

The Danube – The Axis of European Security

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Abstract: This article highlights some aspects of the Danube River, which, in an increasingly dynamic Europe, offered good premises for cooperation, and the sustainability of its borders has conferred, in general, stability and territorial strength of coastal states. However, this strength, over time, has unfavorably placed itself on the political convenience of the coastal states in terms of the geo-economic dynamism of the riparian states. The European Union must meet the challenge of constantly adapting to the changes generated by the internal factors (enlargement, aging, population growth and decline, the need to adapt the Union's institutions, efficiency, transparency and legitimacy of decision-making at Community level, communication with its citizens), and by the external factors (global economic and financial crisis, the crisis of natural resources and raw materials, the competition coming from the other poles of power and not only, the terrorist threat, the political instability in the states of North Africa, threats related to the environment such as climate change, natural disasters, pandemics, etc.). Due to the interference of economic and political interests, the Danube now represents a key point in the North Atlantic Alliance, facilitating access to the extended region of the Black Sea. We consider that the turbulent history of Europe has been closely linked to the legal regime of the Danube, and the chessboard of the players of political, diplomatic and economic interests has always reflected this issue. In addition, as the river, Danube is not a simple waterway, but a powerful base on the infrastructure of any interest, its problems must be fully understood.

Keywords: European Union; regional cooperation; geopolitics; security strategies

1. Introduction

As a major navigable artery of the continent, the Danube has played a fundamental role in shaping the destiny of the countries it crosses. As a source of life, as an original matter, it suggests a common European destiny. The geographical situation of the river defines the general “axis of travel”, which connects the West with the East, the center with the province, the homeland with the foreign country. For reasons of “natural history”, the Danube is one of the most cosmopolitan rivers in

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Europe, crossing the Germanic, Romanesque and Slavic spaces. The Danube could be described as a place of transition - geographical, historical, trade and culture, with a composite character. Cosmopolitan coordination aims at passing and overcoming identities, the explosion of boundaries, demystification (Boia, 2000). The Danube is, therefore, an unmistakable topo due to the status given to it by its special geographical-historical and cultural position, to which many artists and writers have referred. Border identity, the Danube is a crucible that sums up the presence of various national and cultural components, "a space where cultures met and separated, like any border, which can mean a place of passage, but also a barrier." (Magris, 1994) Attractive by its location and picturesque, the Danube is a bridge-river. The Danube was built and grows from all the contributions of the crossed countries, and this is how the European culture has been established over the centuries through the contribution of all the peoples of the continent. There is no river called by so many different names by its riparian and there is no culture enriched as the European culture from so many particular cultures (Cionchin & Trieste, 2003).

So the central position of this river border and its belonging to the Central European culture generate studies of different order which, starting from the delimitation of the Danube space (geo-political topo, cultural model and mental-affective matrix), analyze literary creativity in this area of ethnic contact, the phenomena of meeting, collaborating and confronting this creativity (Magris, 1994).

2. The Danube in Europe. History and Culture

The Danube, a river whose waters connect West with the East of the Europe to the borders established by the people, has been an antiquity since ancient times and continues to be an axis on which many countries and organizations focus for a concerted evolution. The name of the Danube, declined in the many languages of the peoples whose territories it crosses, preserves in its sonority the Latin root: Danubius (God of the rivers); it derived in turn from an ancient Indo-European root, reached in Latin by the Celtic languages in the form danu (w) -yo- or through the languages of the Scythians and Sarmatians who belonged to the Iranian branches in which in the Avestan language dānu, means river. The root is thus present in the names of other European rivers: Donet, Dnieper, Don, etc. The Danube is the largest river in the European Union, the only one flowing from West to East and the second largest river in Europe after the Volga. From its springs to its discharge into the sea, the Danube crosses 10 countries (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia,

Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine) and affects the lives of tens of millions of people. The Danube, the second longest river in Europe, is also one of the largest rivers in the world. If its length from springs to discharge into the sea measures 2857 km, it should be mentioned that its maximum width is 1.5 km and the depth varies between 1 and 8 m. The Danube river basin gathers several dozen rivers and covers an area of 817,000 km², except for the Danube Delta which in turn has about 6750 km².

It leads at an average speed of 8-9 km / h, with a turbulent flow, its basin ranging from 400 to 10,000 m³ with an average of 2000 m³ / s. The rapid flow is also due to the difference in altitude between springs and discharge, this being 1078 m. km of its course, so on average a dam at 16 km. However, the largest dam is the one at the Iron Gates I and II, in the Djerdap gorge, 117 km long, between Serbia and Romania. The dams are over 300 m and 30 m respectively. Here, the river reaches a flow of 5500 m³ / s, and the dam has a drop of 34 m inland.

