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# **Romania's Foreign Policy Towards the Wider Black Sea Area in the Aftermath of the 2007 EU-Accession A by-Product of Exogenous Influences, Colliding Interests and Energy Rivalries**

**EDUARD RUDOLF ROTH**

With the accession materialized, the Romanian foreign policy was given the opportunity to enter a new stage – as it allowed the country to further pursue its vital interests<sup>1</sup> – although the change in legal status brought a structural need for the consolidation of the integration process with Western institutions and a certain recalibration of the country's diplomatic perspectives<sup>2</sup>. However, as Romania remained under *the* scrutiny and conditionality of the European Commission – especially with respect to the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* in the fields of justice and economy – the country's behavioural pattern in the post-accession period was rather an inertial mimicking of its pre-accession dynamics.

In short, Bucharest did not manifest any special interest in using the superior institutional capacities available for the design and formulation of various foreign policy deliverables or in exploiting the possibility to upload its national preferences to Brussels foreign policy framework, and thus taking advantage of its newly achieved increased political influence within the EU. In fact, as all indigenous political actors began to exhibit a winner's syndrome, trying to capitalize the electoral effects of the EU accession in order to settle their political disputes and achieve their political goals for the 2008 elections, the indigenous political system witnessed populist referenda, increased electoral volatility and overall political instability<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Octavian Milevschi, "Romania: From Brotherly Affection with Moldova to Disillusionment and Pragmatism", in Marcin Kosienkowski, William Schreiber (eds.) *Moldova: Arena of International Influences*, Lexington Books, Plymouth, 2012, pp. 159-183/p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Liliana Pop, *Romania's Foreign Policy after EU Enlargement: A Country in Search of a Role*, Institute for the Study of European Transformations - London Metropolitan University, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> William Crowther, Oana-Valentina Suciuc, "Romania", in Sten Berglund, Joakim Ekman,

In this context – following the initial idleness – Bucharest slowly evolved into a more vocal supporter of the projects and initiatives aimed at “intensifying EU Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) through tightening the Union’s relations with South East European and the Black Sea countries”<sup>4</sup> while keeping itself anchored in its pre-accession perspectives. Moreover, during the German presidency of the EU Commission, Romania together with Greece and Bulgaria supported the creation of the *Black Sea Synergy* – officially launched in 2008 within the ENP framework – an initiative for a special EU policy in the Black Sea region, aimed at increasing the existent cooperation, through the implementation of sectorial partnerships<sup>5</sup> covering various aspects like trade, energy market and transportation, frozen conflicts, illegal migration, organized crime, weapon and drug trafficking, environmental problems<sup>6</sup>.

Its involvement in the implementation of the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy and of the *Black Sea Synergy* did allow Bucharest to integrate some national perspectives into the formulation of the mainstream European standpoints, but also to develop a pro-active stance in the design of Brussels’ involvement vis-à-vis the Black Sea countries covered by ENP, like Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia or Ukraine. Of note, in the pre-accession period, Romania’s most important contribution to the development of a policy model for institutional interaction was represented by the initiation of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership (BSFDP) that took place in Bucharest in 2006 – an action aimed to diversify the regional cooperation framework dominated by the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). The Forum – an expression of Romania’s endeavours to acquire a regulatory role in the Black Sea and to upgrade the political and security role of the existent institutional infrastructure<sup>7</sup> by taking advantage of the superior external action capacity conferred to Bucharest by its strategic relationship with the US – can be conceptualized as an *Americanized* foreign policy deliverable by Bucharest, articulated as a political umbrella and aimed at allowing Washington to project its preferences and perspectives in the region while assigning Bucharest a key role in the implementation process. In practice, by somehow positioning Romania as a “security provider” and as a “democracy

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Kevin Deegan-Krause, Terje Knutsen (eds.), *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe*, Edwar Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 2013, pp. 369-407/p. 381.

<sup>4</sup> Nikolaus El. Papakostas, *Romanian Foreign Policy Post Euro-Atlantic Accession: So Far So Good*, Institute of International Economic Relations, Athens, 2009, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ruxandra Ivan, “Black Sea Regional Leadership in Romanian Foreign Policy Discourse”, in *Idem* (ed.), *New Regionalism or No Regionalism?: Emerging Regionalism in the Black Sea Area*, Ashgate Publishing, Surrey, 2012, p. 164.

<sup>6</sup> Nikolaus El. Papakostas, *Romanian Foreign Policy Post Euro-Atlantic Accession...cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Manoli Panagiota, *The Dynamics of Black Sea Subregionalism*, Ashgate Publishing, Surrey, 2012, p. 113.

enhancer" in the Eastern neighbourhood<sup>8</sup> or as "a stability exporting factor"<sup>9</sup> – president Bănescu aimed to find a *niche* in the East-West dialogue<sup>10</sup> by supporting the development of a security dimension of the existent BSEC cooperation<sup>11</sup> which – in practice – was just an articulated diplomatic *démarche* alluding to the limitation of Russia's influence in the Black Sea, directed towards other international fora.

Romania's proposal for future institutionalization of Black Sea Regionalism, wasn't however solitary. Bulgaria and Greece came with their own designs regarding the development of the cooperative framework in the Black Sea region, with Sofia opting for a *network-of-networks* institutional architecture, while Athens advocated an inter-institutional relationship<sup>12</sup>. Bulgaria's approach – note Nikolov and Simeonov – seemed the closest with EU's synergy philosophy of low level political designs and sectorial cooperation build upon the existent institutional infrastructure – and enjoyed the support of Germany, while Greece's project was – in the same logic as Romania's – articulated in order to promote the interests of another global player in the region, in this case Russia<sup>13</sup>.

