

**GEOPOLITICAL, GEOECONOMIC AND GEOSTRATEGIC
TENDENCIES IN THE BLACK SEA REGION
CASE STUDY
PARALLEL BETWEEN THE UKRAINE AND KOSOVO
CRISIS**

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ABSTRACT:

THE GOAL OF THIS PAPER IS TO PRESENT THE MAIN ISSUE OF THE BLACK SEA REGION WHICH IS REPRESENTED BY THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS WHICH IS BEING CONSTANTLY AND STRONGLY MONITORED BY THE MAIN ACTORS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM WHICH ALL HAVE GEOPOLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND GEOSTRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE REGION. THE RESOLUTION OF THIS CRISIS BY INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT BECAUSE THE MAIN FACTOR LEADING TO THE CURRENT CRISIS WAS THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TRYING TO MAINTAIN ITS INFLUENCE IN THE BLACK SEA REGION USING THE KOSOVO PRECEDENT. I WOULD THEORIZE THAT THE SOLUTION TO THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE WILL COME IN THE FORM OF A FEDERALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE EASTERN UKRAINE REGION WHICH WILL THEN FUNCTION AS A BUFFER BETWEEN THE WESTERN ECONOMIES AND RUSSIA.

KEYWORDS: GEO-POLITICS, GEO-ECONOMICS, GEO-STRATEGIC, BLACK SEA, UKRAINE, CRIMEA, KOSOVO.

THE BLACK SEA ISSUE AFTER THE COLD WAR

The realistic theories always considered the Black Sea region a geopolitical center, a historical bridge between civilizations and a land of confrontation between old and new rivalries, which are now combined with old regional conflicts and also with new global threats. The constructivist approach is underlining the historical connections and cultural models that defined the area from the oldest times. The neorealist theories have been talking about the emerging of a new multipolar world where the equilibrium of regional power is still current when talking about the security study of the Black Sea.

From a strategic perspective, the Black Sea region is one of multiple antinomies: a region where the old rivalries from the Cold War evolved into what Bruce Jackson called the “soft wars²”, and the old world inheritance was shaped by the present challenges. This area

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² Bruce Jackson, “The soft War for Europe’s East”, in Ronald Asmus (editor), *next Steps in Forging a Euroatlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea*, (Washington D.C: German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006), 17-18.

could be described as a mosaic of weak and corrupt states, close to failure, with diverse identities, aspirations and different evolution patterns and rhythms all of them situated in the middle of a triangle formed of three civilizations: Russian, European and Islamic³.

From a geo-economic point of view, the region is a key player for the energy security of EU which has access to the Caspian and Black Sea's resources, therefore reducing their dependency to Moscow. In this context, the Russian Federation uses the energy resources as a weapon since it monopolizes the transit in the Caspian Sea area which has huge petroleum and natural gas deposits⁴.

Therefore, the research hypotheses of this essay are presented as questions: "How will the Black Sea situation affect the international arena? What changes will take place in the area? What are the interests in the area? How will the current international crisis end?". These are questions I will try to answer in this essay.

The current strategic interests of the main political actors from the international arena show us three reasons for which the Black Sea region is becoming the center of attention of the international community again: the strong desire to consolidate the peace and stability in Europe, the necessity to stabilize the Black Sea area (solve the long existing conflicts and resolving the issues from the Middle East) and the access of the euro Atlantic community to the natural resources from the Caucasia – Central Asia⁵.

PLAYERS WITH GEO-STRATEGIC, GEO-POLITIC AND GEO-ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN THE REGION RUSSIAN FEDERATION

In regards to the Black Sea region, the Russian Federation has three areas of interest. First of all, the area is rich in energetic resources and a transit area for the resources. Second, we are talking about states neighboring Russia, which are considered by Russia to be under its influence. And third, we need to consider the dynamic of the relationships between EU, NATO, USA, relationships characterized by the Moscow's fear of the growing influence of the two organizations' in the area closing in around Russia's borders and also the tense relationship between Russia and USA due to the American anti-missile shield.

Russia is trying to maintain a position of sole provider of natural energy resources for Europe, this being its main trump card when it comes to defending Russian interests as we have seen many times before, during the 2006, 2008 and 2009 crisis when for various reasons Russia stopped the natural gas export to Ukraine and implicitly towards the rest of Europe⁶.

Analysts theorize that Russia's strategy is built to bring Russia to its former glory as a regional leader, position lost as a result of Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, an event called by Vladimir Putin "the biggest geo-political catastrophe of the twentieth century", a loss he is trying to remedy by bringing all the former "republics" of the Soviet Union into the "Customs Union"⁷.

