

# THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE AND THE ACTORS OF SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

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*There is no doubt regarding the importance that south-eastern Europe has gained over the past years in geopolitical and geostrategic terms. Due to its history and considering the changes that have taken place here after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and also as a consequence of the “hot spots” emerged here on ideological, political, economic and terrorist grounds, this part of the continent still is an area of control and interests confrontations orchestrated by the actors that provide the international affairs with a multipolar dimension. All the aforementioned factors lead to various phenomena in which individual or group interests result in regional as well as global consequences.*

**Key words:** *security, geopolitical interests, power poles, regional actors, south-eastern Europe.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's complex and alert realities have demonstrated the geostrategic interests displayed in south-eastern Europe by actors such as the Russian Federation, Turkey, USA, NATO and EU. All of these are accompanied by the European dimension of China's politics and all the other regional actors of south-eastern Europe. We have thus approached the issue of strategic competition and global consideration of spheres of influence from the perspective of the policies promoted by the previously mentioned actors.

## 2. THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

First, we will attempt to define our area of interest from the viewpoint of international politics. Thus, the

geostrategic interest refers to the way in which a state or a group of states relates to its social system of values represented by expectations, certainties, conceptions, philosophies, strategies and doctrines.

*“EU and NATO do not guarantee Romania the security it hoped for when it joined them, which is why Romania must enhance its sovereignty and build its own politics according to its national interests. The last 20 years have been a nice historical interval, but from now on Romanians themselves must consider their future, although it is sometimes easier to pretend one is helpless and therefore to let others decide upon one's future”,* said George Friedman, the founder of Stratfor. So this is one of the strong reasons why we need to enforce our regional individuality within the world's strategic arena.

Over the last years and particularly after the collapse of the

Soviet Union and of the communist regimes in general, the geopolitical reality of south-eastern Europe has become more and more sensitive. The main reason is the emergence of new phenomena of a security and economic nature that changed the area's geopolitical importance and entailed strengthening the international and regional actors' efforts to approach them according to their own interests. However, these state and non-state actors' interests have often been and still are divergent. Consequently, they transformed south-eastern Europe into an area of geopolitical disputes fueled mainly by the Russian Federation, Turkey, USA and EU.

The 90s have been difficult for all the states of south-eastern Europe as they were dominated by armed conflicts (Yugoslavia, the Russian Federation, Georgia, Moldavia), identity movements (Turkey), diplomatic conflicts and democracy enforcement (Albania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Romania). These countries were like a puzzle of weak and corrupt states having different identities and uneven levels of development placed in a triangle delineated by the Russian, European and Islamic civilizations. By means of internal efforts and external implications most of the problems have been overcome and raised at a level of apparent stability. In spite of the fact that the disputes have not been solved, these "Euro-Asian" states – as Zbigniew Brzezinski called them – chose the western model of development instead of the eastern Russian one. The West decided not to decline their option. Thus, south-eastern Europe changed into a frame of inter-ethnic and geopolitical conflicts that imply unsafe frontiers, weak states and

numerous threats to European and international security. The area of the Balkans, Black Sea Area and Caucasus is a critical strategic center for the war against terror and enforcement of democracy.

It is clear that this region has enjoyed different degrees of attention at different moments in time. In the ancient times, it witnessed the competition between the great powers and the sequential domination of the Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire, followed in the end by the Cold War, which isolated it from the rest of the world.

Except for the case of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, south-eastern Europe consisted of Soviet Union satellite states, which placed it in a cone of shadow. The evolution of the global system drew the international community's attention to these states. Now, for the first time, the region is open to international community. NATO's and EU's expansion to the east has changed south-eastern Europe into an area where many international partnerships, programs and projects are developed for the purpose of economic development and Euro-Atlantic integration. South-eastern Europe has a relevant strategic position: the crossroads of Europe and Asia, between great Russia and Middle East and directly connects East to the western Europe and the Mediterranean Sea by the Danube River. Currently, it is also an extension of NATO and EU and links it to the great Euro-Atlantic powers. This position gave birth to the debated theory of Halford J. Mackinder related to the concept of heartland or Samuel P. Huntington's theory of the lines that delineate civilizations.