About 20 million tons of sediment stop annually through these dams (Sobaru, Năstase, & Avădanei, 1998). After the dam, the river travels freely the remaining 860 km to the Delta. The second largest dam is the one at Gabčíkovo, located downstream of Bratislava, where 90% of the Danube's flow produces about 10% of Slovakia's electricity. The Danube is a good source of drinking water, directly accessible - as in the Stuttgart and Alb-Donau region, where about 30% of drinking water comes from the Danube or through wells or after sand filtration.

3. Danube-Main-Rhine Strategic Complex - Center of Gravity of the European Security

Due to its geographical position (Sobaru, Năstase, & Avădanei, 1998), the flow of water and the economic resources of its basin, the Danube is the most important European River. Although, in terms of length and flow, overtaken by the Volga, the Danube has the advantage of crossing the European continent horizontally, from its western part to the Black Sea. Positioned relatively evenly in relation to the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean, and flowing into the Black Sea, the Danube allows the opening of communication routes to Central Asia. These aspects determined the well-known scientist, Grigore Antipa, to state: "the Danube has an importance and a global role". According to Antipa's ideas, the Danube is today an essential element in economic strategies aimed at both the idea

of European integration and the broader connection of important regions of Asia and the Middle East to Europe (Sobaru, Năstase, & Avădanei, 1998). “One of the permanent causes of the wars in Europe over the last two centuries has been selfish control of European shipping lanes. I am talking about the Danube, the Black Sea Straits, the Rhine, the Kiel Canal and all the inland waterways of Europe that cross two or more states”, said President Truman on August 9, 1945, after the Potsdam Conference.

A river separates and unites equally, and the Danube is both the natural border of several European states and an excellent but little used waterway¹. Starting with 1992, after the completion of the Main-Danube canal, a new navigable waterway with a length of 3,540 km, which crosses Europe diagonally, it was built from the North Sea to the Black Sea. The North Sea-Rhine-Main-Danube-Black Sea complex is a set of hydrotechnical constructions, with special functions, located along two large rivers that cross Europe, forming a waterway that crosses the continent from north to south on the territory of eleven states and connects the Black Sea with the North Sea.

This complex is based on the Danube and Rhine rivers, connected by the Danube-Main canal, rivers that flow into the Black Sea (through the natural mouths that make up the Danube Delta and the Danube-Black Sea canal), another into the North Sea (through the mouths that make up the Rhine Delta). The complex is of major importance in the European system of inland waterways and this situation will not change in the near future. Currently, with the exception of three riparian states, Serbia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, all the states crossed by the components of the complex are members of the European Union, which ensures good conditions to invest in this waterway, to turn it into a fully functional backbone of Europe. The Rhine and the Danube are currently the integrating factors in the large and complex process of multiplying relations between the riparian countries and the other countries of the European continent, a process that is a driving force for the enlargement of the European Union.

Given that the European Union is going through a stage of redefining the identity and internal cohesion and the need to assert itself as a competitive and dynamic player; in a world of continuous globalization, against the background of the

¹ *Revista GeoPolitica/ GeoPolitics Journal no. 39* (2011). Axa Ponto-Danubiană - axă strategică/ Ponto-Danubian axis - strategic axis, Bucharest: Top Form.

“digestion” of the fifth wave of enlargement (which began in 2004 with ten states and was completed by the accession of Romania and Bulgaria on 1 January 2007), this complex can be a factor of economic development and social balance. This is because the European Union is in the process of reconnecting with its own citizens and regaining their support for the European political project, to correspond to their concerns, at the beginning of the 21st century. Equally, the European Union is looking for credible and effective answers in order to strengthen its external role, against the background of the partnership, but also of the strategic competition with USA and states from Asia.

In this context, the fluvio-maritime complex can be a favorable means of economic development and acceleration of the integration of Eastern and South-Eastern European states into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. The importance of the complex is given, mainly, by the economic factor, but its value as an alignment and strategic direction should not be neglected either, including the role of the tributaries, of the hydrotechnical systems, of the canals and the related works of art. By moving the center of gravity towards Central and South-Eastern Europe, determined by the construction process of the European Union, we can say that from the point of view of security there is a translation of its center of gravity on the Danube-Pontic axis, which it entitles us to identify a new value of European security: Danubian security. The transformations that lead to the current parameters of this security area arise a major interest for the riparian states and not only. The European Union, in the achievement of the traditional German strategy “Ostpolitik”, i.e. the penetration on the Asian continent by the subordination of Central Europe and, especially of the Danube countries (which has been achieved to a large extent), seeks to achieve a control of the area. Through the Danube-Pontic axis, the European Union wants to maintain control and supremacy over the “silk road” and the Eurasian energy axis (Bădescu, 2004). The Danube-Black Sea river-state area generates and will generate geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic strategies with implications in the field of zonal security and the development of energy and trade projects vital to the European Union. For states that are not located in this area, the access to the pontoon-Danubian axis can be achieved through networks of navigable canals connected to the system or through the development of multimodal road and railway networks. In the future, the Euro-Atlantic partners have the obligation to recognize the importance of the states found on the Ponto-Danubian axis, as important geopolitical actors, in this sense having the well-established role of generating a well-defined geostrategic

