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## THE BLACK SEA – BETWEEN STRATEGIC CROSSROADS AND HUMAN SECURITY

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The Black Sea region is a strategic space where the geopolitical interests of the West and the East intersect. This area plays a key role in the national security of the riparian states and is also a good place to signal the interdependence between energetic, national, and human security. Energy resources are vital to the well-being of the population, but insecurity of supply

affects quality of life and can exacerbate energy shortages. Energy security, economic and individual well-being are interdependent and essential for the stability of the Black Sea states. Constant access to energy supports economic growth and improved quality of life. However, dependence on external energy resources exposes economies to market fluctuations and possible political unrest. Countries in the region have developed varied strategies to diversify energy sources and strengthen energy infrastructure, but competition for control of resources remains a source of tension. Due to shared security concerns and dangers, the Black Sea region has become a geopolitical security zone since the 2000s [1, p 53]. Also, the energy needs in Europe are increasing and in order to meet the needs of the society and to maintain economic activities such as industry, cooking, transportation and others), the European consumer depends primarily on energy resources and their supply networks [2, p. 53].

### **The Black Sea – geopolitical context and energy security**

The European Commission defines the Black Sea region as a distinct area connecting ten states, including six riparian states such as Bulgaria, Ukraine, Romania, Russia, Georgia, Turkey, along with four other states that are located near the Black Sea: Greece, Armenia, Republic of Moldova and Azerbaijan [1, p. 245]. Terms such as "Black Sea-Caspian Sea Region" and "Black Sea-Mediterranean Sea Region" demonstrate the scope of the region [2, p. 287]. US, EU, NATO and Russian interests collide in this space while political and territorial struggles such as border disputes and conflicts between nations and peoples are the main causes of security problems in the region [2, p. 289]. The area is becoming increasingly important in terms of transport infrastructure, as well as from the perspective of energy security and stability in Europe. In addition, the geo-economic importance of the region is growing, especially in terms of enhancing European energy security by importing hydrocarbons from Central Asia and the Caspian Basin, as well as its potential as a hub in a pan-European transport area [3, p. 6].

Governments and national alliances are concerned on a daily basis with energy security and dependence, as it is a crucial issue that is closely linked to national security [3, p. 52]. "Availability of energy at any time in various forms, in sufficient quantities and at reasonable and acceptable prices" is how the European Environment Agency defines security of gas supply [3, p. 52]. The offshore energy potential of the Black Sea is significant, along with its strategic importance on a continental and regional scale [4, p. 5]. It is worth mentioning that the wars on the southeastern border of the European Union and the Russian-Ukrainian war are seriously hampering the economic potential of this area and have made the security system a source of growing tension [3, p. 52].

In an effort to reduce the EU's dependence on Russia, energy sources have been diversified, which has further increased the geo-economic importance of the Black Sea region and the area is becoming increasingly important in terms of transportation infrastructure as well as energy security and stability in Europe [3, p. 56]. While energy is essential to a nation's human and economic progress, it also fuels complicated systems and incites conflict [3, p. 52]. Black Sea nations were heavily dependent on Russian natural gas before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Other nations in the region were importing gas heavily, mostly from Russia, while Romania was the only country able to cover 80% of its needs domestically [4, p. 5].

### **Cooperation through partnerships**

Joint projects can help create a framework of dialogue and mutual trust and through collaboration, states can manage energy and security challenges, avoiding destructive competition and increasing the security of citizens.

The parties need to work together to create a new security framework in the area in order to achieve the security objective, but the unresolved disputes in the area pose a continuing threat to regional security [1, p. 247]. A closer naval partnership between Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey is necessary given the interest of the three Black Sea NATO states to utilize the gas in their exclusive economic zones. Patrol missions, mainly by Turkish and Romanian vessels between the Sakarya field in the Turkish EEZ and the Neptun Deep field in the Romanian EEZ, can be a successful way to deter potential unfriendly Russian decisions [4, p. 22]. It is worth mentioning the numerous organizations and their sphere of influence that has developed over time. This location became a focal point for US security strategies after September 11, 2001, as a result of EU and NATO expansion and the growing US perception of a security vacuum [2, p. 290]. The lack of an interregional tradition or mechanism for dispute settlement talks exacerbates this situation. Since 2010, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), which was founded in 1992, has not produced many results and the presence of only partially recognized republics such as South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Kosovo, as well as ongoing hostilities and numerous separatist movements are some of the biggest challenges [2, p.290]. Other relevant issues in the region are the protection of key oil and gas pipelines, organized crime, human trafficking, arms and narcotics issues, and serious economic underdevelopment. A non-cooperative attitude is encouraged by regional and global competitiveness and instead of creating inter-regional channels of cooperation, regional rivalries influenced by global competition for influence lead to competing interests and different expectations [2, p.291]. Because of the Central and Eastern European member nations bordering the Black Sea-

