georgia's and Ukraine's accession to NATO appeared on the table, Russia decided to tackle the problem unilaterally. It engaged in a five day invasion of Georgia, in August, and partitioned the country by recognizing the independence of two Georgian provinces with a Russian speaking majority, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Moreover, Russia sent thousands of troops into both territories, which right up to today constitute a major threat to Georgia's territorial integrity²².

The Russo-Georgian war also turned out to be a benchmark in the evolution of the security architecture of the Black Sea region. Russia proved its ability to unilaterally take back control over the Eastern flank of the Black Sea littoral through extensive military operations. A Russian researcher, Irina Kobrinskaya, suggested that after the August 2008 episode, Russia's policy towards the Black Sea Region entered into a dynamic period, which she called *the new active regional strategy phase*. This period is characterized by aggressive actions aimed at reversing its declining position in the Black Sea region and rolling back the Euro-Atlantic advance in the area²³.

²¹ NATO, Public Diplomacy Division, *NATO-Russia Relations: The Background*. Available at http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_09/20140901_140901-Backgrounder_NATO-Russia_en.pdf (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

* 1695 km from Turkey, 378 km from Bulgaria, and 245 km from Romania.

²² Janusz Bugajski, Peter Doran, *Black Sea rising. Russia's strategy in Southeast Europe. Black Sea strategic report no. 1*, Center for European Policy Analysis, Washington, DC, February 2016, p. 5.

²³ Irina Kobrinskaya, “The Black Sea region in Russia's current foreign policy paradigm”, in *Transformations in the Black Sea region. A PONARS Eurasia Workshop*, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 2008, p. 1.

As a result, NATO found Russia's military action in Georgia to be "disproportionate and inconsistent with its peacekeeping role, as well as incompatible with the principles of peaceful conflict resolution"²⁴. But at the Summit in Strasbourg and Kehl on 4 April 2009, the NATO leaders decided to restart political dialogue and cooperation with Russia. The cooperation reached its zenith in November 2010, where at a NATO-Russia Council held during the Lisbon Summit, NATO leaders and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agreed to embark on "a new stage of cooperation towards a true strategic partnership"²⁵.

The Fourth Phase: Adjusting the Alliance's Regional Defence Capabilities as a Consequence of the Russian Aggression in Ukraine (2014-present)

The period of serenity in the Black Sea region came to an end at the beginning of 2014. After refusing to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union at the Vilnius Summit in 2013, the Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovich, triggered a huge wave of discontent in his country. The discontent turned rapidly into a violent uprising, which in February 2014 led to Yanukovich's removal from power and the installation of a pro-Western government in Kyiv.

Faced again with the possibility of a former Soviet state joining the Euro-Atlantic sphere of influence, Russia decided to destabilize the whole Black Sea region in order to reshape the regional security architecture in line with its interests. In March 2014, Russia illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula and started a hybrid war* in Eastern Ukraine, in order to reverse the Euro-Atlantic path of the government in Kyiv. Through these actions, Russia gained control over the Kerch Strait, thus fully bringing the Sea of Azov under its own control, and over the port of Sevastopol, the largest port at the Black Sea. Moscow has also extended its exclusive economic zone in the northern Black Sea, a region with vast oil and gas reserves, and drastically limited Ukraine's coastline and access to open Black Sea waters²⁶. As a consequence, NATO Foreign Ministers decided to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia on 1 April 2014 – even though channels for dialogue remained open, especially the NATO-Russia Council, which has met three times since the illegitimate annexation²⁷.

²⁴ NATO, Public Diplomacy Division, *NATO-Russia Relations: The Background*. Available at http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_09/20140901_140901-Backgrounder_NATO-Russia_en.pdf (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

* The hybrid wars are confrontations where the combatants are not recognized states, but networks of state and non-state actors, often without uniforms, and most of the violence is directed against civilians as a consequence of counter-insurgency tactics or ethnic cleansing.

²⁶ Janusz Bugajski, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁷ NATO, Public Diplomacy Division, *NATO-Russia Relations: The Background*. Available at http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_09/20140901_140901-Backgrounder_NATO-Russia_en.pdf (Accessed on 1 September 2016).