representation and a greater firmness in the involvement of these states in generated projects (Bădescu, 2004).

European relations have experienced a different evolution in the areas covered by the Complex. Thus, if in the area of Western Europe crossed by the Rhine and Main, bordered by the North Sea, after the convulsions produced by the Second World War they stabilized by the establishment of bodies and organizations of economic political and military, cooperation; the Danube and the Black Sea area experienced a long period in which, both in relations between the communist bloc states in the area and in their relations with other states on this European corridor, evolved according to the interests of the USSR. In the last period, after the disintegration of the communist bloc, there has been a positive evolution of the international relations established in this space, from rudimentary forms to complex forms of cooperation, without which it would not have its own identity.

Initially, the idea of building the Rhine - Main - Danube canal tried to draw a demarcation line right in the heart of Europe, so that later, this line would draw attention to a simple and obvious idea: this Complex is in Europe, and the regional cooperation and collaboration must be extended to the whole of Europe in order to achieve the concept of globalization. Integration is mainly the way to achieve the European Union. It is a very complex process by which states build a new community that is intended to be unitary, monolithic. The European integration is therefore not a simple joining of the parties' process, but a new construction that is achieved by merging the parties. The most acute problem that arises - at least at this stage - is whether the parties remain entities or only components of an entity. In other words, United Europe will be an entity of entities or simply an entity (Georgescu, 2010). The answers to this question divide Europeans in two. Some see a Europe without borders, without political states, that is, a Europe of regions, a federal Europe, others believe that our old continent must become a Europe of states, that is, an entity of entities. Currently, through development, the countries that benefit from the "Danube course" are increasingly integrated, being able to affirm the role of integrating factor of the strategic complex, which is a vector for resources and development. The connection of the European Union with the economic zone of the Black Sea determines a strong system of cooperation and alliances. In this way, it is possible to ensure the increase of security and stability in the area, the conjugation of the economic interests of the states and the elimination of the existing development gaps. The control of the Danube and its connection with the Black Sea meant and means access to markets and sources of raw materials, but also to keep

under observation some areas known to be host and, at the same time, centers of expansion of instability and crises.

In the interference of economic and political interests, the Danube is today a key point for the North Atlantic Alliance, facilitating access to the wider Black Sea region within the area, as well as for the geopolitical representation of the European Union (Petrescu, 2005). In this sense, joint efforts of an economic, political, military, social and environmental nature were exercised in a first phase, for later, to seek solutions for regional development in the context of globalization. Another argument in support of the importance of the complex as the axis and center of gravity of European security is the elements of the pivotal theory, developed at the beginning of the last century by Halford Mackinder. In 1919, the author, a former dean of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science in London and vice-president of the Royal Geographical Society, published the work "Democratic Ideals and Reality" in which he approached the world in a completely new way. It operates with notions such as The Planetary Ocean, the Great Island of the World (consisting of Eurasia and Africa), practically giving up the division of the planet into oceans and continents. The Planetary Ocean represents 3/4 of the globe's surface and was dominated at the time by Britain (which held ocean supremacy). For this reason, his theories will focus on the land area, i.e. the Great Island of the World, so that its vast resources were also controlled by this great power. The author considers that Africa is part of the Great Island of the World due to the fact that it is perfectly united with Asia (the Suez Canal being man-made) and almost united to the straits of Gibraltar and Bab-el-Mandeb with Europe (Japardize & Rondeli, 2000).

Given that the Great Island of the World held 2/3 of its land surface, that the majority of the world's population lived here, and that, in addition, the greatest natural riches were also found here, it goes without saying why the author elaborates a program for mastering this area. Unfortunately, due to historical conditions (the end of World War I, from which England emerged victorious) Mackinder did not gain the interest of his compatriots, but his writings had a particular impact on Germany (which saw in them a way gain the supremacy lost in war). Mackinder speaks of the heartland which, according to him, would be the area between Eastern Europe (from the Ural Mountains or the Caspian and Volga) and the Pacific Ocean. This pivotal area is rich in natural resources and holds a key position in terms of communication between different regions of the globe. The rising inner (marginal) represents the maritime front made up of the states that are located inside the continent, but which have access to the Planetary Ocean (Germany, Turkey, India, China). Outer (insular)

crescent are the states that are outside the pivot zone (Great Britain, South Africa, Japan) (Bădescu, 2004).