Three countries have already joined the "Union", but on the "Russian's authorities list" there are many countries, including Ukraine and Moldavian Republic. The future of the region, is called, in the Russian's vision, the Euro-Asian Union, a political body which is due

³ Florin Rodeanu, "InteresegeopoliticeşigeostrategiceînregiuneaMăriiNegre", în: *BuletinulFortelorNavale*, Nr. 18,(Constanța: Școalade Aplicație a ForțelorNavale, 2013), 15.

⁴ Paula Daniela Gânga, *RelațiaUniuneaEuropeană- Rusia. Problemaenergetică*, (Iași: Institutul European, 2010), 98-102.

⁵Ibidem, p 17.

⁶GeirFlikke (ed.), EinarWigen, HelgeBlakkisrud, PålKolstø, *The Shifting Geopolitics of the Black Sea Region. Actors, Drivers and Challenges*, (Oslo:Norwegian Institute of International Affairs Report, 2011), 25-26.

⁷Okunev, Igor, "A Foreign Policy to Suit the Majority?",în *Global Affairs*, No.2, (Moscow: Foreign Policy Research Foundation, 2013).

to be born in 2015. Analysts are also theorizing that “in a world that is looking towards Asia” Russia’s intention to position itself as a bridge between Asia-Pacific and the Euro-Atlantic region is a necessary, even essential strategy to raise Russia’s economy to the international power level⁸.

Russia prefers a regional approach when it comes to security in the Black Sea area as under this approach it would have more chances to maintain its status of regional power. To achieve this, Moscow fights for cooperation in all the security organizations, but at the same time opposes NATO’s and EU’s implication in the area⁹.

EUROPEAN UNION

The international community started paying more attention to the Black Sea basin mostly after 2001 when the attacks on the World Trade Center happened, followed by the “global war against terror” and also after Romania and Bulgaria asked to be received in NATO and EU. Because of the above mentioned facts the two organizations became very interested in the region’s security, that interest being amplified by the area’s proximity to the Middle East.

For EU and for the rest of the political players in the Black Sea area, the energy security is extremely important. The relationship between EU – Russia continues to be extremely complex, difficult and ambivalent and the cooperation programs between the two (The EU – Russia Partnership, the Monitoring Partnership) have not been able to improve the situation much, especially given the fact that they both have the same interests in the Black Sea area and also the fact that EU depends on Russia for energy resources and Russia depends on EU from an economic perspective.

For the European Union, the Black Sea basin is an important security factor because of old “frozen” conflicts in the area, because of Russia’s aggressive attitude and expansion politics and because of partnership initiatives with states that are neighbors for both EU and Russia, some of these states having governments that stray pretty far from the principles of a fair and effective administration and of course, because of the energy security issue.¹⁰

NATO AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Once Turkey became a member of NATO, it became an important player in the Black Sea basin; however, during the Cold War, Turkey’s implication in the region was almost nonexistent. After 2004 when Romania and Bulgaria became members, NATO’s involvement in the region visibly increased when USA’s attention focused on the natural energy resources of the area¹¹. NATO doesn’t only have three members that have access to the Black Sea, it also has agreements with additional players from the basin; all this led to some theories according to which the Black Sea will become a “NATO lake” if Ukraine and Georgia become NATO members, not a “Russian lake¹²”.

⁸Lukyanov, Fyodor, “Central Asia: An Indicator of Russia’s Imperial Aspirations”, *în Global Affairs*, No.2, (Moscow: Foreign Policy Research Foundation, 2011).

⁹ Cristina Bogzeanu, *Evoluția mediului de securitate în zona extinsă a Mării Negre și influența acesteia asupra configurării Forțelor Navale ale României pe termen mediu și lung*, (București: Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, 2012), 20-33.

¹⁰ Bogzeanu, *Evoluția mediului de securitate în zona extinsă a Mării Negre și influența acesteia asupra configurării Forțelor Navale ale României pe termen mediu și lung...*, 33-46.

¹¹ Mitat Celikpala, „Escalating rivalries and diverging interests: prospects for stability and security in the Black Sea region”, *în Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (London: Routledge, September 2010), 291.

¹² Viorica Marin, “Marea Neagră: lac NATO”, http://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/marea-neagra-lac-nato-1_50ba05c57c42d5a663b06b86/index.html, (accesat la 18.03.2015).

Russia's reactions to NATO's extension in Eastern Europe, the "gas crisis" in its relationship with Ukraine and also the war with Georgia can be explained, according to a realistic view on international affairs. Also, as a result of these events, the Euro-Atlantic integration seems to be put on the back burner for a while in exchange for improving the relationship with Russia; this seems to be the logical conclusion if we think about the fact that Russia received a 30% discount for the natural gas imported from its eastern neighbor and the Russian naval fleet's presence in Sevastopol will also be extended until 2042.