Danube basin, the EU has always considered the Black Sea region as strategically important. The effectiveness of pipeline and TEN corridor expansion projects crossing the South Caucasus, Ukraine, Turkey or other Black Sea littoral states is becoming increasingly important for the Union's energy security [5, p. 26]. The Eastern Partnership, the Black Sea Synergy and the European Neighborhood Policy have been instrumental for the internal stability and democratic transition of the region as well as for closer cooperation of regional actors with the EU [5, p. 26]. Mutual dependence creates a basis for interdependence and cooperation. For example, joint energy infrastructure projects, such as gas transportation corridors, could reduce tensions and stimulate collaboration between the states in the region.

### **Human security and its importance in the context of energy security**

According to the literature, the field of human security has emerged as a result of the growing need to address the ethics of security and insecurity with people as the object of reference [6, p.33]. Human security was originally defined in 1994 in the United Nations Human Development Program report as meaning "first, safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities" [6, p. 34]. According to one report, worries about everyday aspects of life, such as concerns about securing enough to eat, fears of job loss, worries about the safety of streets and residential areas, or the possibility of becoming a victim of aggression because of one's religious beliefs or ethnic background, are more likely to generate feelings of insecurity [6, p. 34]. Energy use has changed significantly in recent decades and has become an essential component of human security [7, p. 101]. As a component of national security, energy security includes protection of the environment, security of energy sources, protection of existing energy routes and the discovery of alternative energy sources [8, p. 15].

Based on the Commission on Human Security, protecting the essential components of every human life from serious and ubiquitous risks, without compromising long-term human satisfaction, is the goal of human security [9, p.221]. According to the cited study, human security is one of the developing and essential concepts of energy policy. Energy scarcity was its original cause, but environmental deterioration and the problems posed by climate change have brought it into the spotlight. The idea focuses on people's personal security and emphasizes the sustainability of community well-being. It focuses on non-traditional aspects of energy security, where important components include energy affordability, access to modern energy services and minimization of risks, whether it be environmental impacts such as

climate change and environmental degradation, or the socio-economic effects of energy on people's well-being [7, p. 101]. Multilateral collaboration can provide an opportunity to preserve regional stability and unity. The objective of regional and political cooperation should be to complete the transition from authoritarianism to democratic values, human rights and the rule of law. Economically, it is vital to focus on collaborative initiatives that support market liberalization and privatization while generating a positive investment environment [8, p. 18].

### **Conclusions**

Energy can be both a weapon and a bridge, being used as a tool of geopolitical influence. The link between human and energy security is straightforward: access to affordable and clean energy supports human development, reducing poverty and social vulnerabilities. At the same time, energy insecurity can amplify political tensions, leading to militarization of the region in response to the perception of increased risk. This militarization increases the risk of escalation but, paradoxically, can also act as a form of strategic deterrence. The complexity of Black Sea relations highlights the different perceptions of East and West on energy and military security. While Western states prioritize diversifying energy sources and reducing dependence on Russia, Eastern states, such as Russia, rely on the export of energy resources as a strategic lever. However, interdependence offers opportunities for dialogue, and joint efforts to protect the environment and develop the energy field through technology can become points of convergence. The Black Sea region is an area of challenges but also of opportunities for cooperation. Balanced management of energy security, an area that can be seen in close connection with human security, can help to reduce tensions, promote regional stability and raise the quality of life of citizens.

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**МІЖНАРОДНІ КОНФЕРЕНЦІЇ ТА ДОГОВОРИ,  
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206