Although in the last 10 years important steps towards reconciliation, the aftermath of the war - territorial problems, war crimes, refugees, etc. - have been recorded in the Western Balkans - are still felt and, under certain conditions, according to many analysts, still pose risks. That is why the states in the area, especially the most fragile ones, have placed their hopes in joining the European Union and NATO to ensure stability and peace in the region, to strengthen independence, sovereignty and national identity. As is well known, integration into the European Union involves not only reforming the political, military, economic and legal system, adapting to the rules of the Union, but also resolving in advance each candidate state all outstanding, risky issues in with other states in the area, especially with neighbors. Undoubtedly, if there are no serious political events worldwide to change the current balance of forces and the political constructions that support it, the integration, at least in the European Union, of the Western Balkan states will be achieved. Our country can participate more actively in consolidating an environment conducive to the stabilization of the region, it can be an example and an urge to continue reforms in the Western Balkans, increase prosperity and stability, intensify regional dialogue. Due to its geographical position, the complex was and remains an important transport route (Stefan, Toma, Degeratu, & Liteanu, 2008).

4. Introducing Danubian Security in the European Security and Defense Option

The current European security architecture reflects the essential features of the geopolitical environment in which it takes place: the transition to the international multipolar system, the competition between powers in the Euro-Atlantic space for the redistribution of roles; the depth of EU integration; the attempts by the Russian Federation to maintain its status as a major power in the world arena and to occupy key positions in European security structures.

The aim is to promote cooperation in order to prevent conflicts in the political sphere and to reduce the danger of armed confrontation. It also aims at avoiding escalating potential conflicts, with a particular focus on promoting openness and transparency. The strategic protection of the ensemble within the EU and NATO is achieved in the following ways: through the care of the national politico-military factor - which

elaborates strategies for the functioning, development and defense of the complex; through the benefits of the protection offered by the nearby military bases and objectives - the categories of forces located in the vicinity of the complex, both NATO and national, are able to ensure an effective defense of its vital elements; through anti-terrorist protection measures of the complex's police, carried out on each of its national segments; through own protection of the fluvial objectives that carry out their activity in the complex - protection ensured with their own forces, or engaged; through satellite protection provided by NATO and through services provided by the USA and Russia (Săgeată, Dumitrescu, & Damian, 2010).

For the overall security of the complex, the solution must belong to the EU by setting up terrestrial-air-air-river-maritime action groups, which will fulfill the main missions taken over from the national security factor¹. In the context of imposing the Danube security value as part of European security, we believe that the new EU security strategy should have a separate chapter dedicated to it. The zonal security strategies generated in the framework of political cooperation processes in the Danube region in Central and South-Eastern Europe such as the Danube Cooperation Process, the Stability Pact within the Danube Cooperation Process, NATO Initiative for South East Europe (SEEI), the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe (PSESE), the Agreement on the Prevention and Combating of Crime (SECI Agreement), the Multinational Peace Force Southeastern Europe (SEEBRIG) The Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Visegrad Group (V4), the Central European Initiative (ICE) and the Central European Cooperation Initiative (CENCOOP) must focus their content on the region corresponding to the complex or complementary to the complex in question in a harmonization with the new component of European security, the Danube security.

The process of integration into the European Union of the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe will be extremely complex. For its successful achievement, we consider that regional security initiatives are required on the Adriatic and the Black Sea, connected to the Danubian security. Security, stability and regional cooperation will substantially improve by the firm application by the whole community of states in the area of the provisions of the Charter of Good Neighborhood, Stability, Security and Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe, adopted by the meeting of Heads of State

¹ *** "Security and Stability in the Black Sea Region - military dimension and general framework" Conference Report of the 6th Black Sea Strategy Group Meeting, Kyiv, Ukraine, February 28 - March 2, East - West Institute, 2002.

and Government in Bucharest¹. A solid pillar of regional stability, our country attaches great importance to the efficient functioning of the established politico-economic cooperation structures, to the dialogue of the member states of the Central European Initiative (ECI), to the BSEC, to the regional economic conferences, to the affirmation of the vocation of European integration of the states of the region, as well as the way in which the regional military structures work.