Nonetheless, argue Nikolov, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria's actions trying to impose a cooperative structure under a big-power's patronage, proved illusionary<sup>14</sup> with the Black Sea Synergy itself being eventually partially replaced in 2009 by the Eastern Partnership<sup>15</sup> a Swedish-Polish foreign policy model which left a lesser role for the Black Sea EU members (Bulgaria, Romania and Greece) than any of the previous institutional concepts. Moreover, unlike the Black Sea Synergy – that was tailored as an interaction platform for EU members in their relations with Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia and Turkey – the Eastern Partnership was

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<sup>8</sup> Ruxandra Ivan, "Black Sea Regional Leadership...cit.", p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> Simona Soare, "The Romanian-Russian Bilateralrelationship in the Aftermath of Romania's Euroatlantic Integration", *Monitor Strategic*, no. 1-2, 2010, pp. 93-121/p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> Tatiana Bitkova, "The Place of Romania and Russia in the Context of East-West Relations: Political and Cultural Aspects", *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations*, vol.11, no. 2, 2014, pp. 44-52/p. 49

<sup>11</sup> Sergiu Celac, "Romania, the Black Sea and Russia", in David Phinnemore (ed.), *The Eu and Romania: Great Expectations*, The Federal Trust, London, UK, 2006, pp. 145-151/p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> Krassimir Nikolov, "The Black Sea Cooperation and Bulgaria: Context, Concepts and Actors", in *Idem* (ed.), *Europe on the Black Sea Shore*, Bulgarian European Community Studies Association, Sofia, 2007, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> Krassimir Nikolov, Kaloyan Simeonov, "The Effect of EU Accession on Bulgaria", in Graham Avery, Anne Faber, Anne Schmidt (eds.), *Enlarging the European Union: Effects on the New Member States and the EU*, Trans European Policy Studies Association, Brussels, 2009, p. 84.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Ruxandra Ivan, "Black Sea Regional Leadership...cit.", p. 164.

articulated in the logic of centralized institutionalization and, last but not least, kept both Moscow and Ankara outside of its conceptual borders<sup>16</sup>.

In this context, most projects launched within the framework of Black Sea Synergy, like the Black Sea Euroregion – launched in September 2008 under the initiative of Bucharest as a “forum for cooperation among local and regional authorities in the Bulgarian and Romanian Black Sea area”<sup>17</sup> – proved nothing but formal conceptual constructions with broad and unclear agendas and with a minimal potential to contribute to the development of important foreign policy deliverables. Some explanation for these institutional development failures derive – according to Weaver – from the absence of regional cohesion or “regionness”<sup>18</sup> due to the wide economic, political, social and cultural discrepancies and complex relationships among the Black Sea countries and under these circumstances from the absence of any internal and external potential for region building<sup>19</sup>.

Another key dimension of Romania’s foreign policy dynamics during this period was rooted in the deepening of the American-European rift that characterized the last part of president George W. Bush’s second term in Washington. In practice, for Bucharest – whose security and regional perspectives were built upon US/NATO institutional backbone – the US/EU rift led to a certain radicalization of its relations with some EU states an aspect which (arguably) temporized or delayed the achievement of some of Bucharest’s post-accession goals – like the strengthening of its profile within the EU, the accession to the Schengen zone and the removal of the regulatory barriers preventing the access of Romanian workforce in some Western EU markets (UK, Ireland, Netherlands, etc.).

Under these circumstances – aware that a change of administration in Washington could affect US interests in the Black Sea Region and in the Greater Middle East and, subsequently, its external action capacities – Bucharest tried to upload and institutionalize some of its Americanized regional perspectives both within NATO and EU (although in the latter case, to a much lesser extent). Of note, the Americanization of Romania’s foreign policy – and especially of its security dimension – took place under the form of an indigenous hybridizing of an imported transatlantic policy agenda, yet not as a by-product of an organic paradigm shift rooted in the democratic development

<sup>16</sup> Carol Weaver, *The Politics of the Black Sea Region – Eu Neighbourhood, Conflict Zone and Future Security Community*, Ashgate Publishing, Surrey, 2013, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Manoli Panagiota, *The Dynamics of Black Sea...cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Carol Weaver, *The Politics of the Black Sea Region...cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Mustafa Aydin, “Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea and Integration in the Euro-Atlantic Structures”, in Jean Dufourcq, Lionel Ponsard (eds.), *The Role of the Wider Black Sea Area in a Future European Security Space*, NATO Defense College, Rome, 2005, pp. 31-43/p. 30.

of the domestic establishment, but rather as a means to enhance Romania's status with the West and especially with the US, throughout the late 1990s and the 2000s. Regardless of its *raison d'être*, the process – mainly developing within the conceptual infrastructure of the Romanian-US Strategic Partnership – eventually germinated into several functional and structural outcomes. For instance, an extremely visible result is represented by the prevailing transformative dynamics of the recurrent post-2001 National Security Strategies whose crux was the identification of the international terrorism as Romania's main security threat for Romania and the promotion of a security paradigm shift, from the reactive, defensive-oriented security policy from the mid 1990s and early 2000s towards a rather assertive policy, based on pre-emption and prevention of the risks and threats, seemingly stemming from the from an interplay between Washington interests and security perceptions. Moreover, among the discernible manifestations of the Americanization of Romania's foreign agenda were Bucharest's convergent alignment with Washington in regard to the conceptual overstretching of the self-defence argument from the of UN Charter's Article 51 (the Bush doctrine) and for the subsequent US-led military intervention in Iraq, the signing of the agreement that prevented the extradition of US soldiers and personnel to International Criminal Court in The Hague, the actions taken in order to add value to the American interests in in Europe or in the regions of the world where Washington was, at that time, increasing its involvement and presence, like for instance Europe's Extended Neighbourhood, like the active engagement in the redefinition of a security dimension of the Black Sea institutionalization, the promotion of energy transport projects aimed to integrate the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceihan bloc into an European energetic security equation and the support of GUAM regionalism and Ukraine and NATO's bid for MAP status within NATO. And last but not least, the picture is completed by Bucharest's back up for US basing presence on Romanian territory, promotion of a "NATO-first" security policy perspective for the EU, in a period when Berlin and Paris were putting pressure on Washington and the North Atlantic Alliance with the strategic institutional designs of CFSP/ESDP, and culminating with the support for Washington's decision to the set-up of a land-based version of the Standard Missile 3 anti-ballistic interceptors on Romanian territory as a part of NATO's Article 5 against an illusory Iranian threat.