Above are some of the reasons why south-eastern Europe is a region of a major importance in the equation of security globalization. Moreover, south-eastern Europe is the only significant area that drew the attention of the four of the most important global actors: the Russian Federation, USA, NATO and EU. Its political-military engagements naturally belong to its global conducts. The state and non-state actors we have mentioned have stated their solidarity in the war on terror as a preventive measure at a global scale: security vs. insecurity in south-eastern Europe induces global geostrategic conditions.

Also, the major strategic importance of south-eastern Europe can be superposed on the following geopolitical and geostrategic characteristics: south-eastern Europe is placed at the active confluence of three regions – the Balkan peninsula, Caucasus and Asia, which are all very close to the hot spot of Middle East. This region has a great strategic potential as it borders the south of NATO area, where the great nuclear states' interests collide. Then, the Black Sea is the access gate to the planetary ocean of Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and the small trans-Caucasian states. South-eastern Europe is the center of the foreseen routes for the transport of the Caspian oil from central Asia to the strategic consumers from the west, as well as the illegal weapon trafficking and immigration from central and Middle East to the west. The Black Sea also has important amounts of natural resources. The Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea are Russia's shortest ways to the south and to Africa via the Suez Channel. Last but not least, south-eastern Europe has a large number of civilian and military harbors.

Understanding the strategic role of south-eastern Europe within global stability and security means accepting the existence of a strong link between Euro-Atlantic security and international security with global implications.

## **2.1. THE MAIN ACTORS IN THE AREA**

We are currently witnessing the strategic repositioning of the world's main power poles in order to set a new international order, on which we next intend to elaborate.

The European Union (EU). The EU's strategic interest in the major problems of global security started to shape at the end of the last century, when the Yugoslavian crisis broke up with its well-known consequences. The EU's involvement, which was quite shy and somewhat contradictory in the Balkan context, can be regarded as the first step to assuming a global role. The main trend, formally declared and conceptualized, is the EU birth by integrating the Balkan groups of states, which was seen as the only sustainable step to peace, stability and security in Europe. Formally, the document that stipulates EU's geostrategic interest is the European Security Strategy approved on 12 December 2003 and elaborated by the representative for Foreign Policy and Common Security of the EU. The document defines this as follows: "Europe has never been so prosperous, safe and free", whereas "the world is full of new dangers and opportunities". This precedes the global role assumed by EU, which focuses on: overcoming the threats that jeopardize its development, that is, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts

in its proximity, bankrupt states and organized crime, assuming a growing role in the global effort to manage the new types of risks and threats, promoting a productive policy in the field of conflict prevention as far as its economic and political interests are concerned, building a climate of continental security, preserving international order, advantageously ensuring energy resources for the purpose of the Union's survival, extending the fields of economic, political and cultural cooperation.

Mention should be made that since the year 2007 EU has been neighboring the Black Sea, a region that enjoys a great deal of attention from Brussels. EU regards the Black Sea as a great global actor and as an opportunity for Europe to assume its conditions as a credible civilizing factor. It all depends on the way in which EU is willing to manage its addition to the Russian energy resources, regardless of where exactly they come from.

On the other hand, EU plays its roles from the stance of its global importance under the present condition of its integrality. This is based on the fact that Europe, by means of its great colonial powers, played such a role for almost half a millennium. This leads EU to the following actions: consolidating security and stability in its proximity, developing its influence in Central Asia and around the Black Sea area, contributing to post-totalitarian enforcement of democracy, materialization of its economic interests in the Far East.

Over the last decade, NATO has enhanced its strategic assets in south-eastern Europe and around the Black Sea area. It has secured partnerships with the Russian Federation and Ukraine without hiding its intentions

to expand its borders to the east, that is, the will of Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan to join NATO, which is carefully considered. It is clear that NATO has gone over its initial birth purposes, e.g. collective defense, and it now stand for a security community. The Alliance's transformation aims at assuming an increasing responsibility regarding the management of global risks. In this respect, it has conceptualized its intent to involve in conflict prevention, crisis management, peace keeping, disaster management and humanitarian aid.

In the geostrategic field, NATO targets the following: involvement in frozen conflicts, development of democracy in former communist countries, dissolving terrorist networks, war on terror wherever the Alliance's interests call for that, fight against the illegal trafficking of weapons of mass destruction, protection of maritime and energy transportation routes, development of partnerships with states that are not NATO members, consolidation of security in its proximity regions.