Romania's role as beneficiary of a large part of the complex and especially of the Danube, involves the Danube security initiative by convening and agreeing the Danube countries for a complex strategy in the Black Sea - Danube area with the participation of stakeholders NATO, EU, Russia, Turkey (Boşneagu, 2001).

5. Transnational Interdependencies in the Danube Region

Areas and watercourses are sources of geopolitical power in relations between states, and geographical features and conditions act on the imperatives and constraints of a country. River or maritime access and control have often started important conflicts in history. The Danube was an identity barrier that allowed riparian states to preserve their local heritage over time. The opportunities of the river were explored more peripherally, reaching functions of territorial separation and familiarization with the neighborhood. Throughout history, the Danube has demarcated empires (Scythians vs. Persians, Byzantines vs. Franks, Habsburgs vs. Ottomans), but in recent history, the river has had the role of separating or limiting the spread of conflicts in the interior of the states (e.g. the case of the Balkans) (Şarfi, 2017). In practice, territorial advances over rivers are difficult to achieve through soft mechanisms, and important expansions and changes in borders over water usually occur because of military conflicts (Georgescu, 2010).

The Danube makes it easier for riparian states to access major sea routes, and cheaper waterways for freight, facilitating regional export competitiveness. Agricultural products, goods and other resources can be transported far beyond the river to the continents of the world. Consequently, the Danube gives a strategic value to the riparian states, but if it doubles by functional mechanisms, it will increase its advantage - trade and internal stability, as a geoeconomic value, can turn the region into a geopolitical lever at the international level.

¹ www.edusoft.ro

It is necessary to convert traditional geographical approaches into much more refined geo-economic coordinates. From an energy perspective, the size of relations between Europe and Asia is no longer filtered only through the Middle East, and Central Asia and Eastern Europe outline the profile of an energy corridor / hub with impressive potential for transit / transport lines across the Black Sea and The Danube¹.

The Main-Danube Canal represents the maritime route between Rotterdam and Constanta, respectively, the shortest navigable connection between the North Sea and the Black Sea. In the context of more comprehensive geopolitical projects, such as the Polar Silk Road (navigation in the Arctic Circle) and the Belt and Road project, the geo-economic dimension of the Danube has the potential to become an area of intercontinental interest. China currently owns shares and maritime terminals in 12 major European ports (Simileanu & Săgeată, 2009). Left in an area of vulnerability, the Danube Region may have an inability on the part of riparian states to manage contagious phenomena such as migration, smuggling, transnational environmental risks with implications for the Danube Delta and the Black Sea, but also a development gap compared to the rest of Europe. The great opportunity offered by the geo-economic construction of the Danube is to connect the East and the Western Balkans with the democratic and economic functional core of Europe. The synergistic interconnection between the Danube, the Black Sea (geographically) and the EU (institutionally), is the key element for achieving a sustainable economic ecosystem. The project is employable both through regional convergence and through the capacity building of the Union's resources: procedural, legislative, relational and financial, but also in terms of complementarity with other mechanisms and cooperation projects such as the Three Seas Initiative - supported by the Trump Administration and The Eastern Partnership (Simileanu & Săgeată, 2009).

6. The Cooperation Mechanisms in the Danube Region

The Danube region can contribute substantially to the growth of European well-being, being a factor of stability, development and prosperity. The Danube is an effective corridor for supporting and promoting European values, being defined both as the “River of European Enlargement” and as the promoter of the European Union's

¹ ***, “Security and Stability in the Black Sea Region - military dimension and general framework” Conference Report of the 6th Black Sea Strategy Group Meeting, Kyiv, Ukraine, February 28 - March 2, East - West Institute, 2002.

internal development. The peoples bordering the Danube have wanted over time, with predilection in the last two centuries, to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Danube and, at the same time, to ensure greater socio-economic cohesion in the Danube basin. The today's institutions for correlating the activities in the Danube region must act in solidarity and in close partnership to face the existing challenges in the region, regardless of the field concerned - transport, environment, economy and culture. In the framework of the structural reforms proposed by the Treaty of Lisbon for the EU institutions and policies, a new strategic approach to regional cooperation in the Danube region is more than welcome.

Through the institutions put at its service, the Danube region can become a good example of the application of macro-regional strategies. Thus, the Danube can substantially contribute to increasing the well-being of the citizens of the riparian countries. The Danube Strategy is an excellent opportunity to identify and propose a list of projects of cross-border importance, covering the four pillars proposed by the European Commission: connectivity, environmental protection, socio-economic development and the improvement of governance systems (Dobrescu, 2010). The existing national and regional cooperation institutions in the Danube region have been able to implement this strategy by implementing the selected priority projects. An example of such a major project that can be accomplished by the common will of the riparian countries is the high-speed train that connects central Europe to its southeastern part (Dobrescu, 2010).