In this context, the projected development, the institutionalization and solidification of EU's CFSP/ESDP through the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon seemed to shape a window of opportunity for Bucharest as it held some undertones of significant changes in EU's foreign policy perspectives, namely towards a global military power block able to export peace and stability beyond its boundaries. For Romania, which managed to promote elements of the indigenous political agenda through the military, economic and political support

of Washington, the perspective of an EU able to promote peace and stability in its immediate Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods<sup>20</sup>, was therefore, extremely appealing.

However, overestimating Washington's interest in the Wider Black Sea Area, EU states commitments regarding an EU solidarity in matters of energy supply and arguably encouraged by the political collisions that swept the Union following the gas disruption generated by the 2006 and 2009 Russian-Ukrainian gas disputes – Bucharest tried to upload its (also Americanized, and visibly anti-Russian) energy perspective into NATO, and marginally to EU's institutional framework. For instance, Romania together with Poland became one of the most vocal NATO members to advocate for the Alliance to assume a more prominent and active role in the field of energy security, a domain largely non-military in nature, featuring a plethora of institutional and organizational players and, above all, being traditionally situated under the mantle of national responsibility. The “Energy NATO”, which evolved into a standard mantra of Bucharest and Warsaw rhetoric, was eventually included into the Alliance's key issues agenda especially following the 2008 Bucharest Summit, when NATO was given a dedicated mandate to work in the field of energy security. Under these circumstances, although over the years NATO's security agenda gained more coherence and systematization in three major areas: “Raising strategic awareness of energy developments with security implications, contributing to the protection of critical energy infrastructure, and enhancing energy efficiency in the military” and the energy security became an essential part of the Alliance's ‘modern toolkit’<sup>21</sup>, NATO kept only a modest role in Wider Black Sea Region's energy security matrix. Subsequently – in an effort to deprive Moscow from an effective tool of political leverage – Bucharest pledged for diversification of EU's energy suppliers and for the establishment of a common energy policy and of a unitary EU body to negotiate the hydrocarbon prices with Kremlin, thus replacing the existent system of bilateral deals, which allowed Russia to exert its influence over various EU member-states. Bucharest's aspirations to have EU develop a pro-active involvement in the Black Sea neighbourhood, “to confront Russia's assertiveness” or to enhance Brussels' political leverage in the region arguably relied on the anticipation that it will be ‘rendered the main promoter’ of EU's projected interests in the Balkans and in the Wider Black Sea Region, allowing it to increase its controllability of the regional development infrastructure<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Weaver, *The Politics of the Black Sea Region...*cit., p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> NATO's Energy Security Agenda - <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/NATO-Energy-security-running-on-empty/NATO-energy-security-agenda/EN/index.htm> [accessed, February 23, 2015]

<sup>22</sup> Nikolaus El. Papakostas, *Romanian Foreign Policy Post Euro-Atlantic Accession...*cit., p. 21.

The most visible foreign policy vector circumscribed to Bucharest's alignment and perspectives was its unconditional support for any energy-transport projects bypassing Russia and especially for Nabucco gas transport pipeline that became the country's paramount energy security design. In particular, although EU rhetoric assigned Nabucco a symbolic role in the Union's energy policy, in practice, Brussels' involvement and support never left the theoretical realm. In fact, EU's financial involvement became reality only in 2010, decades after the announcement of the project<sup>23</sup> – in a moment when the project was already facing risks of defaulted supply contracts – and arguably because Brussels had to react somehow against Russia's decision to interrupt gas flows to Europe for 13 days, during its dispute with Kiev from January 2009.

Like many other EU projects, the establishment of a hydrocarbon transport corridor from the Caspian Sea to Europe triggered a complex matrix of collisions and interactions between hegemonic influences originating in Washington, Brussels or Moscow – ranging from strategic policies and ending with energetic rivalries and competition between various patronage-based hydrocarbon oligarchies and business circles keen to project their interests through the political infrastructure on which they exerted a dominant influence. In this sense, Nabucco was a paramount design – circumscribed to US strategy towards the Southern Caucasus (and to the interests of companies with a hidden power politics dimension from Washington) and an instrument aimed to marginalize Kremlin, to reduce Moscow's benefits deriving from its energy transport monopoly and its influence “both with regards to EU and the Black Sea region”<sup>24</sup> – which triggered “undisguised hostility”<sup>25</sup> in Kremlin. Under these circumstances, Romanian establishment – whose rhetoric tried to portray Bucharest as Washington's pivot ally in the Black Sea Region – evolved eventually into one of the most vocal advocates of Nabucco within EU. Subsequently – it became actively involved in the solidification of a support group for the project within EU, mainly consisting of states directly interested in mitigating the effects of future potential gas supply disruptions on their economies and/or of states openly and viscerally opposing Russia's alleged coercive use of its energy policy.

On another hand, states like Germany, Italy or France – although affected by the 2006 and 2009 Russian-Ukrainian crises and being forced to draw gas from their existing stocks in order to make up for the missing

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<sup>23</sup> Katinka Barysch, *Should the Nabucco Pipeline Project Be Shelved?*, Centre for European Reform - Policy Brief, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Nikolaus El. Papakostas, *Romanian Foreign Policy Post Euro-Atlantic Accession...*cit., p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Erkan Erdogan, “Bypassing Russia: Nabucco Project and Its Implications for the European Gas Security”, *University of Munich*, MPRA Paper No. 26793, 2010, p. 11.