At the same time, the Alliance will focus on: Afghanistan's peaceful and democratic reconstruction, consolidation of the Balkans' security and stability, implementation of the future security engagement under UN mandate, provision of support to UN for the purpose of keeping peace and security at an international level, development of relations with EU, particularly in the field of security, crisis management, war on terror, civil emergencies etc.

The Russian Federation has returned into the equation of geopolitics by explicitly redefining its expectations in terms of rebuilding the bipolar power balance

by means of strengthening relations with the EU and China in the form of a sophisticated political-military partnership in the post Cold War era.

Currently, the Concept of national security is the document that identifies and defines and the geostrategic interests of the Russian Federation from the perspective of its global role, which naturally include south-eastern Europe. According to it, the Russian Federation's interests are as follows: applying the principles of proximity and partnership relations with the great powers or organizations having interests in this area; assuming the right to act in a military manner against terrorist groups in any part of the worlds, but particularly in this region; maintaining good relations with EU in exchange with EU dependence on Russian energy resources; exerting domination in the Black Sea Area; rejecting the export of democracy and extension of NATO to the east; proactively developing the Collective Security Treaty; rejecting the placement of the American anti-missile shield, which is regarded as a direct threat to its own security.

As a result of defining its geopolitical status, the Moscow administration argues for the recognition of its sphere of influence in the area of the former Soviet Union and military equivalence with the USA. In terms of the Black Sea area, in spite of its limited direct access to the sea, the Russian Federation claims a major role connected to its military and resource potential in order to preserve the secession triangle represented by Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Russian Federation's realities and geopolitical perspectives are delineated by the following objectives: overcoming influences exerted by

the USA, EU and NATO; decreasing the impact of the orange revolutions from Georgia and Ukraine; involving in the local conflicts without UN, EU, NATO and Black Sea neighboring countries, including the conflicts from Georgia, Turkey and Armenia; exerting economic and political pressures on Moldavia, Ukraine and Georgia.

The Russian Federation's significant fleet and its naval bases from Ukraine and Georgia consolidate its role in the Black Sea area, but the most important role in its geopolitical role is played by the neighborhood of NATO and EU, which strengthens the western influence in the region from an economic, political, technological and demographic point of view.

As far as the region bordered by the Azov Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea and Volgograd is concerned, it is a passing to south Caucasus. Rich in natural resources, it hosts the pipe from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, where also the oil pipe to Turkey starts. The area is ethnically heterogeneous, as it is the home to more than 50 Caucasian populations, Turkish and Indo-European, Muslim and orthodox. Therefore, this region is hard to control. In fact, north Caucasus has often raised problems for Russia, which has consumed important resources in order to suppress its instability and insecurity.

The United States of America. Its interests are stipulated in the Strategy of National Security, which mentions its role of global superpower and the desire to permanently involve in the most important global issues.

In terms of the matters of south-eastern Europe, USA are interested in: consolidation of democracy and economic independence of these states; general development

of the states within inter-regional cooperation; free access to the resources of the area; solving conflicts by means of negotiations; involvement in solving local conflicts; strengthening NATO and EU philosophy in these countries; opening alternative energy routes; enforcing military presence in the area; war on terror, illegal trafficking of weapons, nuclear materials, drugs and human beings; risk management related to security; creation of active defense centers to be used in case of military actions; opposing the increasing political and economic expansion of China and Russian Federation; reshaping the system of regional security.

The People's Republic of China plays its global role as a great economic and military power mainly due to its huge demographic potential. It centers its evolution on a massive absorption of western capital as well as on the global development of markets. As the world's fourth economic power after USA, Japan and EU, China has been growing at outstanding levels lately, and it aims at: consolidating the strategic and sustainable security of the state; intensifying campaigns against corruption; balancing economic disparities; strengthening the country's democracy; synchronizing the fight against corruption, economic development and social justice; modernizing the armed forces and defense industry; significant growth of the defense expenses budget.

At the same time, China's foreign and defense policy focuses on the following: consolidating its role as a global actor; developing its military power; positive management of its relations with Taiwan; decreasing tensions in territorial disputes with the

neighboring countries; harmonization of its relations with India, USA, Russia, Japan and EU; development of the Shanghai Organization.