The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) is an international body established for the implementation of the Convention for the Protection of the Danube River. The Danube Commission (research and development) is an international organization composed of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary, with the main task of ensuring normative conditions for maintaining freedom of navigation on the river, under Commission regulations, with Member States improving navigation on national sectors. The mechanisms created for the functioning of the Commission, as well as the lack of interest of the states led to the lack of involvement of the Commission in the development of the Danube transport. Its regulations have the value of a recommendation and, consequently, there is no integrated project for the development of transports on the Danube.

Currently, the countries concerned are those participating in the Danube Cooperation Process: Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), Austria, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Romania, Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (regions along the Danube). As already mentioned, eight are member states of the European Union. The approach is based on the experience provided by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, considering the different nature of the Danube region. Community strategies aim at coordinating policies and aligning existing funding instruments. These strategies provide an integrated and transnational means of tackling complex issues, such as the environment or demographic development.

MEPs believe that the European Strategy for the Danube Region should develop in the following areas of inter-regional cooperation: protection and social development; sustainable economic development; energy and transport infrastructure; environment protection; culture and education. MEPs call for an EU Summit to be held every two years with local and regional stakeholders and its conclusions to be presented to the European Council and Parliament. The European Parliament (EP) is a partner in the process of developing and implementing the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. To this end, the Danube Intergroup and the Danube Forum have been set up within the EP (Lăzărescu & Onisor, 2011). The EP has supported the creation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region since the previous parliamentary term: in September 2008, the Committee on Transport and Tourism sent a delegation to the Danube Region to promote the potential of this great European river and its surrounding regions. One of the main conclusions reached by this delegation was the creation of an intergroup within the EP focusing on the Danube region.

The Danube Intergroup worked closely with high-level national representatives responsible for the Danube, with representatives of regions and cities along the Danube River, with those of the European Commission and other European and international institutions (Vlase & Onisor, 2010), as well as with the coordination of priority projects for the Danube basin region. The European Parliament had to become an important player in this process and, therefore, its objectives were set at the first meeting of the Danube Intergroup. The members of the intergroup will focus on three aspects: the development strategy of the Danube region, the promotion of the Danube regions and the promotion of cooperation between the EU Member States and other countries located by the Danube region along the Danube. Inland waterway systems are an important aspect for the development of transport in the region. The urgent need to remove bottlenecks on the Rhine / Museuse-Main-

Danube river axis must be considered, bearing in mind that inland navigation has fallen, mainly due to the economic recession. In order to increase the degree of connectivity with the Black Sea through road and rail transport routes (on the road transport routes of the goods and by fast means) the improvement of the TEN Trans-euro Network. Strategic and impact assessments on the environment, including assessments of the effects on the entire river ecosystem complex, are a prerequisite for all infrastructure projects in the field of transport and energy¹.

7. The Danube Security - A New European Value

The Danube crosses areas between which there are strong economic gaps, doubled by a latent state of conflict. Mention may be made of the ex-Yugoslav and ex-Soviet space near the estuaries (Transnistria). This fragility of the security environment in the area favors the action of factors and dangers of any kind. The perpetuation of these conflicts near the Danube, the temporary and limited solutions brought to some of them, as well as the slow progress of the enlargement of the European bodies have determined the consumption and, sometimes, the exhaustion of the possibilities, respectively the inability of the international community for solving conflicts, with a wide range of causes and forms of manifestation, as well as the proliferation of new risks, threats and dangers to the internal and international security of the states and peoples of this part of Europe. Geographically, the Danube has a relatively equal position towards the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean, flowing into the Black Sea which allows the opening of communication routes to Central Asia (Marinescu, 1968).

Starting with 1992, after the completion of the Main-Danube canal, a new navigable waterway with a length of 3540 km was built, which crosses diagonally Europe, from the North Sea to the Black Sea. The European Union is in the process of reconnecting with its own citizens and regaining their support for the European political project, on a basis that matches their concerns, at the beginning of the 21st century. The European context for building a new security architecture starts from the existence and functioning of Euro-regions. This star develops a real axis, which overlaps and generates a development corridor with a width of 150-300 km consisting of: North Sea Basin, Rhine, Main, Main-Danube Canal, Danube (including the Danube-Black Sea Canal) and the Black Sea Western Basin (which has a major European, regional

¹ www.europe.org.

and national interest in integration, development and security).