imported volumes<sup>26</sup> – weren't at all alarmed by EU's reliance on Russian hydrocarbons. Neither were the 'Russian-friendly' states like Greece, Spain or Bulgaria. The lack of political will in some European capitals and – in some cases – even open opposition to Nabucco<sup>27</sup> were tributary to a series of processes among which Gazpromization<sup>28</sup> of the indigenous economies, Schroederization<sup>29</sup> of the domestic political elites<sup>30</sup> and the "raw deals" offered by Kremlin to some governments at the negotiation table<sup>31</sup> directly or through indigenous energy holdings, played the most important role. In addition, in some particular cases, the opposition derived from the refusal of several states to allow Ankara exert its control over an alternative hydrocarbon transport pipeline, due to fears that Turkey could use its important leverage potential during its EU accession negotiations. In short, whether personal or group

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<sup>26</sup> Alain Guillemoles, "Les Leçons De La 'Guerre Du Gaz'", *Politique Internationale*, vol. 1, no. 123, 2009, p. 446, [http://www.politiqueinternationale.com/revue/read2.php?id\\_revue=123&id=805&search=&content=texte](http://www.politiqueinternationale.com/revue/read2.php?id_revue=123&id=805&search=&content=texte), [accessed January 13, 2014].

<sup>27</sup> Erkan Erdogan, "Bypassing Russia...cit.", p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Gazpromization denotes a complex doctrine and behavioral dynamics employed by Russian Administration during Putin and Medvedev eras, with both local and externalized dimensions. While local Gazpromization involved an aggressive acquisition of private Russian assets through state owned companies and the removal of foreign companies from the national extraction sector, externalized Gazpromization – mentioned above – is circumscribed to a convoluted portfolio of manifestations, tributary to the place of the implementation and namely if within or outside Russia's "near abroad". In the case of EU states, Gazpromization mainly consists in obtaining political concessions for Moscow's policies and behavioural dynamics, through the exploitation of the focus on profit maximization and market strengthening of the EU energy holdings with a hidden power politics dimension, which can exert an important influence at any level of the indigenous administration. In some cases, it also incorporates the acquisition by Russian entities of share packages at energy companies managing or owning energy infrastructure, deposits, port infrastructure or distribution networks. In the case of CIS states or young democracies Gazpromization implicates the exploitation of the target-state's energetic vulnerabilities or of Moscow's direct control of the indigenous energy infrastructure in order to interfere with the local politics by favouring some elites with the aim of being conceded or granted various economic or political benefits. The political recalibration process often relies on a structural atopy within the indigenous political realm (a strong corruption network which can be developed or adjusted and/or a strong ex-Soviet intelligence infrastructure which can be easily activated or resuscitated).

<sup>29</sup> Schroederization is a variant of Gazpromization, implemented in Germany and with the potential to be implemented in other states, consists in the coopting of a key political elite in an important position within a Russian state-owned energy entity (or in an equation of energetic profit), with the aim for the elite to exert its political influence in order to crystalize a network of interests that would serve Moscow's strategic interests in the development of a project, policy or specific foreign policy alignment.

<sup>30</sup> Eduard Rudolf Roth, "The Limits of Gazpromization", *Strategic Monitor*, vol. 1, no. 3-4, 2010, pp. 71-81/p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> Zeyno Baran, "Eu Energy Security: Time to End Russian Leverage", *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2007, pp. 131-144/p. 133.

benefits, whether national prosperity and subsequent electoral effects, such incentives severely decreased the appetite of some Western government to antagonize Moscow over its energy interests in the Caspian region and, eventually acted as conceptual catalysts for the cartelization and collusion of EU energy market and, subsequently of EU energy security policy of the late 2000s.

Several visible manifestation of the phenomenon were recorded in the cases of Russia's paramount designs North Stream and South Stream which managed to coagulate an informal, Kremlin-led cartel of interests within the European Union (comprising Germany, Netherlands, France, Italy and Moscow's traditional allies within EU, Bulgaria and Greece) and which led, more or less, to the erection of an energetic Iron Curtain on the EU territory, as both transit routes were designed in order to circumvent the territories of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Romania and the Baltic States, the most vocal opponents of Kremlin's approach to use Gazprom's monopoly as an energetic weapon. In particular, notes Grazioli, Poland and the Baltic states went as far as openly accusing Berlin (Moscow's key-advocate in the EU) that its privileged deal with Moscow over North Stream pipeline represents a modern variation of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact<sup>32</sup> with dramatic effects for the future of the EU security. Subsequently, on June 23, 2007 Gazprom and ENI (Italy) signed the memorandum to construct *South Stream* pipeline – a hydrocarbon transport corridor from the Caspian region to Europe – and addressed invitations to Nabucco participants<sup>33</sup> to join Russian-led project<sup>34</sup>, revealing the inchoate and volatile nature of EU's rhetoric in regard to its energy diversification strategy and energy solidarity perspective in front of Moscow's *divide et impera* approach.

Moreover, in order to secure Gazprom's monopoly on the EU market, Kremlin managed to secure – through its energy entities – important share packages of various European energy companies whose portfolio of assets and services included management of energy infrastructure, energy deposits, port infrastructure, transportation and distribution networks or other energetic assets<sup>35</sup>, while bound Central Asian gas producers to sell a large amount of their

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<sup>32</sup> Stefano Grazioli, "L'asse Mosca-Berlino È Il Perno Del Continente", *Limes*, 2008, <http://limes.espresso.repubblica.it/2008/05/13/lasse-mosca-berlino-e-il-perno-del-continente/?p=617>, [accessed January 13, 2014], p.111

<sup>33</sup> With the exception of Romania all other participant countries In the Nabucco pipeline project reconsidered their strategic energy priorities and decided to take part into the development of South Stream transport pipeline. Left out of South Stream's energetic geometry, Bucharest began negotiations to participate in the still-nascent White Stream project, backed by Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania.