At the first NATO summit held (in Wales) after the tragic events in the Black Sea region, the issue of the Russian aggression towards Ukraine dominated the discussions. The Wales Summit Declaration, issued on 5 September 2014, stated clearly that the NATO members “condemn in the strongest terms Russia’s escalating and illegal military intervention in Ukraine” and demanded “that Russia comply with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities; end its illegitimate occupation of Crimea; refrain from aggressive actions against Ukraine; withdraw its troops; halt the flow of weapons, equipment, people and money across the border to the separatists; and stop fomenting tension along and across the Ukrainian border”²⁸.

As a result of the new Black Sea security context shaped by the Russian actions in Ukraine, the Alliance announced a “swift and firm” response: the NATO Readiness Action Plan. This initiative stipulated the enhance of the responsiveness of NATO Response Force (NRF) and the establishment of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which was designed as a “new Allied joint force that will be able to deploy within a few days to respond to challenges that arise, particularly at the periphery of NATO’s territory”. The mechanism, stated the declaration, had to consist of a land component with appropriate air, maritime, and special operations forces available and an appropriate command and control presence and some in-place force enablers on the territories of eastern Allies at all times²⁹.

The declaration also expressed NATO’s concern about Russia’s behavior towards Georgia and Moldova, which displayed a “pattern of disregard for international law”. Moreover, Russia, through its actions, threatens “the rules-based international order and challenges Euro-Atlantic security”. The Black Sea region is seen in the declaration as an important component of the Euro-Atlantic security. In reply to Russia’s current actions, which are “contrary to the principles on which the established confidence building mechanisms in the Black Sea were built”, the Allies expressed their “support to the territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova”³⁰.

The Wales Summit also gave special attention to the domestic situation in Georgia. NATO members welcomed “the democratic development” of the country and the sacrifices Georgian troops have made in Afghanistan. As a result of these achievements, NATO members reiterated the decision made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, that Georgia will become a member of the Alliance. To help Georgia “advance in its preparations towards membership in the Alliance”, NATO endorsed a “substantial package for Georgia that includes defence capacity building, training, exercises, strengthened liaison, and enhanced interoperability opportunities”³¹.

A final issue regarding NATO’s actions in the Black Sea region discussed in Wales was the deployment of a missile defence system, the Aegis Ashore, in

²⁸ NATO, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 5 September 2014. Available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm (Accessed on 2 September 2016).

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

Deveselu, Romania. The Summit declaration stated as clearly as it could that the aim of the system is only to provide the Alliance with a significant increase in ballistic missile defence (BMD) capability, and is not directed against Russia and will not undermine Russia's strategic deterrence capabilities. Furthermore, the NATO missile defence, explained the declaration, is "intended to defend against potential threats emanating from outside the Euro-Atlantic area"³².

The resolute tone in the Wales Summit declaration was followed by concrete measures, designed to put into practice the initiatives adopted by the NATO leaders in September 2014. Witnessing the continuation of Russia's destabilizing actions in the region, and "its military build-up from the Barents Sea to the Baltic, and from the Black Sea to the eastern Mediterranean", NATO officials took important measures to reinforce the collective defence of the area. These measures included tripling the size of the NATO Response Force, "with a brigade-sized high-readiness spearhead force at its core", and setting up the first six new small headquarters in the eastern part of the Alliance. Moreover, the Alliance increased the number of fighter jets on air-policing patrols over the Baltic States, deployed fighter jets to Romania and Poland, established six multinational NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs)* in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania, established a deployable Multinational Divisional Headquarters Southeast in Bucharest, and inaugurated the Aegis Ashore site in Deveselu, Romania³³.