The Republic of Turkey is a complex society with a regime protected by the constitution. Its force and stability result from its strong position within NATO, robust economy, political stability, and secular character of the armed forces. Turkey exerts a strong influence in southern Caucasus and northern Iraq; it hosts the energy routes Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan and the Blue Stream pipe; also, it has joined the Nabucco project. Outside its borders, Turkey has positively managed the conflicts with Armenia, Syria, Iraq and Greece. It also exerts a dynamic influence in Crimea and Caucasus by adopting a moderate attitude regarding Chechnya and Azerbaijan. Moreover, Turkey is aware that it is an essential actor of south-eastern Europe, which sets it close to the superpowers' block, with an emphasis on maintaining supremacy over the Black Sea straits.

Turkey's economic, cultural, political and social realities in the 90's prevented the Turkish populations from being integrated in a "great Turkey". On the other hand, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation initiative has had a positive impact, particularly because Russia was integrated in this partnership and it thus shares with Turkey its hegemony in the Black Sea area.

## **2.2. OTHER SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE ACTORS**

Over the last century, the political and administrative map of south-eastern Europe has been like a puzzle, with the exception of the Cold War

period. We can therefore say that the present configuration of Europe is the consequence of the geopolitical and geostrategic changes that took place after the Second World War until and after the end of it, with a special role played by the two great poles of power – USA and Russia. In this context, the following actors may be included in the map of south-eastern Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Moldavia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

Albania is a country undergoing democracy formation, in which the adoption of Constitution was hard to achieve after a long process that came to an end in November 1998.

Albania enjoys wide exit to the Adriatic Sea. It gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, and after the two world wars it was included in the communist region. In 1990 it adopted the multi-party regime and market economy, but the process was market by corruption a serious social problems. This led to political chaos in 1997, which required international military intervention in order to enforce public order. At the present moment, Albania is a NATO member and EU oriented.

The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a recent state on Europe's map (it was recognized in April 1992), and has a narrow exit to the Adriatic Sea. Its population of 4.5 million people consists of three ethnic groups: 40% Serbian, 38% Muslim, and 22% Croatian. However, these percentages are approximate since censuses are hard to perform in an area of high instability. Despite that

almost the entire population speaks the same language, their spiritual values and economic desiderata are quite divergent. There is only one convergence in this respect: EU and NATO accession.

The constitution is based on the Dayton Agreement (SUA) signed on 14 December 1995. The collective presidency consists of three members: a Muslim, a Croatian and a Serb. Although this should ensure stability, this artificial form of leadership is hardly a democracy to be born. The three ethnic groups coexist due to the presence of international troops.

The Republic of Bulgaria, whose eastern border is the Black Sea, is a NATO and EU member. It does not recognize national minorities, but only ethnical groups. It has some difficulties dealing with the Turkish Muslim minority (8-10% of the population), as well as with the refugees from Macedonia, whom are assimilated to the Bulgarian population. In the 80's there was a strong campaign during which other nationality people's names were changed into Bulgarian names.

Bulgaria's political trends have displayed interesting features for the last five decades: during the Cold War, Bulgaria was close to the Moscow regimes, whereas after 1990 most of the parties have placed themselves on a western oriented direction. Moreover, in 2001 the government leadership was given to Simeon the 2nd, Bulgaria's former king.

Cyprus is the third largest island of the Mediterranean Sea after Sicily and Sardinia. Its northern part is known as "the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus", recognized solely by Turkey. The capital city, Nicosia, has a population of approximately 300,000 people, 80,000 of which

being Turkish Cypriots. It was divided between Turkish and Greek parts in 1974, when bishop Makarios expressed his willingness to unite Cyprus and Greece. The Turkish intelligence found out about the plan and the Turkish troops invaded northern Cyprus. This situation is persists as what is known as “Cyprus crisis”.

The economy in the Greek part is prosperous, but prone to external shocks. The economic crisis of 2009 was reflected in the number of people visiting Cyprus. On the other hand, the lack of water in the Turkish part of Cyprus is an obstacle to its economic development. Also, the foreign companies are reluctant to invest here, and the Turkish currency is weak on the international exchange markets. To compensate for this situation, Turkey provides support in tourism, education and industry.