The most interesting way to achieve and strengthen stability and, on this basis, security seems to be the transformation of traditional areas of confrontation and buffer zones, areas of strategic indifference, areas of fault, areas in dispute or considered risky in areas of strategic confluence. The transformation of the vast Black Sea area into a confluence space would suddenly raise this region to the rank of generating security and stability, which could influence both the Middle East and other conflicting areas on the number two circle: The Western Balkans, the Aegean Sea, the Middle East, Chechnya and Transnistria.

If the riparian and next-level countries in the Black Sea strategic ellipse do not harmonize their policies and strategies to build, primarily through their own means, such an entity, it is unlikely that external factors, including the European Union, will do more than their interests demand. For example, the European Union is developing a strategic partnership with Russia and China, and its geopolitical materialization is achieved by activating a strategic corridor through the Baltic States, through Siberia (an area extremely rich in energy resources) through South Korea and China. The European Union also has a strategic partnership with India, the Indochina Peninsula and the Middle East, activating the strategic corridor on the rimland.

In this way, the Black Sea area, which turns out to be the most direct and efficient towards these spaces, could be avoided. Or its activation, through a combined effort primarily of the countries in the area, could completely change the data of the problem, focusing the interest and financial resources corresponding towards this area, of great importance for Eurasian stability (Boşneagu, 2001). The vast area of the Black Sea has and may have the value of a true geopolitical network node. This is very important for building, in this space, exactly on the strategic fault of the past, a pillar of security and stability of European, Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian value. Romania, as the owner of the mouths of the Danube, so of entering the strategic corridor of the Danube, whose economic importance increases significantly, especially in terms of transport in the European river network, together with Bulgaria and Turkey, NATO countries, which have more than half of the Black Sea coast, in cooperation with Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and neighboring Caucasus countries, but also with other countries in the wider area, has an active and extremely important role, becoming a kind of country or pivotal country in the new Southeast European regional construction. The Danube is an integrating and dynamizing factor of the enlargement of the European Union. The North Sea-Rhine-Main-Danube-Black Sea

complex promotes economic development and accelerates the integration of Eastern and South-Eastern European states into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, as well as the involvement of new states in international cooperation, as the region bordering the axis is included in the economic and geostrategic circuit.

The control of the Danube and its connection to the Black Sea means access to markets and sources of raw materials. The process of building the European Union emphasizes the importance of Central and South-Eastern Europe. The connection of the European Union with the economic zone of the Black Sea determines a strong system of cooperation and alliances. The translation of the center of gravity on the Danube-Pontic axis generates a new European value: the Danube security. For the second decade of this century, it is necessary to reconfigure European security on three pillars: Euro-Atlantic, Mediterranean and Danube. At the interference of economic and political interests, the Danube is now a key point for the North Atlantic Alliance, facilitating access to the wider Black Sea region (Săgeată, Dumitrescu, & Damian, 2010). In this context, the fluvio-maritime complex can be a favorable means of economic development and accelerate the integration of Eastern and South-Eastern European states into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. The importance of the complex is given by the economic factor, mainly, but its value as an alignment and strategic direction should not be neglected either, including the role of the tributaries, of the hydrotechnical systems, of the canals and its works of art. By moving the center of gravity towards the Central and South-Eastern Europe, determined by the construction process of the European Union, we can say that from the point of view of security there is a translation of its center of gravity on the Danube-Pontic axis, which it entitles us to identify a new value of European security: Danube security.

The Danube-Black Sea river-state area generates and will generate geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic strategies with implications in the field of zonal security and the development of energy and commercial projects vital to the European Union. For states not located in this area, access to the onto-Danubian axis can be achieved through networks of navigable canals connected to the system or through the development of multimodal road and railway networks. In the future, the Euro-Atlantic partners have the obligation to recognize the important states found on the Ponto-Danubian axis, as important geopolitical actors, in this sense having the well-established role of generating a well-defined geostrategic representation and a greater firmness in the involvement of these states in generated projects.

8. The Strategy for the Economic Development of the Area Delimited by the Danube Riparian Countries

Currently, the Danube River Basin plays an important role in the political, social, economic and cultural context for the development of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

That is why the European Union has a Strategy for the Danube Region (SUERD), a Community cooperation mechanism for Danube basin states, aimed at the economic and social development of the Danube macro-region, by strengthening the implementation of EU policies and legislation in the region. SUERD is the EU's second macro-regional strategy, taking over the cooperation model developed by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea (adopted in 2009) with adaptation to the specifics of the Danube region. SUERD is a political initiative of Romania and Austria, promoted by a joint letter at the level of Prime Minister, in June 2008, and addressed to the President of the European Commission.