One could easily observe, from the paragraph above, the conscientiousness with which NATO prepared the defence of its Eastern flank, including its Black Sea coastline. But the Warsaw Summit on 8 and 9 July 2016 marked an important shift in the Alliance's policy towards its Eastern flank. From analyzing the text of the Warsaw Summit Communiqué, it appears that the Alliance's focus falls on firstly ensuring the defence of the Baltic Sea region, and then the defence of the Black Sea region. For example, the Communiqué stated that the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, beginning with early 2017, will receive multinational forces provided by framework nations (Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States) and other contributing Allies on a voluntary, sustainable, and rotational basis. These forces will be organized in four battalion-sized battlegroups, and will be able to operate in concert with national forces. Moreover, NATO leaders also accepted the Polish offer to provide an existing division headquarters as a basis for the establishment of a multinational division headquarters³⁴.

By comparison, for the Black Sea region, NATO leaders only announced the development of a "tailored forward presence", the Combined Joint Enhanced Training Initiative (CJET), which is supposed to include military personnel only

³² *Ibidem*.

* Small headquarters which facilitate the rapid deployment of the VJTF and other Allied force units.

³³ NATO Public Diplomacy Division, *Summit Guide Warsaw*, 8-9 July 2016. Available at http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160715_1607-Warsaw-Summit-Guide_2016_ENG.pdf (Accessed on 2 September 2016).

³⁴ NATO, *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*, 9 July 2016. Available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm (Accessed on 2 September 2016).

from Romania and Bulgaria³⁵. All that NATO leaders decided in Warsaw regarding the increase of the Alliance's military presence in the Black Sea was the necessity of further consultations. According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the military planners of the Alliance will study the legal possibilities* for NATO to provide "enhanced naval presence and also enhanced presence in the air over the Black Sea". And only after the elaboration of these studies, will the Alliance consider what additional measures could be taken to increase its military presence in the region³⁶.

Conclusion

The present article analyzed the North Atlantic Alliance's actions in the Black Sea region during the post-Cold War era. The analysis started with the portrayal of the geopolitical profile of the Black Sea region, describing it as an important transit area with a large population, rich in natural resources, but very heterogeneous and unstable. The second section of the article displayed the main security problems of the region, showing the difficult context of the area.

The third section of the article, the most consistent one, dealt with the actual subject of the research: NATO's actions in the Black Sea region during the post-Cold War era. The research behind this section revealed that NATO's actions in the region between 1990 and 2016 can be divided into four stages. Between 1990 and 1994, the Alliance searched for a new role to meet the realities of the new world system. Between 1994 and 2004, NATO's actions in the region focused on creating an institutional framework which could encourage the Black Sea states, especially Russia, to collaborate with the Alliance in the security field.

The third phase, between 2004 and 2014, was characterized by NATO's enlargement in the region, action determined by the new military necessities brought about by the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. If the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2004 did not cause many difficulties, the discussions at the 2008 Bucharest Summit whether Georgia may become a NATO member provoked a violent response from Russia, which invaded the small South Caucasian republic in August the same year. Despite of being aware of the grave implications this military intervention had on the security architecture of the Black Sea region, NATO leaders decided to restart the political dialogue and

³⁵ *Ibidem*. See also Paul Ciocoiu, *Romania to host NATO multinational brigade*, 10 July 2016. Available at <http://www.balkandefense.com/romania-host-nato-multinational-brigade/> (Accessed on 2 September 2016).

* The main legal impediment in enhancing NATO's naval presence in the Black Sea is represented by the Montreux Convention, signed in 1936. The convention specifies that non-Black Sea state warships are permitted to stay in the Black Sea only twenty-one days.

³⁶ Jens Stoltenberg, *Press Conference following the meetings of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Heads of State and Government*, 8 July 2016. Available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_133276.htm?selectedLocale=en (Accessed on 2 September 2016). See also Jens Stoltenberg, *Press Conference following the meetings of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Heads of State and Government on projecting stability*, 9 July 2016. Available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_133797.htm?selectedLocale=en (Accessed on 2 September 2016).

cooperation with Russia. The cooperation between the two global actors continued on a normal path until 2014, when Russia decided to punish its Western neighbour, Ukraine, for wanting to join the Euro-Atlantic sphere of influence. As a consequence of this episode, NATO's actions in the Black Sea region entered a new phase: that of adjusting the Alliance's regional defence capabilities, in order to prevent the further escalation of the Ukrainian crisis and the spreading of violence to other parts of the area.

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