<sup>34</sup> Erkan Erdogan, "Bypassing Russia...cit.", p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Steven Woehrel, "Russian Energy Policy toward Neighboring Countries". *Congressional Research Service RL34261 - CRS Report for Congress of United States of America*, Washington DC, 2009, p. 2; Eduard Rudolf Roth, "The Limits of Gazpromization", cit., p. 74.

gas production to Gazprom<sup>36</sup>. In particular, it is worth noting that – due to this *modus operandi* – Gazprom, Rosneft and Transneft (state owned companies) and LUKoil (private company) began to play such active role in the implementation of Russia's foreign policy, that – claims Lo – sometimes their importance even surpassed that of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>37</sup>. The key dimension behind the cartelization of the EU energy security policy derives, contrary to the Russian energetic superpower thesis<sup>38</sup> – picturing a restorationist and neo-imperialist Kremlin<sup>39</sup> that achieves political objectives through its coercive or rewarding energy policy<sup>40</sup> – from Russia's severe structural, political and economic weaknesses which it was forced to conceal in order to secure itself the international acceptance of its ascending power projection in the topography of a future multipolar world<sup>41</sup>. More specifically, by mid 2000s, Russian energy sector reached a *plateau* level in oil production – Western Siberia fields became unable to yield the incremental production, recorded significant downsize in all Gazprom's major production fields Urengoy, Yamburg, Medvezhye, Nadym și Pur-Tazovskoye<sup>42</sup> and faced a severe increase of the domestic consumption levels. Moreover, the limited development of the new Sakhalin hydrocarbon fields and the insignificant progress recorded in the development of the extraction and transport infrastructure in Eastern Siberia, Far East and Arctic offshore regions forced Moscow to look abroad in order to compensate the shortages in oil and gas volumes required in order to supply its domestic and external customers. Due to these aspects, Kremlin was forced to operate not from the position of an

<sup>36</sup> Erkan Erdogdu, "Bypassing Russia...cit.", p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Bobo Lo, *Russia's Crisis – What It Means for Regime Stability and Moscow's Relations with the World*, Centre for European Reform, London, 2009, p. 139.

<sup>38</sup> Fiona Hill, *Energy Empire: Oil, Gas and Russia's Revival*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Vladimir Papava, Michael Tokmazishvili, "Russian Energy Politics and the EU: How to Change the Paradigm", *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2010, pp. 103-111/p. 104.

<sup>40</sup> Marshall Goldman, *Putin, Power and the New Russia Petrostate*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 2; Anita Orban, *Power, Energy, and the New Russian Imperialism*, Praeger Security International, Westport CT, 2008, p. 5; Julianne Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship: Defining Moment or Déjà Vu*, Center for Strategic and International Studies and L'Institut Français des Relations Internationales, Washington DC and Paris, 2008, p. 12; Margarita Balmaceda, *Energy Dependency, Politics and Corruption in the Former Soviet Union: Russia's Power, Oligarch's Profits and Ukraine's Missing Energy Policy, 1995-2006*, Routledge, London, 2008, p. 23; Peter Rutland, "Russia as an Energy Superpower", *New Political Economy*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2008, pp. 203-210/p. 203.

<sup>41</sup> Eduard Rudolf Roth, "The Limits of Gazpromization", cit., pp. 75-78.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Gonchar, Vitali Martyniuk, Olena Prystayko, "2009 Gas Conflict and Its Consequences for European Energy Security", *EU-Russia Centre Review*, vol. 1, no. 9, 2009, pp. 30-47/p. 31.

energetic superpower, but from a position of incertitude, generated by its dire hydrocarbon deficit<sup>43</sup> and therefore constrained to strengthen its influence in the Caspian<sup>44</sup> and to control Kazakh, Azerbaijani and Turkmen oil and gas production<sup>45</sup> and regional export routes<sup>46</sup> by any means. Analysed through these conceptual lenses, the Russian-Ukrainian energy crises of 2006 and 2009 and the 2008 Russian-Georgian war – regularly portrayed as manifestations of Moscow's exercise of authority in its near abroad, in order to define and cement its spheres of influence and most of all to project its great power identity in order to claim a major spot within a mutating global geometry – gain a different weight. Ukrainian crises, for instance, were fuelled – at least partially – by Gazprom's impossibility to deliver enough gas to cover the skyrocketing domestic and foreign demands during the anomalous cold winters of 2006 and 2009. In particular – confronted with both technical issues (condensation) or quantity issues (hydrocarbon deficit and low pressure), Gazprom operates regular reductions of its delivery towards Europe during winters, with the unfriendly or cheap customers being the first ones to be targeted by the curtails.

Moreover, placed in the hydrocarbon deficit framework, the crises could be linked with Kremlin's organic need to discredit both Ukraine and Georgia as transit countries, to deal a serious blow to all gas transport projects that were circumventing its distribution network (*White Stream* and *Nabucco*) or, according to Fraser, to accelerate the construction of its own gas transport corridors North Stream and South Stream<sup>47</sup>. However, the idea that behind Moscow's actions lies the need to recalibrate the profits of various groups of interests which control the energy companies and which had their revenues reduced due to the incidence of the global financial crisis<sup>48</sup> cannot be discounted.

Another key-point related to Russia's energy policy is whether Kremlin's strategic documents and behavioural dynamics – arguably calibrated with the energetic superpower thesis – and its energy-related persuasion arsenal are realistically dimensioned. And the answer is that Moscow's "blackmailing" toolbox is extremely limited due to severe structural deficiencies. For instance, Moscow's constant threats that it would reroute its gas (and oil) fluxes towards

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<sup>43</sup> Eduard Rudolf Roth, "The Limits of Gazpromization", cit., p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> Julia Nanay, "Russia's Role in the Eurasian Energy Market: Seeking Control in the Face of Growing Challenges", in Robert W. Ortung, Jeronim Perović, Andreas Wenger (eds.), *Russian Energy Power and Foreign Relations: Implications for Conflict and Cooperation*, Taylor & Francis, London, 2009, p. 109-132.

<sup>45</sup> Yannis Tsantoulis, "Geopolitics, (Sub)Regionalism, Discourse and a 'Troubled Power' Triangle in the Black Sea", in Dimitrios Triantaphyllou (ed.), *The Security Context in the Black Sea Region*, Routledge, New York, 2010, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> Eduard Rudolf Roth, "The Limits of Gazpromization", cit., p. 77.