Also, after Crimea's annexation by Russia, the latter continues to fuel the tension in the Black Sea region by declaring that in the near future it intends to possibly set up nuclear weapons in Crimea. As a result, Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg declares after the NATO-Ukraine Commission's meet that Russia's declarations regarding a possible emplacement of nuclear weapons in Crimea could be worrying¹³.

VULNERABILITIES AND RISKS OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS

The current Ukrainian crisis represents just one of the risks that are present in the Black Sea basin, but there is always the risk that the current crisis will evolve into a full energy crisis which it would negatively impact not only the region, but the entire global economy.

Also, the conflict from Ukraine has implications for other post-Soviet regions; the crisis affects (Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Abkhazia, South Caucasus, Kazakhstan, etc.), by instigating the Russian ethnics from these states to an eventual separatist movement or by eventually facilitating Russia's involvement in their domestic policy.

From a political, economic and military perspective, the European continent is split once again, with Russia in the eastern part, NATO and EU in the western part and with the "in between" areas like Moldavia, Ukraine and the southern part of Caucasus being battlefields. The war for establishing one big power in Europe was thought to have ended in the early '90s, but now it seems it is coming back as a strong possibility, even though not necessarily in the near future. The war on information was in full force. Russia and USA directly confronted each other in Georgia in 2008, in what was a very short episode, quickly overshadowed by the global crisis and the change of administration in Washington, but the episode left powerful impressions on everybody. Georgia did not change the history after the Cold War, but Ukraine did.

Ukraine is a geo-political pivot given its independent existence and its contribution to Russia's transformation. Without this space, Russia ceases to be a Euro-Asian empire and the loss of this space proved to be not just a pivot but a real cataclysm. In fact, Ukraine's geo-political and geo-economic importance is due to the liaisons the country has with the Mediterranean Sea and with the Balkans, Ukraine being the old empire's interface. "The main issue here is that Russia can not be part of Europe without Ukraine being in Europe, but Ukraine CAN be in Europe without Russia being there"¹⁴.

PARALLEL BETWEEN THE UKRAINE AND KOSOVO CRISIS

In an attempt to try and explain Kremlin's steps in Crimea before and after the referendum and its annexation by the Russian Federation, theoreticians and politicians tried

¹³ Adriana Matcovschi, Stoltenberg: NATO este îngrijorată de declarațiile Rusiei cu privire la posibila amplasare de arme nucleare în Crimeea, <http://www.agerpres.ro/externe/2015/05/13/stoltenberg-nato-este-ingerijorata-de-declaratiile-rusiei-cu-privire-la-posibila-amplasare-de-arme-nucleare-in-crimeea-19-17-06>, publicat la 13.05. 2015, accesat la 15.06.2015.

¹⁴ Cristina Avram, *Ucraina pivot geopolitic*, <http://geopolitics.ro/ucraina-pivot-geopolitic/>, (accesat la 25.03.2015).

to compare this situation with the one in Kosovo. The protests in Crimea were instigated by none other than Putin who justifies his decision to send troops to Crimea by comparing that with NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999. In Putin's interpretation, nobody can refuse in Crimea what was permitted in Kosovo. There are also parallels being drawn between Putin's tactics in Crimea and Yugoslavian president, Slobodan Milosevic, which posit that is Putin decides to become another Milosevic, the Western world will see a new fault line in Europe.

The events in Ukraine started taking place last year and culminated with the annexation of Crimea following a referendum that favored the separation from Ukraine and continuing with a conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine between pro-Russians and pro-west protesters. To this date, the western world still refuses to acknowledge Crimea's decision to separate from Ukraine. However, Kosovo, which used to be part of Serbia, also separated from the mother country, and it was accepted as an independent nation not only by USA, but also by most of EU countries.¹⁵

There are various reasons why we can't compare Crimea with Kosovo. First of all, the Albanian population from Kosovo were threatened with genocide by Milosevic, that being his attitude towards the non-Serbia population from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hundreds of thousand of people from Kosovo asked for refuge in the neighboring countries because of the danger posed by the Serbian army so NATO intervened only to avoid a catastrophe. In Crimea, there were no threats towards the Ukrainians and no attacks against the Russian population. Franz-Lothar Altmann, International and Intercultural Relations professor at the University of Bucharest affirms that "There is no fear and no massacre. Those dangers which truly existed in Kosovo, do not exist in Crimea".