The European Commission drafted a Communication on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, as well as an Action Plan, presented on 8 December 2010 and adopted by the EU General Affairs Council on 13 April 2011, and the European Council endorsed the Danube Strategy on June 24, 2011. The documents discussed and accepted at Community level and which form the core of regional cooperation on the Danube represent the concerted effort to develop the riparian states. These, together with the European Commission, analyzed and assessed the real needs of the Danube region and proposed a document agreed both politically and technically. The Danube Strategy is a European Union project in which non-EU states from the Danube basin are also invited to participate. Fourteen-member states participate in the Danube Strategy: nine EU member states (Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany - as a federal state and through the states of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary) and five non-member states of the EU (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine).

The strategy is structured on four main objectives: interconnecting the Danube region, protecting the environment in the Danube region, increasing prosperity in the Danube region and consolidating the Danube region. Each objective of the Strategy corresponds to specific areas of action, grouped on 11 priority areas, each priority area being coordinated by 2 states /lands in the region.

The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), located in Vienna (Austria), coordinates all activities under the Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River. Its mission is to promote and coordinate the work of sustainable and equitable water management, including the conservation, improvement and rational use of water for the benefit of the countries of the Danube river basin and their inhabitants. Romania became a member state of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River in 1995, with the ratification, by Law no. 14/1995, of the Convention on cooperation for the protection and sustainable use of the Danube river. Austria, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Republic of Serbia, Ukraine, Montenegro and the European Commission are also members of the commission¹.

The current European Union Strategy for the Danube Region includes a limited approach to river transit space without capturing broad geo-economic perspectives. Moreover, the financial mechanisms are poor, and the budgets regard predominantly networking activities, research and education, the fight against crime, minor investments in the infrastructure of riparian cities. The European Commission captures the mechanisms of the macro-region by funding experimental actions, often highlighting in the document the obstacles of the region to the detriment of a plan for economic recovery and infrastructure development, supported by dedicated financial instruments. The strategy does not foresee the location and role of the Danube in the medium and long term, but rather idealistically ticks a series of ideas to justify its attention to this region (Dobrescu, 2010). The Danube is part of a much more complex geopolitical and geo-economic equation and can provide Europe with the connection of energy resources in Central Asia (Caucasus) and the connection with the Planetary Ocean. The establishment of a geo-economic platform in the Danube region, complementary to the Three Seas Initiative and the Eastern Partnership, has great chances to combine the participation of riparian states, creating further premises for regional geostrategic assurance with EU-NATO security instruments.

Reversing the approach, from military to economic, has not proved very effective in motivating all actors to participate in a common regional project. The United States has the power to use the geo-economic and geostrategic components

¹ www.europe.org.

ambivalently. According to Joseph Nye, in international relations the term smart-power refers to the combination of hard (military) and soft power (diplomatic, economic, cultural, etc.). China has gained global influence through the use of software, and is likely to be forced in the near future to secure its investments and reduce disadvantageous interdependencies through hard drives. The economic gap between the east and the west of Europe, which inevitably benefits the western part of the Union by attracting skilled labor, in reality makes the east and implicitly the European continent vulnerable. A coherent strategy for economic cooperation in the Danube region would close this gap and at the same time take Europe out of an outdated paradigm of traditional disparities, giving it a chance for true unsmart-power.

9. Conclusions

The strategic complex North Sea - Rhine - Main - Danube - Black Sea creates an axis that represents the “column” of a continental geopolitical system, which opens the way for the European Union to Asia. The strategic complex can link the high technological western pole to the eastern (Russian) pole of resources, generating an area of integration, development and security that is attractive within the globalization process.

In the current security context, it is necessary to be aware of the importance of Danube security in the concerns of common and collective security. To achieve this goal, we propose activities supported by the media, the debate of the subject in academic activities, in scientific forums held at national, regional and continental level, as well as the development of projects funded by European funds to support studies on this topic. The Danube security initiatives by zonal segments: Western, Central European and South-Eastern European must make connections with security on the Black Sea and the North Sea. Each strategy will need to show the risks, threats, common and collective security interests, purpose, resources allocated, management and set responsibilities.

For the second decade of the 21st century, we consider it necessary to reconfigure European security on three pillars: Euro-Atlantic, Mediterranean and Danube.

The security environment at the beginning of the third millennium is characterized mainly by the following major trends: acceleration of globalization and regional integration, while persisting actions aim at state fragmentation, reasonable convergence of efforts to structure a new security architecture stable and predictable, accompanied by the accentuation of anarchic tendencies in some regions, the invigoration of states' efforts to preserve their influence in the dynamics of international relations, in parallel with the multiplication of forms and increasing the share of non-state actors in the evolution of these relations.

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