<sup>47</sup> Cameron Fraser, "The Politics of EU-Russia Energy Relations", *EU-Russia Centre Review*, vol. 1, no. 9, 2009, pp. 20-29/p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Bobo Lo, *Russia's Crisis...*cit., p. 5.

China have only a rhetorical value. In practice, the absence of a distribution network, the lack of investment, the lack of political incentives, the geographical positioning of the major operational Russian gas and oil fields prevent the occurrence of serious mutations within the current energy equation. Russia's accelerated involvement (and investment) in the development of Eastern Siberia and Far East energy projects – is triggered not only by economic, but also by security constraints. In particular, Russia is forced to secure an economic partnership with China, not only because the latter is supporting and implementing some sort of a politico-economical encirclement, but also in order to avoid a possible exploitation by Beijing of Russia's economic and demographic vulnerability in its Far East Region and provinces, where - according to the Japan's Institute for Research Development – live only 7.2 million permanent residents, most of them of oriental cultural and genetic heritage – and where the secessionist trend – labelled as a “*threat to the national security*” by ex-president Putin<sup>49</sup> (seems to have been galvanized by the eruption of the international crisis<sup>50</sup>).

Under these circumstances, Romanian-Russian relations evolved as an asymmetrical by-product of the structural mutations and overlapping patterns of interests that shaped the topography of the region, especially in a Brussels-Washington-Moscow triad of divergences and, to a certain extent, of the common denominator binding various energy groups with a high politics agenda from Russia, EU and US. In particular, the deterioration of the political relations between Kremlin and the White House allowed Romania to exhibit its superior external action potential conferred by US's support for its policies and perspectives – yet without any of its endeavours, projects and initiatives (Black Sea Forum, *Nabucco* hydrocarbon transport pipeline, the internationalization of the ‘frozen conflicts’ neighbouring the Black Sea, etc.) – being able to evolve into a fully fledged foreign policy deliverable and thus to lead to the marginalization and the diminishing of Moscow's influence in the region or to the transformation of Romania into a regulating player in the Wider Black Sea Area. In response, Moscow boycotted all Romanian initiatives aimed to reshape the Wider Black Sea institutional architecture and recalibrated its hydrocarbon prices in order to capture the deterioration of the bilateral relations. In addition, according to some proponents of the external subversion thesis – like for instance Tudoroiu (2008) – Moscow was the driving force behind the failed 2007 parliamentary impeachment that targeted the pro-American President Traian Băsescu with the allegedly Kremlin-orchestrated plot being supported

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<sup>49</sup> Nina Poussenkova, “All Quiet on the Eastern Front”, *Russian Analytical Digest* no. 33, no. 8, 2008, pp. 13-18/p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Christina Lin, *The Prince of Rosh: Russian Energy Imperialism and the Emerging Eurasian Military Alliance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, ISPSW Institut für Strategie- Politik- Sicherheits- und Wirtschaftsberatung Berlin, Germany, 2010, p. 7.

and implemented with the help with the indigenous oligarchs due to converging interests between Russian and Romanian energy groups with important political influence<sup>51</sup>. Support for this claim – argues Tudoroiu – can be found in the fact that week before the vote on president's suspension, Romanian Prime Minister Călin Popescu Țăriceanu – Băsescu's arch-enemy and a figure closely connected with Romanian energy groups with a high politics agenda – met Aleksandr Kondyakov, a person allegedly well connected with the Kremlin administration. More or less in the same period, argues the author, Romania's most important hydrocarbon oligarch and Prime Minister's close partner and sponsor Dinu Patriciu issued a series of pro-Russian statements, for only shortly after to sell its 75% of his energy company Rompetrol to the Kazakh state-owned KazMunai Gaz (placed, according to Tudoroiu, in Gazprom's spheres of influence) in a US\$ 2.7 billion deal<sup>52</sup>. Of note, although it can be reasonably accepted that Tudoroiu's hypothesis cannot be completely discounted, the author's attempt to explain his observation remains extremely speculative, as – in a later statement - even President Basescu himself admitted that Kodyakov, represented rather private business stakes and not Moscow's interests<sup>53</sup> and that other factors (discounted by Tudoroiu) might have played a major role in the process and in the unfolding of the events.

However, the return of Băsescu to his leading foreign policy authority role – after the failed referendum – coincided with a gradually decreasing magnitude of Moscow's antagonization in the incumbent President's discourse, up to a formal normalization of the rhetoric by the spring of 2008<sup>54</sup> and with a rejuvenation of Bucharest's vocal support for the arguments put forward by Washington for giving Georgia and Ukraine's immediate NATO membership action plans<sup>55</sup>. The US proposal – backed up by the UK and the anti-Russian

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<sup>51</sup> Theodor Tudoroiu, "From Spheres of Influence to Energy Wars: Russian Influence in Post-Communist Romania", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2008, pp. 386-414/p. 498.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 406-408.

<sup>53</sup> Traian Băsescu, Romania Libera Newspaper, July, 23, 2012 <http://www.romanialibera.ro/politica/institutii/interviu-ri-cu-traian-basescu--ce-crede-presedintele-suspendat-despre-legatura-dintre-inlaturarea-sa-si-cea-de-a-doua-vizita-in-romania-a-rusului-kondyakov-271276> [Accessed February 23, 2015] [accessed January 13, 2014].

<sup>54</sup> Ziare.com, April 4, 2008, <http://www.ziare.com/basescu/presedinte/basescu-numai-lapte-si-miere-cu-putin-281945> [accessed January 13, 2014].