Kosovo was part of Serbia and the Milosevic regime took away all national and cultural rights from the Kosovo population, which was 90% Albanian, and dissolved all institutions. After Ukraine gained its independence, the Russians from Ukraine enjoyed the same rights they had when they were part of the Soviet Union. Crimea became an autonomous province of Ukraine and unlike in Serbia, the Ukrainian government did not violate any human rights in Crimea which has a population of 60% Russians.

The Albanians in Kosovo fought for their independence by themselves, with no substantial support from outside, while Russia sent 16000 soldiers to Crimea before the referendum that decided separation from Ukraine took place. The Albanian ambassador to Sarajevo pointed out that Albania did not intervene in Kosovo and did not ask that Kosovo becomes part of Albania. Sonja Biserko from the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia declared that "There is no resemblance between Crimea and Kosovo. The two situations would have been similar if Albania would have taken over Kosovo".

When it comes to the international legality of Crimea's separation from Ukraine, we have to keep in mind that Putin told US president Barack Obama in a phone conversation that the referendum in Crimea was in agreement with the international law. According to the transcripts from the same conversation, Putin cited Kosovo's Declaration of Independence from 2008, which was categorically rejected by Russia. The Russian Federation actually fought against international recognition/acceptance of Kosovo's independence based on the fact that it would encourage other separation movements across the globe. USA and EU insisted that Kosovo was a unique case and did not create a precedent but Putin is now citing the "Kosovo precedent" and insists that Crimea's separation is "absolutely legal" while also maintaining Russia's former position when it comes to Kosovo which has already been recognized as an independent state by 108 governments and UNO members. Also, by annexing Crimea, Russia violated the international agreement signed by USA < Great Britain

¹⁵James Robertson, *Is Crimea another Kosovo?*, <http://socialistworker.org/2014/03/27/is-crimea-another-kosovo>, (accesat la 15.04.2015).

and Russia in 1994 when the three participants agreed to “accept Ukraine’s territorial integrity” in exchange for Ukraine’s agreement to give up its nuclear arsenal.

There is a big difference between the international opinion when it comes to Kosovo and Crimea. Kosovo will remain a significant part of Balkans and for Serbian national mythology as being as it was an important part of the Medieval Serbian Kingdom and the battle of Kosovo (1389) will always remain the place where the Ottoman Empire crushed the remains of the Serbian Empire. Still, the long oppression of the Albanian people led to growing discontent and finally to a armed fight for independence in the 1990s. Their fight for independence was brutally crushed by the Serbian army which prompted the bombing of Serbia by NATO forces and made Kosovo one of the most important international issues. On the other hand, Crimea is an important strategic point not only for Russian, but for Turks and European empires and also for the East – West relations. The best argument for Crimea’s importance is the Sevastopol seaport which represents Russia’s military glory and it is the home of Russia’s fleet at the Black Sea with over 26 000 troops¹⁶.

Kosovo’s independence was the result of a long process of international mediation under UNO’s supervision which applied strict guideline while Crimea’s annexation happened over a very short period of time and under foreign protection – Russia. To approach and solve the crisis in Crimea, Moscow rejected the proposition to form a contact/negotiation group formed by Russia, Ukraine, Great Britain, France and USA while Kosovo welcomed UNO’s intervention. Also, Russian hooligans threatened UNO’s special representative in Crimea and expelled a delegation led by the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities¹⁷.

CONCLUSION

I would theorize that the solution to the conflict in Ukraine will come in the form of a federalization and international acceptance of the Eastern European region which will then function as a buffer between the western economies and Russia. As mentioned before, Russia’s economic situation contracted by 2 % in 2015 compared to 2014 and it is estimated that it will continue to go through a period of decline, the decline being mostly caused by the sanctions imposed by the western powers as a reaction to the annexation of Crimea. As a result, Russia will not have sufficient resources to maintain this conflict. A diplomatic resolution of the conflict would be beneficial for the entire international community given the fact that in this global economy there are strong economic ties between USA-EU-Russia and a prolonged crisis would not be in anyone’s best interest.

As a conclusion, besides the unstable situation from Ukraine, there is also a diplomatic war between Russia and “the West”, what seems to be the returning to a new "Cold War" being carried on through declarations made with the purpose of establishing the spheres of influence in the region.

¹⁶Hajrudin Somun, *Five reasons why Crimea cannot be compared with Kosovo*, http://www.todayszaman.com/op-ed_five-reasons-why-crimea-cannot-be-compared-with-kosovo-by-hajrudin-somun-344554.html, (accesat la 14.-4.2015).

¹⁷Phillips L. David, *Crimea is not Kosovo*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/crimea-is-not-kosovo_b_4936365.html, (accesat la 15.04.2015).

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