The Republic of Croatia is a presidential and parliamentary democracy, in spite of the fact that its founder – Franjo Tudjman, the president of Croatia until December 1999 – adopted dictatorial politics centered on the presidential institution. Tudjman was a nationalist, an anti-Semite and a xenophobe who gave up power at the end of his life. His death allowed for Croatia’s Euro-Atlantic orientation.

Croatia’s economy has developed moderately due to its weak fiscal discipline and lack of reforms.

Georgia is a small state that enjoys outstanding importance in the Caucasian geopolitics as it hosts the terrestrial routes between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. Its main problems, which emerged after gaining independence in 1991, are the following: the existence within its borders of two separatist

states – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – which militate for integration into the Russian Federation; the Russian military troops are deployed in Georgia under the pretext of peace keeping. NATO’s decision to postpone granting of MAP has discouraged Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration perspectives.

Greece lies in the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula as well as approximately 2,000 islands from the Ionic Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Aegean Sea. It has a capitalist economy in which the public sector brings 40% of the GDP. Greece is one of the major beneficiaries of the EU support since its public debt, inflation and unemployment are well above the European average values. The decline in public finances and its lack of credibility along with the insufficient reforms and measures have led the country to a severe crisis. Under EU pressure, the government adopted a set of measure on medium term: reducing governmental expenses, reducing public sector, reducing fiscal evasion, reforming the health and pension systems, increasing competitiveness in the labor market. However, Greece’s creditors ask Greece to enhance its efforts to harness public sector’s expenses and increase tax collection.

During the Cold War, its geostrategic position played an important role in attracting American capital and economic growth. Therefore, it accessed the European Economic Community in 1981, which overcame the threats to its internal and external conditions.

The province of Kosovo is but one of the concerning symptoms of the dissolution of the international order after the First World War.



The province has been inhabited since ancient times. In the middle ages, Kosovo was the center of the Serbian Empire. Then, the Turks ruled Kosovo for more than four centuries until Serbia regained its territory during the First World War. During the Second World War, parts of Kosovo were placed under Italian ruling, replaced later by the German ruling. At the end of the war Tito's partisans proclaimed the autonomous republic of Serbia within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 1974, the Yugoslavian Constitution granted Kosovo the statute of a socialist autonomous republic, which resulted in numerous protests by the Albanian population demanding the province's total independence. It all reached a climax in 1998, when a bloody armed conflict broke out. The consequences can still be seen nowadays. The independence of Kosovo was recognized by 69 out of 192 NATO states, including SUA and 22 EU countries. Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Greece and Cyprus did not do that, and neither did China and Russia.

FYROM is another state born in the last decade of the 20th century after the collapse of Yugoslavia. It is difficult to state exactly when the Macedonians settled down in this area, but they claim to be the followers of Samuil, who founded the first Macedonian state in 969-1056. The Greek regard the Macedonians as part of their ancient history, whereas the Bulgarians consider the Macedonian language as a dialect of the Bulgarian language.

The Macedonian economy was strongly affected by the UN sanctions against Belgrade, the Greek embargo and the Macedonian-Albanian conflicts, which were close to reaching catastrophic proportions

before they were overcome by means of the international community's support.

The Republic of Moldavia is a small state that gained independence in 1991. As part of the Community of Independent States and GUAM, Moldavia is marked by the absolute energy dependence on Russia and the secession of Transnistria. Both events have influenced the geopolitical conditions in the proximity of the Black Sea. Moscow has offered only two alternatives to the tensions: transforming the republic into a federation or Transnistria's independence. The internal political arena is determined by the two main political actors – the Alliance for European Integration and the Communist Party. The economic crisis is ever present, whereas the political arena is subject to tensions and disputes generated by differences in values, principles and culture.

Although it has a favorable climate and fertile soil, Moldavia has been undergoing severe economic devolution for it depends almost entirely on Moscow's support and resources. Transnistria is an autonomous region of Moldavia de jure, but de facto it declared its independence on September 2, 1990. The independence was not recognized by the international except for Russia, which led to the conflict in the region.