<sup>55</sup> Traian Băsescu, Bursa Magazine, April 2, 2008, [http://www.bursa.ro/romania-sustine-extinderea-nato-in-balcanii-de-vest-si-in-spatiul-ex-sovietic5267&s=print&sr=articol&id\\_articol=25267.html](http://www.bursa.ro/romania-sustine-extinderea-nato-in-balcanii-de-vest-si-in-spatiul-ex-sovietic5267&s=print&sr=articol&id_articol=25267.html); [accessed January 13, 2014]; Ileana Mădălina Racheru. "Teme de politica externă a României. Relațiile bilaterale România-Georgia (2004-2009)", *Sfera Politicii*, no. 139, 2009, <http://www.sferapoliticii.ro/sfera/139/art11-racheru.html> [accessed January 13, 2014]; Hotnews News Agency, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-4048492-traian-basescu-romania-sustine-acordarea-map-ului-pentru-georgia-ucraina-reuniunea-ministrilor-externe-nato-din-decembrie.htm> [accessed January 13, 2014].

axis of the EU (Poland, Romania, Baltic States) – failed to be crystalized into an official agreement during NATO’s 2008 Bucharest Summit, especially due to the lack of support of some EU states, mainly France and Germany, not eager to provoke Russia in any way<sup>56</sup>.

The discernible deepening of the transatlantic rift – arguably fetishized to some extent by Kremlin masterminds – appeared to signal the opening of a window of opportunity for keeping the US at the periphery or even out of the Caspian power and energy topographies<sup>57</sup> – while shaping a power architecture circumscribed to Kremlin’s projections, namely with EU’s benign presence in the West and with its own hegemonic domination in Eurasia<sup>58</sup>. In this context, not only that Kremlin’s behavioural dynamics hinted that US’s “influence in its near abroad is no longer welcomed”<sup>59</sup>, but also began to manifest pseudo-hegemonic symptoms in order to signal the change that appeared to have occurred in the regional balance of power and which culminated with its actions during the 2008 Russian-Georgian War<sup>60</sup>. NATO and EU’s reactions of not expressing a firm condemnation of the Russian military intervention – although, nominally, Baltic States, Poland and Sweden had extremely vocal responses – induced the idea that Western support for Georgia was rather hollow and that the states situated in Russia’s neighbourhood should re-evaluate their ways of dealing with Kremlin in the future.

To some extent, seen from Bucharest, Russian invasion of Georgia and the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia were predictable collateral effects of US/EU’s recognition of Kosovo’s independence, perfectly circumscribed to Romania’s refusal rhetoric associated with its decision not to align itself along the same political line with Washington and Brussels over the Kosovo issue, a stand which – according to Bitkova – marked Bucharest’s first derailment from its traditional loyalty matrix towards NATO’s actions in the Balkans since late 1990s<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Carol Weaver, *The Politics of the Black Sea Region...cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>57</sup> Elkhan Nuriyev, *The South Caucasus at the Crossroads: Conflicts, Caspian Oil and Great Power Politics*, Lit Verlag, Berlin, 2007, p. 113.

<sup>58</sup> Craig Nation, Dmitri Trenin, *Russian Security Strategy under Putin: US and Russian Perspectives*, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle PA, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Yannis Tsantoulis, “Geopolitics, (Sub)Regionalism, Discourse...cit.”, p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> Of note, argue Nation and Trenin, Russia’s military intervention on Georgian territory shouldn’t be conceptualized as a revamping by Kremlin of former USSR’s military doctrine and strategic thinking, but rather as a recalibration of Moscow’s perspectives along the lines of the pre-World War I “*ruthless strategic competition among nations*”, which attributed the status of *reasonable foreign policy tool* to the use of force and more generally, to war. Craig Nation, Dmitri Trenin, *Russian Security Strategy under Putin...cit.*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>61</sup> Tatiana Bitkova, “The Place of Romania and Russia in the Context of East-West Relations: Political and Cultural Aspects”, *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations*, vol.11, no. 2, 2014, pp. 44-52/p. 49.

Moreover, through the same conceptual lenses, the Russian-Georgian war had a relatively critical dimension: first of all, because similar uses of the Kosovo precedent could have been employed by Kremlin in the cases of Transnistria and Ukraine, situations engulfing major threats to Romania's security and having the potential of dragging Bucharest in an armed conflict, and secondly because Russian control over South Ossetian oil hub would have undermined of Romania's chances to maximize its role in the hydrocarbon transport projects linking the Caspian Region with Europe. In the case of a *de jure* secession of the breakaway Georgian province, noted Papakostas, the "flow of oil resources that would enter In the European mainland through Romanian ground" would have been interrupted<sup>62</sup>. In this context, not only that Romania has sent the biggest team of observers in the EU Civil Monitoring Mission in Georgia<sup>63</sup>, but it indulged Brussels to "acquire a more proactive role in the peacekeeping and peace building processes" in the frozen-conflicts bordering the Black Sea<sup>64</sup> and became one of the main advocates of granting MAP status to Tbilisi, at the Lisbon 2010 NATO Summit.

Moreover, aware of the high political barriers standing in the way of *Nabucco's* future, Romanian administration focused on the development of a less ambitious, yet easier to be implemented energy project – the AGRI interconnector – a transport solution for supplying liquefied Azeri gas from Georgian port of Kulevi to Romanian port of Constanta. In this sense, at the end of a year of year of trilateral negotiations, Tbilisi, Baku and Bucharest signed in 2010 a memorandum that aimed at attaining the necessary framework for the project.

Romania's behavioural dynamics towards Wider Black Sea Area, the constant diatribes against Russia's energy practices (especially in the discourse of Romanian President Traian Basescu) and of a higher importance, Bucharest's successful attempt in involving Western structures in the management of Moldova's social, political, economic and security problems, generated significant concerns in Moscow<sup>65</sup> and triggered a series of reactions from Kremlin, especially through economic gestures<sup>66</sup>, under the form of retaliatory, coercive prices for Gazprom's exports to Romania. Under these circumstances, the end of the 2000s would find the two states in a complete standstill<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Nikolaus El. Papakostas, *Romanian Foreign Policy Post Euro-Atlantic Accession...cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>63</sup> Ștefan Georgescu, Marilena Munteanu, Tabriz Garayev, Costel Stanca, "The Importance of Relations between Georgia and Romania for the Progress of Energy Projects", *Constanta Maritime University Annals*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2012, pp. 283-289/p. 284.

<sup>64</sup> Nikolaus El. Papakostas, *Romanian Foreign Policy Post Euro-Atlantic Accession...cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>65</sup> Tatiana Bitkova, "The Place of Romania and Russia in the Context of East-West Relations...cit.", pp. 44-52/p. 51.

<sup>66</sup> Ruxandra Ivan, "Black Sea Regional Leadership...cit.", p. 167.

<sup>67</sup> Simona Soare, "Still Talking Past Each Other: Romanian-Russian Relations", *Russian Analytical Digest*, vol.1, no. 125, 2013, pp. 14-18/p. 15.

Brussels' low appetite for hard foreign policy approaches and the apparent lack of impetus in challenging Russia over its energy and military monopoly in the Black Sea Region, left Romania in the same foreign policy stance as in the pre-accession period and namely looking towards Washington in order to consolidate its security and achieve its foreign policy outcomes. As a result, in February 2010 – Romania announced that it will host components of Washington's anti-ballistic missile system (ABMS) or “*missile shield*” in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>68</sup> a decision that made the relations with Russia take “another turn towards the inimical”<sup>69</sup>.

Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea and Kremlin's continuous destabilization of Kiev's authority, sovereignty and territorial integrity – which arguably occurred in context characterized by a rather gradual shrinking of EU's security commitments towards the region – found Romania in a relatively complex situation. On one hand, with Washington taking the lead against Moscow over its actions in Ukraine – within a North Atlantic institutional frame marked by normative collisions and political divisions regarding NATO's reactions towards Kremlin – Bucharest made a stand for superior military capabilities to be deployed on its territory in order to ensure its security<sup>70</sup> while, on another tried to use EU's institutional capabilities in order to prevent the contagion of the Ukraine crisis in Moldova (a state which Bucharest aims to keep within its spheres of influence). Moreover, despite the establishment's mild rhetoric against a Russian “aggression” and “destabilization”<sup>71</sup>, passing the redline of international law<sup>72</sup>, Bucharest's behavioural patterns reveal the adoption of a strategy of avoidance and buck-passing, in which the – arguably theoretical – burden of confronting Kremlin was passed to Washington and Brussels<sup>73</sup>, yet aware that whatever modest US in the region and EU's conceptual support for Ukraine won't justify a confrontation with Moscow in its “near abroad”, a region of vital interest for Russia.

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<sup>68</sup> Carol Weaver, *The Politics of the Black Sea Region...cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> Simona Soare, “Still Talking Past Each Other...cit.”, pp. 14-18/p. 15.

<sup>70</sup> Agence France Press, News Agency Report – Romania Presses for NATO Redeployment over Ukraine Crisis, <http://www.afp.com/en/news/romania-presses-nato-redeployment-over-ukraine-crisis> [accessed January 13, 2014].

<sup>71</sup> Traian Băsescu, Libertatea Newspaper, August 28, 2014, <http://www.libertatea.ro/detalii/articol/traian-basescu-rusia-putin-ucraina-transnistria-505270.html> [accessed January 13, 2014].

<sup>72</sup> Klaus Johannis, Digi 24 Television, February 6, 2015 <http://www.digi24.ro/Stiri/Digi24/Actualitate/Politica/Klaus+Iohannis+Rusia+a+depasit+linia+rosie> [accessed January 13, 2014].

<sup>73</sup> Traian Băsescu, Gandul Newspaper, March 6, 2014, <http://www.gandul.info/politica/criza-din-ucraina-in-consiliul-european-basescu-ceea-ce-a-facut-federatia-rusa-este-o-agresiune-daca-se-decide-un-format-de-negociere-romania-trebuie-sa-fie-partea-12207632> [accessed January 13, 2014].

## *Conclusions*

The primary conclusion of this analytical rendition of Romania's foreign policy dynamics towards the Wider Black Sea Area in the period 2007-2010 is that a large part of Bucharest's portfolio of foreign policy deliverables and paramount designs engulfing the region – like the securitization of a regulatory role for itself in the Black Sea area, the increase of its control over the regional development infrastructure, the development of a security cooperation dimension within the existent cooperation framework and the development of a hydrocarbon transport corridor from the Caspian to Europe bypassing Russia – were, in fact, by-products generated by a divergent interplay of exogenously articulated influences (primarily of US and Russian and secondary of EU origins) and by the subsequent projections of Washington's (and to a lesser extent, Brussels') heterochthonous regional perspectives, preferences and *interests*, which Bucharest transposed into its foreign policy agenda, with the anticipation that it would be rendered the main promoter or implementer.

The indigenous hybridizing of an imported (mostly) transatlantic and European policy agendas for the Wider Black Sea Area wasn't however tributary to an organic development and transformation of the post-Communist Romanian political and economic spectra, but rather as a incidental side effect of the recurrent autochthonous establishments' attempts to enhance the country's status and allure in the West, during a timeframe when the US and EU seemed to manifest an apparent interest in the region.

Cartelization of EU's energy policy, colliding interests between patronage-based hydrocarbon oligarchies and business circles with high political agendas, Russia's hydrocarbon deficit, the overestimation of Washington's and Brussels' interests in the Wider Black Sea Area and the arguably illusory perspective regarding member states commitments to support a EU-wide energy solidarity, were the utmost factors that affected Bucharest's foreign policy and triggered substantial mutations in its behavioural dynamics towards the region.

Moreover, in the post-accession period, when Bucharest eventually began to use the superior institutional capacities for foreign policy design and formulation, it started to upload its previously-constructed Americanized foreign policy perspectives regarding the Wider Black Sea Area into EU's institutional framework. In particular, with EU (especially France and Germany) manifesting both a lack of appetite for hard foreign policy approaches and a lack of motivation, of political and institutional impetus for challenging Russia's regional or energy hegemony, Romania's endeavours led to extremely modest results and, to some extent, to the isolation of Bucharest (and of other actors with similar agendas) at the periphery of Brussels' foreign policy profile.