In order to respect the political condition of the region, the Moldavian Parliament adopted in July 2005 the law on the Fundamental provisions of the legal status of the area on the left bank of the river Nistru, which refers to advantages such as: the official languages – Moldavian, Russian and Ukrainian, the right to establish foreign relations in the economic, scientific and humanitarian fields.

Montenegro re-appeared on the world's map in May 2006, when it claimed its right to organize a referendum concerning its becoming independent from Serbia. The global financial crisis significantly impacted upon its economy, although it has created a friendly internal environment for business investments. It has the lowest profit taxation in the region (9%) and more than 90% of the state companies have been privatized.

Romania is the largest country in the region, and it has been spared by the segregationist trend that characterized Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Bucharest is the second largest capital in the Balkans after Athens. Romania has an exit to Black Sea (including the Danube Delta) of 287 km.

The political leaders' lack of maturity, the slow pace of reform and high corruption caused Romania's economic downturn during the 90's. In 1999, Romania ran the risk of economic collapse, but the national banking system managed to avoid that. At the beginning of this millennium Romania found a favorable international situation accompanied by some maturity signs in the political leaders' attitude, which resulted in internal economic stability. However, the common citizens still have a low level of income, and the level of unemployment is high (6.9%).

Serbia consists of two provinces – Voivodina and Kosovo (although the federal authorities have no control over Kosovo). Serbia's population is mainly Albanian (92%), particularly due to their high birth rate, but also due to the Serbians' migration because of the Albanians' intolerance. An interesting aspect of the Serbian authorities' politics is the

way in which they treat minorities. Thus, the Albanian and Hungarian minorities sometimes enjoyed some rights and even a certain degree of local autonomy, other minorities have been assimilated as they were not recognized and given any rights. A possible explanation is that the Serbian authorities wanted to prevent them from claiming rights, as the Albanian and Hungarians had done before. However, little progress has been done in this respect since the year 2001.

Serbia's current geopolitical position in Europe has changed significantly, considering its Euro-Atlantic orientation. After 1999, Serbia is still a country with a weak economy, incapable to preserve its neutrality. But Belgrade tries to emphasize and enhance its international prestige by its alliances with Moscow, Beijing and Washington in an attempt to apply the reforms required by Brussels.

The Republic of Slovenia declared its independence in 1991 and has an exit to the Adriatic Sea. It is also a NATO and EU member. In fact, it is the most economically advanced country in the region, which played a significant role in its EU admission in 2004 along with its political stability and coherence. Its political leaders' pragmatism made Slovenia be the only former Yugoslavian state that did not break economic relations with Yugoslavia, which helped overcome the impact of recession by exporting goods and service to the East.

Ukraine is one of the most important state in south-east Europe and it declared its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991. On the one hand, it adheres to the Euro-Atlantic values; on the other hand, it preserves close relations with Russia.

Its political balance is fragile, and the population is undecided between the two orientations. The reform is declining, diplomacy turns towards Kremlin, whereas the country depends on the Russian energy resources. The tense relations with Romania, Poland and Georgia are fueled constantly, and so are the interethnic and interreligious ones. The strategic impeding of Ukraine's adherence to MAP is perceived differently by different countries if one considers that France and Germany did not agree with it.

Due to its geographic size, economic potential and military potential, Ukraine is regarded as a regional power. At the same time, Ukraine deprived Russia from the access to the Danube and separated the straight of Bosphorus from Crimea, which consolidates its geostrategic value.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Placing south-eastern Europe and its adjacent areas at the heart of Euro-Atlantic concerns is a sine-qua-non prerequisite for the positive evolution of political situation, as well as regional and world stability and

security. The primary responsibility of south-eastern European states is to provide stability to the people in the region, considering their huge cultural diversity, which is both a source of conflicts and a pool of richness. Also, the natural resources give these countries particular strategic importance. Their geographic position makes them a bridge for the various international actors with distinct economic, strategic and political interests. Thus, the concepts of south-eastern Europe becomes a useful tool for understanding the complex dynamics of these phenomena. When talking about the Black Sea, George Cristian Maior said:

*“In order to define the security dimension of the Black Sea, I believe that the concept of bridge instead of border should be used more comprehensively. The Black Sea could become a strategic platform used to spread democracy and stability and to promote sustainable development and security from the Mediterranean Sea to Levant, Middle East and Central Asia”.*

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